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uncertain interiors

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2023

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

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about

idea journal recognises interiors and interiority as emerging, discursive, and interdisciplinary fields of research across spatially oriented design, artistic, and architectural practices. It promotes the production of new knowledge on interiors and interiority through the critical appraisal of the conceptual, material, and social relationships between people and built environments. Uniquely, *idea journal* provides a space for scholarly engagement through the publication of both text-based and visual-based research essays. *idea journal* serves an international academic, professional, and student readership. It welcomes contributions from researchers and practitioners involved in bolstering theoretical and creative discourse on spatial design.

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this issue's provocation

In 1981, architect Nigel Coates described London's underground clubs as spaces that wilfully induce delirium. Introducing ideas of obscurity, uncertainty and the unknown into his analysis of these interior environments, Coates suggested that their darkened spaces disintegrated the certainty of walls and physical limitations. Instead, clubs enabled the inhabitants to cultivate each interior as an event—spaces made from the murky, intermingled experiences of London's youth and the 'dress-up box add-on aesthetic' of their art-as-fashion lifestyles. Coates's comments heralded a decade of experimentation with interior environments that blurred disciplinary boundaries between art, design and fashion practices, and introduced ideas of shock, contradiction, fragmentation and ambiguity into interior planning, their drawings, and their performances.

This issue of *idea journal: Uncertain Interiors* sought theoretical, historical, and experimental analyses on the concept of uncertainty in interior environments. Uncertainty is often considered an undesirable quality, a transgression from normative behaviours and functions. Yet, uncertainty is inherent to critical and creative practices of spatial design. It underpins the complex experience inhabitants make with interior space beyond the designer's intention. History is replete with spectacular examples of designs, drawings and spatial practices that embrace the unknown to surpass the predictive, authoritative and determined limitations of their space-planning and programming.

Conversely, recent global events have plagued every aspect of daily life with the impact of uncertainty. Our ecological, economic, political and social spheres now compound instances of unanticipated, and sometimes devastating, change. Fear of uncertainty reveals the latent entrenchment of positivist and conservative values that limit our capacity to adapt with speed, flexibility and agility. Yet, if spatial designers embrace an uncertain relativism altogether, then what claims can they make to predict the real and material impact their work has on social change, political action, and environmental stewardship?

Recognising the significant and complex capacity of uncertainty to disrupt normative practices of design and inhabitation, authors were encouraged to address ideas of uncertain interiors for this journal issue in text-based and image-based research essays.

reviewers for this issue

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With special thanks to reviewers Rachel Carley and Julieanna Preston

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editorial introduction

Welcome to the 2023 issue of *idea journal: Uncertain Interiors*. The realisation of this issue reflects Luke Tipene's first year as Executive Editor of *idea journal* after Professor Julieanna Preston completed her tenure as Executive Editor in 2022. We thank Julieanna for her continued support and advice for *idea journal*.

This year also sees Dr Olivia Hamilton join *idea journal* as Editor, and the journal expand its editorial team with two new Editorial Assistants, Piper Saunders and Harriette Ellis. These new appointees are part of the journal's broader shift towards increasing the scope of its content and level of engagement with communities of interior practitioners, researchers, and educators in 2024.

As an idea, uncertainty frequently speaks to the influence of things that are unknown, unforeseen, and often unimaginable: objects, actions, and episodes of change that call in to question what we hold to be true, real, and dependable. Over this year, accelerating change across our ecological, economic, political, and social spheres has made this study of interior uncertainty as significant as it is timely.

Uncertainty is inherent to spatial design. It underpins the complex experiences inhabitants make beyond the designer's intentions and foregrounds the importance of relationality in the conception and production of interior environments. Despite the potential discomfort the instability of uncertainty may bring, it also renders tremendous potential for critical assessment and creative experimentation of unexplored ideas. It is in this spirit of exploring the complex, co-created, and often interdisciplinary ideas along the periphery of the histories, theories, and practices of interior and spatial design that the essays of this issue take their cue.

Uncertainty emerges as an important foundation in the current discourse on decolonising and re-indigenising spatial design pedagogy. Jen Archer-Martin has led two teams of authors, including Stuart Foster, Kura Puke, and Georgina Stokes, on a pair of essays emerging from the Spatial Design undergraduate programme at Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa Massey University, in Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand. Both essays explore new pedagogical practices that move away from dominant, colonial modes of knowledge formation in spatial design. The first, *Waewae taku haere*, describes pedagogical practices that are embodied, collective, and embedded in Indigenous modes of learning and belonging to place. The second, *Whakamana*, explores restorative and regenerative bicultural learning

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and designing partnerships. Together, these essays reflect complementary aspects of spatial design pedagogy attuned to Indigenous paradigms that embrace uncertainty, plurality, and more-than-human ways of knowing, being, doing, and, of course, designing.

Technologies are increasingly being repositioned as innately uncertain, particularly in relation to the psychological and physical qualities of interior environments. Yuman Zeon argues against the certitude and rationality often uncritically associated with modern technology through an essay that examines a fascinating and complex research project focusing on the spatial allegories of Chinese-born novelist, playwright, and painter Gao Xingjian. In the essay *Point/cloud: diffusive spatial imaginaries*, Carl Douglas considers the experiential qualities of laser scanning within a diverse range of projects, elucidating how point cloud technology reveals ambiguity rather than exactitude. In *Resisting the real through imagined interiors and social media's spaces of uncertainty*, Dave Loder investigates how the intersection of the virtual and physical in digital images provides access to imaginaries of virtual worlds, potentially able to unlock new interior materialities for the design of interior environments. Linda Matthews's essay concerns the production of new material and spatial strategies with new generative digital image processing techniques that capture temporal-visual understandings of interior spaces.

Relationships between still and moving images of interiors and uncertainty are drawn out through the contributions by Nevena Mrdjenovic, Büşra Balaban, and Aslıhan Şenel. Mrdjenovic's essay considers scenography and mapping to memorialise the physical and psychological aftermath of domestic interiors destroyed in ethnic conflicts captured in photographs. Balaban and Şenel interpret a filmic interior by using mapping to identify 'non-interiors' capable of producing alternative and fragmented, subjective, situated knowledge of interiors and interiority.

Public and private interior spaces are reconfigured in uncertain terms for other authors. The ubiquitous public toilet fascinates Nick Rebstadt, who introduces a queering technique of vacantly occupying the public restroom. The occupation is elaborated in ficto-critical writing that reframes these overlooked spaces through perspectives and approaches outside the dominant heterosexist and academic norms. Erika Brandl questions the fixity and durability of domestic interiors, examining the concept of 'plan flexibility' and how uncertainty in planning can contribute to resilient qualities of future-oriented homes. The thought-provoking, insightful, and challenging insights of this year's essays prompt us to reconsider the limits of normative practices in interior planning, education, technology, and social and cultural inclusion.

We would like to extend our deepest appreciation to this year's authors for their contributions to the 2023 issue of *idea journal*, *Uncertain Interiors*. It has been wonderful working with you and seeing your essays develop in depth and significance. We would also like to sincerely

thank this year’s peer reviewers for lending their time and expertise to support our authors with their valuable comments, reflections, and references. Thanks go to our production team, Madeleine Collinge for her editing services, Caitlin Ong for her graphic design services, as well as the IDEA Board and its member institutions for their continued support and resources.

Finally, we would like to thank you, our readers of *idea journal*, for your continued efforts to support our journal by remaining vigilant and curious about the critical exploration of the histories, theories, and practices of interior and spatial design. In today’s interminable throes of change, we hope the preparedness of our authors to explore the characteristics of *uncertain interiors* offers insights for your own endeavours to address complexity and embrace unknowns.

Please enjoy the 2023 issue of *idea journal: Uncertain Interiors*.

Sincerely,

Luke Tipene, Executive Editor of *idea journal*, and Dr Olivia Hamilton, Editor of *idea journal*.

non-interiors: mapping ambiguous interiority through Chantal Akerman's *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*

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abstract

This text-based research essay, through the theory and practices of mapping, suggests a non-dichotomous conceptualisation of interiority. It offers to probe the potentials of ambiguities and multiple meanings of an interior rather than the traditional oppositions such as inside-outside, private-public, female-male invoked by the term interior. We argue that interiority is not a fixed entity but a continuously changing state through the relationships formed among the imagined, remembered, and lived spaces of a subject. Our research is centred around a study of filmmaker Chantal Akerman's *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*, which traces filmmaker Anna's encounters with hotel rooms, stations, and trains as she travels through different cities to promote her film. Akerman's film introduces interiors provoked by uncertain and unfamiliar modes of interiority by interrogating its habitation through the peculiar tactics of filmmaking and viewing. By mapping this filmic interiority, we argue for 'non-interior' as a critical and creative way of approaching an interior. Non-interior is not the opposite of interior, nor an in-between position of interior and exterior, yet is concerned with what is unknown, what is excluded, and what is unheeded. It aims to theorise and practise an uncertainty of the interior without assigning a single static definition. The research of a non-interior offers ambiguity, multiplicity, and uncertainty to an interior, allowing us to explore interiority within gradual shades of its materiality as a room, a threshold element, or a piece of furniture.

Mapping came to the fore as a method of this research, which performs the filmic topography. It suggests an embodied practice of film viewing, including the authors' analytical and emotional responses to the encountered representation of the interior. Mapping enables us to explore the potential of filmic representation to blur the presumed definitions and conventional boundaries of the concept of the interior. By mapping filmic interiors, we reveal ambiguous states of the interiors we encountered in the film and multiply their layers of uncertainty. These mapped uncertainties allow the interior to be questioned and the non-interior to be produced. In particular, non-interior draws on the non-dichotomous approaches in art and architecture such as Robert Smithson's 'non-site', Pascal Bonitzer's 'de-framing' or 'off-screen', and Rosalind Krauss's 'expanded field' to explore ambiguity as a critical tool in order to understand the uncertainty of an interior. Mapping of non-interiors proposes architectural theory and representation that consists of fragmented, subjective, situated, and embodied knowledge of interiors.

keywords

interiority; critical spatial research; critical topographical practices; filmmaking-viewing; Chantal Akerman

cite as:
Büşra Balaban and Aslıhan Şenel, 'Non-Interiors: Mapping Ambiguous Interiority Through Chantal Akerman's *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*', *idea journal*, 20.1 (2023), 10–25 <https://doi.org/10.37113/ij.v20i01.489>

mapping the *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*

Chantal Akerman's film, *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*[01] opens with a sequence where Anna is on a train platform. She leaves the station, arrives at a hotel, and goes up to her room where she heads straight to the window. The camera traces Anna with the window and the curtain behind to direct the viewer to the view outside. The train platform she was on from the previous scene is here inside the room through the view offered by the window. Later, the camera orientates the viewer to the interior of the hotel room. Akerman allows the viewer to assign a context to this anonymous hotel room. The window becomes a threshold between the interior and exterior. It enables the viewer to include what is excluded and to reflect on what is included. It takes the outside view and movement into a relatively static interior space of a hotel room, meanwhile questioning Anna's physical and mental position within this interior. In this instance, the window is regarded as a material and spatial embodiment of ambiguity. The materiality of the window, which allows the viewer to question the concept of interiority and imagine multiple interiors, is considered a state of ambiguity.

The top left corner of the mapping draws the scene in front of the window in the hotel room in Essen. Layer by layer, Anna, the window frame, the view, and the reflection behind her are illustrated [Fig. 01]. Each layer transforms the interior's perception and representation, introducing new and ambiguous spatial boundaries with uncertain interior states.

Mapping refrains from drawing a strict line between the view and the room, yet it allows the superposition of different states of these ambiguous and dynamic relationships.

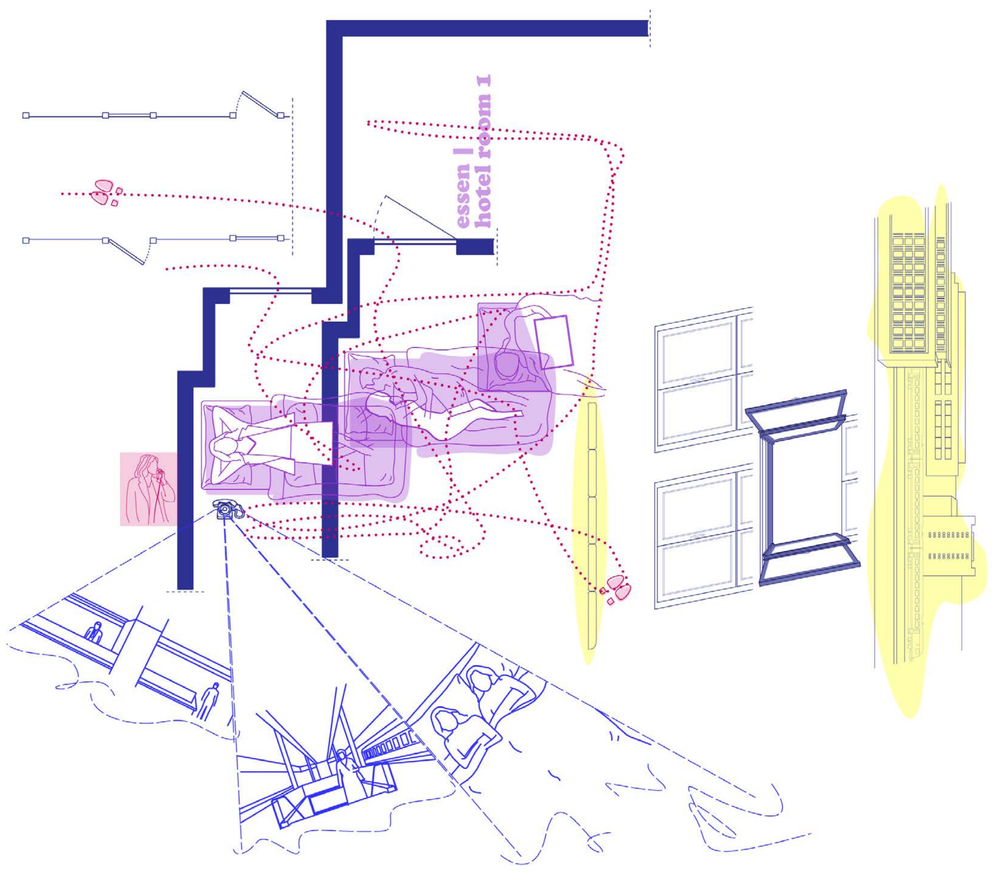

Figure 01.
Drawings that multiply the layers of the window in the hotel room in Essen. From mapping, produced by the authors, 2023.

We propose our mapping as critical spatial research, which is associated with the art and architecture critic Jane Rendell's definition of 'critical spatial practice'[02] and Aslıhan Şenel's term 'critical topographical practices' developed from that.[03] According to Rendell, critical spatial practices propose different ways of doing by unmaking the conventional design practices dominated by power.[04] As discussed by Şenel, the practices of cartography, literature, and film are more than representations of place, as they also offer a dynamic relationship between the place, the maker, and the viewer.[05] Their critical readings, for example, a particular way of mapping, offer critical topographical

practices and question the uniformity of representation.[06] Rather than a representation, mapping offers a performance, a continuous production of embodied, situated, and subjective knowledges. Our mapping enables tracing ambiguity at the filmic site as well as revealing uncertain states through its performative practice. It incorporates techniques and methods excluded by conventional representations into the field or differentiates existing ones by using them for other purposes or contents. It offers a practice of tracing those that are difficult to represent and excluded from representations of interiors such as time, movement, and everyday experiences. Revealing the relationships between the interior, the filmmaker, and the map maker, our mapping questions the ambiguities of interiority. Here, we argue that interiority is not a fixed entity but a continuously changing state through the relationships formed among the imagined, remembered, and lived spaces of a subject. These spatialities inherently hold ambiguities by allowing multiple views and meanings. In this research, we argue for an uncertainty that emerged from our specific approach to these ambiguities existing within a filmic interior.

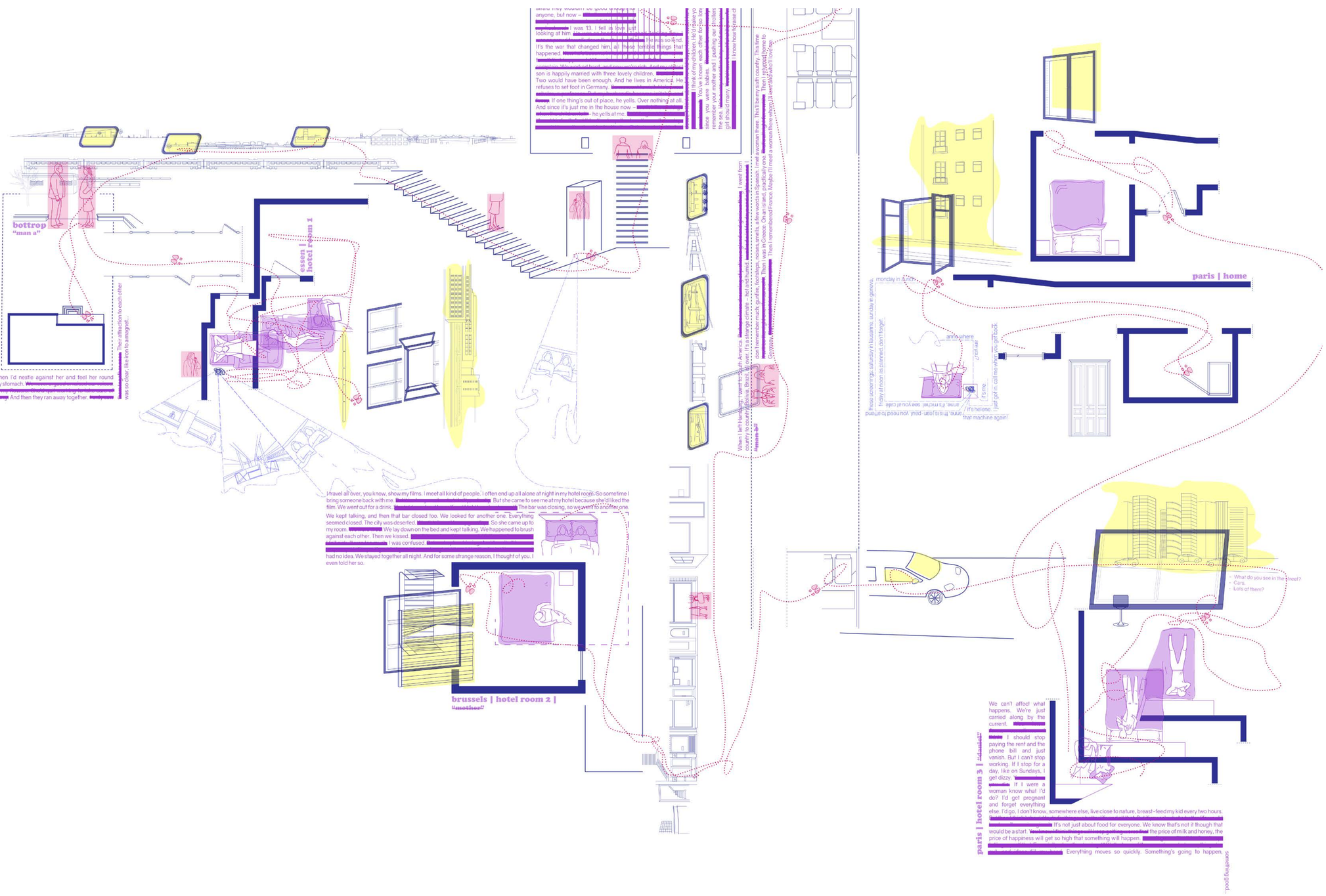

Figure 02.
Mapping Akerman's *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*. Produced by the authors, 2023.

By revealing our positions as researchers in the field of architecture and addressing our situated, limited, and multiple knowledges of the filmic site, mapping reproduces interiors, as Figure 02 shows. Our mapping conveys the encountered spaces and spatial references to paper through drawing and writing; it allows the viewer to see different spatial relationships by multiplying the perspective offered in the film. Our mapping improvises multiple tactics. It draws the space according to the various positions of Anna, the camera, and the viewer. It includes re-drawings of an interior focusing on its several spatial elements such as a window, a bed, and a telephone. Further, the mapping illustrates overlapping representations of the experiential, atmospheric, and relational qualities within the built interior. It also incorporates the dialogues into the spatial drawings as elements for constructing interiors or rather uncertain boundaries for variable interior situations.

Feminist filmmaker Chantal Akerman's cinema is remarkable because of its focus on women and domestic interiors. In particular, *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*, completed in 1978 and translated in English as *Meetings with Anna*, is essential in this research with its embedded autobiographical elements. *Rendez-vous* narrates the journey of Anna, a young, successful, and introverted film director, through Essen to promote her new film and her arrival in Paris at her home. Throughout the three-day journey, Anna drags herself from hotel to hotel and railway station to train. Accompanying Anna's journey are several people such as a stranger in Essen, a friend of her mother in Cologne, a traveller on the train, her mother in Brussels, and her lover in Paris. *Rendez-vous* is almost entirely recorded by a fixed camera in various closed or semi-closed spaces. Akerman mostly prefers close-ups in which there are encounters between Anna and other people, and objects and spatial elements in confined spaces such as train cars, stations, hotel rooms, homes, toilets, etc. These frames mainly show temporary spaces and suggest acknowledging interiors in different scales, contexts, and locations. Along with Anna's habitation in such framing of filmic sites, the film creatively questions the ambiguities and different possibilities of interiority. The window appears as a threshold element that enables us to discuss interiority at the boundaries. The bed(s), which are given special attention in the film, can be seen as interiors located within other interiors. The presence and mobility of the other objects, such as the telephone, suitcase, and the clothes accompanying Anna, create a sense of ambiguity by transporting the filmic view outside the confines of the interior space.

Through the filmic production and our mapping practice, ambiguities and multiplicities reveal the uncertain properties of an interior. It allows us to theorise this uncertainty, which we also research through our mapping practice, as *non-interior*. Situating ambiguity as a form of uncertainty and discussing its various forms challenges the traditional binary understanding, which ends up with a division and hierarchy. Non-

interior enables a field to discuss interiority by unveiling the multiple possibilities and ambiguous potentialities of the interior in-between or unheeded. Non-interior as an unconventional understanding of the interior evidently requires another way of production, which cannot be represented by conventional representation techniques and methods. The concept of non-interior and the mapping practice explicitly produce and require each other. A non-interior here offers a spatial practice along with a theoretical discussion of the interior throughout the research.

Up to here, we have introduced how mapping is operationalised to discuss the uncertainty of an interior and what kind of potential it has to produce the non-interior. The following parts of this essay explicate what a non-interior offers conceptually and methodologically. First, we develop the concept of non-interior in order to discuss interiority beyond dichotomous approaches by probing the literature on ambiguity and uncertainty in the history and theory of art, architecture, and feminist studies. Second, we raise questions about the complicated entanglements between the site, the representation, the maker, and the viewer to propose a specific methodology for the production of a non-interior. Echoing the theoretical investigation, we elaborate on the practical production of a non-interior through the embodied practice of film viewing and mapping.

non-interior as an uncertain concept beyond dichotomous approaches

Non-dichotomous approaches in art and architecture have employed prefixes of 'non-', 'de-', and 'off-' operationally to question the ways in which oppression works in thought and practice. For example, artist Robert Smithson, through his art practice, describes the non-site as a 'large, abstract map' in a gallery to refer to the site that cannot be precisely located because it no longer exists or resists representation.[07] This non-site reproduces an actual site without resembling it and offers imaginary travels and new meanings between site and non-site. According to art theorist Nick Kaye, non-site allows the artist to produce a limited (mapped) version of their own subjective and particular encounter with the site.[08] Unmaking the analogy between site and representation, non-site points out those who are not included in the representation rather than reproducing the existing meanings of the site. In film theory, we find similar terms to refer to the unrepresentable. As film theorist and director Pascal Bonitzer points out, 'de-framing' or 'off-screen' allows the film viewers to create a narrative of their own.[09] This exclusion somehow directs the inside of the frame as well. The film can only initiate the narrative, but the viewer creates meaning by establishing connections. De-framing does not divide or separate; rather it multiplies and brings forth new relations.[10] Site and non-site, frame and de-frame, or on-screen and off-screen are not opposing concepts; on the contrary, they have reciprocal dynamic relationships

that feed on each other and enable the production of new meanings between them. These remind us of art theorist Rosalind Krauss' argument for an 'expanded field' 'by problematising the set of binary oppositions between which the modern category of sculpture is suspended.'[11] According to Krauss, the sculpture is not a middle term between not-architecture and not-landscape nor a combination of exclusions.[12] The sculpture is rather a 'term on the periphery of a field in which there are other, differently structured possibilities.'[13] Landscape and not-landscape, architecture and not-architecture, and other possible combinations are explored through this other vision of sculpture.

We consider these visions in art theory to claim a creative and critical apprehension of the interiority by adding to it the prefix 'non-.' Non-interior does not fit into dichotomies; it holds ambiguities.[14] These ambiguities are traced to understand and reveal the uncertainty of the interior. As Cathryn Dwyre et al. point out, ambiguity is a critical tool in the era where conventional dichotomies including 'nature/culture, women/men, animal/human, art/technology' are dissolving.[15] Ambiguity, characteristically, holds multiple meanings and even contradictions together and enables a 'critical and productive mode of intellectual and aesthetic inquiry.'[16] Similarly, non-interior is as concerned with what is known as it is with what is unknown, and as concerned with what is included as it is with what is excluded.

Interior, in dichotomous approaches, is 'understood as binary and defined against what it is not,'[17] 'excluded through the hierarchical categories it creates,'[18] and 'disregarded due to the direct misconnections between its prominent practitioners as women.'[19] Transgressing the binary thoughts that create division and exclusion within the context of body and space, Elizabeth Grosz suggests 'the position of the in-between,' which means to think about a location, a relation, a place that is related to other places, but has no place of its own.[20] According to Grosz, in-between positions, lacking a particular form and not belonging to one defined state, are able to facilitate different identities and varied matters.[21] Enhancing the discussion of interiority as an in-between state, Christine McCarthy argues for the creative potential of reciprocal exclusion between interior and exterior rather than falling into conventional binary thoughts.[22] According to McCarthy, the materiality of interiority is variable in relation to the ambiguous entanglements between constructive factors such as boundary, habitation, bodily relationship, and time. Unlike an in-between position, non-interior rejects the division of interior and exterior and suggests multiplicities positioned within an interior, expanding out the interior, and juxtaposing exteriors and interiors. Suzie Attiwill and Gini Lee propose thinking of interior and exterior in which the relationships are dynamic and not determined in advance.[23] Following Grosz's question of architecture as a field that establishes a frame, they suggest excluding architecture in the field

of interior and landscape for exploring a creative approach to interiority: 'without architecture, there is no frame and hence no inside/outside'.[24] For instance, addressing the discussion of Ross Gibson, they argue the garden is 'situated as a conceptual and metaphorical site where relationships are worked out and dualities and/or oppositions are blurred'.[25] Within this view, 'enclosure, porosity, incompletion, framing/not framing, travelling, transformations at boundaries, instability and mutability' come forward as concepts that layer the qualities of the interior by ambiguating its conventional understanding.[26] In a similar way, non-interior suggests dynamism, continuity, and relationality. Yet it additionally foregrounds the dynamic position of the subject as the main motivation of this relationality. Non-interior recognises that spatial relations might change with the variations of the subject itself and its positions. This dynamic subject multiplies interiority through its layered relationships. Therefore, non-interior is produced by mapping in which the viewer's critical readings are invited.

non-interior as an uncertain methodology through mapping interiority

Akerman's *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna* invites the viewers to make their own readings, interpretations, and spatial productions. We consider the filmmaker's alternative positioning tactics and their potential, referring to the 'death of the author',[27] to suggest non-interior not only conceptually but also methodologically. Feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey points out that traditional cinema, with its patriarchal codes and methods, ignores the look of the camera and the viewer and also positions the targeted male spectator in a fixed gaze.[28] Such traditional films turn the subject into a voyeur and promote the illusion of voyeuristic separation. However, as in *Rendez-vous*, the viewer does not have a single, static, and passive position. Different subject positions are produced with multiple bodily as well as visual relationships.

As architecture and art critic Giuliana Bruno points out, a film viewer and a site visitor share similar experiences.[29] The film, by creating frames, transforms the viewer into a visitor, a moving observer who is mapping this haptic space through the embodied encounter instead of expressing a disembodied, fixed gaze.[30] This mobility also transforms the structure of the vision; travel to a site is no longer 'sight-seeing' but also 'site-seeing', which can address many other forms of bodily engagements within the site.[31] As feminist theorist Donna Haraway reminds us, the vision itself is not phallocentric; the 'embodied nature of all visions' provides limited and subjective knowledges.[32] Donna Haraway suggests another kind of vision to explore mystified areas such as science and women as a result of hierarchical divisions. Insisting on the vision that is inherently embodied, interpreted, and biased, being situated can provide subjective, multiple, limited, and fragmented states of knowledge, and defines feminist objectivity by avoiding

binary oppositions along with exploring mystified areas.[33] If we consider the film within its spatial and bodily kinetics, the viewer becomes a voyageur or *voyageuse* rather than a voyeur. A bodily encounter between the film and the viewer suggests a site for re-writings and re-readings. We claim that this embodied experience with a filmic interior can enable the production of a non-interior.

Non-interior does not offer a holistic representation of a space or its precisely defined state, yet provides fragmented productions. These situated and partial productions unveil the uncertainties of an interior by drawing on everyday life, the film as its reproduction, and the mapping as a critical reading of the film. Non-interior evokes uncertainties along with the ambiguous states of whether interior or exterior, variable inclusion or exclusion of interior and exterior, and their transitive conditions. Non-interior evolves conceptually and methodologically to focus on the not-included in the theory and practice of architecture. Non-interior does not have only one definition, yet it is produced, as pointed out above, through an active subject who transforms the traditional meanings and established limits. Here, mapping comes forward since it both shows up as a method of research and a key condition for producing a non-interior, enabling us to pursue critical spatial research.

