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fictions, fantasies, and fabulations: imagining other interior worlds
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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'.[01] Choi's sentiments air a sense of urgency for relevance as much as they point to the value and agency of poetic meaning and making in artistic, spatial, and interior practices.

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01 https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PLYUdgQtOLXIc7HWIc3nBH7VNNvt5hDTA&v=iwoS--CB7k8&ab_channel=PBSNewsHour

in this issue

07 introducing, inducing
Julieanna Preston
Luke Tipene

08 a design studio on fantastic space: exploring the narrative of *spirited away*
Demet Dincer
Ilke Tekin
Pelin Cetken

33 variations on piranesi's *carceri*
Andrea Alberto Dutto
Maria Fedorchenko

58 tempering grief through the victorian home's furniture and objects: the emergence of spiritual comfort
Vanessa Galvin

75 imagining a more inclusive world: notes on difference, disability, and space in *the shape of water*
Ann Heylighen
Daniel S. Friedman

93 let it unfold — performative exhibitions: the living interior of the austrian pavilion at expo milan 2015
Ayman Kassem

109 dancing in your brain!: interiority, affective witnessing, and xenoethics
Cathryn Klasto

128 ghost written: the winchester house as cinematic trans-mediation
Cameron Macdonell
John Sicat

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

163 refabulating domesticity: a reparative reading of interior genre painting
Kris Pint

182 william heath robinson and k. r. g. browne: literature contraptions as inspiration for facing spatial issues
Sofía Quiroga Fernández
Guillermo Sánchez Sotés

200 whakapapa plotting: an aotearoa-specific method of spatial communication
Georgina Stokes (Ngāi Tahu)

introducing, inducing

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abstract
It seems fitting to explore an alternative form of introduction to an issue that promises other interior worlds. It also seems fitting to take up the opportunity to experiment with digital interfaces, word processing software and audio-visual media to exploit the static state of the page in favour of the spatial, the temporal and the audible. “introducing, inducing” is a product of fabulation, and evidence of the journal’s commitment to push the boundaries of the multiple practices it reflects and the modes of making creative practice research public. The cover image created by Sophie Forsythe forms the first layer — a doorway, a threshold — that articulates a stretched, warped, morphed and fragmented world of many dimensions, unfettered by the tired binary of inside and outside. Its textures, surfaces and ethereal colours wrap space akin to spring pea tendrils, reaching towards luminosity with heliotropic determinism, and pushing through the flat page like new potatoes. References to each article contained in this journal issue lurk amongst this visual dissonance, slipping in between its layers, like English Numbers Stations, giving themselves up to forces other than gravity and voices other than human.

https://cdn.sanity.io/files/iobfixk6/production/05420ffe28e1468b9fa3d14cb3e2691549072e5c.mp4

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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.[01] 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).[02] 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.[03] 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.'[04] 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.'[05] On the other hand, famous fantasy author Ursula Le Guin claims '[fantasy] isn't factual, but it is true.'[06] 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.'[07] 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.[08] 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.[09] 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.[10] 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.[11] 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.[12] In fact, characterising a genre to re-group works that include any un-real and/or supernatural features is not sufficient.[13] This definition does not address the intricacies of the changeable, unstable, and context-dependant characteristics of 'reality.'[14]

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).[15] According to his theory, 'fantastic' occupies the space of hesitation that occurs between events or experiences, being interpreted as natural or supernatural.[16] 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.[17] As such, the contemporary understanding of fantastic has departed from solely structural conceptualisation and now incorporates discussions of its narrative qualities and psychoanalytical perspectives.[18] 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.'[19] 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.'[20] 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.[21] 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.'[22]

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.[23] 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.'[24] 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.[25]

A fantastic space can be constructed through manipulating or distorting any spatial domains, including physical, mental, or social.[26] 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.[27] Eco draws on the notion of possibility while discarding a static, syllogistic view of order.[28] Accordingly, an open work gives a central position to the individual 'to create future possibilities, based on personal decisions, choices and social context,'[29] 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.[30] Fantastic worlds in animation create dynamics between sensorial perception and conceptual understanding,[31] 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.[32] 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.[33] 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.'[34] Miyazaki notes how our world has become an ambiguous place of mass consumption, which is the main theme of *Spirited Away*.[35] His films reflect his views of the world, including 'conflagrations and catastrophes, but also rebirths, new beginnings and children who say "stop".'[36] In his works, Miyazaki refers to human characters and creatures 'that are by turns surprising, inventive and instructive.'[37] Miyazaki's personal experiences, such as his European travels and his mother's illness, had a significant role in shaping his works.[38] 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 fantascapes in *Kiki's Delivery Service* (1989),[39] which were inspired from northern Europe.[40] 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.'[41]

Miyazaki implements child protagonists in his fantastic stories specifically because of the pure and innocent nature of children.[42] *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*.[43]

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.[43] 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.[44] 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.[45] 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.'[46] 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.[47] 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".'[48] Aligned with Holl's standpoint, architect and theorist Bernard Tschumi provides further criticism of the static-only contemplation of a body in architectural thinking.[49] 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.[50] 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.[51]

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.[52] Art historian Christine Poggi also emphasises the constantly changing, unstable system of relations between surface and depth in the collage painting.[53] 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.[54] 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.[55] 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.'[56] 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.[57] The multi-layered structure of a collage technique allows both the creator and its reader to convey and produce multiple meanings.[58]

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.[59] 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.

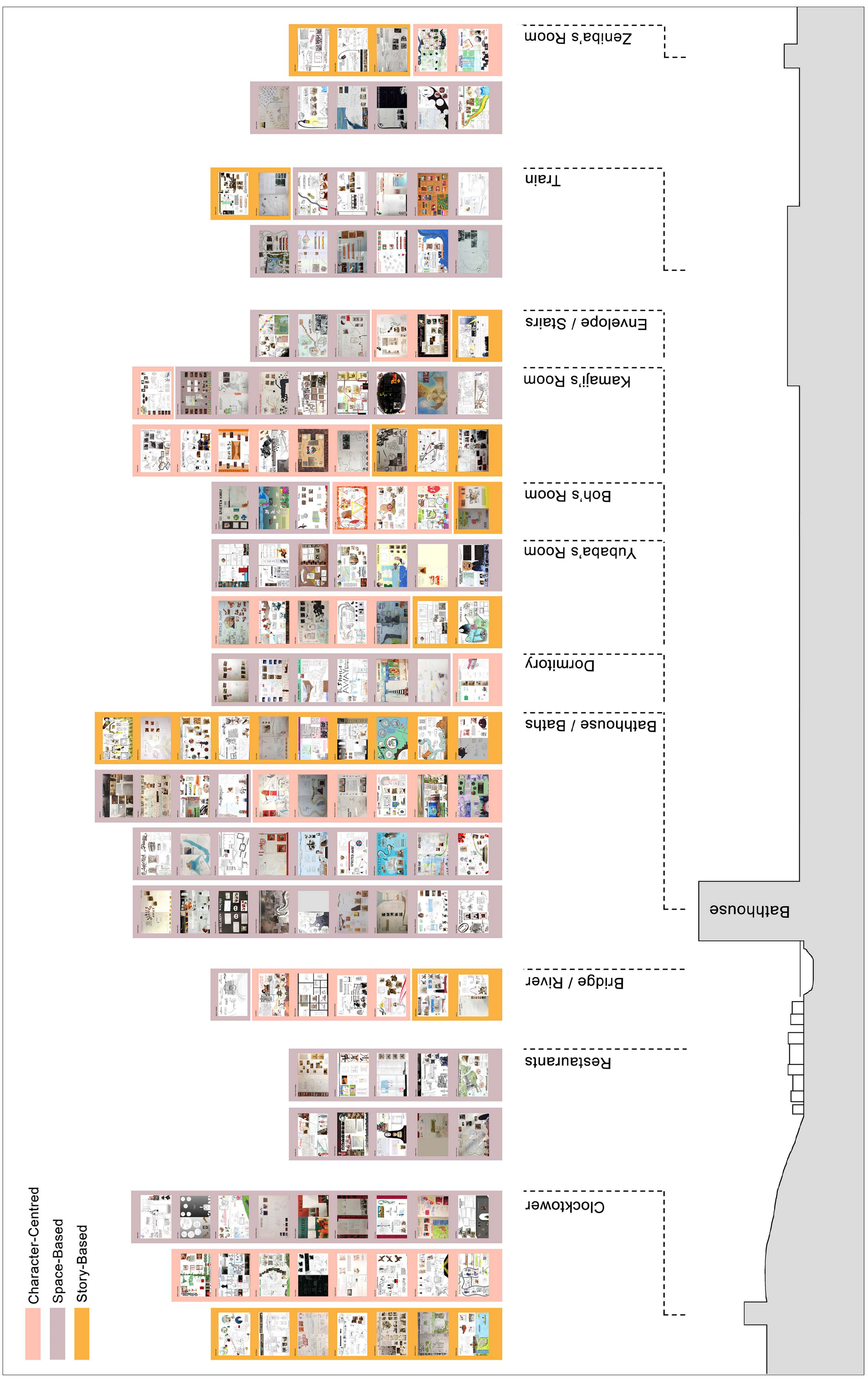


Figure 03.
Image set of 156 student project submissions categorised according to the three major design approach types: character-centred, space-based, and story-based.

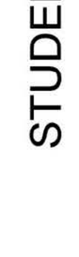
data analysis: three design strategies

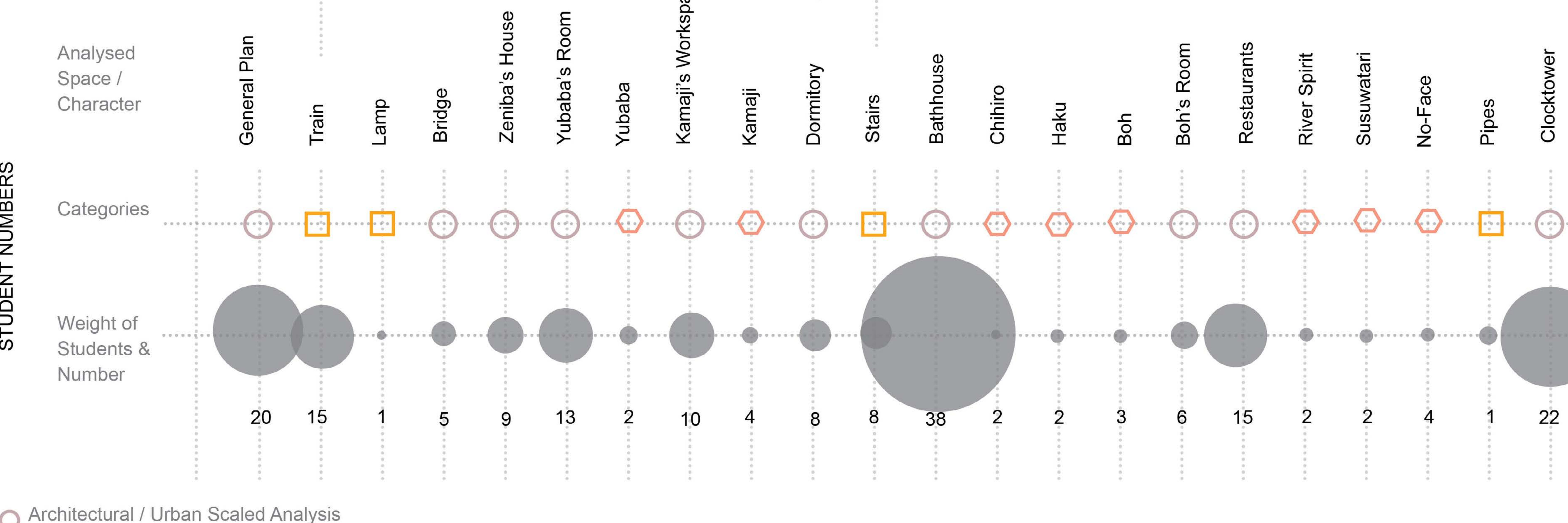
The final works of 156 students and their multifaceted interpretations of the animation subject were analysed regarding their design strategy, classified under three categories. The authors sought further insights in how students constructed a spatial relationship with the character and space they chose, 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





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.

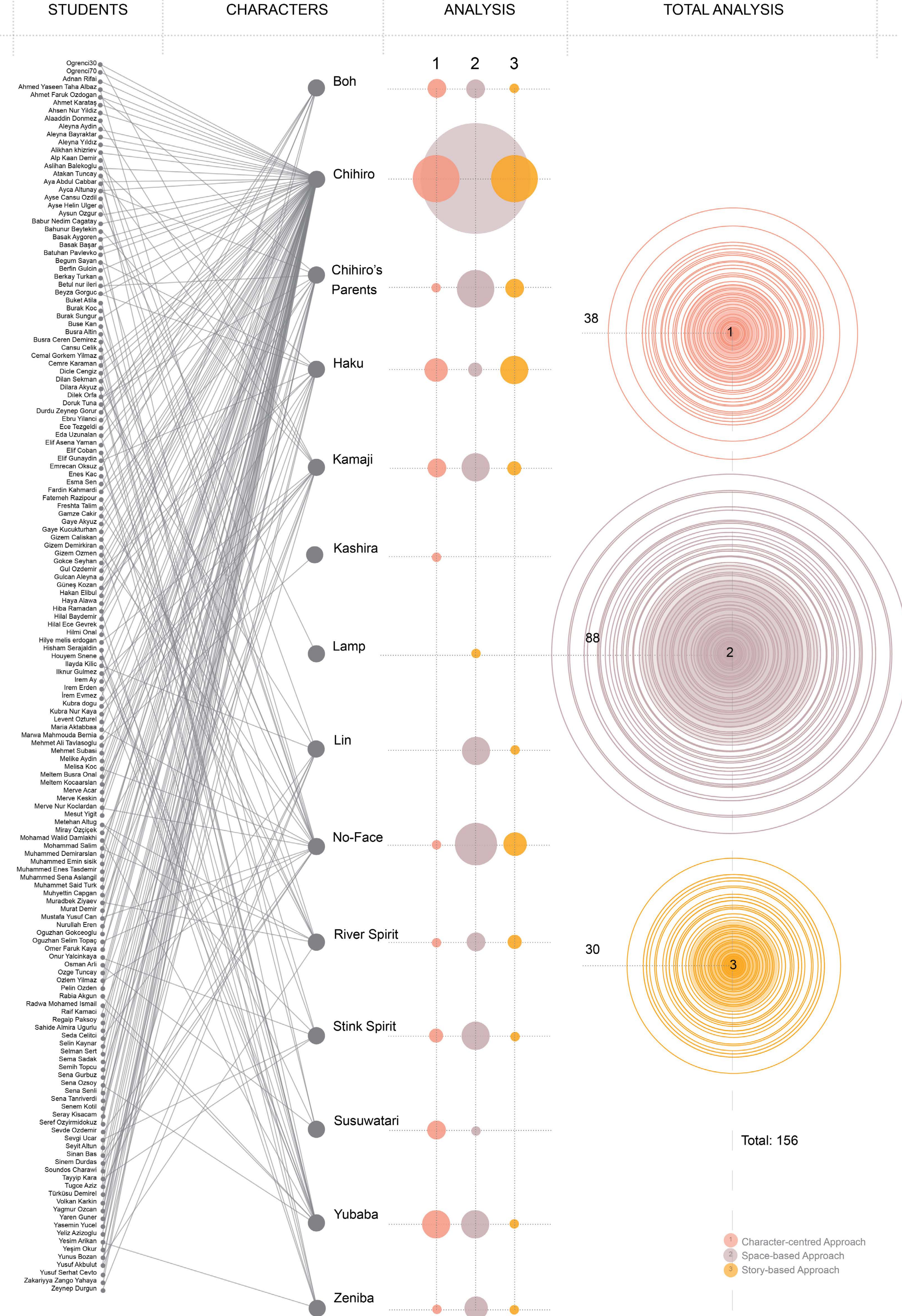


Figure 05.
Selection density of subjects and design approaches as chosen by the 156 first-year students in their design studio project submission.

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).

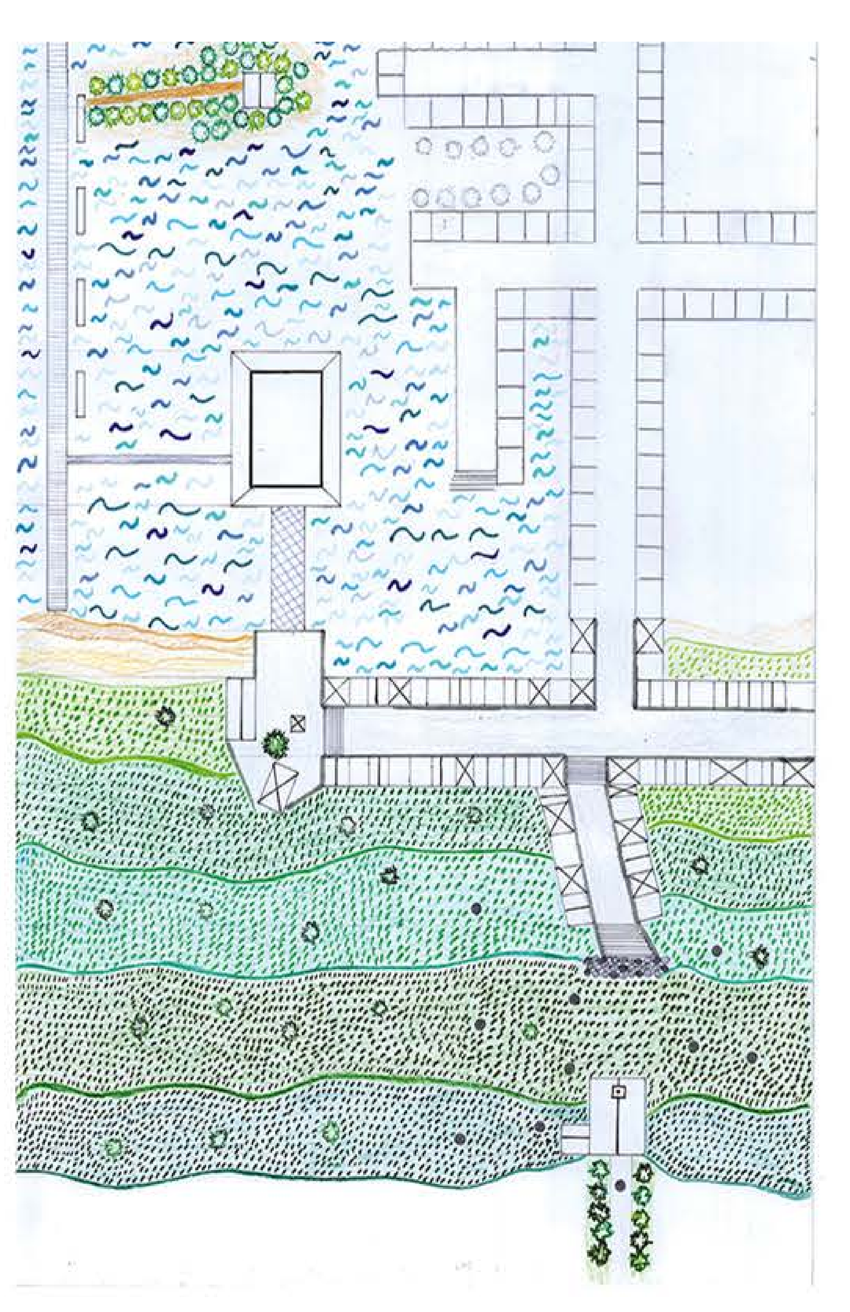
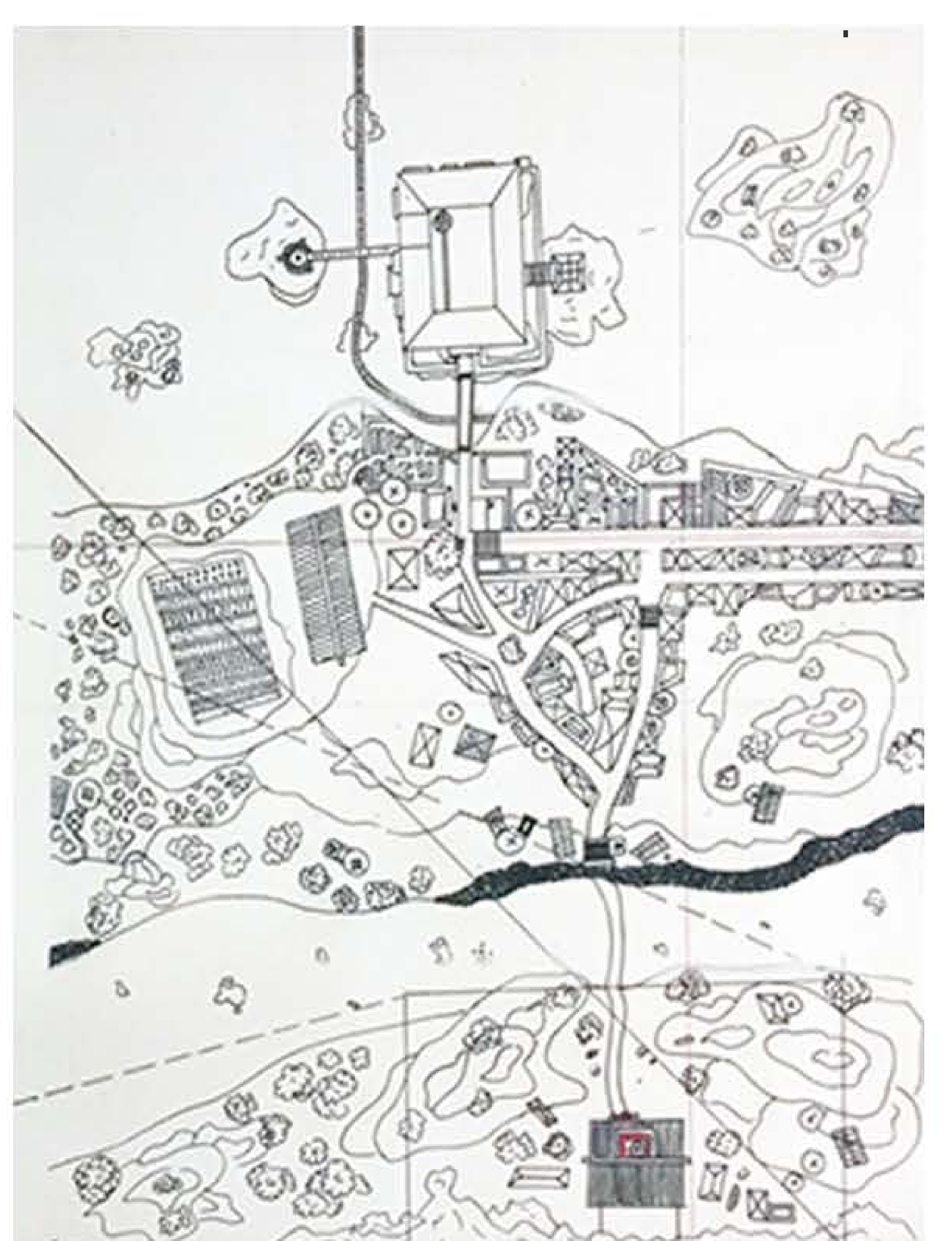
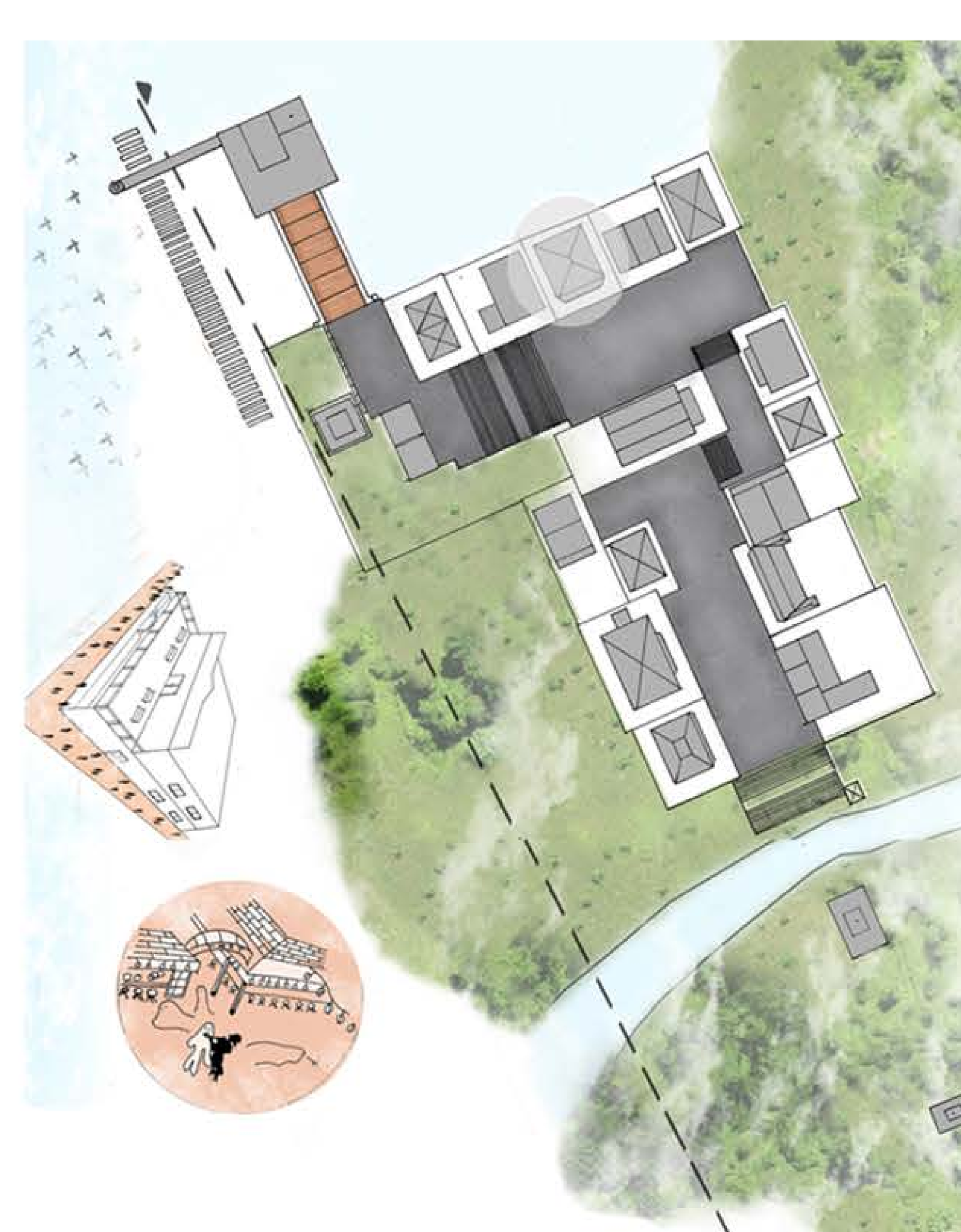




Figure 06.
Student representations of the bathhouse from an aerial view. With permission from Doruk Tuna, Gizem Demirkıran, Batuhan Pavlenko, and Hilal Baydemir.

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-assemblage 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).

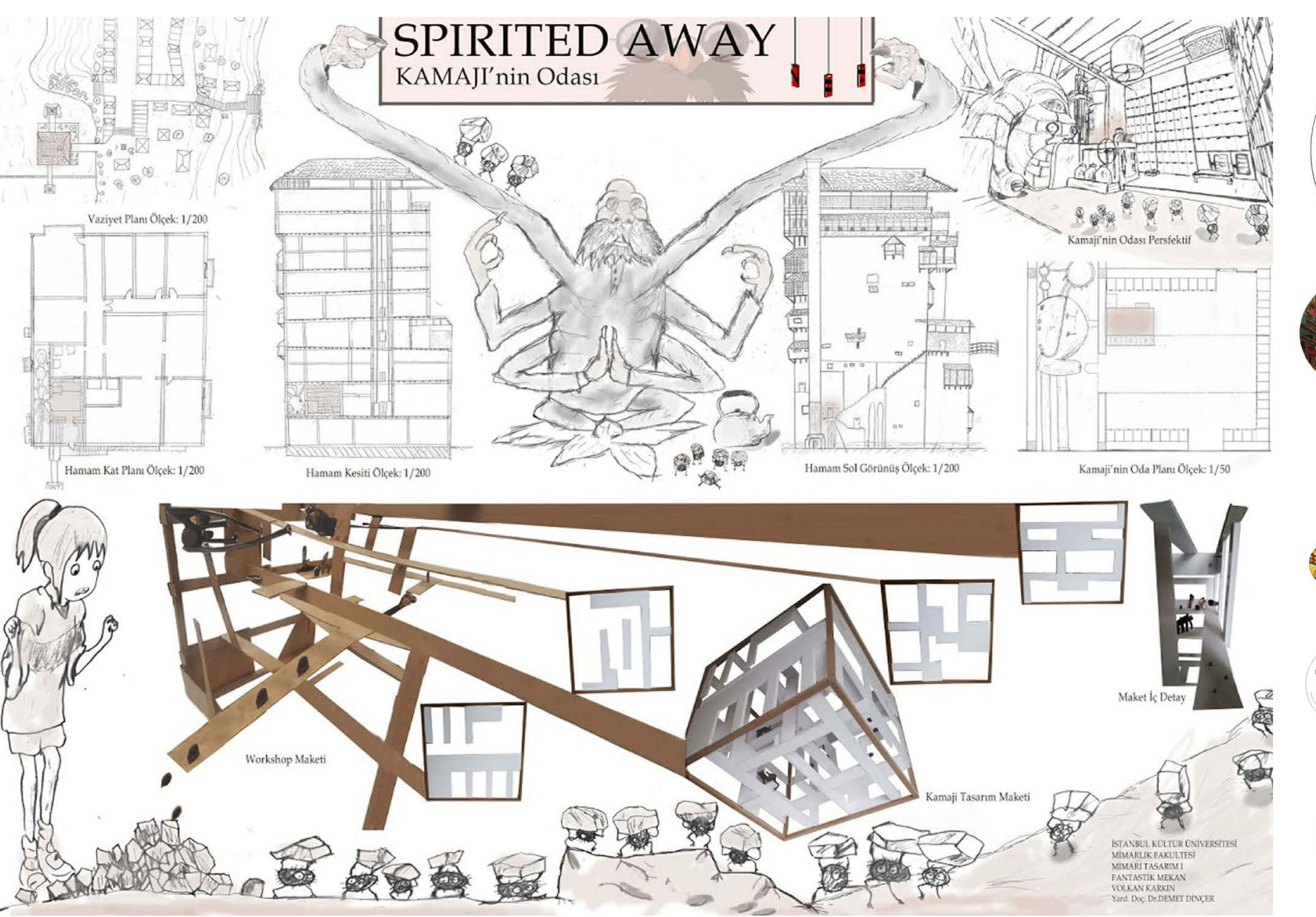
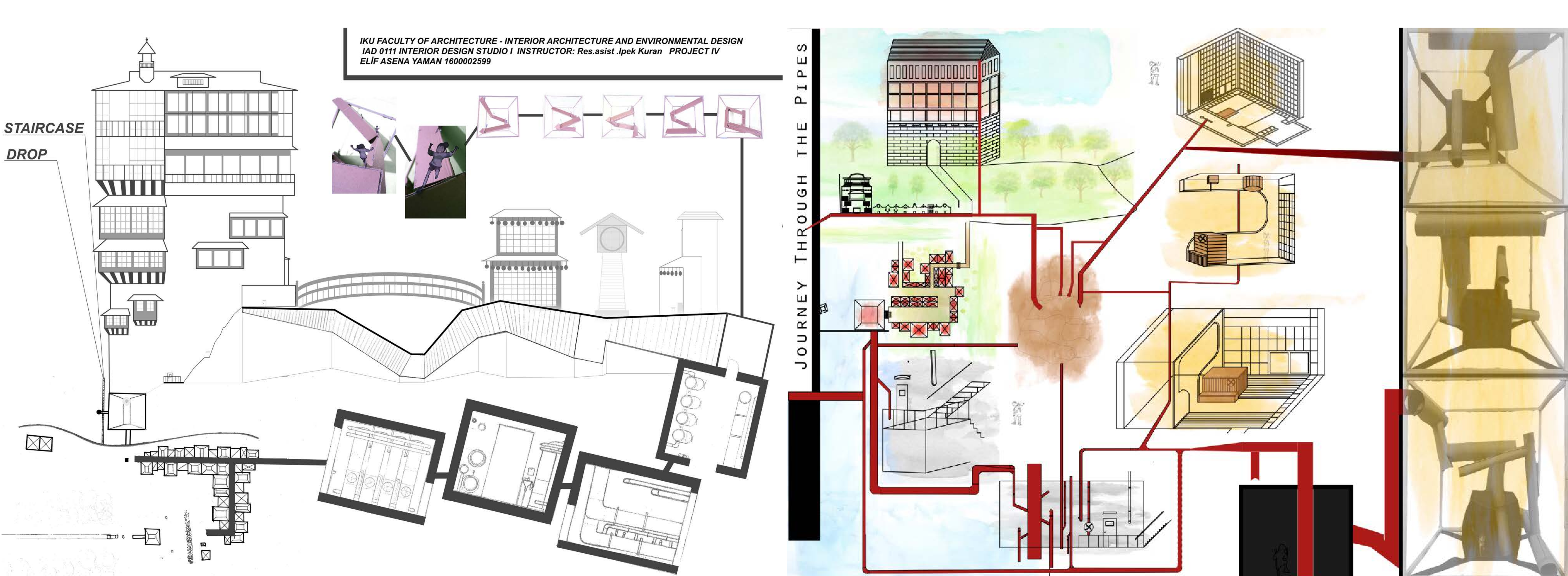


Figure 08.
Right, Volkan Karkin's poster exploring spatial representation through Kamaji's character; *Left,* Onur Yalcinkaya's poster focusing on the bathhouse.

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.[60]

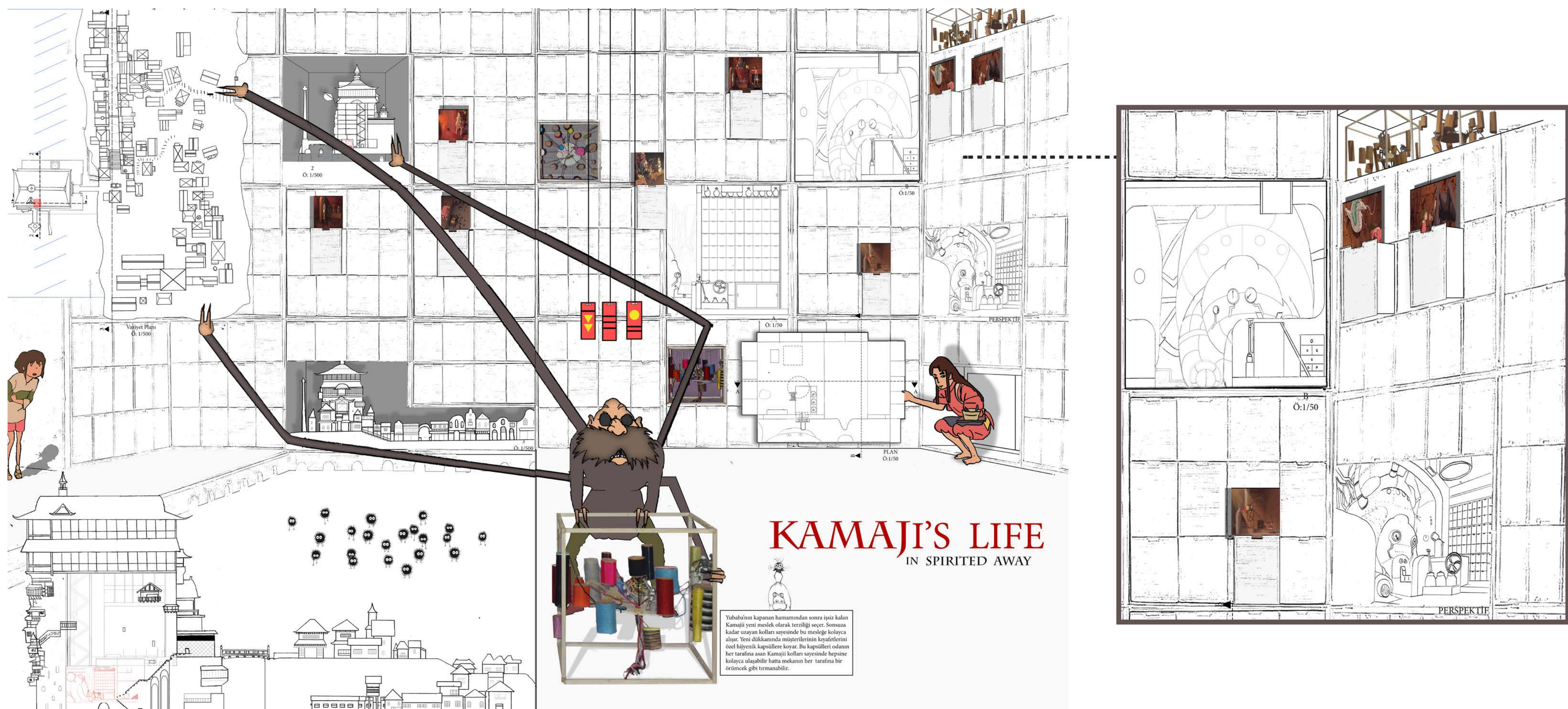


Figure 10.
Semih Topcu's design incorporated his story-based approach where Kamaji's future beyond the main *Spirited Away* storyline has been conceived as becoming a tailor.

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.'[61] Within the narratives they created, students followed humans and non-humans 'in act'[62] 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.'[63] 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.[64] 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.

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variations on piranesi's *carceri*

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abstract
As one of architectural printmaker Giovanni Battista Piranesi's most studied print series, *Carceri d'invenzione* (1750–1761) constitutes a timeless precedent for architectural experimentation. This text-based research essay describes the outcomes of a design-driven experiment that attempted to unpack the hidden potential of *Carceri* in the domain of architectural representation. The aim was to analyse Piranesi's oeuvre from a new curatorial perspective, as well as propose a further speculative step in the hermeneutics of *Carceri.* In our experiments, the *Carceri* was understood as a temporary aggregate of heterogeneous materials capable of establishing a metaphorical link with architectural objects at different scales.

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digital representation, experimentation, interiority, Piranesi, speculative design

the theoretical assumptions behind the experiment

Following a design-driven experiment conducted with students of the Architectural Association School of Architecture, this essay undertakes a speculative reading of Giovanni Battista Piranesi's print series *Carceri d'Invenzione* (1761), which is translated as *Imaginary Prisons*.[01] This essay is in no way a contribution to the considerable number of historiographical studies carried out on Piranesi over the past two centuries.[02] Readers interested in deepening their historical knowledge of Piranesi's work may therefore be disappointed this essay does not have a historical goal. As the authors are not architectural historians, it is possible that crucial insights from recent historical scholarship on Piranesi will be omitted. This essay reports on the outcome of an experiment carried out with students, in which the objective was to create a new interpretation of *Carceri,* while also producing theoretical and graphic ideas about architectural representation and diagram-making.

Piranesi elaborated *Carceri* at two separate times, about a decade apart, producing two different series of engravings. The first series, created between 1745 and 1750, resulted in highly dramatic spaces, products of an excited imagination combined with an interest in ruins that spread along with archaeological campaigns. In *Carceri* Piranesi put into practice some of the technical skills he had acquired as part of his scenographic studies, which are reflected in the conception of endless rooms, immense yet claustrophobic interior spaces. In 1761, Piranesi produced the second series of engravings, inspired by the previous one, but featuring the thickening of details and the chiaroscuro strokes, resulting in further darkening of the figures. Both series continue to incite visionary drawings.

Over the past few decades, many architectural experiments on Piranesi's *Carceri* have been undertaken and published in the form of rediscoveries and variations.[03] As far as we are concerned, these initiatives have played an important role in highlighting *Carceri* as references for new architectural speculations. This essay is situated among these experiments, or deliberate variations on originals, carried out in recent years.[04] What we present is therefore a collective body of work that could be seen as part of another larger body of *Piranesi Variations.* It points towards future possibilities of repositioning Piranesi's work in relation to an advanced epistemology of digital representation.

In this section, we present the theoretical assumptions behind our experiments. These are concepts we have extracted from a direct observation of Piranesi's prints as well as from the historical literature. It is useful to clarify the overall theoretical concern that informed our experiments, namely the use of references in the making of architectural designs. In other words, we were interested in the ability of the

student to select one of the many aspects of a reference — a building or an image — to find a solution to a problem or speculative scenario. Piranesi's *Carceri* were chosen because it would be possible for students to maintain focus on a singular aspect within each image without viewers' attention being hijacked by the noise of the figure itself.

Students were provided with a very short initial syllabus that included general background texts such as the essay collection on Piranesi edited by John Wilton-Ely. Wilton-Ely offers an elegant and clear introduction to *Carceri* as:

> [...] a series of caprices or fancy jokes [...] whose forms are rapidly sketched, traced on the plate in that fluid and summary manner [...] and with an equally personal language, where mysterious subjects [...] defy all attempts to impose a coherent iconographic solution.[05]

This definition requires additional explanation to be useful to creative and imaginative experimentation. Indeed, a problem with historical assessments such as these is that they do not generally provide cues for creative elaboration — the initiative to transport Piranesi's drawings beyond the realm of history is delegated to the reader. We noticed that this act of transporting materials out of their field of origin — in this case, from history — is not at all easy for an architecture or design student. Even within their educational curricula, inquiry is divided into fields such as technology, history, design, or theory. For this reason, we combined the students' introduction to Piranesi's work with an encouragement to see themselves as twenty-first-century designers.

The experiments took place on three fronts, which we can define as problems: the problem of the author (or the *Theft*); that of interior space (or the *Scene*); and that of the book as an object of theoretical speculation (or the *Media*). More generally, Piranesi's work stimulated us to reflect and speculate on our shared pedagogy.

theft

The first challenge we encountered in our experiments was to dissolve the feeling of respect and reverence that makes it difficult to use historical material in an unrestrained manner. Without this burden of respect, a student operates with a sense of indifference towards the historical product. But with it, the student can't feel that it is possible to transport the historical material into the present. In both cases, what establishes a sense of distance seems to be a perceived lack of erudition that generates a fear of the unfamiliar. The case of Piranesi is very useful in overcoming this problem, since he himself is described by historians as an architect who was somehow disrespectful and irreverent toward the historical material he employed for his own creative purposes.[06]

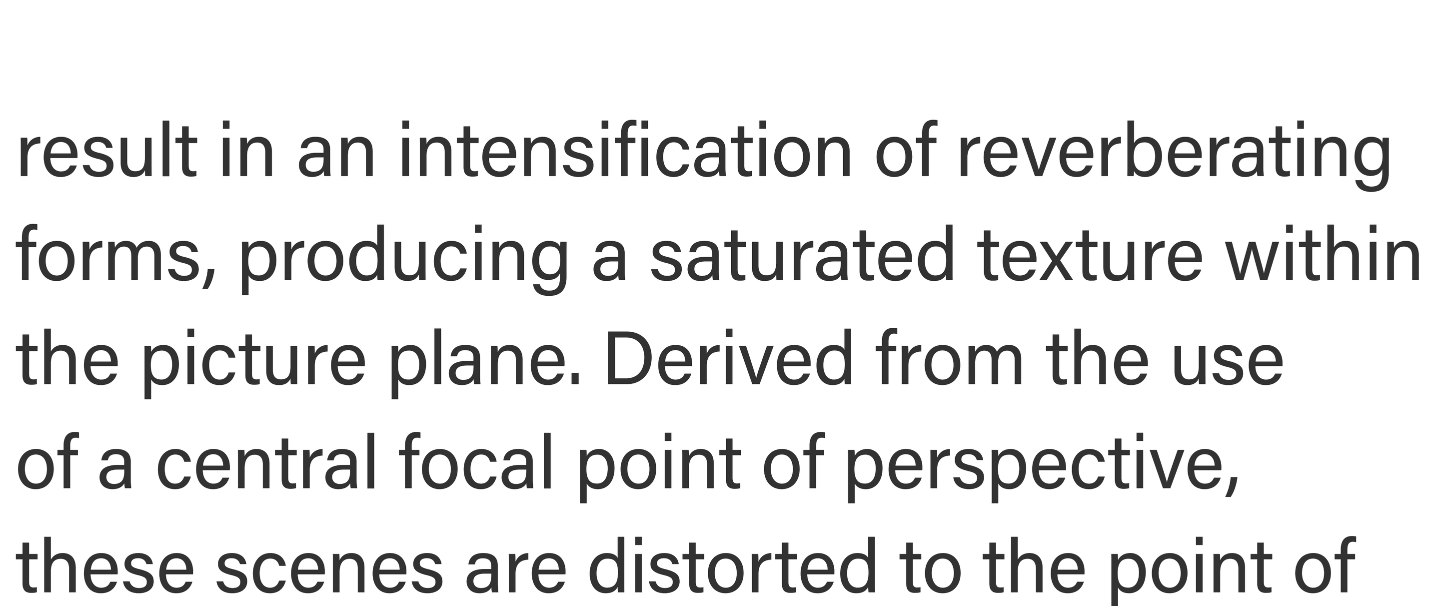
This observation comes from an important essay by Manfredo Tafuri, in which the Italian historian describes Piranesi as a 'wicked architect'[07] — borrowing a phrase from the French artist and writer Pierre Klossowski's essay on the Marquis de Sade.[08] Tafuri means that Piranesi performed two types of work — historical and creative — or rather, his strategy allowed him to achieve a new aesthetic under the guise of archaeological research. During the mid-eighteenth century, the archaeological exploration of ruins became an important theme in the study of the past, and a way of conveying a new architectural aesthetic. As a result of this activity, antiquarian books and prints became increasingly popular and the drawn architectural form became the vehicle of Piranesi's aesthetic.[09] As one of his biographers recalls, 'Piranesi's first years in Rome was a time of running without respite from ruins to libraries.'[10] Therefore, when Tafuri (quoting Klossowski) states that Piranesi is 'concealing the passion under the appearance of thought,'[11] we believe he means that Piranesi creatively 'misused' archaeological materials without letting himself be hindered by respect or reverence for the ancient.
On the contrary, Piranesi seemed ready to manipulate the meaning of ruins to the point of appropriating them by highlighting his own contribution over the reference. Tafuri's statement — which may seem exaggerated for a historian — is a rhetorical device we found useful in provoking the students and giving them the courage to steal, or, in other words, to hide their own personal research into architectural expression behind their analysis of Piranesi's *Carceri*.

scenes

Carceri have been described by Wilton-Ely as interpretative keys to the spatial complexity found in certain other projects by Piranesi.[12] In our experiments, however, we understood *Carceri* as scenes depicting alternative concepts of interior space. Some of the plates of *Carceri* are so absurd that it is difficult to imagine such spaces could ever have existed, or that Piranesi could have encountered them during his visits to archaeological sites. In fact, as he himself clarified, the prints are *d'Invenzione* — that is to say, invented spaces from his own imagination. They relate to the tradition of *veduta ideate*, a model of representation that had become popular in the 1720s and consisted of the imaginative depiction of ancient monuments in the form of assemblages and compositions.[13] Perspectival reconstructions by art historian Ulya Vogt-Göknil demonstrate the unstable and disordered geometry of *Carceri*, as well as their substantial infraction of the rules of perspective.[14] Similarly, Franco Purini has observed:

> […] the axes on which the spaces are aligned penetrate deep into the multiple vanishing points [and] the essence of the interior of the *Carceri* is exalted in the very moment in which their geometric deconstruction dissolves this "interiority" in an open and divergent coexistence of perspective layouts.[15]

We believe the concept of scene, from the Greek σκηνή (curtain or backdrop), describes the type of representation to which Piranesi aspired. Like curtains, the scenes of Carceri



result in an intensification of reverberating forms, producing a saturated texture within the picture plane. Derived from the use of a central focal point of perspective, these scenes are distorted to the point of destabilising the true rule in which the same perspective is grounded.

Piranesi may have acquired these technical skills of representation through his studies in scenography,[16] and from other artists in the Venetian area, such as Tintoretto, Veronese, and Tiepolo.[17] Piranesi may have drawn on techniques from scenography, which allowed him to create illusions of fantastical worlds of unlimited expanse through the manipulation of linear perspective. Depicting a scene from the corner is something Piranesi is likely to have learnt from Ferdinando Bibiena's *Architettura civile* (1711).[18] This technique constituted 'a revolutionary idea,' writes Wilton-Ely, 'thanks to which the traditional central vanishing point was abandoned in favour of several diagonal visual axes, each of which allowed to open further views, creating a spatial structure of high complexity.'[19]

Without the time to attempt geometric reconstructions of Piranesi's scenes, we experimented with different forms of perspectival distortion using image and video processing programs such as Rhinoceros 3D, Blender, and Unreal Engine. This approach resulted in contradictory spaces that were both flat and deep at the same time. Those students who worked simultaneously with the elaboration of three-dimensional spaces and its two-dimensional representation proved more successful in finding innovative and interesting points of contradiction and irreconcilability between space and image.

We were unable to delve into an analysis of secondary literature on Piranesi,[20] such as the studies by twentieth-century Soviet film director and film theorist Sergei Eisenstein, which demonstrate a clear interest on the part of the filmmaker in the variations that occur between series.[21] Nevertheless, we could see how some students were referencing Eisenstein indirectly through filmic means. Another theme left for future research and experimentation was the *memento mori,* and the reception among contemporary audiences of the prints in warning of the dangers of criminality in eighteenth-century Rome.[22]

In a way, the *Carceri* prints point to several possible themes precisely because they were created from the imagination rather than direct representations of physical spaces. With our experiments, we attempted to unleash the expressive potential that can emerge from reinterpreting and reworking the scenes from the series.

media

In addition to considering Piranesi's imagery, we also extended our experiments to examining *Carceri* as a media publication. This interest was related to recent research on Piranesi that has brought to light some

interesting contextual details. For example, in the 2020 volume *Piranesi Unbound*, the editors Heather Hyde Minor and Carolyn Yerkes demonstrate that the book was a vehicle of knowledge and a powerful tool for the construction of architectural discourse.[23] Similarly, Minor, Mario Bevilacqua, and Fabio Barry shed light on a dimension of Piranesi that is no longer limited to his activity of architectural engraver, but also to his entrepreneurship in the making of publications.[24] These historical details were of interest to us only insofar as they offer stimuli for experimenting with a different way of reading Piranesi, or rather, of producing speculations about the architect's field of action.

We asked ourselves some questions about the numbering of the plates and the resulting reading sequence. We realised, for example, that the historian Andrew Robison does not devote any attention to this when he considers the structure of the book to be the result of a spontaneous development, without any preordained thought on the part of Piranesi. Piranesi did not in fact leave any evidence to justify the sequence of the plates.[25] As Minor and Yerkes state:

> [...] although contemporary readers often expect books to be static and immutable, Piranesi's volumes certainly were not. For Piranesi, after a book was bound it remained a flexible object. Although the text includes page numbers, the order and composition of the illustrations varies from copy to copy, indicating that there was not a set sequence for the figural plates. Piranesi's approach to layering sheets together features a sense of fluidity. The layers — the order, and therefore the resultant reading — could change over time.[26]

In our experiments, we questioned the sequence of the prints, as if looking for a key to read the work as a book. On the one hand, the sequence of plates works as a device of spatial or temporal proximity between the rooms represented in each panel. This understanding was suggested by Plates X and XV, whose margins appear to allude to possible connections or relations of continuity between the spaces. On the other hand, the attribution of titles to each plate seems particularly relevant when it attracts attention to a specific element, as seen in the *staircase* of Plate VIII (*The Staircase with Trophies*), the *well* in Plate XIII (*The Well*), and the *tower* in Plate III (*The Round Tower*). At the end of the experiments, this feature of the work remained highly prominent and stimulated our collective understanding to establish a continuity between the parts and the whole.

This speculation on how to read *Carceri* seemed to us a good way to also discuss the role of the architect as a cultural agent today. Indeed, we believe this approach can be useful in innovating the way Piranesi's work

is exhibited, in museums as well as digital exhibitions and publications. As such, we wanted to draw attention to the speculative architecture of the book and introduce students to the fundamental changes the published book might undergo today, in the way it is made and displayed.[27]

We also considered the concept of the *corpus,* which emerged from reading an essay by Minor: 'The word *corpo* in eighteenth-century Italian referred not just to the human body but also to unbound books,' she states. 'There were more than three hundred such *corpi* in Piranesi's Museum [Collection] on the day he died.'[28] We interpreted the concept of corpo as an accumulation of different materials, heterogeneous in terms of content and subjects, a temporary container that is always inconsistent or incomplete. This concept of corpo allowed us to make some speculative comparisons between the form of the city and the construction of *Carceri* as a theoretical object.

To summarise, our aim was to revise Piranesi's *Carceri* in terms of scenography; the relationship between interior space and scene; and emerging modes of figuration with regards to the plates and media.

critical and methodological observations

Together, our *Piranesi Variations* tried to deflect the conventions of visual representation, while testing additional graphic, diagrammatic, and organisational techniques. A common aspect across the students' works was the desire to play with dense and shallow renditions of space by tweaking saturation and texture. In many instances, there was a manipulation of the borrowed material as well as new additions. Most of the experiments approached the plate as a singular moment within a much larger interior space.

repetitive elements, inclusive spaces, and loose techniques

In the first cluster of our variations, we started by working with architectural cues from select *Carceri* plates, then enriching, reshuffling, and further animating their contents. Meanwhile, we tried to connect them to contemporary contexts subject to demolition and rebuilding programmes. Inspired by Piranesi's willingness to fragment, misuse, and collide various formal fragments in dynamic compositions, several student variations extended this approach to address recent urban issues. These voracious interiors began to amass additional *spolia* and bits of wreckage, including, for example, modern construction waste. New streams of content further intensified the process of scenographic saturations — the build-up of form and detail as seen in the transition from the first to second edition of Piranesi's *Carceri*, and plates I and XVI. With digital shortcuts, we were able to accelerate the production of visual texture by fracturing larger fragments and diffusing finer particles. Set within reimagined crypts and caves, these scenes referred not only to cycles of material transformation and reuse, but also to recent discussions about discreteness in digitally driven design production (see Figure 01).[29] Specifically, they probed the discrete logic of the image itself, beyond the visualisation of digitally controlled assemblies.

Here, we detected a shared interest in building the scenes through repetition and variations of sub-elements. Like the *Carceri* plates, many images were marked by the eerie recurrence of a few select elements, such as arches and bridges, that repeated in various positions, rendered with different technique. The gaps between these repetitive figures made room for subordinate spaces — as interior pockets or vistas — yet there is no illusion of depth. As the density and dynamism of the images escalated, we could see the students were paying tribute to a passionate indulgence in the raw beauty of the surreal landscapes they were creating using design strategies such as splintering, exploding, melting, and fusing. However, considering the technological tools and processes they were using, the students managed to balance this aesthetic intensity with rational thinking; like Piranesi, they dissimilated their intellectual endeavours behind creative enthusiasm (see Figure 02).

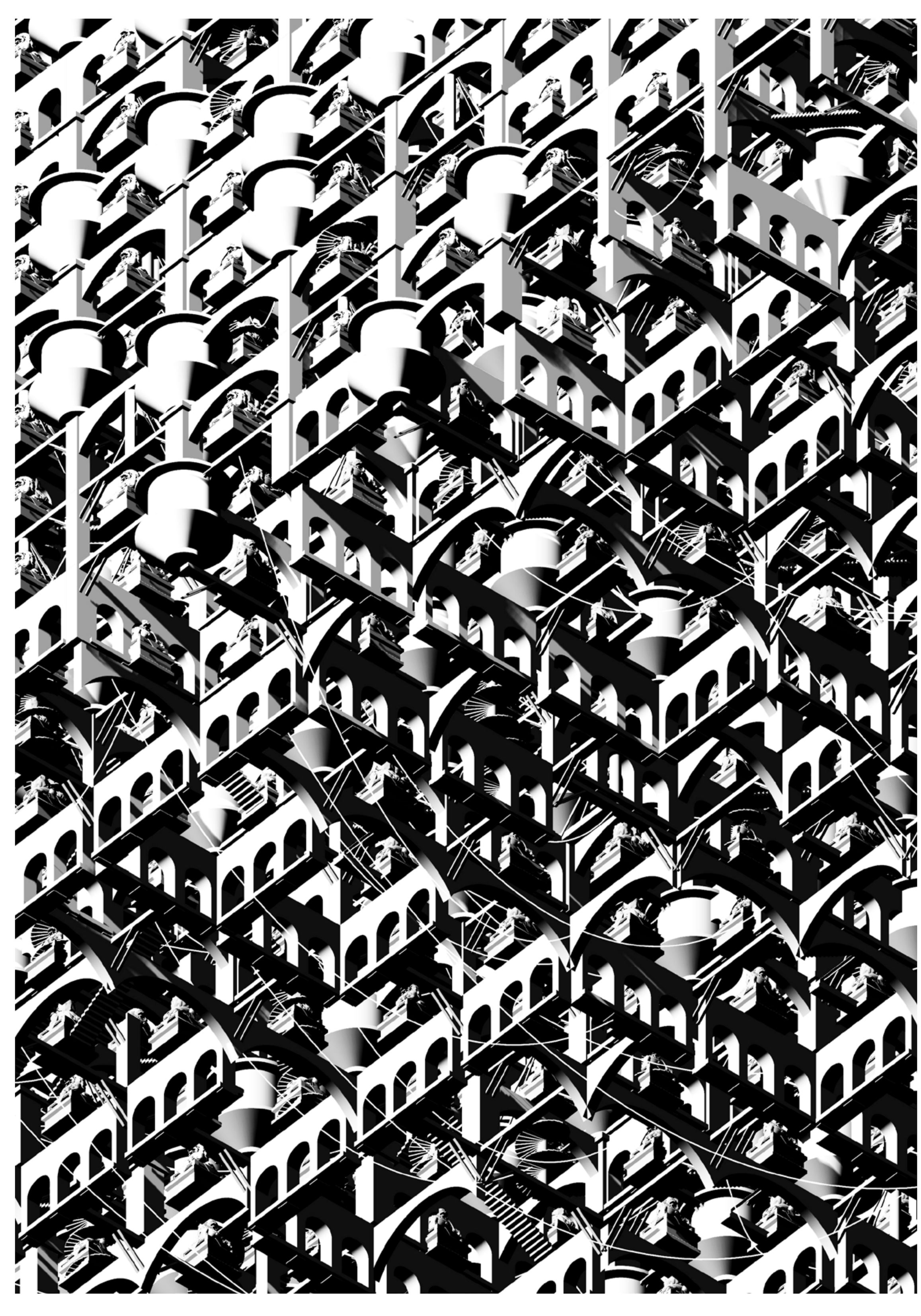
Figure 01.
Anastasija Fedotova, *Cave of Junk*, 2021. To see the full video go to: https://cdn.sanity.io/files/iobfixk6/production/6670d143563b6a04bf 24b010b5ab3 e868cbb7ac0.mp4. An interpretation of fragmentation in current environmental discourse, this exercise used advanced scripting and animation software to expand the range of reused fragments and debris to include modern demolition waste such as concrete, metal, and glass.

Figure 02.
Anastasija Fedotova, *Cave of Junk*, 2021. Building on the early phases of the experiment in fragmentation and densification of form, the reworked interior scenes were saturated with multiple industrial infrastructures and the material transformations. New mechanics and robotics were depicted, bringing together issues of contemporary technology with emerging design logics and material aesthetics.

The resultant images were not just rich and overwhelming; they also sought to outline transitional stages between different modes of representation. They increased repetition and variation of key visual techniques and attempted to reveal how the representational devices worked behind the scenes. Here, we were directly inspired by Piranesi's deliberate subversion of the pictorial conventions of his time, drawing on his jumps between foreground and background, multiple axes of escape, and centrifugal explosions of the image across the picture plane.

In several examples of the students' work, the repetition of architectural features — columns, beams, arches, and stairs — further emphasised the lack of spatial clarity and suggested ambiguous interpretations. By questioning the conventions of image-making and 3D-modelling, several variations alternated between flatness and depth within their algorithmically generated interior worlds (see Figures 03 and 04). Such oscillating thick 2D-images made it difficult to distinguish between object and field, and figure and ground. Depth appeared momentarily, just before it collapsed back into the graphic surface in a deliberate push and pull within the immaterial, virtual space.