We suggest the mapping practice as an act of embodiment through drawing.[34] As Paul Emmons reminds us, although the rationalised theory has reduced architectural drawing to mere normative practice, from the Renaissance onwards drawing practices have had explicit entanglements with embodiment, imagination, and materiality.[35] Our mapping traces uncertainty by representing ambiguous entanglements of space and offers a critical spatial practice with an embodied vision. It avoids the conventions and norms of architectural drawing through tactics such as drawing plans and sections from multiple viewpoints, multiplying, juxtaposing, and overlapping these views, and refusing a single, divine perspective. Through the mapping of the *Rendez-vous* in the act of embodiment and performativity, we produce the non-interior by probing different material references of ambiguous interiority such as window, bed, and phone. Below, we unveil the particular material conditions of these spatial elements in the act of exploring the non-interior with the accompanying questions: How can a bed, as impersonal as possible in an anonymous hotel room, and its relationship with the body define an interiority? Can outer-inner perspectives from a window screen differentiate the untimely hotel room's uncertainty to a certainty for an instant? How can a telephone as an agent capable of defining its own spatiality interrelate different interiorities? Can a private dialogue between two people redefine spatial boundaries? Can there be a peculiar form of representing these uncertain interior states?

window as an ambiguous interior at the threshold

Rendez-vous prominently frames spatial thresholds such as windows, doors, entrance halls, and corridors. Windows, in particular, initiate our mapping by providing us with a critical reading of interiority. Anna first faces the windows in each hotel room. The static camera opens up the scene in each interior by framing Anna's body in front of a window and the window itself towards the outside view. As a tactic to introduce a hotel room, Akerman directs the viewer first to the outside through the view within the window, then locates the viewer inside with a perspective gained from the outside. Those window scenes superpose several states: Anna's body, the views concealed or disclosed by the window, the material of the window profile, a closed or open curtain behind, a balcony in front, the interior reflections on the window screen, or the outside reflections on the interior space. These various states of the window are multiple layers that allow the blurring of the threshold itself.

Mapping reflects on the film's tactic of blurring this threshold as ambiguating the drawing of the hotel room. As in Figure 03, the part of the mapping that illustrates the scene in a hotel room in Paris separates layers related to windows to grasp each one's role in an interior, which also differentiates the drawing of the interior. A look at the exterior surroundings or superimposed looks of interior and exterior reflections distinguishes the understanding of interiority. For example, an interior could belong to a room in a skyscraper district in Paris or a nineteenth-century apartment in Brussels. By this filming tactic and our mapping practice, we claim a hotel room's anonymous, timeless, and ambiguous state is perceived as a certain interior through the window, conveying information about its specific location and time. This exterior information has the potential to transgress the interior and differentiate it accordingly.

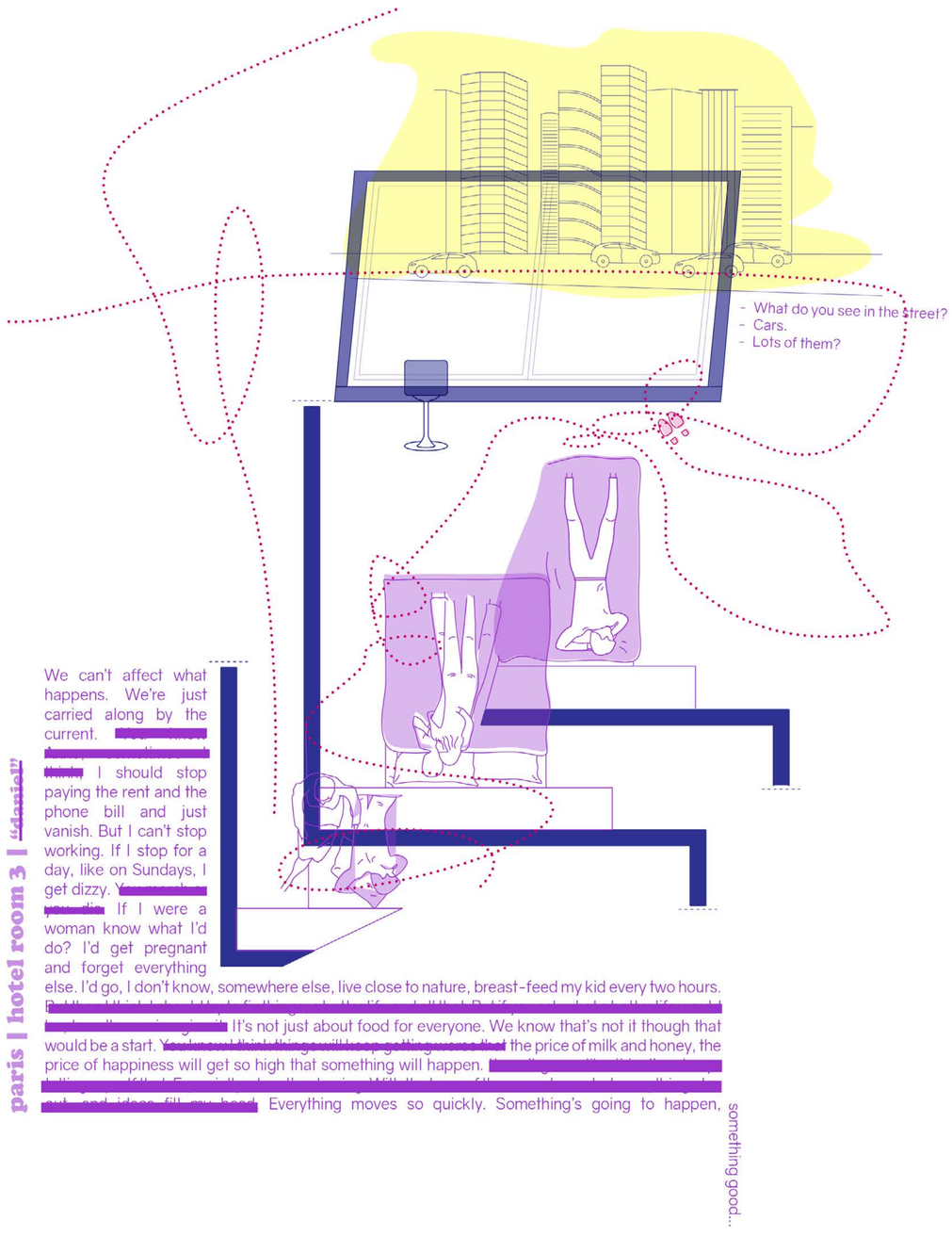

Figure 03.
Overlapping by drawing the varied states of windows and their multiple layers in the hotel room in Paris. From mapping, produced by the authors, 2023.

These examples of the varying conditions of windows disturb the predefined distinction between interior and exterior, private and public, or object and subject. In our mapping, we point out the window as an element that

questions the interiority of a hotel room, which is unfamiliar to a domestic one. This approach to revealing the ambiguous state of the window through our mapping practice allows us to discover that interiority oscillates between certainty and uncertainty rather than having one specific definition. It also calls the agency of the window one of the key spatial elements in constructing the filmic topography and producing the non-interior accordingly. Our mapping practice and the theoretical discussions enable the exploration of the window not only as part of an existing interior nor a threshold element but rather as an uncertain state of an interior itself.

bed as an ambiguous interior within an interior

Our mapping suggests the bed(s) produces non-interiors through its materiality in the film structure. Akerman frames almost all the scenes in the hotel rooms by centring the bed with a key role in the filmic topography. The bed is a much-depersonalised object in an impermanent and non-domestic interior such as a hotel room; however, those beds and their interrelations with Anna's body urge us to question interiority. Throughout the film, the beds in three different hotel rooms and one in the home in Paris receive Anna and the bodies she has encountered during her journey. Although the bed is supposed to be a comfortable, hygienic, personal, and private area of a house, here, on the contrary, beds are framed as shared spaces in impermanent interiors with clothes that never change for three days.

The mapping aims to discover the potential of the material conditions of the bed(s) as a tool to reveal the uncertainty of an interior. Akerman introduces varied beds where the body(s) performs daily actions: listening to music, talking on the phone, having breakfast, making love, sleeping, or talking. Rather than treating the bed as a fixed furniture block, mapping the beds with bodies and related activities unveils the materiality by drawing it over and over. By questioning whether the architectural drawing focuses on a frozen moment, these embodied drawings investigate how space is defined according to the different positionings of the body on the bed and to the camera tactics recording these interrelations between body and bed [Fig. 04]. Drawing each moment of the bed marks different elements and objects of the interior; therefore, mapping explores the bed as an interiority and overlaps the uncertainties produced through its various states.

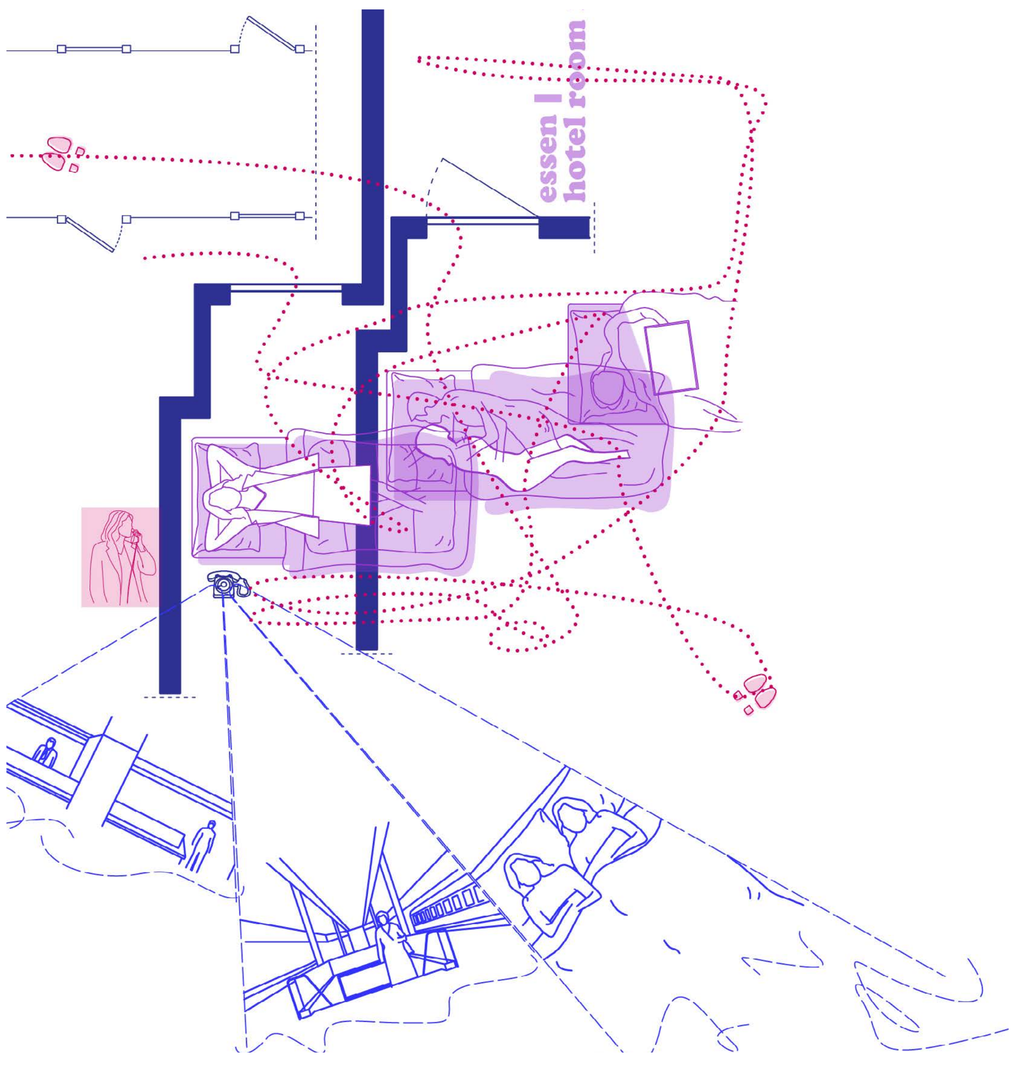

Figure 04.
Plan drawing that multiplies the relationship between body and bed in the hotel room in Essen. From mapping, produced by the authors, 2023.

This entangled relationship between a hotel room, the bed, and the window reminds us of John Lennon and Yoko Ono's *Bed-In for Peace*, performed in a room in the Amsterdam Hilton hotel. Referring to the sit-in protests, their 'bed-in' performance brings the protest from public space to private space, from the street to the bed. During the performance, the back of the bed faces the window, yet Yoko Ono and John Lennon face the hotel room's interior; 'outside was, of course, Amsterdam, but the bed was far more public than the streets.'[36] Viewers can realise it is in a hotel room in Amsterdam, yet the room and the bed are detached from their context in a way. The bed is occupied in the mornings as their office with interviews on camera and in the evenings as a place where they work to conceive a baby.[37] Unlike the traditional meaning of 'home', which is constructed by separating workspace and living space, this hotel room as an interior constructs uncertainty by oscillating between public and private, or exposure and concealment. In parallel with *Rendez-vous*, the performance undermines issues such as the privacy of a hotel room, the individuality of a bed, and its belonging to a private interior. Mapping through the bed pursues the research of interiority by speculating with the drawings on how the body defines, transforms, or personalises different anonymous interiors. Each drawing experiment probes the materiality of the bed and the window to uncover the ambiguous and anonymous hotel rooms as uncertain interiorities.

Another scene in the hotel room in Brussels, where Anna has a long dialogue with her mother, might also exemplify probing into the bed's materiality. Mapping of this scene, which frames Anna and her mother in a hotel bed, proposes the bed as well as the materiality of the sound—especially communication blocks—as prominent constitutive elements of the filmic topography [Fig. 05]. Visual as well as audial elements reveal uncertain modes of an interior. Here, the voices of the two characters, the emotions conveyed through them, the intimate story she shared, and her mother's barely perceived reactions in the dark room become interwoven with the bodies of the two women lying on the bed. It enables the viewer to pursue questioning the uncertainty of the interior. This scene is not the only example; throughout *Rendez-vous*, Akerman records Anna's encounters with monologues rather than dialogues between two people. Anna listens patiently to the monologues of others and barely responds to the conversations, which are 'passed interspersed with long periods of uncomfortable silence.'[38] These monologues can be described as 'signs of hindered communication' and 'sound masses that rhythmically break the silence' but do not 'function as actual conversational exchanges.'[39] Essentially, each communication block marks a place, a character, and a story. In deciphering these monologues, mapping explores the ambiguous relationships between the space in which the conversation is performed and the spatial references mentioned, remembered, recalled, or visited through these conversations.

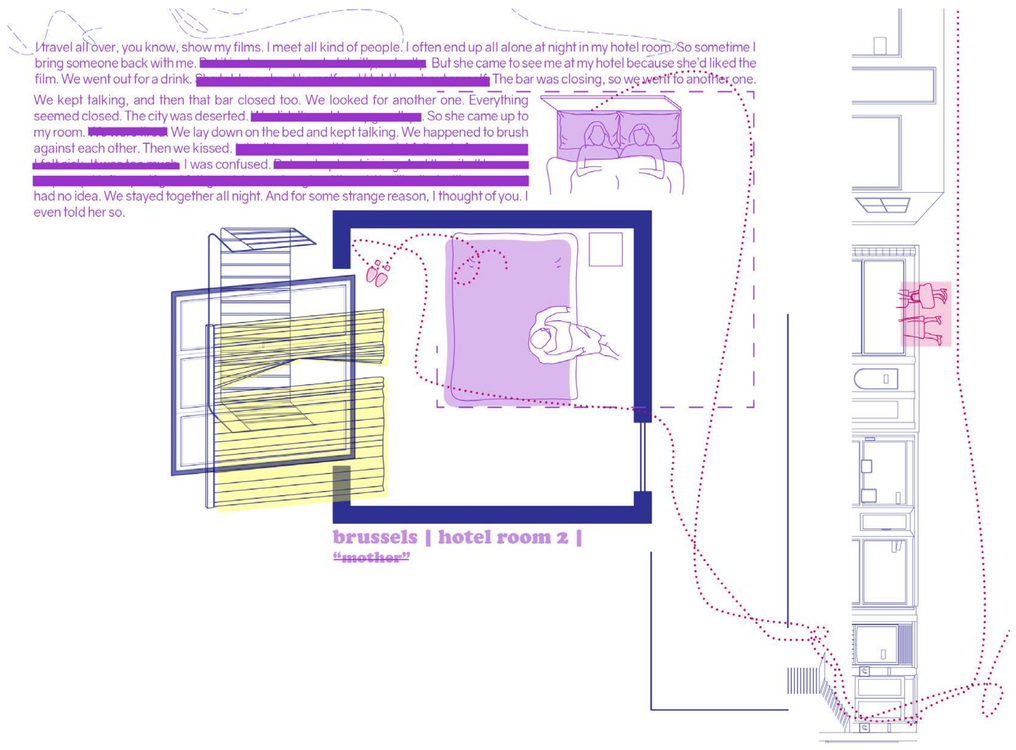

Figure 05.
Juxtaposing visual and audial elements entangled with the body and the bed in the hotel room in Brussels. From mapping, produced by the authors, 2023.

phone as an ambiguous interior on transition

Akerman's in-between interior spatialities contain other non-human agents as well as beds and windows. According to Corpas, Anna's body, which constantly wanders around temporary spaces such as hotel rooms, waiting rooms, and trains, is also accompanied by 'transit objects' such as telephones, coffee cups, or suitcases.[40] These are the main materialities of an uncertain filmic topography. They are not only objects available to the subject but also the agents accompanying the subject and the narrative that explores the uncertainty of this filmic interior. For example, throughout the film, the viewer confronts the telephone in different places as an element that produces a destination, awakens, reminds of some places, imagines, or recalls some people. Mapping reflects on the ambiguity of a telephone by drawing its multiple states.

In the hotel room in Essen, the telephone mediates the situations in which Anna talks to reception, attempts to contact a friend in Italy, and arranges a meeting in Cologne. By including the remembered, thought, and wondered places and people in the hotel room, the mapping claims that the phone can interrogate a peculiar mode of the interior. In the mapping, the fixed yet movable position of the desk phone enables new layers to centre the phone by drawing exterior perspectives just as the window. However, we claim that an interior is not only defined by the subject entering and using it but can also acquire other definitions from the perspectives of other non-human agents and subjects. If we look at Anna's return to her home in Paris at the end of the film, all we see is a window, an empty refrigerator, a messy bed, and a desk phone next to the bed. This phone independently constructs the interior of the home by storing and transmitting the messages it received, undermining the relationship between the interior and the user subject. Meanwhile, mapping differentiates the perception of the interior with the people and dialogues are included through the phone and transform the plan drawing accordingly. Here, the sound coming from the phone also appears as a crucial materiality to create ambiguity within this interior [Fig. 06]. The duration of the incoming voice, the content of the monologue, and the emotion conveyed through the voice on the other side of the phone are becoming slightly included in the scene. What is framed by the film is no longer Anna lying on a bed in front of an anonymous wall. This approach of mapping the materiality of the sound opens

a field to explore the ambiguous boundaries of both the house and Anna's interiority. Variations of sound coming from the same phone create ambiguity, and through this, we draw the traces of this particular interior's uncertainties. An interiority is confined by demanding questions from others as well as expanding to infinity with a quick greeting from a friend who has not been touched for a long time. This complicated entanglement of the materialities of the phone, the sound, and the body of Anna establishes an uncertainty.

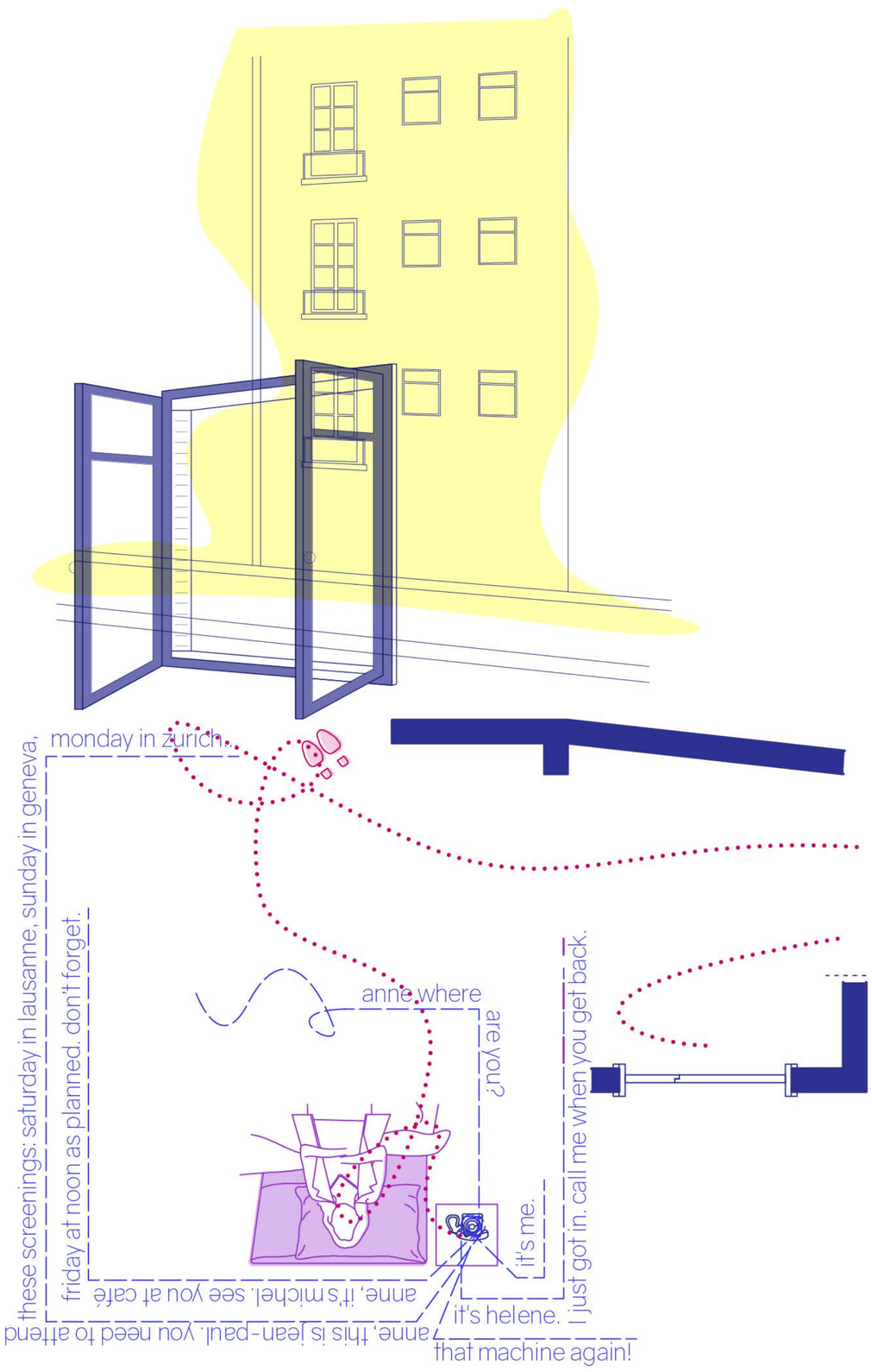

Figure 06.
Establishing spatial boundaries with the heard voices by phone at home in Paris. From mapping, produced by the authors, 2023.

Objects such as the desk phone that unfold by the mapping are not only encountered within an interior space. Even though they are located alone in public or exterior contexts, they may recall or directly reproduce an interior. These can be identical objects encountered in different contexts or only one portable object accompanying the journey. Their own mobility or presence within other mobile interiors has the potential to multiply uncertainties beyond dichotomies. By doing so, *Rendez-vous* allows human and non-human characters to get beyond the dichotomous understanding of space-user, object-subject, or interior-exterior. Mapping enriches this relationship through drawing by discussing the telephone(s) encountered throughout the journey. These drawings examine the modes in which the phone invites the outer space into an interior, produces boundaries of an interior, or overlaps several interiorities. The phone itself as an uncertain interior simultaneously ambiguates and reproduces the environments in which it is located.

conclusions

This essay focused on the possibility of breaking the cycle of architecture that constantly reproduces certain dichotomous approaches, spatial divisions, and their predefined social relationships with the enclosed subjects. Drawing on theories of art, cinema, and feminist studies, we unfolded that the beyond of these dichotomies has so far been sought through methods such as enabling ambiguity, encompassing the unknown potentials

of multiplicities, and including what is excluded from the site. Similarly, we were concerned with proposing non-interior as a theoretical speculation, which we also experimented with a practice-based work on filmic mapping. We criticise architecture's reduction of space to spatial hierarchies, particularly the identification of an interior with the mere female subject. Rather than using binary oppositions, our research exposes the multiplicity and ambiguity of an interior to discuss the possibility of uncertain interiority produced through a specific way of filmic production and our mapping practice. The conceptual investigation of a non-interior together with an embodied practice of mapping offers an interdisciplinary study across and beyond architecture and cinema to explore the uncertainties of a filmic interior. In such cases as the spatial boundaries are blurred when a subject has simultaneous multiple mental and bodily experiences, the privacy of the enclosure is punctured with the cinematic gaze of the camera and the viewer, and different states of dynamism are encountered when the subject relates to various objects. In this critical spatial research, both through our mapping practice and theoretical discussion, we wandered around various scales, contexts, locations, and mediums to unveil the ambiguous materialities of the interior and evoke its unheeded, marginalised, or not-included states in thought and practice.

Tracing the journey of a filmic topography, we uncovered the ambiguities in different scales, locations, and contexts. Our mapping of Les *Rendez-vous d'Anna* defines various interior states such as being a room, a threshold, or piece of a furniture. An anonymous and temporary room might blur the meanings and functions of interior and exterior; a threshold might establish shifting boundaries or evoke different spatialities; a piece of furniture, which is in transition or confined within an interior, might enable the experience of gradual shades of an interiority located in an interior. Rather than a representation of conventional spatial codes, the room, the threshold, and the furniture are particular states of becoming and forming a series of relationships. These material states are layered throughout the research by tracing the inhabitation of space, its representation in film, and the embodied viewing practices of the researchers. Our mapping draws this multi-layered state of becoming, rather than representing a static and frozen moment. Such an approach, which focuses on the instability and the becoming in the material scale, produces uncertainties for an interior. Despite revealing and distinguishing these ambiguous materialities, our mapping produces a kind of non-interior by overlapping the fragmented knowledges of an uncertain interior. Our aim here was not to specify only one interior nor limit the material uncertainties of an interior to the ones mentioned in this essay. Rather, we claim that further explorations can be pursued on uncertainty by probing into this state of becoming through creative studies of everyday life and critical re-readings of different films or other representations.

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13 Krauss, 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field', p. 41.

14 Literary critic William Empson defines ambiguity, in daily language, by referring to openness to multiple interpretations and an intentional uncertainty of meaning for words, ideas, and images. In this essay, non-interior establishes ambiguity both linguistically and theoretically. However, linguistic ambiguity is only instrumentalised to enhance the theoretical discussion rather than being the purpose of this research. William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (New York: New Directions, 1966).

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point/cloud: diffusive spatial imaginaries

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abstract
Laser scanning holds out the possibility of extreme certainty. Digital scanning has become deeply integrated in contemporary archaeological surveying, and in architectural heritage and preservation contexts digital scans are now common. Certainty in this text-based essay is understood as an *affect*, an experiential quality rather than an absolute measure. It does not question the possibility or usefulness of precise measurement (although it does question the rhetorical use of exactitude and precision), but explores the imaginative role of exactitude in this form of digital imaging. It makes readings of a series of moving-image works that use point clouds generated by laser scanning. Rhetorically, the term 'point cloud' is suspended between the apparent certainty and exactitude of the mathematical point, and the vague ungraspability of vapour. Rather than expressing exactitude and objectivity, the works discussed here highlight ambiguities of human perception, and seek to see from nonhuman perspectives (the driverless car, the kāhu/hawk, and an oak forest). It concludes by suggesting that such works in particular, and point cloud imagery in general, can be understood in terms of a diffusive material imaginary.

keywords
scanning; digital imaging; moving image; material imaginary; heritage

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part one—certain images

Laser scanning holds out the possibility of extreme certainty. A laser scanner measures distance by timing how long light takes to bounce back from a surface, producing an (x, y, z) position in Cartesian space calculated from the angle of the beam and the measured distance. Optionally, it may also use an image sensor to record a Red, Green, Blue (R, G, B) value as the visible colour of this point in space. Turning, the device records many thousands of such points, yielding a large table of data that can be plotted using three-dimensional modelling software to produce a visualisation known as a *point cloud* [Fig. 01]. These point clouds can be viewed from any angle, processed further, manipulated, and coordinated with other digitally-modelled elements.[01]

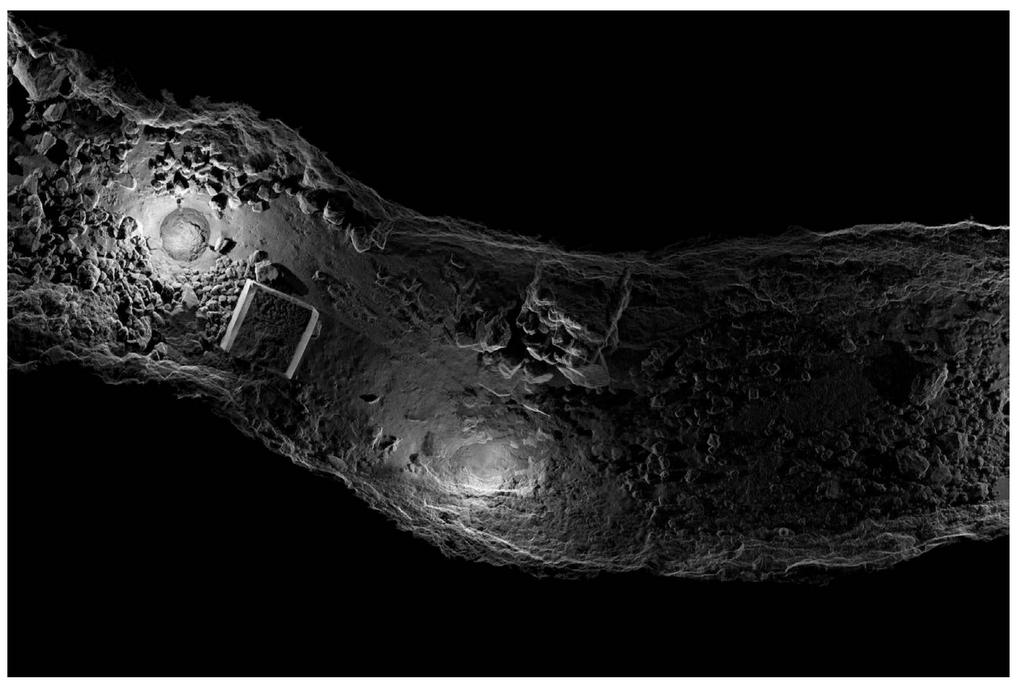

Figure 01.
Mount Royal Cave, Ōwairaka. Terrestrial LiDAR scan (from the series 'Ngā Mahi Rarowhenua', Chirag Jindal, 2018).

Laser scans have become ubiquitous in heritage architecture and interior design because they allow for accurate measurement of surfaces and building elements that may be irregular, worn, or have shifted from their original position, and because they allow for new elements to be designed to interface exactly with their current position. The literature studying applications in archaeology, architectural preservation, and museum contexts commonly describe scanning as *capturing*—a symptomatic term.[02] Many museums have scanned items from their collections and made these available on the grounds that this facilitates public access and study, and can act as a digital backup in case the original is lost or damaged.[03] Digital scanning has become deeply integrated in contemporary archaeological surveying, and in architectural heritage and preservation contexts digital scans are now common.

The apparent certainty of the laser scan rests on its exactitude. In an ever-increasing array of contexts, what is certain is what can be measured accurately and precisely. But, as Susan Stewart writes of the emergence of literary realism, 'exactness is a mirror, not of the world, but of the ideology of the world.'[04] Exactitude, writes Mark Wigley, 'involves fantasies of control, of controlling and being controlled, constraint and release. The world of calculation is never separate from that of sensuality, desire, and emotion.'[05] If exactitude is a desire, however, it is shadowed by anxieties: in particular, worries about things dissipating or eluding our grasp, being vague or indefinite.

Certainty in this essay is understood as an *affect*, an experiential quality rather than an absolute measure. It does not question the possibility or usefulness of precise measurement (although it does question the rhetorical use of exactitude and the 'troping of precision'), but explores the imaginative role of exactitude in this form of digital imaging, and the ideology it reveals.[06] It also points out a peculiar inversion by which an excess of certainty can produce experiences of uncertainty, experiences that can be exploited and creatively cultivated. While this essay does not detail the technical production of point clouds, it is concerned with them not as purely technical means, but as a form of imaging that activates a particular material imaginary: that of particulate and diffusive matter.

Technologies do not only operate in terms of their technical operation, but function in relationship to imaginations about what they are capable of. What matters is not only what the technology *does* but also what it is *imagined to be doing*. Such imaginations condition how technologies are applied, how their operation is interpreted to perform socially or politically, how they are subsequently developed, what new contexts they might be applied to, and how they might be applied as metaphors or analogies. These have been referred to as 'sociotechnical' or 'technoscientific' imaginaries.[07] Intuitions, assumptions, and narratives associated with physical experiences of material bleed into our understandings of technology. Here, imaginings of particles, clouds, and dust are found to permeate the practice and aesthetics of laser scanning.

Point cloud visualisations often appear ghostly and insubstantial, with odd lighting and gaps. The term *point cloud* embeds a tension between extreme certainty and indistinct vagueness. If a point is a moment of absolute precision, a 'concentrated certitude' or 'bare position', a cloud is a figure of indeterminacy.[08] In the words of art historian Hubert Damisch, it 'contradicts the idea of outline and delineation and through its relative insubstantiality constitutes a negation of the solidity, permanence, and identity that define *shape*'.[09] The internal contradictions of the point cloud, then (exactitude and vagueness, certainty, and the indefinite), orient this discussion.

In the first part of this essay, I examine the idea of scanning as *capture* with reference to a point cloud scan of London's Soane Museum produced by ScanLAB and presented as a 'virtual tour' on the museum's website. I link the ideology of grasping and acquiring to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century practices of touring, collecting, and describing, and explore clouds as part of the material imaginary of the ungraspable. I then discuss several moving-image artworks based on point cloud scans. Rather than expressing exactitude and objectivity, these works make explicit the ambiguities of human perception, and seek to see from nonhuman perspectives: the driverless car, the kāhu (hawk), and an oak forest. Textural and material qualities and effects that are suppressed in the idea of capture are expressly articulated in these works. I conclude by reflecting on atoms, dust, and the diffusive material imaginary.

carrying off the palace

Marketing materials for scanning devices often evoke the idea of a perfect correspondence with the world. Leica Geosystems, a major manufacturer of laser scanners, and Autodesk, who produce software for scanning, describe their products as 'reality capture', imagining imaging as directly grasping or arresting rather than mirroring or representing.[10] This term is usually given an anodyne definition such as 'the use of technical means to record and visualize elements from the physical world', but this obscures its evidently acquisitive and positivistic implications.[11] The paradigm of possession, and language of grasping and controlling, pervade the use and literature of scanning.[12] This acquisitive paradigm harmonises with older practices of collection and heritage preservation, as we can see by looking at a scan of London's John Soane Museum.

The museum was architect John Soane's house in Lincoln's Inn Fields from 1792 until his death in 1837. Over forty years, Soane slowly converted it into a live-in museum, eventually assimilating the neighbouring houses and filling them with an eclectic collection of plaster casts, architectural models, paintings, antiquities, and other curiosities.[13] The museum today is preserved close to the way Soane left it. Like many museums, the Soane Museum has experimented with scanning both individual artefacts and spaces. This work was carried out by ScanLAB, the LIDAR-imaging firm of Matthew Shaw and William Trossell, who work across archival, art, and architectural contexts.[14] On the museum's website, visitors are invited to 'explore' this imaged museum by viewing and interacting with visualisations of these scans.[15] The opening text suggests that website does not merely picture the museum in detail, but offers it 'made digital.' Only three spaces can be visited through this interface, however: the Model Room, the Sepulchral Chamber, and the Picture Room. These rooms can be rotated to view, and several items in each space can be isolated for a more detailed view.

This virtual tour aligns neatly with Soane's original intentions for the museum: to be a teaching tool and place of public outreach, making accessible places, times, and material culture to those unable to travel or access these in their original place:

> The whole object (a building or a ruin in its native site, whether in England or further afield) was here supplanted by an assemblage of parts [... while] artists would still need to travel to the actual sites of ancient remains, they would be doing so only to confirm the image provided by souvenirs and representations back in London.[16]

Where a physical tour involves displacing oneself, the virtual tour displaces sites and things, arranging them around the viewer. Soane's published catalogue *Description of the House and Museum on the North Side of Lincoln's Inn Fields* led the viewer from the street, up the front stairs, and through each room in turn, revealing its contents: paintings, cornices, books, stones, vessels,

and plaster casts.[17] Soane was concerned that without such a guide, 'many of the smaller Models and Sculptures might be overlooked, by those who will delight in tracing their happy conception and delicate workmanship.'[18] Soane's guide is itself a kind of tracing or scan, a complete and rigorous viewing attentive to detail and form, that could obviate the need for travel by concentrating historical experience into a selection of objects and images.

The reality captured by these exacting scans is conspicuously superficial. As the virtual camera ghosts through the museum, there is no intimation that floors or walls have mass or substance. Rather, the museum is exfoliated and rendered as an atom-thick surface. A laser scanner has no way of registering the solidity or depth behind the outermost surface. It is up to the viewer to supply an understanding of what might lie beneath from superficial cues. The scanner valorises a single temporal state, deprioritising substrates, concealed elements, and overlays except insofar as they can be read forensically from the surface. The scanner is myopic, unable to see beyond the surface it is focused on, comprehending distance but not depth.

crawling over things

Optical scanners, of course, are not the first visual technology claiming to transcend mere representation to grasp reality directly. The camera, for example, has often been imagined to be such a tool, so that '[p]hotographed images do not seem to be statements about the world so much as pieces of it, miniatures of reality that anyone can make or acquire.'[19] Even John Ruskin, sceptical of the value of photography, saw its value for producing documents of built heritage that outdid drawing in precision and detail:

> It is a noble invention, say what they will of it, and any one who has worked and blundered and stammered as I have done for four days, and then sees the thing he has been trying to do so long in vain done perfectly and faultlessly in half a minute, won't abuse it after-wards. It is very nearly the same as carrying off the palace itself—every chip of stone & stain is there—and, of course, there is no mistake about proportions.[20]

Where drawing was attended with long labour, blunders, and stammering, the photograph almost instantaneously comprehended its object. Ruskin's language recalls that of contemporary writers on digital scanning: by tracing the surface in ever-increasing detail, the object is imagined to be so fully mastered that it has been arrested and carried off.[21]

Ruskin's prioritisation of detail can be understood in the context of a rising fascination with detailed description through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Literary historian Cynthia Sundberg Wall writes that new descriptive genres emerged in this period:

> Improvements in trade and travel, discoveries and methodologies of

> empirical science, Puritan habits of self-examination, the passion for collecting and classifying, all found wide-open spaces for description in topographies and maps, micrographies and meditations, lists and catalogs, diaries and satires.[22]

These new genres were associated with swelling consumerism, practices of collecting, touring, and new scientific practices. The microscopes of Robert Hooke for instance, revealed a new world of detail. The smallest typographical marks on a page were revealed by the microscope to be 'smutty daubings', and a flea found to be 'adorn'd with a curiously polish'd suit of sable Armour, neatly jointed, and beset with multitudes of sharp pins.'[23] A new paradigm emerged: 'Minute observation and description [...] will, in fact, get closer to something essential than will pulling away and constructing larger "truths".'[24] By examining and rendering detail, a territory, object, space, or person could be traced out exhaustively. As Wall puts it, description 'crawls over things', elaborating surface rather than depth.[25] Where once meaning was assumed to be concealed in underlying principles, now '[t]he surfaces of objects—the surface world—were acquiring an interpretive richness in their own right.'[26]

To the extent that laser scanning also crawls over things and enables one to carry off the palace, it can be seen as reflecting a collector's reality, in which items are not merely to be pictured, but acquired. The contexts in which this data is typically handled—framed on the screens of portable devices, or viewed from one's own desk, reinforce this sense of possession. Scans, like the collector's objects, render portable, accessible, manipulable, and intricately detailed objects. As James Scott memorably put it, 'Certain forms of knowledge and control require a narrowing of vision [...] [simplification] makes the phenomenon at the center of the field of vision more legible and hence more susceptible to careful measurement and calculation', yielding an 'aggregate, synoptic view of a selective reality' that enables 'control, and manipulation.'[27] The term 'reality capture' masks ideological and imaginative assertions about the nature of reality, and the possibility of absorbing value and meaning into computational space.

gaps in the clouds

In the reality capture paradigm, scans are understood to be realistic to the extent that they are sensitive to detail beyond the practical capacity of traditional measuring and drawing practices. From another perspective, however, the imagery resulting from these scans is wildly unrealistic: a ghostly and insubstantial resemblance that would be difficult to mistake for the real thing. A virtual visitor to the Soane Museum is disembodied, moving like a ghost through a building itself rendered ghostly. The façade becomes transparent as we draw close, like a thin veil disclosing the museum's interiors: chairs, cabinets, panelled surfaces, paintings, and other objects. The detail is impressive, but overwhelming, layering up and gliding past faster than we can catch hold of it. The imagery is riddled with gaps and inconsistencies.[28]

One of the key characteristics of a laser scan is variable resolution. From its standpoint in front of the building, the rotating head of the scanner fires its laser outward. This means nearby surfaces are sampled very closely, creating a denser cloud of points. Further out, however, the angle between the points means they are being sampled further apart, creating a less dense cloud. This results in a gradient that is particularly visible on a flat floor [Fig. 02]. The surface directly below the scanner can't be imaged, leaving circular gaps in the data. From this circle, lines of points radiate outwards, becoming progressively more sparse until they reach the limit of the scanner's range (either set in software or reaching the limits of the hardware).

Surfaces occluded from its camera can register no points. With a black background to the image, this appears as a shadow cast by the occulding surface. These occlusions can only be filled by repositioning the camera to capture the hidden surface from another viewpoint. The effect is to render the scene as if it were lit from a point source at the location of the camera. If the scene is rendered against a black backdrop, the lighting resembles that of a candle or lantern at night, diffusing into darkness. Laser scanners have particular trouble with glass, mirrors, and other reflective surfaces, which can create visual ghosts and other unexpected effects.[29]

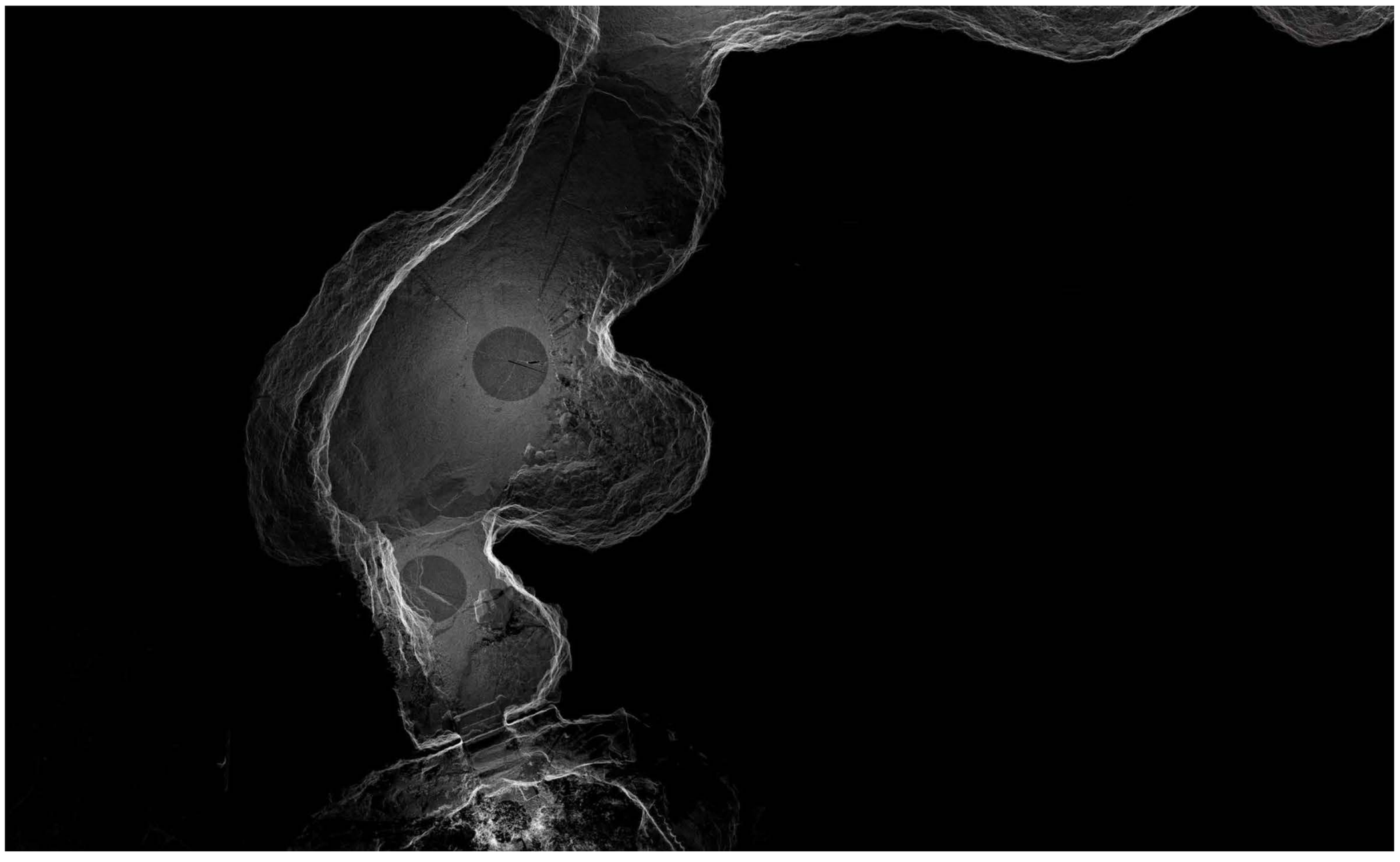

Figure 02.
Ambury Cave, Māngere Bridge. Terrestrial LiDAR scan (from the series 'Ngā Mahi Rarowhenua', Chirag Jindal, 2018).

Clouds are arguably one of the most important material images of our time, serving as they do to describe diffusive, vague, or distributed phenomena. Art theorist Hubert Damisch suggests we can discern in the ways artists have approached the portrayal of clouds the boundaries of semiotic and perspectival understandings of image-making. Cloud 'contradicts the very idea of outline and delineation and through its relative insubstantiality constitutes a negation of the solidity, permanence, and identity that define *shape*.'[30] Damisch examines Ruskin's perspectival studies of clouds, in which they were modelled as simplified forms in three-dimensional space [Fig. 03], comparing them with the clouds and mists of Chinese Song and Ming paintings, and the works of Turner. In his studies, Ruskin attempted to bring clouds within the perspectival frame. In the latter, however, clouds expressed a condition of unknowing that can obscure or muddle objects and their spatial location, or act as the ground from which they resolve, but were not discrete objects themselves. In portraying clouds, argues Damsich, artists find themselves suspending the rational order of perspective and exposing their work to uncertainty.[31]

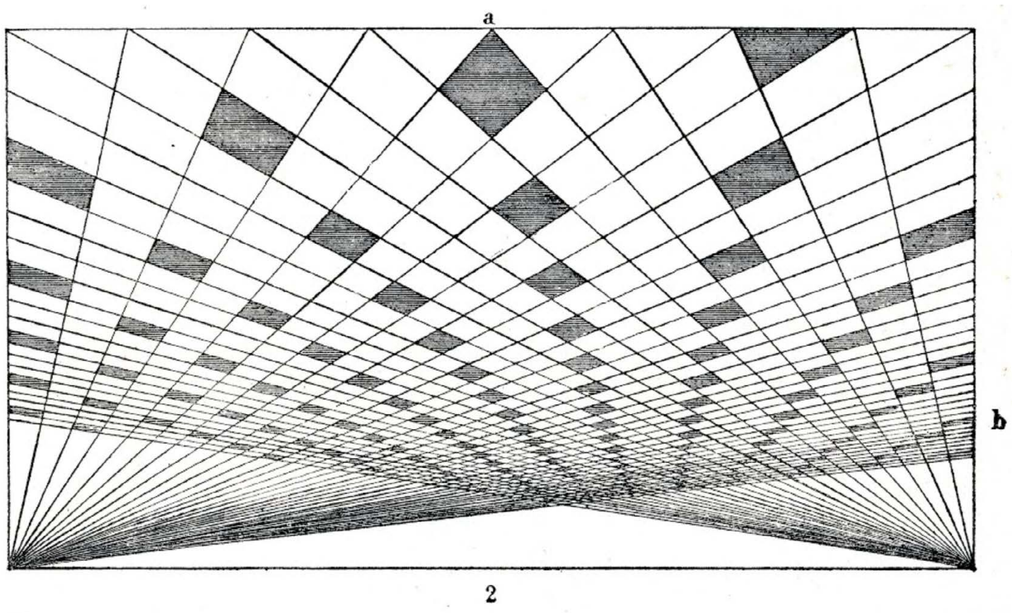

Figure 03.
Diagram showing how to draw clouds in perspective (John Ruskin, *Modern Painters V*, 1860, p. 152). Public Domain.[32]

part two—a view from everywhere and nowhere

the dream life of driverless cars

While laser scanning has been used as a means to accurately document, record, and archive, it also seems to offer alternative ways of seeing. How does a machine perceive? Artists and speculative designers have worked with scanning vision in a way that highlights its alienating, detached qualities: the sense it offers of a view from nowhere. That is, laser scanning is not only a convenient means for collecting and visualising precise information, but also provokes imagination. One of the critical forms this imagination takes is as uncertainty or anxiety about the dissolution of the traditional viewing subject.

In its 2015 video work 'The Dream Life of Driverless Cars', ScanLAB asked how sensing machines might be understood to perceive, imagining how the world might be revealed through their sensory apparatus, and what opportunities for action and sense-making might come into focus.[33] Having modified the sensors of a self-driving car prototype, Shaw and Trossell recorded its output as it passed down the streets of London. The space they make visible is an unsettling version of our own visual world. Where the Soane Museum scans were intended to produce a sense of mastery and possession, 'The Dream Life of Driverless Cars' revels in the sense of uncanny familiarity.

In the rendered animation the virtual camera moves through a point cloud coloured pale blue and violet [Fig. 04]. Solid buildings appear as thin veils. While the Soane Musuem scan is thickened by overlaying multiple sets of data taken from different station points, the moving scanner is riddled with gaps. The initial sequences are relatively familiar: we recognise buildings and trees, and pass over a bridge. Along the street are vague wisps, fleetingly touched by the laser: this is how the sensors are perceiving vehicles and people in motion (making human bodies solid in the perception of self-driving cars has proved to be notoriously problematic). Partway through the animation, however, the camera begins to move like a drone, looking down from above an intersection, where a strange elongated object appears. This is revealed to be a double-decker bus in motion alongside the scanning vehicle, smeared like a Gerhard Richter painting in three dimensions. The illusion that the scanner is producing images like a human eye dissolves.

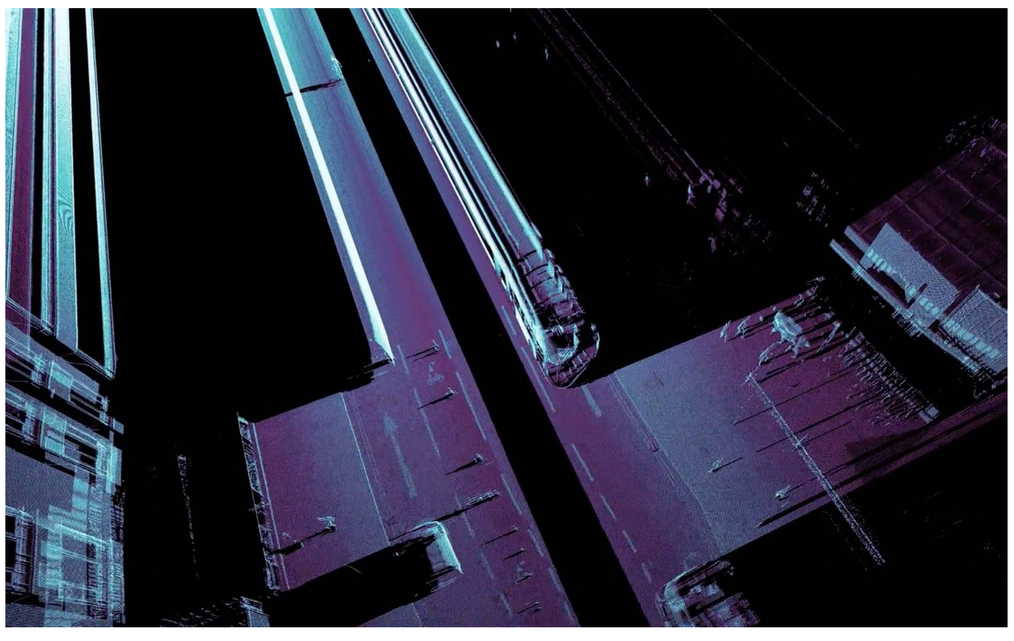

Figure 04.
Still from 'The Dream Life of Driverless Cars' (ScanLAB, 2015).

The scanned imagery is a technical composite of times and movements: the period of the rotating scanhead, the movement of the vehicle, the static point cloud, and the reanimated timeline of the virtual camera. ScanLAB's imagery, according to media theorist Jussi Parikka:

> [...] relates to the complexity of the technological laser scan records both as a movement across the city and as a sensitive way of dealing with light as a living entity that records the complexity of the multiple surfaces of the city, itself as an image, a trajectory of light.[34]

The view is characterised not only by gaps in vision, but also by 'over-seeing,' in which 'complex architectural forms, reflective surfaces, unpredictable weather and temporary construction sites' interact with the sensors to produce unexpected results.[35] When the car turns a corner, Big Ben is re-scanned, appearing doubled a few seconds into the animation. While the driverless car's software attempts to eliminate and process out these ambiguities and confusions, Shaw and Trossel suggest they are a view into the vehicle's subconscious, a kind of dream-state, 'mad machine hallucinations.'[36] On this view, mad vision would be not merely the opposite of rational vision, but one of its emergent possibilities.

te ahua, te wa, te atea

In *Te Ahua, Te Wa, Te Atea* (2022) a recent work by Māori artist Russ Flatt (Ngāti Kahungunu), point cloud imagery suggests

the possibility of seeing through, or seeing in parallel. Point cloud sequences alternate and blend with photographic imagery to create the sense that the same space might be being simultaneously perceived as being very different worlds. The opening sequence orbits a hill (properly, the maunga Te Wheao, important to Kahungunu and Heretaunga iwi). As we would expect from laser scan imagery produced by drone, the land appears as a thin veil [Fig. 05]. The imagery cuts and fades between point cloud and black-and-white drone photography.

Figure 05.
Still from *Te Ahua, Te Wa, Te Atea* (Russ Flatt, 2022).

Curator Brook Konia, writing of the work, recalls a Heretaunga whakataukī (proverb) that refers to the whenua (land) as 'Heretaunga Haaro o te Kaahu': 'Heretaunga, beauty of which can only be seen by the hawk', inviting us to see how the work 'invokes the eyes of the hawk.'[37] Where Shaw and Trossell use the point cloud to express the life of a technological other, Flatt (in Konia's reading) aligns the vision of the scanner with the eye of the indigenous kāhu (swamp harrier). In each case, the laser scanner serves as a means of othering sight. The drone/kāhu glides over the terrain, and at several points pauses to reveal forms traced out on the land: the circle of a roundabout, the square base of an monument, the outline of a parcel of land, the irregular bars of bridges over a river. Late in the video, the virtual camera rises up through the veil of the ground from below: the kāhu flies through the land, not only over it. The virtual camera suggests the presence of other viewers, other occupants of the whenua (land, understood as animate), other lives. It is as if we are viewing at an angle, obliquely, askance, watching a performance from the wings. The gaps and ambiguities of the point cloud make explicit the uncertainties of human perception.[38]

In a series of recent point cloud portraits, *Tekau ma Rūa*, Flatt portrays wāhine Māori (Māori women) as 'ethereal female figures who still defiantly occupy the veiled landscapes of their whenua.'[39] As monochrome point clouds, material mass is subtracted. Although light has produced the image, it is not illuminated in the manner we are accustomed to. The laser is agnostic about whether it has rebounded from the trunk of a tree, the side panel of a car, or the hair of a human figure. Body and place, wāhine and whenua read as comprised of the same stuff, as continuous. Flatt softens the discreteness of things, working against the objectifying quality emphasised by the 'reality capture' paradigm. Instead, the agnostic, myopic vision of the scanner is taken to disclose an underlying reality, a world oriented to other-than-human eyes.

Quercus

A similar use of scanned imagery to dissolve human subjectivity is found in *Quercus*, a digital animation by Italian design duo Formafantasma as part of their exhibition Cambio, commissioned by London's Serpentine Gallery.[40] *Quercus* takes the viewer on a slowly gliding tour through a digitally scanned oak forest, with a voiceover from the perspective of the trees, provided by philosopher and author of *The Life of Plants* Emanuele Coccia.[41] The forest is imaged as a point cloud, rendered in a gradient from red to white, disassociating them from the greens and browns that would appear to human vision [Fig. 06].

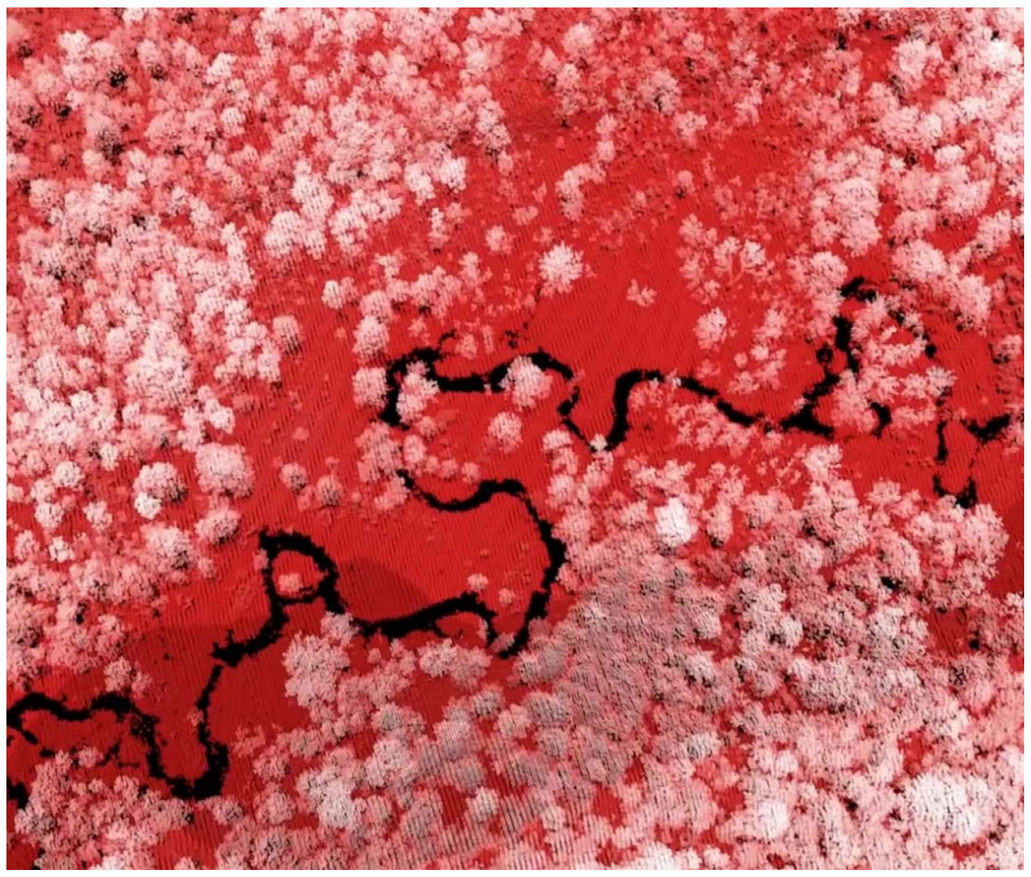

Figure 06.
Still detail from *Quercus* (Formafantasma, 2020).

While the video presents a single point cloud, it has been assembled from a number of scans: an aerial scan from a drone renders the topography; terrestrial point scans image a region of the forest in more detail (there are tell-tale circles indicating the position of the tripod); and at least one tree has been imaged at a higher resolution again.

Sometimes the view is an aerial one: rivers appear as black meandering threads through the red and white forest. At other points we recognise individual trees, looking up into their canopies, meandering among their trunks, and tracing the contours of individual boles. The impression is that the camera is able to move smoothly and freely from seeing the forest as a whole to the surface contours of an individual tree. In this seemingly visual world, however, the virtual camera moves in ways impossible or difficult for a physical lens. It passes through tree trunks, pivots off kilter around multiple axes, and drifts lazily in continuous gliding pans. Perhaps the language of cameras and shots, drawing on analogies with the performance of physical lenses and the logic of assembling film is not apt for this kind of simulated sight.