While this fertile figure–figure digital realm could support further experimentation, we were cautious not to reproduce the type of self-referential postmodern games that often resulted in drawings that were intellectually astute yet visually overwhelming and virtually illegible without internal theory of the projects — Daniel Libeskind's *Micromegas*,[30] and Peter Eisenman and Jacques Derrida's *Chora L Works* are two examples.[31] With this in mind, we undertook the creation of composites by using the relationships between the scenes and, in part, subverting the tradition of layered, hybrid drawings.[32]

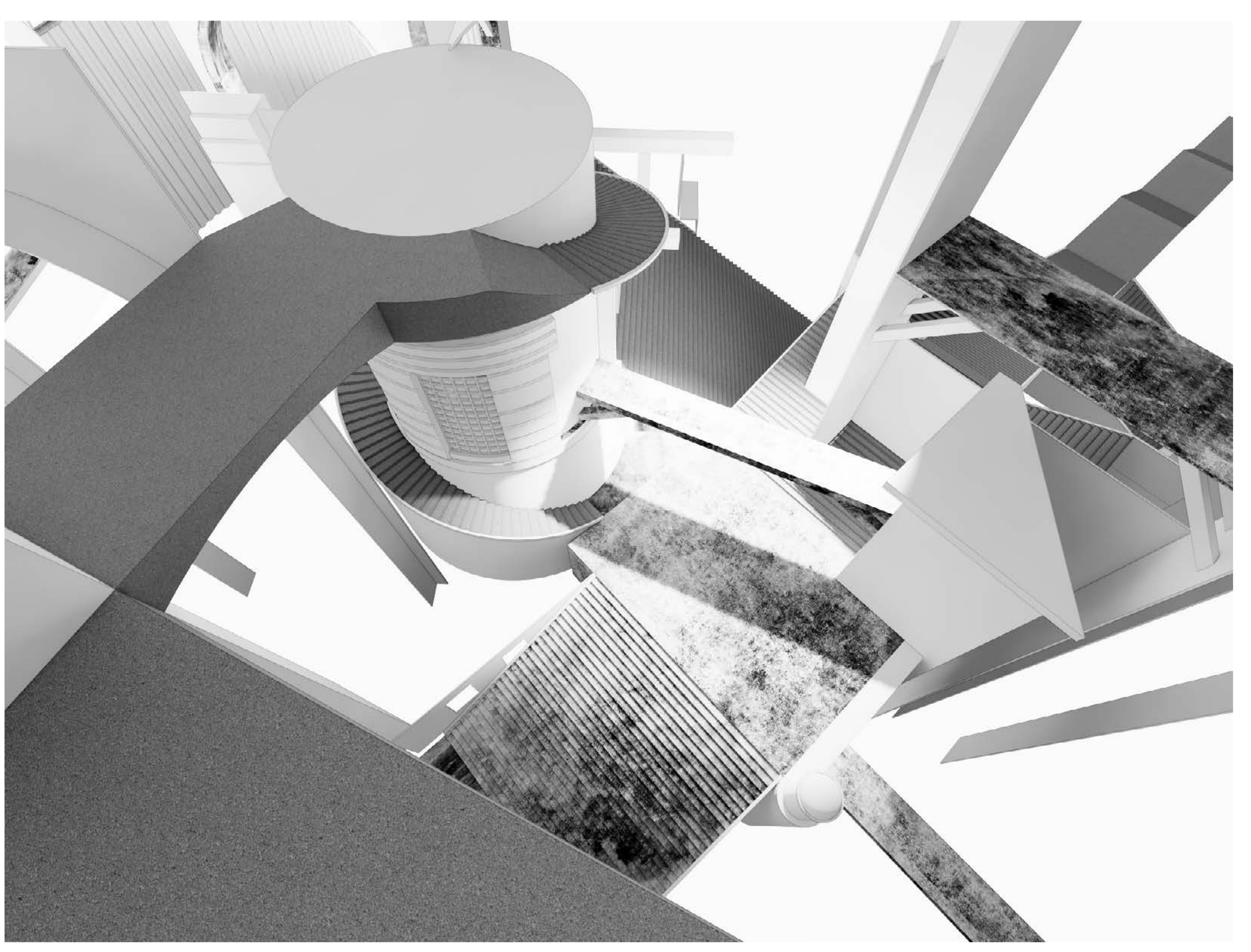


Left, Figure 03.
Ka Chun Chan, *The Arch as Recursive Figure*, 2021. This exercise used repetitive figures such as the arch from Carceri's The Round Tower to generate an unbounded matrix — a virtual interior. The experiment worked in two phases: the first was a realistic construct, subject to shade rendering and depth allusions; the second was a virtual construct that colour-codes the picture surface without allusion to any analogue environments. With conventional legibility obfuscated, the image became a new figure–figure representation that emphasises the multi-dimensional nesting of spaces, and follows a fractal logic.

Right, Figure 04.
Ka Chun Chan, *The Arch as Recursive Figure*, 2021.

The students' intentional ruptures between flat and deep zones allowed several concepts of space to coexist within the same image. The conceptual complexity escalated as we began to reinterpret *Carceri* in relation to other discourses such as on composite urban images or formal assemblages. However, we did not intend to create more architectural capriccios or collages of disparate fragments. Rather, we tried to expose the impossibility of Piranesi's scenographic space, and to highlight its relevance.

In some works, the students reminded us of the long-standing relationship between architecture and cinema by approaching Piranesi's plates through the analogy of a continuously evolving cinematic set (see Figures 05 and 06). Abandoning the correspondence between image and model, they exaggerated the feedback loops between the architectural props of film sets and the cut-up contents of the cinematic frames. To an extent, they tapped into the inherent plasticity of space, explored as a malleable and contingent interior over time. Executed in time-based media, these variations were made up of montages of spaces, threaded with several viewing trajectories.



Above, Figure 05.
Verdi Tsui, *The Round Tower Cine-Set*, 2021. This variation was part of a larger exercise that took five plates from *Carceri* as starting points for the construction of a round tableau of collided architectural elements, using the analogy of the cinematic set. The elements included paths from The Round Tower, frames from The Grand Piazza, textures from The Smoking Fire, displays from The Staircase with Trophies, as well as danglings from The Well. In the case of the tower, the work zoomed into hypothetical viewing paths that wrap around the anchoring central elements. The spatial spiral was built up using additional flights of stairs, landings, bridges, and galleries. In a deliberate twist, the attempt to consume the whole construct as a top-view exposed its implausibility.

Below, Figure 06.
Verdi Tsui, *The Round Tower Cine-Set*, 2021.

These experiments showed that we can expand, enrich, and agitate the contents of scenes such as Piranesi's *Carceri*, while highlighting the importance of more dynamic forms of representation that unfold beyond a single composite drawing. As we advanced to working with longer visual narratives and animations, we raised further issues regarding the representation of the spaces that connect multiple moments. Could such in-between spaces become the key tissue of spatial matrices and perceptual connections? Could *Carceri* be understood as the organisational paradigm of such transitions?

book-spaces, combined tools, and diagrammatic lines and surfaces

A second cluster of variations drew on *Carceri* as an unbound book or *corpo*, and a loosened organisational diagram. These experiments undertook a manipulation of a larger set of plates. They tended to explore the interdependence of the divergent parts of *Carceri* as well as ways of ordering the whole. Presented as visual sequences and animations, the variations in this cluster focused more on the dynamic links and ruptures — or the discontinuity — found in the originals. The book was used as a diagrammatic ordering device and cultural tool — the book-as-project.

Several exercises began by building up layers of depth within the plates. Imagining the spatial consequences of the partial hints, the students then extrapolated additional spaces between the original plates, constructed by drawing outlines and atmospheric textures (see Figure 07). These added slices of space then called on additional devices — arcades, walkways, and landscape paths — that allowed viewers to almost move through the striated space (see Figure 08). In this way, the distended plate sequence became a longer immersive document.

Next page, Figure 07.
Deborah Wong, *Carceri as an Immersive Document*, 2021. To see the full video go to: https://apc01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fcdn.sanity.io%2Ffiles%2Fiobfixk6%2Fproduction%2F21ecb65b521c25d a479257f23f910d 1e0eb8a72b.mp4&data=05%7C01%7CJ.Preston%40massey. In this exercise, the spaces between the plates were constructed via several techniques: first, by peeling away and spacing apart the pictorial surfaces; and second, by adding surfaces and passages to support the flow between the plates.

I II III IV V VI VII VIII IX X XI XII XIII XIV XV XVI

LANDSCAPE INSERTIONS
STRETCHED PLATES
ORIGINAL PLATES

Legend:
PHYSICAL (body movement)
VIRTUAL

PHYSICAL INCISION
PIRANESI'S CARCERI

Figure 08.
Deborah Wong, *The Carceri as an Immersive Document*, 2021. The overall impact of *Carceri* was explored as an experiential journey, where interim transitional landscapes were brought together along with manipulated plate-spaces. This experiment suggested that we can rethink the way we conceive architecture in terms of abstract formal rhythms and perceptual thresholds, and how we construct spaces of connection.

However, we were cautious not to equate the experiential journey or visual tunnel — replete with deliberate interruptions, detours, and lateral shifts — with the narrative structure that would conventionally bind together a book. In our experiments, we did not resort to a bidirectional flow of analogies between image and text. While the text has been used as a lens to describe the discontinuities within *Carceri*, such as by architectural theorist Jennifer Bloomer, we did not attempt allegorical 'constructions' of hyper-texts that explored how various separate points and lines suggest 'constellations' of descriptions and delineations.[33] Rather, we explored how the visual book might be actualised spatially, to trigger an investigation into additional layers and dimensions. Contemplating these spaces presented both familiar moments (they are reminiscent of ruins and assemblages) as well as uncanny ones (they depict mutating monuments, floating supports, lop-sided enclosures). In this cluster of variations, we found additional wrinkles and paradoxes to be explored. The concept of the book served as both an immersive space and an expositional device, always open and receptive.

But here we should ask: how does this spatial approach affect the overall logic and consistency of the project as a whole? In response to this question, the students proposed a shift from the visual narrative to the diagrammatic framework as the primary tool for managing the book-space. Neither the geometric scaffolding involved in reconstructing the spaces behind the images nor the narrative thread can sustain the flow of transitions overall, they found. Experimental diagrams, on the other hand, can manage a project both visually and conceptually.[34] Diagrams help us to sequence the visual samples and unify them into a conceptual whole.

Simple, linear diagrams of progression would be problematic, especially given the images produced by the students, in which vectors, directions, and lines of escape proliferated. And so, several experiments proposed that multiple organisational diagrams can be imposed and relaxed, obeyed or violated. Rethinking the sequence of the *Carceri* plates, the students tested the application of surface-driven, topological diagrams (see Figure 09). These exercises located the shared elements and implied adjacencies of space laterally, across the edges of the plate. Like the pieces of a huge puzzle, the plates were then arranged and rearranged upon a flexible surface. But how to reveal this process of disconnecting and reconnecting the pieces, as well as the unfolding and refolding of the overall construct? At one point, the animations suggested a kind of three-dimensional myriorama, and at another, they seemed to resemble Surrealist 'exquisite corpses' or postmodern 'architectural jazz.'[35]

Figure 09.
Tara Malek-Gilani, *Carceri Cloud and Unfolding Myriorama*, 2021. To see the full video go to: https://cdn.sanity.io/files/iobfixk6/production/38bd3659ab3 57958ab43b2af619 f359aedd44cb2.mp4. This exercise operated with fictional contiguities such as locating another tier of a tower, an extra flight of stairs, or a continuation of a walkway, in order to propose alternative flow across the prints. With this, the extent and the position of graphic fragments was altered. Furthermore, the digital scans of *Carceri* prints initiated a discussion of contemporary technologies of sampling (such as photogrammetry and 3D-scanning). Thus, the construct deliberately switched between surfaces and points-clouds. Overall, the three-dimensional myriorama also invites additional associations: a fragile house of cards, a growing rhizome of connections, and a cinematic labyrinth. The book-space is always fluid, discontinuous, and mutable.

With the burden of these associations, the way we understood our book-worlds became more complex, knotted, and non-linear. And so, whether we experimented with various interconnecting points and lines, or deployed the pliancy of the diagrammatic surface, we emphasised the power of the book as a visual device and intellectual instrument — one crucial for our own architectural culture.

Today, we need more than flexible diagrams that can accommodate fluid patterns of organisation; we also need new tools for processing, filtering, and display of information. And so here we considered the relationship between old and new media tools. If the old media (etched plates, books, archives) could merge with the new (digital exhibitions, websites, virtual platforms), what does that imply for our ability to manage digital sets of architectural representations? Going beyond the spatial book-constructs and the digital archives of prints, could we encompass the collection of urban images using the idea of the growing imaginary city — a cumulative body of work that is *Carceri*? How would that alter our approach to curating and display?

subdivided city, urban **corpi**, *and digital platforms*

The third cluster of works took our experiments to further levels and scales and focused on transfers between media and visual carriers of cultural content. These variations exploited the logic of *Carceri* as an urban *corpo* — in other words, they attempted to construct a larger project from discrete timelines of architectural variations. They also evolved their diagrammatic frameworks to adapt to the larger scope of the project, using digital matrices, archives, and platforms.

Noticeably, several exercises continued to exploit the gaps and subdivisions found in the *Carceri* plates. Through analytical dissection and re-framing, they released architectural fragments from the imaginary ground. At the same time, they responded to recent cultural debates on the life cycles of urban artefacts (along with accompanying loops of their short-term utility and obsolescence).[36] Focusing on the deconstruction and reconstruction of architectural monuments, several exercises presented us with abstract diagrams and visual tableaux of cities of ruins (see Figure 10). They tracked the processes of erection and collapse in both directions: the complete breakdown of persistent structures such as towers as well as the architectural monsters and chimeras rising from the entropic fields of debris (see Figure 11).

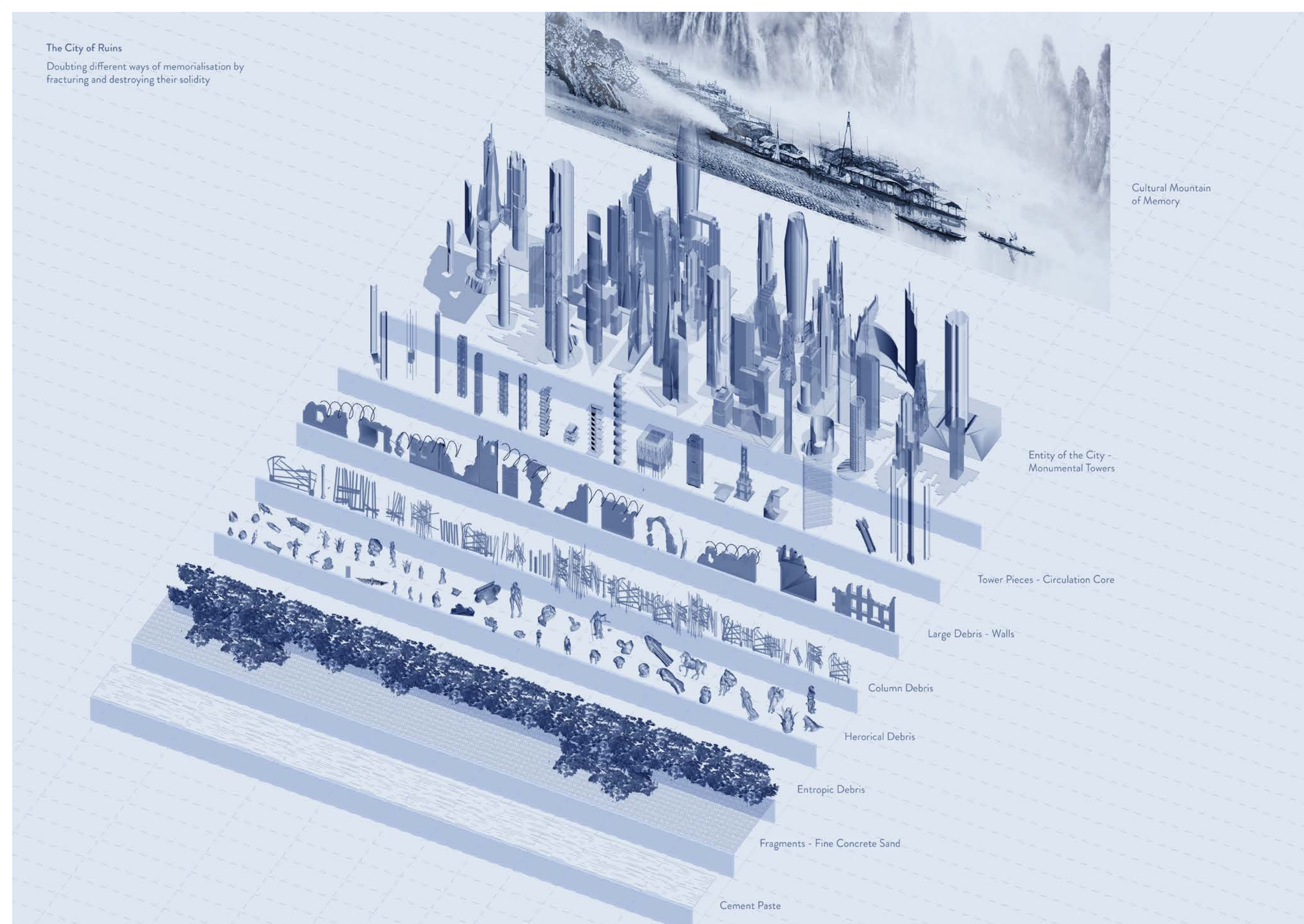


Figure 10.
Zhi Bin Cheah, *City of Ruins*, 2021. This exercise extended the deconstructed monuments of *Carceri* to current debates on obsolescence and renewal. It focused on the fate of architectural monuments, and especially the tower. The towers were deconstructed into minor elements and fragments and all the way to dust and debris. At the same time, there was a reversal of this process, with new artefacts reconstructed as aggregates of decontextualised old parts.

Figure 11.
Zhi Bin Cheah, *City of Ruins*, 2021. The composite image did not aim to represent a city-scape or a futuristic urban vision, but was conceptually layered to reveal our ability to think about several operations on monuments simultaneously. In that, it suggested a different approach to architectural obsolescence. Its main goal was to try to combine several time-frames (and levels of order and entropy) in the same paradoxical image of a city in ruins.

Beyond representing space, the students attempted to visualise time — vectors, timelines, and transcripts. Such preoccupation marked the gradual yet deliberate departure from cartographic approaches to urban speculations. Despite the map-like appearance, the results should not be confused with composite maps of an imaginary Rome. This is significant, for many projects on multiplicity and dis-continuity of the city rely on the *Campo Marzio* as a precedent — another of Piranesi's renowned projects that is often lauded as the visionary archeological reconstruction and the first modern, architectural project on the city of Rome (the potential plan of the city, extrapolated from the few surviving fragments of the stone map as well as re-imagined to fill in the missing pieces of the spatial puzzle).[37] Its rhythmic architectural plan that spans between several historical periods is often used as a unique basis for projecting further

planimetric grids and infrastructures, as well as adding urban landmarks as linked to contemporary variations.[38] By contrast, we chose *Carceri* as the central model, serving as a springboard for experimentation on discrete urban artefacts, without the limitations of a totalising map or a common ground (see Figure 12).

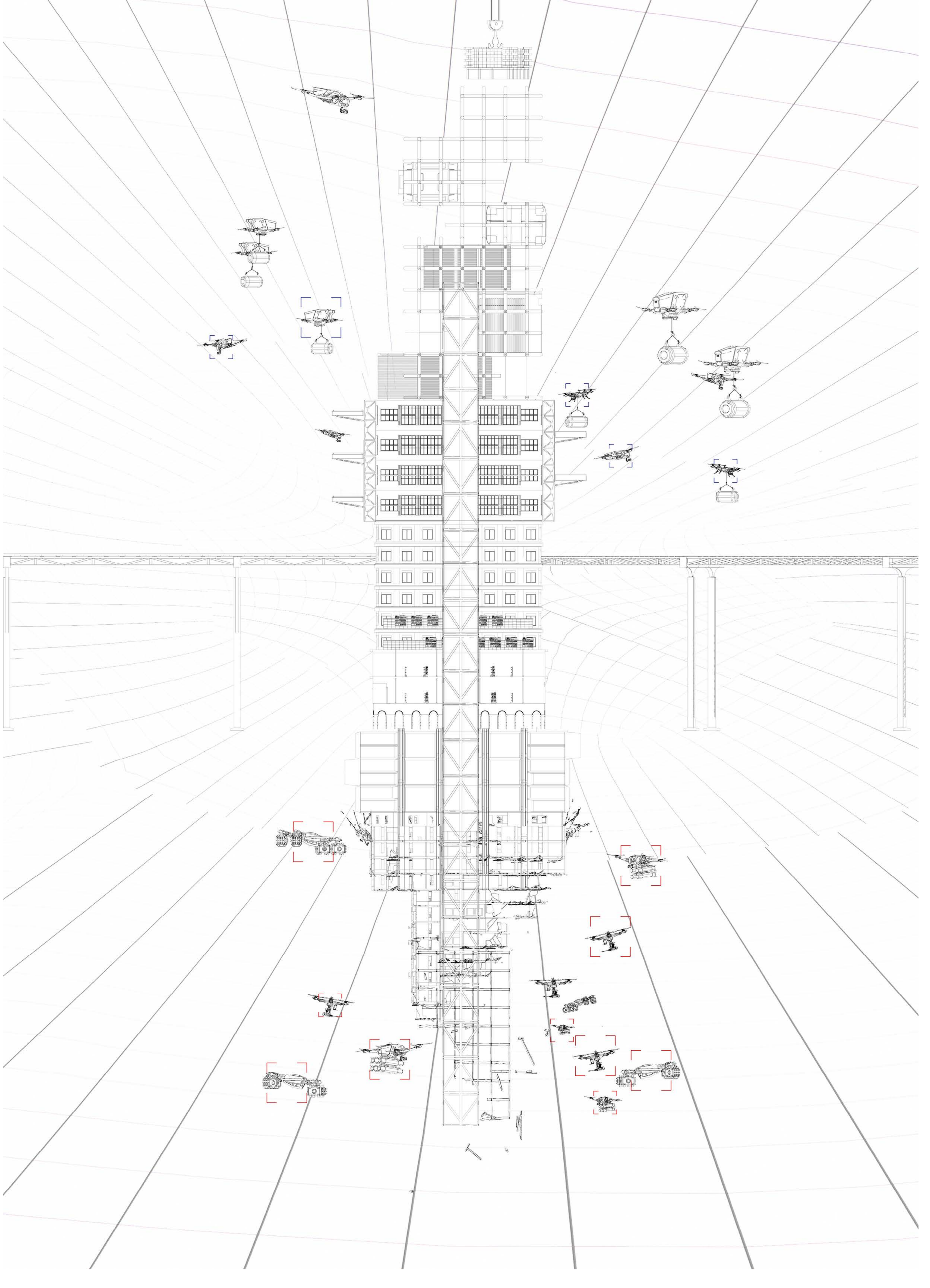


Figure 12.
Tianyi Chen, *Reiteration of Fundamental Elements*, 2021.
This exercise used archaeological layering in section as a tool to not only show accumulation over time, but also to follow the fates of the most fundamental elements of architecture. These were shown as reincarnated in several historical periods, with different construction methods and material techniques. Viewers can move up and down across a new section of an imaginary vertical space, and also use the image as a cultural device, looking backwards or forwards in time.

Next page, Figure 13.
Siyue Zhang, *Three-dimensional Corpi*, 2021. This project attempted to explore how the corpo of *Carceri* could be used to subvert contemporary variations on Piranesi's *Campo Marzio* (an example of the latter is *The Field of Dreams*, a project by Jeffrey Kipnis and a team of students at Ohio State University from 2012). In a conversation with *Field of Dreams*, discrete spatial pockets of the city were also presented as urban palimpsests, containing both historical sites and hypothetical transplants of contemporary landmarks. However, the emphasis shifted to representing evolution of discrete urban sites over time, with less need for the overall map to grant consistency to the project.

Furthermore, while several experimental practices gave us clear indexical representations of formal transformation (such as via diagrammatic matrices and 'diaries'), the changes of artefacts in their urban project were harder to track.[39] Working from the idea of *corpi*, we could better track the evolution of multiple elements simultaneously as parallel timelines. We could also stratify and excavate multiple versions of the same fundamental elements across time and contexts (see Figure 13). This approach allowed the experiments to capture one of the more unique aspects of architectural thinking: the incessant act of tinkering and revision, returning to the past while leaping into future.

In addition to enabling such multi-tracked and self-critical ways of working, this cluster of experiments also made us consider current debates around data-collection, management, and retrieval — especially for urban archives, research platforms, and cultural institutions. For example, some exercises drew our attention to the effects of monitoring information on continuously changing urban sites, while others made us reflect on how growing digital archives might be managed (see Figure 14). Together, these variations presented the future imaginary city as akin to a curated exposition in the virtual space.

Connecting old and new discourses and media, these works sustained the crucial exchange between architecture and city. In them, the future architecture of the city could be glimpsed through select anchor-points, time-sections, and virtual portals. This is relevant for future endeavours, for most of our speculative work will soon be splintered and reconfigured as it moves across multiple platforms — digital archives, multi-media exhibitions, and virtual realms.

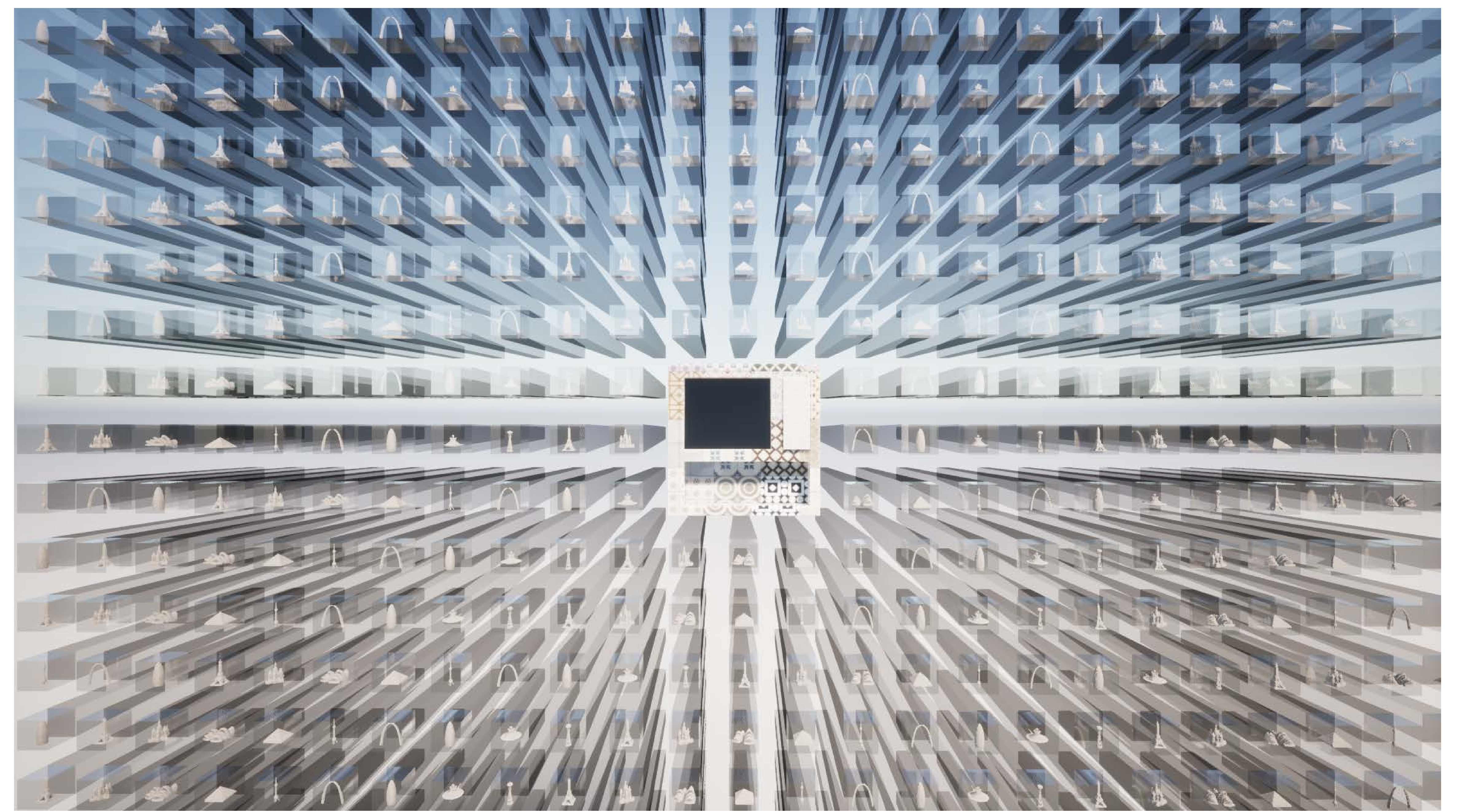


Figure 14.
Siyue Zhang, *Three-dimensional Corpi*, 2021. With the use of advanced digital technologies, the historical artefacts and their multiple speculative futures were imagined as one large database. Such a digital database would need new interfaces for browsing and display, especially with the growing importance of the virtual dimension. Building the critique of the frame of the Piranesi prints to other boxes, windows, and portals we deploy on the screens, the project explored multiple points of entry into the virtual exhibition of the urban archive, composed of digital architectural models.

conclusion

This collective experiment stressed the timeless relevance of Piranesi's *Carceri* and demonstrated how the series might resonate with current areas of interest within architecture and design, including visual techniques, design methods, and speculative practices. We have shown how these visual explorations can affect the ways in which we construct and manipulate architectural imagery as they perform as carriers of images and concepts while testing new approaches to figuration, organisation, and process. Our *Piranesi Variations* is a speculative project that subverts notions of flatness and depth, subdivision, and reintegration. As the variations challenged conventions and habits, they also helped us recalibrate our design methodologies in that we became more open to embracing creative freedom while maintaining intellectual consistency.

Our experiments are only a taster of a wider project that could continue elsewhere. It is important to identify further avenues of exploration in the margins of more established research agendas. Specifically, our work could go beyond current obsessions with the surreal, accidental aspects of digital representations, and include deliberate misuses of cutting-edge tools and technologies.[40] At the same time, with augmented (artificial and human) design intelligence, we could generate and manipulate an enormous number of derivative and synthetic images without losing the crucial aspects of subjective judgment and curation.[41] Speculative image-making could be undertaken not only to capture architectural visions, but also to make visible the emerging spatial principles that arise between the visionary and the visual.

By challenging dominant modes of communication and exposition, we could anticipate future curatorial concepts and strategies. We could learn to sustain transformation, variation, and assembly across multiple sites and timeframes. The immersive documentation could traverse interiors that are both real and imagined. To get more out of these journeys and experiences, we would finally be able to switch between discrete and continuous modes of viewing intellectual and spatial frameworks.

Most importantly, we hope our project stresses the benefits of cutting across backgrounds, expertise, and skill sets. This is only a small step towards obviating detrimental divides — between history and speculation, theory and design, analysis and synthesis. With this, we wish to stress the enduring power of the speculative project to deliberately reconstruct and redirect our shared architectural past.

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tempering grief through the victorian home's furniture and objects: the emergence of spiritual comfort

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abstract

This essay describes the emergence of spiritual comfort in the home by exploring how Victorian spiritualists formed an intimate and meaningful connection to the home's furniture and contents. Through their contentious beliefs and practices, believers of spiritualism transformed their living rooms into fantasy realms where the souls of their deceased loved ones continued to dwell. Through otherworldly interactions, the bereaved found solace in the place they experienced grief most acutely: the home. As a part of the discussion, I undertake an analysis of Morrel Theobald's book, *Spirit Workers in the Home Circle* (1887). In addition, I consider how Theobald used his manuscript to present scientific proof of the supernaturalist occurrences in his home, and a public platform to authenticate spiritualism as a truth claim. His primary motive in *Spirit Workers* was for spiritualism to be accepted as a reasonable way of life for the greater good of all individuals. I describe how Theobald jeopardised his reputation as a rational, reputable human being to promote his spiritualist agenda and how his phantasmagoric interiors played a role in proving spiritualism to be a legitimate and beneficial way of life.

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keywords:
domestic interior, home, spiritualism, mourning, spirit, parrhesia, Victorian, self care, consolation, comfort, self formation

the spirited interior

The Victorian spiritualist interior was a fantastical place where disembodied souls animated household furniture to communicate with the living during the mid to late nineteenth century. Believers of spiritualism imagined that the home, with its ordinary furniture and everyday objects, was not solely accommodation for living family members. It was also a place for the spirits of the dead. Tipping stools, rapping tables, and levitating armchairs typified the kinds of otherworldly exchanges that might occur in the home if the atmosphere were conducive and the occupants receptive. Individuals from all walks of life revelled in the prospect of such 'spirited interiors,' as I have termed rooms affected by spiritualist animations.[01] For some participants, spiritualist experiments and practices like séances provided a thrilling form of entertainment (see Figure 01). For others — particularly individuals who sought to temper the pain experienced in grief and mourning — spiritualism provided a way to commune with deceased loved ones in a way that was emotionally satisfying.

Figure 01.
Reproduced from Henry Vizetelly, *Table Turning and Table Talking*, 2nd ed. (London: Clarke, Beeton and Co., 1853), Inner leaf. Public Realm.

This essay considers how Victorian spiritualist beliefs and practices informed the interior's status as a place of emotional recuperation and material comfort in mourning. The focus looks beyond the arrangement of the darkened séance room to explain how the prospect of communication with deceased loved ones encouraged grieving inhabitants to fashion an extraordinary connection to their home's ordinary furniture and contents.[02] The outcome produced a kind of *supra-interior* whereby bereaved individuals formed an intimate and meaningful bond with their living environment. For this reason, I argue that the spiritualist inhabitant's distinctive, fantastical connection with their interiors contributed to the home's wider significance as a place of emotional comfort.

It is worthwhile noting that the inception of the modern spiritualist movement in America involved a claim by two young sisters, Maggie and Kate Fox, in 1848. They believed the tapping sounds they heard coming from their rooms were the communications of a salesperson who was rumoured to have been murdered in their home five years

earlier.[03] The girls' assertion is significant because it highlights two important shifts in conventional thinking of the period. The first is that the soul or spirit could remain in the material world after death, rather than directly ascend to heaven — or hell — as conventional Christians believed. The second is that the contents of ordinary households, specifically the dining table, had taken on a new and fascinating role as conduit to an immaterial world of spirit life.[04] Spiritualist Morell Theobald's retrospective monograph *Spirit Workers in the Home Circle* (1887) reveals how the author called upon his home interior to heal his afflicted soul.[05] Theobald's *Spirit Workers* chronicles the supernatural experiences that occurred within his home over the twenty years prior to publication. In an elaborate account of his daily life, Theobald describes communication between the family's living members and their four disembodied spirit children. Like ordinary children, the *other* Theobalds enlivened their family home through their unpredictable yet welcomed activities. Their exploits included communication in séance, writing on ceilings and walls, cheerful play, and, most remarkably, household work.

Importantly, Theobald's story is a 'provocation' because he adopted a supernaturalist understanding of domestic life in mourning over a materialist one. His conduct refuted conventions of rational thought and the proper everyday running of his household. While his privatisation of grief conformed to societal expectations, the phantasmagorical experiences he describes did not. Furthermore, he exposed his grief to a public stage by publishing his strange consolatory practices in *Spirit Workers*.

It is notable that Theobald invited public ridicule to prove that the practice of summoning spirits of the dead had the potential to '*benefit mankind*.'[06] Theobald's repudiation of normative domesticity was by means of 'truth telling' — a form of free speech that Foucault describes as *parrhesia*.[07] This verbal activity individualised Theobald, because the beliefs and practices he posited as truth stretched the limits of what was a possible way of engaging with the domestic interior within conventional culture. Theobald's divergence from hegemonic relations of power, knowledge, and subjectivity in the home was marginalising to himself, his family, and their supporters. Yet, he believed so strongly in the Spirited Interior's analgesic property that he placed his reputation at risk as a moral, rational being. Theobald's *parrhesiastic* condition as marginal speaker underscores his status as a visionary character. He looked to benefit the wellbeing of a family in mourning by extending the limits of credible domestic life through his spiritualist interior. In doing so, Theobald engaged in a normalising discourse of a different kind, one that sought to promote a 'fantasy life' as a reasonable one.

To explain what drove Theobald to defy social conventions, one should take into account the circumstances that made spiritualism appealing to him and other believers who shared his sensibility. Most notably, death in the Victorian family was a common occurrence, and the sentiment of pain in grief was experienced more intensely than it had been before.[08] This concentration of feeling, as historian Philippe Ariès has explained, 'led to an almost fanatical cult of remembrance.'[09] Commemorative practices made death more palatable for those at particular risk of sickness and death, as well as survivors.

The Victorian culture of commemoration allowed the private interior, as the prime setting for spiritualist experiences, to enter the public discourse on consolation, memory, and fashion. The development was buoyed by an attitude toward death that romanticised dying and constrained the experience and memory of death along certain lines. Enactments of *the good death*, which involved 'dying surrounded by one's family in a Christian home'; *the beautiful death*, which 'aestheticised' it; and *the theatre of death* whereby 'profound last words were uttered in the final moments of life', are common Victorian motifs. In addition, material artefacts provided individuals with reminders of the deceased. For instance, locks of hair spun into jewellery provided portable mementos of loved ones, and a solemn reminder of one's own mortality.[10] Spiritualism adapted these kinds of performative and material aspects of conventional bereavement to produce an enhanced consolatory experience in séance and daily life at home.

Victorian spiritualism was ultimately pushed aside by a pragmatic way of knowing and conceiving of the world, the home, and oneself, which was distanced from domains of spirituality and Christian faith.[11] This, however, did not occur without resistance from believers like Theobald. He noted that 'scientific men', particularly, had little tolerance for his spiritualist claims.[12] So, Theobald employed what he thought to be empirical measures to ensure his spirited home's recognition and acceptance by sceptics. In a culture that increasingly privileged reason, Theobald strove to prove the certainty of what was inevitably dismissed by many as a fantasy life. Despite the scientific community's opposition to spiritualism and the psychiatric approach to bereavement that eventually prevailed, Theobald may have been reassured to know that the spiritualist attitude to the interior as a place of emotional comfort survived.

Historian Judith Flanders recognises that today's home is a place 'where we find emotional sustenance' and where we can 'find literal, as well as spiritual, comfort.'[13] The examination of Theobald's book might contribute to the explanation of why we conceive of home in this way. I argue that the contemporary, emotionally sustaining interior described by Flanders as comforting was established in part through the historically specific practice of '*Spiritualism at Home*.'[14] I posit that the altered conception of the soul and future life as played out though the reception and handling of Victorian domestic furniture establishes a genealogical

connection between the spiritual comfort of the bereaved in spiritualism, and the secular peace and contentment of the modern interior. Importantly, spiritualism's fantastical convictions about the home comprise a particular kind of self-nurture that draws not only on the resources of interior spaces, furnishings, and objects, but also on the inhabitant's own imagination. I believe the sanguine and personal connection spiritualists formed to their household furniture offers a significant contribution to the notion of physical comfort that is synonymous with the domestic interior of the nineteenth century and continues today.[15]

defining oneself through grief's misery: *making up* the spiritualist subject

> My wife and I had passed through years of sorrow; and as I look back upon the time I wonder at the unbroken hearts which we carried with us through various consecutive chambers of sickness, worldly trials, and bereavements. The darkest hour precedes the dawn; and while we two, after burying three little ones, sat wondering if these three whom we had lost, one after another, were lonely, and what was really the future into which they had entered [...][16]

It was not unusual that the Theobalds should lose three, and eventually four, of their children, two of them stillborn. Death among infants and children was a common occurrence in the nineteenth century.[17] Although mortality rates were lower among the privileged classes, there was a certain democratic character to death. Death affected all people equally, particularly in terms of its impact on surviving family members. The 'unsettling effects of grief,' as Reverend Henry Ward Beecher described them, did not distinguish between social status or religious denomination.[18] Of these non-discriminating circumstances, a consolatory article, written in 1846, explained, 'From the throne to the cottage, and from the monarch to the mendicant, through all the intermediate grades of society, all must enter the furnace of affliction, and be chastened by the rod of pain.'[19]

Enduring the loss of a family member, and especially a child, was most acutely and privately experienced at home. The Reverend Henry Ward Beecher wrote:

> Who ever gave an idea of the workings of grief in a parent's heart when for the first time Death comes and takes away a child? [...] The alternation of anguish and of utter stupidity, the outburst of grief or the deep inward pain that yield no tears and on which all words fall as the dust falls on flowers, to disfigure and burden; the calling voices in the night awakening one as in a trumpet, the troubled dreams, the dull and heavy mornings — who can delineate these?[20]

The adversity of bereavement transformed the sufferer's emotional state and demeanour. Grief converted a contented soul into a sorrowful one. Another article observed that 'A great grief often changes the character so wonderfully that we are unable to recognise it again.'[21] Overwhelming sadness impaired mourners' capacity to partake in daily life. A grieving husband still had a responsibility to provide for his family; a bereaved mother had surviving children to care for, yet grief overrode the concern for oneself and others. The bereaved family member was a new type of inhabiting individual who was unable to bear the load of suffering.

Importantly, the Victorian sentiment of pain in grief was the signal by which individuals recognised themselves as objects of affliction. Attaining a state of 'happiness' or consolation to counter the experience of pain in grief was a goal for the home's new inhabitanting subject.[22] Grieving Victorians were counselled that '[n]ot the most afflicted but the most feeble 'die of a broken heart.'[23] Yet, surviving bereavement was a challenge for all. For the heart to remain strong, the soul to heal, and one's life to continue in a normalised way, grief needed to be managed.

While grief did not discriminate, the quest for solace reflected denominationally varied perceptions of death, the soul, and future life.[24] For example, evangelicals had been long counselled that 'God afflicts us for our benefit.'[25] Protestants commonly believed that 'time' was required to heal the soul.[26] Meanwhile, Ariès explains that Catholic survivors were 'content to cultivate the memory of the deceased,' and took solace in 'the conviction that they would be reunited in heaven with those whom they had loved and venerated on earth.'[27] Spiritualists, by contrast, did not wait for their own deaths to reunite with their departed kin. Rather, they sought them out through séance, mediumistic experiments with rings, puppets, hats, and music stools, as well as clairvoyant readings and other more spontaneous interactions in the home. The prospect held persuasive appeal for the bereaved. One believer explained that 'the anxieties and sorrows consequent on sickness and bereavement have been entirely removed by a knowledge of spiritualism.'[28] Knowing that a deceased loved one had re-entered the material world, as evidenced by animated household furniture and objects, offered a tactile and therefore superior form of consolation to grief-stricken inhabitants.

The expedient, comforting relation to the home's furniture and objects that the belief and practice of spiritualism provided was a compelling antidote to a sentiment of irreplaceable loss. Theobald explained that it was his 'privilege — sometimes a sad, sorrowful, and perplexing one — to have received an unusually extended range of spiritual phenomena in my own household.'[29] Spiritualism had made an anguished but timely entrance into the nineteenth-century home.

comforting oneself at home through a belief in spirit life and work

Among spiritualism's fantastical convictions was the belief that household furniture was a conduit for communication with spirits. The thought enabled grieving spiritualists to draw on the resources of the interior and their own imaginations to craft a contented inner state for themselves and their homes. For sceptics, a belief that spirits exist and can occupy the home was replete with fiction and imaginative self-deceit. Yet, for believers, it offered welcome assurance of a loved one's continued presence in their earthly home and welfare in their future life. Home was the place in which a deceased family member's absence was most intensely experienced by those remaining. A spiritualist engagement with the interior, its furniture, and contents offered comfort, and provided a form of consolation par excellence in bereavement.

The following excerpt is taken from a book entitled *The Soul of Things* (1863) and is worthy of lengthy citation.[30] It forms a part of a wider discussion of *psychometry*, which involves the scientific study of the paranormal ability to discern information about an object's history, often pertaining to its owner.[31] The characterisation and tone of the passage communicate how rhetoric and writing style express the pain of grief, and, furthermore, how the interior, its familiar objects, and personal effects connect the bereaved to their loved ones:

> Can you tell me, my friend, why it is that the room in which the loved one breathed out the last ray of earthly, organic life is still so very dear to you? What it is you so distinctly feel within those walls that reminds you of the loved and lost? Why, when you pass within its portals, your eye instinctively turns toward sofa, bed, and chair, as if you expected the same fond gaze to greet you now as it has often done before? [...] Nor are these sensations confined to the room alone. The clothing our loved ones have worn, the books they have handled, and, I may add, even the objects on which they have gazed with fondness and pleasure, have all a kindred power to reproduce sensations of their presence.[32]

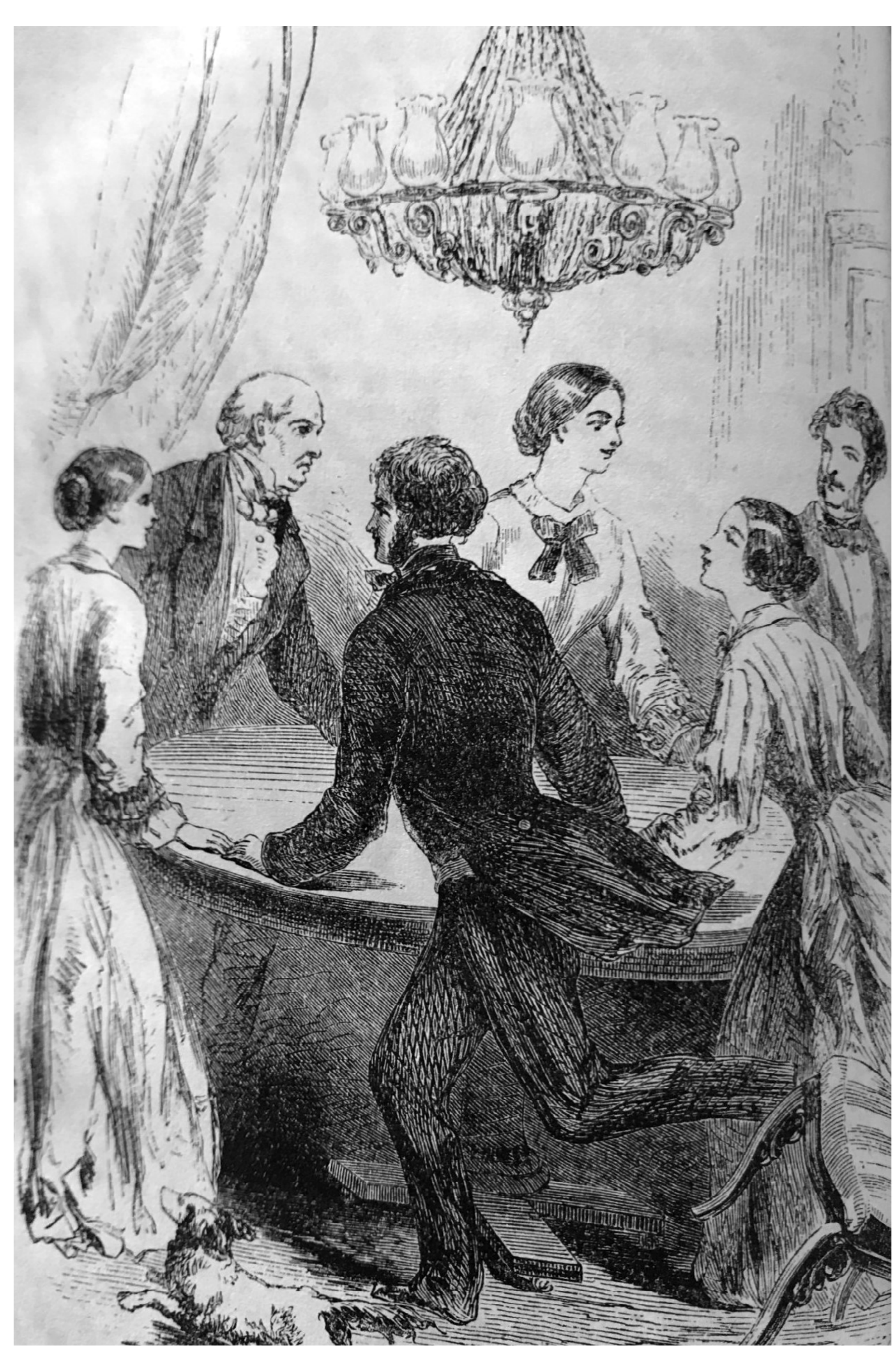
Despite the author's interest in psychometry, the passage appears to be framed through spiritualist ideology. It describes the hyper-sensory quality of rooms, furniture, and personal items formerly associated with the deceased that could revive their presence in a way that was emotionally sustaining.

Spiritualists believed that such a visceral association with the home's furniture and contents provided disembodied spirits with the most logical and convenient means of communication.[33] After all, having previously resided in the home, the spirits knew the items well. As previously mentioned, the table particularly had become the spiritualists'

primary means of communication. While any table would do, Henry Vizetelly's guidebook *Table Turning and Table Talking* (1853) offered advice about the most effective kinds:[34]

> The tables which have hitherto produced the best effects are those called drawing room tables, of moderate size, and an oval form [...] Tables having only one leg are also so much the better [...] The table should be wooden, no matter of what wood or what form, for experiments on mahogany, deal, oak, or fir tables, round or oval, have all equally succeeded. It is indifferent whether it be a folding one or not. Its weight is also a matter of no consequence [...][35]

Yet, experienced spiritualists found that interactions were not limited to tables, commonly featured in séances and occasionally levitating, as many Victorians had been led to believe. Vizetelly also described experiments with puppets, rings, hats, and music stools (see Figures 02, 03, and 04).[36]



Left, Figure 02.
Vizetelly, The Turning Table, p. 99.

Right, Figure 03.
Vizetelly, The Oscillating Puppet, p. 140.

Figure 04.
Vizetelly, The Music Stool, 147.

In her monograph *There is No Death* (1891), prominent British spiritualist Florence Marryat described the intimate nature of spirit contact she had experienced through her varied personal effects such as 'a cardboard box, a gentleman's hat, a footstool, the strings of a guitar, and on the back of my chair, even on the pillow of my bed.'[37] Marryat describes the convenience, spontaneity, and intimacy of ordinary household items as a means of communication with departed loved ones.

Likewise, a substantial portion of the spirit communications Theobald experienced and recorded were integrated seamlessly into his family's daily life. Theobald considered these impromptu interactions differently from the variety that was encouraged through séance. Of the natural quality of these easy exchanges he wrote:

> About this time it was no unusual thing, when I stood up to carve the joint at the dinner-table, to have the table suddenly moved completely away from my reach and, upon my asking for it to be brought back to me, for it to return and push me back with it until I was tightly pinned to the wall! Frivolous? Very! [...] and we must bear in mind that this all mingled in naturally and *unsought* with daily life.[38]

Despite the sometimes frolicsome day-to-day activities among spirits that Theobald recalls in the preceding example, the spirit children's endeavours extended beyond childish play. As the book's title, *Spirit Workers in the Home Circle* suggests, housework undertaken by the spirits comprises a substantial component of the recorded events. Among the family and spirits alike, it was understood that the spirit children would contribute to household chores to assist the Theobald's mediumistic housekeeper, Mary. Mary would become physically exhausted by her mediumism, which rendered her unfit for her domestic duties. The spirits' undertaking of household work allowed Mary to rest and recuperate. She could then expend her energy on mediumism in séance, and enhance communications between the Theobalds and the spirits of their children. Theobald explains,

> Again we all — visible members and invisible — fell into our regular work. Household duties were often divided pretty equally between the two groups. The spirit friends seemed to take any amount of trouble to help, and especially so when physical strength had been exhausted [...] Invisible help was persistent, and real as the ordinary domestic help.[39]

However, the spirit children accomplished more than ordinary tasks in the household. By creating a 'condition of domestic peace and harmony', as Theobald described his home's atmosphere under the influence of spirit life, the spirits also provided emotional consolation and physical comfort.[40] Not only were the spirits making themselves visible to their grieving parents by animating household furniture and objects, but through household chores, they were reducing the toil of daily life and even indulging the Theobalds in small domestic comforts. Theobald explained that '[n]early every day was marked by acts of domestic service done by unseen friends, while not unfrequently puddings have been entirely *made and cooked* when all the family were sitting together on Sunday evening *en séance*.'[41] To further his point to his readers, Theobald traced '[o]ne week's phenomena (or rather a portion of them, for other phenomena and much writing also occurred).'[42] This was 'only a sample of what is now continually going on in our house, and I have reason to believe that similar phenomena are to be found in other private families.'[43]Theobald included a basement plan of his home to show the layout of the interior in relation to the paranormal activities he documented.

Figure 05.
Morell Theobald, Plate I, Part II, Ch. 1, Basement Plan of House, in *Spirit Workers in the Home Circle: An Autobiographic Narrative of Psychic Phenomena in Family Daily Life Extending Over a Period of Twenty Years* (London: T Fisher Unwin. 1887), pp. 106–07. Public Realm.

In *Spirit Workers*, Theobald contextualises the ordinary household duties his spirit children undertook, by situating them relative to the floor plan of his home.[44] In doing so, Theobald connects the comfort that came with knowing his spirit children were with him to the domestic interior, its contents, and the daily life within it.

Theobald's suggestion that readers look beyond proper 'household routine' to seek spiritualism's 'meaning and value' for themselves is tied to the spiritualist home's consolatory aspects.[45] Spiritualism undermined a number of cultural certainties, ranging from religious and domestic concerns to practical logic.[46] Yet, Theobald believed the personal benefits of consolation outweighed the socio-cultural risks that accompanied the unorthodox belief in spirit life. Those who challenged forms of domestic culture — as those who believed in spiritualism inevitably did — put themselves at risk of disapproval.

the medicalisation of spiritualist beliefs and practices

The previous section described how the spiritualist home serviced the bereaved soul but in doing so compromised normative standards of domestic life. This section explains how a spiritualist understanding of the home — where tables 'talked,' tipped, and turned, was interpreted as medical grounds for a diagnosis of insanity. The spiritualist's quest for inner contentment through the home interior diverged from a long experience of Christian asceticism that

was closely tied to the proper running of households. It is my opinion that spiritualist self-care as a practice was a critical step toward seeing the sentiment of wellness as a fundamental requirement in household design, which we still embrace today.[47] I argue this because the spiritualist mode of self-nurture entailed a secularising shift from the puritanical 'Know yourself' toward what Foucault describes as the more self-indulgent commandment 'Take care of yourself.'[48] The object of spiritualism had a lesser focus on the eschatological question of one's death, moral judgment, and prospects for a heavenly future in favour of one's welfare in daily life.[49]

As a religion of 'survival,' as Ariès has described mid nineteenth-century spiritualism's consolatory aspect, spiritualism was analogous to the medical science of patient recovery.[50] Yet the incompatible nature of medical and spiritualist knowledge systems in the Victorian period prevented their union. A key issue was the idea of evidence and the apparent lack of empirical basis for spiritualist belief. For pragmatists, individuals inhabiting what seemed to be an imaginary domestic world were irrational or even mad. In contrast to spiritualist convictions about the other world, medical practitioners saw spiritualism as a fantasy life of the 'gravest nature.'[51]

In his publication *Spiritualistic Madness* (1877), Dr Lyttleton Forbes Winslow explains that the spiritualist individual becomes 'a visionary alien to the real world, a denizen of his adopted country, and an outlaw to those around him; he lives and breathes an imaginary atmosphere of his own, to the exclusion of everything else.'[52] Forbes Winslow was describing the spiritualist's inhabiting relation to their domestic surroundings. He regarded the spiritualist's illusory home life as a primary cause of 'superstitious madness' or 'religious insanity, associated with melancholic and suicidal symptoms, rendering many of its victims dangerous to be free agents for their own protection, and that of societies in general.'[53]

As part of the medico-spiritualist debate, Susan Elizabeth Gay responds to Winslow's publication in 'Spiritualistic Sanity,' published in 1879.[54] The difference of opinion presents a point of epistemological upheaval centred on the spiritualist self and home. Gay explains that scepticism about spiritualism was an inevitable course of all new claims to truth, pending normalisation and acceptance.[55] Gay writes about what would be lacking from human experience, and by extension the home, if 'materialism were ever to become the "dominant idea" of mankind':[56]

> Mere science, in the sense of a knowledge of the external facts of visible nature, is cold, negative, isolating. It does not inspire; it has no vast outlook on the future; it brings no comfort to the bereaved; it solves no problem of suffering.[57]

A spiritualist home and way of life was a cause and measure of insanity. Rationalists like Forbes Winslow could not see reason in the spiritualists' fantasy world of animated household furniture, whereas believers like Gay did not want to conceive of a domestic world without these consolatory benefits. Caring for the self by forming an imaginary relation to the home's material culture was a process that was tied to the spiritualist's self-formation. Spiritualists fought for the recognition of their domestic practices and their self-hood through indefatigable efforts to convince the scientific community, and to seek validation from them. Theobald's book is an example of such efforts. In an age of increasing pragmatism, the sanctioning of spiritualism by the scientific community and the acceptance of spiritualism by the wider community was a deeply significant prospect for believers. Accordingly, much spiritualist literature is aimed at justifying the spiritualists' relation to household furniture to non-believers, as the following section illustrates.

'rationalising' oneself through the spiritualist home and theobald's *parrhesiastic* condition

Among spiritualist believers, the Christian home's status as a site of sanctity and truth validated, to a certain extent, the phantasmagoria of spirit life. By drawing on conventional themes of truthfulness, familiarity, and privacy, spiritualists like Theobald viewed the home as a means of achieving personal and domestic integrity or wholeness. Furthermore, Theobald found that events occurring in his home's interior provided authentication for his claims. He wrote of fires that were lit in unoccupied rooms, the appearance of letters in locked drawers, and the mystery of spirit writings that appeared on ceilings and cornices in the bedroom, the hall, the study, and the drawing room.[58] These happenings produced compelling evidence of spirit activity, or so he thought.[59]

Theobald verified acts of spirit writings on walls and ceilings by taking tracings, where possible, and including them as evidence in his book (see Figure 06).

Theobald, like other spiritualists, looked to his home and family for credibility. However, by exposing his family's testimony to public censure, the publication of his private life violated the Christian (and Victorian) understanding that the husband's primary responsibility was to the family. By publishing *Spirit Workers*, Theobald willingly disclosed what were for many implausible household experiences. These shortfalls were exacerbated by his disregard for the public's acute concern for domestic privacy.[60]

Importantly, Theobald had a motive for conveying his minority view of domestic life. Theobald was willing to risk condemnation in pursuit of a truth he believed would benefit both himself and others. He explains that when 'vital truth is concerned, it is right to make some sacrifice of personal feeling, and allow outsiders to share some of the

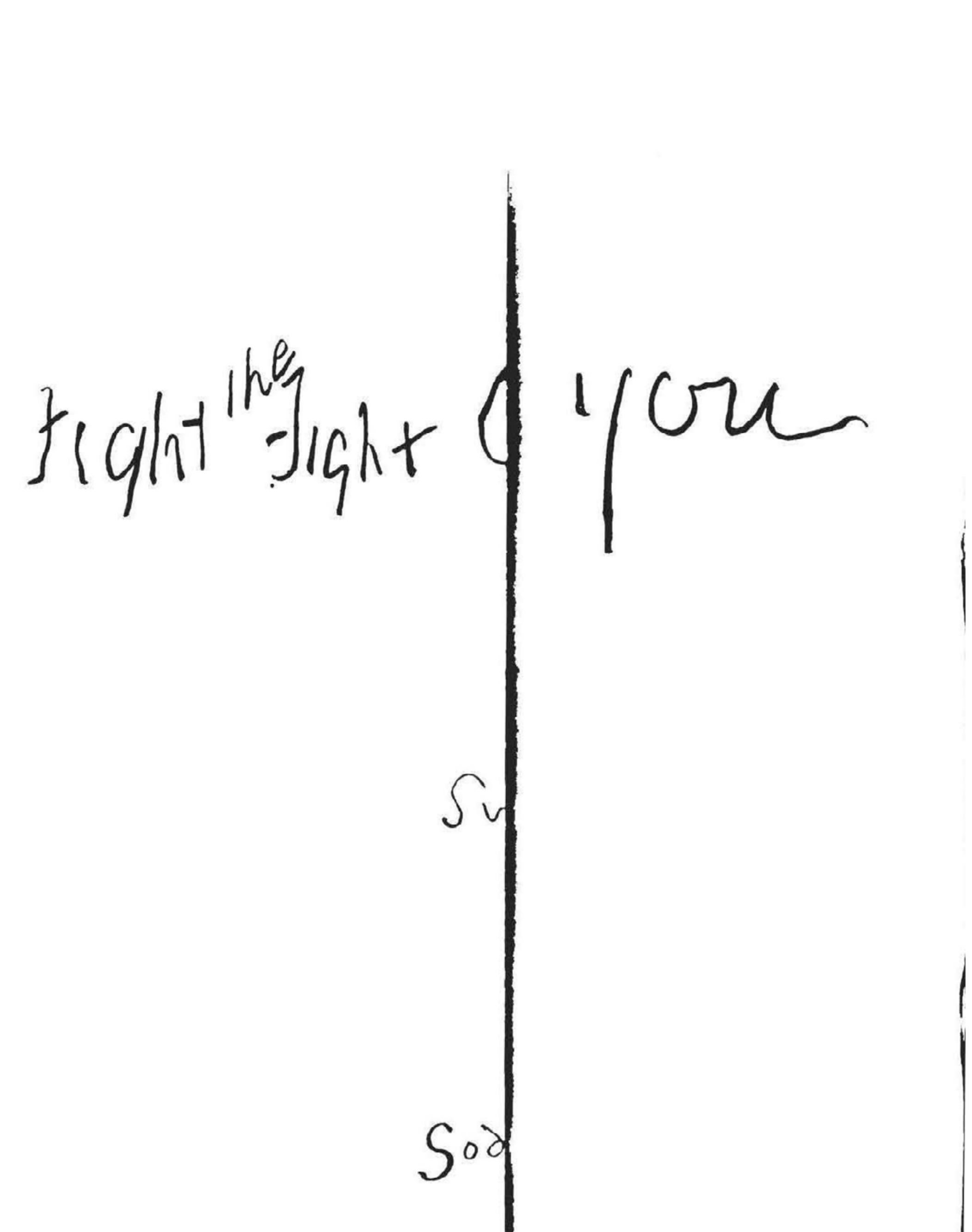


Figure 06.
Theobald, Plate II, Part II, Ch. 1, Facsimiles of (some) *Writings on Ceiling, in Spirit Workers in the Home Circle*, p. 141.

privileges we so much value.'[61] In the passage, Theobald emphasises the obligation he felt to communicate his opinion to an unreceptive audience.