The film has a quality of reverie; the unblinking slowness of the pans, the sense of something at once familiar and strange suggest a kind of dream or meditation (as in *The Dream Life of Driverless Cars*). The voiceover insistently uses collective pronouns ('we' are the trees, 'you' are humans), and the point cloud reinforces this through the difficulty of distinguishing one tree from another. Formafantasma deepen this loss of distinction by zooming in until even the sense of surface disappears. In a passage just past ten minutes into the film, the frame is filled with a blizzard of

pink and white static blowing back and forth against blackness [Fig. 07]. For nearly a minute this Lucretian atomic rain rushes and shifts as if driven by the wind.[42] Sometimes it seems like a pattern might be emerging, like an old television broadcast as you fiddle with the antenna. In flat tones, the voiceover is discussing the difference between sculpting in wood and building in brick or cement, drawing our attention to questions of substance and matter. Lines and streaks emerge from the hail and finally settle into a lumpy pattern, which quite suddenly resolves as the forest, viewed once again from above. Although the point cloud renders the environment as a ghostly veil, the movement of the camera reinforces the ghostliness of the viewer. Forests are places of ritual, elemental, and spiritual experience, in which individuals might discover themselves to be only part of an ecology, community, or cosmos. *Quercus* revels in approaching solid matter to reveal it dissolving in detail. Up close, in the precise domain of the discretely measured point, the image disperses completely.

Figure 07.
Still detail from *Quercus* (Formafantasma, 2020).

affective certainty

In each of these works, the point cloud renders a view from elsewhere, or even nowhere. They exploit the *affect* of certainty while calling certainty into question. By rendering the world as clouds of particulate or diaphanous veils, ScanLAB, Flatt, and Formafantasma relish the dematerialising effects of scanning. They are sufficiently intricate in their detail to present recognisable elements—trees, buildings. At times the effect of the scanner's position creates the impression of lighting effects. But the image is only *apparently* lit, *apparently* viewed, *apparently* solid. Each activates a short-circuit or contradiction between the accurate and precisely measured data point and the affective vagueness of the point cloud. They each make explicit the question-begging nature of digital precision. The ambiguities they manipulate are not simply unclarities that can be resolved with the addition of further precision. In fact, a number of their ambiguities emerge precisely through 'over-seeing', a surfeit of precise data.[43]

This surfeit produces a sense of an excessive and ceaseless process. Traditional orthographic drawings typically emphasise completeness and discreteness by employing devices like framing and scaling. Scans, however, have a flatness that I have referred to as agnosticism or myopia. An apparent lack of judgement (or perhaps rather a deliberate suppression of it) forms part of its affect of detached, authoritative certainty.

part three—diffusive imaginaries

Philosopher of computation Alexander Galloway writes:

> Computational vision takes it as a given that objects and worlds can and will be viewable from all sides. Indeed, the point should be made more forcefully. Computational vision takes it as a given that point of view is not necessary for seeing.[44]

The history of computational vision, suggests Galloway, is a story of transcending the single perspectival viewpoint. For example, he describes François Willème's 'photosculpture' technique, in which the object to be imaged was positioned in the centre of a ring of twenty-four cameras that were triggered simultaneously.[45] This yielded twenty-four profiles of the figure viewed in fifteen degree increments. In early versions of the method, these profiles were cut from thin sheets of timber and then assembled into a three-dimensional form as a preliminary to producing a carved sculpture. According to Galloway:

> Willème's technique reveals something profound, that there is an alternative history of photography *in which point of view has no meaning*, at least not a single point of view [...] in escaping the limitations of the camera obscura's single aperture, photography smeared itself across a limitless grid of points, neutering the axis of time while emboldening the axes of space.[46]

Zeynep Çelik Alexander, in her history of scanning as part of the technics of design, writes that technical vision, at first understood in terms of tools and techniques, came to merge with understandings of human perception.[47] That is, human perception itself became understood in technical terms. In the late nineteenth century, a widely held understanding of sight divided it into a two-stage process: first a non-semantic 'gazing/scanning' which yielded the raw data of perception, followed a process of recognition or interpretation.[48] The foundation of contemporary scanning techniques is the idea of the non-perspectival and non-semantic view. Seeing rested on a foundation of bare perception: the eye was imagined to be an unconscious detector that accumulated data points that could then be rendered and interpreted in the mind's eye. Sight — whether organic, mental, or technical—was understood to include a stage of assembly interposed between detection and interpretation and overlapping with them.

> The visual field needed to be composed. The aggregation of the visual field became allied with the discretisation necessary for digital processing of images:
>
> [...] all imaging today is a process of detecting energy emitted by an environment and chopping it into discrete, measurable electrical charges called signals, which are stored, calculated, managed, and manipulated through various statistical methods. Images are thus the outputs of energetic processes defined by signalization, and these signals, in their accumulation, are what we mean when we say the word data.[49]

Computational vision, according to Galloway and Çelik Alexander, is exact to the extent that it is quantified and signalised, but accompanying this process is the dissolution and decomposition of the image, and the diffusion of the perspectival viewpoint (not so that there is no viewpoint, but so that the viewpoint is *everywhere simultaneously*).[50] If we recall Damisch's idea that clouds required artists to wrestle with non-perspectival epistemologies, we might see computational vision as a becoming-cloudy as much as a becoming-exact.

Even before photography, these features of contemporary imaging were anticipated by techniques of measured drawing. As drawing was reinvented as geometric calculation, a fascination with parsimony—the minimum number of points needed to represent accurately—arose.[51] Drawings that became overwhelmed by points, on the other hand, could become lost, dissolving into impressionism, and losing their instructional functions.

In rendering its cloudy world, laser scanning triggers a 'material imagination' of particles and diffusion.[52] Gaston Bachelard points out that the intelligence and imagination we develop from our experience of materials becomes a heuristic through which we interpret, diagnose possibility, orient ourselves, and take action. Our expectations, assumptions, and intuitions are pervaded by our imaginations of matter. As Bachelard describes it, imagination is not merely situated in the minds of individuals. On the contrary, it 'eludes the determinations of psychology [... and] constitutes an autochthonous, autogenous realm.'[53] That is, imaginations such as the diffusive material imagination indicated here, are simultaneously metaphoric and literal, social and individual, creative and technical, poetic and practical. Through imagination, we attribute meaning to the world and discern what possibilities for action lie open to us.

One of Bachelard's forays into material imagination inquired into the idea of the *atom*, which he argued we primarily imagine through the material imagination of *dust*: 'From the phenomena of dust, powder, and smoke, Homo faber learns to meditate upon the delicate structure and the mysterious power of the infinitely small; along this path lies the knowledge of the impalpable

and the invisible.'[54] Bachelard's invocation of dust suggests another reading of the point cloud. The data points of a laser scan accumulate like a superficial residue. In the case of the Soane Museum we might be reminded of the close affiliation between archives and dust. Museums, their contents, and their occupants are often reputed to be dusty. As items become thickly coated with dust, their withdrawal from use and life is ever clearer. Dust, 'associated with uneventfulness and inactivity, and things that are still, dull and out of date', becomes an accusation of lateness, being out-of-time, lost in the past, or useless.[55]

Dusting is part of the domestic labour of cleaning, wiping away the traces of human presence, reasserting the present. By wiping away dust, we insist that a space is in current use. Dusting is also morally coded: 'a surrogate for the absence of social concern [...] a failure of control over the environment' or even 'a moral breakdown.'[56] The laser scanner, slowly turning, carefully strokes the interior surfaces of the museum, trying like a diligent cleaner not to miss a spot. The idea of meticulous attention, of missing nothing, connects such scans with the labour of cleanliness. Digital spaces perpetuate the possibility of being dustless; philosopher Michael Marder writes that 'the virtualization of existence instills in us the illusion of a dust-free world.'[57] The genre of point cloud imagery seems to assert a domain of precision, certainty, and acquirable objects: a world of precisely defined things in a continual present. But, just as obsessive cleaning might be taken to indicate a fear of dirt, the obsessive precision of scanning might also indicate anxieties about the diffusion of world and subject.

In imagination, dust becomes a way to conceive of time and loss, and our own physical matter. Marder writes that, 'as we clash with external dust, we displace existential anxieties and obliquely confront our mortal, rootless, restless selves, no longer discernable as such.'[58] Dust 'corroborates our suspicion that reality is not a hard and unchipped rock, against which we throw meaning and ourselves in vain, but loose residue on a surface without depth.'[59] The threat posed by dust, according to Marder, is the idea of 'mereness', that something might have nothing more to it, or that it could be reduced to some kind of minimum. Art critic Mario Praz points out that in the end, a museum's occupant may themselves become figured as dust:

> I see myself as having myself become an object and an image, a museum piece among museum pieces, already detached and remote [...] I have looked at myself in a convex mirror, and have seen myself as no bigger than a handful of dust.[60]

conclusion

The dusty interior and the particulate spaces of point cloud visualisations tap into a diffusive material imagination. They unsettle ideas of time, substance, and viewpoint by activating intuitions and experiences

of the vaporous, atomised material world. The results of a laser scan are imagined to be ethereal or dreamlike because they resonate with our ideas and images of dust, atoms, particles, and clouds. In the moving image works considered in this essay, these resonances are amplified, revealing how technical methods of sampling, scattering, and plotting, and the idea of nonhuman vision are themselves conditioned by such imagery. In examining the technical practices and aesthetics of laser scanning and point cloud imagery, I have taken particular note of affective qualities—diffusion, vagueness, emptiness—that are in tension with ideas and techniques of exactitude, precision, and certainty. The apparent internal contradiction of the term 'point cloud' is not a minor coincidence but exposes emotional and imaginative investments that overflow and trouble the distinction between the technical and the imaginative, the certain and the uncertain.

acknowledgements

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notes

01 For detailed technical discussion, see G. F. Marshall (ed.), *Handbook of Optical and Laser Scanning*. Optical Engineering 90 (New York: Marcel Dekker, 2004). For a discussion of scanning in the context of media and imaging practices, see Jussi Parikka, 'On Seeing Where There's Nothing to See: Practices of Light Beyond Photography', in *Photography Off the Scale: Technologies and Theories of the Mass Image*, ed. by Tomás Dvořák and Jussi Parikka (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), pp. 185–210. The other main approach to scanning three-dimensional objects is photogrammetry, which uses coordinates sets of photographs (sometimes taken with a specialised binocular camera) to locate points in space and generate a point cloud. There are nuanced differences between these methods that are outside the scope of this essay, which focuses on laser scanning.

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04 Susan Stewart, *On Longing* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 5.

05 Mark Wigley, 'The Intolerances of Architecture', in *Exactitude: On Precision and Play in Contemporary Architecture*, ed. by Pari Riahi, Laure Katsaros, and Michael T. Davis (Amherst MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2022), pp. 15–31 (p.18).

06 Francesca Hughes, *The Architecture of Error. Matter, Measure, and the Misdaventures of Precision* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2014), p.17.

07 Sheila Jasanoff and Sang-Hyun Kim, 'Containing the Atom: Sociotechnical Imaginaries and Nuclear Power in the United States and South Korea', *Minerva*, 47.2 (2009), 119–46. George E. Marcus, (ed.), *Technoscientific Imaginaries: Conversations, Profiles, and Memoirs*, Late Editions, 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

08 Carl Douglas, 'Epizeuxis. Point / Cloud', in *Into the Under World / Ngā Mahi Rarowhenua. Suburban Lava Caves of Auckland. A Selection of Critical Texts*, ed. by Chirag Jindal (Auckland: Chirag Jindal, 2018), pp. 4–7 (p. 4). Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place. A Philosophical History* (Berkeley: University of California, 1997), p. 281.

09 Hubert Damisch, A Theory of /Cloud/. Toward a History of Painting (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 15. This figurative role of the term 'cloud' is only reinforced by its recent use to describe the dispersed infrastructures of the contemporary internet. Shannon Mattern, 'Cloud and Field: On the Resurgence of "Field Guides" in a Networked Age', *Places Journal*, 2016 <https://doi.org/10.22269/160802>

10 Leica Geosystems, Reality Capture <https://leica-geosystems.com/industries/reality-capture> [accessed 20 September 2023]. Autodesk, Reality Capture <https://www.autodesk.com/campaigns/reality-capture> [accessed 20 September 2023]

11 Danielle S. Willkens, 'The Craft and Care of Reality Capture', *Buildings & Landscapes*, 29.2 (2022), 2–14 (p. 2).

12 For example, an archaeologist describing the scanning of a building in southern Spain writes, 'Having a Muslim tower of the thirteenth century in our hands was something unthinkable until a few years ago, but today the development of new technologies has made it possible.' Francisco Arias, Carlos Enríquez, Juan Manuel Jurado, Lidia Ortega, Antonio Romero-Manchado, and Juan José Cubillas, 'Use of 3D Models as a Didactic Resource in Archaeology. A Case Study Analysis', *Heritage Science*, 10.1 (2022), 1-15 (p. 3) <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40494-022-00738-x>

13 Helene Furján, *Glorious Visions: John Soane's Spectacular Theater* (Florence SC: Taylor & Francis Group, 2011).

14 ScanLAB Projects <https://scanlabprojects.co.uk> [accessed 20 September 2023]

15 The animated scan imagery can be viewed at <http://explore.soane.org> [accessed 20 September 2023]

16 Furján, *Glorious Visions*, p. 28.

17 John Soane, *Description of the House and Museum on the North Side of Lincoln's Inn Fields, the Residence of Sir John Soane* (London: Levey, Robson, and Franklyn, 1835).

Furján writes that 'Soane enlisted a whole range of scenographic and aesthetic tropes—from a *lumière mystérieuse* formed from light, shadow and color, to the fragment and the mirror—to produce a spectacular space in the service of memorialization and display'. Furján, *Glorious Visions*, p. 4.

18 Soane, *Description of the House and Museum on the North Side of Lincoln's Inn Fields*, p. vii.

19 Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin Books, 2002), pp. 3–4.

20 In a letter to Ruskin's father, quoted by Wigley, 'The Intolerances of Architecture', p. 32.

21 For example, Arias et al., 'Use of 3D Models as a Didactic Resource in Archaeology', p. 3.

22 Cynthia Sundberg Wall, *The Prose of Things: Transformations of Description in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), p. 41.

23 Hooke, quoted by Wall, *The Prose of Things*, pp. 76, 73.

24 Hooke, quoted by Wall, *The Prose of Things*, pp. 77.

25 Wall, *The Prose of Things*, p. 21.

26 Wall, *The Prose of Things*, p.77

27 James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State. How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 11.

28 For example, Willkens explores inconsistencies resulting from the interaction of the laser scanner with mirrors and reflective surfaces. Danielle Willkens, 'Clouds and Cataracts: Optical Experiments at Sir John Soane's Museum', *Technology|Architecture + Design*, 3.2 (2019), 211–20.

29 Willkens, 'Clouds and Cataracts'.

30 Damisch, *A Theory of /Cloud/*, p. 15.

31 Particularly by suspending 'the coherence and consistency of a syntactical ordering'. Damisch, *A Theory of /Cloud/* p.185. John Durham Peters writes that our fascination with the sky produced two sciences: *chronos*, astronomy and the knowledge of the constant movements of the heavenly bodies, 'the epitome of an exact science'; and *kairos*, the probabilistic knowledge 'of weather, rain, hail, thunder and lightning, temperature, and clouds'. John Durham Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. 166. Notably, the laser time-of-flight range-finding techniques at the heart of laser scanning were pioneered by meteorologists seeking to take readings of clouds. G.G. Goyer and R. Watson, 'The Laser and Its Application to Meteorology', *Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society*, 44.9 (1963), 564–70.32 John Ruskin. *Modern Painters V* (London: George Allen, 1860) <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/44329> [accessed 20 September 2023]

33 Geoff Manaugh, 'The Dream Life of Driverless Cars', *The New York Times*, 11 November 2015, section Magazine <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/15/magazine/the-dream-life-of-driverless-cars.html> [accessed 17 November 2022]

34 Jussi Parikka, 'On Seeing Where There's Nothing to See: Practices of Light beyond Photography', in *Photography off the Scale: Technologies and Theories of the Mass Image*, Technicities, ed. by Tomás Dvořák and Jussi Parikka (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), pp. 185–210 (p. 198).

35 Manaugh, 'The Dream Life of Driverless Cars'.

36 Manaugh, 'The Dream Life of Driverless Cars'.

37 Brook Konia, 'Heretaunga Haukū Nui', *Pantograph Punch* <https://pantograph-punch.com//posts/russ-flatt> [accessed 18 November 2022]

38 Another use of point cloud imagery to explore animal perception is the virtual reality experience *In the Eyes of the Animal* (2023) by the group Marshmallow Laser Feast, of which a sample can be viewed here <https://vimeo.com/213658343> [accessed 20 September 2023]. My thanks to one of this essay's reviewers for bringing this work to my attention.

39 Russ Flatt, 'Tekau Mā Rua', 2022 <http://www.russflatt.com/tekau-ma-rua> [accessed 17 February 2023]

40 *Quercus* can be viewed at <https://vimeo.com/394196768> and the wider project at <https://formafantasma.com/work/cambio> [accessed 20 September 2023]. I viewed the work as part of the Speaking Surfaces exhibition at Auckland's St Paul St Gallery (now Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery) in 2020 <https://stpaulst.aut.ac.nz/all-exhibitions/speaking-surfaces> [accessed 20 September 2023]

41 Emanuele Coccia, *The Life of Plants: A Metaphysics of Mixture* (Medford MA: Polity, 2018).

42 'The atoms, as their own weight bears them down / Plumb through the void, at scarce determined times, / In scarce determined places, from their course / Decline a little--call it, so to speak, / Mere changed trend. For were it not their wont / Thuswise to swerve, down would they fall, each one, / Like drops of rain, through the unbottomed void". Titus Lucretius Carus, *On the Nature of Things*, trans. by William Ellery Leonard (1916) <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/785> [accessed 20 September 2023]

43 Manaugh, 'The Dream Life of Driverless Cars'.

44 Alexander Galloway, *Uncomputable: Play and Politics in the Long Digital Age* (New York: Verso Books, 2021), pp. 63–4.

45 Galloway, *Uncomputable*, p. 31.

46 Galloway, *Uncomputable*, pp. 35, 37.

47 Zeynep Çelik Alexander, 'Scanning. A Technical History of Form', in *Design Technics: Archaeologies of Architectural Practice*, ed. by Zeynep Çelik Alexander and John May (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), pp. 71–102 (p. 95).

48 Galloway, *Uncomputable*, p. 74, citing media theorist Wolfgang Ernst.

49 John May, 'Afterword. Architecture in Real Time', In *Design Technics: Archaeologies of Architectural Practice*, ed. by Zeynep Çelik Alexander and John May (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), pp. 219–43 (p. 224). Janet Vertesi explores the contestable nature of forming images from data through processes of 'seeing as'. Janet Vertesi, *Seeing Like a Rover: How Robots, Teams, and Images Craft Knowledge of Mars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. 79.

50 Jonathan Crary wrote of another optical device in similar terms: 'If perspective implied a homogeneous and potentially metric space, the stereoscope discloses a fundamentally disunified and aggregate field of disjunct elements [...] Our eyes follow a choppy and erratic path into its depth: it is an assemblage of local zones of three-dimensionality, zones imbued with a hallucinatory clarity, but which, when taken together never coalesce into a homogeneous field.' Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1990), pp. 125–26.

51 See Robin Evan's discussion of Piero della Francesca's geometrically constructed heads. Robin Evans, *The Projective Cast. Architecture and Its Three Geometries* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1995).

52 Gaston Bachelard, *Water and Dreams. An Essay on the Imagination of Matter* (Dallas: Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, 1983), p. 17.

53 Gaston Bachelard, *The Psychoanalysis of Fire* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), p. 110.

54 Gaston Bachelard, *Atomistic Intuitions: An Essay on Classification*. SUNY Series in Contemporary French Thought (Albany: State University of New York. 2018), p. 17.

55 Inkeri Hakamies, 'The Dusty Museum', *Nordisk Museologi*, 1 (2018), 74–88 (p. 80) <https://doi.org/10.5617/nm.6399>

56 Gary A. Fine and Tim Hallett, 'Dust: A Study in Sociological Miniaturism', *The Sociological Quarterly*, 44.1 (2003), 1–15 (pp. 3, 5).

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first hard, then soft: house architecture and the future-ready value of plan flexibility

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abstract

This text-based essay conceptualises uncertainty in architectural interiors as 'plan flexibility', with a normative focus on its future-oriented qualities. I concentrate on one specific typology: housing. In this context, a 'good', future-ready plan refers to the quality of conserving options and resources for coming generations of dwellers; it builds from principles of architectural resilience, or exaptation, where design ambitions link to preparing for an increasingly vague future where ecological, economic, political, and socio-cultural conditions of human life are difficult to anticipate. Despite risks of temporal agnosticism, I argue that focusing on housing allows me to discuss the forthcoming architectural needs of individuals without fully committing to an era-bound programme. My contribution focuses on asserting the long-term value of dwellings' flexibility in terms of *programme* indeterminacy (multipurpose use of space; hard-then-soft) rather than *formal* indeterminacy (adaptable elements; soft-then-hard). I define the notions of *programme* indeterminacy and formal indeterminacy, which I briefly tie back to the modernist history of alternative models of flexible domestic dwelling. I then comment at length on the interiors of Portuguese architect Álvaro Siza Vieira's *Wohnhaus Schlesisches Tor* (Berlin, *Internationale Bauausstellung*, 1984–1987), making the case for some of the abovementioned design principles. I contextualise *Wohnhaus Schlesisches Tor*'s interior design ambitions and effects in light of contemporary characterisations of housing adequacy and argue for the potential of the 'extra room' as one possible manifestation of the desired plan flexibility: this, inter alia, develops into a broader reflection on measures such as the 'bedroom tax' policies, and into a celebration of future-ready attitudes in planning houses.

keywords

temporal stability; architectural flexibility; programme indeterminacy; formal indeterminacy; *Wohnhaus Schlesisches Tor*

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short introducing remarks

Uncertainty in architectural interiors is examined in this text-based essay through the concept of ‘plan flexibility’ and its future-oriented qualities, focusing on domestic interiors. A ‘good’ future-ready plan here refers to conserving options and resources for future generations, referring to architectural resilience and preparing for uncertain times ahead. The contribution highlights the long-term value of programme indeterminacy, which it contrasts with formal indeterminacy; I define these concepts and trace their roots in modernist models of flexible dwellings. An in-depth analysis of Álvaro Siza Vieira’s *Wohnhaus Schlesisches Tor* (1984–1987) in Berlin then illustrates the application of these design principles. Interior layouts of Siza Vieira’s dwellings are analysed in the context of contemporary adequacy; in this analysis, I argue for the concept of the ‘extra room’ as a manifestation of plan flexibility. The essay finally closes with a brief reflection on housing policies such as the British ‘bedroom tax’ (2013).

shift in architectural cultures: new context, new aim?

Malleability, mobility, softness; these are notions that contrast a certain tradition of design in architecture. In past times, built realisations were deemed good when permanent, hard, stable.[01] To design and erect material infrastructure was already to do so in the spirit of solidity and durability; as signifiers of long-established power, architectural objects were to project an impression of fixity, immutability, and rootedness—they were to reflect the fixity, immutability, and rootedness of the (ideological) systems and influential actors that participated in its perpetuation. To frame it in the conceptual language of the present essay, these architectural objects were to project an impression of order and certainty. Churches, banks, manors, museums, town halls: these buildings had to appear rock-solid, steady, inevitable. Their form and function in the world’s fabric are certain. In the context of such narratives, the future-readiness of architecture is understood as changelessness. Residential or institutional constructions are not to adapt to new societal dynamics and demands but to withstand them.

Present-day considerations now turn the resolution of built environments and objects towards notions of adaptability and openness to change, a thought-provoking professional move that arises as an answer to pressing economic and environmental challenges. Unjust distributive patterns and the climate crisis make for a bleak vision of the future. Architects and designers are challenged on their use and forming of resources; their realisations are held to new standards of sustainability and adaptability. Buildings and their interiors behave in novel elastic, evolutive, customable, dynamic, mobile, modulable, supple ways. In the context of such narratives, the future-readiness of architecture is understood as exaptation, as flexibility. Residential or institutional constructions are to adapt to new societal dynamics and demands—through an array of smart structural and programmatic tools, they work towards preventing their temporal

obsolescence. Uncertain times are ahead; should architects respond with uncertain designs? And when they do, what formal qualities should participate in their good future-ready performance?

This sort of interrogative, hypothetical exercise, where scenarios of normative judgements are adapted and extended to future material conditions, must qualify its interpretation of 'good' architectures. As professionals of the built environment face these new contextual pressures, any theorising that purports to say something meaningful about architectural value and future readiness ought to better define and clarify its standards and references. I therefore posit (and will proceed to defend) the following: a good, resilient design relates to the set of options available to users in the future. By 'conserving options', building projects shape up to enable future generations to act and make decisions based on their values, emerging information, and aspirations.[02]

Of course, the conservation of options comes hand in hand with the conservation of necessary material resources to realise those options. Building users' ability to keep options open during uncertain circumstances and use new information as it becomes available amounts to one exaptative manifestation of architectural making; the purpose of flexibility is here thought to enable dwellers to possess a wide range of options to choose from, in response to new context-related information. Designing a flexible space already contributes to the conservation or expansion of options for future users, whose capacity to choose can be measured as the 'number of available options' that result from chosen options in the present. In this view, even when our (architectural) future is considered uncertain, 'flexibility itself can be considered a resource that may be conserved and passed down to future generations.'[03]

Overall, operationalisability should guide the examination of design principles for achieving the future-oriented adequacy of architectural objects and spaces. A principle being 'operationalisable' matters to its general appropriateness and appeal. Operationalisability relates to the definition of a concept in such ways that it can be, somehow, distinguishable and understandable enough to be practically measured. To state the obvious, it must be possible to know what these architectural principles entail and if they have been satisfied. So, the principles that guide the making of 'good' built interiors should be 'operationalisable' and 'operational'; only then can they become of use for professionals of the built environment (architects, designers, builders, architectural educators, policy-makers) who are presently engaged in developing and evaluating their projects, in light of new contextual compulsions. Context, again, matters deeply to an inquiry that admits of temporal uncertainty and variation. Practically, these new contextual compulsions—be they ecological, economic, political, or socio-cultural—are difficult to anticipate. Intensifying of environmental degradations (anticipated

ecological sphere), of the neoliberal 'profit-prioritising' market (anticipated economic sphere), of nationalist dynamics (anticipated political sphere), of social life digitalisation (anticipated socio-cultural sphere): such empirical contingencies ultimately matter for an argument like mine, which seeks to provide operationalisable guidance for the making of future-ready dwellings.

What will this future really look like? While 'reasonably probable', these impactful spheres of human existence aren't universally predetermined or fixed but fast-changing, mutable; their forthcoming features remain elusive. All in all, we cannot deny our inherent ignorance about the pace and direction of technological change in coming times—at this level, we do remain quite ignorant about the 'detailed nature and quantum' of architectural features that future peoples in future contexts will require to achieve satisfaction of their needs.[04]

In order to better account for this key temporal agnosticism, I propose to limit my argument to one typology (and one case study) of architectural spaces: *housing*, which I interchangeably refer to as 'domestic architecture', 'domestic interiors', or 'dwellings'. I outline two definitions of this typology in the following segment, focusing on its time-bound—temporally stable or unstable—features. Doing so, I argue, allows me to make stronger evaluative statements about the significance of these features in future architectural situations.

two definitions of domestic architecture, with comments on temporal stability

Housing definitions that orient towards the fulfilment of *basic needs* correspond to a level of certainty in the context of a temporal examination. Basic domestic architecture implies that an individual or family has protection from the elements, a place to store belongings, and the ability to fulfil basic physical needs such as sleeping, washing, and consuming food. The term 'housing' is conceptualised as 'shelter, lodging', 'dwelling provided for people', 'something that covers or protects'.[05] It aims to enable and maintain normal human functioning; it concentrates on a specific class of obvious disadvantages, and tries to eliminate them. It is a building, an interior, an enclosure, or a material structure that shelters an individual from external elements (rain, sun, snow, wind, or adverse animals and pathogens) that are out of her control. To serve its minimal function, housing must be suitable to the climate. It is not functional if it's too cold or too hot, too humid, too bright or too dark, too cramped, or too dirty.

Now, other important features of domestic interiors relate to basic infrastructures and services. Sanitation, lighting, clean water supply and drains, energy for cooking, road access, garbage disposal, sufficient storage, heating or cooling devices are features that participate in rendering the shelter 'habitable'—but note that these features dance a fine line between *being basic* and *participating in adequacy*. Both basic housing

elements (roofs, walls, floors, windows, and doors, along with land) and these additional material assets and services represent large intergenerational expenditures, whether in an urban or rural context.

Housing definitions that orient towards the fulfilment of *adequacy* correspond to a level of uncertainty in the context of a temporal examination. The concept of housing adequacy is most difficult to detail, since adequacy is often thought to relate to the abovementioned temporal and cultural spheres, to technological development and socioeconomic contexts and norms. Housing is where we dwell and sleep in peace. It is where we reproduce: the space of the private nuclear household. It thus represents the basic architectural space; for most of us, it is where we develop family relations.[06] Adequate domestic interiors give people a measure of intimacy, security, and stability. Without a home, pursuing personal aspirations, participating in societal projects, finding and sustaining a professional occupation, getting an education, or raising children are nearly impossible.

Here, housing deeply relates to wellbeing, social security, and work: it gives us the means to lead good and productive lives. When we purchase a house or rent an apartment, we are also securing access to larger life networks—to a common world infrastructure that connects us with 'jobs, entertainment, necessities, visual delights, encounters, barriers, threats, beneficial relationships, educational opportunities, sports facilities, and places that are more or less protected from surveillance.'[07] Features that participate in the 'goodness' of domestic architecture include, among others, availability of materials, affordability, habitability, accessibility, legal security of tenure, and cultural and temporal adequacy. The latter is of special significance to us, as it directly relates to the notion of architectural flexibility.

This sort of descriptive work informs my limitation of the present examination of *housing interiors*. Of course, an appreciable range of buildings are now designed with future-ready ambitions; the insights I advance could extend to these other typologies. However, given the direct ways in which housing weaves into our most essential physiological and mental needs, we can attribute to it an important degree of temporal stability. An answer to the challenges of temporal agnosticism identified above, the concept of temporal stability refers to the simple intuition that individuals from all backgrounds should be able to 'imagine the future' of an architectural space, able to imagine its constant presence or importance in the lives of future humans. Its present-day importance won't suffice—we need a bit of certainty; we need some imaginable, predictable pattern that allows us to imagine the building's form or impact on individuals' good or bad existence in many decades' (or centuries') time. The architecture of dwellings provides us with such a pattern.

I wish to emphasise this point once again. In the context of research that centres on

the future-oriented adequacy of domestic interiors, temporal stability is a crucial criterion. If the identified design measures are to garner professional support, they must demonstrate how they accommodate this criterion. While our human prospects are uncertain, future individuals' demand for adequate housing units constitutes a reasonable parameter to depart from. In other words, focusing on domestic spaces matters because the further into the future one hopes to carry an architectural principle, the more will it be the case that one is making design decisions under uncertainty. How can one make relevant use of 'plan flexibility' as a valuable design principle without working at such a level of generality that the relevance of the principle for specific challenges concerning spatial adequacy is lost? There remains much vagueness about the specific architecture needed for achieving future satisfaction. By contrast, as typology, housing offers an interesting degree of knowledge about the constituents of future people's wellbeing.