Theobald's *parrhesiastic* testimony addresses his concern for the welfare of other domestic inhabitants. He shapes his vision for the home through his marginalised or eccentric beliefs, values, and choices that are centred on the emotional needs of both himself and a community of people who shared in the burden of grief. His vision supports a formative connection to the home's material culture that has continued to frame our affinity to our homes as a place of comfort.

In conclusion, this essay has analysed Theobald's book *Spirit Workers* to describe a connection between household furniture, spirit work, and consolation that contributed to the spiritualist home's significance as a place of emotional comfort. A belief in spirits and their occupation of the home inevitably raises the question of imaginative pretences. Spiritualism's phantasmagorical aspect drew normalising discourses of inhabitation into the public domain. Sceptics suggested there was a more sensible, rational, or reasonable way to inhabit the home. Counterpoising spiritualism as a kind of domestic fiction, with empirical bases for understanding and managing the domestic environment, opens the door to other kinds of methodological explorations for studies of the interior, for example, the play of fact and fiction in the home, and the subjective, psychological, and social contexts for the divide.

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author biography
Vanessa Galvin is a lecturer in Interior Architecture at Curtin University. Her research adopts a Foucauldian approach to the domestic interior's history. Her interests extend to questions of inhabitation that include notions of subjectivity and the processes of self-formation as they relate to the built environment. In addition, her work often explores the counter positioning of fictional and imagined regimes against empirical bases for understanding and managing domestic environments.

notes

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03 The Fox sisters' story prefaces many spiritualists' histories, including Henry Vizetelly, *Table Turning and Table Talking*, 2nd ed. (London: Clarke, Beeton, and Co., 1853), p. 7.

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05 'Spirit Workers in the Home Circle: An Autobiographic Narrative of Psychic Phenomena in Family Daily Life, Extending over a Period of Twenty Years. By Morell Theobald (Book Review)', in *The Spectator* (London: The Spectator (1828) Ltd., 1887), p. 1546.

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56 Gay, *Spiritualistic Sanity*, p. 2.

57 Gay, *Spiritualistic Sanity*, p. 2.

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imagining a more inclusive world: notes on difference, disability, and space in *the shape of water*

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abstract

Fiction can stimulate empathy toward others by deepening sensitivity to difference. Pragmatist philosophers like Richard Rorty and John Dewey consider imaginative capacity the root of empathy and promote fiction as a source of ethical insight. Understanding others who are different is fundamental to designing more inclusive spaces. Based on these connections, we explore how *The Shape of Water* illuminates the current discourse on inclusive design, particularly how design practices influence encounters between and among diverse bodies and environments. *The Shape of Water* is a non-trivial, award-winning, commercial film about the inter-species romance between a mute janitor, Elisa Esposito, who works in a top-secret, 1960s military research facility, and her love interest, the captive Amphibian Man, a tall, green, biped, bi-respiratory humanoid. We explore the film's ethos as a speculative (even magic) 'realm' in which excluded individuals find agency and power in their very marginalisation and exclusion. This is most evident in its depictions of mutism and non-normative communication, which inspire fundamental reformulations of the nature of otherness and disability in relation to the material environment. We address both the film's narrative action and its scenography, with interest in how production design embodies the protagonists' exclusion and agency. *The Shape of Water* illuminates the discourse on inclusive design in multiple respects. First, through narrative depiction of individuals' interactions and lives, it demonstrates how divisions between 'us' and 'them' materialise in objects and spaces, and how differences considered a deficit in one context may manifest as an advantage in another. Second, through the agency of magical realism, the film invites us to explore the potential of spaces that accommodate such a/symmetry through environmental hybridity. Finally, while social and material environments are are known to disable or enable, *The Shape of Water* represents how they interact, highlighting the role of everyday design(ers) in making spaces more inclusive.

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keywords:
disability, ethics, magical realism, inclusive design, otherness

beginning in the middle

> The way he looks at me. He doesn't know what I lack … Or how I am incomplete. He just sees me for what I am. As I am. And he is happy to see me, every time. Every day.
>
> — Guillermo del Toro and Vanessa Taylor (2016)[01]

Midway through *The Shape of Water*, the film's chief protagonist, Elisa Esposito, a mute woman in her early thirties, desperately signs to her next-door neighbour and friend, Giles, a gay, lovelorn commercial artist, who translates as she gestures. Elisa begs Giles to understand that her prospective lover, Amphibian Man, sees her as she really is, free from the prejudicial assumptions that often accompany perceptions of people unable to speak. Difference is the crux of this unconventional love. Strictly speaking, Amphibian Man is not human, but rather a sentient, river-dwelling humanoid, held captive in a top-secret 1960s US military research facility, where Elisa works as a janitor.

The romance between Elisa and Amphibian Man is the love story at the heart of Guillermo del Toro's film. Based on a screenplay he co-authored with Vanessa Taylor,[02] *The Shape of Water* earned nominations for thirteen Academy Awards, winning Oscars in four categories: Best Picture, Best Director, Best Original Score, and Best Production Design.[03]

The film has attracted interest from scholars in various academic domains, not least because of its representation of otherness and disability.[04] While this representation is also what drew us to *The Shape of Water*, our analysis focuses on what the film can teach us about designing more inclusive spaces.

In this work-in-progress, we explore the ethos of *The Shape of Water* as a speculative 'realm' in which excluded individuals — mute, gay, black, poor — find agency and power in their very marginalisation and exclusion. Its depictions of mutism and non-normative communication inspire fundamental reformulations of the nature of otherness and disability in relation to the material environment. Our analysis therefore addresses both the film's narrative action and the diverse spaces that accommodate it, with attention to how the director crafts production design to reflect the protagonists' exclusion and agency. We further explore how the film illuminates current discourse on inclusive design,[05] particularly the way today's design practices influence the encounter between and among diverse bodies and environments. After sketching the background of our analysis, we highlight three themes: a/symmetry, hybridity, and everyday design; and we connect these themes to selected real-world artefacts and spaces.

otherness, fiction, and inclusive design

Together, Elisa and Amphibian Man constitute what legal scholar Aviam Soifer calls 'a category of individuals much feared, manipulated, and discriminated against throughout our history.'[06] Problems of discrimination, exclusion, and inequity involve a diverse spectrum of perceived differences that people regard negatively. Besides bodily differences, western society identifies differences related to age, class, education, employment, gender, health, and race, but problematises only some of their features. For example, in the case of human beings, the inability to see ultra-violet light is considered neither a lack nor a difference worth anyone's concern.[07] The inability to *speak*, however, represents a noticeable, often exclusionary deficiency — at least among speaking people. Such negatively valued differences form the basis of 'othering,' that is, the establishment of divisions between an 'us' and a 'them.'[08]

Although established by people, such divisions are materialised in the fabric of objects, spaces, and buildings. When architects or other designers anticipate future use, too often they build deeply habituated assumptions or under-examined hypotheses into the materiality of their designs, frequently based on their own day-to-day experiences and implicit aesthetic bias.[09] The last fifty years have seen important efforts to encode rights to accessibility in policies that govern architecture and other design domains.[10] Yet, studies show that even well-considered legislative measures are insufficient to produce truly inclusive environments.[11] On the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), American architect Karen Braitmayer pointed out that an architect's or designer's compliance with the letter of the ADA is not the same as their internalisation of its civil rights goals. We align with Braitmayer's argument that what remains for architecture is 'to lift itself into the next realm.'[12]

Of equal value to existing policy and social theory is insight offered by ethical and moral references articulated through fiction — novels, poetry, plays, and film.[13] American philosopher Richard Rorty advocates for novels based on their unique power to render alternative realities without the encumbrance of specialised academic vocabularies and parochialism. 'Something that has actually worked' to eliminate 'the cruelty to which human communities treat one another,' Rorty argues, 'is identification across boundaries by imaginative projection.'[14] He builds upon the work of philosopher John Dewey, who considered imaginative capacity the root of empathy. Dewey used the terms interchangeably, calling imagination empathic projection and defining empathy as 'entering by imagination into the situations of others.'[15]

Research in psychology suggests that engaging with fiction indeed may help navigate the real social world by improving one's social-cognitive ability.[16] Meta-analyses of studies in this area show that frequent fiction reading not only *correlates* with higher scores on empathy and theory of mind — the ability to think about others' minds[17] — but causally *improves* social-cognitive performance.[18] Engaging in fiction's simulative experiences can facilitate understanding others who are different and can augment people's capacity for empathy and social inference.[19]

Understanding others who are different is fundamental to inclusive design. Although inclusive design thinking has evolved differently in different contexts, the common ambition is to accommodate the widest range of people possible.[20] According to Professor of Engineering Design P. John Clarkson and Professor of Inclusive Design Roger Coleman, this ambition derives from two premises:[21] first, 'there is such considerable diversity in mental and physical capability both across the population and over the length of the life-course that the association of "normality" with "able-bodiedness" is neither accurate nor acceptable'; second, 'disability arises from interactions with the surrounding environment that are amenable to design and structural interventions, and not inherently from capability levels, health status, or associated degrees of impairment.'[22]

The latter premise resonates with contemporary understandings of disability. Whereas traditional conceptions consider disability as an individual physiological disorder, situated in a person's body, more recent social-relational models conceptually distinguish between impairment — a bodily dysfunction — and disability, which is socially constructed on top of that.[23] By placing the explanation of its changing character in the organisation of the society in which it is found,[24] including the spaces shaping that organisation, these models recognise the two-way relationship between a disabled person and their socio-material environment.[25] Conceiving disability not as an attribute either of a person or environment but as an effect implies a shift from static to dynamic understanding: 'disabled is not something one is, but something one becomes.'[26]

More recently, inclusive design has evolved towards a wider understanding of diversity beyond age and ability, including aspects related to cultural and social differences;[27] gender;[28] sexuality;[29] and their varied intersections.[30] Together, these developments in the scholarship on human diversity have progressively shifted the focus in inclusive design 'from THEM—the elderly and disabled in academic parlance—to the US.'[31] It is this shift that forms the background for our analysis of *The Shape of Water*.

a/symmetry

zich als een vis in het water voelen
[feel like a fish in water]

be in one's element,
feel (perfectly) at home

like a fish out of water

als een vis op het droge,
niet in zijn element
[like a fish out of water,
not in one's element]

— van Dale (2022)[32]

In *The Shape of Water*'s screenplay, del Toro and Taylor introduce inter-species relationships to familiar asymmetries of power characteristic of othering.[33] Amphibian Man (Doug Jones) is a towering, green, biped, bi-respiratory humanoid, worshipped by indigenous Amazonian tribes as a god. He possesses supernatural abilities, including the power to heal grievous wounds, restore hair, and raise the dead by touch. He is kidnapped by Richard Strickland (Michael Shannon), a sadistic, cattle prod-wielding Army intelligence officer, whose superior, General Hoyt (Nick Searsy), orders a vivisection against the advice of Dr Robert Hoffstetler (Michael Stuhlbarg), a lab scientist who is secretly a Soviet spy.[34] Elisa Esposito (Sally Hawkins), a lonely, lowly, mute janitor with mysterious, gill-like scars on either side of her throat, falls in love with Amphibian Man. She succeeds in freeing him, thanks to the assistance of her gay next-door neighbour, Giles (Richard Jenkins), and her protective black co-worker, Zelda Fuller (Octavia Spencer). What excludes Elisa, Giles, and Zelda in their work and homelife — ableism, racism, sexism, and homophobia — also strengthens their courage and solidarity. Amphibian Man's supernatural abilities and the narrative action that flow from his captivity and liberation frame an alternative ethics of immediate relevance to contemporary realities beyond cinema, to which del Toro makes continual reference through poetic layering and skilful juxtaposition of speech, imagery, history, and popular culture.

communication

But you cannot use persuasion if you
cannot talk. No imagination,
no language. No linguistic change,
no moral or intellectual progress.

— Richard Rorty (2004)[35]

The Shape of Water shows that attributes negatively valued in one context may be positively valued in another, and vice versa. For example, among the many representations of 'otherness' in the film — class, gender, race, sexual orientation — the one that drives the central storyline is the inability to speak. Elisa's mutism is generally considered to be a deficit; even her trusted neighbour Giles

offhandedly notes, 'my best friend is not much of a … conversationalist.'[36] Yet within the filmic universe of del Toro's magical realism, her mutism becomes a kind of super-ability, an ability that 'exceeds a norm.'[37] Having adapted effective and expressive methods of alternative communication, Elisa exhibits sensitivities and insights that transcend conventional speech. She engages Amphibian Man through signing, enriched with a 'syntax' of fluid gestures and actions, eye contact, facial expressions, music, and dance.

From her first encounter with Amphibian Man, Elisa seems transfixed by the sounds emanating from the steel-reinforced tank that staff deliver to the research facility. She establishes trust by setting hard-boiled eggs on the edge of the small laboratory pool, where his captors keep him chained. Amphibian Man shyly takes the eggs, then quickly learns from Elisa how to sign them, along with signs denoting the music she plays for him on her portable turntable.[38] Their correspondence continues and intensifies. Elisa brings yet more records and more eggs, signing back and forth with Amphibian Man, inviting him to choose among the albums she presents to him; soon they respectively dance and swim in happy unison to the sounds of Benny Goodman's 'Moonglow.'[39] Elisa presses her open hand against the glass; Amphibian Man replies in kind. 'Her smile turns wistful,' the screenplay notes. 'She keeps her hand there. Leans her forehead against the glass';[40] Amphibian Man responds by activating and changing the colour of his phosphorescent, piscine markings.

Unbeknown to Elisa and Amphibian Man, Dr Hoffstetler observes their romantic exchange while hiding in the shadows of the lab. Caught off-guard by their effortless communication, he recognises Amphibian Man's extraordinary, even 'human' qualities. Hoffstetler excitedly reports to his handlers: 'this creature … may be able to communicate with us … I have reason to believe,' he adds, that Amphibian Man 'is intelligent. It … responds to language [and] to music.'[41] Later, in his role as lab scientist, he objects to the creature's vivisection. 'Sir,' he says to General Hoyt, 'you cannot — under any circumstances — kill this creature. You cannot';[42] and to Strickland, the film's principal antagonist, he pleads, 'I don't want an intricate, beautiful thing destroyed. The creature — and I am certain of this — is intelligent. Capable of language, of understanding — of emotions.'[43]

accommodation

Besides Elisa's interaction with Amphibian Man — the social context — the material context likewise affects what constitutes a significant lack. In this connection, disabilities studies scholar Alison Wilde and co-authors wonder: 'Is "mutism" Elisa's most significant impairment or is it her inability to breathe under-water?'[44] As they point out, the three scars on each side of her neck suggest that her natural home may have been aquatic. When Strickland interviews Zelda and Elisa, he inquires about Elisa's name: 'Doesn't Esposito mean "Orphan"?' Zelda replies, 'They found her — by the river — in the water.'[45] Moreover, Elisa's melancholic demeanour and outsider status suggest

that, in her human life, she is literally (like Amphibian Man) 'a fish out of water.' Finally, while Amphibian Man makes no attempt to cure Elisa of her mutism, during the film's violent and tender conclusion, as they float upright in the water, the touch of his webbed palm heals her gunshot wound and opens her scars to reveal the gills she needs for her aquatic 'rebirth.'[46]

The fact that material contexts affect what constitutes a significant lack also characterises the mise-en-scène of *The Shape of Water*, which unfolds during the peak of US/Soviet military tensions in the 1960s. At that time aerospace research and nuclear proliferation were strategically indistinguishable. To extrapolate the effects of weightlessness on human physiology, the US and Soviet Union launched animals (dogs, monkeys, chimps) into orbit. The film's storyline builds on the aggressive military competition over control of Amphibian Man. Once fully understood, the creature's ability to alternate between two separate breathing mechanisms represents a strategic advantage. General Hoyt orders Strickland to expedite a vivisection: on terra firma Amphibian Man is no more than a lab rat; in outer space he is a military 'asset.'[47]

Clearly, the American and Soviet military personnel in the story regard Amphibian Man as a sub-human 'monster.' As creative writer Alberta Natasia Adji notes, 'monsters' represent a favoured topos in del Toro's filmmaking — the *Hellboy* franchise, *Pan's Labyrinth*, *The Devil's Backbone*, *Pacific Rim*, among others.[48] The word 'monster' derives from the Old French, *mostre*: 'prodigy, marvel'; and earlier, by antiphrasis, 'something extraordinary or unnatural; an amazing event or occurrence,' evolving only later into the meanings 'disfigured person' and 'misshapen being.'[49] Its current definition denotes 'a mythical creature that is part animal and part human, or combines elements of two or more animal forms, and is frequently of great size and ferocious appearance'; more generally, it means 'any imaginary creature that is large, ugly, and frightening.'[50] And yet its Indo-European root, *men-*, etymologically connects it to the word 'demonstrate,' which means 'to show clearly [and] deliberately,' from the Latin *monstrare*, 'to show,' from *monstrum*, 'divine portent,' from *monere*, 'to warn, advise,' arguably the meaning with the deepest history and structure, and greatest relevance to del Toro's use of 'monsters' as thematic tropes.[51]

hybrid beings, hybrid spaces

FADE IN:

INT. ELISA'S APARTMENT /
RIVER FOOTAGE – NIGHT.
We float at the bottom of a river.
Surrounded by water
Fish swim away.
Debris floating in the water –
And, then, a lamp floats by –
A coffee pot –
A shoe.

— Guillermo del Toro
and Vanessa Taylor (2016)[52]

To the floating lamp, coffee pot, and shoe, the opening scene of del Toro's final cut adds end tables, dining chairs, a clock, a watch, and an antique daybed. Above these objects floats the slumbering Elisa, in repose under a marbled shaft of light, whose hair behaves as though underwater but whose pillow, which she tenderly hugs, behaves 'normally', that is, subject to the gravity of its terrestrial context. We find ourselves adrift in the depths of a hypnopompic hallucination, the type of vivid dreams human beings experience when transitioning from sleep to consciousness. As she and the objects surrounding her slowly descend into their 'normal' terrestrial configuration, del Toro's oneirically underwater environment gives way to a conventional apartment, which we soon learn occupies an old storeroom originally designed for the aging movie palace immediately below. The waking narrative begins when Elisa's alarm clock sounds, followed almost immediately by sirens wailing outside her apartment window, which glows red as fire trucks rumble past along the street below. Before leaving her makeshift apartment for work, Elisa boils some eggs, fills her tub to the brim, sets an egg-shaped timer, disrobes, slips into the bath water, then 'goes to work on herself, gently, slowly.'[53]

Figure 01.
Inside Elisa's dream, opening scene, from *The Shape of Water*
(del Toro, 2017).

In this opening scene, which foretells the trans-zoomorphic, inter-species love story about to unfold, del Toro skilfully introduces the 'magically real' interior atmosphere of the story, including and especially Elisa's 'otherworldly' character and emotional motives. For the film's sets and scenes, he creates 'monstrous spaces', spaces that both show and warn. The spaces of *The Shape of Water* are therefore hybrid in nature, like its principal protagonists, who possess neither purely aquatic nor purely terrestrial bodies; rather, they are supernatural beings who inhabit supernatural space by virtue of supernatural physiology, perception, and sensoria. Del Toro synthesises the properties of one environmental regime with the properties of the other. In the spirit of magical realism, he does not add them together or integrate them so much as reconceptualise them as a continuity within the protagonist's unconstrained subconscious. Her dreams and memories seem to suggest a prior incarnation, a deeper truth about her mutism, the origins of the scars on either side of her neck, and her true identity.

The supernatural hybridity of the opening scene contrasts sharply with the top-secret military facility near Baltimore's industrial waterfront where Elisa works, which del Toro renders as an oppressive, almost carceral space. Later, at work, in the course of their janitorial duties, Zelda and Elisa enter a laboratory concealed by what the screenplay describes as a 'slaughterhouse-like' door marked 'T-4'; the lab is crowded with military personnel, scientists, and technicians, busy servicing the room's massive machinery, tanks, pools, industrial pipes and ducts, and related hydrological infrastructure.[54] As Wilde et al. note, 'T4' is also the name of a notorious WWII Nazi campaign resulting in the institutionalized murder of over 250,000 physically or mentally impaired German citizens, through a programme of involuntary 'euthanasia', precursor to the unimaginable holocaust soon to follow.[55]

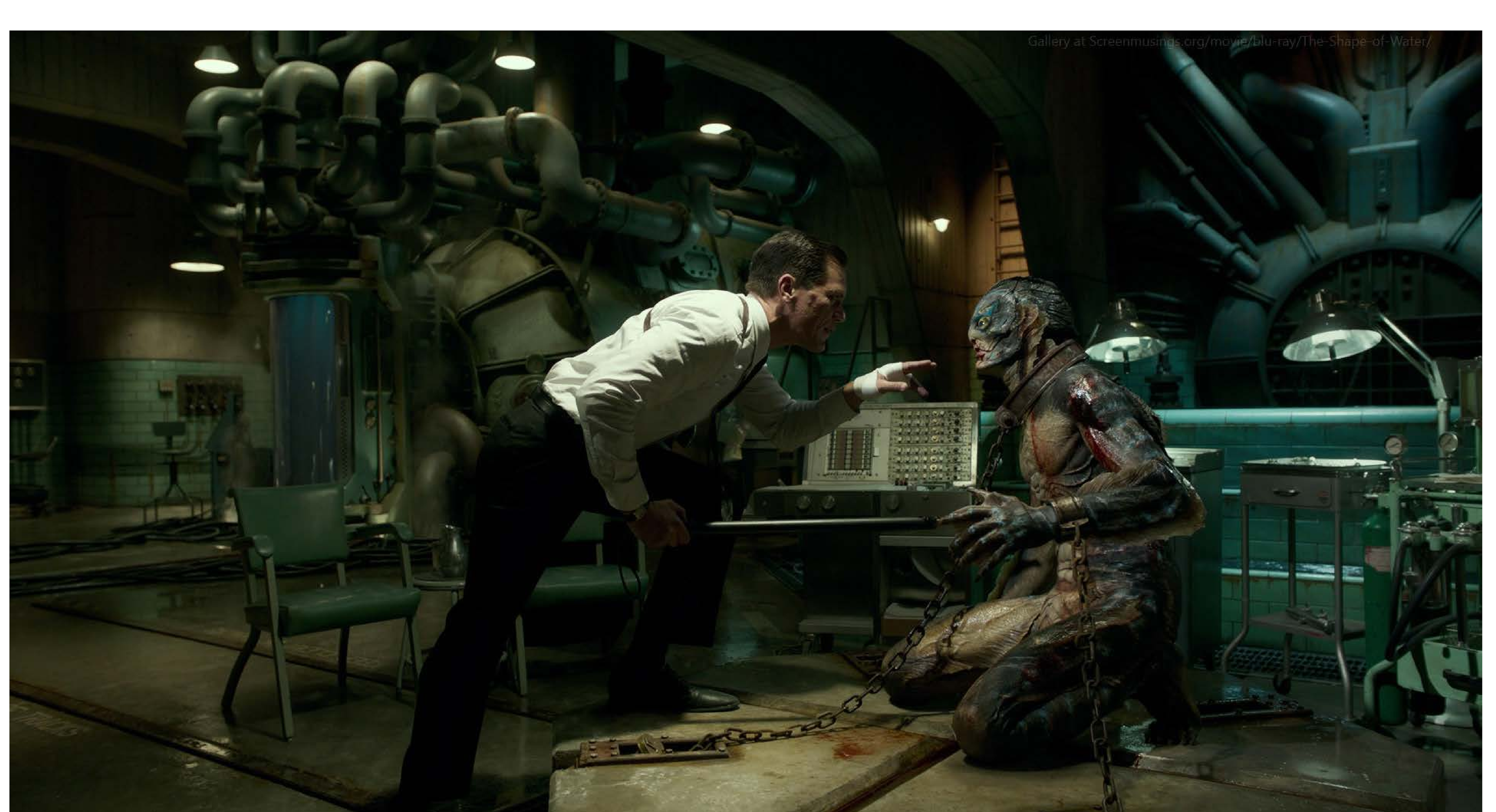

Figure 02.
Strickland torments Amphibian Man in T-4, from *The Shape of Water* (del Toro, 2017).

everyday design

> *GILES.*
> [...] There's nothing we can do. What are we, Elisa? You and I? Nothing. What can we do? Nothing.
> (beat)
> And – I am sorry. But it is not even human.
>
> She trembles in rage as she signs. Subtitled: 'If we don't do Something ... Neither are we.'
>
> — Guillermo del Toro and Vanessa Taylor (2016)[56]

So far, we have highlighted how del Toro illustrates the relationship between othering and material context, e.g., aquatic versus terrestrial, orbital versus grounded environments; and how he employs imaginative set design to accommodate the protagonists' otherness/hybridity, e.g., by reconceptualising commonplace environmental regimes in the dreamlike opening scene. Besides demonstrating the force of his own imagination, however, del Toro also shows the agency and creative power of thoughtful characters in this connection: he shows how in performing day-to-day activities and fulfilling social roles the social and the material *interact*.

Del Toro and Taylor populate *The Shape of Water* with vivid examples of interdependent relationships, individuals taking care of each other regardless of whether they have an 'impairment.' Indeed, the film's stereotypical antagonists, brutes and bigots, target Zelda for being black, Giles for being gay, and Elisa for being mute; yet courage, interdependency, and kind-heartedness prevail. Consider how Zelda translates Elisa's sign language: 'I answer mostly, on account that she can't talk,' she explains to Strickland;[57] or how she takes care of her husband: 'Then I get home and I make him breakfast. Bacon and eggs and buttered toast. I butter the man's toast, Elisa. Both sides — As if he were a child.'[58] Likewise, Elisa tends to the needs of Giles as though he were a relative or spouse. 'Oh, darling child,' Giles says, when she brings him a plate of food. 'I'd waste away to nothing without you looking after me. I am the proverbial starving artist am I not?'[59]

Of particular significance for inclusive design, however, is how individuals take care of each other as 'everyday designers' of their material environment. While design is traditionally associated with professional designers, design scholars increasingly note that design does not stop when an object, space, or building leaves the drawing board; people creatively act upon objects and environments to adapt, appropriate, and redesign them or, alternatively, repair, repurpose, and resource them.[60] In doing so, they engage in ongoing design through use.[61]

A form of 'everyday design' that plays a central role in *The Shape of Water* is the practice of cleaning.[62] The janitor (from the Latin *janua*, door, entrance) is the caretaker of the building, who guards portals and surfaces against the effects of use — dirt, dust, grime, wear and tear. Janitors stand at the outside of activities; their duty is to sweep the floor and care for the ground. Strictly speaking, janitorial work is perpetual. We call janitors and the kind of work they do 'maintenance' (from the Latin *manure tenere*, to hold in one's hands). Roof leak? Call maintenance. Lost keys? Find the janitor. True to form, it is Elisa who finds Strickland's two severed fingers floating among the suds of the bucket of water she uses to douse the blood-soaked floor of T-4, after Strickland's continuing attempt to torture Amphibian Man backfires.

It should come as no surprise that del Toro elevates a janitor and her co-worker to the status of heroes, who by skill and cunning subvert Strickland's and Hoyt's power. Maintenance presupposes continuation and sustenance. Janitorial work derives from acts of cultivation, like soil preparation, plant care, or farming (the word 'culture' comes from the word meaning 'to cultivate,' not unlike the way Elisa uses eggs to cultivate trust with Amphibian Man). Del Toro and Taylor express the irony of this inversion of power in a key dialogue. Toward the film's conclusion, when Hoffstetler lies dying, shot by his own comrades, Strickland tortures him for the names of the 'strike team' that helped Amphibian Man escape. 'Names! Ranks! Now!' Strickland brutally commands; Hoffstetler laughs through his pain in reply: 'No names, no ranks, they … they just *clean*.'[63] As literary scholar Michel de Certeau notes, 'Tales and legends [are *repertories of the schema of action*] . . . The formality of everyday practices is indicated in these tales, which frequently reverse the relationships of power and, like the stories of miracles, ensure the victory of the unfortunate in a fabulous, utopian space. This space protects the weapons of the weak against the reality of the established order . . . [T]hese "fabulous" stories offer their audience a repertory of tactics for future use.'[64]

Cleaning springs from clearing. Cleaning therefore re-enacts a return to beginnings, the recovery of a prior or original condition, which resonates with the mystery of Elisa's 'gills.' Each night the maintenance crew comes in, clears away the sediment of the day's activity — dust, debris, trash, smudges, or, in the case of *The Shape of Water*, flesh and blood — and restores or renews the building, noting any items for replacement or repair. Few activities embody architecture's theoretical origins and responsibilities more fundamentally than everyday acts of clearing and beginning anew.[65]

Beyond their work as janitors, the film's central characters engage in everyday design by using and transforming objects and environments in ways not necessarily

intended by their (professional) designers. A phone becomes usable for Elisa thanks to Zelda's inventiveness: 'Elisa, honey, you gotta listen to me, make a sound in the phone if you can hear…'[66] The terrestrial environment becomes liveable for Amphibian Man thanks to Elisa, who (with the help of others) adjusts it so generously to his needs. She keeps the water in the bathtub at 75 to 85 percent salinity and adds algae to the bathwater every three days as instructed by Hoffstetler, who has been transformed after secretly witnessing the love expressed between Elisa and Amphibian Man. Elisa eventually designs a way to temporarily help Amphibian Man by sealing the door and filling her entire bathroom with water:

> The tub's filling up.
> The creature watches.
>
> She opens and closes the HOT/COLD faucet. Tests the water.
>
> She takes the box of algae that Hoffstetler gave her. She opens the box. She gets an idea. Smiles and looks around the bathroom.
>
> – opens the faucet on the sink.
>
> The sink overflows
>
> She takes the towels – sealing the cracks – and uses a towel to stuff the space between the door and the floor. The water continues to run – […]
>
> Elisa is floating, naked, next to the Amphibian Man – now the entire BATHROOM is immersed in water.
>
> She embraces him – Eyes closed, feeling him underneath her and the water on her face. His markings move rhythmically like a melody.
>
> She intakes and holds.
>
> As the water goes above her head.
>
> They float underwater. Contemplating each other.
>
> — Guillermo del Toro and Vanessa Taylor (2016)[67]

Figure 03.
Elisa and Amphibian amorously adrift in Elisa's bathroom, from *The Shape of Water* (del Toro, 2017).

navigating the real world

The insight that othering materialises in architecture and interior design, and likewise that the material environment can be disabling or enabling, are not new: social-relational models of disability have been out there for several decades.[68] What *The Shape of Water* adds, however, is first a different way of communicating these insights, that is, through narrative depiction of people's (and other individuals') interactions and lives.[69] Second, while scholarship on othering argues *that* differences considered a deficit in one context may be an advantage in another, this film imagines *how* this may be the case — see, for example, del Toro's aforementioned representation of aquatic versus terrestrial environments. Finally, while writings on social-relational models of disability acknowledge the disabling/enabling role of the social and material environment, *The Shape of Water* foregrounds how these two factors interact, thereby highlighting the role of everyday design(ers) in making environments more inclusive.

In this connection, the film's narrative mode and content hold great promise to facilitate understanding of how different people and environments interrelate.[70] The storyline and scenography can be understood as bringing Rorty's and others' ethics to life as a kind of 'therapeutic philosophy', a form of 'low cunning' more authentically tool-like and useful in its application to the design of inclusive environments than high-minded moralising or legislative measurements.[71] Although derived from human consideration, designers too often experience these measurements as restrictive, compromising their creativity and discouraging imaginative design solutions.[72] In contrast, through the

agency of magical realism, *The Shape of Water* invites its audience to reimagine the world within an alternative context, and to explore the potential of accommodating a/symmetry creatively. Its central characters' otherness is accommodated, on the one hand, by del Toro's own imagination — the way he reconceptualises environmental regimes through the realistic depiction of dreams and imaginative scenography, including, for instance, the costume design of Amphibian Man and the gill slits on Elisa's neck.

On the other hand, it is accommodated through the agency and creative power of thoughtful characters who perform day-to-day activities and fulfil social roles, whether by cleaning and maintenance or by creatively repurposing and adapting ordinary objects and environments. In the tradition of celebrated Latin American writers and filmmakers, such as Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel García Márquez, Isabel Allende, and Alfonso Arau, del Toro 'commingles the magical and the real, the supernatural and the natural, which, in turn, illuminate aspects of the world that may have been previously hidden […]. By fusing seemingly divergent or contradictory elements the narrative mode entices […] to explore a third space, which is hybrid in nature because of "the purely natural way in which abnormal, experientially impossible (and empirically unverifiable) events take place".'[73]

What motivated us to analyse *The Shape of Water* is the claim — advanced by pragmatist philosophers and psychologists alike — that engaging with fiction may help navigate the real world. Therefore we would be remiss not to offer — by way of epilogue, and however briefly — at least some indication of how the film's invitation may relate to real-world professional and everyday design(ers).

The potential of creatively accommodating a/symmetry, for example, is already recognised by parents putting together a Halloween costume for their disabled child. Usually, other children do not know what to make of their child's condition, yet turning a wheelchair into a magical chariot, *Thomas the Tank Engine* or a *PAW Patrol* fire truck makes them genuinely jealous: 'This is epic. This is the costume I wish I was in.'[74] Expressions of hybridity — in effect, a 'third space' — can be found in a treehouse designed by a team at the University of Michigan's Taubman College of Architecture.[75] Differences between children with limited mobility and other users are minimised through an array of body prosthetics, including harnesses, ropes, tracks, and race car seats: 'Everyone entering the treehouse uses these prosthetics to be "launched" 22 feet into the air, leaving wheelchairs and other terrestrial implements behind.'[76] In another example, the Multisensory Museum at Van Abbe in Eindhoven (the Netherlands), an art exhibition space co-designed by architects and disabled people, minimises the differences between people in wheelchairs and other people. Its designers create a space that invites all visitors to experience the art from a seated position. The walls guide visitors towards seating alcoves positioned to orient museum visitors slightly towards one other, in a circle around the artwork that can be completed by visitors using a wheelchair.[77]

Figure 04.
Craig VanLaanen, Treehouse and Woodland Retreat in Mayville, Michigan, 2004. Collage: Kristine Synnes.

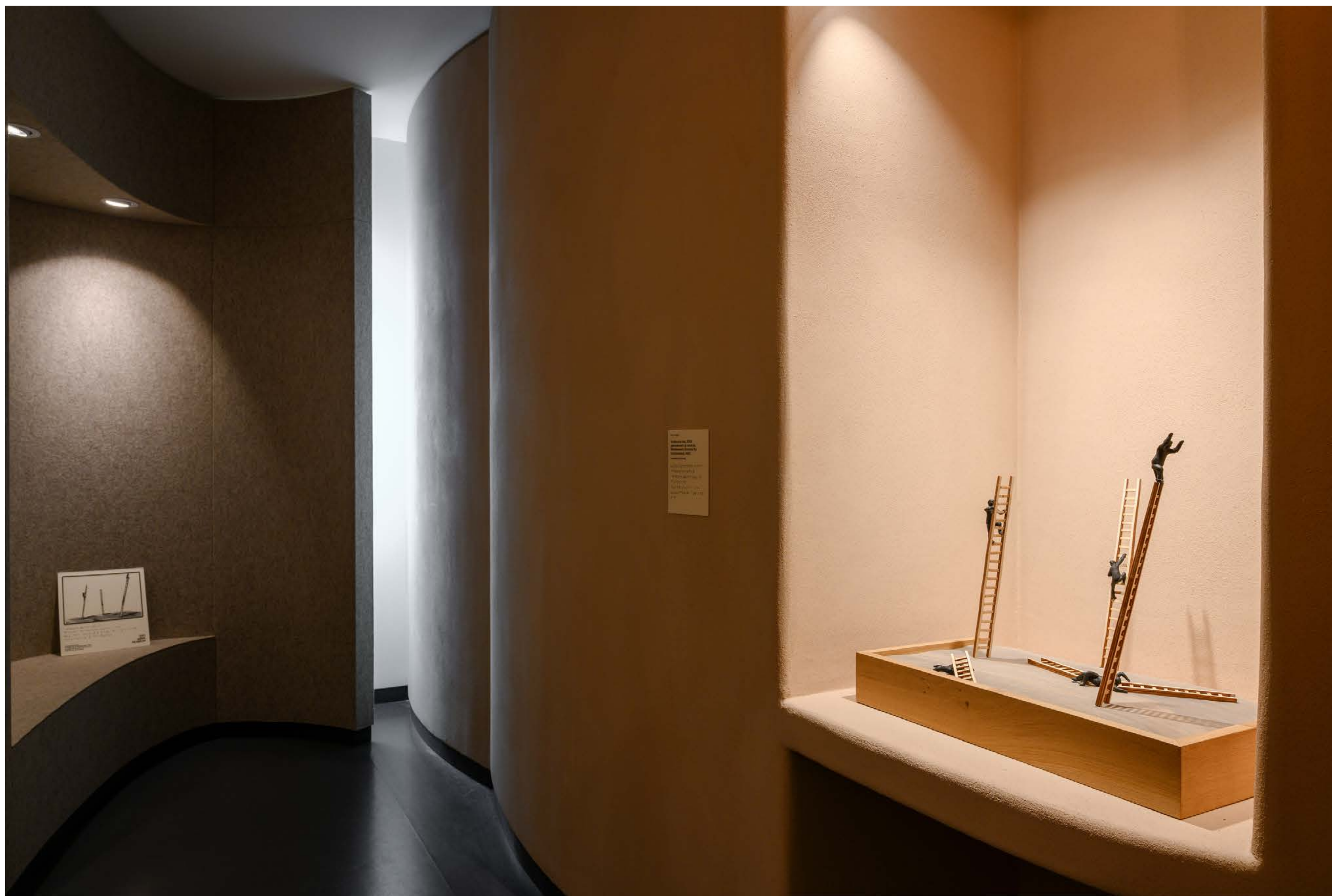

Figure 05.
Multisensory Museum at the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, Netherlands, 2019. Photo: Peter Cox.

In future work, we hope to further explore how *The Shape of Water* invites us to reimagine a more commodiously inclusive world, particularly ways in which 'ordinary' environments contain the kernel of extraordinary experience, which can beneficially influence, even restructure, encounters between and among diverse bodies and the diverse worlds we design to accommodate our differences.

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13 In this context, we prefer the specificity of 'novel', 'screenplay', and 'film' or 'cinema' to the more general but equally appropriate alternative 'literature', commonly used as a description of the total order of words surrounding a given subject, including scholarly and academic articles, essays, research papers, books, and other publications.

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15 As cited in Steven Fesmire, *Dewey and the Moral Imagination* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), p. 133.

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31 Clarkson and Coleman, 'History of Inclusive Design in the UK', 235.

32 *Van Dale Woordenboeken*, s.v. 'vis'; 'fish'. <https://vowb-vandale-nl.kuleuven.e-bronnen.be/> [accessed 17 July 2022].

33 Central to othering is an asymmetry of power relations: 'only the dominant group is in a position to impose the value of its particularity (its identity) and to devalue the particularity of others (their otherness) while imposing discriminatory measures.' Staszak, 'Other/Otherness', 44.

34 See Adji, 'Falling for the Amphibian Man', 52: 'In one of his interviews, del Toro claims to have been inspired by *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*, Jack Arnold's 1954 film, in which the amphibian creature falls for the female protagonist, but they end up separated.'

35 Richard Rorty, 'Getting Rid of the Appearance-Reality Distinction', in *Philosophy as Poetry* (Charlottesville: The University of Virginia Press, 2016), p. 15.

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38 For a discussion of the theme of eggs and fertility in the film, see Wilde, Crawshaw, and Sheldon, 'Talking About *The Shape of Water*', 1529.

39 del Toro and Taylor, *The Shape of Water*, p. 34.

40 del Toro and Taylor, *The Shape of Water*, p. 34.

41 del Toro and Taylor, *The Shape of Water*, p. 37.

42 del Toro and Taylor, *The Shape of Water*, p. 44.

43 del Toro and Taylor, *The Shape of Water*, p. 62.

44 Wilde, Crawshaw, and Sheldon, 'Talking About *The Shape of Water*', 1530.

45 del Toro and Taylor, *The Shape of Water*, p. 27. Note the parallel with Moses, another liberator.

46 del Toro and Taylor, *The Shape of Water*, p. 116.

47 del Toro and Taylor, *The Shape of Water*, p. 10.

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49 *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. 'monster' (Oxford: University Press, 2021) <http://www.oed.com/> [accessed 20 July 2022].

50 *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. 'monster' (Oxford: University Press, 2021) <http://www.oed.com/> [accessed 20 July 2022].

51 *American Heritage Dictionary*, Third Edition, s.v. 'demonstrate'; and (in the appendix, 'Indo-European Roots'), s.v. 'men-' (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994). The distinction between who is and who is not the 'monster' — and how we commonly perceive 'monstrosity' — is central to the film's storyline.

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53 del Toro and Taylor, *The Shape of Water*, p. 3.

54 del Toro and Taylor, *The Shape of Water*, p. 8.

55 See Wilde, Crawshaw, and Sheldon, 'Talking About *The Shape of Water*', p. 1529.

56 del Toro and Taylor, *The Shape of Water*, 48.

57 del Toro and Taylor, *The Shape of Water*, p. 27.

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let it unfold — performative exhibitions: the living interior of the austrian pavilion at expo milan 2015

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abstract

This essay explores the relationship between fantasy, fabulation, and the performative through the lens of exhibition design in general and, in particular, expo pavilions. While studying the case of the Austrian pavilion visited by the author during Expo Milan 2015, it further examines the repertoire of the performative as a spatial fabulation indicator. Furthermore, the essay proposes a dramaturgy of analytical tools that interpret the exhibition space as a metaphor of a fantasy-oriented spatial production, and as an illustration of a performative interior architecture opening newer perspectives through which we may study and analyse interiors.

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keywords:
fabulation, exhibitions, performative, unscripted, unfolding, event

introduction

During the last decade, world expos have shifted boldly, in terms of spatial design, from silent monumental pavilions to performative ones. While past expos conceived brutalist monuments and massive concrete forms, recent expos presented ephemeral reversible high-tech structures. In the last two world expos (2015 in Milan and 2020 in Dubai), the architecture and the interior of the pavilions were closer to an event, a show, a stage set, or a fictional spatial performance. In a single pavilion, many performative characteristics could be detected, in which architecture and interior combined a variety of spatial qualities and exhibition types, such as narrative space, experiential interiors, reversible structures, flexible architecture, smart design, interactive interfaces, ephemeral installations, sensorial experiences, scenic and theatrical display of content, and participatory aspects. Thus, world expos have become an architectural wonderland and a festival experimenting with and exhibiting various contemporary trends in spatial design. The design of each pavilion assumes a high complexity level, in which a large amount of data and parameters contribute to shaping the form and the experience. Such shifts towards the performative and the fabulatory require newer scholarship guided by analytical and theoretical lenses.

Exhibitions are a metaphor of a new modernity, as suggested by the Italian architect and thinker Andrea Branzi.[01] In fact, exhibitions in general, and especially expo pavilions, appear to act as illustrations and metaphors of a performative contemporaneity, or of a fluid and constantly changing and event-oriented modernity to which the disciplines of architecture, design, and interior are trying to respond. Exhibitions and pavilions can be predicting and depicting what is happening and what is going to happen in the world of spatial design. Therefore, analysing a pavilion as a 'space in performance' and a fantasy-oriented space gives us an opportunity to rehearse new conceptual and analytical tools for spatial design that can be used in education/theory and in practice. This text-based essay explores the concept(s) of performative fabulatory interiors through the case of the Austrian pavilion at Expo Milan 2015. The essay further dissects and analyses the pavilion's various performative aspects, in which the interior space is conceived as open for transformation and non-static; it acts as a performing theatrical milieu with an emphasis on the aesthetics of experience.

fantasy-oriented space conception

Creating magical realities is a speciality of exhibition design. It is a discipline that translates fantasies, temporary realities, illusions, interior scale wonderlands, phenomenological events, and ephemeral spatial performances. Exhibitions and pavilions are territories for testing the unrealisable and the unusual boundaries of

interior, exterior, installation, scenography, illusion, reality, and art. In such a performative–atmospheric turn, surreal, fantastic, and performative spaces are experimental. Sylvia Lavin, a Professor of History and Theory of Architecture at Princeton University, indicates that the performative liberates spatial practices from the limitations imposed by disciplinarity, and that with the performative, architecture allows itself to explore new methods and tools.[02] In fact, these concepts (spatial qualities) drive us to fantasise about spaces designed to be open and flexible, where form, programme, and function are no longer determining factors. The form in this scenario is following a desired fantasy (an experience or a performance), which recalls Bohme Gernot's statement that spaces affect people through the atmospheres; via its atmosphere, a person experiences their space.[03] A perceiving subject's body is invaded and penetrated by the atmosphere within which it is immersed. It is the sensation of being transformed or transported into another world.[04] Hence, form is no longer a priority. The pavilion is a metaphor for a shift from the design of space towards the design of experience.

Exhibition design is usually considered an act of creative contextualisation and re-contextualisation of content, especially in the case of immaterial exhibitions where the emphasis on the spatial performance compensates for the absence of objects. When the exhibition space is no longer dedicated to objects and their aura, it becomes dedicated for spatial performances, which denotes a shift from philosopher, cultural critic, and essayist Walter Benjamin's aura to pioneer of German ecocriticism Gernot Böhme's atmosphere.[05] This means that when staging an exhibition, the priority is given to the creation of a spatial experience that communicates a certain content related to the exhibits. In this case, the exhibition becomes an opportunity to stage an atmosphere.[06] This approach opposes the traditional display approach that glorifies an object and dramatises an aura around it while disregarding the holistic creation of a spatial experience in a museum or an exhibition space. The communication of the immaterial content is then manifested through the spatial experience that results from performative and fabulatory tools reflected in the co-presence of various features and the layering of experiences and encounters with space-content, content-visitors, and space-visitors. The emergence of such characteristics in spatial design discourses underlines the shift from the design of space towards the design of experience where the aesthetic of perceiving becomes the aesthetic of experiencing.[07] The 'what to experience' is therefore more emphasised than the 'what to see'; the 'what to experience' becomes the driving force of the spatial conception process. A performance-oriented creation of space becomes a tool for fantasy creation and fabulisation of the exhibition spaces that propels towards a semi-dematerialisation of the space.

performative repertoire

In spatial discourse, performative is characterised by a broad range of interpretations and uses. It represents an interest in social and human sciences, and literature in the performance of the inanimate on humans, and an approach that recognises space as having qualities that can be shaped.[08] While 'performative' has been related to the interest in designing a milieu or a living environment,[09] more recent contemporary texts have expanded the dimensions of the performative. Portuguese architect, curator, and writer Pedro Gadanho indicates a Performative Turn in architecture as the influence of performance on other disciplines including architecture.[10] The Performative Turn comprises spatial practices being inspired by the world of performance while borrowing new performative dynamics and mechanisms such as the participatory, the ephemeral spatial practices, the flexible structure, the emphasis on the scenic and the spectacular, and the emphasis on the experience.[11] For David Leatherbarrow, Professor of Architecture at the University of Pennsylvania School of Design, the term Performative Architecture describes architectures belonging to dynamic environments, indicating a shift in architectural theory, from what the building is to what it does.[12] Related to scripted and unscripted events, the performative character refers to how architecture is productive beyond the planned programme as a play between intentionality and non-intentionality.[13] The performative project, as described by Italian architect and scholar Valentina Signore, is able to adjust itself for the unscripted by being open and flexible. It is based on the concept of open form, in which the project is designed to be open for transformations, in contrast to the idea of definitive perfect form where the form and the programme are pre-defined.[14] The performative project 'accepts uncertainty, incompleteness, and openness to events and users, urban and interior improvisations, responding to a contemporary complex and changing context.'[15] With flexible mechanisms instead of linear ones,[16] the performative is transformative; it can restructure spatial and social order by impacting both audience and context.[17] Performative refers to scenic and theatrical potentials in spatial situations;[18] it refers to the ability of the space to communicate and spatial performance acts as a communication medium.[19] This essay used the above attributes of what constitutes performative as a benchmark for challenging interior spatial boundaries and to reflect a fantasy-oriented vision of a mutating living space.

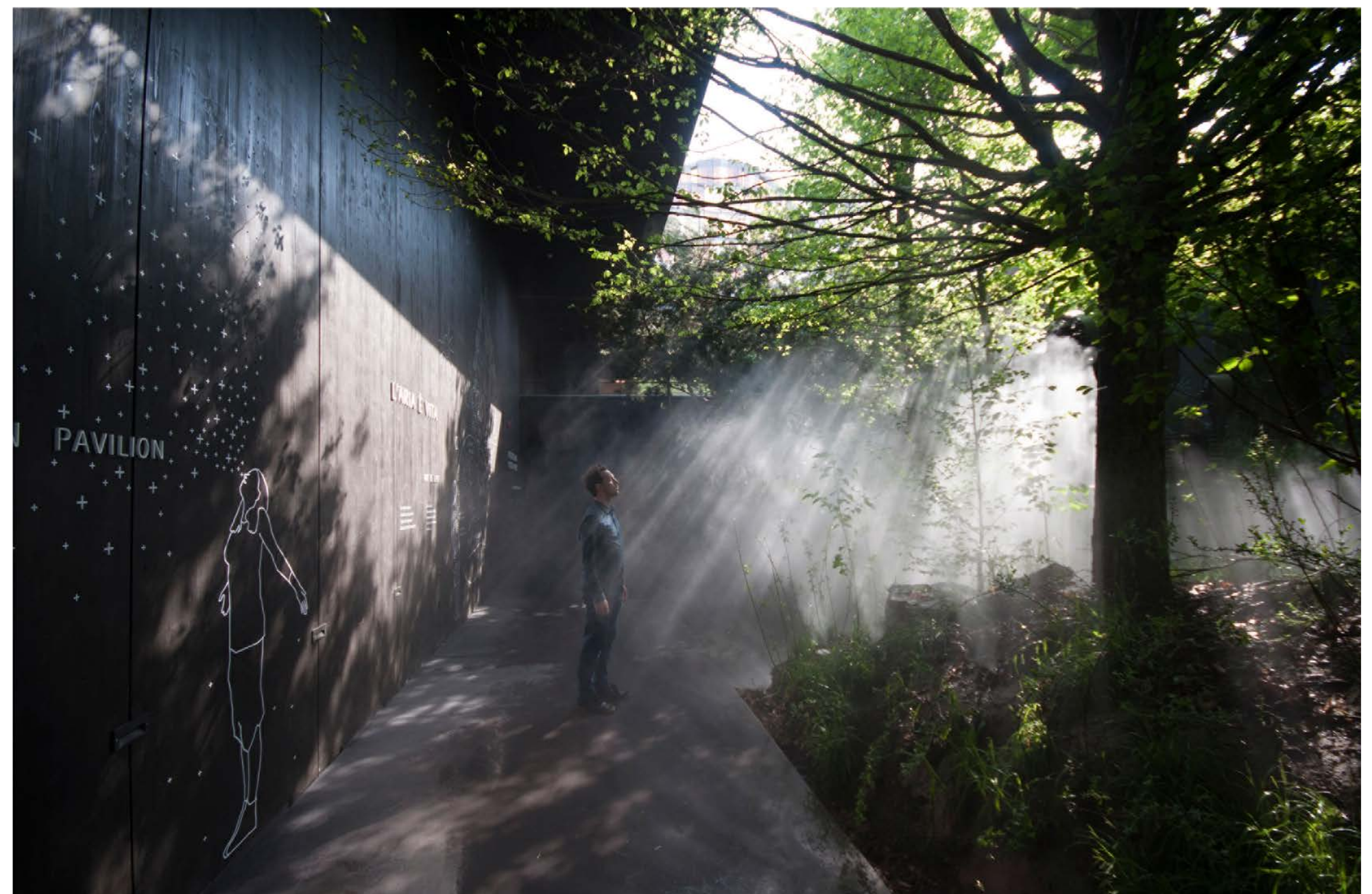
a living interior: a space in performance

The following case study considers a 2015 expo pavilion that was designed to be an autonomous micro-climate, inclusive of scenic and narrative aspects, experiential features, sensorial emphasis, metamorphic evolutionary spatial qualities, and dimensions

of a simulated reality. This pavilion was a representation of what a performance-oriented space could be. The project was a mini-Austrian forest implemented inside a magical wooden curiosity box. It was designed by team.breathe.austria led by Professor Klaus K. Loenhart and his studio terrain: integral designs BDA. Their study looked for evidence of fabulation within the living interior, how it challenged the definitions and boundaries of what interior space is, and how the conception of interior atmosphere was indebted to temporal conditions. The pavilion design was guided by an imagined and fantasised experience, and the form it takes is conceived to follow and fulfil that performance. The fabulousness of a desired spatial experience, with all its material and immaterial qualities such as atmosphere, emotions, time-based experience, and sensoriality grounds the design process even in its early stages.

* The pavilion was developed by the interdisciplinary project group team.breathe.austria of the Institute for Architecture and Landscape at TU Graz, under the direction of architect, landscape architect, and university professor Klaus K. Loenhart. It involved:
Terrain: Integral Designs BDA — Prof. Klaus K Loenhart
With Agency in Biosphere — Markus Jeschaunig
Hohensinn Architektur ZT GmbH — Karlheinz Boiger
LANDLAB, i_a&l, TU-Graz — Andreas Goritschnig und Bernhard König
Lendlabor Graz — Anna Resch und Lisa Enzenhofer
See *breatheaustria.at*

Figures 01 & 02.
The Austrian Pavilion from the interior and the exterior. A pavilion conceived as a forest in a wooden box. 2015 © team.breathe.austria/terrain: integral designs.



The pavilion Breathe.Austria was constructed by architectural and vegetal elements. It relied on bio-geo-natural processes as hybrid tools. The pavilion was an attempt to recreate the interior of an Austrian forest with its decreasing temperatures and increasing humidity. It created an experience one had when moving towards its centre that included Austrian bio-diverse vegetation and unique Austrian scents for which the design team used devices and mechanisms to optimise the desired performance of a forest including modifying temperature and humidity levels, and air flow.[20] The interior architecture of the pavilion was constructed mostly from living elements (trees and plants) that grow and change over time. These design elements made time a significant factor within the design and construction process. The mini forest was conceived to be ready with a sufficient level of growth immediately before the opening of the expo. However, the fact that the mini-forest kept growing and evolving during the entire expo period of six months had a dramatic impact on visitor experience. As the space evolved, the boundaries between a stable form/space and a fluid/living space were challenged. We also noted an illusionary fictive factor: the simulated mini forest performed an illusion of being transported to a fictive forest in a parallel world/reality to the crowded expo.

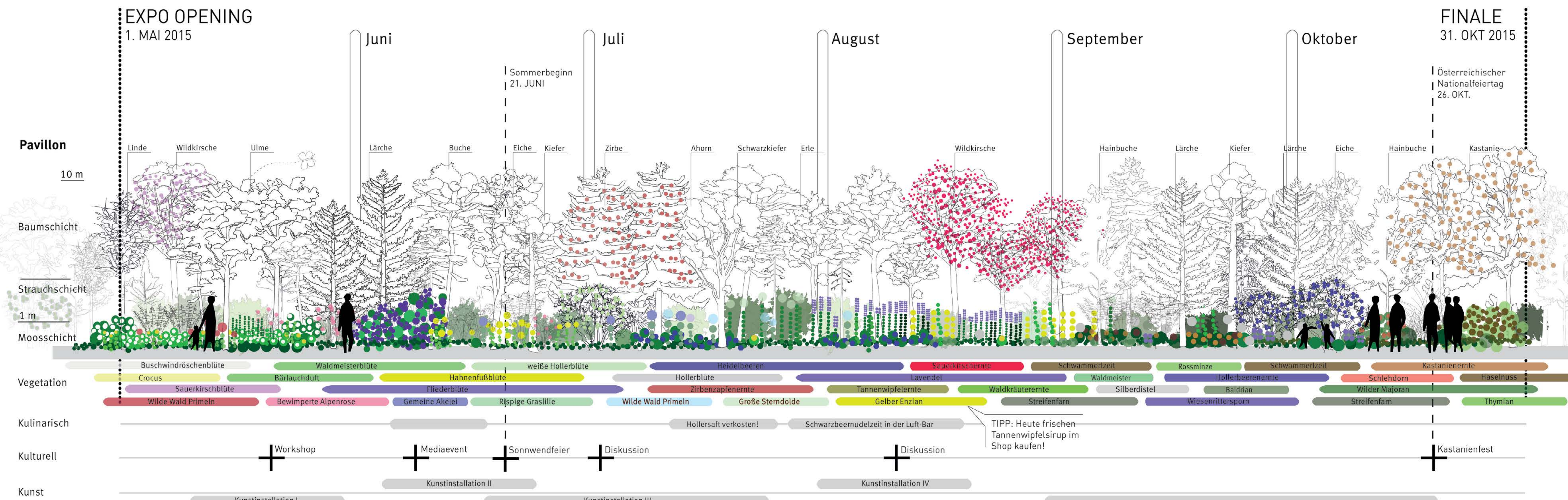


Figure 03.
A planting timeline that demonstrates the evolution of the vegetation through the months of the expo and the transformation of the pavilion. 2015 © team.breathe. austria/terrain: integral designs.

This project also embedded an event-characterisation of the space, which is manifested in its lifetime as an ephemeral spatial event, a living architecture performing for the visitors: the Before, the During, the Unfolding, and the After.[21] The changes in the growth and the density of the vegetation; the unexpected gradual attraction of birds, insects, and lizards; the dismantling of the pavilion; the distribution of the trees to the municipality of Milan were all parts of this spatial event's timeline, with scripted and unscripted happenings. With no pre-testing of the pavilion, it was an experiment waiting to unfold. This case study allowed us to examine the concept of spatial fabulation of a living and performative interior through the following key concepts aligned with repertoire of the performative: left to unfold, the event-character, fluid interior, open-form, anticipatory and improvisatory design, scripted and unscripted performances, and form follows performance.

Figure 04.
The interior of the pavilion as a simulation of an Austrian forest. 2015 © terrain: integral designs/ Simon Oberhofer.

pavilions as performative architectures

One of the uses of the term 'performance' in architecture goes back to the impact of the scientific developments on architecture, in particular biology, from the mid-eighteenth century onwards and the rise of the notions of environment and milieu. It also goes back to 'systems theory' in the twentieth century, the complex systems-engineering of the 1960s, and the design of contained life or eco-systems, where these theories required a more complex approach to design and engineering.[22] The Austrian pavilion relates to those aspects of 'complex systems'

and to the interest to design a 'performing milieu,' a 'space in performance.'[23] The pavilion translates the philosophy of 'form follows content' elaborated by the German exhibition designer Uwe Brueckner.[24] We re-interpret that philosophy as 'form follows performance' in keeping with Brueckner's own elaboration on the shift in exhibitions design from an aesthetic of perceiving towards the aesthetic of experiencing.[25] Memory design and experience design are also manifested within the aim to create a fabulated spatial experience engraved in visitors' memory. These dimensions of the performative character are detected in the openness of the interior, where the interior is a metamorphic evolutionary space open for the unscripted improvisation of the natural elements that constitute it. This pavilion is a significant representation of what a fantasy-oriented spatial design may be, or what a performance-oriented space may mean. The form of the pavilion follows its performativity as an Austrian forest.

The architect Klaus K. Loenhart expresses that:

> The pavilion forms a frame around a generous vegetation body and acts as a vessel for the performance of the internal landscape [...] The central element is a dense Austrian forest brought together with technical elements in order to create a breathing microclimate. With this oxygen and carbon-producing core, the pavilion becomes an air generating station [...] without conventional air conditioning.[26]

The designers of the exhibition asked: How does the Austrian forest perform? As explained by the Austrian architect, when people visit an Austrian forest, the more they move toward its centre, the lower the temperature, the greater the humidity, and, simultaneously, the more intense the smells, and the types of vegetation change.[27]

Figure 05.
Floor plan of the pavilion demonstrating the pavilion conceived as a mini forest inside a box. 2015 © team.breathe.austria/ terrain: integral designs.