Compared to the indeterminacy of future generations' lifestyles (and the material infrastructure that is to support it), a study of domestic interiors offers key foundations on which to build design targets and principles. Given the limits to the substitutability of different basic functions enabled by housing, we can begin to say something about what ought to be passed down to future dwellers. Let us return to the first definition of domestic space that was outlined—that which connects to the satisfaction of basic needs. The temporal stability of housing typology relates to its first need-oriented definition; it relates to human minimal flourishing (as in the human ability to lead a minimally good life)—a 'stable' aim indeed. In that sense, domestic spaces are not merely instrumental. They are also categorical in some more 'profound sense' of being essential to present and future individuals.

So, despite a certain degree of agnosticism, adequacy in house architecture represents a justifiable and fruitful framework for further conceptualising time-bound design principles like flexibility. In the next section, I substantiate this principle by identifying two types of openness—henceforth indeterminacy—that characterise the making of most 'flexible' interiors.

distinguishing programme indeterminacy and formal indeterminacy

'Architectural indeterminacy' or 'plan indeterminacy' is, per se, an incomplete concept: we must develop it by indicating the types of design approaches that are, in turn, used to achieve it. This distinction between types of 'architectural indeterminacy' (open types, flexible types) can be subtle; some domestic spaces present qualities that concurrently relate to indeterminacy in programmed activities and in constructed forms. While programme indeterminacy and formal indeterminacy aren't strictly 'mutually exclusive', they constitute the most substantive strategies,

and known attempts, at creating an architecture that can be modified towards changing future conditions. My goal is to identify and classify certain general (and operationalisable) 'architectural preconditions' that must be satisfied by housing interiors if these interiors are to show true flexibility; if they are to remain adequate over long periods.

Manifestations of 'architectural indeterminacy' link to open-ended processes of definition and redefinition of an interior place, for instance, in the possibility of fitting out or redeveloping the space on a given surface or in the ability to increase or decrease a surface. Through a great range of transformations of programme and form, multiple alternatives (options) of usage and occupancy are made possible for present and future inhabitants. So, when architects speak of their housing projects as elastic, evolutive, customisable, dynamic, mobile, modulable, and so on, they usually do so in light of the two aforementioned principles of programme indeterminacy and formal indeterminacy. What differentiates the former principle from the latter?

Formal indeterminacy connects to the physical structure and layout of a dwelling's interior, which can be modulated with partitions and other movable elements. As opposed to 'formally determinate' rooms, which remain materially fixed, spaces that present 'formally indeterminate' qualities are shape-shifting; they are kinetic, filled with sliding partitions and rotating panels, framed with pivoting doors and hoistable decks. They are mechanised to various analogue or machinic degrees; they are adaptable in a way that is first soft (light-weight elements are being moved around), then hard (these elements are fixed into place, conferring a 'temporary rigidity' to the inside milieu). Housing is conceived of as a soft-then-hard architectural venture. We can say that architectural indeterminacy in form does not require that architects directly provide dwellers with final, resolved plan layouts. The general idea is that these architects should create spaces that enable present and future persons to meet their respective housing needs through their own physical work and efforts—women, men, and children of most ages can take part in the activity of moving construction elements around their home's interiors. In short, formal indeterminacy usually supposes a finite floor area, and volume, within which rooms are modified at will.

Programme indeterminacy connects to the types of activities expected to occur within a domestic interior's distinctive zones. We get 'formally determinate' rooms with unvarying size and static opening placements, but these rooms are not furnished in 'programmatically determinate' ways. In other words, the function-specific features architects and users associate with the various zones of the house are disseminated or absent. In many architectural cultures, standards regarding minimal proportions and equipment of dwelling units differentiate between programmes: kitchens, living spaces, or

bedrooms are at times quantified and qualified separately, with some distinct set of design rules—with some 'programmatically determinate' features.[08]

Architectural indeterminacy in programme does not require that makers of the built environment directly provide dwellers with final, resolved, function-oriented rooms. The general idea is that these expert makers should create spaces that enable present and future persons to meet their respective housing needs through their own varying schemes of room occupation. Interior spaces are not dimensioned and fitted to fit one domestic programme but many. In short, we have a conceptual oscillation between what inhabitants have in a domestic space (hard, material-bound conditions) and what habitants can do or be in that space (soft, activity-bound conditions).

I believe such an approach to the creation of dwellings represents a fruitful answer to canon non-materialistic challenges. When considering material features that correspond to house functions considering temporal variation, we must remember that accounts of housing adequacy should uphold non-materialistic aims. Non-materialism requires architects and developers to consider the *imperfect conversion* of material resources into individual wellbeing at home. Architectural elements, objects, accessories: these material means are not perfect indicators of (how they translate into) individual wellbeing.[09] By supplementing hard, material-bound conditions with a focus on activities and capabilities, a 'programmatically indeterminate' approach to the design of housing interiors appears to better account for differences in conversion factors.

This kind of reflection about formal and programme indeterminacy in the making of interiors allows for a partial reappraisal of, inter alia, modernist experiments on 'evolutionary housing' (from the French 'Habitat Évolutif') and the likes—this is a short essay, and the historical lineage of the architectures of indeterminacy in the past century has received its fair share of scholarly attention.[10] Given this falls outside the scope of this essay, we can posit the following: evolutionary housing projects were a significant theoretical and professional movement and manifested in formally and programmatically indeterminate interiors, though established cultures tend to focus on the obvious, flashy arrangements of the former. Floor plans were depicted in different spatial and intergenerational stages (soft-then-hard); observations were made about alternative programmatic use of certain rooms (hard-then-soft). Of the latter phenomenon, the Greek-French architect and urbanist Georges Candilis (1913–1995) recalled that 'residents [of his newly built housing complex] were using the spaces in a manner different from its intention at the time of design', and that 'this was exactly what he wanted.'[11] Interiors doubled as spheres of choice, which were to be formalised by architects for dwellers. Still, such modernist experiments in design flexibility also came with downsides:

> The architectural concept of flexibility still relied on the old assumption that dwelling was a relatively neutral set of practices that could be subjected to rationalization. In everyday life, inhabitants experienced the architectural technologies of flexible dwelling not so much as neutral enablers *but as anathema to the feeling of a stable home*. While architects and developers cast mobile partitions as liberating instruments, their very mobility posed an almost ontological obstacle for inhabitants in the process of homemaking.[12]

The quote hints at a crucial insight: for all its promises of freedom, dynamism, and customisability, formal indeterminacy in house interiors did not and do not always match the domestic experiences and desires of their present and future inhabitants. Individuals' feeling of a stable home seems to require more (or other) than modernist, 'rationalising' formal flexibility. Unlike, perhaps, mobility in programme, mobility in form might turn out to be a little too uncertain for users' wellbeing—for their experience of true housing adequacy.

wohnhaus schlesisches tor—context

On account of the previous claims about domestic architectures, their temporal stability and the manners in which they can be designed as 'programmatically indeterminate' and 'formally indeterminate', I would like to now turn to one case study that arises as a potent material manifestation of such claims. To be sure, many housing projects constitute rich examples of 'uncertain' design attitudes; I have chosen to closely and comprehensively examine one of them, the interiors of Portuguese architect Álvaro Siza Vieira's *Wohnhaus Schlesisches Tor*, commonly known as *Bonjour Tristesse* (1984–1987). I argue that this social housing project utilises principles of 'architectural indeterminacy' or 'plan indeterminacy' that orient towards the (lesser explored) principle of hard-then-soft programme indeterminacy.

Pritzker-winning (1992) architect Álvaro Siza Vieira was commissioned by Berlin municipal authorities at the beginning of the 1980s to draw and build a housing corner block in the then-dilapidated area of Kreuzberg. Siza Vieira's building was to be part of a larger pool of experimental architectures, which were to be completed in time for the opening of German capital's *Internationale Bauausstellung* (IBA), or *International Building Exhibition*, in 1987. Other architects who were similarly commissioned to take part in the large-scale building exhibition included the famous Peter Eisenman, Aldo Rossi, and James Sterling. These big names of post-modern architecture were invited and encouraged to rethink the rebuilding of a run-down, post-war, housing crisis-facing Berlin; guidelines from the exhibition leaders made mention that the designed entries ought to focus on gentle city renewal and critical reconstruction—architects were to demonstrate a balance between contextual awareness, creative freedom, and progressive vision.

Many building typologies were proposed; Álvaro Siza Vieira chose to work on social housing on an open, urban site that initially belonged to Kleistpark Hausverwaltung. *Bonjour Tristesse* was consequently built at the corner of a large nineteenth-century city block in the run-down Kreuzberg district, in a large void left after the war. Importantly, at the time, almost half the population of Kreuzberg were not German citizens; they had come predominantly from Turkey as part of the early 1960s guest worker state programme or had fled the 1980 Turkish coup d'état and its subsequent violence.[13] This greatly informed the aforesaid, sought-after 'contextual awareness' *Internationale Bauausstellung* architects like Siza Vieira were tasked to demonstrate. Strong of his mid-1970s experiences with popular consultations on housing adequacy, the Portuguese architect's response to this context awareness challenge not only addressed style, materials, and proportions (formal context), but it also included his instigation of participative meetings with users (social context).[14]

Wohnhaus Schlesisches Tor's seven-story structure is known for its uninterrupted and curvy façade, which nicely connects to adjacent, existing walls; a dense and regular (rigid) grid of windows refers to the typical order and rhythm of neighbouring infrastructure. A few commercial functions (a total of eight shops) are placed on the ground floor of the building; the remaining six levels house a total of fifty-six domestic dwellings of varying sizes (forty-six units are made up of seven types of four or five-room apartments, as well as ten special apartments for the elderly). Importantly, original sketches by the Portuguese architect actually showed a housing complex containing twenty large apartments of a size deemed suitable for large Kreuzberg immigrant families. However, economic pressure from the IBA authorities led to increased dwelling numbers and a significant reduction of their originally intended size.[15] Final proposed typical apartment plans show *traversant* housing units ranging from sixty-four to eighty-five square metres and equipped with basic amenities—a compact kitchen, an equally compact bathroom, a salon, and one or two small bed chambers, which are labelled as 'rooms'. In area and height, these spaces followed the funding guidelines for German social housing [Fig. 01].[16]

Now, a trained eye will notice another sort of space niched in floor plans of Álvaro Siza Vieira's *Bonjour Tristesse* apartments. This is the tiny, programmatically indeterminate portion of the housing project's unit floor plan: the extra room. An 'unidentified void space' accessed from the unit's living room, this space was approved by municipal officials as a winter garden, but compellingly lends itself to diverse interior usages. In effect, the extra room of *Wohnhaus Schlesisches Tor* sits as a spatial leftover of sorts, an interstice. Scholars attribute Siza Vieira's inclusion of this room to participation workshops with future users of the project, to the productive 'tensions between architects and users', and to Siza

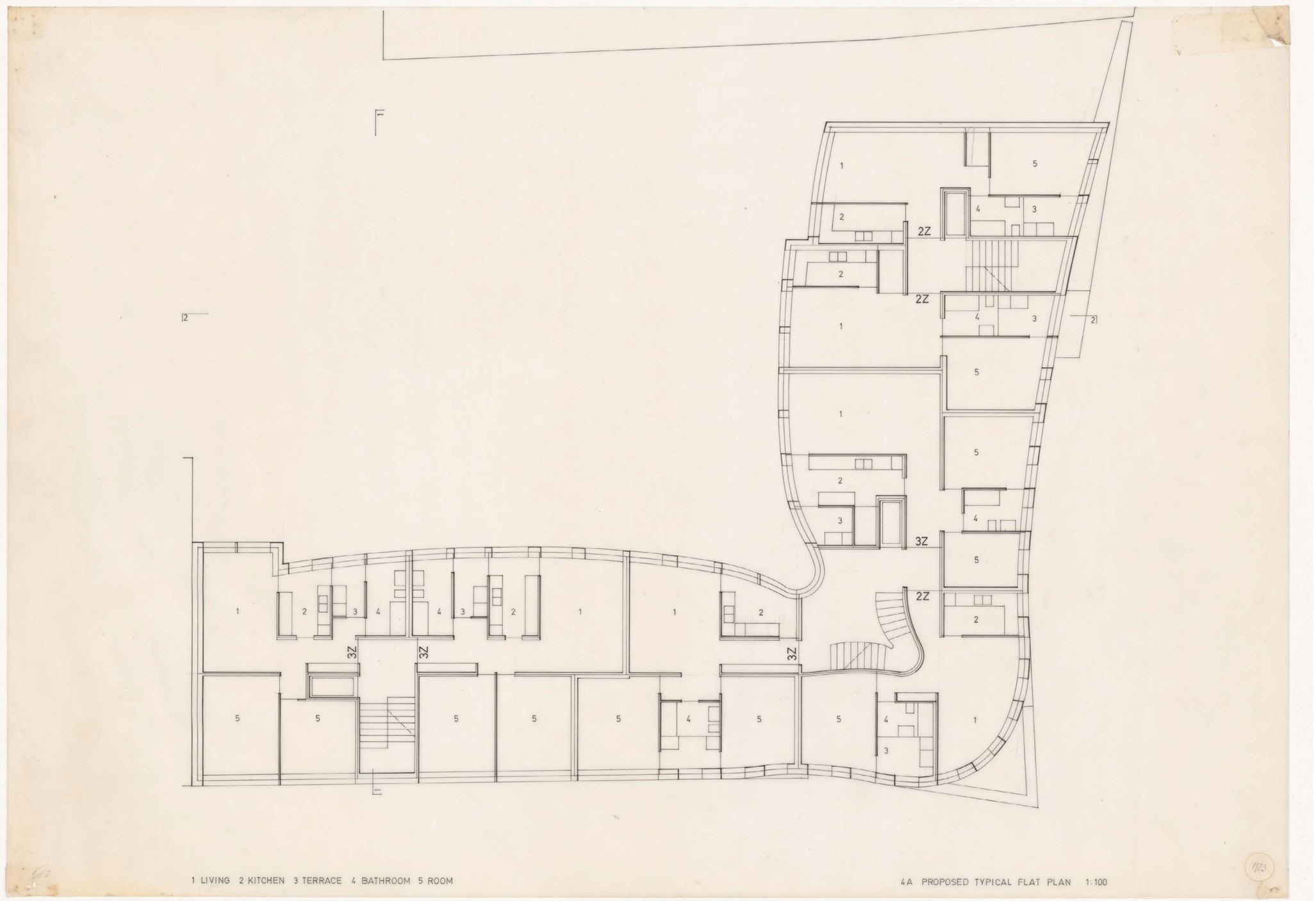

Figure 01.
'Plan for typical flat for Edificio de Apartamentos Bonjour Tristesse [Bonjour Tristesse residential complex], Block 121, Berlin, Germany', 1980. Álvaro Siza fonds, Canadian Centre for Architecture, Gift of Álvaro Siza, © Álvaro Siza

Vieira's intuition and wish that design be a continuous process that came out of such participative frictions—some of these scholars have actually identified the compact, programmatically indeterminate room as 'one of [Siza Vieira's] crucial architectural contributions in the name of participation.'[17] The apartments' extra void was his small but effective gesture toward cultural variability in (and specificity to) spatial use, prescribing a zone for residents' voice at the stage of interior design.

In her years-long photo series (2009–2012), architect Esra Akcan documented different fittings of this programmatically indeterminate room. Her images beautifully feature the glassy interior partitions, the plants and curtains, the chairs, the towels and carpets, the storage—functions and objects of the everyday domestic life of dwellers, who were offered a slit of architecture without a given purpose; among other usages, families in the building used the space for religious practice or meal preparation, or as an additional bedroom for their young children.[18] Three of

Figure 02.

Figures 02, 03.
Karaçizmeli's apartment in Álvaro Siza's *Bonjour Tristesse* in Block 121 for IBA-1984/87, photographed by Esra Akcan for her book *Open Architecture* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2018). Image courtesy of Esra Akcan.

Akcan's photographs are reproduced below [Fig. 02, 03]. They show the extra room of *Bonjour Tristesse* dweller Yüksel Karaçizmeli, an elderly Turkish woman who moved in the building's second-floor corner apartment with her husband and their two sons in 1987 and still lives there.

In these depictions of constructed domesticity, one can recognise mundane cooking apparel and accessories. An oven sits near a large window, with a refrigerator by its side. A little table and chair are facing this set-up—one can imagine a seated silhouette, busy with vegetable chopping, or relaxed while reading a worn-out cookbook. This is one story of appropriation of the 'unidentified void space' among dozens:

> Karaçizmeli turned [the extra room] into an additional kitchen that can be well ventilated and brought in her own oven, refrigerator and got help from a mechanical engineer that she could find easily through her personal relations in her working place at Siemens. When the owner had explained the apartment plan to her before she moved in, he had not told her about the open kitchen, and when she discovered it, it was too late to move to another apartment. She was shocked because she found the open kitchen inappropriate for Turkish cooking due to the strong smells that would permeate the whole apartment. Therefore, she now has a two-part kitchen: an open section for washing,

> preparing, storing, and eating food, and another section for cooking, divided from the first part by a glass partition.[19]

wohnhaus schlesisches tor—lessons

I believe Yüksel Karaçizmeli's reinvention of this little 'pocket of space' speaks to the power and generosity—and so, to the future-ready adequacy—of the uncertain interior when it is declined along certain principles of 'architectural indeterminacy' or 'plan indeterminacy', in the specific sense of programme indeterminacy. Karaçizmeli had specific individual needs that, if unmet, would have rendered her housing set-up (and her experience of being housed) partly inadequate. Despite its small size, the *Wohnhaus Schlesisches Tor*'s extra room served its user well: in the example at play, a two-part kitchen enabled domestic behaviours and activities that were as necessary as they were unique to the person undertaking them. As such, programme indeterminacy ties us back to the social and psychological aspects of the house, emphasised in the second adequacy-related definition proposed in this essay's third section. What is of value here, really, is what present and future dwellers are enabled to do, what they are capable of.

Across time, programme indeterminacy does open up crucial options for individuals' beings and doings at home, for present and future people's genuine opportunities to realise those beings and doings that are important to them. To be sure, professionals of the built environment who pursue architectural flexibility can and should concern themselves with the material apparel of house-related activities. However, they should also work to better facilitate the many programmes that can take place within one fixed space over long periods of use. If they attempt the latter, housing is closer to becoming a hard-then-soft architectural venture.

We should take good note of the conceptual affinity between cross-cultural adaptation and cross-temporal adaptation in the making of interiors. The interiors of *Wohnhaus Schlesisches Tor* were, as narrated, designed to accommodate the varying needs of Kreuzberg's Turkish immigrant communities: anecdotes relating to the building's origin story—and its participation-informed development—made it clear that the architect and the (municipal) developers demonstrated an appreciable openness to 'alternative' or 'culturally differentiated' forms of domestic living. This openness translated with success (as reported in Yüksel Karaçizmeli's story) into features like the 'unidentified void space'; alternative and culturally differentiated forms of domestic living were, in effect, positively enabled, keeping multiple options open for dwellers in anticipation of unexpected cultural needs and the emergence of new forms of domesticity.[20] I argue that this cross-cultural feature of Siza Vieira's dwellings makes a good case for its cross-temporal adequacy. Alternative occupations indeed link to uncertainty across cultures and times. One can reasonably infer that if culturally

differentiated occupations can be enabled through the making of the extra room, temporally differentiated occupations can, too, be enabled; unexpected temporal needs can, too, be met.

The historical teachings of the Berlin *Wohnhaus Schlesisches Tor* apartments point to attractive contemporary potentialities and counterparts. I have said that 'unidentified void spaces' in the building were used for religious practice, heavy cooking, or child nursing; we can easily imagine equivalent present-day uses (a home office during COVID, a playroom, a fitness studio, a bibliothèque) and even indulge in thinking of speculative, near-future usages (a virtual gaming arena, a space for vertical gardening, and micro waste management solutions). Again, individual housing needs might vary across time, but the simple affordance of a small, programmatically indeterminate interior allows for an augmented range of functions to take place effectively inside the home.

The argument in support of the future-readiness of *Bonjour Tristesse*'s interiors is made stronger by the fact that its architect did not utilise more space than planned to make up the extra room. Remember, in light of economic and resource-saving concerns, *Internationale Bauausstellung* authorities had already pushed Álvaro Siza Vieira to increase the total number of dwellings first drawn in his project, from an initial twenty spacious apartments to forty-six compact ones. Unit areas were already scaled down; Siza Vieira thus carved out little 'programmatically indeterminate' pockets from them. In this sense, his architectural strategy was not additive but subtractive. The result of participative, attuned, and clever design iterations, an open-plan interior was permanently partitioned and the extra room was born.

As such, the room's *additive characteristic* is not defined in terms of quantitative space, as in more square metres, but represents more 'qualitative' space, as in one more programme. This is of interest for those engaging in the planning, developing, and making of dwellings in times of economic and environmental pressures. It is arguably compatible with, first, a calibrated maximisation of housing space for profit (economical sustainability prompt), and, second, a sought reduction of large, material-craving units into more compact ones (environmental sustainability prompt).

Relatedly, this additive feature of Siza Vieira's little room—linking to an increase of qualitative space, as contrasted with an increase of quantitative space—is common to the two forms of plan indeterminacy identified above. Both formally and programmatically indeterminate architectures appear to operate within a logic of subdivision, but programmatically indeterminate architectures avoid the aforementioned user dissatisfaction with fully mobile-built elements. Remember that formal indeterminacy in past house interiors seemed to work *against* individuals' feelings of place attachment and of a

stable home. A plausible, appealing and future-ready practice of plan flexibility should work *towards* place attachment and feelings of stability (social sustainability prompt). Overall, plan indeterminacy fares well in the face of market pressures, where a commodity's competitiveness and attractiveness make it more likely to answer consumers' demands (economical sustainability prompt)—Yüksel Karaçizmeli recalled wanting to move to another unit because she didn't like the apartment's open kitchen; as a consumer, she found the 'programmatically indeterminate room' made up for the built-in obstacle to her individual preferences, and settled in.

I want to conclude this section with a short reflection on the extant regulations of domestic spaces. The interiors of *Wohnhaus Schlesisches Tor* show the flexibility-related benefits that unprogrammed spaces bring to the design of housing units; doing so, they also provide us with new conceptual tools to understand and evaluate diverse housing policies that aim at 'maximising usage' of social dwellings. Think, inter alia, of the recent 'bedroom tax' (Great Britain, 2013), which consisted in the removal of the so-called 'spare room subsidy' for renters of state-controlled council houses and apartments; renters who had a spare room had a severe cut on their housing benefits imposed on them. While the policy actually failed in its resource-saving ambitions, its general concerns with overconsumption of domestic space—politicians spoke of the tax as an 'under-occupation penalty'—are relevant to a study of housing adequacy like ours.[21] In many setups, 'extra rooms' can and should be denounced as superfluous and wasteful, in a manner that recalls the pragmatic, economically driven pressures from the Berlin IBA authorities, leading Siza Vieira to maximise dwelling numbers and reduce their original size. Record-high demand for urban or city-near units coupled with current environmental concerns suggests that individuals might have to start changing (reducing) their 'housing consumption habits'—the British 'under-occupation penalty' represented one attempt to initiate such a change.[22]

However, interior designs like *Bonjour Tristesse* proved it is possible to operate within realistically sustainable principles while creating *additional*, programmatically indeterminate interiors. One likely oversight of regulatory bids such as the British tax of 2013 is that it evaluates programmatic user needs in terms of 'quantity of bedrooms'—the thought goes that if you have more than one bedroom per dweller, you are inevitably overconsuming. This is too simplistic. Siza Vieira showed us that good amounts of unexpected (yet important) user needs can be, in effect, answered with a small extra room; such a room can yield remarkable results in face of the uncertainty of user needs in present and future times. We could think of a modern-day regulatory scenario where existing open interiors are divided (as was the case with Yüksel Karaçizmeli and other residents' living rooms) without being counted as an 'extra

bedroom'.[23] By extension, another scenario would seek to limit total square metres per dweller without breaking them into numbers of distinct rooms. All in all, earnest commitments to architectural flexibility and temporal resilience can work to transform value judgement on the (un)desirability of additional spaces in housing, since they reasonably and responsibly answer to economic and ecological imperatives.

concluding remarks

This essay built on the simple premise that uncertain futures are ahead—in decades' and centuries' time, ecological, economic, political, and socio-cultural circumstances are bound to change. They will intensify or be dismantled and substituted in ways of which we remain ignorant. These changes will impact individuals' housing needs; despite a certain degree of agnosticism about the manners in which future people will dwell, we can work to conceptualise and create domestic spaces exhibiting enduring adequacy over an extended timeframe. Programmatically undetermined spaces like the *Wohnhaus Schlesisches Tor*'s extra room emerge as fruitful makings of flexible housing design in the face of time-bound incertitude.

I have shown that the architectural principle of (plan) flexibility emerges as one promising tool for designing good, future-ready house interiors. I critically examined and linked domestic spaces with a specific type of future-oriented performance; I argued that housing typologies, given their appreciable temporal stability, represent a plausible framework for normative value claims that extend long into uncertain times. Architecture has often been linked to intergenerational ambitions, and making resilient interiors in ecological, economic, and social crises is part of a long design culture in search of betterment and hope. I advanced and contended that indeterminacy in space can manifest formally (adaptable elements; soft-then-hard) or programmatically (quantity of space; hard-then-soft); while formal openness in the making of homes is a fairly well-established notion in the field, programme openness might need closer attention, both in theory and practice—by showing ways in which small, 'functionless' rooms can augment housing adequacy, the Berlin *Bonjour Tristesse* case study finally showed the cross-cultural potential—and so, the cross-temporal potential—of 'programme indeterminacy'.

My argument hopes to rally architects, designers, builders, architectural educators, and policy-makers. To them, I say believe in the power of the hard-then-soft domestic interior and in programme indeterminacy's contribution to ensuring the time-bound adequacy of dwellings. A promising future awaits us if we care to build it well.

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notes

01 These architectural properties were celebrated and sought after in many parts of the human world. Yet, it must be stressed that one finds many historical examples of African, Indian, Asian, or Pan-American Indigenous architecture that were articulated around deeply different notions of permanence and stability, privileging malleability and mobility in rich ways. The topic deserves a stand-alone study, and so falls outside the scope of the present essay.

02 Edith Brown Weiss, 'In Fairness to Future Generations and Sustainable Development', *International Law Policy*, 8.19 (1992), 19–26 (pp. 24–25).

03 For details on the concept of flexibility in future-oriented planning, see: Jose D. Teodoro, 'Flexibility for Intergenerational Justice in Climate Resilience Decision-Making: An Application on Sea-Level Rise in the Netherlands', *Sustainability Science*, 18 (2022), 1355–1365, p.1359.

04 Ian Gough, 'Climate Change and Sustainable Welfare: The Centrality of Human Needs', *Cambridge Journal of Economics* (2015), 1194–1214 (p. 1203).

05 'Housing', Merriam-Webster <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/housing>; Cambridge Dictionary <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/housing> [accessed 24 November 2022]

06 Kirsi Saarikangas, *Model Houses for Model Families* (Helsinki: Societas Historica Fennica, 1993), p. 7.

07 Margaret Kohn, *The Death and Life of the Urban Commonwealth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 2.

08 Think of features like special volt outlets and plumbing connections (kitchen, bathroom), or minimal dimensions: building codes from Norway or Canada, for example, specify ventilation-related volumes or window-to-space ratios for bedrooms, which dictate plan sizes and opening placements. See: TEK17 Byggteknisk forskrift, § 13-2. Ventilasjon i boligbygning <https://dibk.no/regelverk/byggteknisk-forskrift-tek17/13/i/13-2?_t_q=soverom>; 'Code national du bâtiment' Paragraphe 9.9.10.1. 1 <https://publications-cnrc.canada.ca/fra/voir/td/?id=7eae2721-7ff6-4e26-ac77-c9e90eb8cc0b&dsl=fr> [accessed 10 August 2023].

09 Lukas Meyer and Thomas Pölzler, *Basic Needs and Sufficiency: The Foundations of Intergenerational Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), pp. 1–32 (pp. 9–10).

10 See, among others: Tatjana Schneider and Jeremy Till, *Flexible Housing: The Means to the End* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), pp. 1–11.

11 Kosuke Matsubara, 'A Shift from "Habitat pour le plus grand nombre" to "Habitat évolutif" in Post-war Francophonie', *Journal of Architecture and Planning* (2020), 601–14 (p. 606).

12 My italics. Kenny Cupers, *The Social Project: Housing Postwar France* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), p. 299.

13 Esra Akcan, *Open Architecture. Migration, Citizenship and the Urban Renewal of Berlin-Kreuzberg by IBA 1984/87* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2018), p. 10.

14 The Berlin apartments were Siza Vieira's first completed work outside his native country of Portugal; in parallel to the completion of *Bonjour Tristesse*, he led the building of social housing units in The Hague (1983–1988), the architecture of which similarly had to adapt to the needs of the local Muslim population. In both projects, future residents with a recent immigration history were invited to participatory meetings and influenced Siza Vieira's final design for the dwellings.

15 Filipe Lacerda, 'Research for a Language: Álvaro Siza in Berlin', *IOP Conference Series: Materials Science and Engineering* (2019), 1–10 (p. 2).

16 Lacerda, 'Research for a Language'.

17 Akcan, *Open Architecture*, p. 268.

18 Esra Akcan, 'Bonjour Tristesse' (Canadian Center for Architecture, https://www.cca.qc.ca/en/articles/issues/22/ideas-of-living/32694/bonjour-tristesse, 2009-2012). [accessed 24 January 2023]

19 Akcan, *Open Architecture*, pp. 277–78.

20 Teodoro, 'Flexibility for Intergenerational Justice in Climate Resilience Decision-Making', p. 1356.

21 Kenneth Gibb, 'The Multiple Policy Failures of the UK Bedroom Tax', *International Journal of Housing Policy*, 15.2 (2015), 148–66 (p. 148).

22 While the policy was limited to social housing, which is controlled by local councils and could easily be regulated, an interesting version of a ruling on housing overconsumption could attempt to discourage housing overconsumption across the market, regardless of formats of tenure. While controversial, this would signal systemic commitments and ambitions.