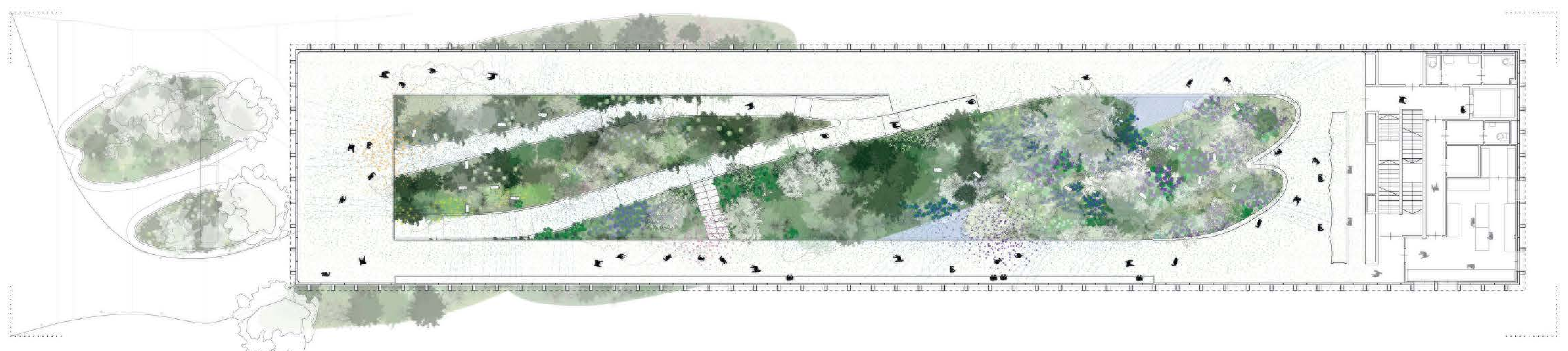


Figure 06:
Top view of the pavilion demonstrating the pavilion conceived as a mini forest inside a box. 2015 © team.breathe.austria/ terrain: integral designs.

Moreover, this project expresses the concept of performative within the design and the construction process. The architecture of the pavilion is constructed from living elements (trees and plants). These elements grow and change, which is an important factor considered earlier in the process. The mini-forest was conceived to be ready, and with a sufficient level of growth, immediately before the expo opening. However, it would keep growing and evolving during the six-month expo period. Strategising the time factor was crucial in the design process in order to emphasise its performative qualities. It is a living architecture that is performing. The pavilion was named Breathe.Austria, a title emphasising the experiential factor, the 'experiencing' and the 'sensorial' aspects of the pavilion and its architecture. The space was hybrid as it was constructed using architectural and vegetal elements; however, it relied on bio/geo-natural processes along with technical devices and mechanisms to achieve and optimise the atmospherically desired performance of a forest: the desired temperatures, the different humidity levels, and the air flows. Adequate trees were planted to provide oxygen for up to 1800 people.
The main message of the Austrian pavilion, in relation to the theme of the expo, was to highlight the importance of oxygen and cooling air to the environment. The design team team.breathe.austria designed the space as a mini-forest that combines natural cooling systems instead of artificial air conditioning, to create its own microclimate.

Above, Figure 07:
Section of the pavilion.
2015 © team.breathe.austria/
terrain: integral designs.

Below, Figure 08:
Elevation of the pavilion.
2015 © team.breathe.austria/
terrain: integral designs.

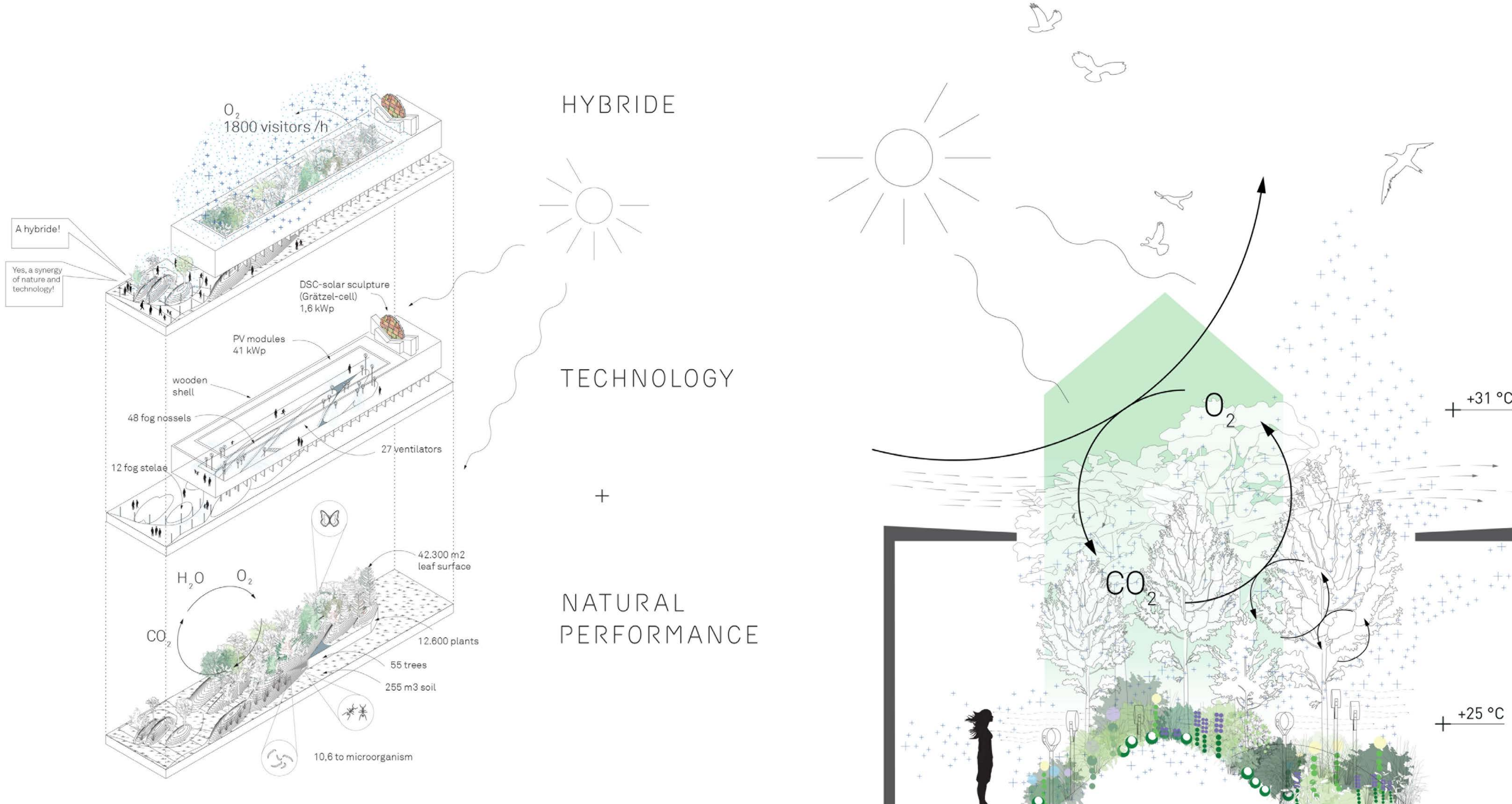
During a presentation at the Politecnico di Milano prior to the inauguration of the Expo and before the pavilion construction, we asked the architect if the design had been tested and experimented on a smaller scale in a laboratory, in a way to guarantee the results and the desired performance of the pavilion. The architect confirmed there was no pre-testing or experimentation of the pavilion.[28] Thus, the making of the pavilion was an experiment that unfolded along with all the scripted and unscripted happenings, which makes the design and the making process a testing and a learning process. Another aspect of a fantasy-oriented conception of space and of a performative architecture can be found in the 'narrative' and the 'interactive' aspects inside the pavilion. Visitors walking through the different sensorial experiences were influenced by its changing topography. London-based writer, editor, and speaker Amy Fearson described the pavilion:

> A snaking pathway leads into the base of the timber structure, which is raised off the ground on concrete feet. Inside, trees and bushy plants cover the majority of the exhibition space and are engulfed by clouds of mist [...] Illuminated letters spell out the word BREATHE across the path. As visitors get further inside, some of the letters

disappear from sight, and those left over spell out the word EAT. This was intended to suggest a link between the content of the pavilion and the theme of the expo, which is Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life [...] The pathway climbs gently up to meet the floor level of the pavilion [...] Digital microscopes dotted around the perimeter allow visitors to closely inspect and identify the different plants and flowers featured. There are also a series of transparent cylinders containing items including feathers and fabrics. As visitors press down on handles, air is pushed into the containers, causing the contents to float upward.[29]

An *ArchDaily* article detailed the following:

The pavilion's entire floor area is densely planted with 12 Austrian forest ecotypes, ranging from mosses and shrubs to towering, 12-metre trees. In a natural, water-rich forest, cooling occurs through evapotranspiration, meaning



Figures 09 & 10.
Schematics and conceptual sheets demonstrating the combination of natural and artificial solutions to replicate the atmosphere of an Austrian forest.
2015 © team.breathe.austria/ terrain: integral designs.

the evaporation of water from flora and fauna as well as from the soil and water surface [...] the evaporative cooling process is technically augmented. While the pavilion surface area is only 560 m2, thermodynamic high-pressure misting nozzles are used to activate the total evaporation surface of the pavilion vegetation, amounting to around 43,000 m2 [...] Breathe.Austria succeeds in creating a unique climate zone within the pavilion [...] The effective interplay between nature and technology cools the interior space by 5 to 7° C and supplants conventional air conditioning. The pavilion produces 62.5 kg/h of oxygen – enough for 1,800 visitors. On its surface area of 560 m2, Breathe. Austria achieves the equivalent of a much larger, 3-hectare natural forest. The pavilion serves as a breathing "photosynthesis collector" [...].[30]

The Austrian pavilion is described as an experiential space technology, where natural diversity and climatic activations collaborate and intersect.[31]

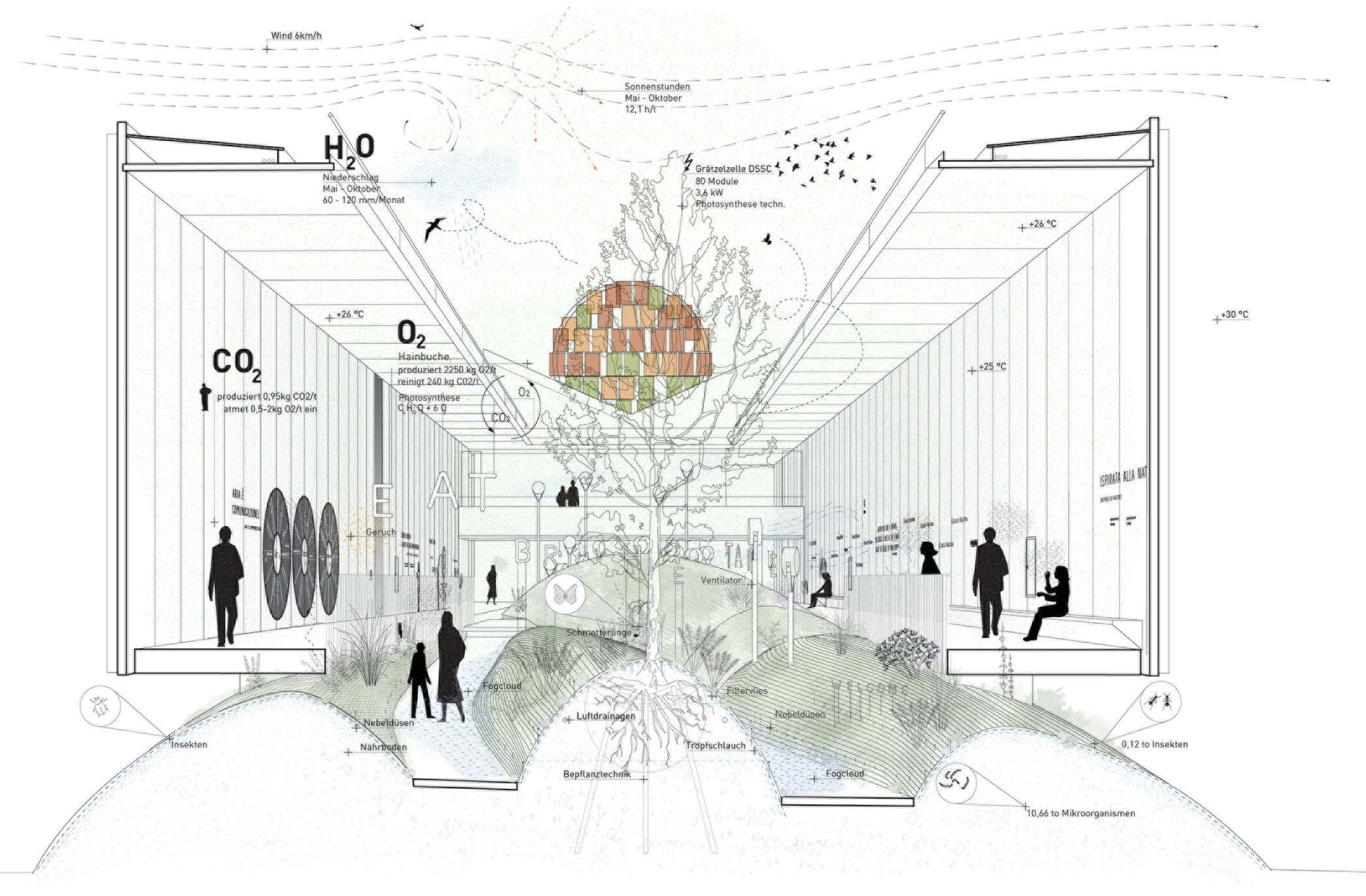


Figure 11.
Interior performance and conceptual schematics. 2015 © team.breathe.austria/ terrain: integral designs.

‘fabulatory’-oriented design: implications

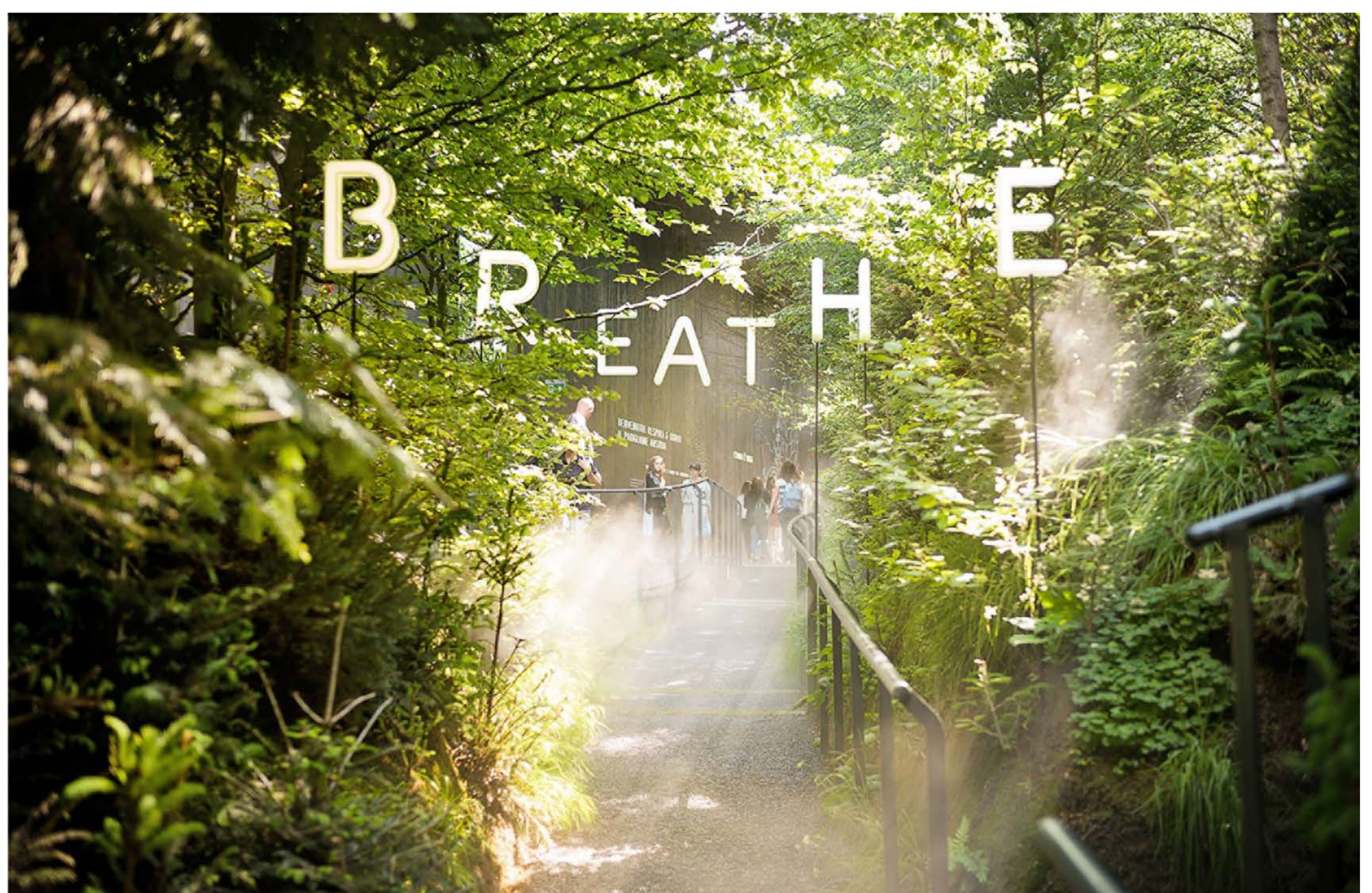
Contemporary exhibitions spaces are tending to be more fantasy- and fabulation-oriented and increasingly performative driven. For the Italian architect and exhibition designer Italo Rota, the ‘pedagogical role of exhibitions is finished. Now it is about a simple evocative and emotional role.’[32] The performative qualities of the exhibition space dominate all other characters, as they keep experimenting with fantasy-evocative, event-oriented, and performative-spectacular spatial qualities that are usually the result of hybrid spatial features and an imagination for a fantasy space. Director of Theatre for Social Change Pam Locker highlights that ‘the theatrical opportunities borrowed from multimedia, sound, lighting design and a range of other exhibition technologies, create interesting opportunities for storytelling through performance.’[33] The abundance of new types of museums and exhibitions is leading to constant innovations in exhibition methods, especially with the use of new types of materials and the emergence of immateriality in exhibition design.[34] Performance, hybrid, flexible, narrative, and interactive are spatial concepts that emerged with the rise of exhibitions that have unusual and challenging content that require creative hybrid spatial strategies in the exhibition spaces. Exhibitions are becoming highly hybrid, performative, and multitasking, where a large variety of tools are employed to make a space perform and communicate/exhibit content in a fantasy space where a fusion is conceived between the interior and the exterior, the static and the metamorphic, the virtual and the physical.

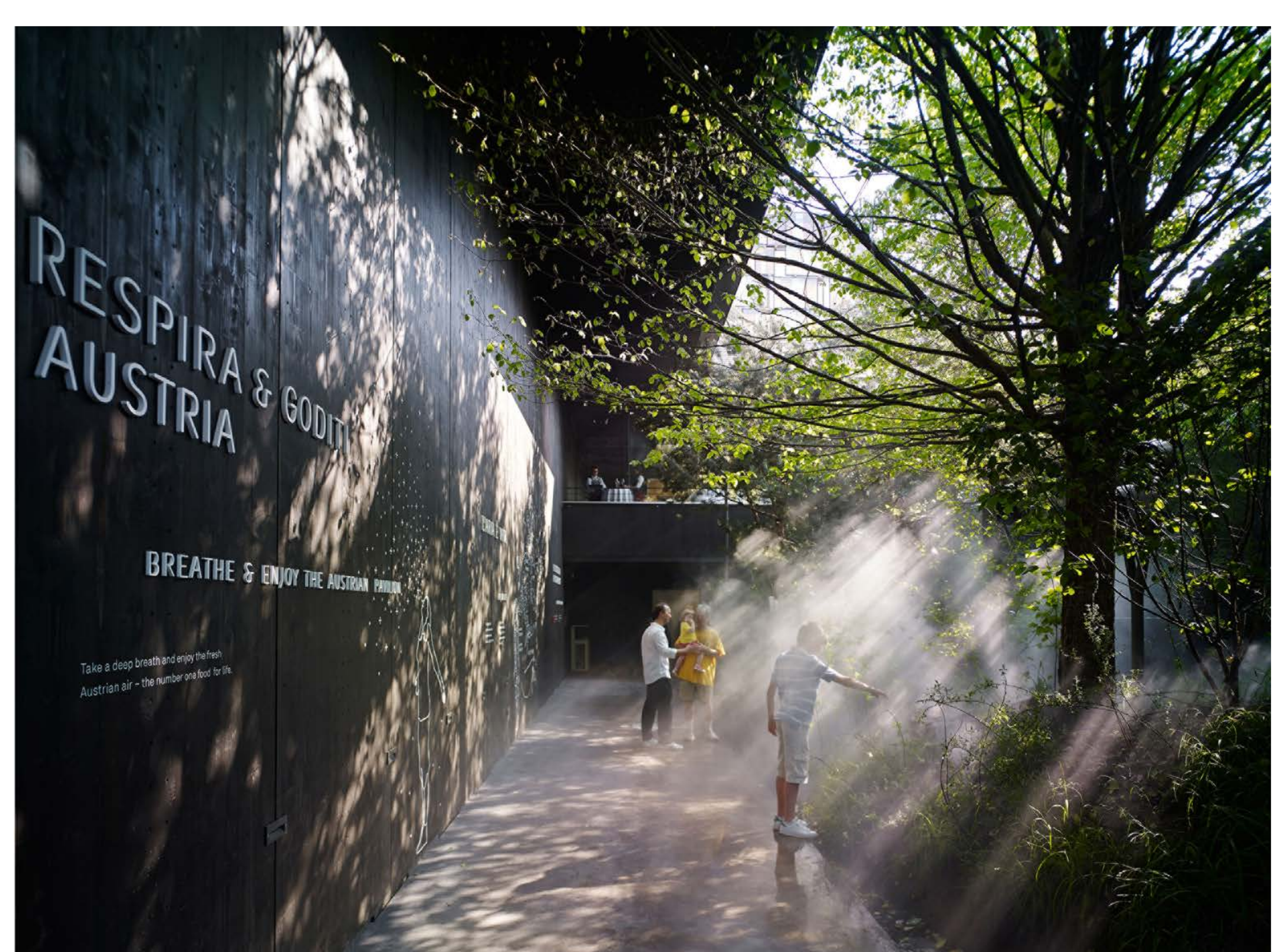
The implication of those tendencies in exhibition design and, in particular, expos, is, as described by Lavin, that spaces come to life only when the lights are on.[35] The pavilions are becoming black boxes that only come to life when the show is on. They are appearing as black boxes waiting to be filled with screenings and projections and scheduled shows. Consequently, the performative fabulation becomes better exercised on us only when visiting the pavilions at night, or when the events and the shining lights are on, while visiting the expo during the day, and, outside the scheduled events, enable us to experience the dry side of the spatial realities including the raw structural skeletons of the pavilions.

Despite its inevitable temporariness and its quasi-event conception, the Austrian Pavilion represented the opposite to those trends; it exercised a unique immersive spatial performance and spatial fabulation through minimum use of technology, screens, smart devices, and lights.

the pavilion as a metaphor

In his famous essay ‘Exhibition Design as Metaphor of a New Modernity’, Founder of Archizoom Associati and Professor at the Polytechnic University of Milan, Andrea Branzi stated:





Figures 12 & 13.
Interior of the pavilion.
2015 © terrain: integral designs/ Marc Lin.

> In the category of the design of displays […] there are in fact all the genetic elements typical of a new modernity, which we shall call “light” and “diffuse” […] A modernity characterized by the design of flexible or temporary environmental micro-systems, architectural subsystems.[36]

In fact, the practice of exhibition design has always been a field where designers have tested and forecasted newer trends of spatial qualities. In this regard, Branzi’s predictions are literally happening. The spatial design practices are increasingly allowing unusual spatial systems that are metamorphic and open for the continual changes in how we inhabit and use our spaces. Unplanned functions and uses may emerge and take place in our spaces, which challenge their original spatial qualities and programme. A pavilion can be used as an illustration of a performative/fantasy-oriented interior architecture. It is a rehearsal of a performative dramaturgy, or an analysis based on performative criteria. Moreover, it is an opportunity to reflect on the concepts of performative and fabulation within the design process that shall be instrumentalised as tools that can be used in education and practice. Such analytical tools must be experiential and based on the concepts of openness, performative, flexibility, and temporality. Elaborating such analytical dramaturgical tools is necessary to study interiors as a living malleable spatial creature capable of unfolding and evolving through its lifetime, and capable of fulfilling and performing various scenographic, theatrical, metaphorical, and communicative missions, while examining a fabulatory spatial conception and a performance-driven design process.

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dancing in your brain!: interiority, affective witnessing, and xenoethics

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abstract

This text-based essay examines the corporeal interiority and ethical spatiality of Braindancing. Braindancing can be defined as a source of entertainment as well as a form of psychological treatment within Night City, the urban centre of CD Projekt Red's 2020 video game *Cyberpunk 2077*. Commonly known as BD, the Braindance manifests as an interactive technological interior, allowing participants to relive the hyper multisensorial and emotional memory of someone else. There exist both legal and illegal markets for BDs, both alluding to its role as a normalised and intimate form of everyday surveillance. Within the context of the year 2077 and the fictionalised game setting, Braindancing operates across the blurred boundary of physical reality and digital fantasy. It offers an escape from the systemic violent and ultra-capitalist conditions that govern the physical urban environment of Night City, while also reinforcing those conditions through the addictive lure of personalised fantasy.

By analysing the interior world of the BD, this essay reflects on our current reality. It begins by applying philosopher Johnny Søraker's construction of *intravirtual* (inside the game space) and *extravirtual* (outside the game space) in order to examine how the BD generates multiple interiors that collapse thresholds between player, character, and game space. It then turns to look at the role of ethics that underpin the BD, considering how, through the collapse of thresholds and extra-intra identities, particular ethical atmospheres are produced. In doing so, the essay puts forward the argument that intravirtual ethics has the capacity to shift how ethics is understood and mobilised extravirtually. This frames a conclusory consideration of xenoethics as a lens that could affect how ethics is understood and practised today. In analysing this fictional context, the essay questions how we define and categorise ethics and considers what can be learnt from future-oriented spatialities currently contained to fantasy.

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welcome to night city

Welcome to Night City. The only limit to what you can do is what you're willing to become.[01]

Night City, a fictional geographic location, operates as an autonomous megacity constructed between North and South California on the Pacific coast of the United States of America.[02] It is the primary site of the video game *Cyberpunk 2077*, a first-person action role playing game released in 2020 by Polish game developer CD Projekt Red. Set in 2077, fifty-five years from our present moment, *Cyberpunk 2077* instructs players to personalise the default character of V in order to gain access to the violent, chaotic, and electrifying reality of Night City.

Night City was first conceived of as an urban territory in the 1990s by American businessman Richard Night. Concerned with growing crime and an impending economic collapse, Night designed a utopian self-sufficient environment financed through amassing capital from corporations that were keen to invest in a place where corporate growth could be allowed to flourish. From its completed construction in 2005 to 2077, the year in which we are introduced to it, Night City underwent violent struggles including two large-scale wars and many incidents of corporate terrorism, the majority of which centred on the fraught power dynamic between ruling corporations and Night City citizens. By 2077, corruption, violence, and high-level crime are defining attributes of everyday existence in the city; the six districts making up the territory are teeming with gangs, mercenaries, cyberpyschos, and junkies, all trying to survive in an acute atmosphere of brutal hyper neoliberal capitalism.

Every human in *Cyberpunk* 2077 is cyborg, meaning they are made up of both organic and human-made material. All humans have a slot connected to their brain where data can be uploaded to their neural network in the form of biochips. The central storyline of the game consists of V becoming infected by a damaged biochip known as the Relic, created by the ruling Japanese mega corporation, Arasaka. The relic contains the engram, or memory data, of 2000s rockstar Johnny Silverhand; meaning that when V inserts the relic into their neural shard slot, the engram is uploaded to their brain and threatens to replace V's consciousness with Johnny's. Players must attempt to find a reversal cure for this corporeal takeover for both characters to survive — V within their physical body and Johnny through the body of the technological biochip. The hunt for a cure takes V on a journey through the hellscape of Night City, a journey that allows for sustained interactions within all six districts of the city, with an extensive and diverse range of characters.

This essay responds to the framework produced by philosopher of ethics Johnny Søraker, whereby he identifies a relation

between the *intravirtual* worlds of games and the *extravirtual* realm of our physical existence.[03] By establishing Night City as an intravirtual laboratory bound to the parameter of the game's digital interior, I argue that this generates opportunities to expand our knowledge and practice of exterior or extravirtual urbanism. The role of time is critical in this process. While Søraker places emphasis on the division between the two realms as a way of understanding real time versus virtual time, I am interested in tracing the echoes that exist between these two times: the intravirtual time of the year 2077 and the extravirtual time of the year 2022. In many ways, Night City as a territory of neoliberal capitalism, corporate power, violence, and technology represents an amplified image of today's cities situated within the global north.

Night City lived through environmental collapse and growth in urban density due to climate migration, something extravirtual cities in 2022 currently find themselves grappling with. Night City has been built out of the corporate power of key individuals such as Saburo Arasaka and Donald Lundee Jr, a fact somewhat mirrored in contemporary extravirtual global society through figures like Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos. Alongside these symmetries, which blur the boundary between intra and extra, Night City is also one of the most extensive interactive future urban environments in existence, with a staggering 600 million hours having been spent in the city across all gaming platforms.[04] As a result, it has the capacity to function as an accessible interior space in which tactics and strategies for alternative ways of being can challenge *both* intravirtual and extravirtual time and their interconnected urban atmospheres.

As this essay is a first theoretical step in testing this potentiality, I have chosen a modest intravirtual aspect of Night City to critically examine in relation to the extravirtual. It takes as its focus the popular entertainment form of the Braindance (BD), a neural experience that allows the viewer to relive someone else's memories, including their senses and emotions. While not a defining aspect of the main storyline, V does come into close contact with BDs at various points in the narrative, particularly through their relationship to Judy, an expert in BD technology.

To provide a brief breakdown of the BD, characters record their experiences live using specialist technological equipment that allows electromagnetic sensors to read brain activity. Recordings are then converted into digital data and stored on the Net or a carrying device such as a disk or chip. These recordings, in their 'raw' data form, are then typically sold to a BD company that edits and enhances the sensory and emotional dimensions of the raw data. This edited BD is then sold or rented to those looking to experience the particular memory, either using personal equipment or by visiting a BD arcade (Figure 01). Some BD companies, as capitalist entities, hire actors to stage false

Figure 01.
Characters using braindance headsets to experience the memories of someone else. Image credit: CD PROJEKT®, Cyberpunk 2077® are registered trademarks of CD PROJEKT Capital Group. *Cyberpunk 2077* game © CD PROJEKT S.A. Developed by CD PROJEKT S.A. All rights reserved. The *Cyberpunk 2077* game is set in the universe created by Mike Pondsmith in his tabletop role-playing game. All other copyrights and trademarks are the property of their respective owners. With permission from CD Projekt Red.

memories to increase sales, while others work with Night City celebrities to record their everyday life, which offers the average citizen the capacity to temporarily 'become' their idol. There are also illegal BDs known as XBDs (Extreme Braindances) or Black BDs, which are elicited by small underground teams via criminal means. They are deemed illegal, as they document real people's experiences of murder, torture, rape, death — both from the perspective of the victim and the perpetrator. Usually, victims have been kidnapped and forced into these macabre acts for the XBDs to circulate on the black market.

Applying a critical spatial analysis, I focus on two specific aspects of the intravirtual BD phenomenon. The first part of the essay engages the first: analysing how BD technology produces layers of neural interiority, or brain interiors. Typically, there is the interior brain space specifically produced by the BD feeder technology that allows the participant to observe the original memory; the interior brain space of the person who produced the original memory that contains their so-called 'raw' emotions and senses; the interior brain space of the character's neural system that is witnessing the original memory; and the interior brain space of the extravirtual player who is controlling the actions of the character who is observing. As argued, these interior layers function as a foam structure; each have a co-isolated autonomy but are stabilised through transitory relays of experience that cross ontological thresholds. This consequently frames the second aspect of the essay: the ethical dimension of the interior interdependent structure that produces both intravirtual and extravirtual

affect. In particular, this second part considers what the ethics of witnessing are within these entangled interiors and what witnessing means in both the intravirtual urban territory of Night City and in our extravirtual urban futures. This leads to the consideration that xenoethics not only exists within the intravirtual realm; its theoretical structure may also prove useful in guiding our encounters within present-day physical interiors.

analytical approach

I begin this first section with a definition of critical spatiality and how this definition is reflected in the analytical approach I am taking towards both interiority and ethics in this context. Almost twenty years after architect Jane Rendell defined critical spatial practice aided by the work of French theorists Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau, it remains the most concrete and clear definition in use. She articulates that taking a critical approach to the praxis of spatiality (how space is understood and practised via everyday activities and creative application) means embedding transformatory reflection.[05] This, she argues, can be implemented in imaginative ways to challenge the existing social and spatial order defined by global capitalism into something different.[06] Critical spatiality is thus a praxis approach towards space (in an expanded understanding of the term) that foregrounds social critique and social change.

Philosopher Armen Avanessian proposes that critical spatial praxis transcends established boundaries, limitations, judgments, and distinctions,[07] a notion found mirrored in Christine McCarthy's definition of interiority. Interiority is a particular category of spatiality which 'enables the recognition and definition of an interior.'[08] Not restricted to architectural insides so to speak, it is 'a transformative concept, dependent on social, cultural, physical and technological developments.'[09] Conceived of as a temporal condition, the boundaries of what we understand as interiority are constantly shifting in line with the future — something that is also the case for ethics. If we agree with philosopher Alain Badiou that ethics manifests in relation to infinite situations and thus contains a multiplicity of truths,[10] ethics becomes a process of speculative position-making as opposed to a restrictive, answerable, and binary-focused discourse. To put it simply, its ontological boundaries are always being (re)defined, a repetitive act that secures its contemporary relevance.

A critical spatial analytical approach is thus useful in my task of interrogating the social order of ethics across interior infrastructures produced by neoliberal capitalism in both intravirtual and extravirtual times, spaces, and scales. To put it differently, I am interested in engaging an intravirtual analysis of spatialised ethics (as manifested through the BD) to lay the ground for extravirtual ethical change. A critical spatial analysis supports my desire to imagine modes of operating ethically otherwise in the spatial present. This is needed in order for us to have any hope of securing a radical future that presents as an alternative to neoliberal capitalism.

Having cemented this red thread of transformation that entangles critical spatial praxis with the production of interiority and ethics, I now turn to applying a critical spatial analysis to a BD narrative as a way of identifying how these neural intra and extra interiors interact. My focus in this section will be on how interiority manifests within the layers of brain interiors and how a shared atmosphere is produced that binds them into a foamy co-dependent structure. This structure then becomes the foundation for a further discussion in the second section pertaining to intra and extra ethical transformation.

neural interiority

V is first introduced to BDs through an interaction with a character called Evelyn Parker. Parker introduces V to Judy, the BD expert previously noted, and it is at this moment relatively early in the gameplay that V gains the necessary skills and equipment needed to interact with BDs. To introduce V to the inner workings of BD tech prior to accessing Evelyn's BD, which is critical to the central storyline, Judy chooses to play a short 'sample' BD on V's headset. Functioning as a guided tutorial, Judy selects a corner store robbery in the district of Heywood, intentionally staged and recorded by amateurs. The BD begins with V neurally entering the recorded experience of one of the robbers, at the moment their criminal partner is instructing them to go in and rob the store (Figure 02). V, experiencing the adrenaline of the robber who recorded the scene, witnesses the robber load a gun and enter the store; holding a gun to the store's employee, the robber threatens to kill him if he doesn't hand over money. When the money is secured, the robber walks backwards to leave the store and when they reach the door, is shot and killed by an unknown source. This is the point the BD abruptly ends, and V returns to their singular neural existence and physical location within Judy's BD editing room.

Figure 02.
The beginning of the BD; the robber instructs V to rob the store. Image credit: CD PROJEKT®, *Cyberpunk 2077*® are registered trademarks of CD PROJEKT Capital Group. *Cyberpunk 2077* game © CD PROJEKT S.A. Developed by CD PROJEKT S.A. All rights reserved. The *Cyberpunk 2077* game is set in the universe created by Mike Pondsmith in his tabletop role-playing game. All other copyrights and trademarks are the property of their respective owners. With permission from CD Projekt Red.

There are six autonomous interiors produced during this BD narrative. I am classifying these six as the central interiors — there are arguably other minor interiors present in the scenario. The first is produced by Judy's computer, the so-called 'feeder' that transmits the BD to V. The second interior is Judy's own neural interior, her brain interior, which is processing her own experience of the scenario. The third interior is V's own neural interior, the space that is receiving the electro-transmitted BD from the headset. The fourth interior is the interior space produced by the BD technology, the corner store setting where the narrative plays out. The fifth interior exists only inside the fourth interior; it is the emotional experience of the robber who recorded the original scene — this is the interior V occupies when viewing the BD. Finally, there is the sixth interior, the extravirtual neural interior of the player who is both an active participant and a passive witness to all the other interiors. Each interior space is produced by both intra and extra corporeal-technological activity; a systematic coming together of organic and mechanical matter both inside and outside the threshold of the game.

Interiority as a process is produced both intravirtually and extravirtually within these six interior spaces via environmental manipulation fuelled by a condition of control; in other words, the boundaries for interiority are initially drawn by the rules that regulate the BD narrative as conceived by the system of the game world. However, while temporality is an active condition for interiority,[11] the boundaries of the temporal condition cannot be presumed to be symmetrical.[12] For example, while the five intravirtual interiors cannot surpass the rules stipulated by the game world, the sixth extravirtual interior is not restricted by the same time or scale; that is, a player may experience the condition of interiority via the sixth interior space once the gameplay has stopped, whereas this extension beyond the boundary of the game is not possible for the other five. To complexify it further, intravirtual experiences of interiority can be collapsed into extravirtual interiors. For example, a player may bring the third interior (V's neural interior) into the sixth interior by reflecting on V's experience as well as their own after play has ended. This possibility for collapse not only makes clear that the boundary condition determines the flexibility, mobility, and extent of interiority,[13] but also that the intra and extra experiences of interiority cease to be oppositional as they become part of a single continuum.[14]

When the gameplay activates within the fourth interior (the BD setting of the corner store being robbed), Judy's neural interior operates as an observer to both the BD playing out but also to the third interior of V's mind and the fifth interior of the original experiencer who recorded the BD material. It also becomes a mediator between the first interior of the feeder and the other interiors, as Judy is controlling the transmission of the

BD, and a direct connection point between the character of V and the extravirtual player as she guides the player's actions as V. Thus, Judy's voice as a sensory manifestation of the second interior moves across the boundaries of all the other interiors, functioning as a marker of the 'psychological squeezing of space' and establishing a 'geometry of intimacy' between the six interiors.[15] McCarthy argues that a criterion for interiority is 'an imaging of closeness and the making of relationships', something that is intensified through emotion.[16]

Emotional interiority functions as a catalyst for the thresholds existing between the interior spaces to blur; it becomes a balm for entanglement. As feminist theorist Sara Ahmed articulates, emotions not only establish the surfaces and boundaries of bodies and worlds, but they also mediate relations by acts of binding.[17] There are many emotions manifesting as interiority in this narrative. First, there is Judy's emotional state present in the second interior; she is anxious because Evelyn Parker has put her in a compromising position by introducing her to V and asking her to run a dangerous BD on her software. As a player operating in the extravirtual sixth interior, you feel Judy's anxiety, which heightens your own player perceptions. Then, there is V's third interior, infected by the fifth interior of the robber, who experiences high levels of adrenaline and fear, and ends with an intense burst of unidentified feeling (enhanced in the sixth interior by the vibration of the controller) representative of death. This, in turn, produces a strong emotional reaction from V, requiring Judy to calm them down after the BD has finished playing (Figure 03).

Figure.03.
V strongly affected by the emotions of the robber. Image credit: CD PROJEKT®, *Cyberpunk 2077®* are registered trademarks of CD PROJEKT Capital Group. Cyberpunk 2077 game © CD PROJEKT S.A. Developed by CD PROJEKT S.A. All rights reserved. The Cyberpunk 2077 game is set in the universe created by Mike Pondsmith in his tabletop role-playing game. All other copyrights and trademarks are the property of their respective owners. With permission from CD Projekt Red.

This ultimately affects the player who is temporarily 'becoming' V — they have after all just experienced death thirdhand. This emotive condition of interiority moves through the boundaries of each autonomous interior — meaning it operates as an atmospheric condition that can affect both intra and extravirtual minds and bodies. This condition represents the 'possibility that the ephemeral and visually immaterial might construct interiority in its own terms.'[18]

To visualise and cement this single continuum of interiority in a way that identifies the temporal boundaries of each interior and their intimate atmospheric relationship, we can turn to the theory of foam. Specifically, I am referring here to the philosophical and networked approach of German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, as detailed in his text *Foams*, the third volume of his Spheres trilogy. Foam, similar to interiority, is a fleeting form that manifests as a series of temporal processes Sloterdijk deems as 'leaps, redistributions and reformattings.'[19] Foam is made up of autonomous cells, each consisting of its own 'self-augmenting context', operating as 'an intimate space of meaning whose tension is maintained by dyadic and pluripolar resonances.'[20]

Each of the six interiors in this BD narrative example operates as an autonomous foam cell that has its own intimate process of interiority. While the filmic walls of each cell do make visible an ontological separation, the cells remain tied within a singular structure due to a tension or atmosphere that is capable of passing across boundaries and thresholds. This atmosphere, or air condition, infiltrates each microcosmic world and affects its social life.[21] Equally as much as the physical infrastructure of the foam, it is this atmospheric affect that establishes the interiors as co-dependent. In this BD case then, the six interiors operating across intra and extra spaces, times, and scales are operating in a structure of coexistence, one that does not possess a hierarchy; that is, not one singular interior is producing an experience of interiority that is then distributed across the other interiors — but rather one of coequality, a multi-chambered system of mutual relations relaying back and forth and stabilising the whole.[22] Artist and filmmaker John Akomfrah speaks of the filmic technique of montage in a similar way, arguing that seemingly mutually exclusive worlds with differing ontologies can be brought into a relationship, and, through that encounter, other onto-physical possibilities emerge that are not restricted or reduced to the condition of the individual.[23]

Having made clear the dependent spatial relation between the extra and intra interiors at play in the BD narrative, the next section will now turn to Akomfrah's point exactly, the potential for alternative onto-physical experiences possible precisely due to interior coexistence. In particular, it will consider the ethics of witnessing and how the intravirtual BD experience of witnessing may affect and influence the extravirtual.

ethical witnessing

The contemporary extravirtual understanding and practice of ethics in western knowledge production remains restricted by both the historical 'province of conservatism' and the lack of definitive consensus.[24] European philosophical ontoepistomolgical reason, which defined the Modern order, most notably through the work of Decartes, Kant, and Hegel, established a global colonial understanding of self-determination, within which ethics was cemented as a defining attribute of the subject and the rights (he) possessed.[25] This Modernist framing of ethics springboarded off the earlier work of the Stoics who philosophised the Greek origin of the word; that is the search for the virtuous good (as an extension and reflection of the self).[26]

While most Modernists stayed true to this Stoical foundation, they disagreed on other aspects including the distinction between ethics and morality, the relation between the individual and the collective, responsibility, proximity to the law — to name just a few. These disagreements infused ethics with a transient atmosphere of confusion. However, it is important to emphasise among this long-standing lack of clarity the 2500-year-old notion of ethics as centred on goodness (as the wise choice of man). Interpretations of ethics across epochs have largely circulated and reformulated this gendered (and racialised) argumentation, establishing a deep-rooted conservatism based on a narrow binary system of good (ethical) versus bad (unethical).

This discussion of extra and intravirtual ethics, and the potential production of an affective economy that binds them, is centred on the premise that ethics, in both realms, no longer occupies itself with the search for what is good. Rather, it begins from the belief that what ethics is searching for is not yet known, as the answer(s) exists in the future; however, we know now that ethics possesses a radical potential that can produce new values within the spaces where judgment breaks down.[27] The intravirtual BD is an example of this type of space. If we construct ethics in itself as a game, something philosophers Jean-François Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thébaud tentatively attempted through dialogue in 1979,[28] then the production of new moves and efficacies become possible when one changes the rules of the game; when the rules change, the ontology of the game also changes.

In light of this, what then happens when we attempt to generate new moves and effiacies by engineering an affective ethical atmosphere that can move through this already identified intra and extra interior dependent structure via processes of interiority? To put it more simply and overarchingly, how might the rules of a fictional future influence what ethics is and how it is practised in the present? Before turning to the BD as the setting for this speculative questioning, it is first necessary to expand on the action of witnessing, as this will be the act from which I will examine this affective ethical atmosphere.

Witness studies has developed as a field of scholarship at the intersection between the law, trauma, violence, and memory studies, resulting in ethical witnessing as a subfield reflecting that interaction. The act of witnessing, as assumed from this disciplinary intersection, has negative connotations of crime, of being in danger, of being in the wrong place at the wrong time — evidently emphasised by the role of the witness in legal proceedings. However, if we strip the act of witnessing down to its most basic definition, it is simply to experience something happen, to observe something taking place.

As an intravirtual technology, the BD is built out of the experience of witnessing, in fact, layers of witnessing that take form within the differing interiors. BD witnessing offers a broader set of intravirtual connotations than in the extravirtual realm, in part because BDs offer a variety of experiences that operate on an extensive emotional spectrum; there is no solely 'good' or 'bad' BD experience as they market themselves as being able to take the viewer on a rollercoaster of emotions from start to finish. Consequently, recordings of violence and trauma are transformed to reflect their primary purpose: to function as marketable experiences of entertainment and enjoyment. According to Night City legislation, BDs cannot be used as evidence in legal cases due to emotional and memory bias.[29] Alongside this, most of the time the witnesser is choosing to observe, often paying to observe, and recorders have deliberately placed themselves in a position from which to record — meaning there is no 'wrong' place or time — even if on the surface it may intentionally appear so. Witnessing in this intravirtual context then becomes a more nuanced and entangled experience that challenges extravirtual binary associations.

Literary critic Shoshana Felman and psychoanalyst Dori Laub have argued that witnessing is an affective encounter that not only shatters one's own worldview but also challenges one's agency to imagine oneself as an ethical and political actor.[30] As such, they assert that the witness becomes 'radically transformed by the very process of witnessing', as the ability to interpersonally relate to oneself and the Other who is being observed produces affective connections that offer the possibility to negotiate new subject positions.[31] To critically witness, then, is to actively question the construction of ethical relations among subjects and spaces.[32] In my next analysis of another BD narrative, I will function as the critical witness by witnessing how intravirtual characters witness and how their witnessing constructs certain ethical relations within interconnected neural interior spaces.

In the previous BD, I analysed the 'test' robbery recording Judy played for V. Now I will look at the BD recording Evelyn Parker shows to V — the BD that plays an important role in the central narrative of the game. Before V views Evelyn's BD, they call their

netrunner (cyber-augmented hacker) T-Bug to be an extra witness to the recording and provide V with guidance on what to do while inside the BD. To offer a brief summary, the BD narrative has been recorded by Evelyn and shows her in a penthouse apartment owned by Yorinobu Arasaka, son and heir of Sabouro Arasaka who is the CEO of the leading Night City corporation, Arasaka. Yorinobu is shown speaking on the phone to an unidentified person, a phone call that reveals both his resentment and estrangement from his father and information about the Relic (a device we later find out to be a biochip that stores digitised human psyches called engrams). The BD also reveals that Yorinobu and Evelyn share intimate relations, providing the reason Evelyn would have been able to get close enough to Yorinobu to capture the revealing recording (Figure 04). In this BD instance then, there are five central connecting interiors at play: V's neural interior (as primary witness), T-Bug's neural interior (as secondary witness), the extravirtual player (as tertiary witness), Evelyn's neural interior (as recorder), and the interior space of the apartment reproduced by the technology.

Figure 04.
Evelyn recording her experience with Yorinobu Arasaka in his apartment. Image credit: CD PROJEKT®, *Cyberpunk 2077®* are registered trademarks of CD PROJEKT Capital Group. *Cyberpunk 2077* game © CD PROJEKT S.A. Developed by CD PROJEKT S.A. All rights reserved. The *Cyberpunk 2077* game is set in the universe created by Mike Pondsmith in his tabletop role-playing game. All other copyrights and trademarks are the property of their respective owners. With permission from CD Projekt Red.

Let us return to my suggestion that ethical potentiality arises within spaces that break down judgment. In *Cyberpunk 2077*, characters accept, embrace, and suffer from the removal of everyday ethical decision making: choosing the good or right thing. Night City is framed as a place one must learn to survive, and as a result ethical judgment is positioned as a luxury the majority cannot afford. Those who can afford to acquire ethics (or goodness) as capitalist commodity, such as corporation leaders, police chiefs, and politicians, position themselves as above ethics, as power does not require it to function. As such, ethics manifests as a no man's land shrouded by irrelevance by both those who suffer in Night City and those who thrive within it. This context is heightened within the interior of this BD narrative, as it reveals the merging of both intravirtual positions — recorder and witnesses (doll, hacker, merc — in Night City, a doll is typically a sex worker and a merc is short for mercenary, a person for hire to do any kind of job, most often dangerous and illegal) representing those trying to survive, and the interior space of the apartment (and subsequently the corporate figure of Yorinobu) as a site where ethics is willfully made absent by power. As such, the singular and contained notion of the good or the right choice is not a viable lens of analysing this ethical context because it is ontologically absent from all intravirtual interiors and processes of interiority. Therefore, in order to engage ethics as present within the narrative, it needs to be framed as something other. This 'other' is a transition from binary judgment to affective atmospherics.

In this BD narrative, ethics does not mobilise as a good or bad choice but as the affective interaction that occurs among subjects and objects situated within a particular space and time. Ethics, then, is the shifting of ontological security that occurs within a particular engineered atmosphere, a repositioning of whom one *becomes* (in the Deleuzian sense) in order to respond to the demands of the situation. Put simply, ethics *becomes* the transformation of the self within time and space in order to respond to the temporal moment. The process of transformation itself is caused by the affective atmosphere produced by the coming together of a particular set of conditions, in this case, the merging of five interiors. Ethics also, then, operates as a process of interiority.

To make this claim, the thinking of lawyer Andrea Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos is useful. Previously, I used the term 'air condition' when describing the atmospheric foam structuring among the interiors; with this in mind, according to Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, air is a material manifestation of the informational, emotional, and sensorial continuum in which affects circulate.[33] This continuum is made up of elements, meaning that air itself becomes an assemblage of elements engineered to produce affect. Atmosphere, then, as Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos articulates, is the 'excess of affect that keeps bodies together; and what emerges when bodies are held together by, through and against each other.'[34]

To identify this argumentation in the BD narrative, the affective elements that create the individual neural interiors of the three witnesses (V, T-Bug, the extravirtual player) and the recorder (Evelyn) leak across their time–space thresholds and enter the temporal interior setting of Yorinobu's apartment. Yorinobu's anger at his father interacts with Evelyn's fear and arousal, which interacts with V's nervousness and excitement, which interacts with T-bug's desire and trepidation, which interacts with the extravirtual player's own emotive state. This interaction generates an affective atmosphere so that, as an extravirtual player, it is difficult to distinguish an ontological singular sense of self because you become multiple — held in a temporal state of conglomeration. This is intensified through the overlapping voices within the BD interior and the gameplay cue to move between audio (Figure 05), visual (Figure 06), and thermal (Figure 07) layers of the recording. As an extravirtual player, you are sensorially engulfed by the atmosphere. Important to note is the affective atmosphere will be engineered differently each time the temporal BD interior structure is formed solely due to the extravirtual capacity to affect the intravirtual. As our extravirtual emotive elements cannot be programmed, we possess the capacity to alter the atmosphere and process of interiority that arises. This in turn alters the extent and form of ethical transformation, further cementing its inherent motile basis.

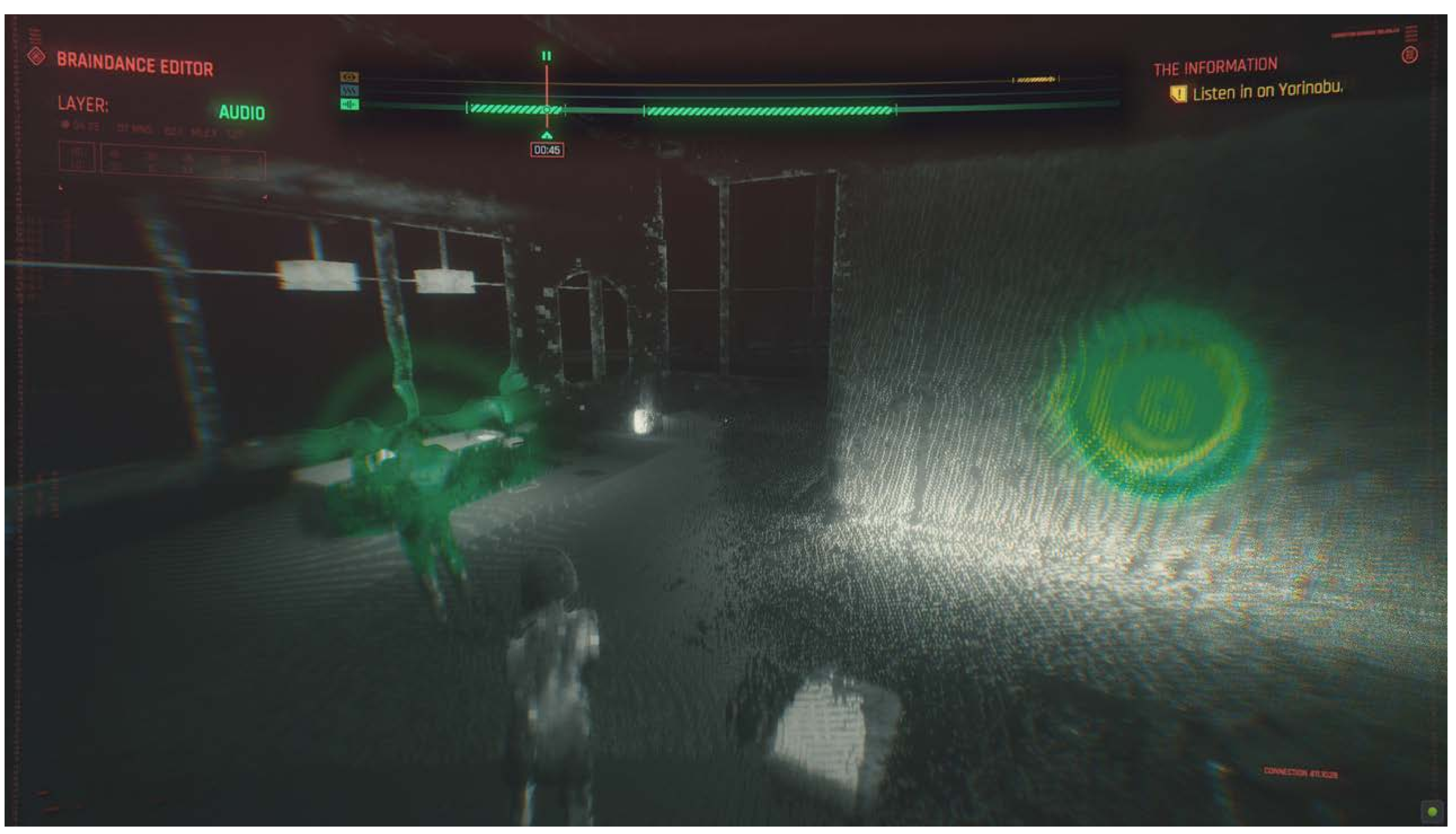

Figure 05.
Audio layer of the gameplay. Image credit: CD PROJEKT®, *Cyberpunk 2077®* are registered trademarks of CD PROJEKT Capital Group. *Cyberpunk 2077* game © CD PROJEKT S.A. Developed by CD PROJEKT S.A. All rights reserved. The *Cyberpunk 2077* game is set in the universe created by Mike Pondsmith in his tabletop role-playing game. All other copyrights and trademarks are the property of their respective owners. With permission from CD Projekt Red.

Figure 06.
Visual layer of the gameplay. Image credit: CD PROJEKT®, *Cyberpunk 2077*® are registered trademarks of CD PROJEKT Capital Group. *Cyberpunk 2077* game © CD PROJEKT S.A. Developed by CD PROJEKT S.A. All rights reserved. The *Cyberpunk 2077* game is set in the universe created by Mike Pondsmith in his tabletop role-playing game. All other copyrights and trademarks are the property of their respective owners. With permission from CD Projekt Red.

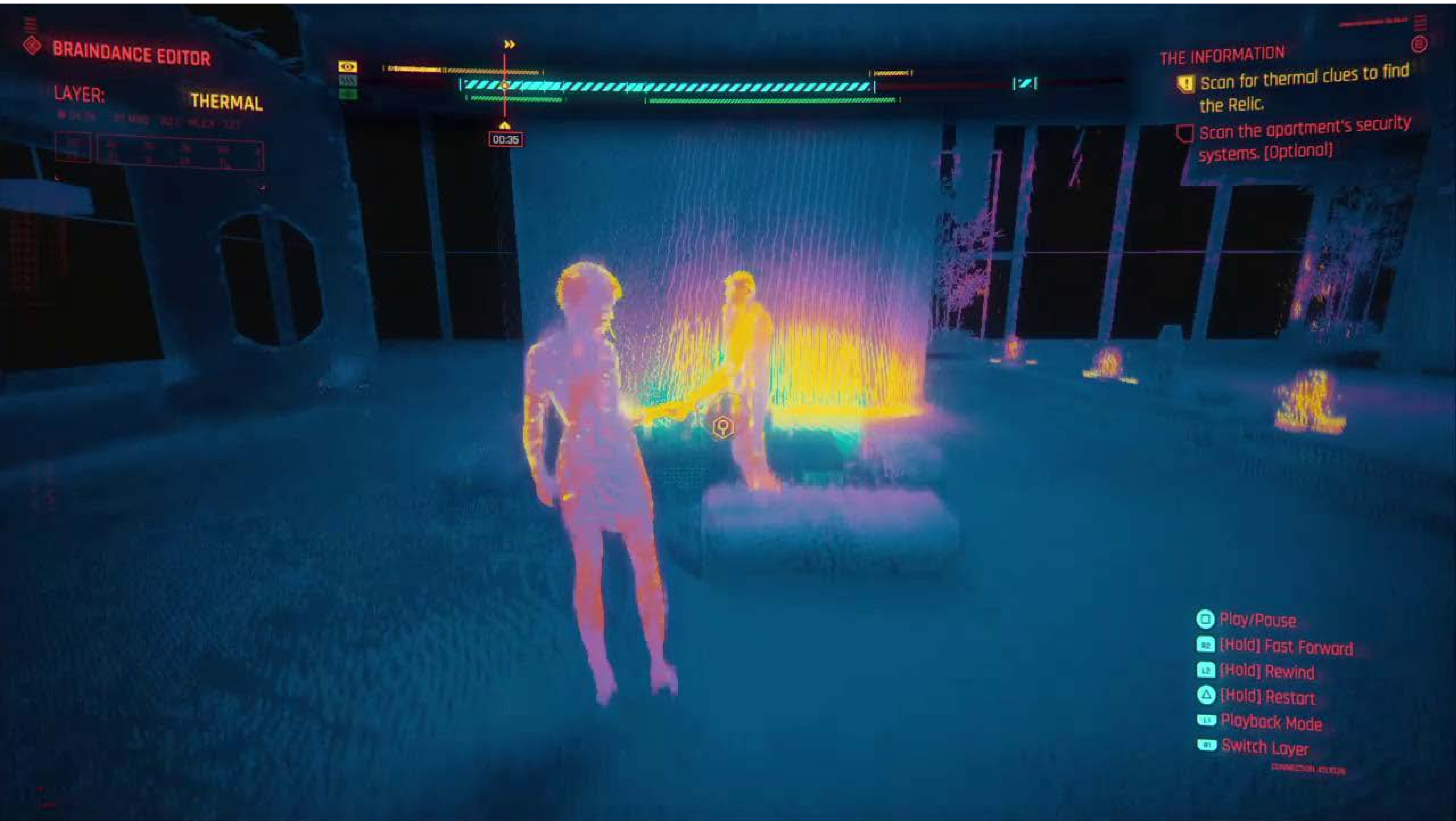

Figure 07.
Thermal layer of the gameplay. Image credit: CD PROJEKT®, *Cyberpunk 2077*® are registered trademarks of CD PROJEKT Capital Group. *Cyberpunk 2077* game © CD PROJEKT S.A. Developed by CD PROJEKT S.A. All rights reserved. The *Cyberpunk 2077* game is set in the universe created by Mike Pondsmith in his tabletop role-playing game. All other copyrights and trademarks are the property of their respective owners. With permission from CD Projekt Red.