23 Even if one was to advocate this sort of measure, there remains the problem that the council houses or apartments where the bedroom tax was applied are already made of quite small rooms, which would be difficult to divide down into Siza Vieira-like 'extra pockets of space'.

resisting the real through imagined interiors and social media's spaces of uncertainty

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abstract

A distinct visual genre has emerged of digitally realised interiors and architectural spaces emblematic in their dreamlike, surreal, and imagined condition, exemplified by digital practitioners including Charlotte Tayler, Andrés Reisinger, and Six N. Five. These virtual spaces, which have predominantly been circulated and popularised via image-based social media platforms, contribute to a stratum of images of the interior, or more precisely, the 'interior-as-image'. As such, their consumption via the digital screen agitates an uncertain condition between imagined and real. Indeed, some of these designs have become emergent into the actual, transitioning from imaginings for the digital screen into inhabitable interior spaces, to further trouble the uncertainties of virtual and real, digital and physical.

This emergent category of interior-as-image can potentially be located under cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard's 'hyperreality', a hyperreal visuality that eliminates the difference between image and reality. With the replacement of reality with the sign/image, signification is suspended for the interior-as-image. However, these digitally rendered interiors are not absent of potential meaning and external reference despite the immediacy of their activation and engagement. Through their instrumentalisation as Non-Fungible Token (NFT) artefacts and unique, commodified digital objects, these uncertain interiors are entangled with energy-hungry machine processes in their production. In the contemporary era of climate crisis and the critique of progressive modernity, where the capacity to envision a sustainable future is itself challenging, this category of digital artefact has the potential to intensify a precarious and uncertain time to come. Moreover, the infrastructural condition(ing) of the circulation and consumption of the interior-as-image via social media platforms has the potential to encode an 'algorithmic anxiety', a doubling of embedded uncertainty.

This text-based essay proposes to define and contextualise this particular category of digital interior-as-image, designating its critical and contemporary mode of uncertainty. In addition to establishing its artefactual status as a discrete yet materially entangled digital object, the potential significance for the discipline of interior design will be questioned. In investigating a number of spatial projects for which the digital image is a primary mode of engagement, this essay reflects on the intersection of the virtual and physical for interior design, and deliberates on the potential of imaginaries of virtual worlds for unlocking new interior materialities.

keywords

social media; interior-as-image; dreamscape; virtual worlds; anxiety

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introduction

At any moment, sitting almost anywhere, I can pull out my smartphone and delve into a stream of images, presented to me on the digital screen of my mobile device. As a practitioner, researcher, and educator in spatial design, my 'feed' has been particularly oriented towards specific categories of images. While these stimulate my professional sensibilities, I am cognisant I co-habit an image-saturated continuum with a multitude of amateur, or other-than-professional, advocates and 'influencers' of architecture and interiors.

But I'm not only looking at photos of real interiors, but also images and imaginings of interiors, and it is increasingly challenging to discern the difference, a moment of uncertainty between fact and fiction, real and unreal. Notwithstanding Joan Fontcuberta's 'every photograph is a fiction',[01] where the photographer makes a decision of what is seen and what is not seen, the images propose a particular aesthetic sensibility that may or may not be present in the actually existing three-dimensional environment documented by the photo. Moreover, the capacity for these photos, as digital artefacts, to be 'filtered', modified, and altered increases the uncertainty of authenticity. In addition to those examples that are ambiguous in their reproduction of reality are the advancements of and accessibility to photorealistic 3D rendering that can be exuberant or deceptive in the production of an imagined reality. Of increasing contemporary concern are also image-based Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) driven processes, where human certainty is even more displaced in the machinic imaginings of spatial environments.

The unsettling of images and imaginings of architectural interiors can be potentially explored and understood via a range of approaches. But to deliberate on uncertainty itself is to agitate the threshold of the known and unknown, where the image of an interior can test the threshold between virtual and real, digital and physical, presence and absence. The imagining of interiors is the imaging of the possible and a making of visuality for uncertainty. While any individual image may be a representation of a particular event of uncertainty, to manifest an anxiety in the viewer is to produce a rupture in reality itself. Certainly, imaginings of interiors are nothing new, but contemporary modes of production and reception grant the possibility of a real interior that is to be consumed as an image. Equally, these modes of production and reception give rise to an enhanced category for the interior that is to remain as an image, to reside on and be inhabited only via the screen, and sustain a condition of possibility in contradiction of probability.

Broadly speaking, the contemporary consumption of the interior as an image asks questions of the significance of the screen for the practice of designing interiors. However, as shall be explored and developed here, a consequence of such a distinct category of digital image points to a specific practice of image-production and a condition of 'interior-

as-image'[02] in the making of un/reality. Moreover, the infrastructural condition(ing) of circulation and consumption of the interior-as-image via social media platforms has the potential to encode anxiety under a complexity of concerns, including techno-capitalist and algorithmic extraction, a doubling or tripling of embedded uncertainty. I describe and give context to the intersecting anxieties and subjectivities of a precarious future, the algorithmic circumstance of the images, and the immediacies of their engagement. Under this framework, an imaging of interior has the potential to unravel the real and agitate the possible to stimulate an anxiety of the interior, in both senses of the term. By examining circumstances of anxiety that underpin an engagement with the interior-as-image, I propose a reconfiguration of anxiety that activates subjectivities receptive to the possibilities of the possible, and a 'radical openness of the future'[03] for all viewers.

This line of enquiry will engage with a specific stratum of the interior-as-image and question their significance when these imagined designs become emergent into the actual, and the screen-mediated interiors make a transition to inhabitable environments. This essay will address new frontiers to existing discourse on the role of the image in the mediation and production of the interior by scholars including Charles Rice[04] and Beatriz Colomina.[05] While these historical frameworks make direct connections between the interior and its mediated image, I will advance the significance of contemporary social media for this context. However, the emphasis here is less on a relation between interior and image, but rather the collapsing of these conditions in the material status of the digital artefact—the interior-as-image. Finally, further intimations will be directed towards the resonance of these images' interior and spatial conditions, contextualised with the parallel emergence of the 'metaverse' and imaginaries of virtual worlds, in an effort to ascertain a role for the interior-as-image in broader interior and spatial design practices. Virtual environments such as Krista Kim's Mars House (2020) might then be considered exemplary in troubling for thresholds of uncertainty between virtual and real, digital and physical, in asking if it offers inhabitation in any real sense.

a 'dreamscape' condition?

A genre of digitally realised interiors has recently emerged that are emblematic in their dreamlike, surreal, and imagined condition. Key advocates include digital practitioners such as Charlotte Taylor's collaborative studio Maison de Sable [Fig. 01], Barcelona-based Andrés Reisinger, and Six N. Five studio led by Argentinian designer Ezequiel Pini. Gathered with others as a compendium of luxurious and seductive images, Berlin-based publisher Gestalten's Dreamscapes and Artificial Architecture (2020)[06] has presented a generation of digital artists producing work at the leading edge of computer-generated photo-realistic rendering. The label of 'dreamscape' has gained further traction in the /imagine: A Journey into The New Virtual (2023)[07] exhibition curated by Bika Rebek and Marlies Wirth to offer a distinct designation for this production of

images. However, I propose here a more critical articulation of the digital artefacts that exceeds the visual celebration of book and exhibition to exemplify the key features of uncertainty for these imagined architectural spaces. The most immediate uncertainties that emerge from these images may ask where these interiors are located and for which occupants. But much more critically ambiguous is their audience, market, and status as visualisations. These uncertainties will be the basis of a questioning as to where these images metaphorically might lead, and the types of engagement they propose.

Figure 01.
Futurism of the Past, 2021. Charlotte Taylor / Maison de Sable in collaboration with Katia Tolstykh + Fedor Katcuba.

Notwithstanding 'the overarching reference to Rene Magritte, whose palette and symbolic use of architecture'[08] exemplifies many of the images, to designate as surreal is potentially insufficient. Nevertheless, aesthetically there is the production of a distinct affective intensity. The images embody a familiarity that demands attention to parse what is unfamiliar, what is certain, and what is not. While typically having an interior or architectural focus, the subject matter and context can vary greatly. Recurring motifs may include architectural forms that test the limits of technical comprehension, gravity defying and precarious structures, and decontextualised objects and encounters. Also common is a stripped back impossible minimalism and an eerie level of perfection in terms of stillness, lighting, and framing. The atmospheric qualities are strongly evocative of the American realist painter Edward Hopper [Fig. 02] and Dutch Baroque painter Johannes Vermeer, especially the preponderance of (semi-)domestic space. But the differences lie most obviously in the lack of a human inhabitant. While the interiority presented contains accoutrements of activity (chairs, beds, etc.) that might suggest particular modes of occupation (sitting, lying, looking, resting, etc.), these virtual and digitally constructed environments are pregnant with an absence of the human. The late cultural theorist Mark Fisher described such evocative questioning of absence as 'eerie': 'nothing present when there should be something.'[09] While a pragmatic review of this may point to potential insufficiencies in the software to render a digital person

with sufficient authenticity, it is a lack that heightens the uncertainty of artifice for the image in an unsettling way.

Figure 02.
Western Motel, 1957. © Heirs of Josephine Hopper / Licensed by Artists Rights Society (ARS) NY/DACS, London 2023. Image courtesy of Yale University Art Gallery

It is essential to note the lack of human figures in these images is not unique when considering a broader context of architectural visualisation and documentation. When figures are included, whether in sectional drawings, perspective renderings, or photographs, they provide value in giving a sense of scale, inhabitation, and 'life.' When deployed in architectural presentations, figures may vary greatly in form and reception, from abstracted blob-like bodies to photo-montaged but perhaps decontextualised characters, they nonetheless assist in delivering a distinct certainty to what is being viewed. As such, the absence of a figure can produce a distancing, disconnecting the architecture from human experience, context, and social realities. Irrespective of any decision that might inform the absence of the human, the impact can be considered in reflecting how the inclusion of the figure in Hopper's paintings can lead to speculation on his or her character as opposed to the interior in isolation. Such a consideration can return to a questioning of how to categorise the image, or more precisely, how it should be viewed. These uncertainties produce a disruption of a symbolic order, compelling a position that lies beyond the conventional understanding and reading of images of interiors. This symbolic order is not limited to the traditions of interpreting images, but extends to the ways in which images are constitutive of the interior. As Charles Rice describes in *The Emergence of the Interior* (2007), the interior itself is a result of and co-constituted by its image. Moreover, and essential for this essay, 'the interior [is] represented in ways visually distinct from conventional architectural representations.'[10] Through the representation of interiors in images, in an articulation of desire and the production of a consciousness for specific materialisations of the interior, realities come to be actually formed. With this particular symbolic function attributing a significance to the interior image, the disruption agitates the threshold of the real in questioning not only what interiors might be emergent from the images of dreamlike interiors, but what is being modelled or 'simulated' by the image itself.

In reflecting on the artifice of these interiors and the intensity of the 'realness' they propose, the photoreal perfection delivers a condition of 'hyperreality' that itself can activate a disruption of the symbolic order. In

cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard's ground-breaking *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994), the hyperreal has a functional performativity, the workings of which can be described by the 'simulation.'[11] Conventional usage designates a simulation as 'a limited, circumscribed experience detached from a background that is perceived as reality', whereas Baudrillard more critically asserts that 'simulation is a pervasive cultural phenomenon that undermines reality itself.'[12] As a feature of hyperreality, the interior-as-image offers a simulation of reality, de/registering the subject of the image as outside of the real while concurrently asserting an operational status in antithesis to its symbolic engagement as representational artefact. This point supports a particularly contemporary reading of Baudrillard's theory, in the status of the digital image as a data object, and 'simulatable' in the projection of other versions of itself, as will be described later. The elimination of representational conventions produces a rupture in replacing reality itself with the simulation. The uncertainty of the virtual interiors is disruptive of the representational condition as a visual signifier, rendering absent the symbolic in concession to the making absent of reality. While representation stems from an equivalence of sign and referent, simulation promotes 'the radical negation of the sign as value.'[13] In being hyperreal, the interior-as-image does not simply refer to the absence of reality but is co-constitutive in its making absent. In as much as simulacra replace reality with its sign and the interior with its image, the eeriness of the interior-as-image stimulates 'forms of knowledge, subjectivity and sensation that lie beyond common experience.'[14]

The interiors of the 'dreamscape designers' consequently have a capacity of the eerie to disrupt reality, engaging 'forms of speculation and suspense.'[15] In addition to the previous points, the visual apprehension of the enigmatic interiors propose experiences at the limits of expectation and comprehension. In their simulation of another reality, it is a strangeness that can be very difficult to place. Furthermore, the uncertainty of how to categorise and view the image stimulates the adoption of alternative subjectivities that cohere with their un/real condition. But it is notable that the images are not singular and isolated experiences, but encounters in an ecology of widely engaged digitally mediated images of interiors. As noted earlier, the digital comportment of the interior-as-image has specific modes of both production and circulation. The work of these practitioners has been predominantly popularised via the circulation of image-based social media platforms, most specifically Instagram. While many have expanded their practice into gallery contexts and commercial interior design, I argue that it is this mode of propagation and engagement that delivers a specific condition for this category of interior-as-image.

platforms of circulation

Visuality in social media can be conceptualised via three broad overlapping elements: image, circulation, and practice.[16] In reference to the first, the affective qualities of the image have been discussed briefly above, but the wider visual context should not be excluded. The site or means of production for the image has a specificity, through a variety of digital modelling platforms and rendering processes as can be gleaned from hashtags accompanying their display on social media (such as #cinema4d, #blender, #octane). But the wider context of representations of interior environments is of key significance. As noted earlier, the category of interior images of focus is marked by a distinct consumption related to circulation via image-based social media platforms. When scrolling through my social media feed, the fictional spaces are subsumed among a multitude of other images of interior environments that only allude to the sheer volume of images present on social media. While I may have a professional agenda for engaging with these images, I am complicit with a more widely performed consumption with actors in non- and semi-professional circumstances, such as influencers and fashionistas, provocative of a 'cult of the interior.'

Arguably, such an audience is in reception to a burgeoning industry at the threshold of popular entertainment and home furnishings, exemplified by television series such as *Changing Rooms* (Channel 4 UK), *Interior Design Masters* (BBC UK), and *Selling Sunset* (Netflix). Print-based publications, including *Elle Decoration*, *Wallpaper**, and other lifestyle sources also drive the consumption of the imaging of the interior as a mass-mediated experience. In *The Emergence of the Interior*, Rice consolidates the historical significance of mainstream media in the articulation of the interior experience. Rice not only points to publications that are consciously interior orientated, but also the capacity of popular visual entertainment more generally, referring to the television series *Big Brother* and *24*, to dictate how interiors might be, and be inhabited.[17] Contextualised by and advancing Rice's 'doubleness' of image and space for the interior, I give specificity to the contemporary context of social media, a redolently digital mediation that has distinct characteristics exceeding print and broadcast media.

In parallel to and co-constitutive of the visual consumerism of image-based social media is the practice of imaging, which itself underpins the performance of circulation. While there is a plurality to the styles, typologies, and contexts of images in circulation, and notwithstanding if they are authentic photos of actually existing interiors or fictional imaginings of impossible architectures, they propose a distinct visual digitisation of artefactual space. A potentially significant attitude to effect is via what Fabiola Fiocco and Giulia Pistone term 'social media architecture' and a practice of image-making that specifically engages with the built environment.[18] Deferring to the preponderance of the 'Instagrammable', these are environments designed to be co-experienced via the digital screen,

persuading occupants to 'selfie' or otherwise visually circulate their participation in a specific location. In 2022, an analysis of Instagram hashtags by photo printing firm Inkifi revealed the London restaurant Sketch as 'the most Instagrammed restaurant in the world.'[19] The restaurant has been circulating in the digital imagination for a number of years, having become famous for its striking pastel pink dining room and sci-fi toilet pods, but it was 2022 when its most current interior iterations were shared in a stunning 83,045 posts, nearly double its closest rival. This is only one example of many interiors that express a photogenic visuality that luxuriates in screen-based mediation. Pointedly in the context of digitally rendered virtual environments, these are physical spaces and may be accidentally or purposefully designed to compel the visitor to digitally collapse physical three-dimensional space onto a two-dimensional screen-based artefact. In contrast to the imaginative acrobatics of a digital model, these are constructed and constructable environments, obeying conventional realities, including gravity, maintenance, and budget.

While the motivations to 'selfie' oneself in location and visually anchor digital presence to physical place are complex and nuanced, these broad habits nonetheless describe a practice of image-making and circulation to specifically contextualise an interface with interior and other built environments. This is a digital socialisation of the aesthetics of space as mediated by the screen, and vigorously engaged and consumed by a very broad community of interest. However, the commercial interior design industry is not without an agenda that leverages the consumerist impulse at play. Designers, like any contemporary brand and commercial actors, are assured of securing an online presence via a plurality of pathways, not least an image-based digital platform such as Instagram through which to showcase projects. But in apprehending the capacity for photogenetic screen-mediated experiences to draw an audience to a physical place, such as the London restaurant Sketch, Instagram has become a context that is increasingly being designed for. With architects and spatial designers increasingly sensitive to this new frontier of engagement, the formalisation of 'designing the Instagrammable' is made clear with publications such as the *Instagram Design Guide* from Valé Architects, who articulate themselves as experts in this specific field.[20] Yet these are not exceptional practices but part of a much wider post-digital condition that digital strategist Sarah Barns defines as 'platform urbanism', under which 'social media engagement is increasingly habituated as an interface of everyday urban encounter.'[21] The contemporary urban experience is mediated via a complexity of digital interfaces, of which social media is one circumstance, but indicates a wider context for the imaging and visualities of daily life organised by a range of technology platforms.

Fiocco and Pistone's account provides visual support that articulates the aesthetic sensibilities that underpin the imaging of

space for this essay,[22] and can be further exemplified by referring to the social media account Insta Repeat (@insta-repeat). While the practice of making 'social media architecture' can be practised anywhere, there emerges a tendency towards homogenisation in the visuality of the outcomes circulated. Much like the quantifiable popularity of Sketch above, the consequence of 'likes' and 'shares' gives an articulation of 'algorithmic determinism' that will be expanded in the next section.

While the practising of 'social media architecture' can, but not always, implicate a body in space—to selfie one's presence in a specific location—as previously noted, the dreamlike imagined spaces are remarkable in the lack of a human figure. Contextualised under a post-pandemic condition, and the experience of social distancing and societal lockdown, the eerie imagined interiors have the potential to stimulate an impulse to express or project oneself into that virtual space. The interior-as-image bears witness to new modes of spatial expression and the collapsing of dislocated rooms upon each other via the digital screen to manifest uncertain and anxious embodied phenomena.

anxious interiors

Peering into the interiors painted by Edward Hopper, it is almost impossible not to be overcome with melancholy and anxiety evocative of the Great Depression when they were produced. In their original state, these large paintings that might adorn the wall of a gallery, offer a particular mode of engagement, a slow and contemplative position for the viewer that, to a limited extent, can be experienced when reviewing a reproduction in some other medium.

In contrast to the sparse drawn-out alienation of Hopper, the virtual interiors produced by the 'dream team' have an immediacy in the context of the superabundance of images contemporary experience is subject to. As outlined earlier, the principal means of digital mediation delivers a specificity of encounter for eerie dreamscapes, and the pull and pausing in one's digital streaming of images. This is an ecology of attention where shared images compete to be lingered upon, or, even more valuable, to be circulated and propagated further. However, with attention having become a valuable commodity in an information-saturated world, digital platforms have developed complex algorithms designed to maximise user engagement and retention, in order to capture as much attention as possible.[23] Thus, the economics of attention stimulates algorithmic determinacy and creates a self-reinforcing cycle, in which algorithms determine what content is shown to users, and users' attention and engagement with that content feeds back into the algorithms, shaping the content that is shown in the future. In her book *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (2018), the philosopher Shoshona Zuboff gives critical focus to how technology corporations extract and monetise user attention through surveillance and behavioural data.[24] The algorithmic function of the interior-as-image announces the extraction of attention under

what digital scholar Nick Srnicek defines as 'platform capitalism' and the economic model in which digital platforms act as intermediaries between buyers and sellers, using algorithms and data analytics to match supply and demand.[25]

The circumstances of visuality for the social media image are therefore underpinned by an operational status, echoing the function of the simulation that displaces symbolic content with performative action. The sign of the image is superseded by its capacity to be propagated, liked, and shared. Under the superabundance of digital images, this operational status has a clear significance. If the aesthetic engagement of the digital image loses precedence to a procedural condition, an algorithmic 'viewing' of the image is accomplished. The superabundance of images is not, and can no longer be, for human viewing, but for nonhuman machine viewing. As philosopher of technology Benjamin Bratton notes, 'Today many images are made for no-one, but this does not mean that they are functionless.'[26] In his book *Signal. Image. Architecture.* (2019), architect and scholar John May expands on this further, and describes how images are now 'signals.' As digital artefacts under review by the machine, images are subsumed and collated to become 'simulatable' of a plurality of conditions, 'data sets that project fleeting versions of their contents, sometimes as spreadsheets, sometimes as texts, sometimes as drawings.'[27] While the category of images that is the focus of the present line of enquiry is one of a plurality of categories, a further significance emerges when contextualised with the eerie absence of the human in the digitally constructed environments. Such absence is not only symbolic in the expression and aesthetic reception of the image, but an absence operationally made via a co-constitutive collaboration in nonhuman machine viewing and an algorithmic determinism. This is not to dismiss any impressive imaginative and aesthetic aptitude of their producers but iteratively gives attention to the operational application of the images and their engagement: 'What matters is experience itself, not how it was produced.'[28]

Its mode of circulation exemplifies the operational status of the interior-as-image, compounding the capacity of simulacra to suspend the real, the deliberation of digital propagation releasing the 'potential to contaminate all of reality with its refusal of depth and reference.'[29] This contamination by uncertainty and the absenting of human agency, as displaced by the opaque processes of the algorithm, stimulates an anxiety of what is and is not knowable. The contemporary attitude to algorithmic structuring of the post-digital everyday is one of apprehension and unease, where 'the computer sometimes seems more in control of our choices than we are.'[30] The impenetrable 'black box' of the algorithm contextualises a specific encounter with the interior-as-image. In Hopper's paintings, anxiety is rendered visible, given visuality. With the dreamlike interior-as-image, anxiety rests not (only) in the representation of space, but embedded in the operational means of

its display, an order of the knowable and the possible. Demonstrating the unknowability of conditions of algorithmic determinism for the images of dreamed interiors is essential for the thesis of this essay.

Drawing upon the writing of Danish theologian Søren Kierkegaard, digital sociologist and philosopher Patricia de Vries is one of an increasing number of scholars with a critical focus on 'algorithmic anxiety': '[A]lgorithms are evoked as omnipresent yet invisible, powerful yet elusive, inscrutable yet invasive, and shaping social worlds and the people living in them', with anxiety emerging when threatened with such unknowability.[31] Under the circumstances of the algorithm, the processual is not only hidden but speculated as possible yet beyond comprehension: 'Anxiety pertains to the possibility of the possible, to possible events that are unknown and unknowable and thus cannot be anticipated.'[32] The simulation of reality eliminates the distinction between original and artifice, yet the distinction itself is indeterminant and unidentifiable, agitating the threshold of actual and real. The eerie qualities of the interior-as-image acquire an algorithmic dimension in the stimulating of anxiety, intensifying 'forms of knowledge, subjectivity and sensation that lie beyond common experience', de/registering the subject of the image as outside the real.[33] As such, de Vries seeks to engage an existential anxiety, transcending uncertainty to challenge the way in which the self relates to the self to address 'ways algorithmic technologies (re) configure identity and subjectivity.'[34]

Consolidating the previous points of enquiry, the troubling of subjectivity emerges via the overlapping stratum of uncertainty for the interior-as-image discussed. Reflecting on the images produced by the 'dreamscape designers', the hyperreal compounding of visuality of uncertainty upon the algorithmic determinism of circulation and reception of the aesthetics of affect produces a post-digital subjectivity at the limitations of knowability. Furthermore, as indicated by the techno-consumerist extraction of attention, our subjectivity is captured in a capitalist means of reproduction. Baudrillard places the origins of hyperreality in capitalism, and the ways in which what the everyday presents does not reflect the actual conditions of the real.[35] For example, hyperreality can account for the disparity between the real world of limited natural resources and the hyperreal world of capitalism that encourages endless consumption. Such structuring of the unknowable is, to an extent, artificially produced, but nonetheless advances more significant states in the unknowability of the future-to-come under conditions of capitalist extractivism. The discourse of the Anthropocene and the contemporary climate crisis gives cognisance to the precarity of the future itself, with the possibility of the possible even further troubled.

With the focus here on unfolding the digital and material conditions for the interior-as-image, it is essential to deliberate how the digitally rendered dreamlike interiors are also resource intensive procedures. One can easily imagine the digital as an

excellent testing grounding to create wildly ambitious architectural projects without the limitations of physical resources, which typify the construction industry. However, to declare that 'designers can specify the wildest luxuries or even use plastics guilt-free because environmental crises don't exist' in the digital realm is an unfortunate failure to comprehend the resource intensive processes virtual visualities require.[36] It could be assumed that customary digital design studios such as those of Andrés Reisinger and Alexis Christodoulou would rely on high-end but commercially available technologies to design and render their creations. Specialist hardware accelerators and GPUs may only nominally increase energy demands when compared to an average modern commercial office, increasing further with more substantial resources such as render farms. But the materiality of the hardware itself should not be overlooked in the context of what media theorist Jussi Parikka describes as the 'geology of media', and the use of technologies that incorporate rare earth elements secured via destructive processes of mineral extraction.[37]

However, of greater significance to the resources necessary to support an individual practitioner labouring at keyboard and screen, is the adoption of blockchain technologies in the form of an NFT and a means of monetising the digital images under production. Where any individual digital data object, such as a jpeg image, has the capacity to be copied endlessly and distributed with ease, an NFT is a digital asset that represents ownership or proof of authenticity of a unique item or piece of content, such as a piece of artwork, music, or video. NFTs are built on blockchain technology, which is a distributed ledger that allows for secure and transparent transactions without the need for intermediaries. The energy consumption associated with blockchain transactions can be significant because the process of adding new data to a blockchain involves solving complex mathematical puzzles through a process called 'mining.' Reisinger was one of the pioneers in using NFT, auctioning a collection of virtual furniture that sold in less than ten minutes for a total of more than US $450,000.[38] The embracing of blockchain technology by many digital producers secures a sustainable economic position in a precarious industry, allowing greater control over the distribution and ownership of their creations. But this currently comes with an ecological price, with energy hungry algorithmic processes feeding fossil fuel capitalism, and the interior-as-image rendering climate trauma visually.

The absence of the human in this interior-as-image, as noted earlier, now gains even greater significance. In a travesty of the supposition of technical limitations that preclude the presence of a digital human form, this absence now affords a symbolic dimension in making void the human. Under an agenda of expanded extractivism, the industries of techno-capitalism have profoundly contributed to the contemporary climate crisis in which the continuation and future of the human is precarious, for which the interior-as-image can provide an eerie and compelling vision.

inhabiting uncertainty

The agenda of extractivism and climate anxiety determines a tangible real-world consequence to the spaces of desire to be inhabited by the imagination. Notwithstanding the implications of algorithmic intensive processes, the exuberance of the dreamscape milieu is arguably its embracing of the digital to explore virtual possibilities that exist outside the realm of the practical. But the success of individual practitioners in their creation of seductive and appealing interiors has elicited opportunities for the possible to become actual, and the translation of digital images into inhabitable environments and experiences. On the whole, the success of digital artists should be celebrated and rewards their excellence in imagining innovative experiential encounters and design outcomes. However, in relation to the overarching line of enquiry, these activities further augment deliberations of uncertainty, possibility, and the un/real.

In 2018 Andrés Reisinger first posted a digital render of his Hortensia chair to Instagram, a seductive curvaceous form covered in thousands of delicate hydrangea flower petals [Fig. 03]. The virtual chair quickly became a viral hit, with Reisinger subjected to numerous enquiries regarding purchase with the assumption the image was a photograph of an existing chair. Subsequently, Reisinger engaged in a collaboration with product designer Júlia Esqué to realise a physical version with the support of Dutch design brand Moooi, and in 2022 the first production model was released to the public. On a

Figure 03.
Hortensia, 2018. By digital artist and designer Andrés Reisinger.

Figure 04.
The Orb, in collaboration with: Netjets and Moco Museum, 2022. With permission from Six N. Five.

grander but no less aesthetically diminished scale, the design studio Six N. Five has been commissioned by the Moco Museum in Barcelona to produce hospitality and retail environments in collaboration with interior designer Isern Serra. Both conceived and executed in 2022, the first of these was the The Orb, a private lounge and bar for Art Basel, which also contained NFT artworks and designed objects by Six N. Five, such as the limestone Caliza Chair [Fig. 04]. The second is the Moco Concept Store, a space to showcase contemporary art and the 'real-life transposition of a virtual concept.'[39] Both interiors have arguably been tempered by real-world constraints but embody the aesthetics of Six N. Five and their use of 'digital tools and CGI [...] to create minimal, surreal and tranquil environments, pastel-hued dreamscapes and vibrant unthinkable architectures that allude to the endless possibilities of this ever-evolving digital tool.'[40]

These examples present a capacity to inhabit the designed interiors of the dreamscape makers, but it is questionable if such an action reflects the conditions as explicated previously for the interior-as-image. In being realised, uncertainty has collapsed into actuality, much like Schrödinger's cat leaping out of its box, stymying possibility in preference of the probable. Reception occurs on different registers, from two-dimensional attention to three-dimensional navigation. Aesthetic experience may retain eerie qualities that are nonetheless evocative of a digital comportment in which the anxiety of the possibility of the possible is circumvented in the confrontation with function. Nonetheless, when hyperreal objects do emerge into the real, they decry their potential ethical status; limestone becomes cheap when it's a digital texture, but has significant material costs when quarried, digitally sculpted, and transported. To some extent, this presents a divergence in materiality, an engagement of the constructable (and disposable) in lieu of advanced techno-materialisms of digital and immaterial attention. But there remains a relation to global supply chains, resource extraction, and attention engaged, but of a more specific and potentially discerning audience.

The reverse of a becoming real is an embrace of the immersiveness that emerging technologies such as virtual reality (VR) might extend and allow stepping into the digital screen for inhabitation. More significantly, and responding to advances in VR technology, is the context of the 'metaverse' and its promise of a fully interactive and three-dimensional virtual environment where users can create, interact with, and explore various digital objects and spaces. Arguably, these are still image-based experiences, mediated via a pair of LCD displays positioned directly in front of each eye, and at present, may have shortcomings in terms of the technological power to render smoothly the very advanced graphical content that exemplifies dreamscape interiors. In its current state, the metaverse is not a single contiguous experience, but

a series of disconnected, decentralised online platforms such as Decentraland and Spatial that offer relatively primitive aesthetic experiences when compared to the seductive and atmospheric environments of Reisinger and others. But, despite current hardware limitations and the decline of investment in late 2022 after an initial boom involving billions of dollars from a range of technology companies, there is a continuing interest in developing and improving the technology much further.