This totalising affect, which temporarily transforms the ontological self into a multiple site of influence, bears an interesting connection to the etymology of ethics. Stemming from the Greek word ethos (meaning character) and the Latin word mores (meaning custom), they combine to define how individuals interact with each other.[35] In other words, ethics at its root is not concerned with our individual ontological boundary or capacity to choose, but rather invested in the collapsing of boundaries through interaction. This takes us back to witnessing as a radical transformation process, and Felman and Laub's argument that interpersonal relations between observer and observed produces both affective connections and the possibility of new subject positions being formed.[36]

In the BD narrative, the affective atmosphere as a process of interiority collapses the distinction between witnesser and witnessed. Through the ontological *becoming* Other (*becoming* more than the subjective self through the interaction of interiors) we lose an ability to distinguish between which interior is witnessing/being witnessed, which in turn produces a new temporal subject position. This position also erodes the intra-extra division because the player also experiences this collapse; the player moves within the BD as an interior structure rather than as a singular character. This entangled subject position manifests as a direct extension of ethics as atmosphere, as interiority, through its foundation of affective assemblage. In *becoming* this new subject position, one is a convergence of situations, of truths; a singularity of experience is transformed.

This intra-extra blended context seeds the potential that extravirtual existence may have the capacity to depart from its longstanding commitment to ontological security and self-determination by cultivating an understanding of ethics as a multiplicity of situational processes. This leads us into a concluding discussion into the possibility of xenoethics as a framework of doing ethics otherwise, a starting point for this framing being that 'nothing should be accepted as fixed, permanent or "given" — neither material conditions nor social forms.'[37] Could xenoethics be a critical element in the radical quest of rejecting neoliberal capitalism?

towards xenoethics

Xeno, simply meaning other or different in origin, has undergone a recent examination in multidisciplinary scholarship. While xeno constructions of feminism and architecture have been articulated,[38] xenoethics remains largely uncharted, with only loose references to its existence by creative practitioners.[39]

Perhaps in an unconventional fashion, I offer xenoethics at this point in the essay as a way of identifying a path forward for theoretical development. The essay thus far has demonstrated that ethics can function as affective atmosphere, as interiority, as

a subject position assembled by multiple situational processes — all of which construct ethics as other (xeno) by departing from the history of the singular subject on a search for what is good. I have critically analysed the intravirtual spatiality of the BD to consider how ethical witnessing can undergo ontological transformation with the interior structure. This, in turn, has led to the question of whether spatial forms of xenoethics can be used to disrupt the norms of power that logiticise extravirtual neoliberal capitalism.

What this essay has made clear is that fictionalised and fantasy settings, as provided by videogames, produce viable spatial fields in which to explore xenoethics and the ontological pluralities its framework offers.[40] This exploration has the capacity to foster diverse economies through gameplay performances that reconfigure how space can be used in both intravirtual and extravirtual futures. Commons theorist Stavros Stavrides has made the argument that performing space refers to the performing of social relations, a process of living potentiality that combines experiencing and creating unfolding realities.[41] I propose, then, that our collective task is to enact xenoethical-socio-spatial performances across multiple temporal thresholds and co-develop platforms where this knowledge can be shared and tested in the present.

author biography

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notes

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ghost written: the winchester house as cinematic trans-mediation

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abstract

In this visual essay, we present a feminist counter-fiction to the likely fictional narratives the media has used to describe Sarah Winchester's reclusive life in the labyrinthine mansion she designed for herself in the Santa Clara Valley, California (1886–1922). Given Winchester's continual construction of uninhabited rooms in that house and given her decision to offer no public explanation for her designs, the media has projected narratives of haunting and madness onto Winchester and her house. Without dismissing the possibility of those readings, our feminist counter-fiction does not presume to assign a specific meaning to Winchester's designs. Instead, we ghost-write two soundtracks along the edges of filmstrips that trans-mediate the narratives of so-called yellow journalism and of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's story of haunting and madness, 'The Yellow Wall-Paper' (1892), into the sepia tones of early cinematic imagery. Specifically, we visualise Winchester as a media construct and the media's fabulation about the columns in Winchester's house and about her would-be seance room, where the public apparently saw nothing more than a woman's silhouette projected onto a curtained window. While we offer nothing to penetrate that curtain, which we have trans-mediated to a cinematic screen that divides us from her interiority, we see traces of objects and a shadow ostensibly tracing a pattern from the other side of the curtain. Thus, we draw inspiration from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's uncanny ability to ghost-write the hymenal curtain/screen between Jacques Derrida's labyrinthine columns of text. Tolling the bell of Derrida's *Glas*, this visual essay positions Winchester's pendular body in a space where the interiority of her designing pleasure eludes representation because that pleasure is not dependent on the reproduction of meaning. We pastiche certain forms from the Winchester House, but these forms, akin to the impossibility of Gilman's yellow wallpaper, do not amount to the meaning of a total design.

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keywords:
Charlotte Perkins Gilman, cinema, feminism, Sarah Winchester, yellow journalism

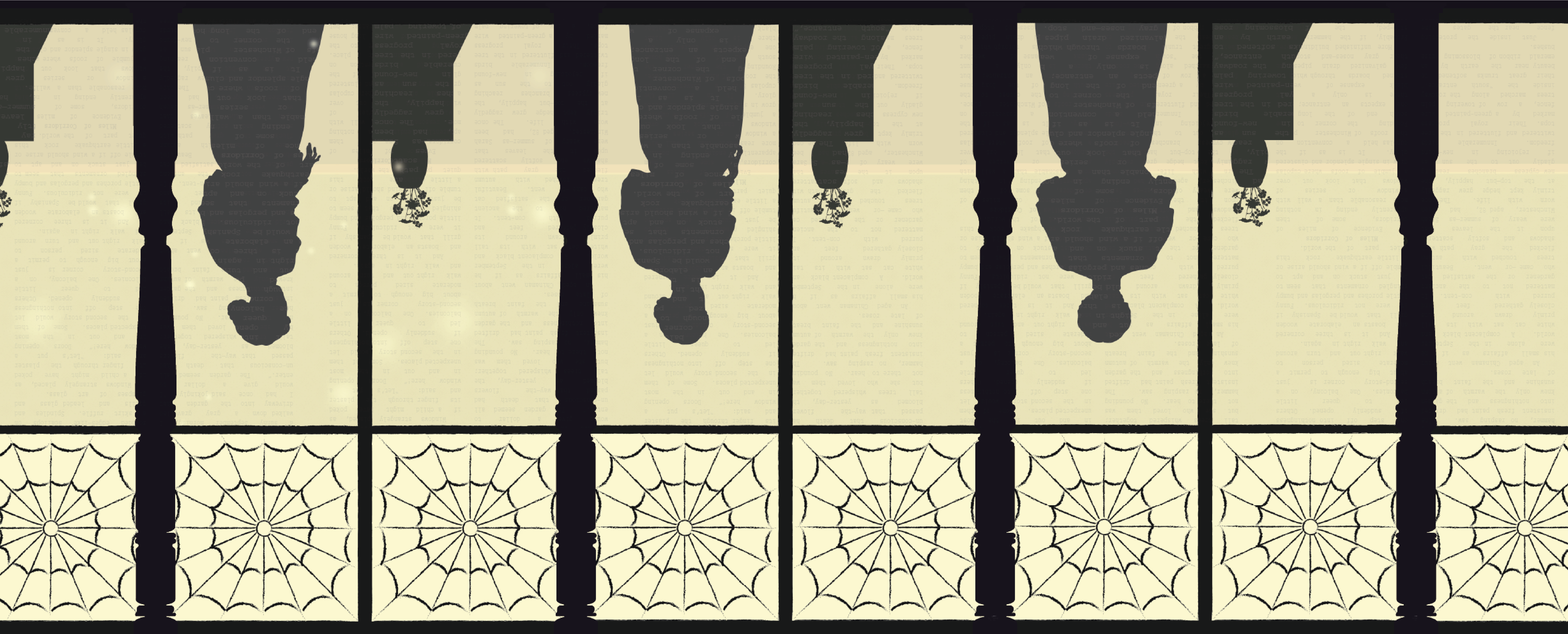
FADE IN:

EXT. WINCHESTER HOUSE - MIDNIGHT (5 JULY 1903)

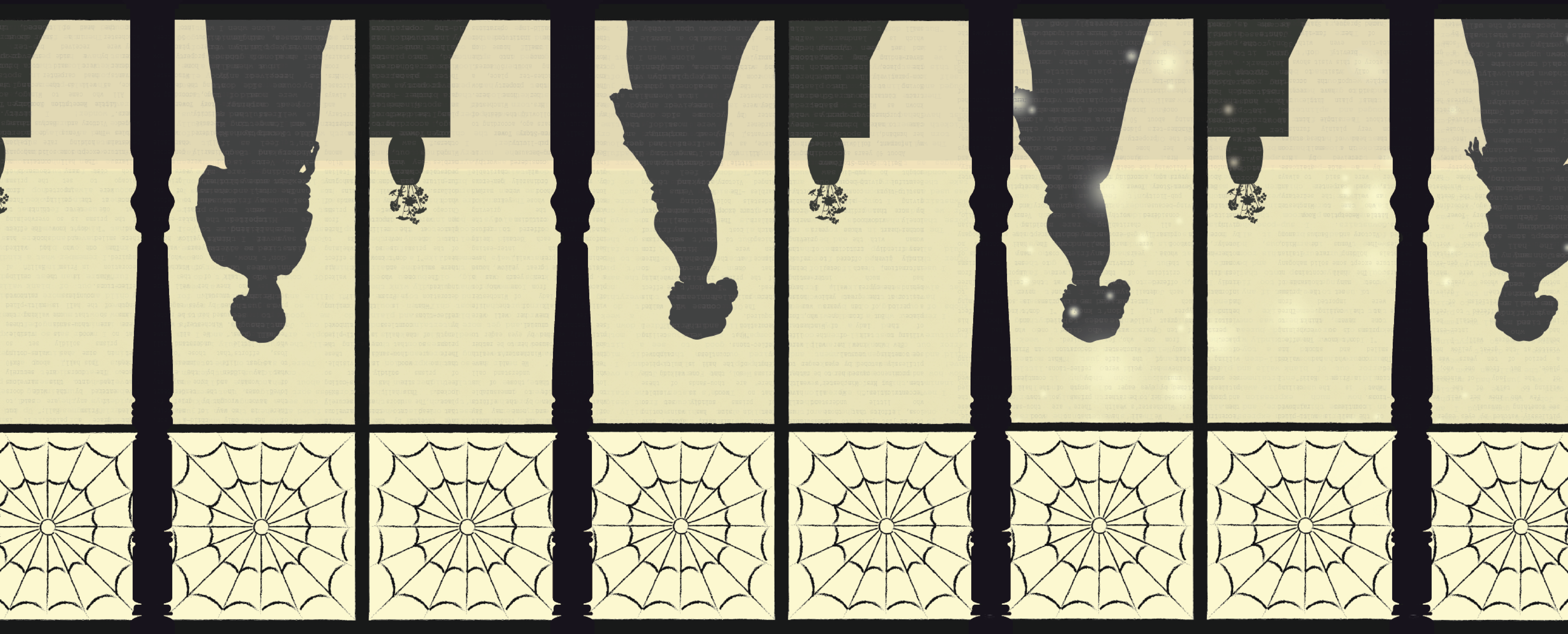
Fireworks are still erupting somewhere off in the mountains, echoing throughout the Santa Clara Valley like the reports of rapid-fire rifles. The explosions reflect as lurid lights in the glass of the Winchester House. All the house is dark except for a window diffusing a yellow light through white satin curtains. Between the light and the window, the projecting silhouette of a woman paces across our view, the stiffness of her Victorian mourning dress keeping her insomniac figure upright.

(V.O.)

when American interior designer Elsie de Wolfe signed the declaration, ‘You will express yourself in your home, whether you want to or not’, the pronominal ‘you’ was gender-specific: ‘It is the personality of the mistress that the home expresses.’[1] In this lingering Victorian firmament of womanly angels in their houses, the bourgeois divisions of public and private life reinforced domestic privacy as the sphere of women and thus interior design as the amateur-cum-professional expression of a woman’s personality. The media has continually (re)presented Sarah Winchester (1839–1922), heiress to the Winchester Repeating Arms Company fortune, as one such amateur designer. A recent widower in 1885, Winchester moved from Connecticut to California, purchasing a small ranch house in the Santa Clara Valley the following year and then expanding it for decades, creating a labyrinthine mansion with well over a hundred rooms. Despite this spacious interiority, Winchester lived in near total reclusion and offered no public explanation for her design decisions, which included odd apertures between rooms, skylights between storeys, and stairs to nowhere. Few saw these interior details during her lifetime; at most, they might catch voyeuristic glimpses of her through the windows.



As Winchester was silent about her designs, local newspapers published presumably fictional narratives about her, claiming she continually built for fear that, if she stopped, she would die.[2] Teams of carpenters were said to have worked on the house day and night. Several of these narratives also claimed that Winchester held nightly seances at the house so that benevolent spirits could tell her how to extend the designs in ways that would confound the vengeful spirits of those murdered by the Winchester Repeating Rifle, the source of her fortune.[3] Thus, because Winchester's designs did not abide by the expected social scripts of bourgeois women who expressed themselves in their homes (de Wolfe had no chapter on the placement of nowhere stairs, for example), the media assigned a personality to Winchester as eccentric as her work seems to have been.

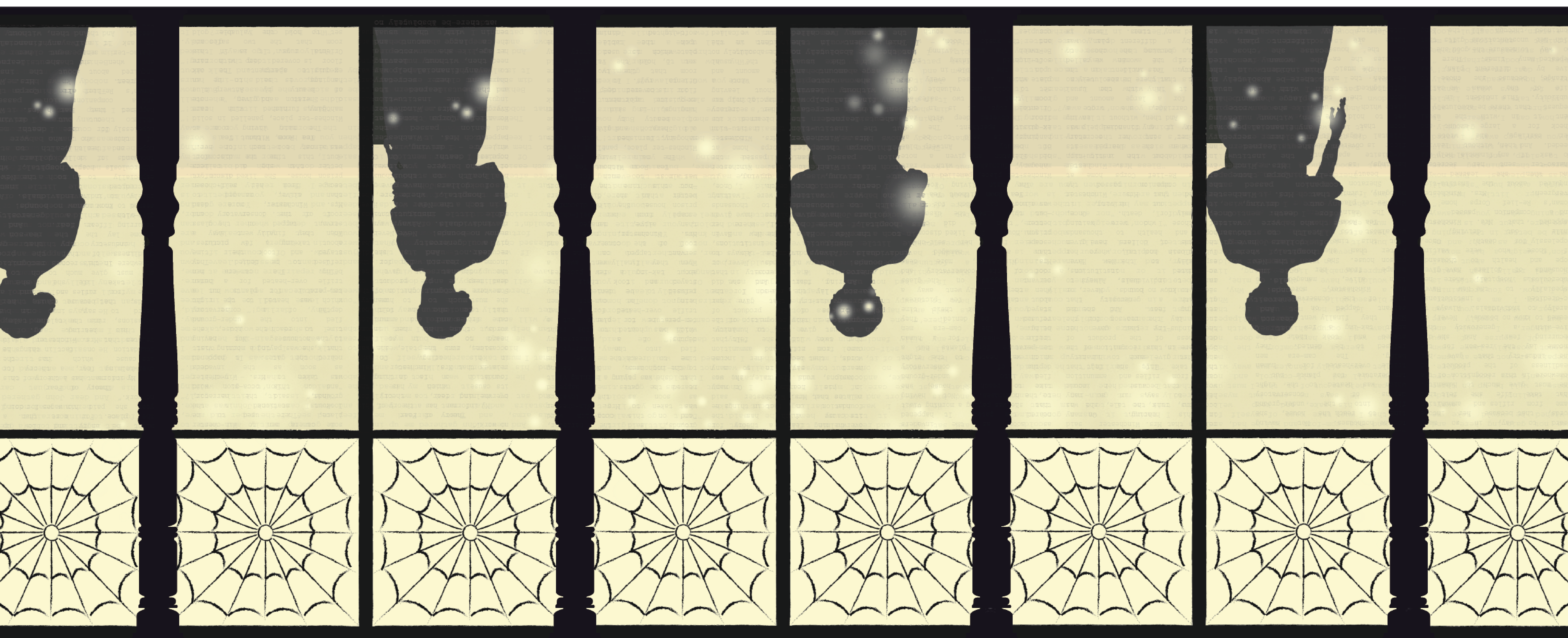


(V.O.)

I often wonder if I could see her out of all the windows at once. But, turn as fast as I can, I can only see out of one at one time.[4]

The lives of designer Sarah Winchester and writer Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860–1935) are curiously doubled. Both were Connecticut-born New Englanders who abandoned the East Coast for California after their marriages had ended. William Winchester died in 1881, a few years before Sarah's cross-country journey to the Santa Clara Valley. Gilman separated from her first husband in 1888, venturing to nearby Oakland. Both Winchester and Gilman may also have sought California for therapeutic reasons. In her scant correspondence, Winchester noted her enduring struggles with rheumatoid arthritis, especially in her hands, perhaps hoping that the warm, dry weather of the valley would relieve the inflammation.[5] And Gilman soothed herself in the 'steady peace' of the Golden State's climate after years of post-partum depression and of physicians' failed efforts to end her depression with a rest cure.[6] Finally, both came home to Connecticut in September 1922. Gilman and her second husband moved to Norwichtown; Winchester's remains were brought to New Haven, where she was interred beside her husband and their infant daughter.

In this essay, we visualise a feminist 'counter-fiction' to the media's mythologisation of Winchester in her house.[7] Previous feminist scholars have already challenged the media's construct, but they tend to present their counterpoints as facts that negate the haunted house.[8] We are not as certain. Granted, we find the feminist explanations of arthritis, melancholia, and natural disaster more convincing than secret spiritualist rituals. Likewise, we concur with Susana Torre's recommendation that Winchester's house models a feminist architecture that rejects the total design of heroic modernism because Winchester constantly built, unbuilt, and rebuilt her 'crazy-quilt mansion',[9] like Penelope's funeral shroud.[10] But we consequently find it impossible to tie up the loose ends of Winchester's story. Instead, we enter the fray of interior design by deconstructing a foundational presumption — that an interior design authenticates the designer's personality.[11] As Jacques Derrida declared, 'departed is the subject', and the most we can do is ghost-write Winchester's narrative in ways that speculate on what the narrative cannot represent.[12]



In this essay, we visualise a fictional double-exposure of Gilman's famed ghost story, 'The Yellow Wall-Paper' (1892), and the so-called yellow journalism that framed Winchester's mansion as the haunted house of a madwoman. Gilman's story is about an ailing woman subjected to the rest cure of isolation in a room with a hauntingly convoluted yellow wallpaper pattern that drives her insane. Gilman's personal life, said to overlap with the narrative of her ghost story, led to a contentious relationship with American news media, especially the sensationalism of Ambrose Bierce and William Randolph Hearst.[13] We hesitate, however, to forward a reading that 'refocuses' Gilman's story as a critique of such journalism, equating yellow wallpaper with the yellowed sprawl of tabloid newsprint.[14] At most, we share in the story's potential warning not to engage in the maddeningly 'relentless pursuit of a single meaning', projecting our double-exposure across a matrix of feminist semiotics instead.[15] 'The Yellow Wall-Paper' questions whether 'language and conventional means of storytelling could ever present an authentic view of women's inner experience', including the media's sensationalisation of Winchester in her house.[16]

We take our clew, therefore, from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's uncanny ability to ghost-write the hymenal surface between Derrida's labyrinthine columns of text,[17] and we acknowledge the repeating reports that Winchester installed the columns in her house upside down.[18] For the building's revived Queen Anne style, the downward taper of the columns was the lathe-turning of wooden legs, not the upward taper of stone pillars.[19] But whether Winchester knew this nuance of the style or if she (intentionally or accidentally) installed them upside down, we are unable to determine. Instead, we trans-mediate the Winchester fiction from the so-called yellow journalism of newspapers to the sepia tones of early cinema because of the perceptual gap between filmic materiality and its projecting illusion on a screen. Filmmakers position material images upside down so that, when light passes through the membrane, the projector's lens 'corrects' the images on the screen. Thus, we visualise reels of filmic materiality (VistaVisual in orientation), where Winchester ostensibly appears on the hymenal membrane between upside-down(?) columnar bars that frame the windows.

One persistent narrative in the media's representation of Winchester is the role of the Winchester Repeating Rifle in the westward expansion of the United States.[20] As early as 1911, a columnist recorded local legends that became the yellow journalism of the day: 'Winchester [...] was a mysterious dweller in a house of 500 rooms [...] fearing to die because of the destruction wrought by [...] the Winchester rifle [... which] figured largely in the "Winning of the West".'[21] The gossiping public and presses thus connected the rifle's violence with Winchester's westward relocation. After all, American democracy and its nineteenth-century fantasy of Manifest Destiny were born of violence, celebrated from the start with the gunpowder of fireworks. Gilman knew this well, setting her story in a 'colonial mansion', a pre-revolutionary retreat of inherited power, isolated from the protagonist's intellectual labour and companionship in the republic.[22] The protagonist's husband/physician 'would as soon put fireworks in my pillow-case as to let me have those stimulating people about now'.[23] Thus, on the Fourth of July, there were no fireworks for Gilman's protagonist, but neither was there rest.[24]

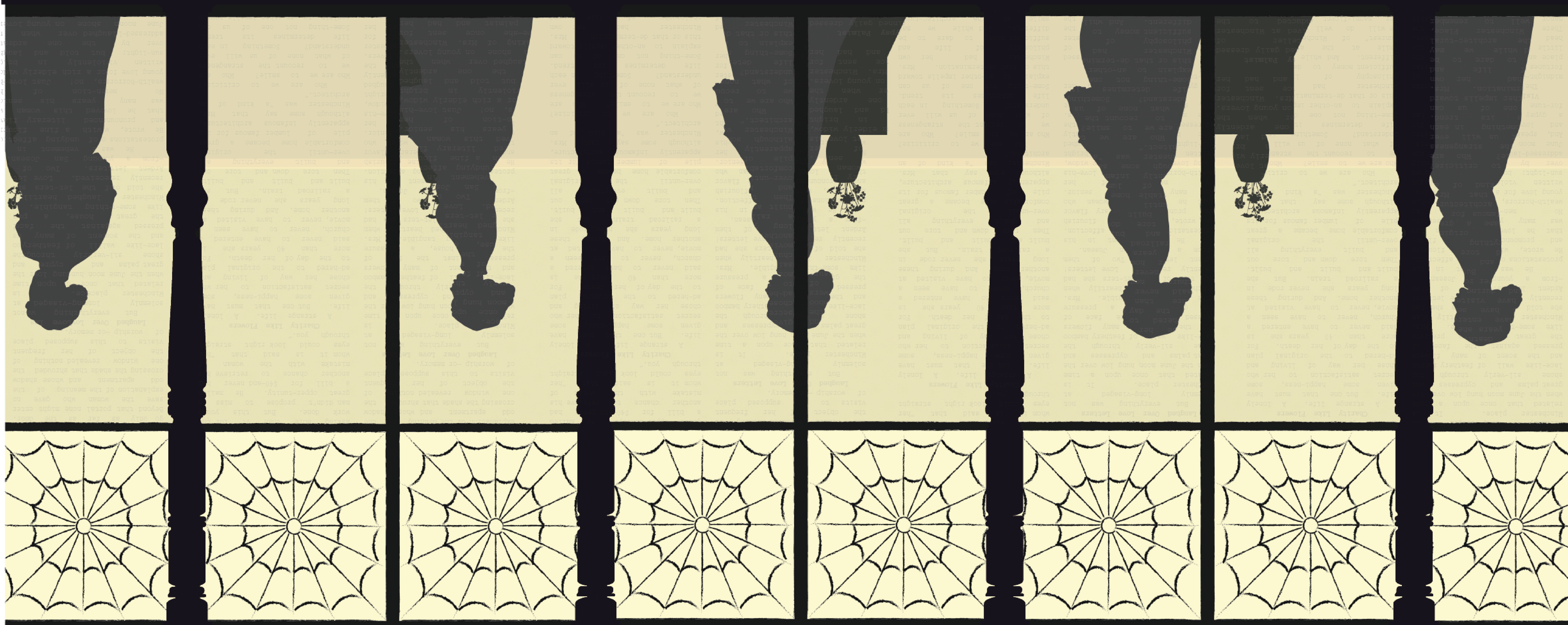
Furthermore, Winchester's would-be appearance along the hymen of filmic materiality phantomimes a space described in a newspaper column:

> The most unusual room [...] was floored in white. The walls and seats were white — spotless white satin. There was only one window, closely-curtained. Across this drawn curtain a woman's shadow sometimes passed; but that was all that curious eyes were ever able to see of what took place in this strange room.[25]

According to the columnist, this was the seance room, and it stood at the base of a seven-storey tower at Winchester's house, a tower that collapsed in the 1906 San Francisco earthquake. Thus, we reconstruct a fictional view of this perhaps fictional space for 'curious eyes', offering no more than the projection of shadows on the curtain's fabricated screen and calling attention to its fabrication through webbed panes of glass that frequent the membranes of Winchester's interiority.

Winchester's isolation was not the same as Gilman's post-partum prescription for curative rest, but, like Gilman's protagonist, Winchester complained of frequent exhaustion and became insomniac — a pacing shadow at midnight in media constructs, including this visual essay.[26] Furthermore, flowers are gathered in a hu vessel behind her, invoking the explicit racism of yellow journalists reporting on Winchester's alleged use of '"pidgin" English' when buying vases from a local Chinese dealer.[27] It also evokes the implicit racism of Gilman's yellow colouration, made explicit with her later writings as a domestic and economic reformer.[28] Finally, under the yellow hue of early cinema, the shadowy figure lifts a gnarled hand to trace an indiscernible pattern on her side of the curtain, inspired to halt her restless pacing for reasons we cannot know. Thus, as with the 'pointless pattern' of form and meaning in 'The Yellow Wall-Paper', the visual elements of this essay do not amount to a total design because they cannot reproduce Winchester's interiority.[29]

Finally, media men have chimed in on the projection of a bellcote at Winchester's house, stating that the bell clanged at midnight to summon spirits to her seances.[30] To this, we echo Spivak's refrain from Derrida's *Glas*: 'Pendulum in the belfry, the fetish oscillates.'[31] Instead of simply fetishizing the curtain/screen as a penetrable surface through which meaning can be reproduced as a reportage for 'curious eyes', we leave the pendular bell(e) oscillating between two soundtracks that do not presume the 'marriage or rupture of sound and image' but rather the pleasure of not knowing Winchester's pleasure in her house, even when it might tremble across the surface of the screen.[32] We prefer the possibility of a feminist pleasure that is not simply a 'means or agent of reproduction' through the recursive loop of a film reel documenting Winchester's spatial and subjective interiority.[33] After all, Winchester was 'never to have seen a movie',[34] though perhaps she could have read that,



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author biographies

Cameron Macdonell is an historian of art, architecture, and interior design, focusing on history as a house haunted by the past and future. Cameron's current book project, intersecting with this essay, is a history of the ghost as a rhetorical figure in design discourse from the seventeenth century to contemporary culture.

John Sicat is a graduate of Toronto Metropolitan University's School of Interior Design, currently working as a designer at Perkins & Will. As a designer, John focuses on exploring the relationship between memory, place, and time — a design philosophy that is further augmented by his passion for design fabrication and graphic illustration.

Image credits:
All images in this visual essay include excerpts from the following texts:

1. Edith Daley, 'Real and Ideal', *San Jose Evening News*, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25 September 1922, p. 6.
2. Charlotte Perkins Gilman (as Charlotte Perkins Stetson), 'The Yellow Wall-Paper', *New England Magazine*, 5 (1892), 647–56.

notes

01 Elsie de Wolfe, *The House in Good Taste* (New York: Century, 1913), p. 5. Penny Sparke aptly noted the irony of the autobiographical 'I' that starts the book because Ruby Ross Goodnow ghost-wrote the text to accompany de Wolfe's signature designs. See Penny Sparke, 'The "Ideal" and the "Real" Interior in Elsie de Wolfe's *The House in Good Taste* of 1913', *Journal of Design History*, 16 (2003), 63–76 (p. 67).

02 See, for example, 'A Strange Story: A Woman Who Thinks She Will Die When Her House Is Built', *San Jose Evening News*, 29 March 1895, p. 4.

03 See, for example, 'Sells Her Mansion and Defies Spirits', *San Francisco Examiner*, 8 November 1911, p. 1.

04 Charlotte Perkins Gilman (as Charlotte Perkins Stetson), 'The Yellow Wall-Paper', *New England Magazine*, 5 (1892), 647–56 (pp. 654–55).

05 See, for example, Sarah Lockwood Winchester (SLW) to Hannah Jane 'Jennie' Bennett (JB), 11 June 1898, Bennett Family Papers, Connecticut Historical Society.

06 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman* (New York: Harper, 1935), p. 107.

07 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, '*Glas*-Piece: A *Compte Rendu*', *Diacritics*, 7 (1977), 22–43 (p. 24).

08 See Susana Torre, 'The Pyramid and the Labyrinth', in *Women in American Architecture: A Historic and Contemporary Perspective*, ed. by Susana Torre (New York: Watson-Guptill, 1977), pp. 198–202; Mary Jo Ignoffo, *Captive of the Labyrinth: Sarah L. Winchester Heiress to the Rifle Fortune* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2010); Kendra Paitz, 'Toward an Ethical Representation of Sarah Winchester' (unpublished master's thesis, Illinois State University, 2011); and Christine R. Junker, 'Unruly Women and Their Crazy Houses', *Home Cultures*, 12 (2015), 329–46.

09 John G. Robinson, 'The "Spirit House" of San Jose', *Oakland Tribune*, 29 October 1922, p. 72.

10 Torre, 'The Pyramid and the Labyrinth', p. 202.

11 In terms of architectural history, one of us has already deconstructed the biographical assumptions of causal links between an architect's life and work. See Cameron Macdonell, *Ghost Storeys: Ralph Adams Cram, Modern Gothic Media, and Deconstructive Microhistory at a Canadian Church* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017), pp. 24–27.

12 Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. by Geoffrey Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 190.

13 See, for example, Lawrence J. Oliver and Gary Scharnhorst, 'Charlotte Perkins Gilman versus Ambrose Bierce: The Literary Politics of Gender in Fin-de-Siècle California', in *Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Her Contemporaries: Literary and Intellectual Contexts*, ed. by Cynthia J. Davis and Denise D. Knight (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004), pp. 32–45; and Denise D. Knight, 'Charlotte Perkins Gilman, William Randolph Hearst, and the Practice of Ethical Journalism', in *Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Her Contemporaries,* pp. 46–58.

14 Sari Edelstein, 'The Yellow Newspaper: Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Sensational Journalism', in *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: New Texts, New Contexts*, ed. by Jennifer S. Tuttle and Carol Farley Kessler (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2011), pp. 180–99 (p. 182).

15 Susan S. Lanser, 'Feminist Criticism, "The Yellow Wallpaper", and the Politics of Color in America', *Feminist Studies*, 15 (1989), 415–41 (p. 420).

16 Jenny Weatherford, 'Approaching the Ineffable: "The Yellow Wallpaper" and Gilman's Problem with Language', *American Studies in Scandinavia*, 31 (1999), 58–75 (p. 58).

17 See Spivak, '*Glas*-Piece'; and Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, trans. by John P. Leavey Jr and Richard Rand (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986). On the former ghostwriting the latter, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Ghostwriting', *Diacritics*, 25 (1995), 64–84.

18 See, for example, John Ashbery, 'Mystery Mansion', *House & Garden*, 159 (1987), 148–53, 208, 212 (p. 208).

19 See, for example, Mark Girouard, *Sweetness and Light: The 'Queen Anne' Movement, 1860–1900* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), p. 221.

20 See, for example, Laura Trevelyan, *The Winchester: The Gun That Built an American Dynasty* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), pp. 36–74.

21 Merle H. Gray, '"The Workshop" of a Woman Architect', *San Jose Mercury and Herald*, 16 July 1911, p. 6.

22 Gilman, 'The Yellow Wall-Paper', p. 647.

23 Gilman, 'The Yellow Wall-Paper', p. 649.

24 See Gilman, 'The Yellow Wall-Paper', p. 650.

25 Edith Daley, 'Real and Ideal', *San Jose Evening News*, 20 September 1922, p. 6. On the act of phantomime, see Jodey Castricano, *Cryptomimesis: The Gothic and Jacques Derrida's Ghost Writing* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), p. 8.

26 See SLW to JB, 11 June 1898, Bennett Family Papers, Connecticut Historical Society.

27 Edith Daley, 'Real and Ideal', *San Jose Evening News*, 22 September 1922, p. 6. On the legacy of racism in 'yellow journalism', see Joseph Campbell, *Yellow Journalism: Puncturing the Myths, Defining the Legacies* (Westport: Praeger, 2001). In the vase, we placed Sweet Williams (for William Winchester, Sarah's departed husband) and Queen Anne's Lace (for Anne Winchester, their departed infant daughter). Winchester House included several daisy motifs for Daisy Merriman, Sarah's beloved niece and lone companion at the house for years. A few days after 4 July 1903, Daisy married Fred Marriott, moving out of Sarah's house.

28 On the racist implications of 'The Yellow Wall-Paper', see Lanser, 'Feminist Criticism', 425–29. On the explicit racism of Gilman's reform writings, see Denise D. Knight, 'Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the Shadow of Racism', *American Literary Realism*, 32 (2000), 159–69.

29 Gilman, 'The Yellow Wall-Paper', p. 650.

30 See, for example, Joe Custer, 'Mystery Shrouds One-Time Famous Spirit Haven', *San Bernardino County Sun*, 17 May 1936, p. 3A.

31 Spivak, '*Glas*-Piece', pp. 31, 41.

32 Peter Brunette and David Wills, *Screen/Play: Derrida and Film Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 86.

33 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'French Feminism in an International Frame', *Yale French Review*, 62 (1981), 154–84 (p. 181).

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

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abstract

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

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

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introduction

Forgetting is always a possibility.[01]
— Jacques Derrida

As a critique of present material and metaphoric structures, the literary and aesthetic genre of speculative fiction functions largely to exacerbate current problems and issues into dystopic future scenarios.[02] It is a form of storytelling that 'takes what we now believe to be true and imaginatively explores what might be the case, if conditions were different than they are.'[03] These narratives tend to break 'with the traditional concerns of a white, male-dominated readership and authorship to include marginalized voices and concerns.'[04] On the other hand, speculative or revisionist history revisits the past to intervene in established narratives, providing space to re-read and re-cast the stories that have become canon.[05] Speculation involves 'contemplation of a profound, far-reaching or subtle character', that also engages 'hypothetical reasoning on subjects of a deep, abstruse or conjectural nature.'[06] When applied to historical interpretation, this approach, akin to feminist historiography, takes existing textual, photographic, and other fragments recorded in archives as well as other repositories as a premise to weave counter-narratives that imaginatively move in and beyond people, places, and things contained.[07] As writer and academic Saidiya Hartman illuminates in her reconstruction of the lives of Black women at the turn of the twentieth century, these counter-readings of the archive are integral for telling histories of marginalised communities as a way to 'grapple with the power and authority of the archive and the limit it sets on what can be known, whose perspective matters, and who is endowed with the authority of historical actor.'[08] Speculative history imagines alternative scenarios and attempts to summon moments of resistance, lost practices, and counter-readings from archival fragments that form larger canons and metanarratives.

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

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

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

This question directed a senior studio course titled *Such a Place as Memory* taught at the School of Interior Design at Toronto Metropolitan University. Students investigated significant architectural sites across Canada that have had complicated, contested, and often traumatic histories erased along with the related material structures: the Ward in Toronto, Japanese internment camps in southern Alberta, Vancouver's Burrard Inlet, and a Scarborough apartment complex. Site-specific research into the erased or concealed narratives of these places generated the creation of an 'apparatus of memory' — a built-space space, a film, a publication, or some other form of remembrance — that would attempt to bring to the surface what had been lost. Positioning the interior somewhere between public and personal memory, in turn, positioned students in relation to collective archives in the city, their own familial records, or in dialogue with both. In doing so, they produced a series of speculative investigations of erased interiors that skirted the edge of fact and fiction, using the archive as a resource. This essay explores the factual and fictional impact from taking the archive, its logic, and its missteps as a premise. How might a speculative interior that approximates what lies between public and private memory shape remembrance? How can the strategies of researching the interior, namely forms of spatial visualisation, work to hold, contain, and relay the past into the present? What complications and opportunities arise when such images, stories, and oral testimonies include contradictions of fact and fabrication?

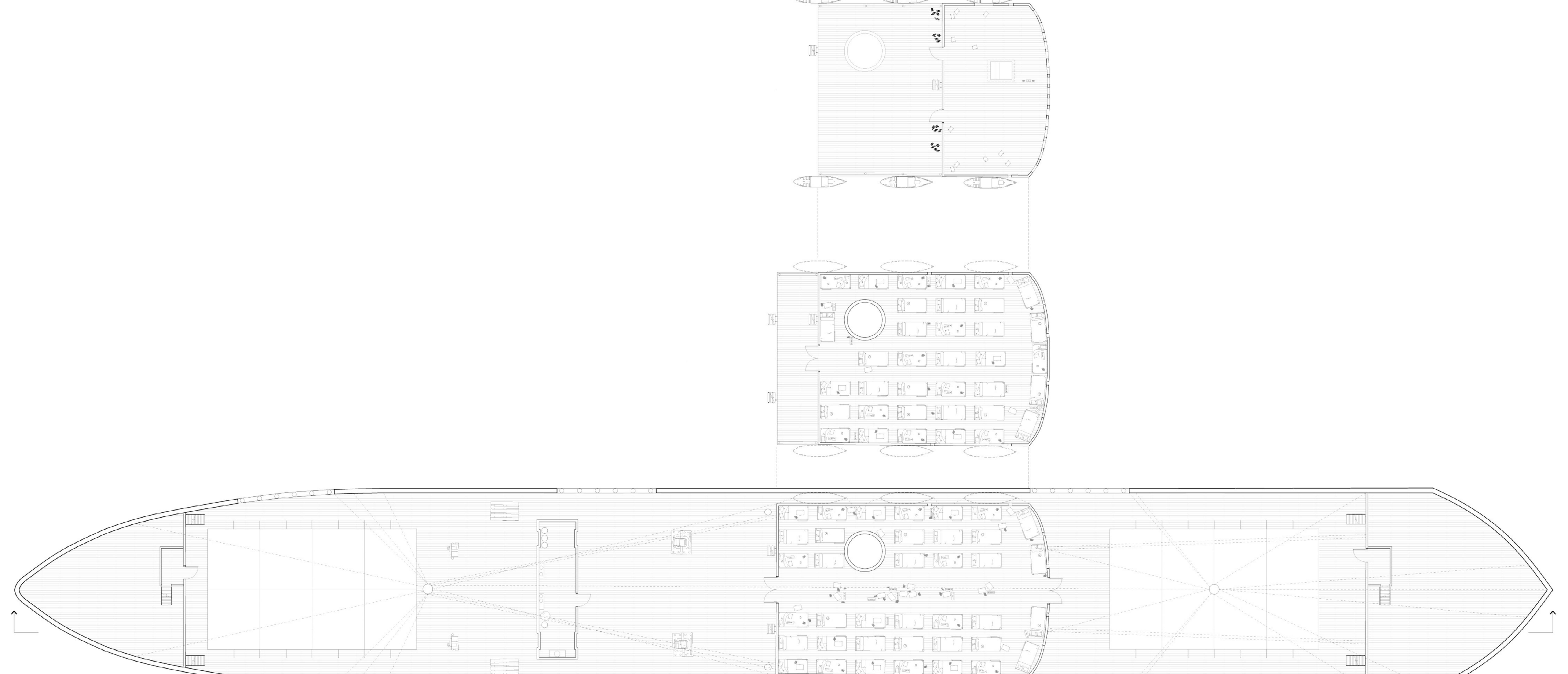
public memory

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

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

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

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



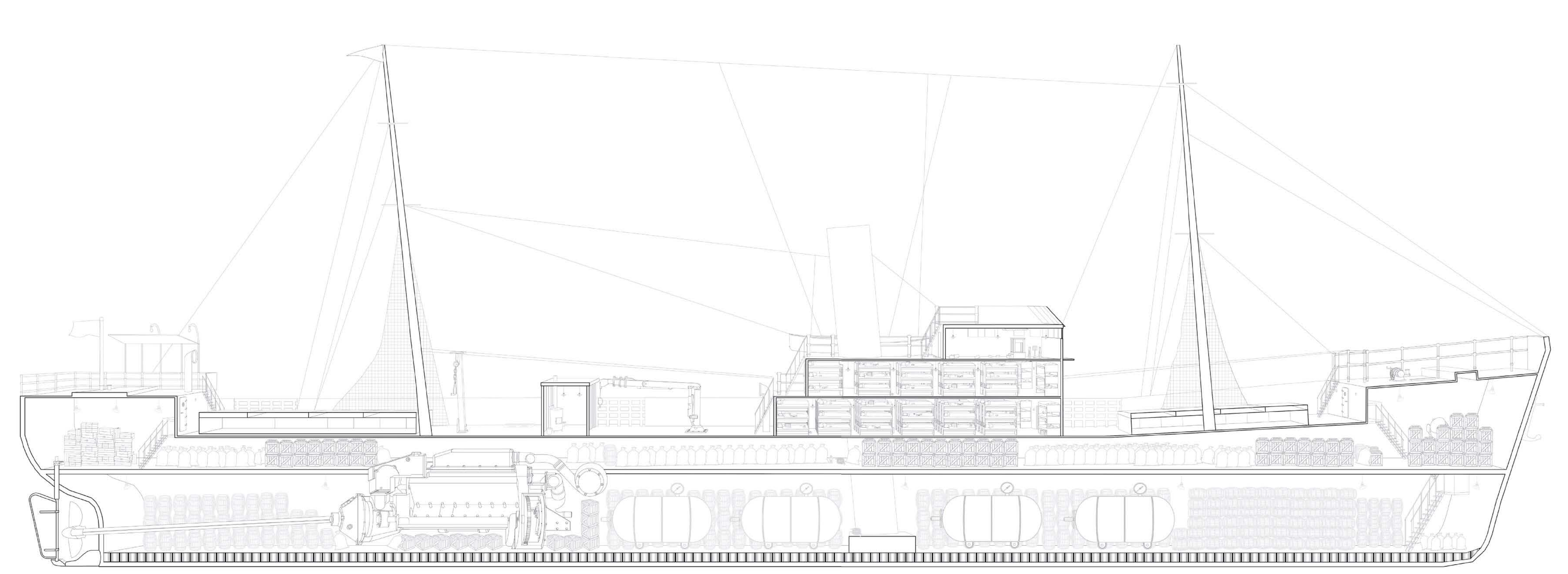
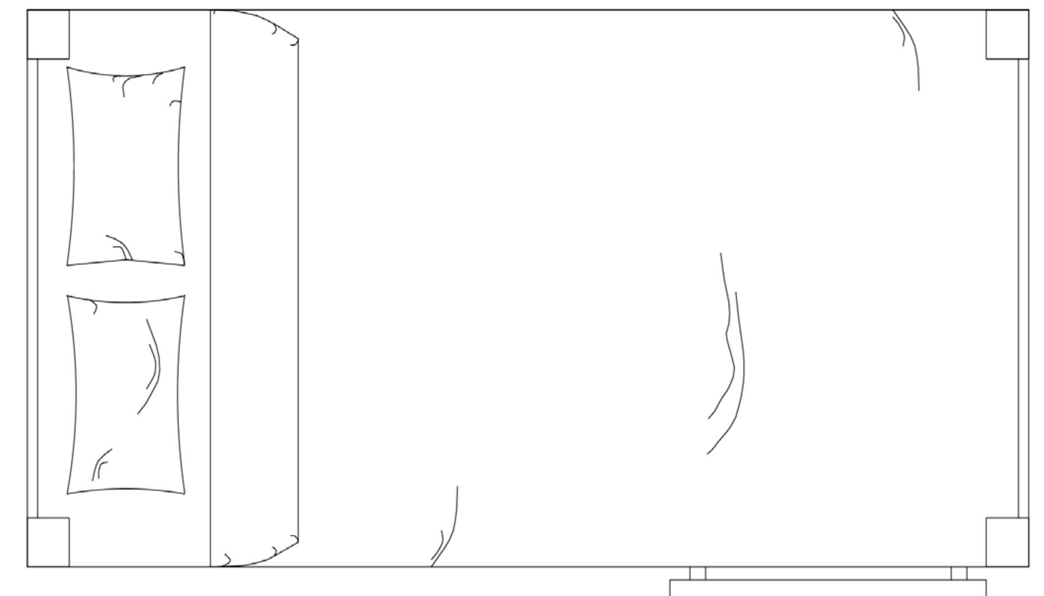
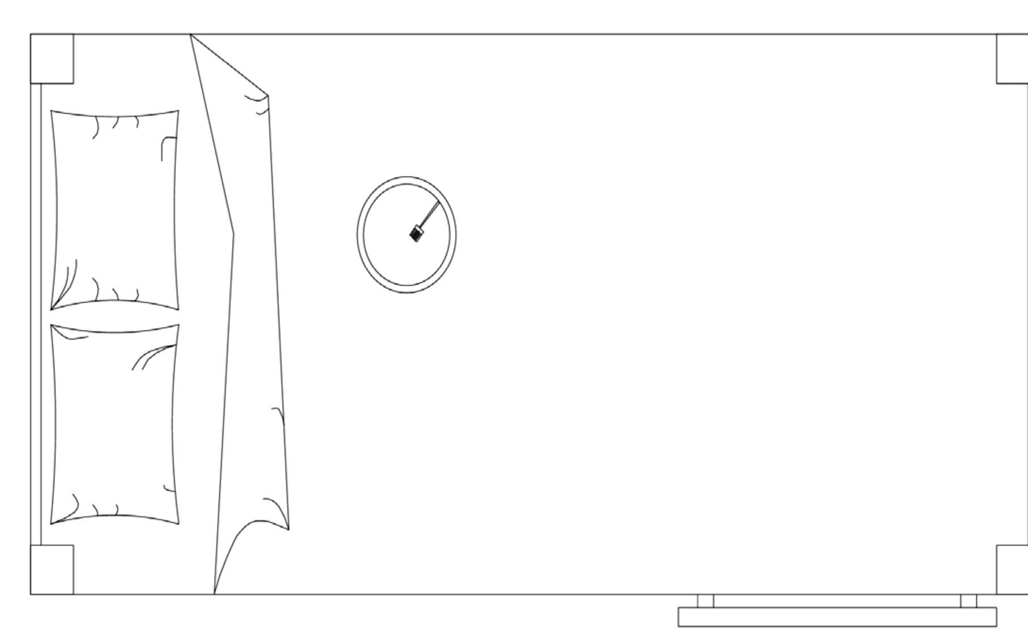
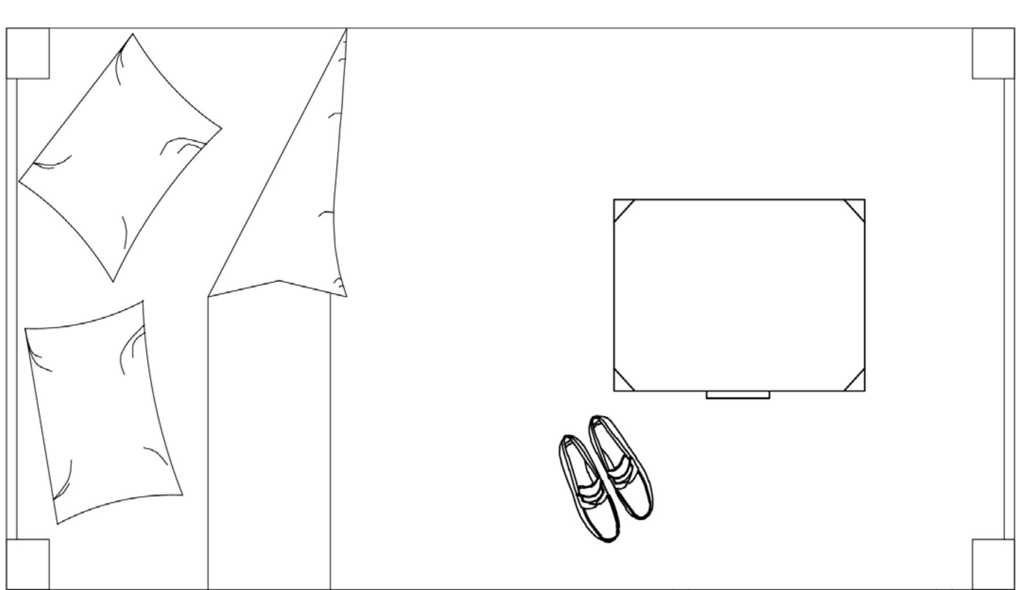


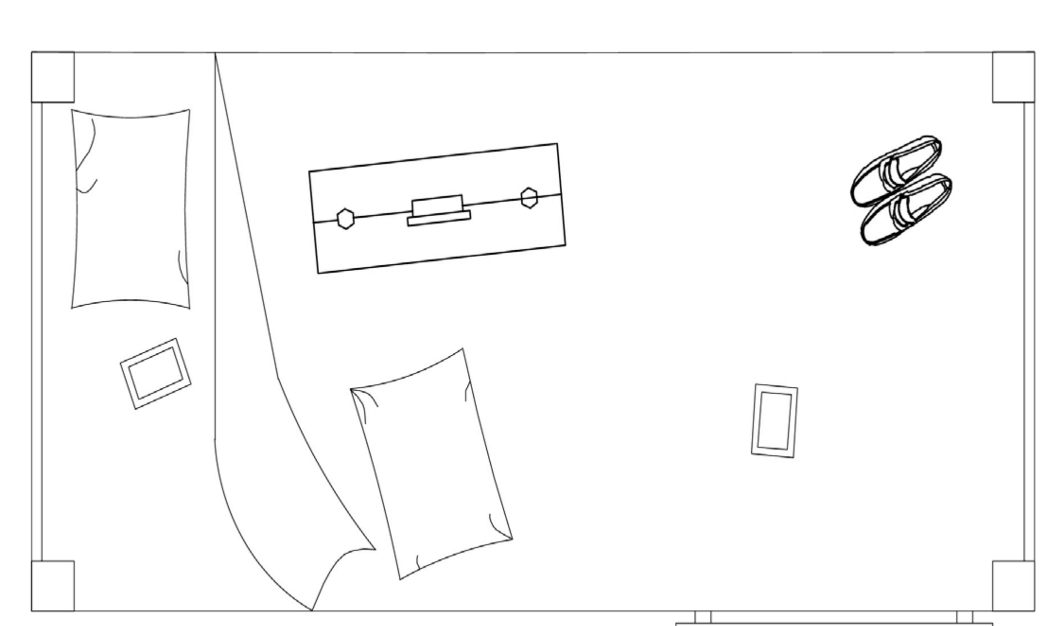
Figure 01.
Plan of the *Komagata Maru*. Illustration by Arshdeep Boparai, 2017. Reproduced by permission © Arshdeep Boparai.

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









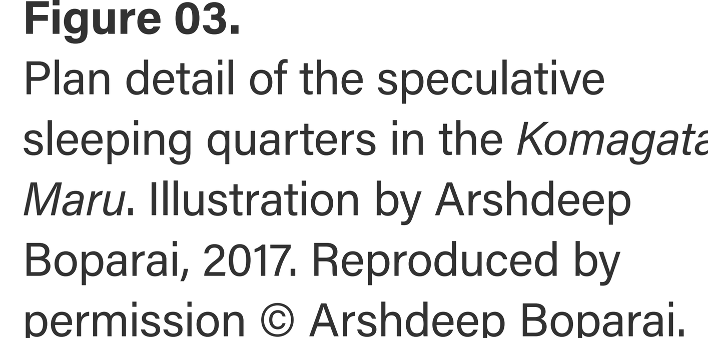


Figure 03.
Plan detail of the speculative sleeping quarters in the *Komagata Maru*. Illustration by Arshdeep Boparai, 2017. Reproduced by permission © Arshdeep Boparai.

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

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

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

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

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

Dating back to the mid-1800s, the area of St John's Ward, commonly referred to as simply 'the Ward,' was a notorious enclave that played host to Toronto's growing immigrant population.[21] It functioned as a de facto 'arrival city' for many newcomers to the country.[22] In the late nineteenth century, Black Americans escaping slavery joined Irish, Italian, and Jewish immigrants fleeing famine, economic hardships, and persecution in Europe.[23]
By the early twentieth century, despite the barriers erected through racist governmental policies aimed at limiting migration, Toronto's first Chinatown emerged at the Ward's southernmost segment resulting from an influx of Chinese immigrants. At the core of a largely white, Protestant, and socially conservative metropolis, the Ward was the target of growing anxieties around the explosive expansion in population between 1871 and 1911 as well as the resulting diversity of Toronto's denizens.[24] Many of the records found in the City of Toronto Archives stem from a 1912 survey conducted by the Department of Health to document the living conditions of the neighbourhood. These records captured interior scenes of poverty, decay, and squalor that were later used as evidence to level the area, and ultimately led to the destruction of the Ward.

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

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

A
B
1
2
3
4

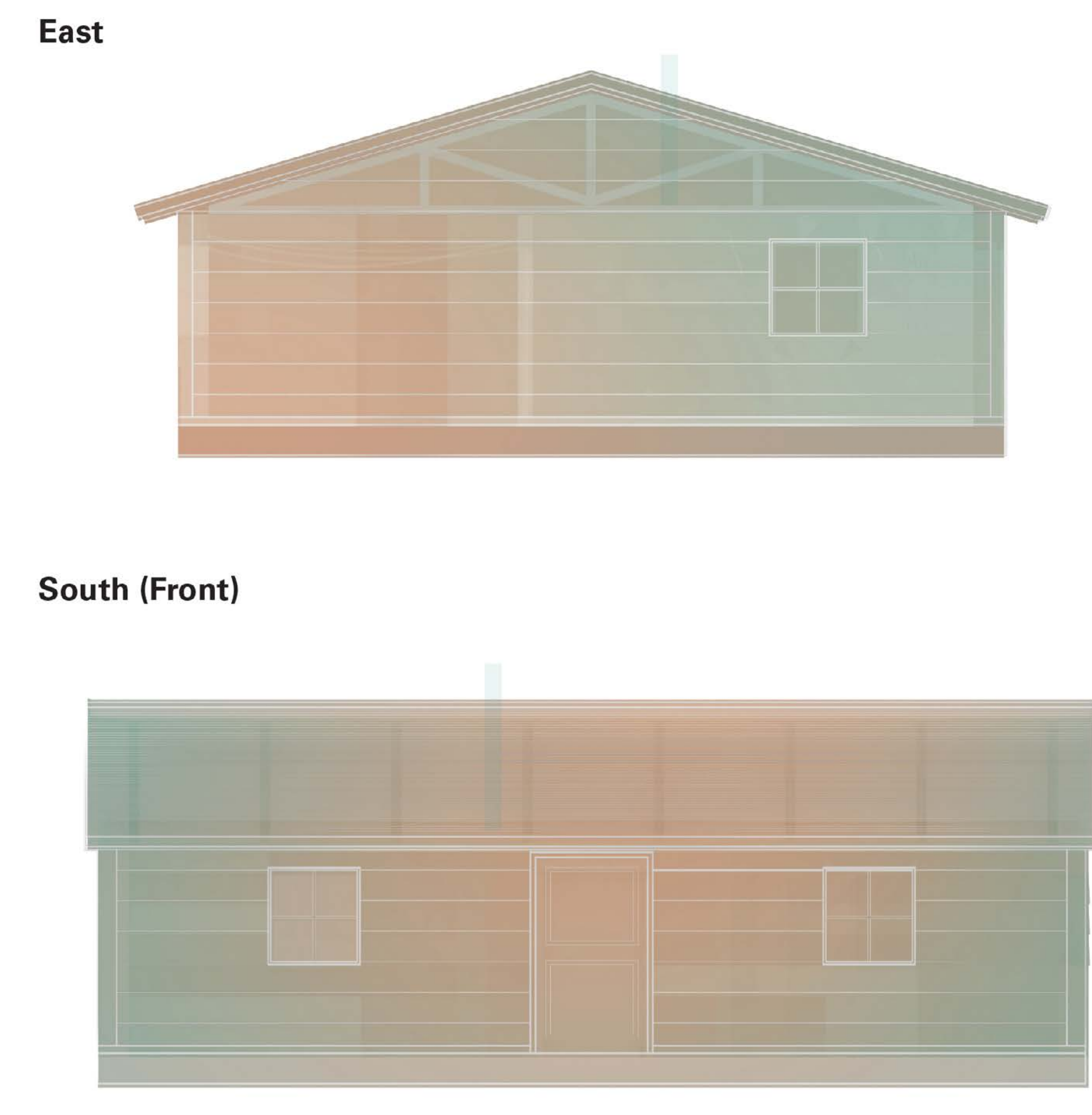
1 Living Area
2 Sleeping Quarters
3 Dining Area/Kitchen
4 Back of House

Figure 05.
Plan of speculative residence composed of fragments of archival images of the Ward. Illustration by Joshua Fajardo, 2017. Reproduced by permission © Joshua Farjardo.

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

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

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



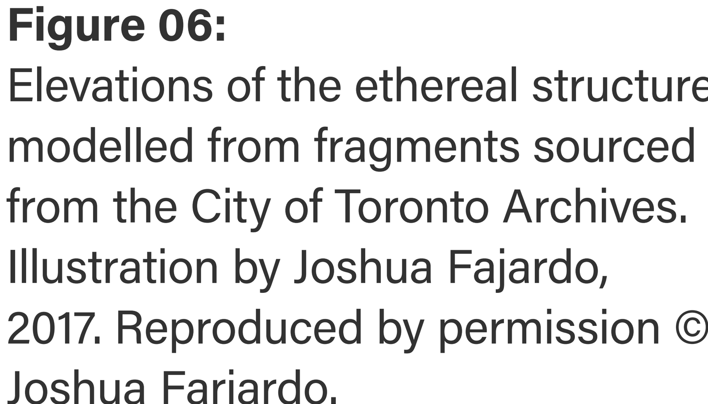


Figure 06:
Elevations of the ethereal structure modelled from fragments sourced from the City of Toronto Archives. Illustration by Joshua Fajardo, 2017. Reproduced by permission © Joshua Farjardo.

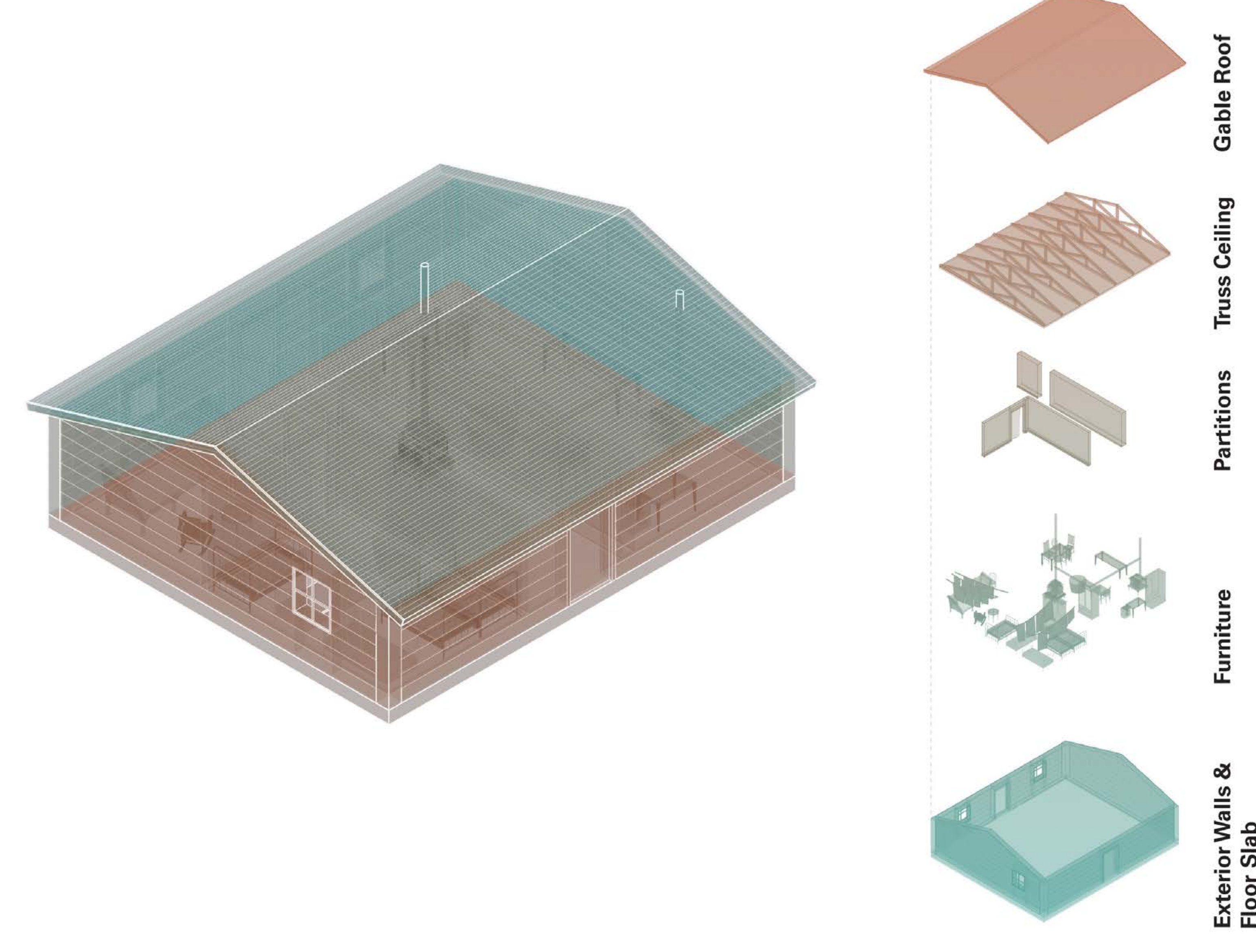


Figure 07:
Exploded axonometric of the ethereal structure modelled from fragments sourced from the City of Toronto Archives. Illustration by Joshua Fajardo, 2017. Reproduced by permission © Joshua Farjardo.