Despite the current aesthetic shortcomings, the context of the metaverse probably offers the most direct means to spatially experience the impossible architectural designs of dreamscape interiors. A notable creative practitioner in enthusing the potential of the metaverse is the Canadian-Korean digital artist Krista Kim, creator of Mars House (2020), reputably 'the first NFT digital house in the world' [Fig. 05].[41] Hosted by metaverse platform Spatial but accessed by invitation only, the virtual architecture and surrounding landscape of Mars House can be navigated via a VR headset, to view the various pieces of furniture that make up a dining area, lounge, and bedroom, as well as an 'outdoor' balcony space. In a fully glazed volume redolent of Farnsworth House (1951) designed by Mies van der Rohe, to inhabit this architecture is to engage with the representation of the landscape of Mars itself, augmented with a colour strobing interior ceiling that is a digital replica of other real-world art installations by Kim. Since the sale of Mars House on the SuperRare NFT auctioning platform for over US $500,000 to a buyer under the name of @artontheinternet, others have been creating unique virtual environments to be sold to private buyers. In 2022, NFT gallery The Row launched on Everyrealm a collection of digitally modelled spaces created by Reisinger, Six N. Five, Christodoulou, and others, and potentially marks a galvanisation to offer high-quality spatial experiences as immersive digital encounters for those who can afford it.

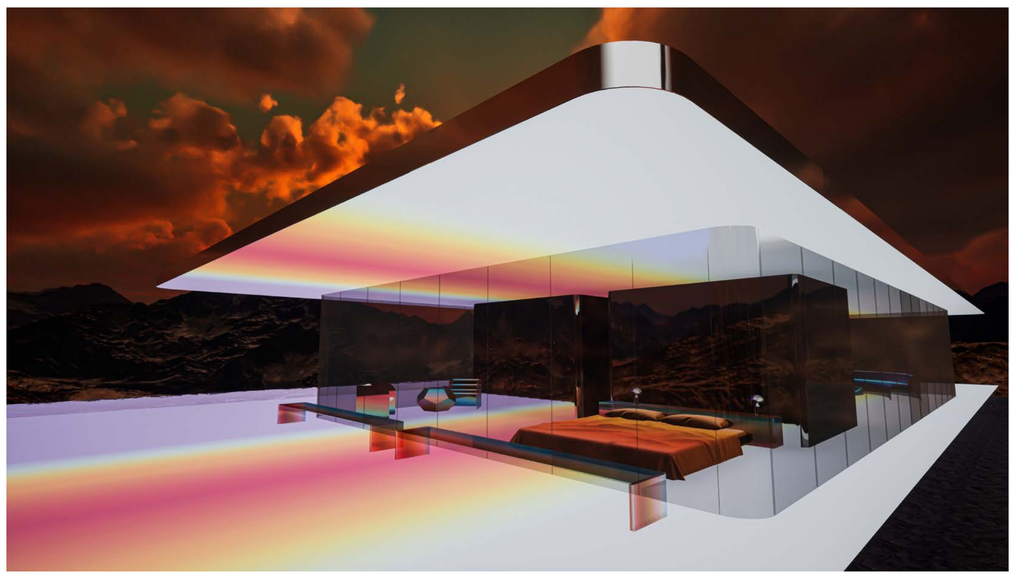

Figure 05.
Mars House, 2020. Courtesy of the artist Krista Kim.

While further technological advancements can be forthcoming to enhance the quality of rendering light, material, and atmosphere in these VR environments, the essential articulations of form and structure already demonstrate the potential of this specific means of testing new and innovative spatial experiences. Reflecting on this potential to imagine radically different spatial experiences the digital can stimulate, it might be disappointing to witness relatively conventional architectural and interior forms being deployed, for example, chairs, beds, and stairs. Moreover, the articulations are

outwith current technological interfacing with digital space. While recent developments in VR have certainly improved engagement and accessibility for virtual experiences, the limitations of '6 degrees of freedom'—to look and move in all three dimensions and directions—is restricted to visual encounter and, therefore, to the ability to spatially interact through actions such as walking up a flight of stairs, sitting, or lying down is manifestly beyond current interfacing. The challenges of these conventions, both conceptually and physically, ask questions as to how these virtual environments should be engaged with and how to release their full potential. Perhaps, in the deliberation of a technological engagement that is arguably still in its infancy, the familiarity of some of the architectural encounters can be considered an exercise in acclimatisation to a new spatial context, an understanding to support access to further, more enhanced experiences. Equally, one can speculate on how conventions might be disrupted, offering experiences that are more authentic to the limitations of engagement, and propose new functions or encounters. One such example would be *The Meeting Place* (2021) by French artist Cyril Lancelin and creative director Benny Or, also hosted by Spatial but publicly [Fig. 06]. As its title suggests, this is a digital environment for multiple users to engage in dialogue, but offers a thoughtfully different space that embraces the potential of new digital forms, yet also has the capacity to be speculative towards imaging new types of meetings between inhabitants of a digital world. Finally, it is of note how Kim and the dreamscape designers have employed their own virtual houses and interiors as showrooms for real-world artefacts and sculptures, for example, Six N. Five's Caliza Chair and polyhedron sculptural side tables, handmade in Murano glass, from Kim's Mars House. Overlooking a potential doubling of resource depletion, these strategies award the physical artefacts with an otherworldly context, and a mode of subjectivity outside physical experience.

Figure 06.
The Meeting Place, 2021. With permission from Cyril Lancelin and Benny Or.

The Hortensia chair becomes real, erupting from the virtual, whereas Kim proposes ever more immersions into the digital, a transection of experiences and motivations that can offer distinct conditions of uncertainty for the interior-as-image as has been expounded so far. Kim is a devotee who espouses the emancipatory potential of

the metaverse and its capacity for spiritual wellbeing to be realised through complete immersion into the digital space but neglects any consideration of the uneven distribution of digital access.[42] Even the author Neal Stephenson in his 1992 satirical novel *Snow Crash*, overly magnified for its coining of the term 'metaverse', is sensitive to digital inequalities, describing an encounter in the virtual world of 'The Street' with 'black-and-whites', those grainy, low resolution, black-and-white avatars and the default for anyone who cannot afford an avatar for themselves. Arguably, as history evidences, the limitations of technology determine the terms of its engagement but does this uncertainty of potential imply a disconnect in how virtual spaces are articulated and can offer a specific function? Equally, is there a privileging of visuality at the expense of the means of engagement if virtual reality is that means? Or, in reference to the terms for the interior-as-image discussed earlier, should mediation and circulation also be attributed as a dimension to this question? Circulation does imply a mode of accessibility, but further to access from a more critical and ethical position, we should also give focus to the uneven distribution of digital access, giving firm identification of those other than able bodied and sighted, and isolate the terms of inequality and privileging being activated under the broader terms of extractivism characterised so far.

Finally, a brief note is to be made for the contemporary hastening of image-based AI and ML driven processes, where human certainty is even more displaced in the machinic imaginings of spatial environments. The example of 'text-to-image' proposes a digital dreaming of new possibilities and an emergent stratum and circulation of seductive visual imaginings of many experiences including architecture and interiors. These visual techniques offered by services such as Dall-e and Midjourney, and other AI chatbot models such as OpenAI's Chat GPT, activate sensibilities of algorithmic unknowability previously observed. But while there persists the black box faculty of the algorithmic processes, the mode of engagement with these powerful technologies has the potential to be collaborative and emancipatory. The precise conditions by which any of these services produce their specific outcomes remains concealed even to the programmers, yet attention to the process and interaction between user and algorithm can be revealing in and of itself, and can also connect to the participation in machine viewing as mentioned in reference to social media transactions. As suggested by the context of the chatbot, there is a dialogical aspect to the process where the user still contributes to the crafting of inputs and the curation of in-progress outputs. But perhaps more astute is a reflection of how a user participates directly with the unknowability of the technology, and is essentially seeking to uncover what is known by the unknowable, to agitate the leading edge of the possibility of the possible.

conclusion

As has been drawn through this essay, the interior-as-image proposes a framework that marks a trajectory to test and acclimatise a more direct engagement with virtual worlds and their potential for yet-to-be-thought experiences and more-than-human collaborations in machine viewing. As demonstrated through the contemplation of the interior-as-image as produced by dreamscape practitioners, these are digital artefacts with an operational function. Through the simulation of reality, reality itself is made absent, activating forms of knowability and subjectivity outside normative experience. The digital circulation and engagement with these seductive virtual environments co-constitute anxiety with an algorithmic dimension, further troubling the knowability of the known to agitate the possibility of the possible. Primed under these circumstances, the interior-as-image exemplifies and reveals extractivist conditions of capitalism, and organises a mode of machine viewing to access more-than-human subjectivities. The aesthetics of uncertainty implicated in the digital interiors impact the real, a constitutive making un/certain of reality, and a critical category of uncertain interiors.

For the discipline of interior design, the images of the 'dream team' add to a body of already existing sources of inspiration to designers everywhere that will inevitably emerge as actually existing interiors, as has already been demonstrated by the retail spaces designed by Six N. Five. But more significantly, the transection of the actual and imaginary, virtual and physical, offers a re/configuration of algorithmic anxiety in a way that is about 'the radical openness toward the unknown and about algorithmic regimes that attempt to ensnare this openness.'[43] To engage the image-as-interior in this context is to activate alternative imaging and imaginings for conditions of change through 'practices that are conducive to living with algorithmic anxiety' and radical openness to possibilities.[44]

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author biography

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abandoned war-torn homes as casualties and witnesses of violence

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abstract

Most global conflicts are followed by a simultaneous war against domestic architecture. However, this phenomenon remains largely ignored by contemporary spatial discourses. Similarly, previously destroyed homes are marginalised and remain disconnected from the contemporary life of the region. This text-based essay frames the region of the former SFR Yugoslavia as a concrete case study and casts light on the uncertain position domestic interiors hold in times of political fluctuations and ethnic conflicts. It specifically focuses on the time after the acts of violence have taken place, when these sites have lost their prime domestic identity and stand as discarded ruins caught in an ambiguous zone between past and present.

The analysis is presented through findings of a unique physical and psychological exploration of the aftermath of ethnic conflicts—*TRAVELS* (2011–2014). Findings from *TRAVELS* are here applied as a universal material and used to analyse the aims, meanings, and consequences of violent attacks in the contexts of widespread ethnic, cultural, and political violence. This essay offers a distinctive perspective by positioning the domestic interior as a direct casualty and witness of violence.

As the key driver of all spatial explorations in this essay, scenography deepens our understanding of the meaning and impact of violence on the current uncertain position of the attacked homes. With scenography taking a forensic standpoint, these sites emerge as abandoned *mise-en-scènes* inscribed with layers of spatial narratives, traces of time, and tactile remnants of past violence and trauma. This essay proposes that the acts of violence transform the meaning of home. In times of conflict, strategic acts of violence are framed as modes of cultural and ethnic cleansing and domestic space as their true medium. In the aftermath, while officially detached from contemporary life, war-torn homes represent survivors of history and metamorphose into uniquely powerful monuments of the collectively lived trauma.

keywords

war-torn home; domestic; abandoned interior; trauma; forensic scenography

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This analysis begins with a set of four photographs of abandoned interiors taken in 2009 in a remote, war-torn village near the town of Knin in Croatia. These images, featuring details of three violated domestic dwellings, were taken by N. A., then a student of directing at the National Institute of Dramatic Arts in Sydney. A native of Serbia, N. A. migrated to Australia with his family in 1995 following the civil war in the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFR Yugoslavia). In the winter of 2009, he visited family who had stayed in the motherland. The many towns he visited are now part of the independent republics of Serbia and Croatia. In Croatia, a chance encounter with an old family friend led him to an abandoned village, where he photographed the domestic interiors. Upon his return to Sydney, I received this set of 35 mm film photographs.

Figure 01.
N.A.'s set of 35 mm film photographs served as key inspiration for the inception of *TRAVELS*. N. A., 2009.

The three interiors were documented fourteen years after the last conflicts took place in the region. They remain in this state of destruction to the present day. As such, they are disconnected from the contemporary life of the region. Their significance, on both personal and collective levels, as well as regional and global, remains undervalued and neglected. These former homes stand as forsaken ruins, vulnerable to the harsh climate conditions and to continued acts of vandalism and trespassing. This essay responds to the collective neglect and casts light on the questions of uncertainty of domestic interior in times of and after ethnic conflicts. It positions a domestic interior as a direct casualty and witness of violence and examines how the role and perception of private interiors metamorphose in times of political fluctuations and ethnically fuelled violent clashes. Further, this essay is particularly interested in unpacking the ambiguous position these homes have moved into after having been the sites and targets of intense violence.

N. A.'s photographs highlight how a simultaneous war against architecture follows all global conflicts. We continually see it happening in Syria, Palestine, Ukraine, and other conflicted regions across the globe. This set of photographs further highlights the lack of attention to and investigation of this phenomenon in contemporary spatial, cultural, and political discourses. While the limited discussion is dedicated to the destruction of sites

that represent 'official' power and cultural heritage, little to no attention is given to the wanton destruction of domestic sites. This is especially prominent for homes located in small towns, rural areas, and remote villages. Yet, we witness that such sites, which ostensibly hold no strategic or political significance in a conflict, continue to represent prime targets of contemporary ethnic violence. Similarly, these sites appear to be of no interest to the authorities of the region where they exist, nor to anyone linked to the original inhabitants.

N. A.'s set of photographs also represents key inspiration for a critical and conceptual investigation of the phenomenon of violence against domestic space: *TRAVELS* (2011–2014).[01] This essay presents the findings of this three-year-long performative investigation, which framed the region of the former SFR Yugoslavia as a concrete case study for investigating the meanings and consequences of violent acts in and against domestic interiors. In this process, it became evident that what started as a study of the aftermath of ethnically charged spatial violence is, in fact, an investigation of an active phenomenon. Continued interest in this topic and further research over the years reveal that this phenomenon is not unique to the conflict of the former SFR Yugoslavia. Similar patterns are discovered in most conflicted zones; we note wanton destruction of the domestic interior as an ongoing feature of contemporary wars. Hence, the findings presented here are treated as universal material. This essay marks fourteen years since N. A. photographed the presented interiors. At the time of his visit in 2009, they had already been in a state of destruction for fifteen years. *TRAVELS* took place almost a decade ago. These temporal references provide a much-needed emotional distance necessary for a critical analysis. SFR Yugoslavia thus emerges as a sound testament for establishing frameworks in search for the meaning and role of the war-torn domestic interiors. To cast more light on the meaning of such sites in our contemporary experience, one needs to trace a more complex meaning of domestic interior before and during the war.

TRAVELS represented a physical and psychological exploration of the aftermath of ethnic conflicts and positioned domestic interiors as tools used to think *of*, *through*, and *with*. This exploration was performed from a scenographic perspective, here framed as '[…] a sensory as well as intellectual experience, emotional as well as rational.'[02] Scenography is primarily employed as the driver of spatial investigations and is seen as a practice that can deepen our perception of war-torn interiors. It offers a distinct standpoint to our understanding of space by shifting the focus to the profound relationship between people and their interior(s). Scenographically, spaces and events are thoroughly interlaced. Space assigns validity to events and narratives and acts as proof an event has taken place. In this light, abandoned spaces go beyond sites of personal and collective traumatic

memory. Such a scenographic approach discovers significant analytical grounds in the ideas of the German philosopher Walter Benjamin (1892–1940), who referred to ruins as emblems of allegory and defined them as critical tools for comprehending history.[03] Benjamin's approach to ruins looked beyond their aesthetic qualities. Instead, he read them as a process: 'a means of demythifying and stripping away symbolism—a means of approaching historical truth through reduction, at the expense of romantic aesthetics.'[04]

Inspired by Benjamin's approach to ruins, scenography is here applied as an inversion of its common frameworks and positioned to act from a forensic standpoint. The war-torn interiors thus mark the beginning of a performative and analytical process. From this perspective, they emerge as abandoned *mise-en-scènes* and represent the remainders of already ceased events. In this light, domestic interiors discovered during *TRAVELS* represent scenographic 'afterimages' of previously performed acts of violence. They act as principal physical remnants of a collective traumatic narrative and represent direct consequences of violence performed during the war. Each violated interior genuinely embodies the traumas experienced by the absent human figures. Collectively, they represent framed case studies of all such attacks and capture the holistic experience of war.

home: from quintessential phenomenological object to target for destruction

Home is a site unique in human experience. It is a complex construct of historic, symbolic, cultural, and spiritual elements. It represents a principle elaboration and the most significant infrastructure of human existence. We begin this analysis by defining the meaning of home on a personal level and position it as a concept that embodies deep psychological associations and significance for each individual. Home, therefore, represents a dominant force in forming personal and collective identity. It '[…] is where one starts from',[05] and marks a focal point in our individual being in the world. It is our territory and the site of everyday activities: of personal, cultural, and social relationships. Home is our private shelter, where we are free to orchestrate our being in the world.

Finnish architect and architectural scholar Juhani Pallasma proposes that the definition of home and its significance belongs more to the realms of poetry than to architecture.[06] Pallasma defines our dwelling sites as containers: 'of memories and images, desires and fears, the past and the present.'[07] We thus begin to understand our home as a shell in which we establish and store our personality, emotions, and memories. We trace Pallasma's thinking to French philosopher, poet and phenomenologist Gaston Bachelard (1884–1962), who similarly conceptualised a house as embodying meanings deeper than those of 'an object'. In *The Poetics of Space*,[08] his seminal study of human existence in space,

Bachelard identifies the house as a site that offers 'heavenly' protection and security. For him, 'to dwell' surpasses banal acts of physical residence in a dwelling unit. Rather, the house represents a site of the most profound human experience. Phenomenologically, the vital qualities of a house lie in the notions of intimacy, protection, and bliss it provides. To render this more evocatively, Bachelard introduces a system of 'topoanalysis', which he defines as 'an auxiliary of psychoanalysis.'[09] Topoanalysis relates directly to 'topophilia', which literally means 'love of place' or, in this context, our profound emotional relationship to a house. In explaining his topoanalysis, Bachelard argues that psychoanalysts could discover a blueprint for understanding the soul by shifting the focus to the localisation of memory. Topoanalysis is thus a psychological survey of sites of our intimate experiences and memories. For Bachelard, memories remain still: 'the more securely they are fixed in space, the sounder they are.'[10] In this light, home represents the fusion of thoughts, memories, and dreams. The most significant aspect of a house is that it '[…] protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace.'[11]

Our home is thus a space of bliss and embodies 'maternal features': 'Without it a man would be a dispersed being.'[12] From childhood, we are conscious of home as a place we leave to experience our surroundings and establish other relationships. Building on Bachelard's proposals, Norwegian architect and architectural scholar Christian Norberg-Schulz (1926–2000) asserts we discover our core personal identity within our home.[13] In his view, 'to dwell' means 'to belong.' Our home represents the central core of our existence. We orient our experiences and establish personal and social relationships in accordance with 'home' as the dominant reference point for existence and identification. A house gives us our place in the world. Importantly for this analysis, Norberg-Schulz explicitly highlights the significance of domestic interiors. In his view, the interior satisfies the need to be situated and to have shelter. Domestic interiors thus allow us to move inside, to be alone, and to be protected.[14]

Phenomenological understanding of home is pivotal for acknowledging its significance on a personal level. However, it also serves as a blueprint for comprehending the underlying reasons and meanings behind violent attacks. Phenomenologically, we understand a domestic site to form the foundation of personal and collective identity. Yet, this concept can't be studied in isolation. Geographical, historical, cultural, and political contexts emerge as crucial references. Here, they assign complex layers of meaning to analyse the heightened uncertainty of political turbulences. These references help us trace the metamorphosis of our (personal and collective) perception of domestic interiors as they transition from quintessential phenomenological objects to targets for destruction. If each conflicted ethnic group in the region (Serbian, Croatian, and Bosnian Muslim) perceived home to be a site of ultimate bliss and the core infrastructure

of human existence, we can argue that in times of conflict these intimate sites become perceived as targets of violence charged with complex, multilayered aims of conquering, dominating, and exterminating 'the other.'

the obscure position of war-torn homes

These additional layers of information are even more significant in defining and understanding the obscure position the abandoned homes now hold in the contemporary experience of the region.

Figure 02.
Map of SFR Yugoslavia representing its territory in the period 1945–1992. Nevena Mrdjenovic, 2014.

We return to their geographical, cultural, historical, and political origins to better understand this complexity. SFR Yugoslavia is a crucial reference here. This was a socialist unity, which existed for almost the entire twentieth century, with the aim of uniting all Southern Slavs in one country. Multiple changes of name and territory and social and political regulations mark its complex history. The country reformed several times, yet its continuous thread was a compound of diverse nations, religions, cultures, and traditions united in a small geographic region. *TRAVELS* focused on the aftermath of the period of the socialist federation that existed from 1945 to 1992. In this period, SFR Yugoslavia was a unity of six constituent republics: Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia, Macedonia, Slovenia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina [Fig. 02].[15]

The socialist unity was built on 'seismic' foundations. World War II left an atrocious legacy of human and material loss in the region, as well as deeply inscribed traumas for many Yugoslavs. The new country, led by Josip Broz Tito (1892–1980), launched with an abrupt shift. Among other aspects, this predominantly reflected a change in the personal and collective sense of identity and belonging, which now came with dictatorial communist concealment of any traces of 'previous' identities between the people from different regions of the federation. Instead, a concept of 'Brotherhood and Unity' was introduced in the name of removing any separative nationalist sentiments within each constituent republic. This denoted Yugoslav nations and national minorities as equal, peacefully coexisting groups who promoted both similarities and interdependencies for the sake of overcoming conflicts initiated and burning during World War II.

The federation disintegrated in the same way it was formed—with many victims; poverty; significant economic disruptions; erosion of cultural, moral, and traditional values; and continuous instability on all

levels. Ethnic clashes between 1991 and 1995 (with further conflicts continuing in Kosovo until 1999) claimed hundreds of thousands of lives. They left a bitter legacy of architectural debris and psychological devastation on all sides. Hence, we locate an essential analytical reference in the proposal of the contemporary French cultural theorist Paul Virilio, who defines war as '[...] the magical spectacle, because its very purpose is to produce spectacle; to fell the enemy is not so much to capture as to "captivate" him, to install the fear of death before he actually dies.'[16] From our scenographic perspective, the war of the early 1990s is the major spectacle of the region. During the war, but also for decades after, aspects of daily life acquired levels of theatricality that transcended those of staged performances. This meant life in a prolonged state of uncertainty, continuous ethnic clashes and escalation of violence, power and water restrictions, multiple rounds of international sanctions and embargo, and heavily affected health and education systems. Finally, this also meant displacement and loss of home for many Yugoslavs.

Two decades later, SFR Yugoslavia remains a reference in history and memory. Independent republics have established relatively positive relationships, and central locations and big cities have mostly 'moved on'. Architectural objects of 'official' significance (cultural, religious, military, etc.) are restored, adapted, and integrated into the (once again) 'new life' of the region. However, domestic sites remain largely ignored and in a state of destruction. As such, they are cut off from the daily life of the region and from the re-making of its official history. They stand as 'in-between' zones, with their current and future role entirely ignored by those in power. These former homes, now in their ruinated state, seem to belong to the life of the motherland that no longer exists. The key focus of this analysis is thus to understand and (re)define the role these sites hold in our contemporary experience. Scenographically, they expose a unitary, intimate experience of spatial narratives and are interpreted as locations charged with traumatic experiences. As such, they emerge as agents in the comprehension of intimate and collective spatial and political relationships.

forensic scenography

Arrival in Belgrade, former capital of the unity, on the afternoon of 27 June 2011 marked the beginning of a complete (re)immersion in the research context and the beginning of *TRAVELS*. In the period 2011–2014, five major *TRAVELS* were performed. All originated from Belgrade, and I was the main performer. This role was dual, and had an insider and an outsider perspective. As performances of a physical and psychological quest through history, *TRAVELS* were a sum of personal and collective experiences, and memory. As such, they embodied parallel conceptual levels, defined as 'insider' and 'outsider'. The insider point of view is derived from the position of the main performer being a person born in the former unity, who lived through the traumatic events of the past. This perspective assigned layers of personal experience and

memory. The outsider treated the framed phenomena from the perspective of a person who was absent from the region for eight years (2003–2011, before *TRAVELS* began).

All *TRAVELS* were informed by live actions and direct experiences in the region and produced faithful representations through written documentation and photographic artefacts. Established on the basis of conceptual and performance art, *TRAVELS* explored events and phenomena within a defined historical and geographical context. This exploration comprised a physical and conceptual search in civil-war conflict regions of the former unity. It was particularly concerned with locations of violent clashes between 1991 and 1995 in the territories of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, and later in Kosovo. They were carefully orchestrated and followed a devised structure. As the main performer, I was always accompanied by at least one more person. Different *TRAVELS* lasted from a few hours, to up to three days of active involvement in the abandoned spaces. Movement between locations was a part of the actual performance, while war-torn domestic sites represented the focus and climax of all *TRAVELS*. This essay focuses on the findings from three *TRAVELS*.

TRAVELS are distinct in initiating the discourse on domestic sites of violent trauma in small towns and rural areas. The destruction of architectural objects in urban locations has been relatively well documented over the past two decades. 'Urbicide',[17] a term coined by English fantasy writer Michael Moorcock in 1963 and later actively used in academia to refer to the destruction of cities in civil wars, reached peak prominence during the fall of SFR Yugoslavia and the violence performed against the architecture in cities like Sarajevo, Dubrovnik, Vukovar, and Mostar. Many scholars, including American philosopher Marshall Berman[18] and Serbian architect and architectural scholar Bogdan Bogdanovic,[19] have written on this topic and have positioned the term as 'the violence against the city'.[20] Writing on the same region and period, but more explicitly focusing on Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina) as a case study, Andrew Herscher coined the term 'warchitetcure'.[21] Herscher specifically coined the term as a name for the disastrous violence against architecture in the period 1992–1996. However, the equivalent violence in rural areas and small towns, often located around the cities that represented the sites of major conflicts, has been largely ignored by the media at the time and scholarly discourses afterwards. Similar phenomena are emerging in recent conflicts outside this region. Notably, most of these violated domestic dwellings remain in a state of destruction to the present day. This defines them as sites of ongoing trauma and tension, adding monumentality to their transformed meaning. By framing these abandoned sites, *TRAVELS* aim to frame the past as active material.

scenographic 'decoding'

Scenography is a unique spatial discipline. It is employed here as a driver of spatial investigations and emerges as a transformative conceptual force. We recognise it as a tool and a system for understanding the complex relationships between people, spaces, and the events of the past. In this light, the abandoned war-torn interiors are sites that allow a telling search through narratives of intimate spaces shaped by war. They are inscribed with layers of spatial narratives, traces of time, and tactile remnants of past violence and trauma. Scenographic strategies are employed as hybrid methods of spatial manipulation and interpretation. They seek to investigate the essential nature of events, phenomena, and objects.

Scenographic 'decoding' involves interpreting inscriptions of past narratives through a series of strategies that include theatricality, narrative, context, perspective, framing, focalisation, atmosphere, inhabitation, embodiment, materiality, and spectatorship. In this context, all spatial and visual explorations are heavily inscribed with layers of cultural, historical, and political associations. Through the acts of scenographic decoding, the material and immaterial testimony becomes the prime witness to a collectively lived traumatic past. The acts of violence that occurred in these homes constitute their present identity. Further, their present monumental nature is contained in the haptic traces of the collective trauma. This form of decoding interprets the *mise-en-scène* by critically investigating the personal objects, remaining furniture, and inherent atmosphere of violently destroyed homes. The discovered scenographic framing reveals some information about the missing inhabitants: their age, family structure, occupation, ethnicity, and so on. Meanwhile, critical investigation of the objects' present state speaks of the nature and intensity of trauma the missing people experienced. Scenographically, these *mise-en-scènes* expose layers of otherwise obscure past narratives and, upon investigation, more closely render the events that took place inside these homes.

The absence of human figures is critical in all investigations. Although they are physically absent from each *mise-en-scène*, the people and their traumatic experiences are the core focus of all spatial investigations during *TRAVELS*. Their previous interaction with each space is inscribed in the captured state of the interiors. Meanwhile, the remaining objects reflect multiple layers of past narratives. The presence of domestic objects, furniture, and personal items reveals multiple domestic activities performed in these spaces before the war. Currently, numerous objects are smashed, personal garments are torn and scattered, and multiple interior elements such as doors and windows are pulverised. Human movement through spaces is traced through strange arrangements of furniture. Scenographically, the ghost of human violence is mesmerically present in all these physical appearances. The atmosphere

is also inevitably controlled by such clear traces of violence. In every room, within each discovered interior, records of violent human interactions are exposed as if frozen in time. In scenographic terms, such events inscribe the spaces with a distinct atmosphere. In each discovered space, material and immaterial traces of violent physical actions define an atmosphere of severe trauma.

three types of decoded interiors

This essay focuses on the decoding of three different *TRAVELS*: an abandoned village near the town of Knin in Croatia; villages near the towns of Brcko and Derventa in Bosnia and Herzegovina; and the town of Visegrad and surrounding villages, also in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Each offers a significant contribution to tracing the transformed meaning of abandoned domestic interiors. Routes from these *TRAVELS* are illustrated in the maps opposite [Fig. 03, 04, 05].

villages around the town of knin, croatia

Abandoned interiors near the town of Knin still contain a range of personal items, family memorabilia, garments, and similar 'intimate' traces of previous inhabitation. Traces of violence are evident, yet in many interiors personal items remain as if frozen in time: jackets hanging in the hallway, half-open drawers full of personal items, postcards, coffee mugs and plates sitting in the kitchen cupboards, schoolbooks and notebooks spread over the floor in a bedroom that most likely belonged to a student who lived in this home with their family [Fig. 08]. Such

Figure 03.
Map of the *TRAVEL* to Knin. Nevena Mrdjenovic, 2014.

Figure 04.
Map of the *TRAVEL* to Brcko and Derventa. Nevena Mrdjenovic, 2014.

Figure 05.
Map of the *TRAVEL* to Visegrad. Nevena Mrdjenovic, 2014.

Figure 06.
A left-behind dress. Nevena Mrdjenovic, 2014.

Figure 07.
Personal items in a village near Knin. Nevena Mrdjenovic, 2014.

Figure 08.
Books and notebooks in a house near Knin. Nevena Mrdjenovic, 2014.