Figure 08.
Sectional perspective of the proposed full-scale monument in Nathan Phillips Square that resurfaces destroyed buildings from the Ward. Illustration by Joshua Fajardo, 2017. Reproduced by permission © Joshua Farjardo.

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

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

personal memory

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

For nearly twenty-six years, the Sri Lankan civil war threw the small South Asian country into violent turmoil. The consequence of conflicts between Sinhalese and Tamil nationals, the bloody altercations between parties brought with it significant civilian casualties, displacement, and destruction.[27] In 1956, Sinhala was introduced as the country's official language and was followed by clashes between the Sinhalese and Tamil groups. Two years later, anti-Tamil riots broke out because of the increasingly hegemonic cultural rule. 'At that time we had our own land and property rights,' recalls Indirani Shivanandan, a Tamil woman who spent much of her adult life in Sri Lanka during the war.[28] Almost three decades later, the violence continued. Shivanandan remembers additional attacks during the 1983 uprisings, where 'they [Sinhalese Forces] started breaking the houses, killing people, stealing the jewellery.'[29] The Tamil Tigers, a para-military group based in the country's North and Northeastern territories, led attacks against the government, intending to secure dedicated space for Tamils. The fighting would continue for the next three decades, eventually ending in 2009 following the death of its leader. With an architectural reference, Indirani recalls the senselessness of the conflict that killed nearly 100,000 Sri Lankans: 'Every house has a well. Every house has walls [...] Why is this happening here?'[30] The result was a mass diaspora or scattering of Tamil from their homeland to urban centres in Canada, Germany, and more.[31]

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

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

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

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

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

Figure 10.
Composite bedroom sectional perspective extrapolated from family photographs. Illustration by Brenda Shivanandan, 2017. Reproduced by permission © Brenda Shivanandan.

Figure 11.
Composite kitchen sectional perspective extrapolated from family photographs. Illustration by Brenda Shivanandan, 2017. Reproduced by permission © Brenda Shivanandan.

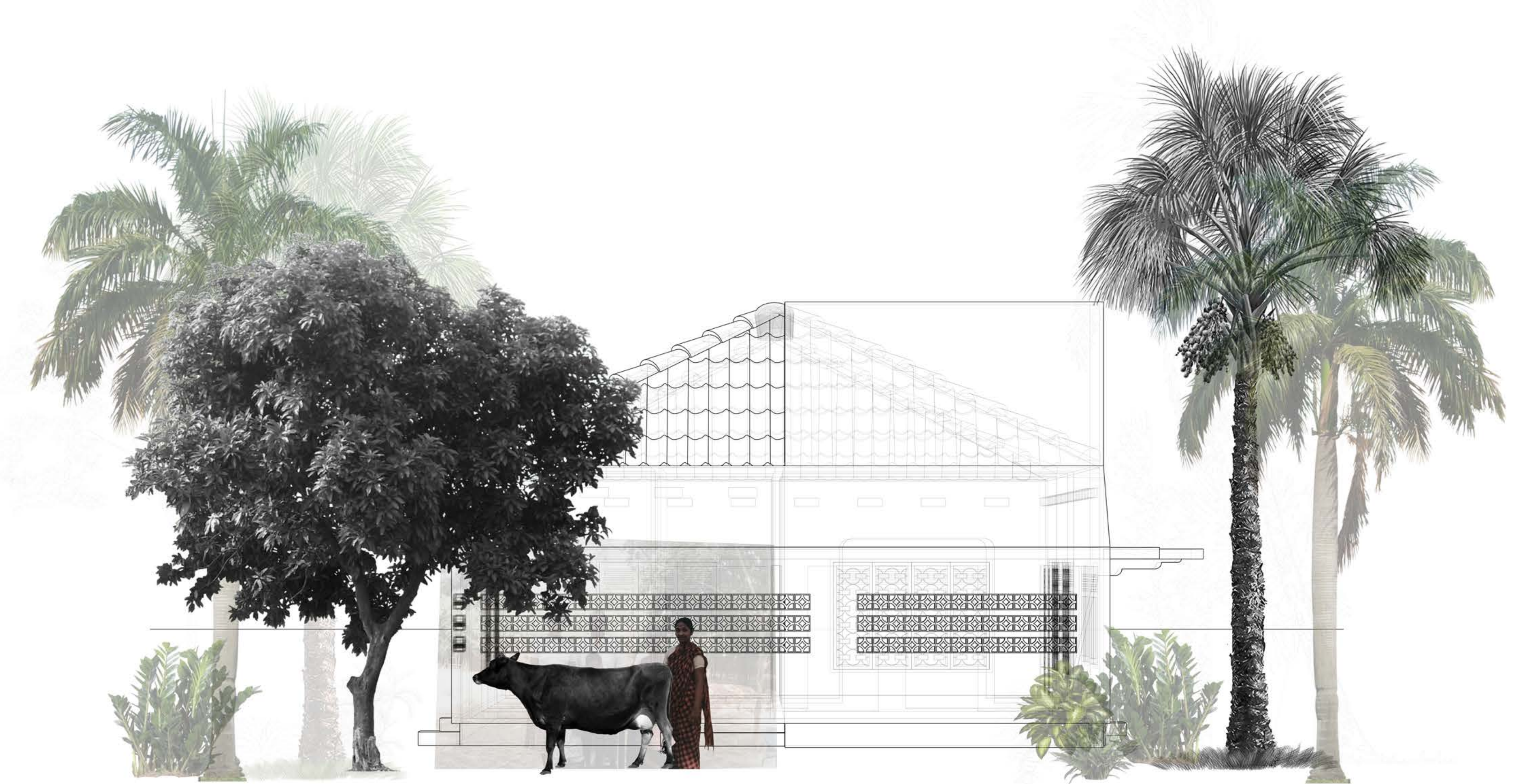


Figure 12.
Composite exterior elevation of the Shivanandan family residence in Sri Lanka comprised of the Rhino model animated by family photographs and sourced images. Illustration by Brenda Shivanandan, 2017. Reproduced by permission © Brenda Shivanandan.

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

between the public and the personal

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

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

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

The first set of drawings documented the existing two-room structure on the farm, a small outhouse, a purpose-built addition, and a separate bathing facility (Figure 13). According to *The New Canadian*, a publication concerned with the plights of second-generation citizens, each forcibly relocated family was to be 'provided with [an] individual cottage and small plots of land for their own use and cultivation in addition to the sugar beet farms on which they will work on the basis of five members to a family.'[40] These cramped quarters, consisting of one bedroom and a small living room, could not adequately accommodate a family of eight when they arrived in 1942.[41] Thus the drawings also revealed the two-room gable-roof addition constructed by Hougan's great-grandfather that provided sleeping quarters for the girls and parents, as well as modest kitchen space (Figure 14). Thin dashed lines connected the edges of each orthographic view as if suturing the deliberately fractured memories back together.

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

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

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

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

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

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

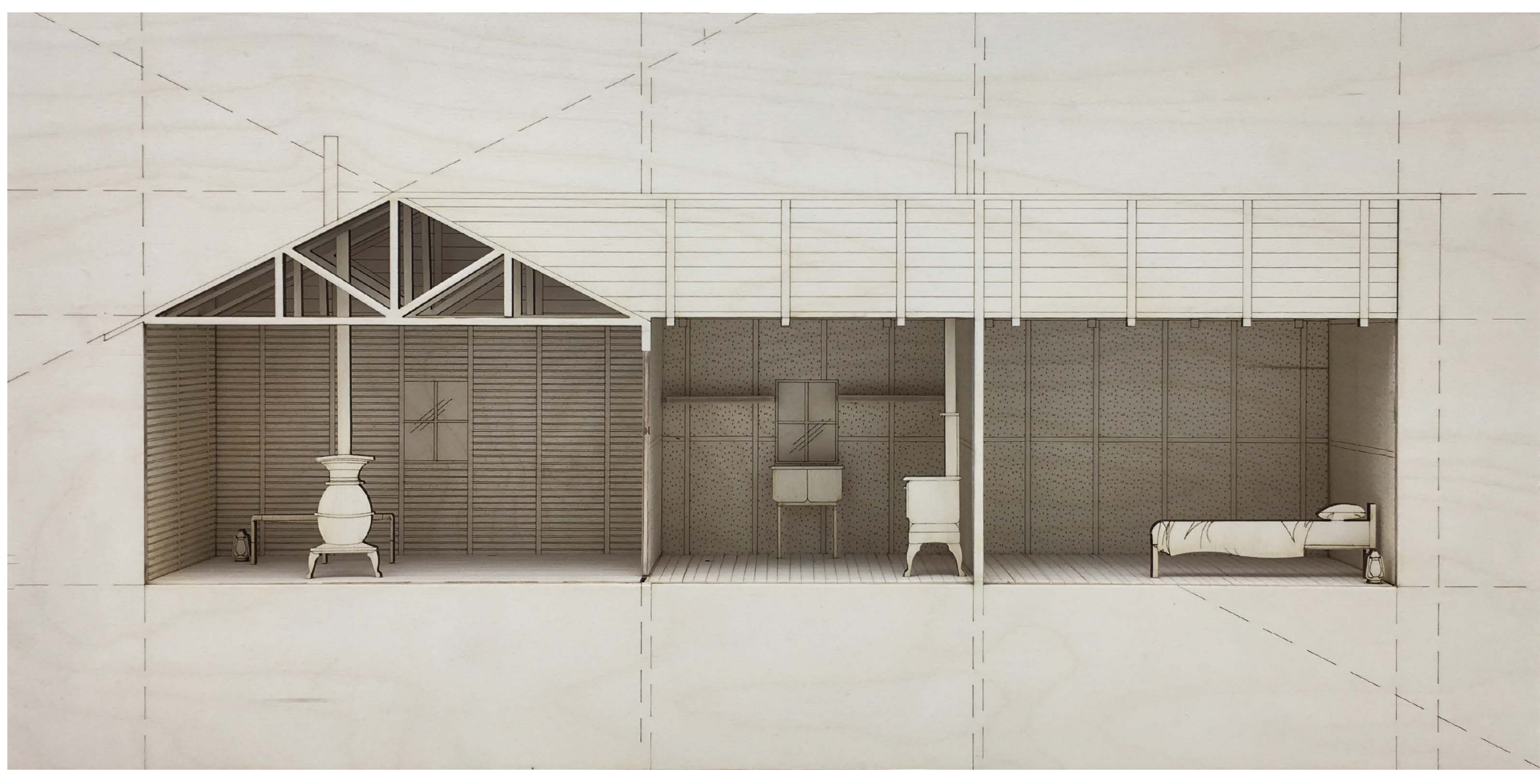


Figure 15.
Laser-cut sectional model of the of the main house and addition built on the Valgardson farm outside Taber, Alberta. Photo by Claire Shimbashi Hougan, 2017. Reproduced by permission © Claire Shimbashi Hougan.

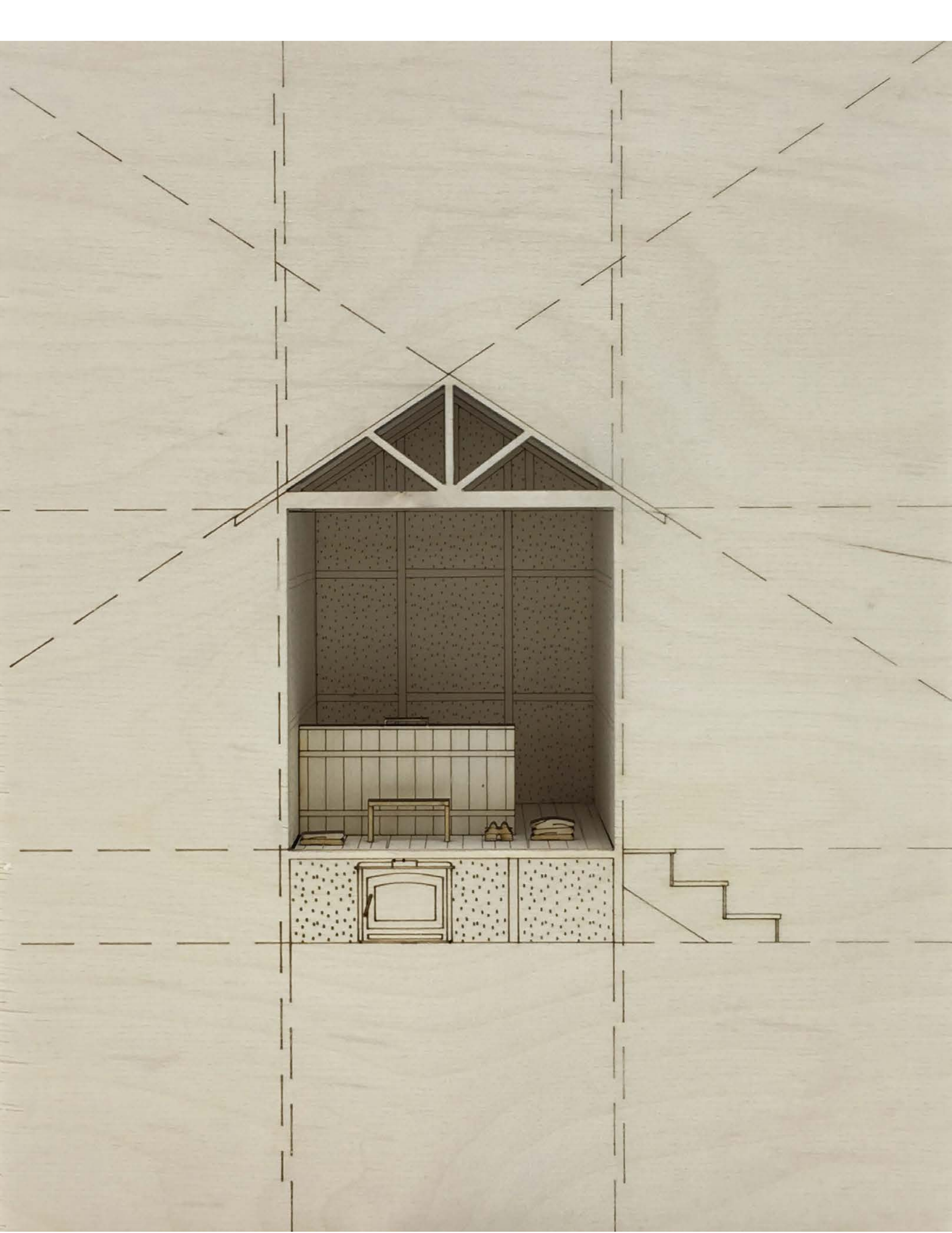


Figure 16.
Laser-cut sectional model of the Ofuro constructed on the Valgardson farm outside Taber, Alberta. Photo by Claire Shimbashi Hougan, 2017. Reproduced by permission © Claire Shimbashi Hougan.

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

towards an apparatus of memory

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

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

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

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

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

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

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notes

01 Jacques Derrida, 'Paul Celan and Language', in *Paul Celan: Selections*, ed. and trans. by Pierre Joris (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), pp. 203–04 (p. 204).

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16 Deepali Dewan, 'We'll Take Your Artifacts but Not Your People: The Komagata Maru in Canada's South Asian Diasporic History', *Trans Asia Photography*, 5.1 (2014) <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.7977573.0005.104> [accessed 21 January 2022] (para. 10 of 19).

17 For instance, a photograph by Leonard Frank in the Vancouver Public Library archives of a group of male passengers is simply described as 'Komagata Maru incident [Gurdit Singh with passengers]' without any mention of the additional travellers. Leonard Frank, 'Komagata Maru incident [Gurdit Singh with passengers]', 1914, Vancouver Public Library, 6231.

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38 Fujiwara, 'Informal Internment', pp. 167–68.

39 All records of the family's internment come from a series of transcribed interviews with Keiko and Charles on 17 October, 8 November, and 9 November 2017. Claire Shimbashi Hougan, 'The Erasure of History', Unpublished Manuscript (December 2017), p. 17.

40 'Alta. Beet Fields for Families, Women, Children to Ghost Town, Nisei to Ont. Camps', *The New Canadian,* 28 March 1942, 4; Fujiwara, 'Informal Internment', p. 170.

41 Hougan, 'The Erasure of History', p. 14.

42 Hougan, 'The Erasure of History', p. 17.

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refabulating domesticity: a reparative reading of interior genre painting

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abstract

In the seventeenth century, Dutch artists like De Hooch, Vermeer, and de Witte famously painted interior scenes. These could seem to follow the birth of bourgeois domesticity and the modern sense of intimate, private dwelling. Still, many scholars have pointed out that this realism is deceptive: these interiors are in fact fabulated spaces, at odds with the architectural and social reality of their day.

Following Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's opposition between a 'paranoid' and a 'reparative' reading of cultural artefacts, we could interpret these interiors in a paranoid mode, revealing the oppressive and exploitative social conditions of the so-called Golden Age in which the genre flourished.

However, as Sedgwick suggests, such an interpretation can be supplemented by a reparative, more speculative, and creative hermeneutics that recontextualises these cultural artefacts. Such an approach can be aligned with the notion of 'fictioning' as developed by David Burrows and Simon O'Sullivan: the exploration of fictional worlds and other possible modes of existence they establish. While they mostly discuss rather outlandish forms of mythopoetic imagination, this text-based essay focuses on 'fictioning' the interior as a tool to experiment with the domestic. The essay will follow three artistic concepts: pictorial formalism (focusing on sensations), tropism (focusing on affects), and metalepsis (focusing on characters).

In this essay, I explore the 'impossible' interior of Emanuel De Witte's *Interior with a Woman at the Virginal* (*c*. 1665), an apparent idyllic scene that nonetheless generates a particularly unsettling atmosphere, as a case study. The painting consists of a complex constellation of places and stories; an assemblage of spaces, objects, and characters that resist their original pictorial and discursive frames. As such, it allows for a reparative, creative approach to the antiquated genre of the interior.

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keywords:
Dutch interior painting, fictioning, reparative reading, tropism, metalepsis

Figure 01.
Emanuel de Witte, *Interior with a Woman at the Virginal* (c. 1665–70). Collection Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen.

reparative fictioning: revisiting a genre

According to architecture professor Witold Rybczynski, in his influential *Home. A Short History of an Idea* (1986), paintings like Emanuel de Witte's *Interior with a Woman at the Virginal* (*c*. 1665–70) reveal the emergence of bourgeois domesticity in the Dutch republic of the seventeenth century. We see a man in a bed and a woman playing at the virginal. The intimacy of the scene suggests they are lovers, married or not. In the background, a female servant is sweeping the floor. A historical reading of this figure places her in the Calvinist modesty of the Dutch republic, where 'even the wealthiest household rarely employed more than three servants, while a typical prosperous bourgeois family included, at most, a single maid-servant.'[01] These paintings of the so-called 'Golden Age' show a simple, uneventful life indoors, yet worthy of depiction, with scenes of quiet happiness, leisure, playing music after making love: 'It is above all this sense of interior space, and hence of insideness, that distinguishes this painting. Instead of being a picture of a room, it is a picture of a home.'[02]

However, this apparent realism is a fiction. The seemingly inconspicuous presence of the servant in fact gives the painting an allegorical meaning that goes beyond a mere factual depiction of an interior. Her positioning between the man and the woman invites us to interpret her presence as an allegory of moral cleanliness, leaving unanswered the question whether she represents the 'proper' relation between husband and wife in the foreground, or, on the contrary, is cleaning away the committed sin of adultery.[03] And not only the allegorical staging, but also the architectural elements reveal the fictionality of the space. Paintings like de Witte's depict rooms that did not actually exist: both the enfilade and the positioning of ceiling beams were very unlikely architectural features for houses of that period. Interior elements like the black and white marble floor tiles and the brass chandeliers were also extremely rare in actual homes of the time, even those of the very rich.[04] The play of geometry and depth, light and textures was far more important to the painter than any claim to veracity. Obviously, this 'impossible' interior architecture creates a curious tension between the apparent authentic, lifelike scene, and the staged, fictional environment, a tension that must have been evident to contemporary viewers.

Rybczynski does acknowledge this fictionality, but argues that nonetheless 'the effect is real, and it is above all one of extreme intimacy.'[05] Still, historical evidence shows that this 'extreme intimacy' may have been a fiction too. Cultural anthropologist Irene Cieraad challenges Rybczynski's view of these interiors as the supposed 'cradle of female domesticity.'[06] She juxtaposes these idyllic interiors with actual correspondence between Dutch women and their husbands serving in the military or mercantile fleet. Many of these letters express longing, concern, and mourning, and suggest a very precarious existence. The paintings presented a rosy picture of material wealth and domestic bliss in a time of economic inequality and uncertainty, actual or looming war with other European nations, and different serious outbreaks of pestilence.[07] As Cieraad argues, this notion of a 'Golden Age' was only a product of nineteenth-century nationalism. Precisely because existence itself was far from gilded, there was a 'compensatory need for these ideal home images' in the seventeenth century, hence the decline of the genre in later, more peaceful times.[08]

The artificiality of these scenes becomes even more problematic if we take Cieraad's critique a step further and contextualise them in a more global perspective. Life in the 1660s was not only very hard for many inhabitants of the Dutch republic. It was also the decade in which trading posts were established along the so-called Dutch Slave Coast in Africa. Unlike the Dutch sailors, the enslaved people bought there for the colonies in America left no traces in the form of letters.

From a contemporary perspective, the 'atmosphere of domesticity' Rybczynski found so appealing in the interiors of these paintings

has become problematic at the very least as an impossible fable that is screening a rather grim and shameful reality. Acknowledging this seems to be the melancholic duty of contemporary scholars when faced with historical artefacts that were long taken for granted: going beyond their apparent realism in order to contextualise them and reveal what remains outside the frame. The implicit guiding principle here would be cultural critic Walter Benjamin's famous quote: 'There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.'[09]

As cultural theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick famously argued, what she called a 'paranoid reading' has become the dominant interpretive mode in cultural studies: 'to theorize out of anything *but* a paranoid critical stance has come to seem naïve, pious or complaisant.'[10] The point is of course not that this 'hermeneutics of suspicion' is infrequently required in our relation to cultural heritage. To a large extent, Rybczynski's view is indeed naïve and complaisant. But Sedgwick denounces the idea that this mode should be the only valuable and acceptable way to perform criticism. As a possible supplement, she proposes another mode of critical reading, which she calls 'reparative', borrowing a term from psychoanalyst Melanie Klein.[11] Reparation refers to the creative potential in the depressive position following the destructive schizoid/paranoid position in childhood development. In the depressive position, the child is confronted with anxiety as they realise their own destructive impulses. The preceding paranoid-schizoid division of parts of oneself and the other, of outer and inner reality, into 'good' and 'bad' objects no longer holds. To psychically survive, subjects need to create an interiority that allows them to accept the ambiguity inherent in one's relation to oneself and to others. They do so by becoming creative, by trying to 'repair' the experienced loss, the damage done.[12]

It is important to keep Sedgwick's reference to Klein in mind, because it makes clear that in the formation of subjectivity, this violent paranoid-schizoid position is a necessary step to make sense of the world and cannot be separated from the reparative-creative moment that follows it. What Sedgwick does is to take Klein's view on the individual genesis of the subject and expand it to the relation with culture. There, too, we are confronted with a set of artefacts that both hurt and sustain, constitute, and violate subjectivities. A paranoid reading is necessary to discover the harmful, yet often hidden, implications of specific cultural forms. Still, Sedgwick makes clear that criticism does not have to stop there. Other modes of critical performance are possible, not by denouncing these artefacts as purely 'bad' objects, but by adapting them, fragmenting and transgressing them, coupling them to affects and experiments that change their original outlook. At this point, Sedgwick is inspired by '[t]he many ways selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of a culture — even of a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them.'[13]

In Sedgwick's work, the focus is mostly on the queer experience in a heteronormative society, but her point can easily be extended to all modes of existence that are not sustained by the dominant cultural discourse. In recent decades, many cultural theorists and sociologists have coined new terms to describe a culture under the spell of a 'social acceleration', a 'tyranny of merit', generating a 'burnout society.'[14] What such criticisms have in common is that they consider contemporary society to be unsustainable and increasingly threatening the quality and, in extreme cases, even the possibility, of modes of dwelling.

What then could a reparative reading of the antiquated genre of the interior mean in the light of this socio-cultural malaise? What if we look at these paintings precisely as what they were according to Cieraad — a promise of domestic bliss in an age that threatened it and made it impossible for many — and take this fiction seriously? What if we further fictionalise the fiction of de Witte's rooms? A critical performance that explores the 'dialectical standstill' Walter Benjamin discerned in some cultural images: yes, they are ideological fictions masking an underlying capitalist system of economic exploitation; but precisely this utopian vision holds a 'messianic' promise, 'a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past.'[15] In these ideological dreamscapes, Benjamin discerned the possibility of a critical awakening. From a fake depiction of a past that never existed, these paintings can be turned into a possible exploration of alternative forms of dwelling. From Benjamin's perspective, these paintings can thus still be interpreted as the cradle of domesticity, but only if we consider it as a domesticity yet to be born.

At this point, the notion of 'fictioning' as developed by cultural theorists David Burrows and Simon O'Sullivan might be useful. They define it as 'the writing, imaging, performing or other material instantiation of worlds or social bodies that mark out trajectories different to those engendered by the dominant organisations of life currently in existence.'[16] They relate this to philosopher Felix Guattari's concept of 'fabulous images':

> These images, found in literature and life, operate as "points of subjectification." Put simply, for Guattari, fiction is a resource in the production of different kinds of subjectivity and thus, again, of the different kinds of worlds that attend the latter.[17]

And while they do not explicitly mention the term 'reparative reading', 'fictioning' can be seen as a specific form of it. Fictioning as a scholarly practice may sound gratuitous, but as a form of cultural repairing it is, to use Sedgwick's formulation, 'no less realistic, no less attached to a project of survival, and neither less nor more delusional or fantasmatic' than a more conventional critical performance.[18]

However, in Burrows' and O'Sullivan's research into the 'myth-functions' of art and philosophy, the domestic myth is remarkably absent. This becomes obvious when they briefly discuss the work of artist Carolee Schneemann, especially her experimental 'home movie' *Fuses* (1967). They focus on the way Schneemann works with technology, and how the film not only counters the male gaze, but the human gaze in general by 'developing multispecies relations' — in this case, with Schneemann's cat.[19] But the exploration of the domestic, so central to this movie as we will discuss later, remains a blind spot in their analysis. This way, Burrows and O'Sullivan overlook which experimental, alternative 'points of subjectification' are to be discovered in the enclosed, private environment of the domestic itself. The exploration of 'fabulous images' does not require outlandish figures like the cyborg or the shaman, discussed by Burrows and O'Sullivan. These images can also crystallise in a domestic setting. The fact that they emerge from the everyday makes them harder to distinguish from the dominant forms of subjectivity, but at the same time perhaps more effective as well, precisely because the border between the fiction and the everyday becomes porous. Not all of us are into shamanism or science fiction, but we must all make our bed, and interact with the people and objects that make up our domestic environment. Refabulating the domestic imagination, based on the interior fictions provided by painters like de Witte, allows us to explore the forces that constitute the individual dweller, from inner affects to outer socio-cultural structures. Such a refabulation requires some specific artistic concepts and techniques. First, a pictorial formalism helps to focus on the sensual qualities of the environment; the concept of the tropism makes it possible to distinguish subjective, affective lines that traverse the interior; and, finally, metalepsis enables us to use characters as a way of thinking about different aspects of dwelling.

pictorial formalism and spatial sensations

In 1928, the Spanish artist Joan Miró travelled to the Netherlands, where he became particularly interested in paintings from the seventeenth century. According to art critic Karen Wilkin, this encounter would have a transformative impact.[20] Upon his return, he painted three *Dutch Interiors* that would mark a new phase in his work. In Miró's interpretation, the main protagonists were not the figures, but the colours and the shapes: he would change the palette, the scale, and reduce them to more abstract forms. Miró's distortions are interesting because they reveal sensual and compositional qualities that a critical reading tends to gloss over, as it primarily focuses on decoding the historical, narrative, or allegorical meanings. Obviously, in Miró's own work, these transformations are quickly 'encoded' again as recognisable examples of his typical style. Hence, it is more effective to take Miró's gaze back to de Witte's painting, and approach it like Miró would: as a visual constellation of shapes, colours, and forms that can function independently from what they are supposed to represent. In a way, it simply follows to the extreme de Witte's own preference of pictorial composition over realistic depiction.

Figure 02.
Emanuel de Witte, *Interior with a Woman at the Virginal* (c. 1665–70) (fragment). Collection Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen.

By primarily considering the sensual qualities of de Witte's painting, something strange happens. The suggestion of music being played activates a synaesthetic interpretation, whereby the sense of hearing is transferred to the visual elements. The inaudible notes from the virginal seem to turn the painting itself into a musical piece, whereby the visual constellation produces harmonies. There is the echo of the water jug in the table leg, as if it reflects itself in some invisible dark water that has flooded the room; the curtains at the windows repeat themselves in the curtains of the bed; and the layout of the black and white tiles stands in a kind of contrapuntal relation to the sunlight and the shadow across the floor. A similar visual rhythm is also at work when our gaze is confronted with the depth of the painting: starting from the left, the line of the sword in the front rhythmically relates to the broom at the wall, and finally with the broom in the hand of the female servant. Starting from the right, the bonnet of the playing woman is repeated first — partially — in the mirror above her, and then in the maid's bonnet. The same, if less outspoken, happens with the man's hat, the bucket, the alcove, the shape of the trees: forms repeat themselves with small variations, fading out. The synaesthetic experience is also present in the light, and the 'warm' colours, as if evoking the sonorous warmth and fullness of the snare instrument: the light from the windows and the notes played by the woman both form a sensual cascade overwhelming the man in the bed, and, by extension, also the viewer. It becomes a musical lesson in how an interior takes shape, not from the layout of the rooms, and the objects and persons in them, but by the constellations, the melodies all these elements form together.

Figure 03.
Emanuel de Witte, *Interior with a Woman at the Virginal* (c. 1665–70) (fragment). Collection Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen.

Cultural theorist Roland Barthes argues that seventeenth-century Dutch painting 'has washed away religion only to replace it with man and his empire of things.'[21] For Barthes, the objects in these paintings are completely embedded in the capitalist system of commodities: all things become utilities, 'separated from matter by the sleek, firm film of *use*.'[22] What remains is a pacified space, with the human being in complete control: 'A more complete subservience of things is unimaginable. The entire city of Amsterdam, indeed, seems to have been built with a view to this domestication: few substances here are not annexed to the empire of merchandise.'[23] These paintings show us a 'universe of fabrication' that 'obviously excludes terror, as it excludes style.'[24] But Miró's gaze reveals that this victory of use over matter is far from evident. The visual rhythms, and the synaesthetic sensations they provoke in the viewer, seem to oppose Barthes' interpretation of these paintings as the mere expression of human control over its environment. Matter resists this absolute integration in a network of exchange and consumption, including the exchange of meaning: the clothes, the curtains, the broom, the jar, the tiles; they all have an intense presence that goes beyond their possible denotations and connotations and confront us with the stubborn materiality of things. The fact that nothing really happens in these interiors — at least, in comparison to historical tableaux, or religious paintings — makes them a place where one is literally and figuratively brought back to one's senses.

The elements that constitute an interior reveal an intensity of being, a sensual materiality of existence that the intimate sphere of dwelling can open. Obviously, with such a pictorial approach it might appear that the interior is still turned into something useful, perhaps not as commodity or as a symbol, but still subservient to a spectator simply seeking aesthetic pleasure. Still, these sensations generate not only a form of domestic bliss, as Rybczynski interprets the atmosphere of these paintings. While the paintings might be deprived of terror, as Barthes argues, they do relate to other, perhaps more subtle, affects that challenge the way we imagine the subjective engagement with an interior. As we will see, they grasp our attention, not in a calm, meditative way, but quite overwhelmingly.

tropisms: inner movements

At first sight, it seems strange to attribute negative affects to these interiors. If anything, they seem to celebrate dwelling as an aesthetic joy. As art historian Angela Vanhaelen puts it, they succeed in 'freezing a fleeting moment by making the prosaic world shine.'[25] Still, as she makes clear in her analysis, this apparent suspension of conflict, this depiction of what the philosopher Hegel called the 'Sunday of life,' proves to be more ambiguous.[26] For the writer Paul Claudel, 'there is repose and motion at the same time, a state of equilibrium undermined by anxiety.'[27] This anxiety subverts the apparent sensual sheen because this 'freezing' of action and meaning confronts the viewer with a material world that might be very sensual, but also without sense: 'If the viewer is very attentive to the works, sheen breaks apart and larger meanings and communal values dissolve along with it.'[28]

From this perspective, these interiors already hint at what for the philosopher Martin Heidegger would be the fundamental mood of modernity: a sense of boredom.[29] It is this boredom that breeds anxiety: the fact that the world is meaningless, but inescapably there to be dealt with. If de Witte's painting is a 'fabulous image' that can create a kind of alternative 'point of subjectivity,' this does not imply a self-satisfied indulgence in passive pleasant sensations, but an active appeal to create sense. For Heidegger, we must confront this existential boredom, 'for its emptiness holds great potential' and 'opens opportunities for introspective reflection on everyday subjective experience.'[30] It is this opportunity for reflection that is offered by these paintings. Made in a time when the exposure to images was far less abundant than today, they needed to engage with their viewers over a longer period. They functioned as 'conversation pieces' to be contemplated and talked about, each time triggering new thoughts and sensations. Their suspension of meaning was thus deliberate. Inspired by Heidegger, art historian Hanneke Grootenboer interprets these interiors as pensive images, expressing the act of thinking itself.[31] Not by simply depicting someone who is thinking and with whom the viewer could identify, but

by showing the process of thinking itself as an environment. These interiors become for Grootenboer the spatialisation of a 'pensive' mood, the wandering of the mind.[32] She reads de Witte's interior as a 'contemplative aid that lets thinking get through,' as a 'metaphor for mental processes.'[33] We should keep in mind that these mental processes also involve sensorial and affective aspects: 'thinking' in this sense is more than just an intellectual, cognitive activity. It is not only the mind that starts wandering in the place evoked by de Witte, but also the embodied subjectivity of the spectator. And, as Grootenboer's analysis makes clear, this subjectivity does not reside in an identification with the characters depicted, but with the depicted interior space.

To understand how this subjectivisation of an environment works, writer Nathalie Sarraute's notion of 'tropism' might prove useful. In nature, a tropism refers to the instinctive reaction of living organisms to certain stimuli. In her experimental debut *Tropisms* (1939), Sarraute transposes this notion to instinctive subjective reactions, 'inner movements,' as she calls it: 'These movements seemed to me to be veritable dramatic actions, hiding beneath the most commonplace conversations, the most everyday gestures, and constantly emerging up to the surface of the appearances that both conceal and reveal them.'[34] *Tropisms* is a collection of very short chapters, each the registration of a mood, an action, a sudden impulse, a stirring of affect. These fragments of subjective reality are not embedded in a specific plot or fixed to the point of view of a well-defined character. In fact, what Sarraute says about her own work can easily be used to describe the effect of viewing de Witte's interior:

> Nothing could distract my attention from them and nothing could distract that of the reader; neither the personality of the characters, nor the plot, by means of which, ordinarily, the characters evolve. The barely visible, anonymous character was to serve as a mere prop for these movements, which are inherent in everybody and can take place in anybody, at any moment.[35]

This indeterminacy is indeed inherent to the painting. Rybczynski already remarked:

> [...] part of the delight of this genre is the painter's ambiguity toward his subject. Is the woman properly penitent? If so, why is she playing and not weeping? She has her back turned, as if in shame, but in the mirror hanging on the walls over the virginals, her face is tantalizingly not quite reflected. Maybe she is smiling; we will never know.[36]

Precisely because de Witte does not reduce the elements of the painting to a storyline, the viewer is free to explore the 'inner movements': a possible smile, the man raising his body slightly, the gesture

of sweeping a floor while being distracted by a thought… And, just as with Sarraute's novelistic tropisms, they are not clear-cut, but together create what Sarraute would call 'a hugely amplified present': everything becomes charged with different affects and feelings at the same time.[37] It is not that we must choose between shame and joy, bliss and melancholy. By considering de Witte's ambiguous environment as a visual precursor of Sarraute's literary tropisms, we might thus understand domesticity as a place where the narrative consistency of identity may be abandoned, in favour of the exploration of different moods and affects. Normally, we are supposed to present ourselves, and interpret others, as consistent characters, following well-known storylines and predetermined emotional responses to specific situations, from banal to very exceptional. But Sarraute's notion of tropism confronts us with subjective experiences that escape this clear determination. It shows how the domestic can make us aware of the different inner movements that traverse us, often without us realising.

metalepsis: leisure and maintenance

Another effect of the fact that de Witte's interior consists of 'barely visible, anonymous character(s)', to paraphrase Sarraute, is that figures can leave their frame and assume a role in another setting.[38] The woman, the man, the pet, and the cleaning lady all belong to a very limited set of stock characters. We recognise them in other scenes of domestic bliss, but also scenes of seduction, or confidentiality, like when the maid becomes a confidante, in Vermeer's famous *Love Letter*, painted around the same time.[39]

Narratology uses the term *metalepsis* to refer to these moments when a character 'escapes' the narrative world to which it belongs and enters another level.[40] This can be the level of narration itself (characters start to narrate the story themselves, or directly address the reader), but also an entirely different fictional world to which the character is transferred. As a narrative technique that breaks the illusion of reality, metalepsis is typical of postmodern, experimental fiction. I want to argue here that this literary technique can also be used in academic writing in which allowing characters to wander into other settings offers new perspectives on the original environment in which we encountered them.

The most prominent characters in de Witte's painting are the man and the woman: while it is unclear whether they are a married couple, or rather illicit lovers, their intimate relationship is obvious. According to Rybczynski, such love relationships were clearly gendered in these paintings:

> When a male is included in a Vermeer, one has the sense that he is a visitor — an intruder — for these women do not simply inhabit these rooms, they occupy them completely. Whether they are sewing, playing the spinet, or reading a letter, the Dutch women are solidly, emphatically, contentedly at home.[41]

The same goes for the interior by de Witte: the sword of the man connects him to the outside world, just like his clothes thrown on the chair feel like an intrusion, disturbing the quiet order of the house: he is the stranger, she is the 'angel of the house', receiving him, but only for a while, until he resumes his role in society, and she can restore her routine.

Once we move from art history to social history and juxtapose these stock figures with actual historical characters, their relationship becomes more complex. The scene may depict the morning after a last night together before a long journey, perhaps suggested by the map; or, on the contrary, express the joy of being united after a long separation. The scene might evoke a memory, like the one expressed in this fragment of a captain writing to his wife: 'My dearest wife, I wish I could spend the night with you and just chat [...] I keep thinking of our last night together.'[42] Or the one in this letter from a sailor's wife to her husband at sea: 'My darling you wrote to me that at night when you are in your berth you take the cushion in your arms and pretend that I am with you, and you also wrote that I should do the same. However, it does not help. I have to endure the time waiting for your return.'[43] Or it can refer to a hope for the future, like the scene evoked in this letter from a trumpeter's wife: 'We will lock the door and send our friends away. When we are happy together all is well, for our friends will not give us this happiness.'[44]

By merging these historical voices with the mute characters depicted by de Witte, the emotional landscape changes: we hear men longing for an intimate privacy in which they are *not* intruders, and women feeling all but at home, precisely because of the absence of their loved ones. The letters also show the fragility of the scene: what we see might just be a fantasy — a sailor-soldier's dream, or that of his wife. And even if their being together is a reality, it is never sure how long it will last before he must return to sea, or to the war, or before health risks (pestilence, but also the risk of childbirth) might end their happiness.

Metalepsis not only enables characters to travel from a fictional to a real context; it also allows these characters to travel into the future. In this case, two forking paths appear: in the first path, the melancholy and anxiety, already lingering in de Witte, becomes dominant in the works of Vilhelm Hammershoi, a painter clearly influenced by these seventeenth-century Dutch interiors. As Grootenboer remarks, a cold light has replaced 'the warm sunlight and the orange-red palette of the Dutch painter', while his

Figure 04.
Vilhelm Hammershoi, *Ida in an Interior with Piano* (1901), via Wikimedia Commons.

figures seem to have lost their original purpose: rather than playing or sweeping the floor, Hammershoi's figures are often just standing, sitting, without doing anything, 'detached from his or her environment.'[45] Hammershoi seems to anticipate the typically modern neurotic character well-known since Freud's case studies, like the story of Dora in *A Case of Hysteria* (1905): individuals wrestling with their sexuality, existential angst and boredom, trapped in bourgeois society.[46] These figures seem not only to be locked in their rooms, but also in themselves, and their malaise taints their possibility to communicate. The space between the lovers has become an unbridgeable gap, each confined to an inner world to which the other has no access.

The other path follows quite the opposite direction, where the domestic does not increasingly become a place of libidinal repression, but rather one of possible liberation. In this time travel, the lovers end up as characters in Carolee Schneemann's *Fuses*, trading the sixties of the seventeenth century to those of the twentieth. *Fuses* is a film diary, registering daily life with her lover James Tenney. The short film features the same dominant elements we also find in de Witte's interior: the curtains, the window, the bed, even the pet (although, in this case, the pet is not a dog, but a cat, Kitch), and, of course, the lovers. Sexuality, only subtly hinted at in the painting, is here made explicit. As art historian Alyce Mahon argues in her analysis of the film, Schneemann looked for a 'more expansive sense of the domestic' that did not reduce the woman to the figure of the housewife-mother.[47] In *Fuses* the subjective position of desire is not fixed, but switches and shifts, not only between the lovers, but also between the characters and the viewer's gaze: '*Fuses* refuses any safe distance between lovers or between flesh and the camera as it brings the spectator into the domestic space through glimpses of architecture, wallpaper patterns, and lace curtains.'[48] The point of view is often hard to pinpoint (the cat, Carolee, James, or just the camera registering their lovemaking). We already saw how de Witte's painting created synaesthetic sensations, but Schneemann takes it a step further, and extends it to the texture of the medium itself. Her manipulation of the actual film reel enhances 'the sense of the film as flesh, to be touched and scratched and played with.'[49] The film renders sensations and 'tropisms' of domestic life in such an intense way that it engages the viewer to explore this 'space between domestic conformity and erotic nonconformity.'[50] It demonstrates that the everyday banality of dwelling and the ecstasy of eros are not separate realms, but intermingle and interchange.

If we look at de Witte's interior as if it were an anachronistic pendant of *Fuses*, the apparently conventional scene becomes a provocative reflection on what it means to live together in an amorous relationship. Because we do not know the nature of the relationship between both lovers, the established roles and images culturally fixed to domestic love are challenged. Just like *Fuses*, the painting turns into an invitation to experiment with other forms of living together, to explore the 'domestic as the space where liberation must begin.'[51] Now, the painting not only confronts us with a historical reality (or fantasy), but with a question about how to fabulate domestic love life in the twenty-first century. After the sexual revolution of the sixties, what restrictive images and patterns (gender, work-life, needs, expectations) still haunt the domestic atmosphere?

Figure 05.
Emanuel de Witte, *Interior with a Woman at the Virginal* (c. 1665–70) (fragment). Collection Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen

But the lovers present a challenge to our view on domesticity. That is also the case for the character that got lost in this anachronistic merging of de Witte and Schneemann: the female servant in the background. In both a historical or allegorical interpretative frame, her presence as the typical single servant of a bourgeois household, or an allegory of moral cleanliness, seems idyllic, unproblematic. But if we allow her to take up her broom and walk out of the picture into contemporary fiction, her position becomes much more ambiguous and paradoxical.

As literary theorist Sonja Stojanovic argues, the figure of the cleaning lady in contemporary novels becomes a narrative tool that 'allows us to peer into the intimate world of our main characters in a "realistic" way, for she sees what one usually hides from everyone else.'[52] As such, she symmetrically mirrors the reader, just like the cleaning lady in de Witte mirrors the position of the viewer: both are witnesses to an intimate, private scene they can never belong to. While her task is indeed to keep the home tidy and clean, by putting everything back where it belongs, she herself is not at home there and remains an intruder. This outsider position is not only a narrative technique, but it also has ideological implications: the cleaning lady belongs to another world, not only in relation to the other characters, but also to the reader and viewer. She is most often from a different class, and in contemporary western societies also increasingly from a different culture.

As such, her presence alone disrupts the self-evident context of the rooms. This is also the case in de Witte's interior, if we allow the maidservant in the background to move to another context. Trading her broom for a vacuum cleaner, she becomes Gaudalupe Acedo, the housekeeper of Rem Koolhaas' Maison à Bordeaux and the main character in *Koolhaas Houselife* (2008), a documentary made by architect/artists Ila Bêka and Louise Lemoine. Here too, we recognise the same elements that create a sense of domesticity: the shoes taken off (in this case, by tourists visiting), the curtains, both at the windows as in the bedroom, separating the bed from the rest of the room. But in this narrative universe, the lovers are absent — the implicit story is one of mourning, as 'Monsieur' has passed away, and the 'Madame' is still grieving — we see her very briefly, from a distance, alone.

This focus on Acedo's intimate, daily interactions with the building challenges the aesthetic, architectural frame from which it is usually interpreted. In her review of the documentary, architecture professor Hilary Sample quotes Rem Koolhaas' response after viewing the documentary: 'I am completely surprised that something that is as harsh and exceptional as the spiral staircase is treated with a Hoover. It is completely insane.'[53] As Sample points out, Koolhaas' 'disappointment is not that the architecture gets dirty, or that the housekeeper is unduly burdened, but that his building has failed to inspire improvisation and creativity.'[54] Sample links this to artist Mierle Laderman-Ukeles' *Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969!*, the short written part of a performance that wanted to make domestic tasks more visible by performing them in the context of a museum. Laderman-Ukeles wanted to demonstrate how these tasks were a burden on her personal freedom and creativity as a female artist, and how they implied low wages, or even no wage (in the case of a housewife). But, at the same time, she challenged this negative view of maintenance tasks, and claimed they were nonetheless a crucial and vital aspect of existence, and worthy of integration into an artistic practice: 'my working will be the work.'[55] Or transposed to the Maison à Bordeaux: the cleaning of the stairs is as important as designing them, and a mere picture in an architectural magazine does not render justice to this daily, existential practice.

If we now consider the cleaning lady in the background as a combination of Laderman-Ukeles and Acedo, she is no longer a silent, discrete presence reassuring that all the mundane things are being taken care of. On the contrary, she starts to challenge the aesthetic, moral order depicted in the painting: the split between maintenance and leisure, art, and dwelling. In a metaleptic move, she not only juxtaposes the playing of the music, but also the viewing of the painting. How does her cleaning relate to these leisurely activities? And how does the attributed boredom of her menial work perhaps also resonate with

the boredom of the leisure class, just playing music, or visiting a museum, to pass away the time, to fight a sense of purposelessness? How is this boredom of both menial tasks and bourgeois pastime to be related to the potentially creative boredom of (artistic) contemplation, as envisioned by Heidegger? A detour via Laderman-Ukeles' work gives this scene an unexpected urgency, a sense that there is something more at stake. These interiors may evoke Hegel's 'Sunday of life,' but as Laderman-Ukeles quite rightly asks: 'after the revolution, who's going to pick up the garbage on Monday morning?'[56] And maintenance goes beyond the simple act of cleaning: it also refers to the maintenance of love, of friendship, but also the more collective, even global caretaking that must happen, from democratic institutions to the climate. Things inevitably will get dirty or broken and in need of fixing. As such, the position of the cleaning lady seems to merge with the role of the reparative reader: someone who has the perspective of an outsider. Not, or no longer, able to fully belong to the cultural imagination one is supposed to take care of, experiencing how the design is not perfectly fitting (like with Koolhaas' staircase). But at the same time, not prepared to abandon it, taking responsibility for it instead, trying to negotiate with it. Does Acedo's response really lack the creativity Koolhaas expected? Or is Koolhaas' creation just an imperfect starting point for Acedo's future appropriation of the building? Just so, de Witte's painting offers us an unfinished fable of dwelling. It is an invitation to take a different look at domesticity, and the kind of (inter)subjectivity we establish there. After all these centuries, the question still stands: 'And you, how do you want to dwell?'

These questions are also an invitation for scholars of the history and theory of interior design, and its allied practices, to take care of their field, to maintain it. This means to regularly revisit specific design traditions and opinions, remove the dust, and adapt them to new generations of students, to different scholarly and designerly contexts. It also means keeping the critical perspective of an outsider (in time, in place) to reflect on what is left out of the picture, which actual realities these fictional interior spaces may screen; on what is happening, almost unnoticed, in the background. It also invites scholars to use fictioning as a critical tool for exploring historical interiors to fabulate future interiors, other modes of dwelling, and other experiences of interiority. Adapting techniques from literature and visual arts and based on the sensorial and affective experiences these interiors generate in contemporary bodies, such scholarship can become a creative form of reparative fictioning in its own right.

author biography

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william heath robinson and k. r. g. browne: literature contraptions as inspiration for facing spatial issues

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abstract

When living in tiny apartments without proper ventilation, sunlight, contact with nature, or the possibility of social interaction, people tend to generate creative and flexible design strategies to overcome these difficulties. Private and public spaces can be reconfigured into multifunctional areas by using simple but effective means to create links between home and nature.

This text-based essay identifies existing and historical architectural discourse that addresses social, cultural, and perceptual issues as a means to locate conceptual solutions suitable for buildings and flats. An inquiry into William Heath Robinson's (1872–1944) drawings indicates that these images, while satiric, were inspired by complex issues that crossed disciplinary boundaries, taking architectural narrative into the political, cultural, economic, aesthetic, and social discourse. The satirical engines created by Robinson constitute a socio-political critique through the representation of biting solutions to the difficulties found in new settlements in the post-industrial city. During this period, many people living in the United Kingdom (UK) moved from the countryside to the cities, and consistently found themselves living in small apartments. The difficulties arising from the lack of space were addressed by Robinson's unbalanced and hypothetical design solutions that included proposing indoor space fabulations that would extend traditional forms of users' occupation. Though an engineer who identified problems and then invented solutions, his creative work was a strange contraption rooted in impossible ideas. He illustrated the possibilities of bringing life to the common areas of shared housing by transforming tiny apartments by adding mobile solutions with the aim to improve the lives of inhabitants. The concepts behind these creative solutions traced back one century ago can be seen as a counterpart to contemporary transformative interior design strategies.

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william heath robinson: contraptions, irony, and absurdity

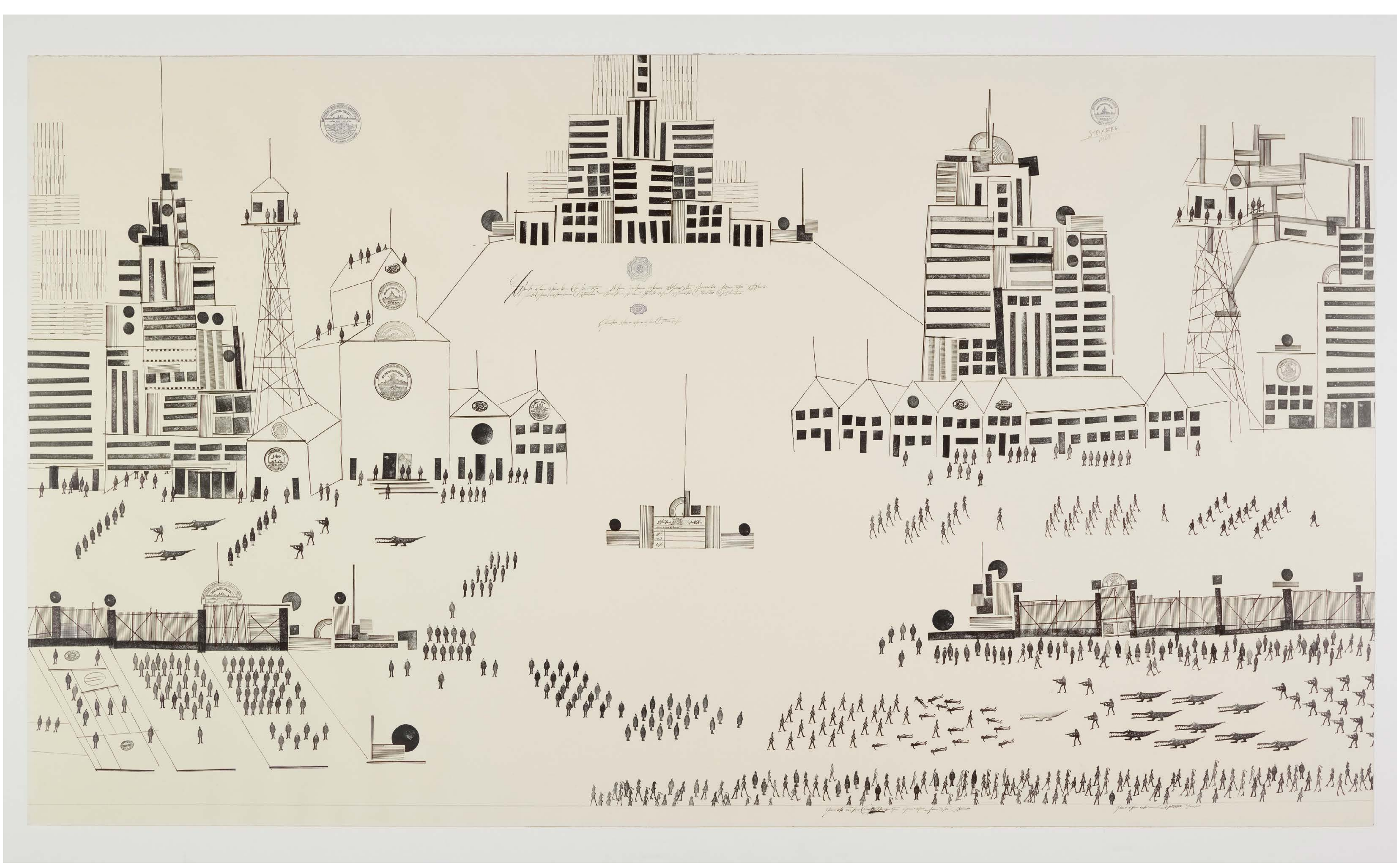
William Heath Robinson (1872–1944) was an English cartoonist and illustrator who portrayed and represented outlandish inventions based on daily activities as a social and cultural critic.[01] Robinson illustrated and wrote several books in collaboration with Kenneth Robert Gordon Browne (1895–1940), which addressed different aspects of UK social and urban development during the interwar period. This period was marked by a hesitant modernisation in planning, usually frustrated by administrative incoherence, failure of political will, and financial constraints, which were reflected in urban planning.[02] Over time, the rapid urban growth forced by the market generated overcrowded neighbourhoods that did not comply with living space requirements related to users' needs. Blocks of housing flats proliferated indiscriminately in cities and suburbs, generating cramped accommodation rented and managed by opportunist landlords. The cost of building increased rapidly, making the price of flats similar to or even more expensive than a self-contained house with similar accommodation.[03] The rapid expansion of UK cities and housing construction and management during the interwar period provided Robinson with substantial opportunity for satire and the creation of fictional narratives and fabulations linked to urban interior dwelling.

Historically, literature and art are linked to daily life; both reflect pressing political, social, and economic issues.[04] Professor Erik Nakjavani suggests that literature creates a world of fiction that multiplies our sense of reality and possibilities.[05] Additionally, academic Leila Claire states that through the inhabitation of a fictional universe, both the writer and the reader can explore personally uncharted avenues of absurd reality through the fictional narrative created.[06] Through representing absurd situations, literature paradoxically allows readers to arrive at a clearer understanding of the designed fiction. The fiction created in Robinson's books and publications demonstrates his particular revolt against the political, cultural, economic, aesthetic, and social conditions; they did so through illustrations of absurd artefacts that could facilitate divergent thinking by proactively exploring new design strategies that may improve living conditions. In their collaboration as illustrator and writer, Robinson and Browne bring to readers the idea of a personal world that otherwise would be impossible to imagine. The interpreted meaning of the words, alongside drawings, must be decoded to understand the critical reflection behind them. The stereotypes adopted in the drawings and their transformation help the reader to decode the critical issues addressed. At the same time, the text acts as a second mirror reading to reproduce the meaning of the drawings. The interdependent correspondence between representation and text reinforces

the significance of establishing a coherent and argumentative critique. Robinson's critical approach can be considered as a graphic narrative that explores the conflicted boundaries of what can be said and what can be shown at the intersection of collective histories and life stories.[07] Irony and the representation of absurdity are graphically used to propose an alternative description of space and activities.

Graphic fiction is subject to an alternative logic; it is a compelling tool that reveals links between communication, space, criticism, and movement in which readers can identify themselves.[08] Drawing itself is a place for experimenting, exploring, and reinventing actions and spaces, contributing to the production of new realities and possibilities. Artist Saul Steinberg defined drawing as a way of 'reasoning on paper.'[09] In 'Graph Paper Architecture' (1950–1954) he uses graphic representation to criticise International Style modernism in architecture as well as American post-war urban development.[10] Steinberg's diagrammatic drawings (Figure 01) show a special ability to evoke new worlds, allowing viewers to discover the different layers of meaning that resonate with the visual conventions of architectural modernism and with popular experience of the modernist city.[11]

Figure 01.
Saul Steinberg, 'The Administration Building', 1969 © Yale University Art Library.



Humour has the ability to replace reality with fantasy.[12] As a form of social communication, it is extraordinarily effective in reappropriating and questioning architectural and urban culture.[13] Humour allows us to enforce norms delicately by levelling criticism while maintaining some degree of identification with the audience.[14] It appeals to issues that are very familiar to the audience, placing the target of it in a position of sharing meaning or perspective on the represented issue.[15] As a powerful tool of architectural criticism and protest, humour offers a vision of the fallibilities of life. Humorous drawings such as cartoons are particularly compelling instruments of the architectural critic.[16] Cartoons reflect critical social events and popular cultural components.[17] As a medium of conceptual narrative, cartoons offer a space of freedom and experimentation, which have been used to express inherent aspects of space and architecture in terms of dystopia and modernity. For instance, Archigram used the graphic codes from comics to describe and represent projects as well as a provocative and experimental medium that reflected a popular social climate interpreted through the lens of architectural education.[18] The use of such unusual languages inspired by sci-fi novels and comics (Figure 02) facilitates communication, contributes to understanding space without knowing technical language, and activates the participation of the reader.[19]

Figure 02.
'Instant City Strikes Again', *Archigram Magazine*, 9 (p. 5) © Archigram 1970.

The visual narrative intends to engage with the audience by revealing information in order to produce a response in the viewers. The graphic representation contains the idea that it prefigures and offers a particular notion of its potential as catalyst for creativity and imagination, offering a medium to create new meanings.[20] As Professor of Architecture Paul Emmons acknowledges, drawings could be considered a tool to provide the viewer with an imagined spatial experience through its representation.[21] Similarly, sociologist Pierre Bourdieu states that drawings offer a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions that make possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks.[22] Robinson's drawings centred on domestic life (Figures 03 and 04) address these points as the transforming activity of turning space and behaviour into parody.[23] The illustrations portray both inner and outdoor areas of buildings, employing the idea of an imaginative and hilarious inhabitation that ironically reflects the Victorian age of the machine and the rise of modernism. The depicted illustrations portray basic principles of behaviour, visually describing alternative conduct in public and private areas (Figure 05). Mediated by humour, these activities relate to a habitation in which daily tasks are assisted by diverse contraptions that mould the imagined interior space. The illustrations offer a deconstructed visual representation of events and situations to become a graphic mechanism of criticism mediated by humour, irony, and absurdity.[24]

Irony is usually defined as a 'figure of speech in which the intended meaning is the opposite of that expressed by the words used.'[25] According to various authors, there have been several attempts to reconcile irony as a worldview and formal method of literary discourse.[26] To Professor and newspaper columnist Leon Satterfield, literary irony is a 'discourse that appears to be moving in one direction while really moving in another.'[27] Usually used for humorous effect, it is open to subversive interpretations.[28] Irony depends on the notion of intended meaning, which is a usual target of criticism. By using irony, theorists and artists identify relations of power and question epistemologies that inform histories of morality, expressing the realities of social behaviour.[29] Theologian Reinhold Niebuhr and philosopher Richard Rorty assume irony to be a social construction inherently resistant to a moral and political convention.[30] Providing reliable rhetoric for locating abuses of power, identifying injustice, and shaping public or private sensibilities, it is becoming a tool to generate social discourses that act as cultural satire.[31] While Rorty believes irony encourages private sensibilities, Niebuhr leans towards public justice. Irony multiplies meanings by establishing a distortion of the real situation, in which the criticised action, activity, object, or idea could be displaced, reinforced, or repositioned in the desired direction.[32] Authors such as Professor Ross Murfin describe the term as a contradiction

or incongruity between appearance or expectations and reality, which could be applied to a variety of events, situations, and structural elements.[33] Even when designed with an intended aim, the idea of an object, machine, or space is open to ambiguity and interpretation; the viewer must recognise the discrepancy in order to achieve its effect as socio-political criticism.

Robinson's fabulations publicly exposed different social, economic, and political features by conveying social meaning through concepts of parody such as humour and irony. The semantics of the parody reproduce a social situation, amplifying conventions and manners; readers can identify themselves within these narratives. This approach established a form of criticism that expressed uncertainty and proposed new systems and solutions based on ironic thoughts and newly constructed realities that offer other viewpoints placed between the sphere of reality and fantasy. The contraption appears as a critic that responds to the incompatibility observed between the traditional spatial layout of dwellings, the lack of space, and the new users' needs (Figures 03 and 04); that is, the new middle class living in flats and serviced apartments without enough money to employ attendants. The daily activities such as doing exercise (Figure 05), having dinner with friends (Figure 03), resting (Figure 04), or sleeping (Figure 03) depicted in Robinson's drawings offer unexpected uses and arrangements creating new spatial realities activated by users.

Philosopher Henri Bergson suggested that any arrangement of acts and events could be comical as they present the illusion of life and the impression of a recognisable mechanical arrangement.[34] Additionally, the human behaviour — or, as Bergson defines it, the ceremonial side of social life — represented in drawings (attitudes, movements, character) is what diverges from normal behaviour and provokes laughter, which makes us aware of the criticism, the irony, and the represented absurdity.[35]

Philosopher Albert Camus considered that absurdity emerges as a human need to understand the world, arising as a confrontation with or opposition to ideals emerging from misplaced disappointments.[36] He also suggested that the realisation of senselessness occurs all around us constantly.[37] In the same line of thought, Leila Clare El-Qawas considers that the use of absurdity is an acknowledgement of the universal futility of life and work; she chooses to exult in both.[38] Philosopher Bob Plant states that absurdity emerges into the human experience.[39] Equally so, philosopher Thomas Nagel specifies that the experience of absurdity is relational; it arises in ordinary situations and distorts the nature of reality.[40] The human experience is the basis of Robinson's work; his drawings analyse daily life critically, reconstructing a new fiction through experimental contraptions linked to the UK's specific urban context.[41]

In Robinson's illustrations, the built environment is reinvented through the action of appropriation, creating new affordances that revise the idea of inside–outside, public and private, or leisure, game, and work. According to psychologist James Gibson, affordances are possibilities for action offered by the environment.[42] Additionally, historians Erik and Ronald Rietveld established that affordances depend not only on the way in which our environment is designed but also on people's abilities, sociocultural practices, and activity patterns.[43] In other words, new designs can create new affordances that are potentially able to transform patterns of activity and even change sociocultural practices. Professors of Mechanical Engineering Maier and Fadel suggest that affordances must first exist before the behaviour afforded can ever be exhibited.[44] It follows that new affordances imply new behaviours based on one's mental interpretation of new conditions that are formed on the basis of one's knowledge and experience, and then applied to our perception of the environment. Robinson illustrates how buildings are not designed to afford the desired uses for their occupants. Consequently, he transforms them through different contraptions and obtains spatial reconfigurations, working as a biting political and social critic of inefficient designs and urban planning. Through these contraptions, he explores imaginative and novel affordances that are ignored simply because they do not fit with normative use or social patterns. The correlation between space, user, and activity are crucial in order to understand Robinson's contraptions, in which affordances pertain to what the environment means for the actor.[45] All of the above informs our analysis of Robinson's new, ironic, nonsensical social critique.

w. h. robinson's operations

Due to the UK's accelerated modernisation and change in modes of living in the interwar period, conventional flats were converted into a number of smaller flats; the new layouts allowed five families to live where previously only one family lived.[46] Robinson and Browne stated that 'converted houses were never intended to be flats', a comparison between the large blocks of flats and 'utopian prisons or Armenian glue factories' fitted with every mechanical device possible to address the limited space available.[47] These flats were generally full of drawbacks, which, according to Robinson and Browne, 'were calculated to fray the tenants' nerves and make veins stand out on their foreheads.'[48]

Robinson's appreciation of the mental health of tenants, related to the new urbanism, its layouts, and its effect on the wellbeing of users, was also recorded by the Women House Managers Committee in official documents presented to the London Unhealthy Areas Committee in 1920.[49] The report reflected the system of large blocks of flats as depressing; they aggravated the lives of tenants, and were a source of difficulties in housing management. The report linked spatial issues

concerning the design of the new urbanism and these flats with a mental health concern.[50] Robinson's contraptions work as space-economising mechanical device solutions that respond to living conditions by multiplying the possibilities of space. The mechanical devices were meant to create new realities and actions through the combination and transformation of daily elements. Because spatial domesticity is socially and culturally classed, the contraptions created architectural paradoxes with the conventional model of living; each designed element communicated absurdity through its opposition to a regular spatial, cultural, and social experience (Figure 03). Robinson applied changes to the general layout, producing major modifications in people's behaviour. The illustrations included in the series 'Heath Robinson Patents for Doing Away with Servants' published in *The Sketch* magazine (1921) presented a range of contraptions to replace domestic servants in different rooms: the kitchen, the dining room, the drawing-room, and the bedroom.[51] Robinson reflected the political and economic issues that affected society while considering the concerns of the public and the design demands of the private realm.

The architectonic incongruity we can perceive in the drawings appears as a result of an unusual composition of semantic units used in architecture. It opens up the possibility of a new, creative understanding of space and uses, replacing the 'reality' with hilarious and, at some point, impractical solutions that reorganise the established and normative design. New, unusual objects and contraptions are used to generate new domesticities (Figures 03 and 04) in order to generate new spatial experiences that can be understood as an analogy of what architects do. In the book *How to Live in a Flat,* Robinson focused on parodies that took on conventions of popular domestic narratives as their targets. He contemplated the nature of reality and created a new method of solving an existing condition, sometimes breaking a rule by using a conventional or unconventional paradox in an attempt to create a solution through augmentation of the existing issue to make it more visible (Figure 04) — sometimes inventing unexpected uses based on conventional elements (Figure 03). The use of ironic images and terms draws attention to territory, history, language, materiality, and architectural issues. Robinson was capable of analysing the comic situations of daily life activities, as well as the historical transformation of society as a whole. The ironic text developed by Browne describes the events that usually occur in a non-conventional flat, illustrated by Robinson as a critic, as can be found in the book *How to Live in a Flat*. The text, together with the figures, can be seen as ironic symbols revealing the supposed benefits of the new minimal flats and way of living. However, they refer to just the opposite — the lack of space and the difficulties found there — which indicates the contradictions of the represented situation. The illustrations pay

attention to the lived experience by focusing on the inhabitants' actions to suggest new and unusual spatial possibilities comically. The performative solutions offer a narrative related to interiority spatial configurations with regard to adaptability and their capacity to accommodate users' changing and combining spatial needs (Figures 03 and 04). The illustrations exemplify satirical insights to overcome the challenges of modern life in which contraptions might be used to reorganise space.

In 'An Ideal Home Number V: The Spare Room' (Figure 03) the designed contraptions portray the use of adaptable and mechanical furniture to increase the use of the micro-apartment ironically.[52] The movement of ceilings (Figure 03) and partitions reveals several arrangements that are adaptable to the changing life requirements of adequate housing, such as gathering, dancing, sleeping, and reading, among other usual and unusual activities, confronting the distance between desire and disparity. The assemblage of the elements that create the contraptions exaggerates certain spatial qualities, intensifying the estrangement of lifestyle scenarios and capturing the playfulness of the inventions. The complicated contraptions are created to address simple tasks carried out by different participants in the scenes depicted in the illustrations (Figure 03). The users of the contraptions draw attention to the ambiguity of the strange actions and experiences that determine the traces and signs of their personal social status and lifestyle.

The graphical representation establishes evidence for the necessity of a contraption operator who alters the patterns of recurrent behaviour in relation to the specific social and domestic spatial settings where life takes place. The contraption mediates with others in the interaction, transforming the collective experience of space and expanding forms of spatial occupation. The occupants become a spatial catalyst, able to conceive new creative and imaginative ways of living that respond ironically to the specific spatial, urban, social, and cultural challenges of their time.

The complexity of impressions and the imperfection become signs of life, transforming the living space into an alternative reality able to locate the experience differently, changing concepts such as privacy and habitation through interventions and contraptions that illustrate how design embodies the new technological world. In 'The Fresh Air Parlour' (Figure 04), the extension made using materials not commonly used, like chromium-steel tubing, renders an imaginative space for action. A settled micro-apartment is transformed into a metamorphic apartment able to create new situations feigning the provision of more privacy and the illusion of comfort. The represented environments capture the simultaneity of social experiences, in which architecture acts as a stage. The depicted events portray different ways of experiencing urban life, presenting radical and alternative proposals where place and space are formed through social actions and relations.

Heath Robinson's interior fabulation depicted in 'An Ideal Home Number V: The Spare Room' (Figure 03) published in The Sketch (1933) portrays life linked to interiority and adaptability concepts. By including specific contraptions and mechanisms, Robinson offers a solution to solve the lack of interior space when a spare room is needed.
The illustration shows how servants are replaced by hydraulic mechanisms and contraptions, revealing economic and social issues experienced by the new medium class users. The irony of such economic and social connotations is immersed in the representation of this performative spatial interior by the representation of owners doing activities usually performed by servants.
Two plywood boards, in the form of movable structural floors, hang from the wall until the moment the spare room is needed. They configure the floor of the temporary spare room. The telescopic manual blower system uploads the boards enclosing the new room. The spare room is spatially organised through its furniture that is pulled up by a connected system of pulleys and ropes operated manually from wheels located symmetrically on the walls. The rope, looped over wheels, transmits movement and motion easily. Four wheels on each side are used to lift the bed together with the guest, reducing the force exerted to lift it. The action sets the new space configuration. Robinson included two system operators, a man and a woman, showing how easily the system performs when used by either gender. The room's furniture is completed by a nightstand (with a bottle of water and a glass), operated by a smaller system of pulleys from the wall on the back, and a chest of drawers and an alarm clock hanging from the ceiling permanently. Hanging from tubular horizontal rods, a curtain appears; the role of the curtain as a partition element creates different temporary settings within the same interior space.
Its ephemeral character manipulates the domestic interior and provides temporary arrangements and privacy. Curtains in this case take over the role of walls, creating a fictional intimate environment for guests. The solution is described as a brilliant idea that renders the possibility of entertaining in the smallest flat without the slightest difficulty.[53]
The image ironically indicates different modes of shaping the space that suggest different patterns of use and privacy.

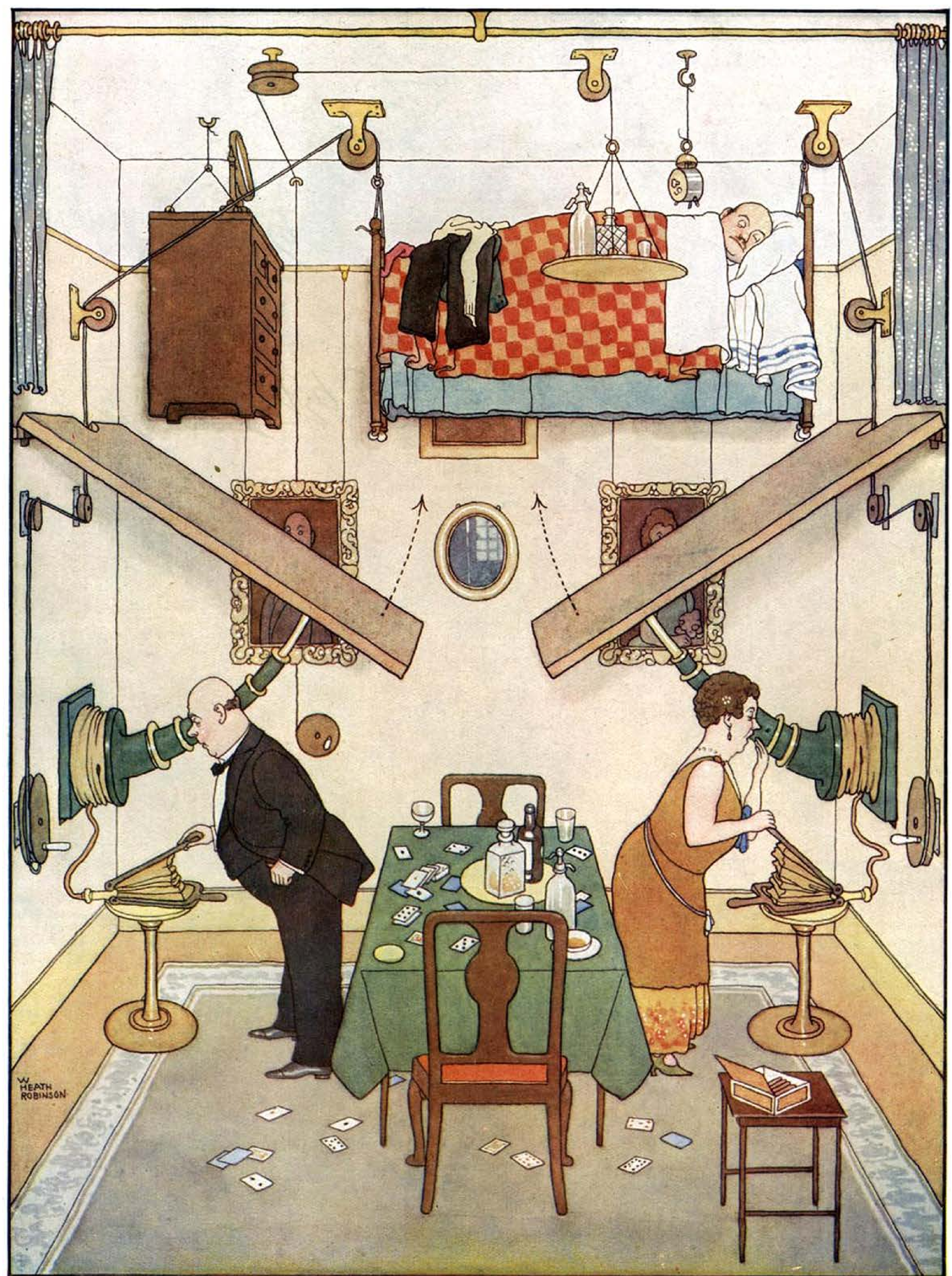


Figure 02.
Heath Robinson. 'An Ideal Home Number V: The Spare Room'. Published by *The Sketch*, London, 26 April 1933, 16. Photo © The Heath Robinson Museum, Pinner, UK.

In several illustrations included in the book How to Live in a Flat, Robinson depicts structural systems that create an outdoor extension of the apartments. The fictional extension palliates the high density of the new constructions and the residents' feeling of being constrained within their apartments. Areas of diverse use, such as leisure, greenery/gardens, pet houses, or children's rooms, are represented in these extensions.[54] In 'The Fresh Air Parlour' (1936) illustration (Figure 04), the interior atmosphere is recreated by the arrangement of objects and the users's performance. The creation of this new fictional interior space into the outdoor environment maximises the limited space available. 'The Fresh Air Parlour' fabulation is defined by a framed tubular structure projected from the wall that virtually encloses the new open room. The room acts as a mediator between enclosure and freedom. The decorative and domestic elements suspended from or strapped to poles, such as the small coffee table, a chair, the pictures and a clock, and the hanging window and the entrance door located on the building wall, immerse the user into the spatial fiction. The interpenetration of spatial structures in such images establishes a new relationship between the house and its exterior space, blurring the boundaries between indoor and outdoor, domesticity and privacy, leisure, pet playground, farming, and other unexpected activities. Robinson emphasises the idea of alternative accommodation arranged outside. The descriptive text that follows the image ironically mentions that:

> [...] pets and babies could be suspended in cages and cradles from stanchions attached to the exterior wall of the building; It keeps them out of sight when irascible old relatives drop in and encourage[s] balmy zephyrs to play on them in a very healing way.[55]

This idea of alternative accommodation that modifies the performance of users is also reflected in the illustration series 'An Ideal Home' Designs, which was published in 1933 in *The Sketch*. In this series, Robinson states that the alternative accommodation was designed for the supposed benefit of the readers.[56] The illustrations include ironic sketches 'showing folding gardens for flat dwellers with a love of open-air life, with the intention to appeal to all householders who like to enjoy rustic amenities in an urban setting.'[57] The sketches present a critique of the absence of green areas and leisure spaces in new constructions, revealing its inconvenience for occupants.

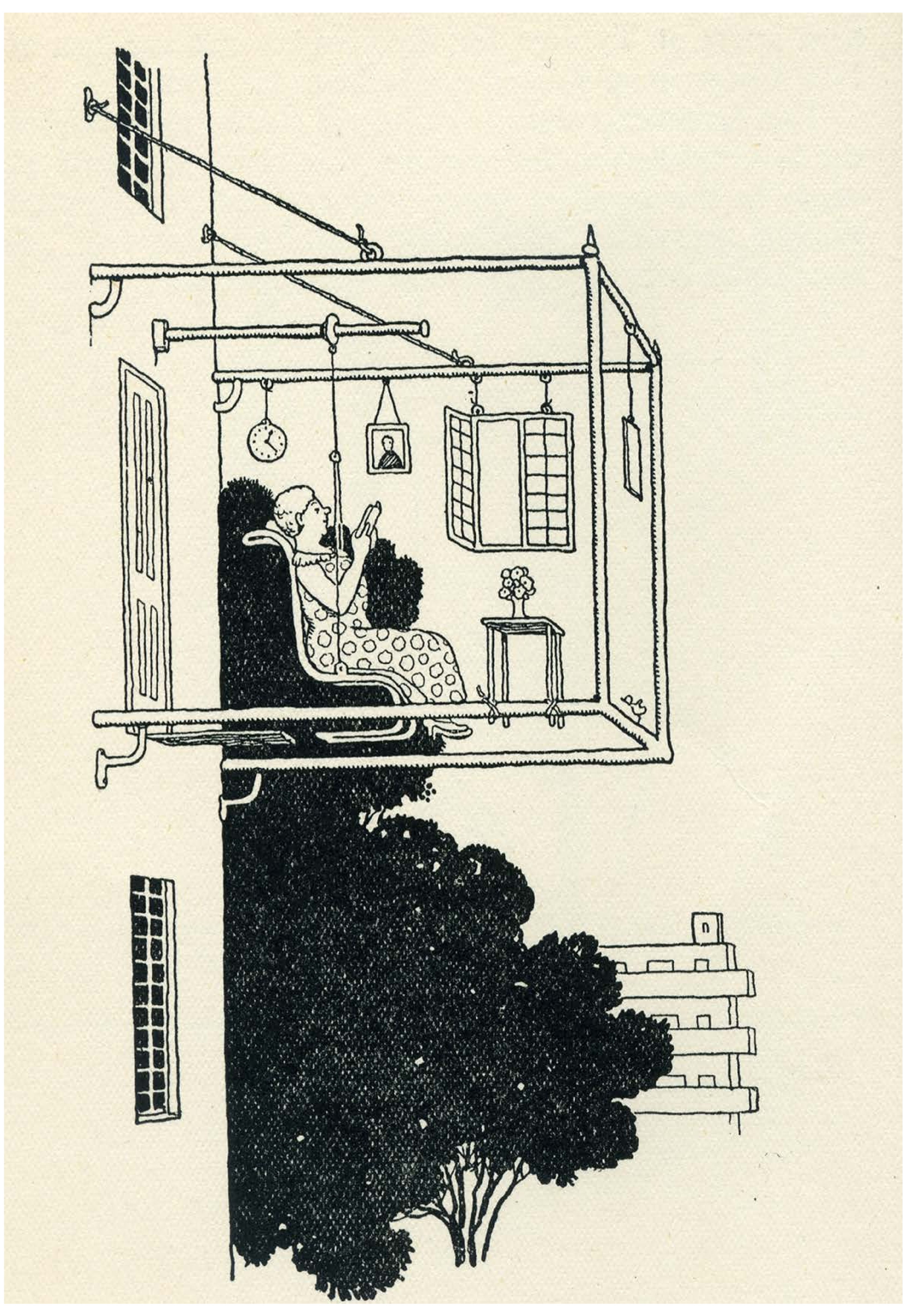
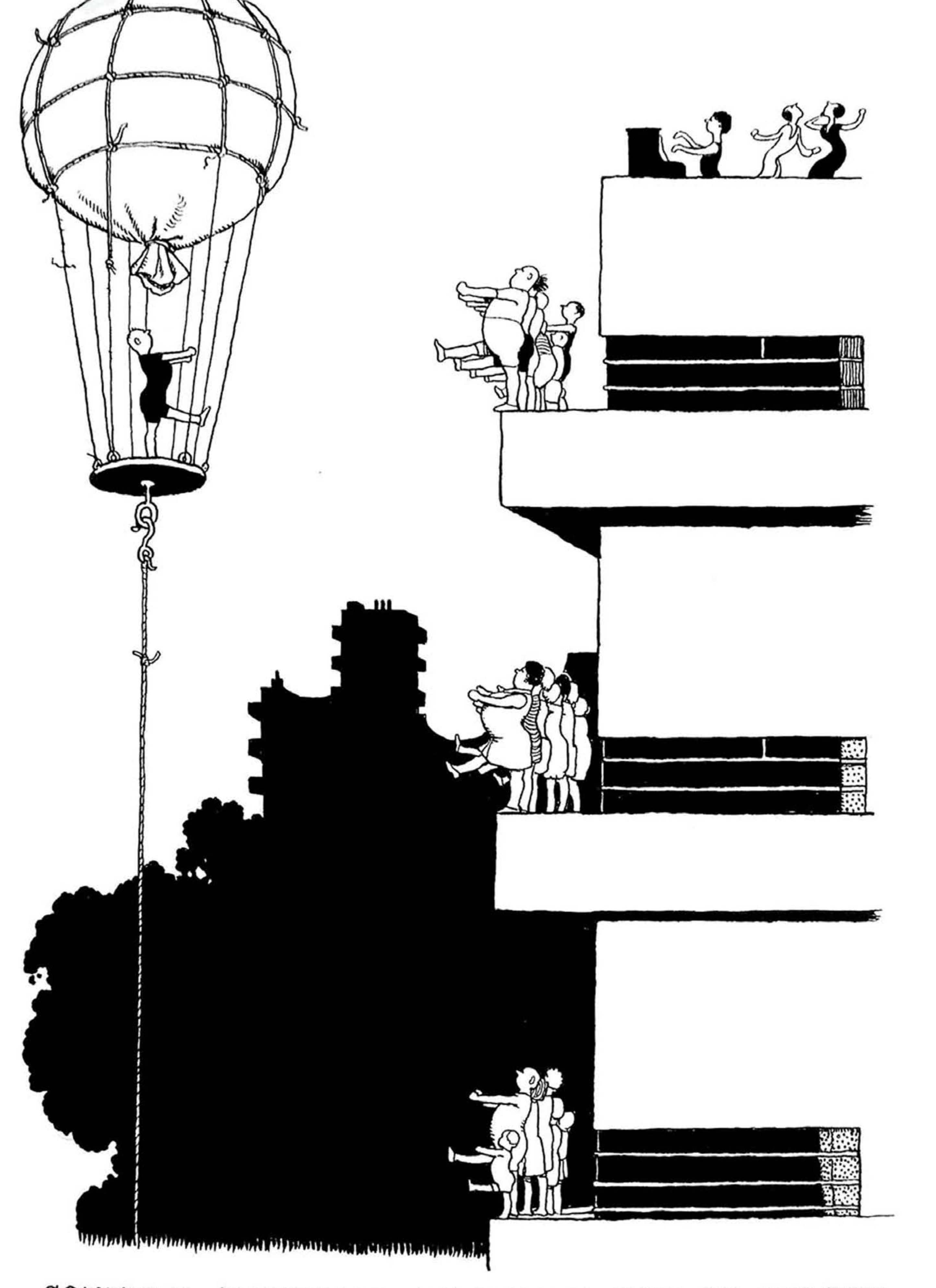


Figure 04.
Heath Robinson. 'The Fresh Air Parlour', 1936. Photo © The Heath Robinson Museum, Pinner, UK.

The balconies and terraces are elements graphically reconceptualised in terms of use and ownership of private areas. A terrace is structurally able to support heavy weights; therefore, it could be transformed into a bathing pool, where the residents can enjoy themselves.[58] Here, Robinson and Browne posit the importance of sport, social amenities, and relaxation to ensure the wellbeing of dwellers. They note that the man who does not occasionally relax is liable to crack under the strain of modern life, again criticising the new way of living, the lack of leisure and recreation areas around new buildings, and the unplanned urbanism that did not consider people and their wellbeing.[59] Terraces and roofs could therefore house new activities to palliate these shortcomings. The illustrations show the possibility of reconsidering the use of existing private and public areas and depict the affordance of social interaction. Games, as a social activity that encourages social communication, are adopted to justify the creation of new venues in these existing spaces. This operation offers the possibility of housing sports areas and communal social amenities, creating new ironic ecosystems that would directly affect the wellbeing of users without taking into consideration the safety performance incongruence (Figure 05) (the trainer on a platform held by a balloon and families on the edge of the terrace handrail).[60] The depiction ironically portrays the phenomenological relation between people and nature taking place in terraces as an extension of the urban context in which families and neighbours meet to do sports. When human interaction is restricted by urban planning and other socio-political authorities, people create new venues that are able to house those interpersonal relations and interactions, areas that could satisfy some of the requirements that public spaces naturally offer, such as the need for contact, knowledge, play, and stimulation.[61]

Figure 05.
Heath Robinson. 'Communal Eurythmics', 1936. Photo © The Heath Robinson Museum, Pinner, UK.



from contraptions to spatial transformations

Literature and illustration offer a place for imagination and the transformation of conventional living patterns. Humorous parodic narratives, irony, and absurdity provide a playful space to critically reflect on the design practice, exposing the inadequacies of design and offering a space for criticism, creativity, and experimentation. Humour as social critique tool is usually inspired by the gaps between social conventions, codes, and preconceived ideas; its narrative oscillates between the frames of reality and fiction, providing a creative atmosphere and alternative narratives capable of opening up a space for debate, criticism, and reflection. Humour and the representation of absurdity offer designers and architects the opportunity to direct attention to social, economic, and urban issues. Humour, absurdity, and irony could be expanded as critical mechanisms for experimentation to address spatial issues from multiple perspectives without the spatial constraints of conventional approaches.

Through irony, humour, and absurdity, Robinson's book *How to Live in a Flat* (1939) exemplifies the relationship between words and visuals to criticise modernism and the efficiency of the machine. Considering that interior representations are linked to culture, gender, labour, and power, Robinson's spatial explorations offer special visual attention to the issues he wants to highlight by engaging directly with the reader's imagination. The multiple spatial alternatives proposed in Robinson's depictions exemplify the imaginative use of drawings to inspire contemporary arrangements. Offering access to fictional occurrences and artefacts, the depicted humorous fabulation could be contextually interpreted to solve real situations. The information provided by these illustrations allows us to respond to new arrangements creatively.

The existing housing stock of the time did not meet the criteria of space, wellbeing, functionality, aesthetics, and flexibility required by the new middle class users. Houses could not be reshaped quickly to respect health standards or make it a more pleasant stay at home. The small apartments designed within multi-storey buildings, without spaces for recreation or social life, meant a family spent little time at home. Nowadays, the housing stock is experiencing similar issues. Understanding that the home is the primary space for resting and recreational requirements related to personal/family daily activities such as having lunch or dinner, meeting, and playing, as well as spaces dedicated to work, suggests that new models of action should be based on multifunctional and adaptable spaces, where rooms should be configurable depending on their purposes through using movable components. The dimensions of space and the quality of the dwelling must be questioned, becoming

laboratories for resilience, in which home should be conceived as integrated living, working, and leisure areas related to user needs. As geographer Edward Relph states:

> The basic meaning of place, its essence, does not, therefore, come from locations, nor from the trivial functions that places serve, nor from the community that occupies it, nor from superficial or mundane experiences. [...] The essence of a place lies in the largely unselfconscious intentionality that defines places as profound centres of human existence.[62]

Robinson's creativity, humour, and irony could be used as a conceptual trigger to overcome difficulties related to human behaviour and spatial transformation. The communicative potential of Robinson's fabulations portrays a fiction centred on human experience that demonstrates self-sufficient buildings and new models of action that can be conceptually applied to the existing housing stock.
The drawings critically illustrate spatial issues but offer the possibility of considering alternative spaces that escape from the seriousness of the design practice. The illustrations could be read contemporarily, representing key qualities that advocate shaping and rearranging spaces, which multiply interior layout and user expectations, offering new possibilities of habitation.

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Guillermo Sánchez Sotés is a Madrid-based chartered architect who graduated in 2016 from CEU San Pablo University. Since then, he has obtained multiple scholarships and been granted funds to enrol in research and teaching at different universities while collaborating with various international architectural firms such as Izaskun Chinchilla Architects. He is also the co-founding partner of the design studio Chubby Lab, where he and his team work at the intersection of culture, technology, and research across multiple disciplines. He is currently pursuing his doctoral studies, investigating the interrelationship of natural sciences and architectural theories at Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University.

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whakapapa plotting: an aotearoa-specific method of spatial communication

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abstract

Aotearoa New Zealand has a rich history of pre-colonial architectural design embedded in Indigenous Māori knowledge — a unique oceanic cultural spatial sensibility. Whenua (land) activates a metaphysical exchange between people, ocean, and atmosphere to grow the spatial sensibility into an intangible interconnected blueprint for design.

Despite possessing a vast body of environment-specific knowledge embedded in centuries of experience, the dynamic spirit of existing Māori architecture stands in sharp contrast to the hermetic design systems brought ashore during the nineteenth-century British colonisation of Aotearoa that inhibited further development of our Māori spatial kaupapa (approach).

How can Aotearoa designers uphold the mana (prestige) of Māori cultural spatial sensibilities when designing within the dominant Pākēha (New Zealand European) industry today?

This visual essay has been created from the perspective of a Māori spatial designer. It foregrounds the need for all Aotearoa designers to honour the philosophical spatial mātauranga (knowledge) crafted by our tīpuna (ancestors). We have a responsibility to breathe life into these skills so our tamariki (children) can thrive in spatial environments without Indigenous erasure.

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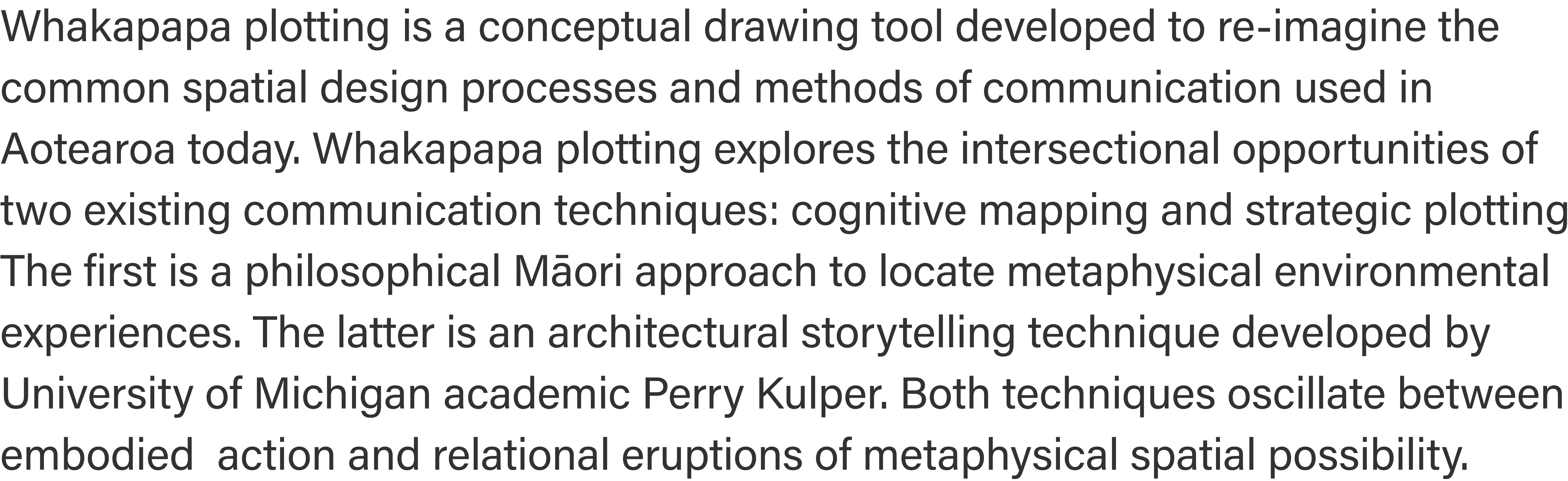
keywords:
drawing; spatial design; Māori; whakapapa; visualisation



Whakapapa plotting is a conceptual drawing tool developed to re-imagine the common spatial design processes and methods of communication used in Aotearoa today. Whakapapa plotting explores the intersectional opportunities of two existing communication techniques: cognitive mapping and strategic plotting. The first is a philosophical Māori approach to locate metaphysical environmental experiences. The latter is an architectural storytelling technique developed by University of Michigan academic Perry Kulper. Both techniques oscillate between embodied action and relational eruptions of metaphysical spatial possibility.

Whakapapa Plots manifest as a metanarrative of design codes visualising potential spatial sequences of lived and possible fantastical space: a koha (gift) of speculative cartography to provide foundation for all subsequent design decisions. They symbolise a commitment that the designer will stretch beyond the confines of Western design systems to protect and preserve mātauranga Māori within every thread of the design process.

pepeha[01]

Ko Aoraki te maunga
Ko Waitaki te awa
Ko Ngāi Tahu te iwi
Ko Ngāi Te Ruahikihiki te hapū
Nō Ōtautahi ahau
Ko Stokes tōku ingoa whānau
Ko Georgina Mary tōku ingoa

kia ora e hoa; hello my friend

Before I introduce you to our Whakapapa Plots, it is essential that you understand the whakapapa (genealogy) behind the nexuses of energy, traces of action, and murmurs of potential relationships they depict in response to the core question of this visual essay:

How can Aotearoa designers decolonise the design process to uphold and strengthen Māoritanga (Māori culture) in our everyday built environment?

Mātauranga[02] Māori knowledge of space is founded upon relationships between the 'natural, spiritual and cultural landscape, and the dynamic movement in between' to form the fields in which Aotearoa cultural spatial sensibilities are manifested.[03] As a core element of Mātauranga, whakapapa can be described as an imprint of all tangible and intangible layers of the past that influence our future[04] — from these marks we can identify who we are, where we began and how we experience the world.[05] Mātauranga specific

to space and interconnected with whakapapa have been passed through generations of tīpuna by way of pūrākau (philosophical narratives). Pūrākau attending to space often express complex intimate phenomenological relationships between tangata (people) and te taiao (the environment) to inspire further learning and experience of the values and frameworks ingrained in Māoritanga. The process of sharing spatial knowledge by weaving narratives of people, space, time, and culture together to sustain a distinctive Aotearoa web of belonging leads to whakapapa as an essential spatial entity at the centre of all Māori design decision making.

The preservation of historical Māori cultural spatial sensibilities in the built environment can only be realised after a meticulous process of translating whakapapa into sequences of movement is undertaken by attending to tikanga — a set of customs and values shaped over many generations in response to socio-cultural contexts.[06] If whakapapa frames the approach to the conceptual design, tikanga will help to lay out the steps to embed the spatial information in physical space. Māori mastery of behavioural spatial flow to develop spatial tikanga stems from the historical process of constructing imagined maps of potential space and relational whakapapa before anything physical is established — cultural cognitive mapping.[07]

Early evidence of this method is exemplified through our ancestors' knowledge gained by travelling the ocean in their waka (canoes). Over time, the compositional fluidity between weather, structure, interior, and exterior of a waka was developed as an 'essential memory blueprint [tikanga] for all subsequent Māori architecture,'[08] namely, the wharenui (meeting house). The human inclination to make connections between symbols, materials, volumes, and memory guides an individual's interpretation of the space's sensibility. For example, the chronology of your movement in a wharenui is strategically activated by the spatial sensibilities that encourage you to 'enter, greet, eat, meet in that order [...] you know where to go, what to do, how to behave and what to do next.'[09]

Visual communication of cognitive mapping preserved from 1793 shows an early brush between Māori and British spatial communication techniques.[10] Twenty-four years previously, British Captain James Cook travelled to survey the geographical qualities of Aotearoa using traditional western cartographic mapping techniques. This pursuit of information gathering for the purposes of colonisation sparked further British attempts to study Aotearoa geography in the decades that followed. As a result, Northland Māori chiefs Tuki Tahua and Ngahuruhuru were detained for the purposes of sharing their intimate knowledge of the land by providing the colonisers a detailed map of Aotearoa coastlines.[11] While it was presumed similar

Western cartographic techniques to document physical terrain used by Cook would be conformed to, Tuki instead called on his whakapapa and delineated a complex plot transcending space and time, 'a subjective distortion of scale favouring [Tuki's] local area [...] this also illustrates the primacy of experienced time in traversal of the landscape rather than the objectification of space.'[12] Perhaps most compelling is a large track down the centre of te Ika-a-Māui (the North Island) depicting a spiritual path of energy — acknowledging the whakapapa of tīpuna whose mauri (life force) continues to live within the whenua through cultural spatial sensibilities. The visual documentation of Tuki's knowledge of the tangible land interwoven with intangible experience within Western cartographic frameworks was a significant moment in the cross-cultural comprehension of divergent spatial worldviews.

Māori academic Dr Rebecca Kiddle has spoken of many historical attempts to strengthen Tuki's extraordinary communication of spatial whakapapa and protect the valuable mātauranga of Māori spatial visual communication; however, dominating Western forces in Aotearoa determined the visualisations of our environments were 'grounded in Captain Cook's cartographic pen lines, not Tuki's ever since.'[13]

How can we learn from our tīpuna and invite whakapapa into the ink of our pens, the pixels on our screens, when communicating space? How can we uphold the mana of Tuki and preserve historical Māori cultural spatial sensibilities within the dominant Western design systems of Aotearoa today?

'Kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua; I walk backwards into the future with my eyes fixed on the past.'[14]

e noho; sit down

Despite our mātauranga telling us we need to stand still and listen to the whakapapa of our sites, our Westernised design systems put higher value on productivity and consistency, overriding the time needed for Māori design processes to breathe.[15] In response, this creative work seeks to re-imagine a kaupapa Māori approach to speculative cartography as a method of design communication that acknowledges the past before uniting knowledge of Māori and Pākēha in a safe way to design future spaces.

In this context, speculative cartography can be described as a mapping design method deployed to graphically record ephemeral relationships between phenomena. Derived from a critique of traditional Western architectural presentation drawing, speculative cartography is attuned to the potential of space within and around orthographic lines — where space for connections and 'ability to merge social, contextual, cultural

and mythological references with personal experience and intuition' are given life.[16] Physical space becomes secondary to the metanarrative of influence uniting relational phenomena entangled in the history and experience of space; 'the map is no longer based on an ontological, comprehensible reality but exists [...] between that which can be represented and that which will always be outside of representation.'[17]

Perry Kulper is an architectural academic from the University of Michigan who uses speculative cartography as a mode to critique the conceptual design restrictions and cultural power imbalances of design communication within traditional Western techniques. Kulper believes all designs must begin by gathering threads of relational matter, then delicately sewing them together to weave the 'metaphorical space from which a design brief is constructed.'[18] Kulper subsequently developed a method of speculative cartography dubbed 'strategic plotting'[19] to conduct complex expressions of possible space. Strategic plots are composed from a concoction of lines, found imagery, text, drawing conventions, and timeframes to express fields of potential spatial experiences deeply embedded in the past.

Site-specific histories, metaphors of fluctuating theoretical space, and tidal material conditions become part of the symphony of movement visualised in a Kulper plot. Respect is given to all relational matter, as he believes that time and creative vision should have higher value than drawing conventions because, 'unlike the language of [Western] architecture, the language of representation positions material as conceptual, temporality as malleable and gravity as negotiable.'[20] A Kulper plot has the sustenance to draw the viewer through dark maritime histories, into the corner of museums, and back under the light of the moon to deliver a highly conceptual proposition of what the next design step could be.

Tidal fluctuations of changing conditions and scores of subjective experiences enabled by the fluidity of speculative cartography (specifically strategic plotting) draw thoughtful threads of cross-cultural communication between Western and Māori approaches to designing space. Such a multi-varied approach to visualising the relationships between matter offers the designer the ability to traverse between space and time in a technique comparable to Tuki Tahua in 1793; it upholds the mana of our Māori cultural spatial sensibilities within a western frame.

How can we ensure the layers of our history, and codified systems of space and atmosphere rooted in our whakapapa are empowered within speculative cartography to visually guide the design of future space in Aotearoa today?

haere mai ki te whakapapa plots; welcome to whakapapa plots

A Whakapapa Plot is a visual ensemble of relational cultural–spatial thinking corresponding to an Aotearoa-based design site. Plots have infinite possibilities for representation; the outcome is deeply embedded within the spatial powers of the composer eliminating 'representational borders with the hope of sustaining a more fluid ideological, critical material amalgamation [of ideas].'[21] Alive with whakapapa, these plots will catapult a conceptual design into the cosmos of non-architectural material to expand beyond tangible environments into metaphysical space.

The Whakapapa Plots you will encounter in this visual essay are situated at two active design sites in Ōtautahi (Christchurch). These plots offer conversation between meta- and micronarratives in accordance with site context, design subject matter, and local iwi (tribe) gifted pūrākau to ensure mātauranga is respected throughout all design process decisions.

The first set of plots are in relation to Paparoa Street School. Under the esteemed guidance of Mātauraka Mahaanui,[22] Paparoa Street School is currently learning from a mātauranga-based framework to re-think the cultural spatial sensibilities of their future learning spaces. The Paparoa community have embraced te ao Māori to ensure all tamariki (children) have space to explore their collective whakapapa and contribute to the layers of living for generations to come.[23]

Paparoa tamakiri have been given the responsibility of growing Aotearoa-specific design ideas for new school spaces. From listening and learning to their bursting, aroha (love) filled proposals, upholding the mana of the whenua, a series of Whakapapa Plots was born in response; they are still in production but swimming with potential.

Whakapapa Plots 02, 04, and 09 are a koha to Paparoa Street School. The drawings render connections between site-specific historical swamplands bustling with native growth, ka Tiritiri-o-te-Moana (the Southern Alps) whisking birdsong within the southwest wind, and unified streams flowing to deliver sustenance for action. The Paparoa plots form a visual language that can be unravelled and explored by involved architectural teams to support a design offering that respects and nourishes our kaupapa and Paparoa's whakapapa.

Paparoa Plots work together in the wider Ōtautahi context to frame the speculative plotting of the second site, Workplace Toru. Located on the Ōtakaro Awa *(*Avon River) edge, Workplace Toru is an existing space of residence for government kaimahi (workers). The current space has been designed to fit within the instructive box of 'The New Zealand Principles for Office Design,'[24] a compulsory

design code developed by the New Zealand Government to prescribe flexibility, uniformity, and cohesion as essential components in the spatial design formula of an Aotearoa workplace. A critique of this approach through a mātauranga lens forms the metanarrative of Workplace Toru Whakapapa Plots, questioning the absence of Māoritanga within these spaces. Whakapapa Plots 01, 03, 05, 06, 07, and 08 offer a speculative redefinition of Workplace Toru with greater respect to our Māori kaupapa — our values, culture, and sense of place by inviting and celebrating whakapapa through relationships of spatial tikanga in the interior space. Workplace Toru now lives with possibilities for archives of energy, rituals of exchange, flows of oceanic action, and divergent atmospheric conditions.

a whakapapa plot translation guide

The Whakapapa Plots you will encounter and perhaps befriend in this work have many lives as they morph within the eyes of each viewer. Yet, each plot is embedded within the mind of the composer, the facilitator of spatial dialogue. They are not meant to be solved or analysed — they can only be experienced and interpreted through your lens as a way to light your imagination.

Please remember, Whakapapa Plots belong to our Māori whakapapa; give them time and space to breathe.

Whakapapa Plots are polyvocal. They empower many voices to converge within one visual field. The nine plots in this series invite you to enter inside the speculative metanarrative of Ōtautahi and journey through a series of plan, section, elevation, and experiential perspectival drawings of Paparoa Street School and Workplace Toru until the moment we might physically arrive facing the whenua with our feet touching the soil.

Each plot varies in scale and density; each page tends to a larger image that encapsulates the entire Whakapapa Plot accompanied by micro narrative fragments peppered above in smaller squares. The codified sequences reveal complexities of space and time within the generative spatial relationships.

The order of Whakapapa Plot experience moves back and forth between Paparoa Street School and Workplace Toru — the interpretive rhythm of their findings operate together to protect and sustain mātauranga Māori.

Once you have journeyed through all nine plots, the greater metanarrative will emerge.

'Āe, mārika kua tae mai koutou; yes, you have indeed arrived.'[25]

acknowledgements

I am filled with gratitude to the many people who gifted me with the support, knowledge, and dreams to create this work. I acknowledge and thank my tīpuna especially. Ngā mihi nui ki a koutou. Mei kore ake koe!

author biography

Georgina Stokes (Ngāi Tahu) is a spatial designer and educator in Pōneke Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand. Her creative practice is centred around the visualisation of mātauranga Māori systems of cultural spatial sensibility and waiora: questioning how our built environment can better protect and care for our Indigenous values, culture, tradition, environment, and sense of place.

Figures.
All imagery by the author.
Georgina Stokes, *Workplace Toru Whakapapa Plots*, digital drawing, 2022.

Georgina Stokes, 'Paparoa Street Whakapapa Plots', digital drawing (Master's exegesis: Aroha ki ō tātou kaimahi, Massey University, 2020). <http://ezproxy.massey.ac.nz/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/ogin.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=cat09011a&AN=mul.oai.edge.massey.folio.ebsco.com.fs00001086.c8da646d.23ff.560a.853d.19e036fcc7ab&site=eds-live&scope=site&authtype=sso&custid=s3027306>.

notes

01 In te reo Māori, a pepeha is a way of introducing yourself and your whakapapa, ancestry, and history <https://pepeha.nz/> [accessed 11 July 2022].

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15 Te Maire Tau and others, *Grand Narratives* (Christchurch: Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority, 2016), p. 15.

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17 Artomity Magazine, 'Speculative Cartography' (2017), para. 3 <https://artomity.art/2017/06/28/speculative-cartography/> [accessed 11 July 2022].

18 Aarati Kanekar, *Spaces of Representation: The Generative Maps of Perry Kulper and Smout Allen* (Oxford: Routledge, 2015), p. 117.

19 Kanekar, *Spaces of Representation*, p. 117.

20 Perry Kulper, *Bartlett International Lecture Series* (Bartlett School of Architecture London: Vimeo, 2018), 09:17–15:00 <https://vimeo.com/300533258> [accessed 11 July 2022].

21 Kanekar, *Spaces of Representation*, p. 117.

22 Mātauraka Mahaanui is the Ngāi Tahu advisory board developed to support schools through re-builds <https://tan-squid-3kg4.squarespace.com/about> [accessed 11 July 2022].

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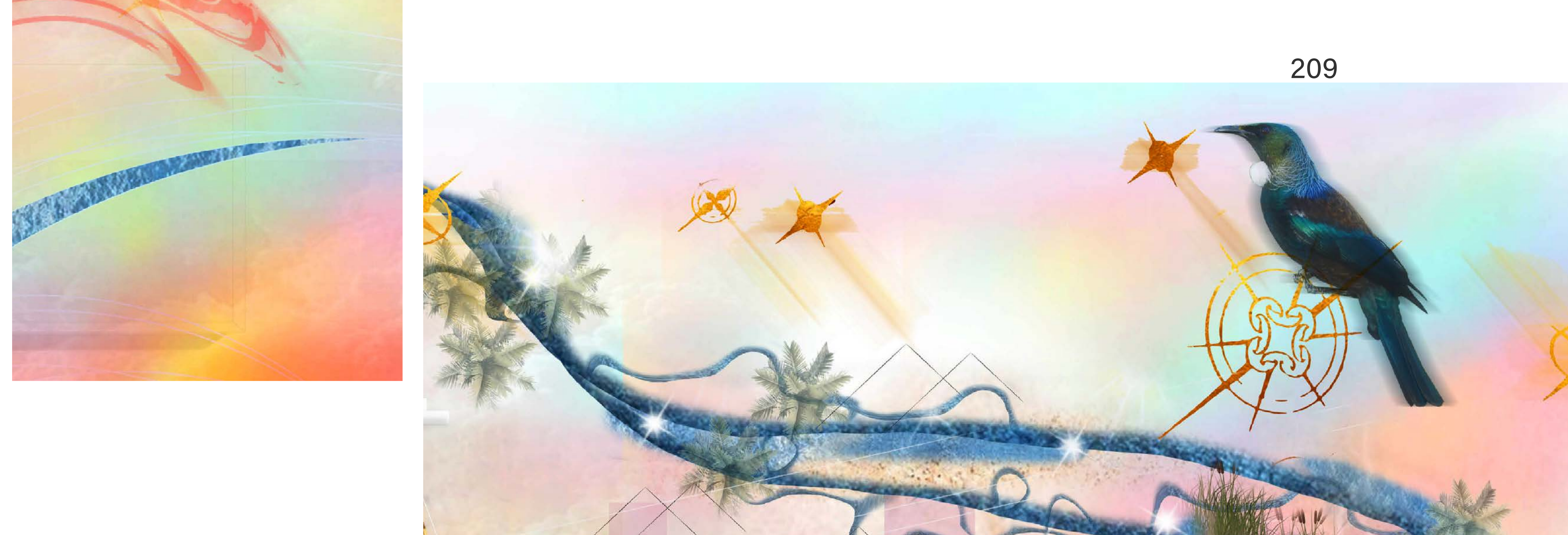

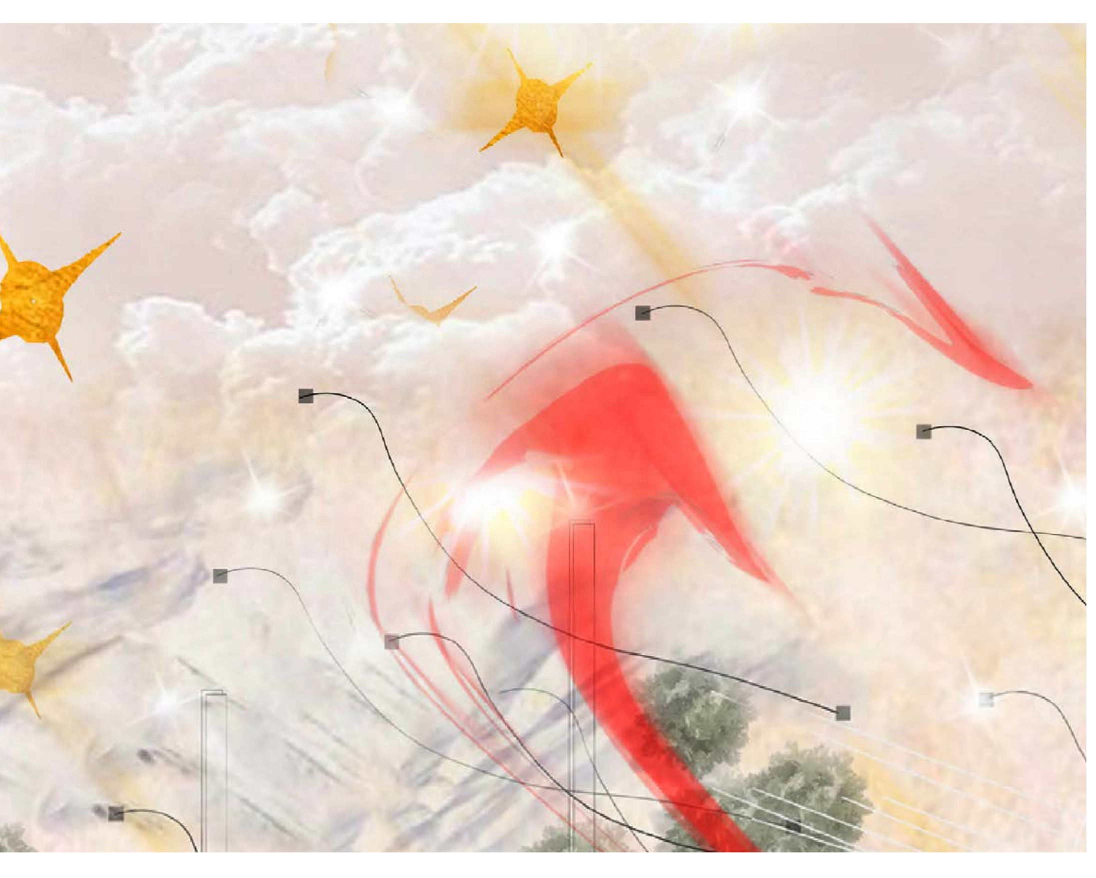

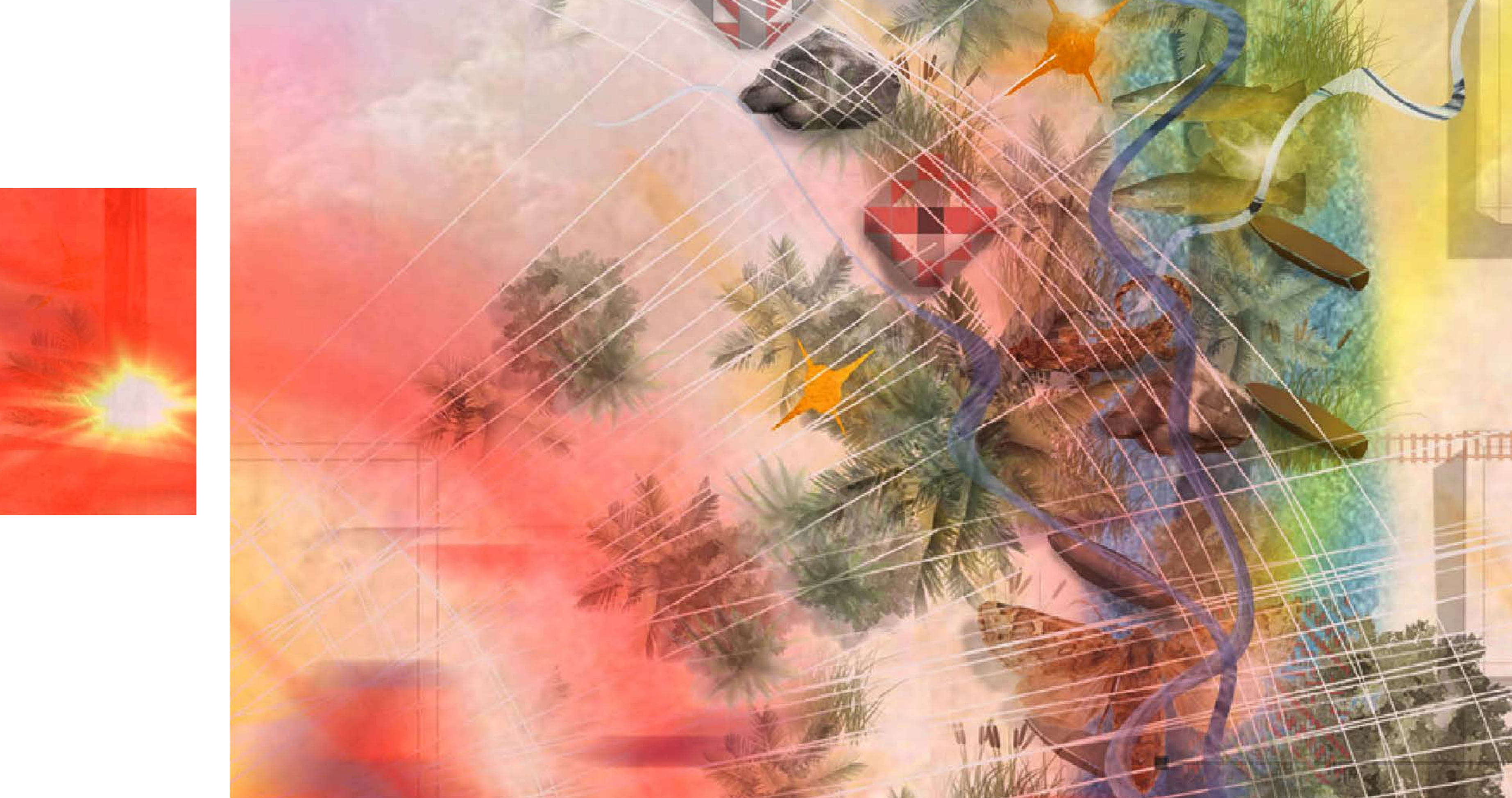

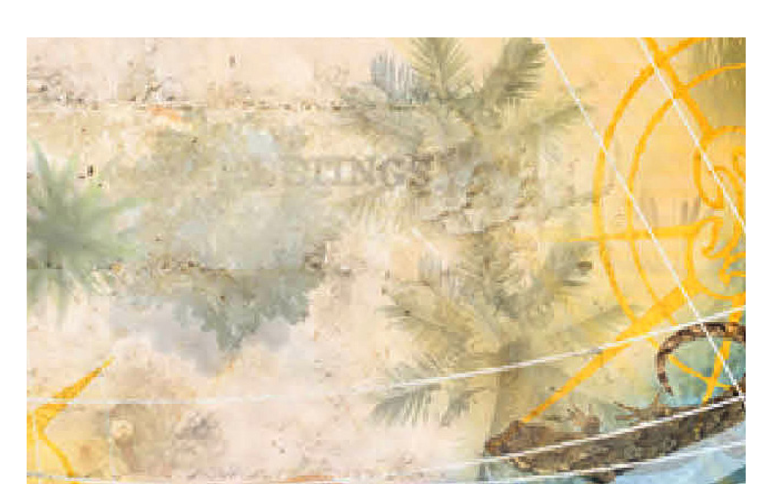

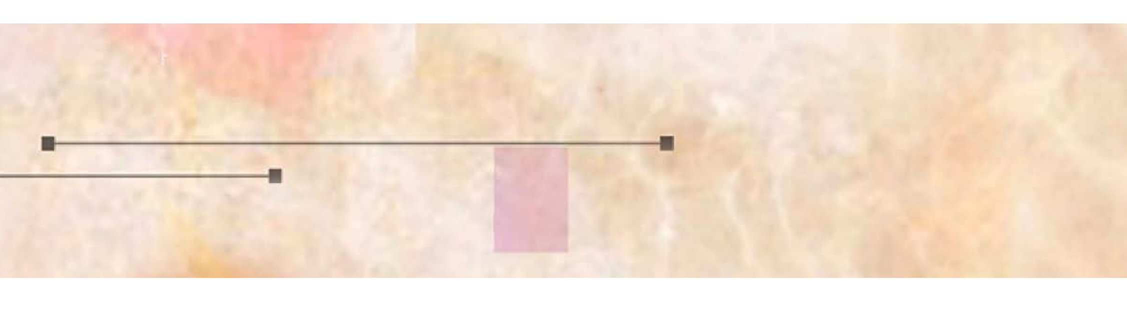

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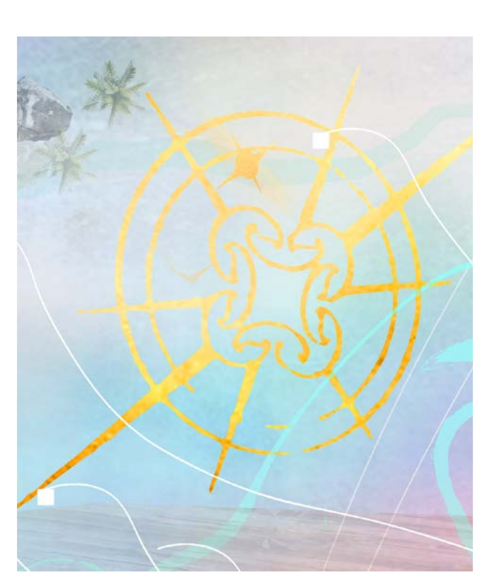
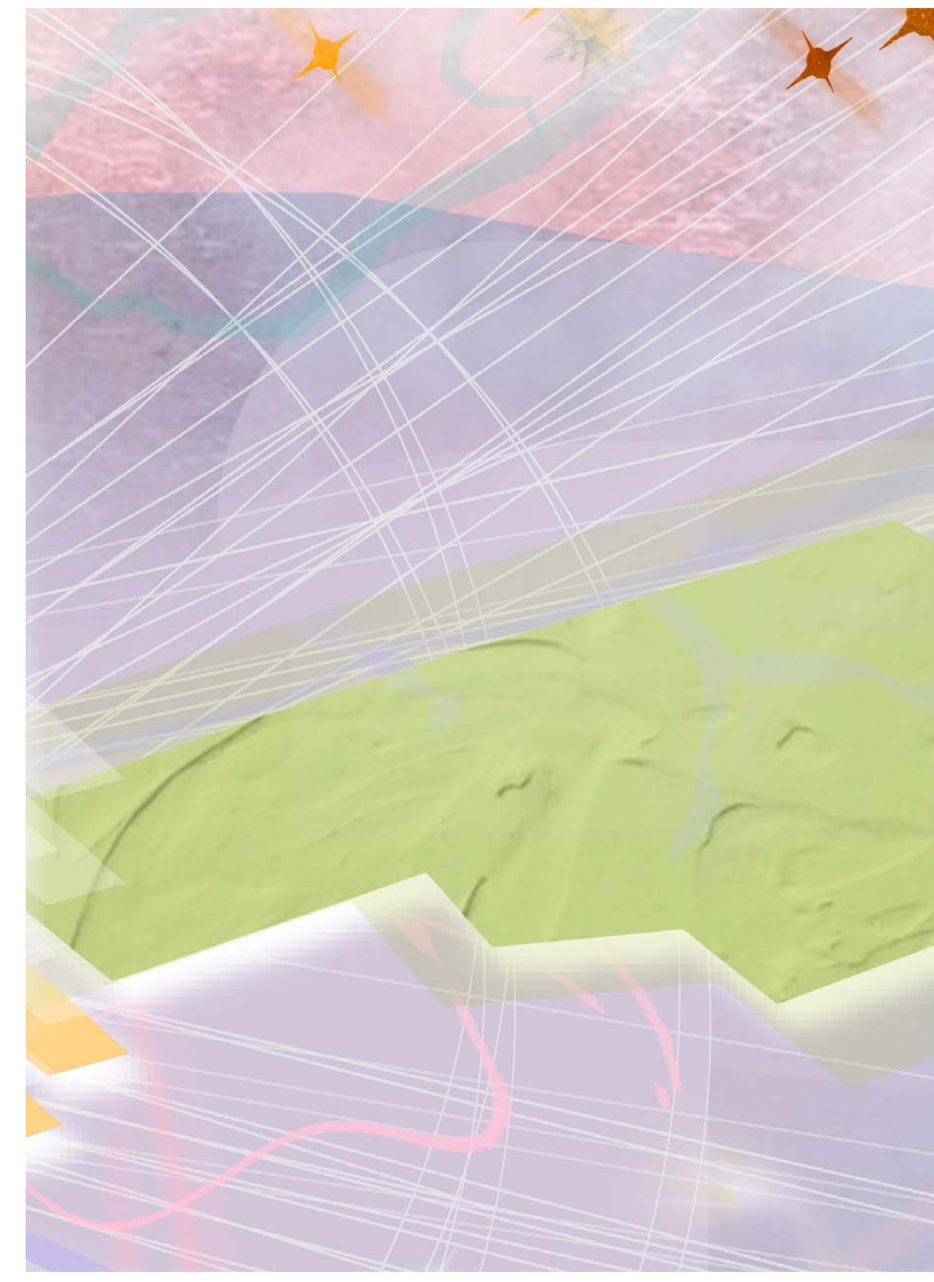
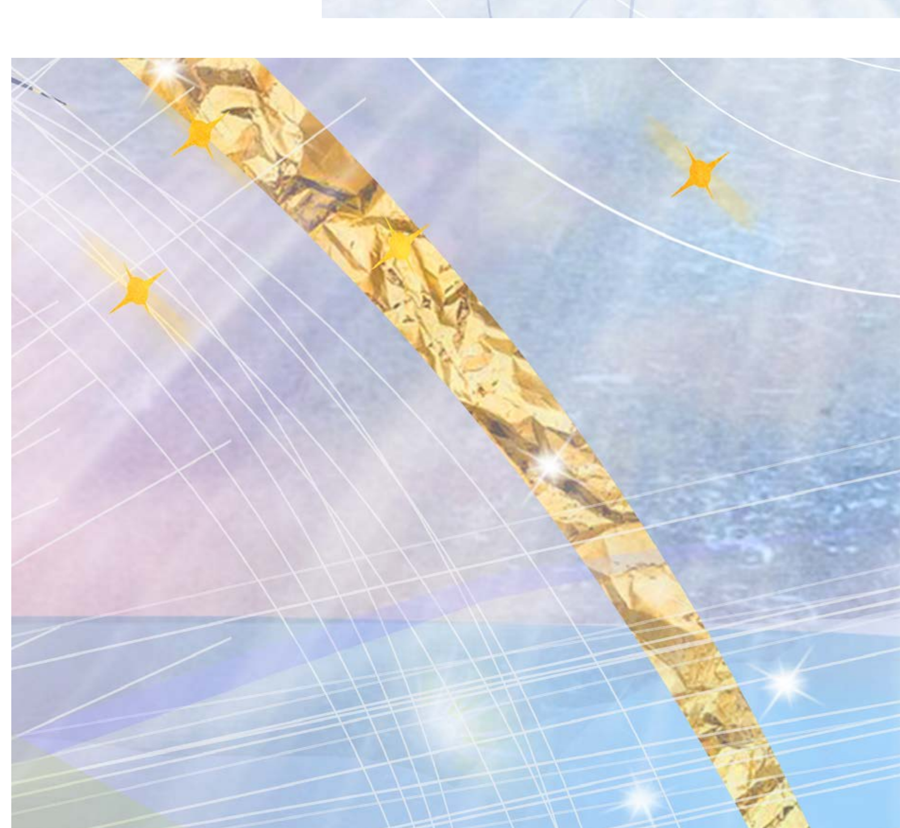
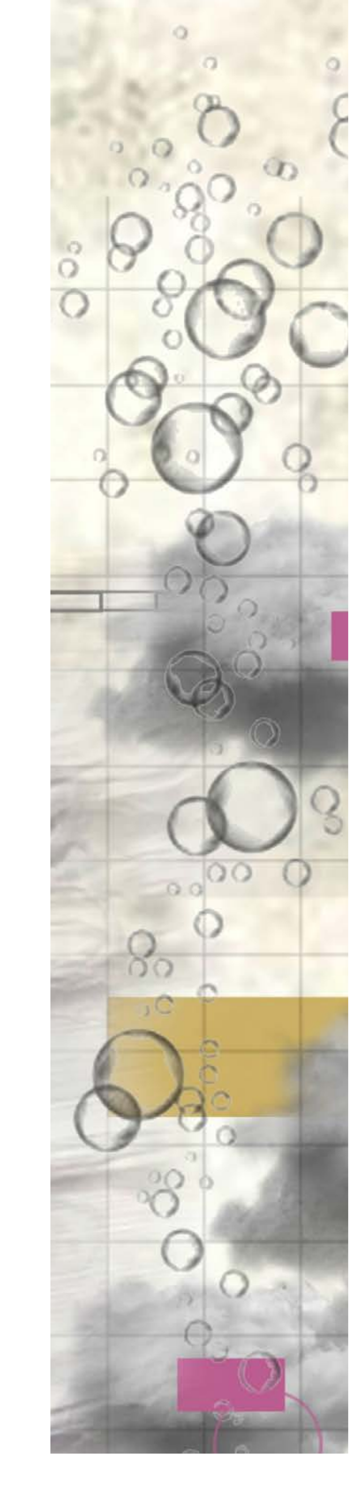


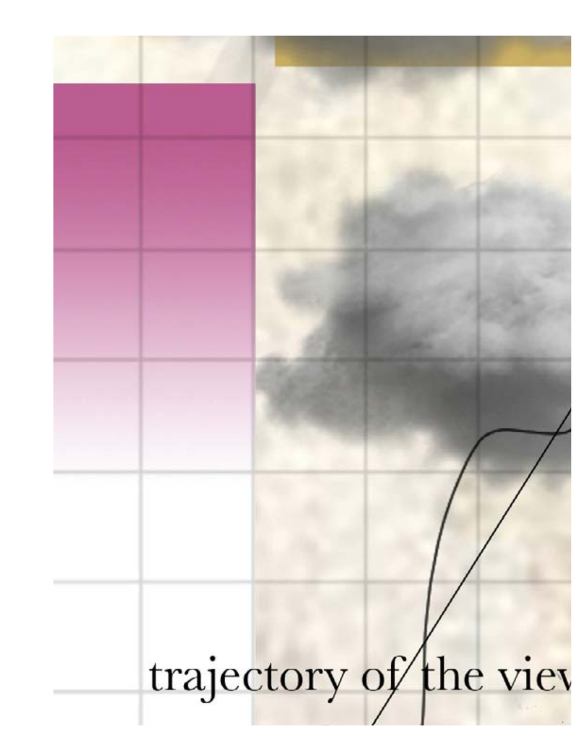


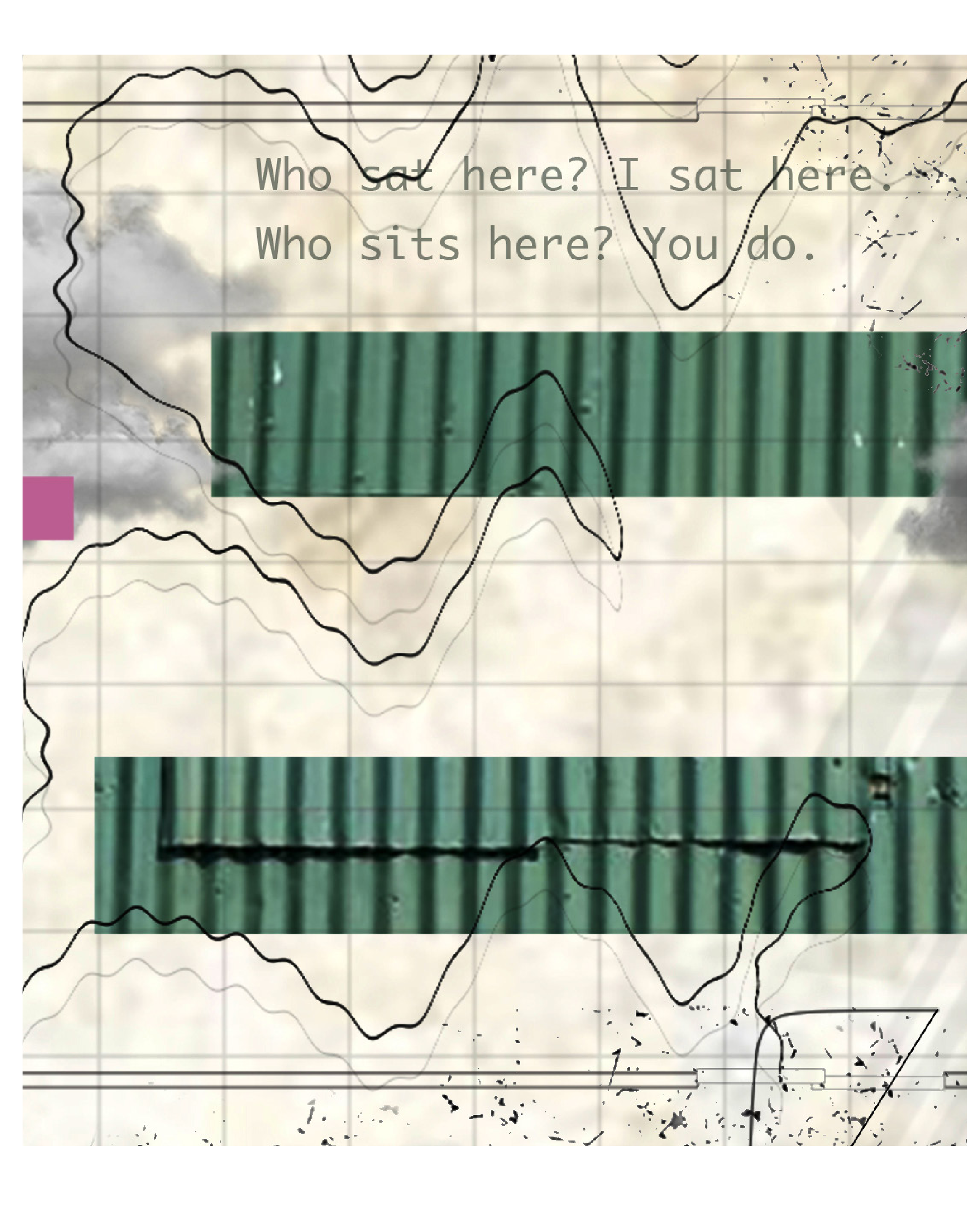


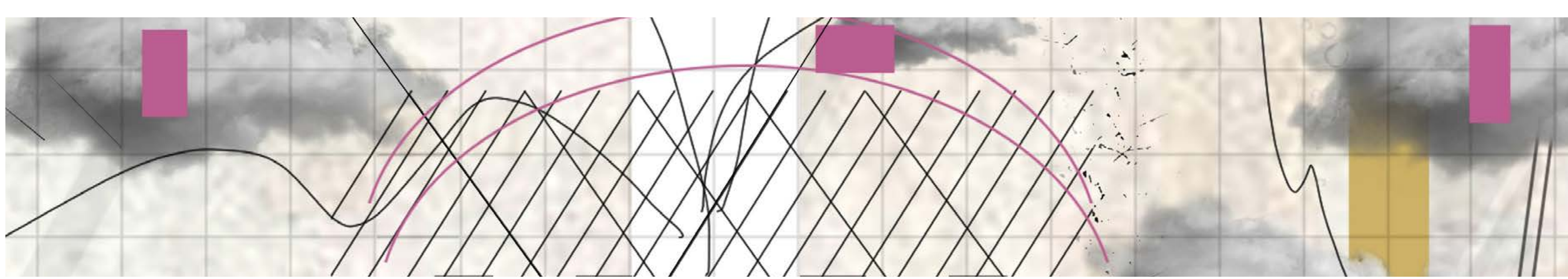
E rere kau mai te awa nei,
mai i te Tiritiri ki Takaroa

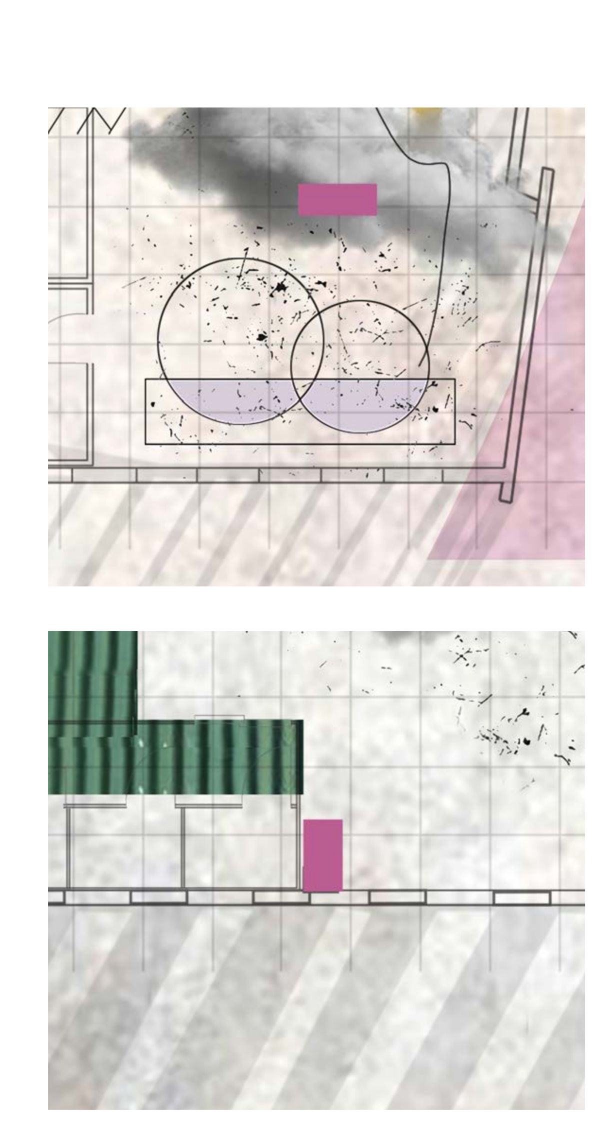
PAPAROA











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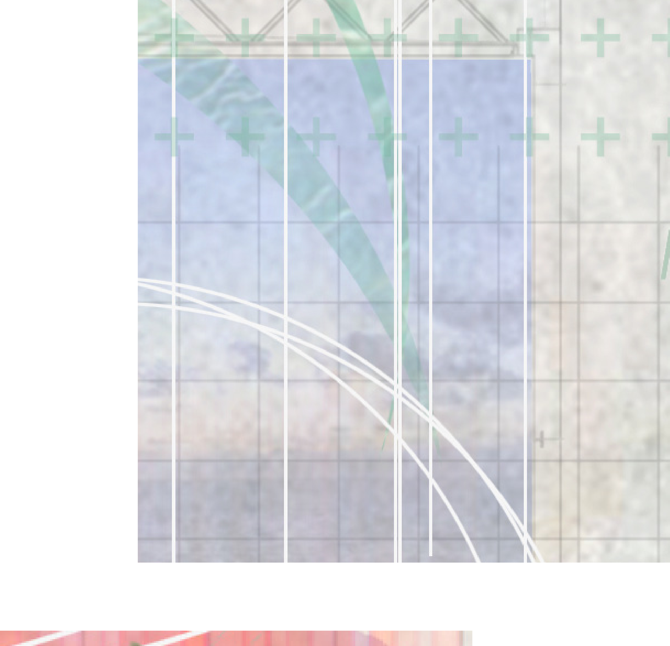
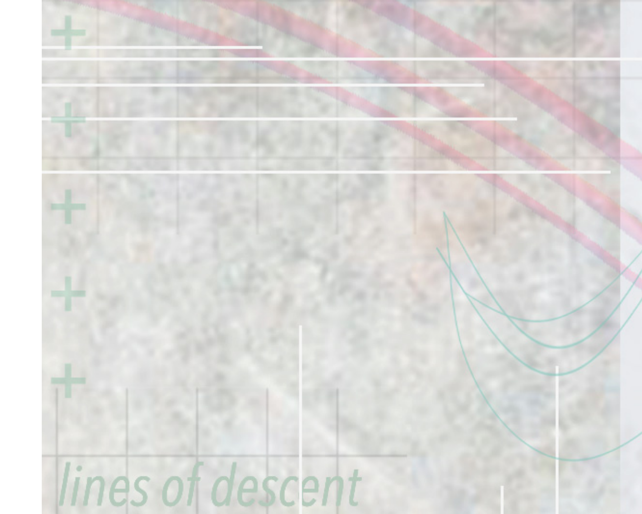
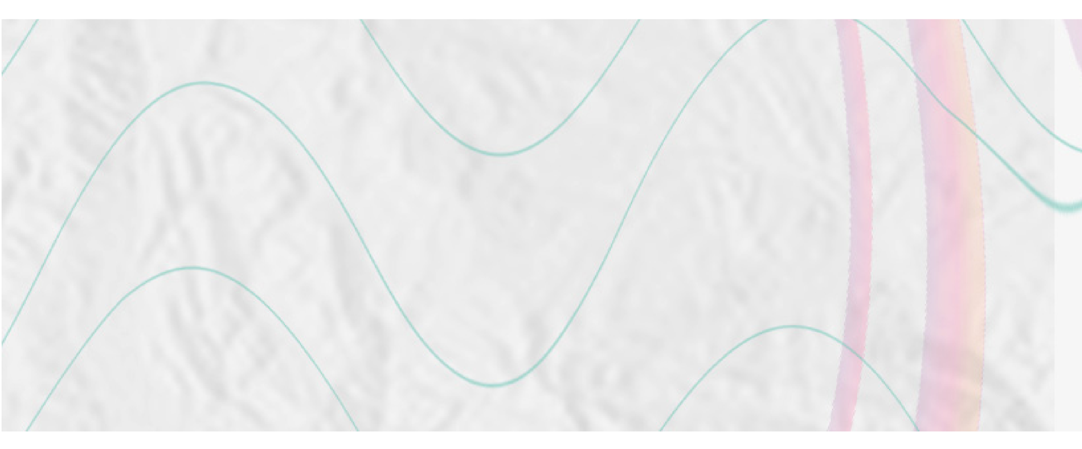
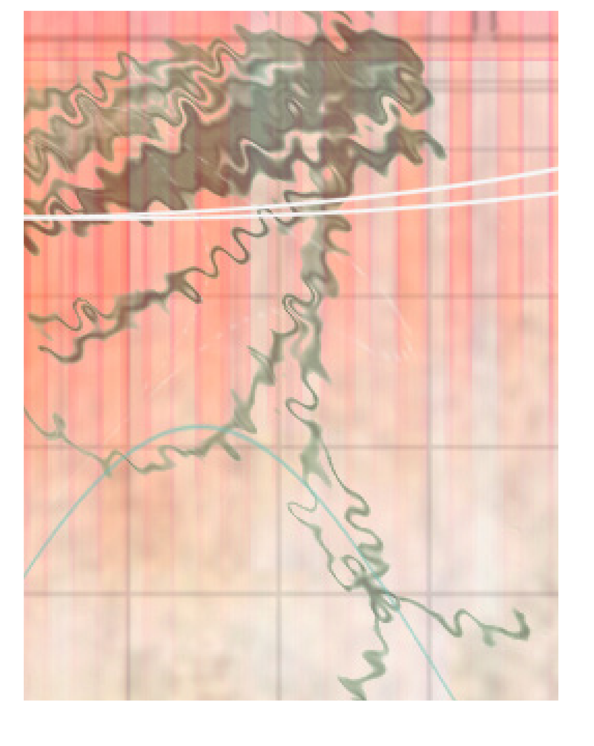
Whakapapa Plot 03

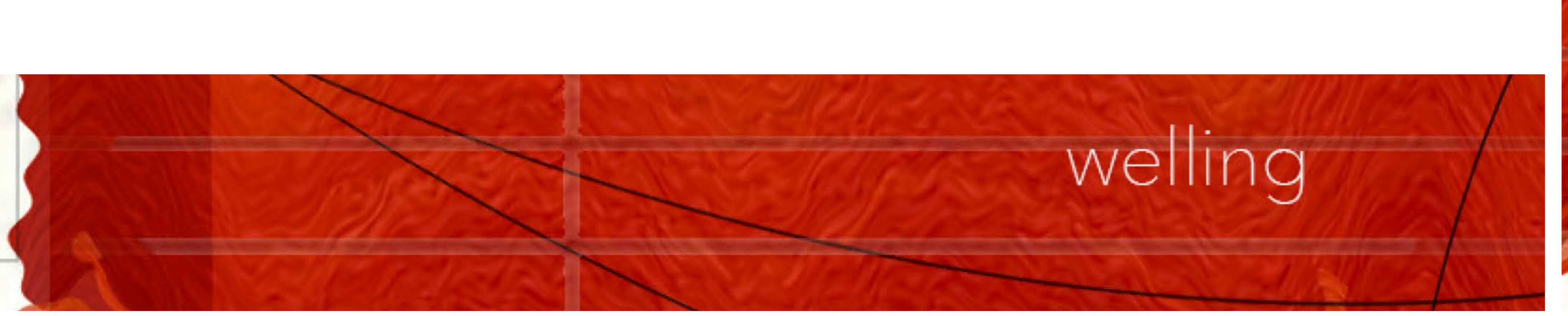








Kaha ake
Whakapapa Plot 04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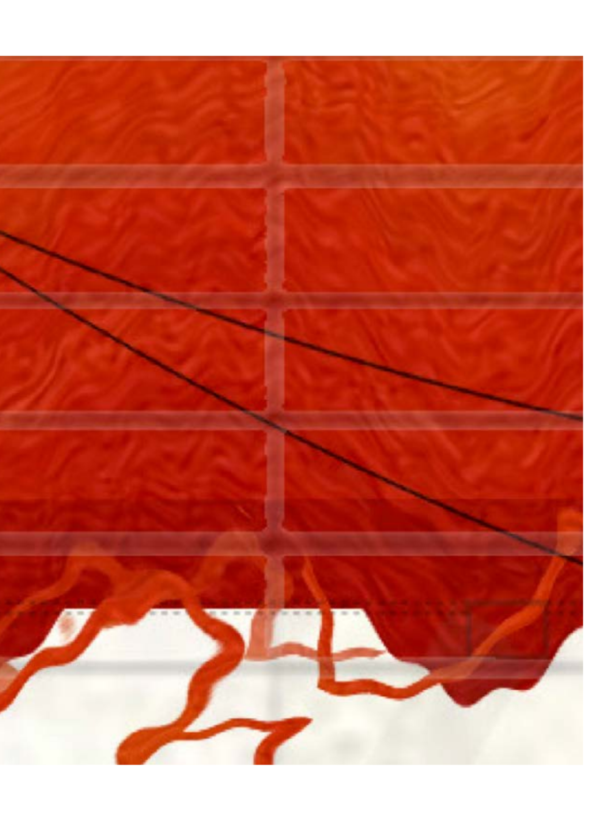
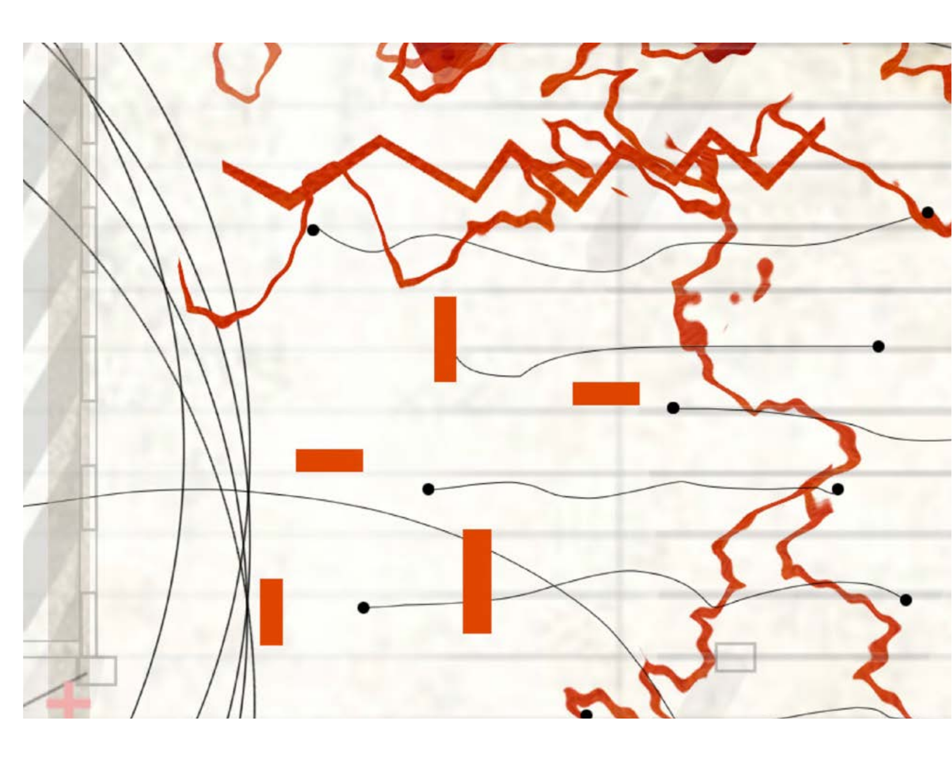
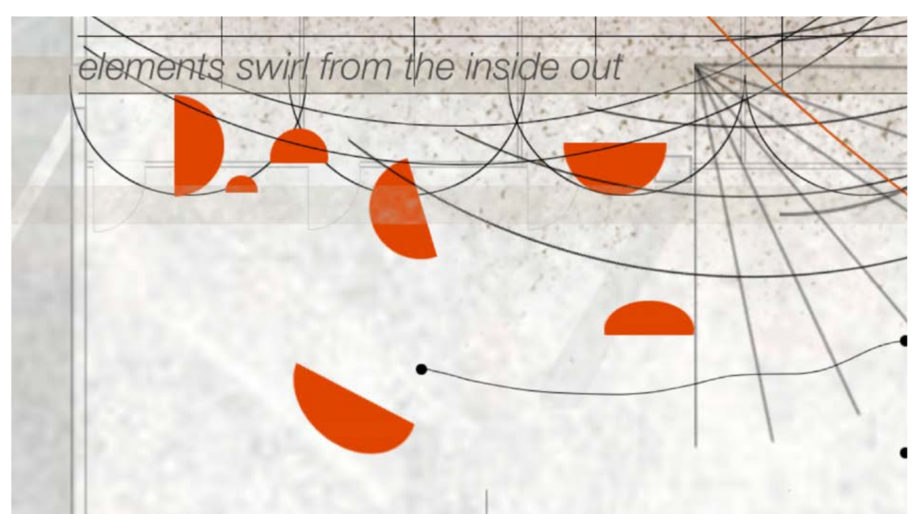
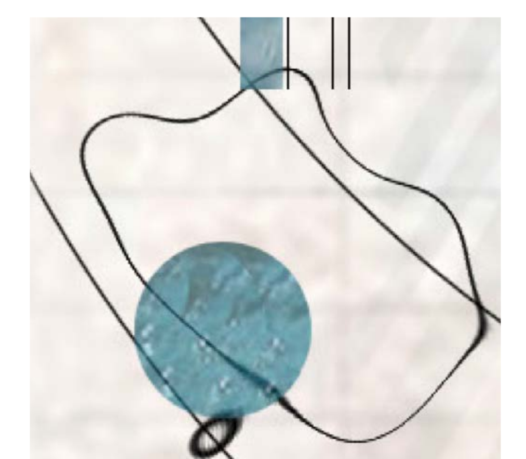
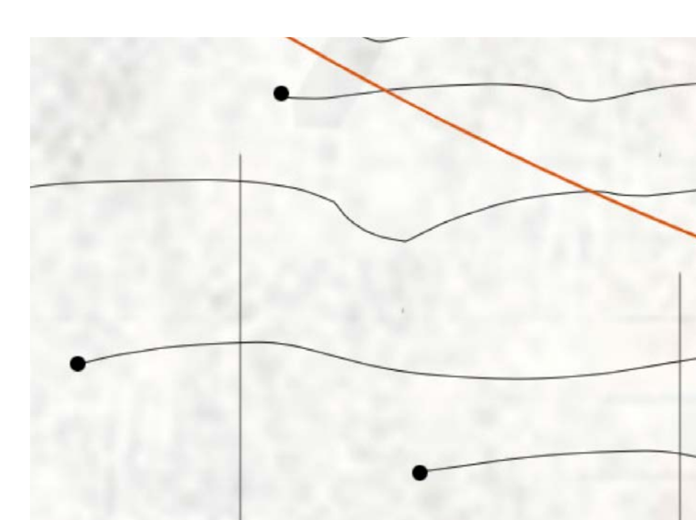
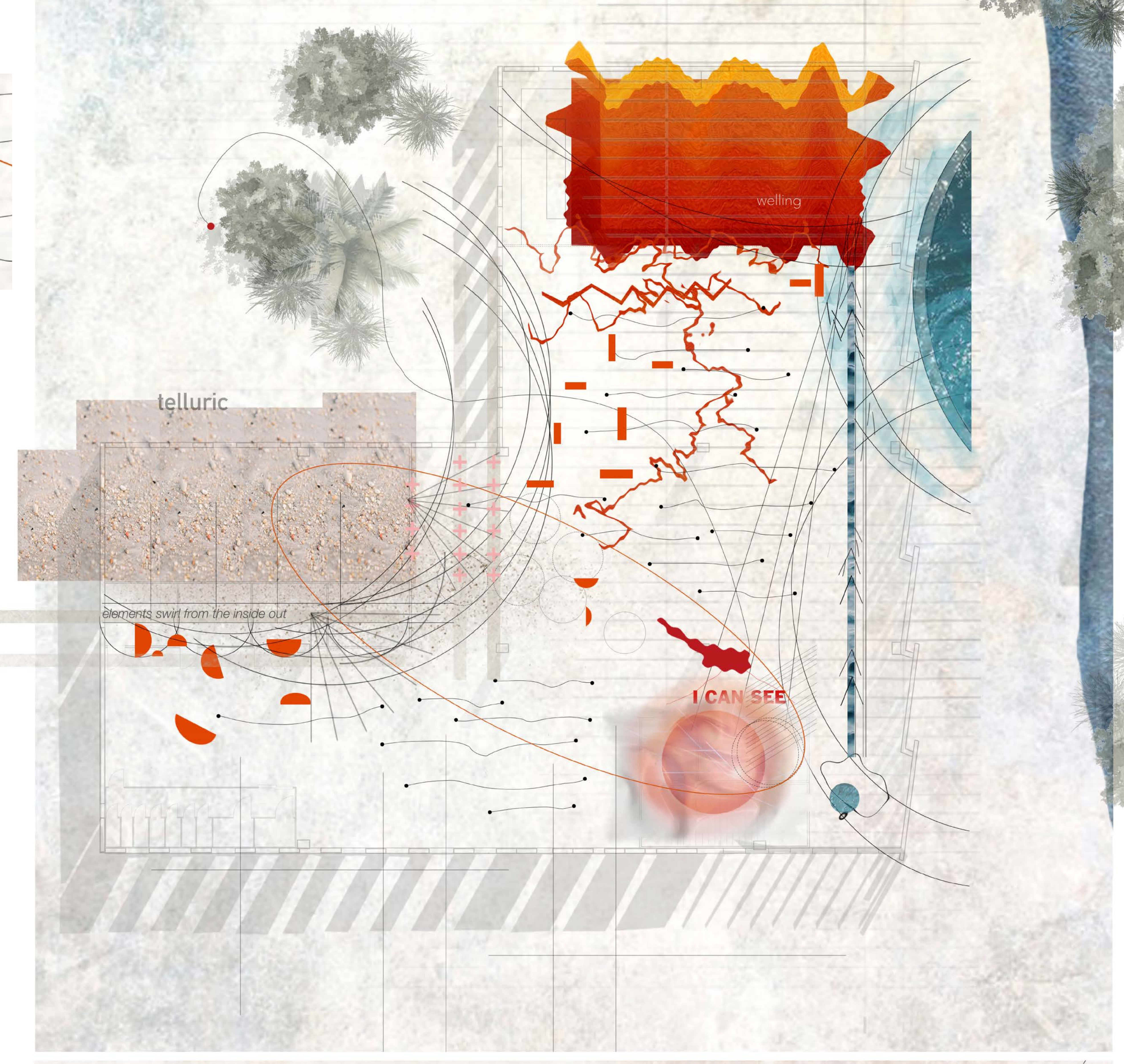





elements swirl from the inside out



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elements swirl from the inside out
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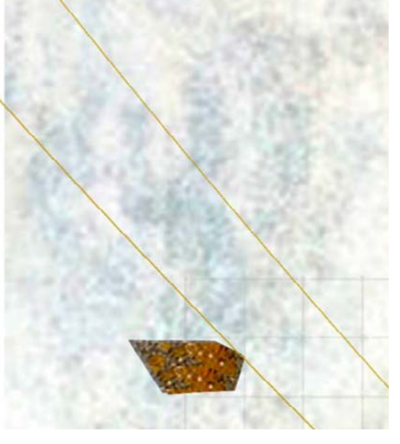

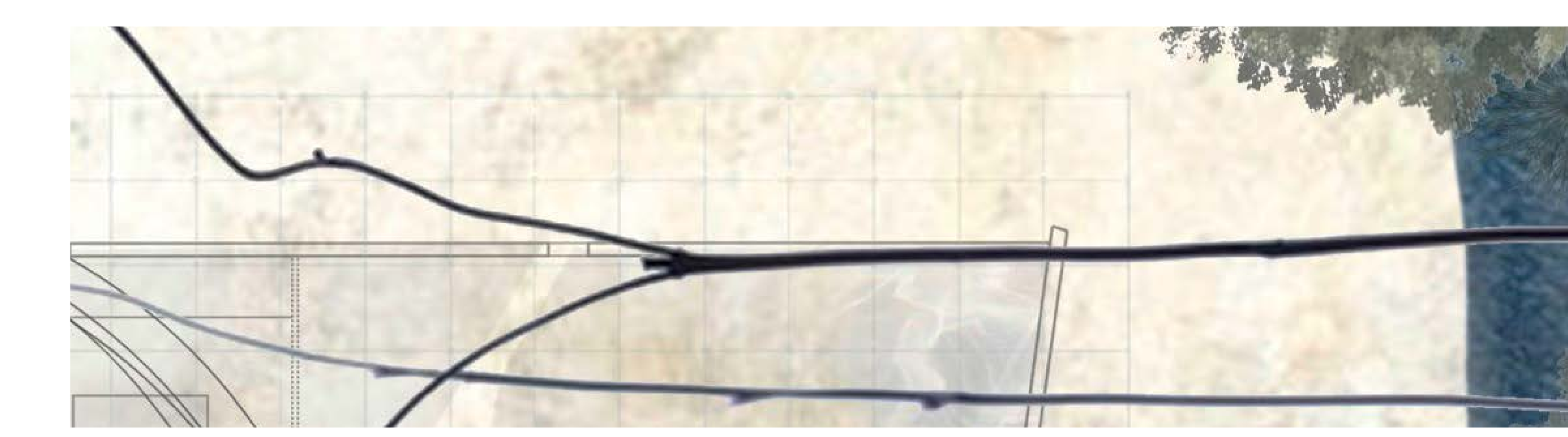

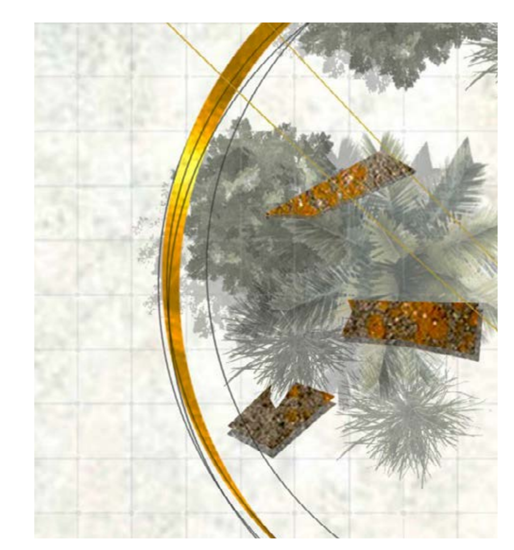

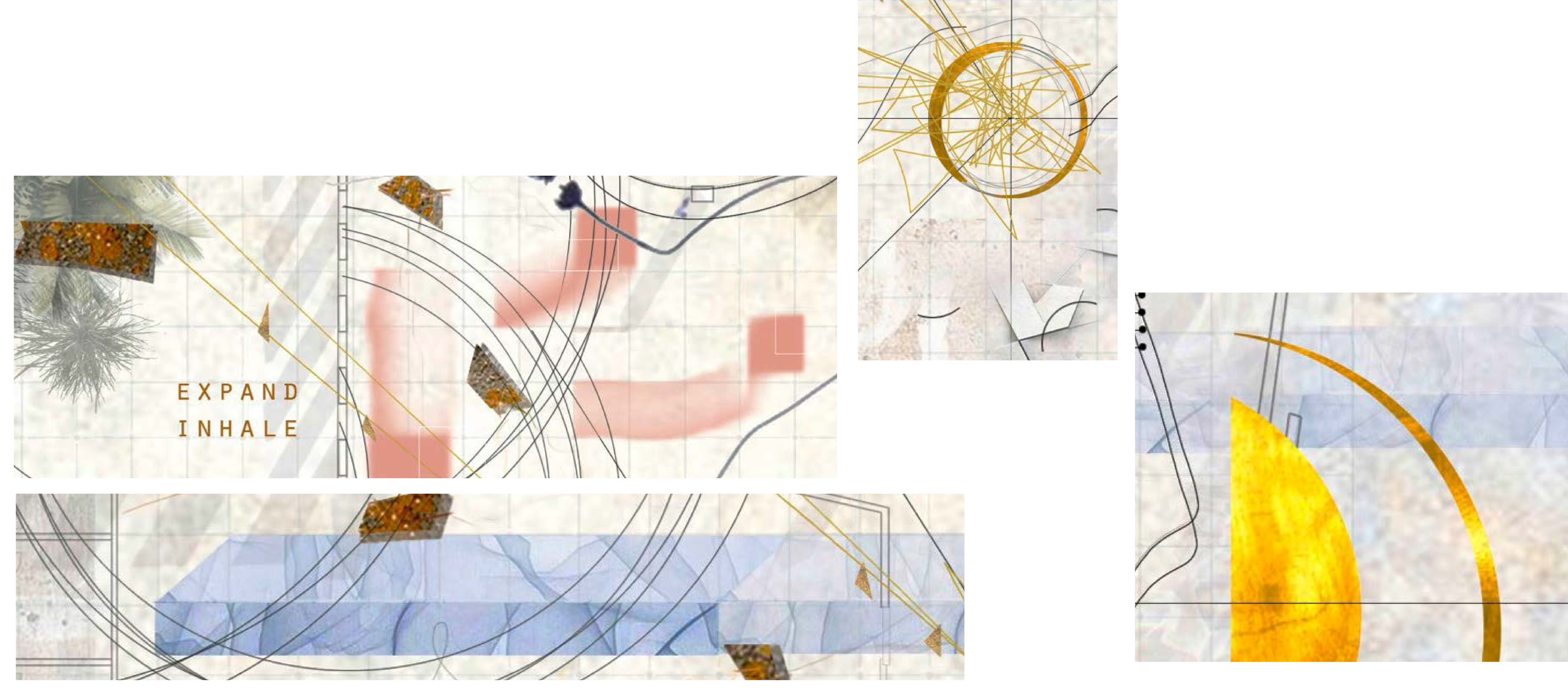

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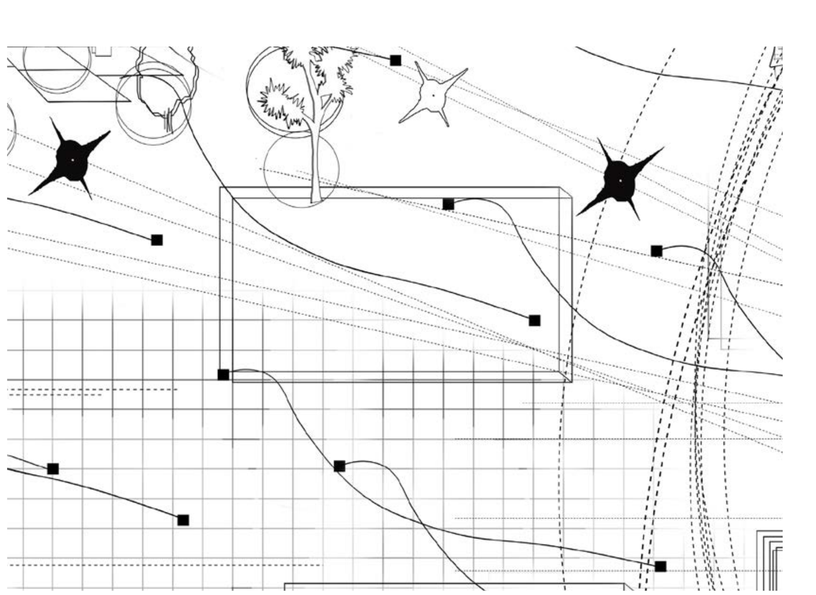

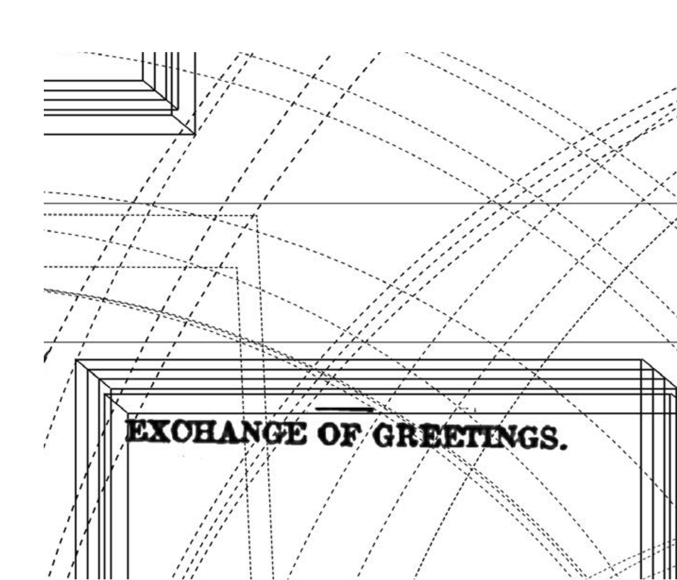
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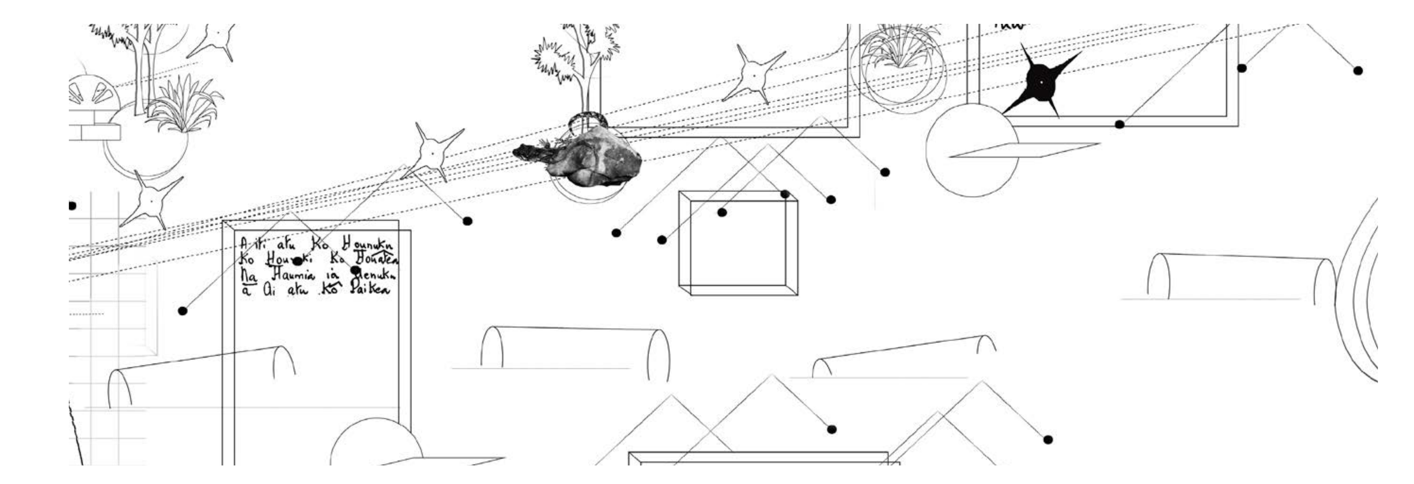
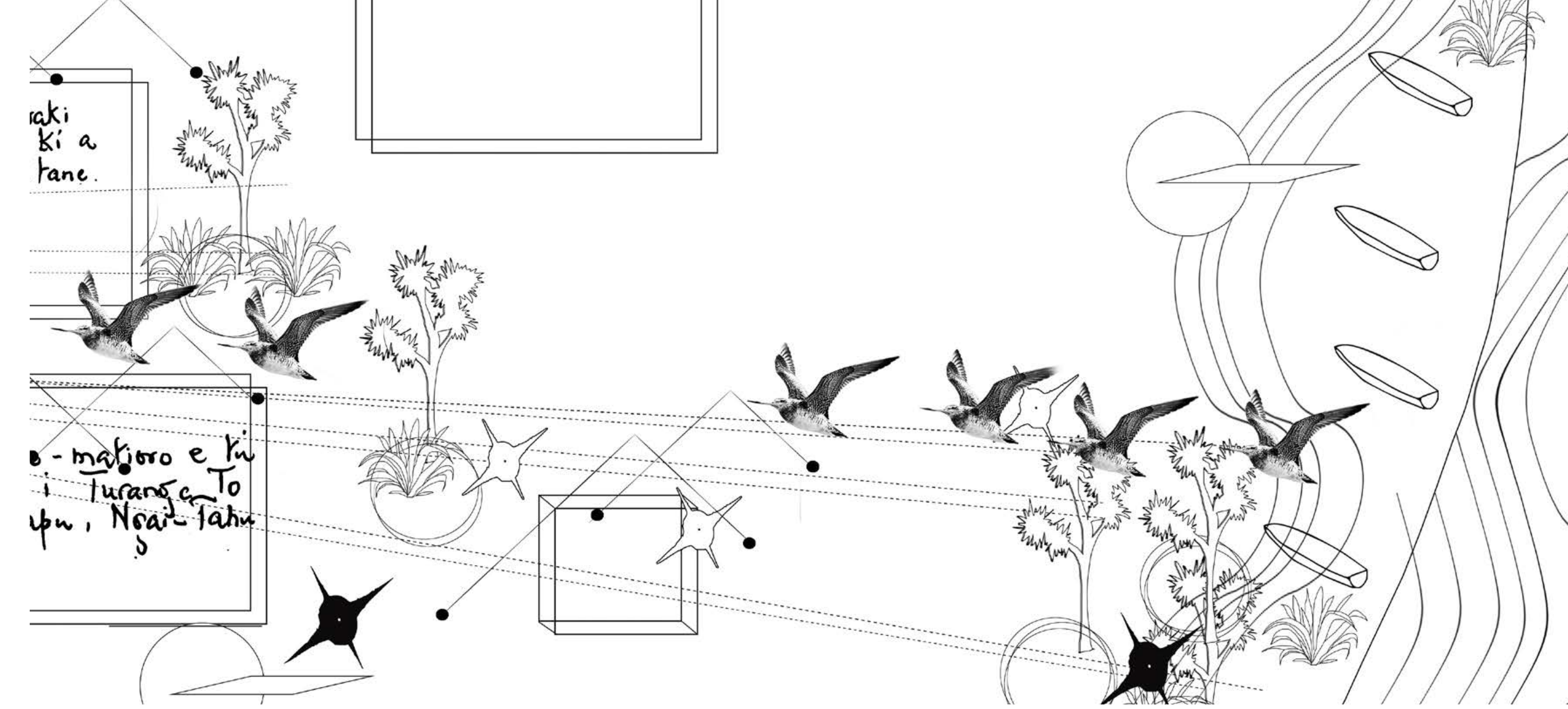
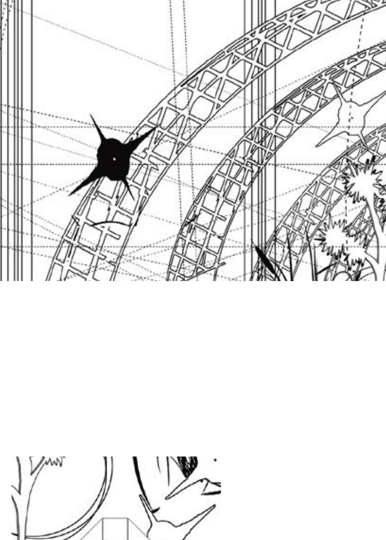
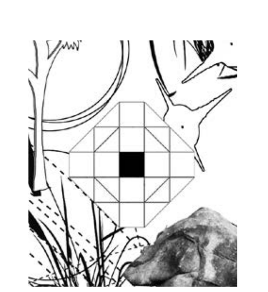
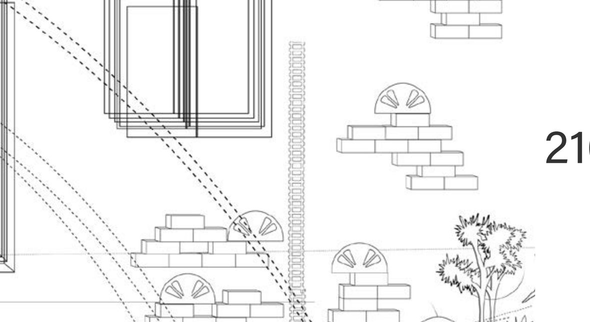
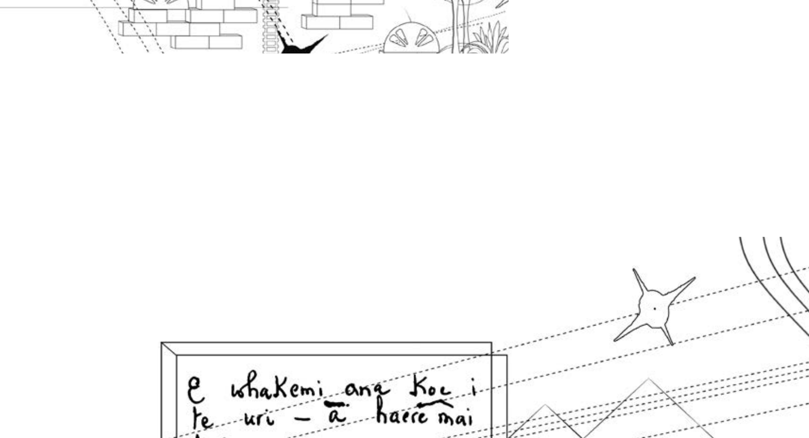


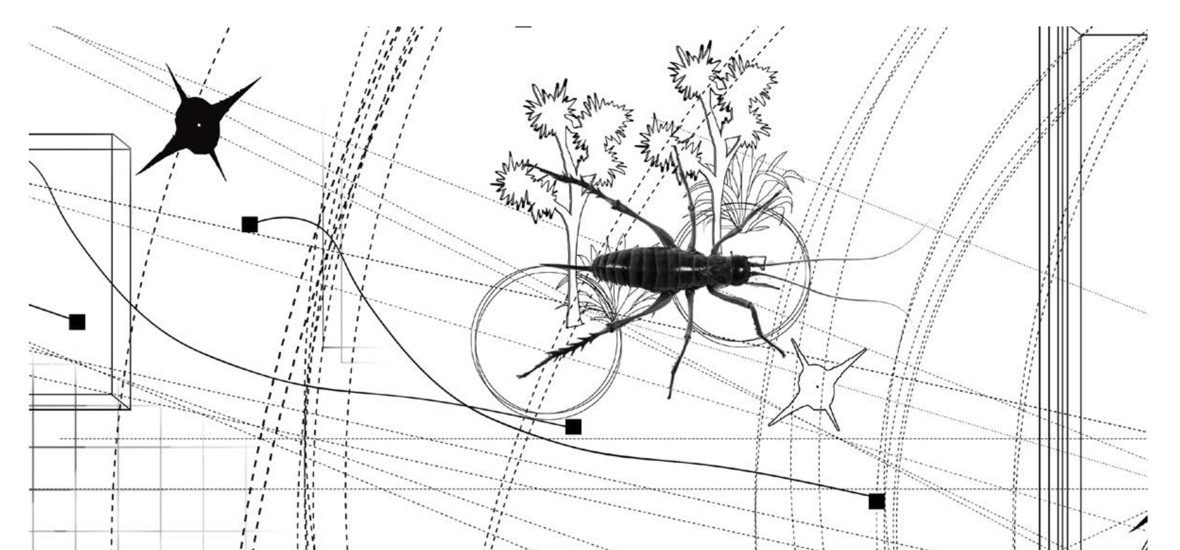


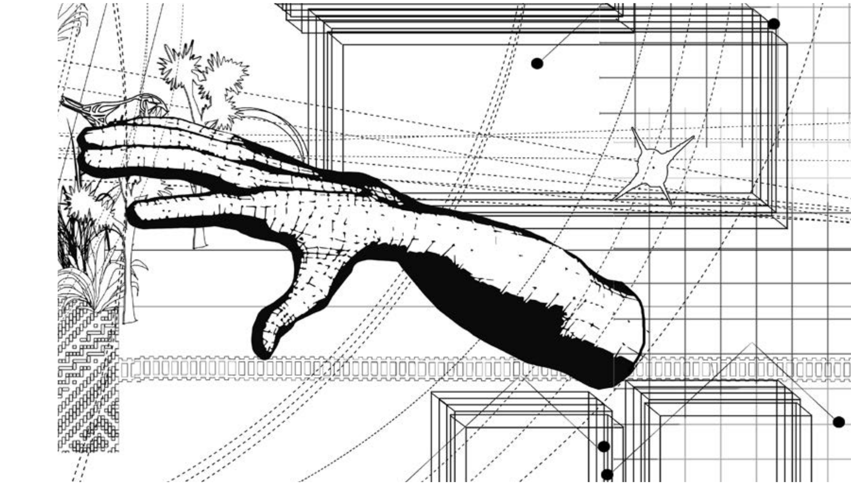




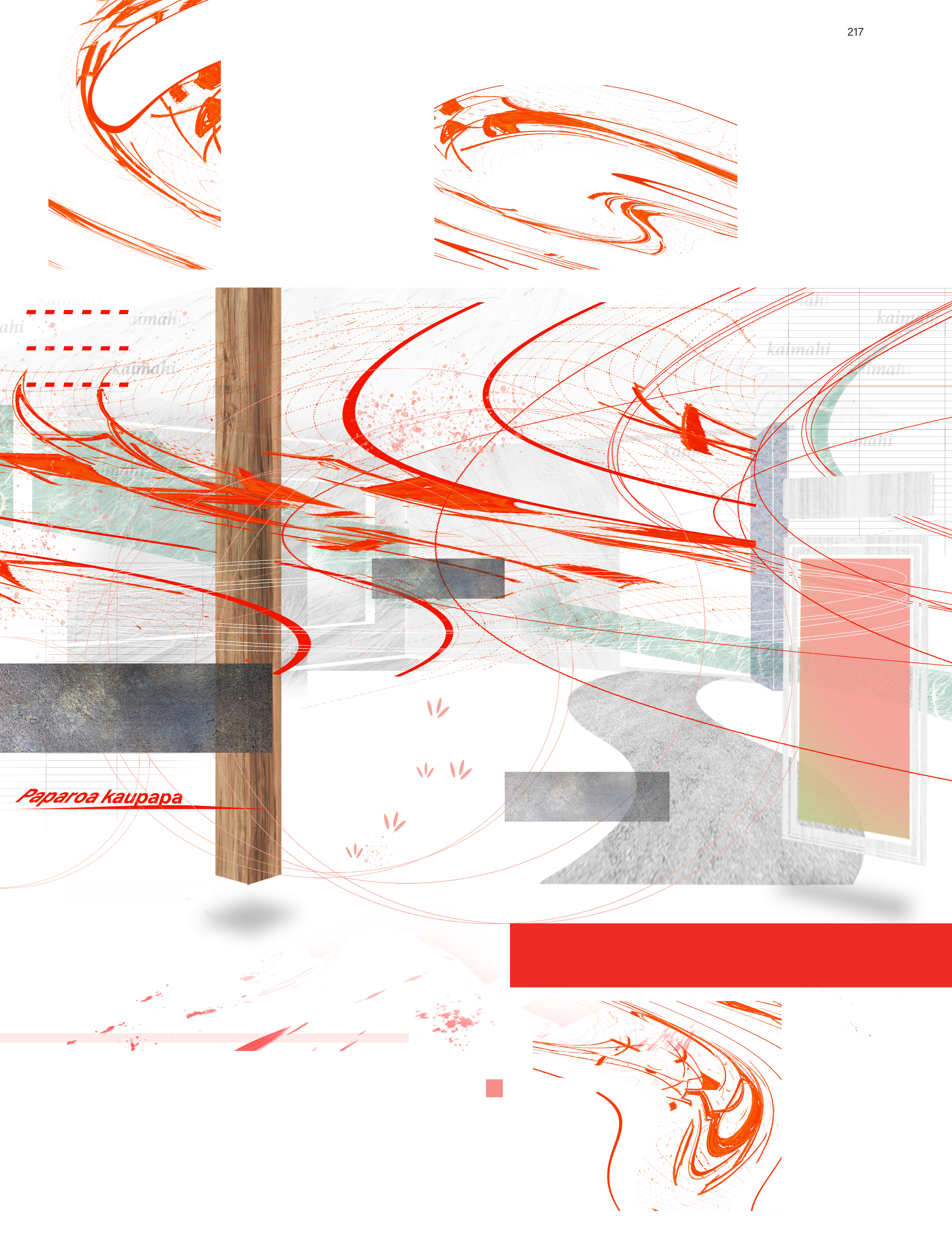








Wānanga
Whakapapa Plot 08



Tūpuna
Whakapapa Plot 09