Figure 09.
Destroyed bedroom. Nevena Mrdjenovic, 2014.

scenes trigger an emotionally heightened interaction with an interior space. In these locations, I interact with material evidence of another human being's traumatic experience. Through these remaining personal items, I have snippets of who they might have been, how many of them lived here, and what their life was like before the war. The atmosphere in these spaces reflects a deep sense of loss, of damaged and interrupted life, and of profound trauma. Images I encounter are profoundly disturbing and embody powerful symbolic meaning. One of the most powerfully engraved images is of an inside-out silk dress draped over a broken wooden wardrobe in a destroyed bedroom [Fig. 06]. The softness of the fabric contrasts with the violently pulverised space. Its presence speaks loudly of a former life. This item is highly symbolic, a delicate, intimate item of clothing associated with moments of pleasure, warmth, bliss, and protection. In this context, it sums up the tragedy of ordinary lives caught up in the whirlpool of a catastrophe.

Explorations of these homes are significant and emerge as turning points in my understanding of war-torn domestic sites. They take place early in the process of *TRAVELS* and, in many ways, shape how subsequent regions are perceived. My first TRAVEL to Knin began with an exploration inspired by N. A.'s photographs. Without much knowledge of the context to which they belong, one could see these spaces as representations of the concepts of memory, inhabitation, human departure, and traces people leave behind. However, my physical and psychological interaction with the discovered spaces immediately assigned the concept of trauma as the most significant aspect of this experience and the region's collective past. The complexity of this experience has further elucidated the monumentality of the destroyed homes. Importantly for this analysis, this did not happen by reading or hearing about the events. In fact, it occurred by standing amid the genuine remnants of trauma—orchestrated purely by the past acts of violence, without any official perspective from the two new republics. I stood in sites of brutal conflict, in spaces that embodied a broken life in its overwhelming connotations.

villages near the towns of derventa and brcko, bosnia and herzegovina

Domestic interiors discovered in *TRAVELS* through Bosnia and Herzegovina revealed very limited or no physical artefacts that spoke of the past inhabitants. Traces of violence were more intense than those seen around Knin, and discarded homes were demolished and vandalised to their bare walls. It appeared as if the acts of violence were performed in different stages, with some dating from the original military clashes in the early 1990s, while other destruction (like graffiti on the walls) was more recent. Homes I interacted with here were bullet sprayed, burned, with floor and wall coverings removed, and many had graffiti in multiple rooms. As different alphabets and traces of dialects suggest (Serbian Cyrillic, Latin, etc.), graffiti were a territory-marking tool utilised by all three conflicted ethnic groups (Serbian, Croatian, and Bosnian Muslim).

Figure 10.
Destroyed interior near the town of Brcko. Nevena Mrdjenovic, 2013.

Figure 11.
A destroyed kitchen in a house near the town of Brcko. Nevena Mrdjenovic, 2013

Without left-behind personal belongings, the experience in these interiors was less impacted by the ghostly presence of previous inhabitants. However, the intense levels of inscribed violence rendered the collectively experienced trauma more prominent. These regions in Bosnia and Herzegovina (especially around the towns of Derventa and Brcko, pictured in figures 10–15) were heavily ethnically mixed during the unity. This meant we could not know to whom a particular house belonged. This added a sense of collective experience of loss and trauma. Furthermore, discovered homes in this region were mostly built during the time of the SFR Yugoslav unity (post World War II). They feature a simple, repetitive floor plan. These interior layouts were common in the whole region of the former SFR Yugoslavia, and could be read as an informal spatial typology of the time. All ground floor levels feature public areas that include a large open-plan kitchen, pantry, dining and living areas, a small bathroom, storage rooms, and a large separate dining room for family gatherings and celebrations. Level one continues with a simple layout: two or three bedrooms and a large bathroom. All bedrooms include large windows and a single long and narrow balcony facing the street.

Empty and vast, these interiors shape no specific image of the former inhabitants. Yet, given their familiar layout, they begin to form a blank canvas for all the memories of SFR Yugoslavia. During *TRAVELS*, this invites a conscious and unconscious translation of memories of spaces, experiences, and people I knew well. These unknown sites thus became symbols of an ‘interrupted’ Yugoslav life. This brings us to the prime significance of these interiors, as we discover they highlight the

Figure 12.
A staircase near the town of Derventa. Nevena Mrdjenovic, 2013.

Figure 13.
Graffiti in a house near the town of Derventa. Nevena Mrdjenovic, 2013

Figure 14.
Abandoned house near the town of Derventa. Nevena Mrdjenovic, 2013.

Figure 15.
A former bedroom in a house near the town of Derventa. Nevena Mrdjenovic, 2013.

fact that such intense acts of violence reach beyond the aim of 'conquering the other.' It appears as if the physical and psychological draft of the enemy was not enough, and we identify a clear aim of extermination and prevention of the possible return of anyone linked to the former inhabitants. At this point, the destruction of domestic sites as the most intimate site of one's existence surfaces as a clear act of strategic destruction. Such intense attacks are closely related to attacks on 'the other.' 'Otherness' is here understood as the state of being foreign to the personal, social, cultural, ethnic, and religious identity of a person. Opposite to what was celebrated in the name of 'Brotherhood and Unity,' 'the other' here meant 'the enemy' and was marked for extermination. All three ethnic groups destroyed and vandalised each other's homes to prove their regional power and ownership, and to prevent any possible return. Thus, we propose these attacks be read as means of exterminating 'otherness.' As such, they unavoidably identify as modes of ethnic and cultural cleansing.

villages around the town of visegrad, bosnia and herzegovina

Domestic sites around the town of Visegrad (also in Bosnia and Herzegovina) revealed the same aims of the attacks. Many of the destroyed houses found in this region were in the upper hill areas, well off the main road. Those who performed the acts of violence had to invest physical effort to reach and systematically destroy them. Again, these homes are not distinct in style and have no ethnic or religious markings. Most are large, architecturally simple, and mainly built of local stone and concrete. They are mostly two-storey dwellings, typical for this region. Such large structures complement the natural surroundings. Almost monumental in scale, they match the harsh natural surroundings specific to this region of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Scenographically, one could identify references for the mentality of the former residents. This region is locally known for its stubborn and physically strong population. In this light, their houses satisfy the need for physical shelter, while their scale

Figure 16.
A destroyed house near Visegrad. Nevena Mrdjenovic, 2012.

Figure 17.
A village near Visegrad. Nevena Mrdjenovic, 2012.

symbolises the concepts of family, heritage, belonging, and identity.

Though these domestic structures no longer provide physical shelter, their distinct atmospheric quality remains. Once inside, one feels entirely isolated. Each interior becomes a disconnected 'zone'. Inside, the houses appear as abstract concrete sculptures. Interiors are dark, and the vegetation that now grows inside often blocks natural light. All traces of the previous inhabitation are erased. Scarce personal belongings remain but are very limited. Many houses have no doors or windows. In some, sheets of nylon are stretched over a window frame instead. Many homes are missing all dividing walls, doors, and staircases. They have been burned, bombed, mined, and vandalised with graffiti. For a moment, this feels like moving through staged *mise-en-scènes* of horror. All notions of intimacy, protection, or homeliness are violently wiped out. To be inside is a horrifying experience.

The sights of the picturesque landscapes around them intensify the power of these images. Physical movement through the spaces is limited. A consistent feeling of danger is still present in these spaces. As I walk between the abandoned homes, I cross the exact paths military troops walked twenty years ago when they attacked these spaces. Former inhabitants fled to avoid almost certain death. Every road is etched with layers of harrowing memory and experience. I encounter no people in these villages. The scenes are uncannily quiet. The experience inside and around these former homes marks the most prominent state of the aftermath. In this TRAVEL, the concept of the past as 'active material' becomes very significant. The overall experience is overwritten with the oppressive feeling of trauma and tragedy. In this region, the mysterious silence that comes after traumatic events is still heavily present. This implicitly defines the symbolic monumentality of destroyed domestic objects. Through

Figure 18.
Remaining house structures near the town of Visegrad. Nevena Mrdjenovic, 2012.

Figure 19.
Remaining house structure near the town of Visegrad. Nevena Mrdjenovic, 2012.

their present state, it is evident they were assigned leading roles in military actions. At this point, they emerge as direct 'interpreters' of the collective traumatic past.

from ruin to monument

Scenographically, these interiors have absorbed the intensity of trauma previously experienced by people. Derived from the Greek 'wound', 'trauma' originally related to circumstances beyond the ordinary and was commonly associated with physical injury. Late in the nineteenth century, the term was introduced to describe less visible, internal, emotional, and psychological 'wounds'. In contemporary contexts, we understand trauma as profoundly distressing and disturbing experiences that interrupt one's ability to cope. American professor Cathy Caruth defines trauma as an overshadowing experience and argues that the definition of trauma is discovered precisely in the 'structure of experience or reception'.[22] This implies that a catastrophic event is not entirely experienced at the moment of its occurrence. Instead, its effects are endured belatedly: 'in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it'.[23] In Caruth's terms, therefore, 'To be traumatised is precisely to be possessed by an image or an event. […] The traumatised, we might say, carry an impossible history with them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess.'[24] In this context, we shift the focus to space as the representation of trauma but also as being the traumatised subject itself. In this way, these authentic sites of trauma become tangible 'reproductions' of memories experienced by people who lived through the events. In psychological terms, these are understood as intrusive flashbacks, yet we here see them as concrete images of trauma in the places of their origin.

The conflicts in former Yugoslavia (1992–2001),[25] in which more than 200,000 lost their lives, 'gave rise to atrocities unseen in Europe since the Second World War, and left behind a terrible legacy of physical ruin and psychological devastation.'[26] Contemporary professor of political sciences Stathis N. Kalyvas analyses the aims and dynamics of violence in civil wars and proposes that 'In everyday language, "civil war" (unlike "revolution") is a term […] often used as a metaphor for extreme conflict and widespread brutality.'[27] Civil wars are fought for multiple reasons, so the behaviour, actions, and tactics vary considerably. Without exception, however, war leaves devastating traces on cities, landscapes, and entire countries. These brutal traces are the results of military actions, which seek different goals. These goals are commonly identified as intimidation, demoralisation, degrading the enemy's ability to fight, gaining territory, destruction of resources, elimination of opposing forces, and material and moral destruction of 'the other'. With a specific interest in attacks on architectural objects in times of war, we here classify military attacks as 'strategic', 'cultural', and 'domestic'.

Attacks on institutions of power and authority, such as military headquarters and army camps, are classified as strategic and aim

to wipe out the enemy's ability to fight. As a tactic, they exemplify the dominant power and superiority of the attackers. Attacks on sites of 'knowledge', which stand for the preservation and confirmation of national cultural identity, are understood as a violent negation of the cultural and historical significance of the attacked. Such attacks are strategic, and targets are never random or irrelevant. Finally, domestic attacks are often ignored, yet we note in these the level of violence is perhaps the most extreme. Domestic attacks embody complex psychological meanings and imply an indirect means of cultural and ethnic cleansing by means of domestic architecture. The destruction of an object that, on one hand, embodies the most profound notion of personal identity and belonging, and on the other, a permanent solid structure, is calculated to inflict maximum psychological damage. To face the destruction of an object that is supposed to outlive multiple human spans, and forms an intergenerational foothold of identity inevitably wants to remind an entire people of their own irrelevance. In multi-ethnic environments, domestic interiors become politicised through the notions of 'belonging', and this phenomenon intensifies in times of war. By belonging to a family of a certain ethnic group, the domestic space is assigned the same ethnic identity. In wars, a home marks the presence of a community marked for extermination. From our scenographic perspective, there is a physical and psychological link between erasing material remainders of human inhabitation and killing people directly.

Polish-born American architect Daniel Libeskind defines memory as the principal architectural element, providing historical, geographical, and ideological orientations. According to Libeskind, memory is particularly significant for places where trauma and tragedy have occurred.
He proposes a shift in our perception, suggesting that everyday life is the crucial realm of architectural experience. Herein, 'ordinary' architectural objects, like homes, are to be regarded on a par with, or more significant than, museums and institutions of power and authority. Libeskind profoundly interweaves trauma and memory into his architectural thinking, focusing especially on trauma that involves destruction: '[…] when the continuity of life is so brutally disrupted […] the structure of life is forever torqued and transformed.'[28]

Following Libeskind's proposal, the experience of emptiness after tragedy connotes that architectural objects are inscribed with life and memory. The destruction of buildings, especially domestic sites, translates to the destruction of a community and its individuals. Ravaged homes, therefore, take on monumental quality and can by no means be classified as collateral damage. In a literal sense, their present ruinated state represents collapse and destruction. However, returning to Benjamin's approach to history through reduction, we shift the focus from individual spaces and events of trauma to a critical understanding of the remaining sites of history. In this, we establish links between

the concepts of violence and trauma, which now define the monumental nature of these 'obscure ruins.'

With this shift in perception, they emerge as implicit monuments to the collectively lived traumatic past. The notion of their monumentality comes from the merging of concepts of embodiment, materiality, and testimony. Trauma and the acts of violence unite these three concepts. Through the embodiment of traumatic memories, evocatively captured in physical inscriptions of violence against the most intimate domains of human existence, abandoned war-torn homes testify to collectively lived trauma. These sites acquire the 'positive state of poverty' by further tracing Benjamin's approach to stripping away the commonly accepted mystical and romantic nature of ruins.[29] Ruins are no longer romantic images but meaningful critical tools. For Benjamin, ruins were never mere remnants whose monumentality has forever ceased. Instead, by defining them as 'allegories', Benjamin positioned them as focal points—perspectives from which to study other concepts.[30] By embracing this, *TRAVELS* discovered that ruination does not necessarily mean 'loss.' Rather, *TRAVELS* initiate a shift in the perception and meaning. Violent attacks have altered the established domestic nature of the found sites. However, in the aftermath, after all the inhabitants have left, they acquire a new monumental identity. While the domestic identity was monumental on a personal level, violence redefines this by shifting the monumentality to the collective experience. Domestic ruins emerge as valid sites of history. They are unchained from the ceaseless flow in which they remain trapped and are reoriented in a new reading—as a legacy for the future.

author biography

Nevena Mrdjenovic (PhD) is a theorist and designer with expertise in interior architecture and scenography. Her research practice is concerned with the performative and poetic capacities of space. Nevena is a lecturer in Interior Architecture, University of Technology Sydney. She has previously worked across theatre, film, installation art, and pedagogy in Australia and Europe.

notes

01 *TRAVELS* is the official name of the presented project and is for this reason written in capital letters and italicised in this essay.

02 Joslin McKinney and Philip Butterworth, *The Cambridge Introduction to Scenography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 4.

03 Naomi Stead, 'The Value of Ruins: Allegories of Destruction in Benjamin and Speer', *Form/Work: An Interdisciplinary Journal of the Built Environment*, 6 (2003), 51–64 (p. 5).

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06 Juhani Pallasma, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), p. 27.

07 Pallasma, *The Eyes of the Skin*, p. 32.

08 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. by Maria Jolas (London: Penguin Classics, 2014).

09 Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 15.

10 Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 31.

11 Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 28.

12 Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 29.

13 Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1991).

14 Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci*, p. 53.

15 At the time of the performance of *TRAVELS*, all were already independent republics.

16 Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*, trans. by Patrick Camiller (New York: Verso, 2009), pp. 7–8.

17 Michael Moorcock, *Behold the Man* (London: Alison & Busby, 2013), p. 18.

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19 Bogdan Bogdanovic, *Vukovar: The Final Cut* (London: Verso, 1997).

20 Bogdanovic, *Vukovar*, p. 51.

21 Andrew Herscher, *Violence Taking Place: The Architecture of the Kosovo Conflict* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

22 Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 4.

23 Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 4.

24 Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 5.

25 The author here refers to the continued occasional escalation of conflicts in Kosovo, which continued post-1999 when most of the other conflicts had resolved in the region.

26 Chris Nation, *War in the Balkans 1991–2002* (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2004), p. 7.

27 Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 16–17.

28 Daniel Libeskind, *Breaking Ground: Adventures in Life and Architecture* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2004), p. 12.

29 Stead, 'The Value of Ruins', p. 5.

30 Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. by John Osborne (New York: Verso, 2009), pp. 177–78.

exploiting the unexpected

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abstract

Contemporary imaging technologies have expanded our ability to view contemporary urban space from many vantage points. The camera's portability has meant a departure from any singular ‘ideal’ viewing position previously proposed using linear perspective geometry. This visual and technological shift has brought new opportunities for how urban space is understood and conceived for various modes of inhabitation. By fracturing and multiplying its representation, the recording of dynamic space thus destabilises the traditional relationship between image and form and, in so doing, presents previously unconsidered spatial opportunities.

This text-based essay explores the instrumentality of digital image processes in the production of new material and spatial strategies for design and architectural applications. Contextualised within a frame of the digital image and contemporary envisioned space activated by the Internet, it focuses upon the spatial and material properties of three different architectural scales—the residential dwelling, the apartment block, and the public building. The essay demonstrates how repurposed medical imaging software can uncover hidden and unexpected characteristics of different-sized interior spaces by recalibrating image data from captured video footage.

The essay draws on a range of generative digital techniques that transform the temporal visual content of interior space—the image stack and its slices or frames—into diagrammatic abstractions of recalibrated colour and form. The various axes of the stack thus serve as a contemporary extrapolation of the traditional orthographic diagrams that currently define architectural production—the plan, section, and elevation. With the visual content of these axes completely redistributed across different scales according to the shifts of the colour- and contrast-based properties of the digital array, the emerging slippages within each slice compose a new dynamic template or diagram that informs new and uncertain strategies of inhabitation.

keywords

colour; image; digital; viewer; spatial

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digital anamorphosis and architecture

Brunelleschi's 1425 demonstration of linear perspective in Florence changed how the physical world was and still is viewed. While this new technique enabled the viewer to experience an unprecedented projection of the body through a spatial frame indistinguishable from reality, it also meant that its derivative imagery increasingly became a vehicle for marketing the Church's so-called objective and universal ideological truth.[01] Yet the collapse of image and truth provoked a response from those who wanted to draw attention to the representational contrivances underpinning the linear perspective system and its exploitation by the Church. As early as the sixteenth century, Hans Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors* probed the spatial control imposed upon the viewer by linear perspective by introducing an anamorphic element, which interrogated the viewer's spatial relationship with the picture plane by returning their autonomy.[02] A century later, two Minim monks, Jean-Francois Niceron and Emmanuel Maignan, overturned the rational integrity and reliability of linear perspective by reinstating the subject's viewpoint to one where the viewer is drawn simultaneously into an engagement with the space of the image and the phenomenal space of reality. The viewer is no longer asked to 'see through' the picture plane into a projected and hypothetical space beyond. Maignan's 1640 fresco *San Francesco di Paola* in the church of San Trinità in Rome created both a secondary viewing space and a secondary image offering numerous unexpected, self-contained 'sub-images' that align with the viewer's various viewpoints along its surface [Fig. 01]. The top two images in the montage show the fresco viewed from the 'correct' oblique viewing position, while the lower images, which are part of the larger image, can only be viewed as the observer passes along the surface of the fresco. As Lyle Massey observes, these unsettling elements are designed to serve as a constant reminder of the actual viewing space and the act of viewing itself: 'Perspective thus becomes a property of man's movement and trajectory in physical space.'[03]

However, if Niceron and Maignon's intention was to employ the anamorphic technique to set the body in motion in front of the picture plane by denying the viewer a single viewpoint, then the same can be said of Le Corbusier's strategy for architecture. His experiments with a carefully orchestrated building colour system demand a similar immersive engagement with the body as did Maignan's frescoes. Le Corbusier's complex colour system, Architectural Polychromy, devised in 1931 and 1959,[04] comprised sixty-three colours, divided into nine colour groups intended to suppress or amplify architectural volume in tandem with the viewer's experiential journey or 'promenade', as he observes.

> At the interior, the first attempts at architectural polychromy, based on specific optical reactions, put into practice the notion of architectural camouflage, i.e., either the affirmation or suppression of certain volumes.[05]

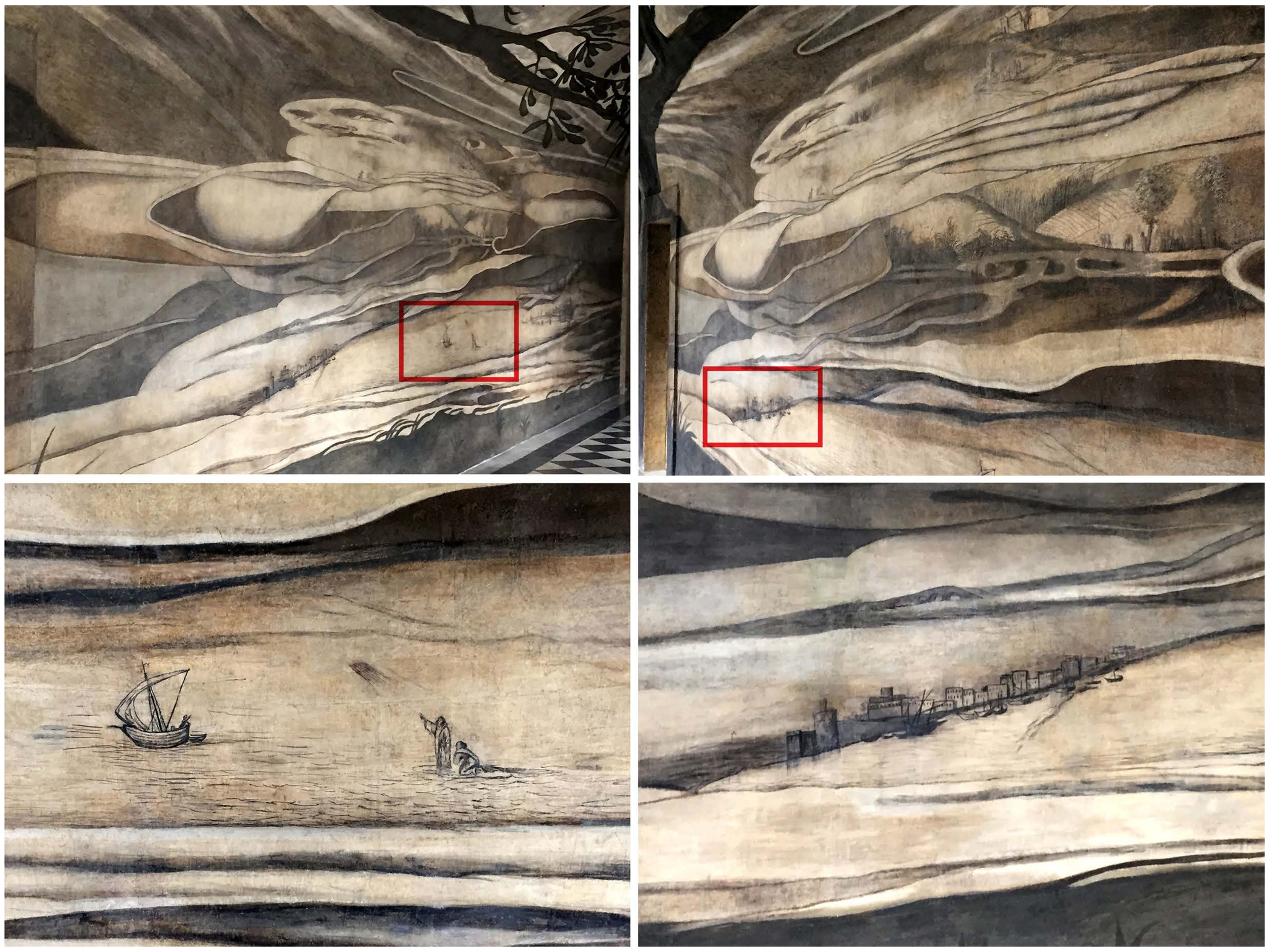


Figure 01.
Emmanuel Maignan's fresco *San Francesco di Paola* (1642) in Trinità dei Monti, showing the principal image from an oblique viewing position, with sub-images outlined in red (top); Micro-landscapes embedded within the larger image (bottom). Photographs by author, 2017.

In contrast to the viewing constraints of the linear perspective spatial model, contemporary 'envisioned' urban space is based on a composite of multiple vantage points captured over time. This representation of the world captured by smartphones, internet webcams, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs, or camera drones), and high-altitude aircraft cameras for various promotional and surveillance applications is not constrained by the terrestrial coordinates of traditional global geography.[06] Instead, it is 'a nowhere, imaginary place' whose aerial vantage points transpose the landscape into an unfamiliar relation of patterns and textures.[07]

Architectural engagement and agency within this new virtual and multi-dimensional digital space also deploy very different tools from the makers of the seventeenth-century anamorphic fresco. Therefore, this essay advances the traditional orthographic

diagrams that presently describe and enable architectural production by aligning them with new digital representational tools.

Creating a digital image involves assigning an integer value to each pixel, the smallest unit of the image, to determine its colour and brightness. Values are assigned to all the pixels on the picture-plane grid to form an entire image. In the case of colour images, pixel values consist of triples of scalar values such as red, blue, and green, or hue, saturation, and intensity. These values dictate the relationships each pixel can have with another.

In digital images, content is represented by an array of pixels, each having specific numerical relationships with one another. The imaging process also translates complex scenes captured by imaging devices into specific numerical values and positions on the picture grid, allowing reproduction to be easily accomplished using a unique array pattern. Furthermore, these values focus solely on defining shapes and forms through colour and brightness rather than lines. This emphasis on a space's qualitative aspects suggests a transformative approach to spatial documentation and construction.

By establishing the means to document the complex conditions of space as numerical data, this technique creates a reproducible platform that indexes spatial properties according to a new range of qualitative criteria. It also means that the numerical data relating to conditions of colour and light in the image can be transposed into physical form as a range of material relationships. For the architect, the intrinsic numerical basis of the image thus opens numerous opportunities to incorporate the qualitative aspects of life, revealed in digital images in terms of colour and brightness, into the physical spatial design.

By applying a mechanism traditionally used to track and map the progression or remission of disease—biological and medical imaging software—to the analysis of digitally captured space, new diagrammatic abstractions of recalibrated colour and form extracted from the various axes of the stack serve as a contemporary drawing set.

An open-source digital tool, *ImageJ* software,[08] allows the viewer to project themselves through orthogonally intersecting X, Y, and Z axes that offer various reconfigurations of the stack's visual content [Fig. 02]. The ability to view spatial change across a temporal frame transforms the stack's structural and material content into an experiential visual journey controlled by the viewer and the flexibility of the digital tool. Depending upon the relative location of the viewer and subject, each image slice disrupts any traditional spatial representation by offering new and unexpected insights into every temporal increment of the journey, just as did Maignon's frescoes. Digital visioning tools, therefore, now allow us to understand the implications of the anamorphic journey virtually and more speculatively. They not only liberate the image's spatiality from

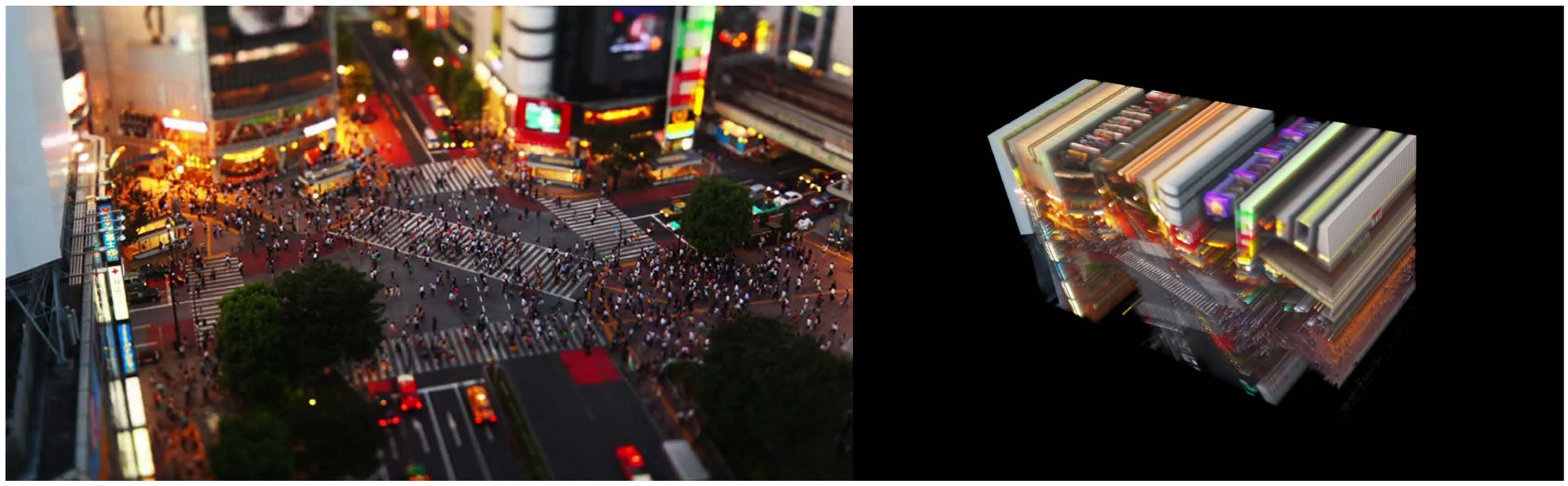


Figure 02.
Public webcam view of Shibuya Crossing. With permission from Tokyo Forrest Brown/Shutterstock.com (left). Image stack of stills extracted from video footage of the same location created using *ImageJ* software (right). Image by author, 2022.

the limitations of a singular viewpoint by extending the structural and material possibilities of the reconfigured subject but provide a methodological framework by which to deliver a series of systematic 'deconstructed' views.[09]

These virtual body movements are represented as diagrammatic abstractions of recalibrated colour and form, mapping the viewer's experiential, immersive journey through interior space. The images are presented in terms of amplified material colour and accelerated cinematic spatial 'jump-cuts' explored across different interior spatial typologies. It proposes that, by releasing hidden properties of these spaces, these new virtual anamorphic snapshots interrogate the more traditional static modes of spatial representation and, in so doing, initiate a new diagrammatic template for architectural production that embraces the uncertainty of the temporal frame.

The conversion of a series of images into a colour- and brightness-based representation achieved using software like *ImageJ* introduces the ability to map qualitative content as visual data corresponding precisely to temporal shifts in materiality and program. For the architect, this introduces the means to design an intervention that responds strategically to its context in terms of its materiality (colour and texture) or changes in its program use (brightness). For example, an interior space might be required to stand in high contrast to its surrounding context, in which case a choice of materials would be selected to work in opposition to a neighbouring space that transforms dynamically across a temporal framework. Similarly, the requirement for low visibility would mean the selection of materials and programs that complement the space's immediate context. This technique would, therefore, be able to deliver the data to make these sorts of design decisions.

the architects of movement

In one of Le Corbusier's early house projects, the La Roche House (1923–25), the changing colour composition of the interior surfaces has a cumulative effect on the viewer, whose journey is no longer prescribed by the need to occupy any fixed viewpoint but instead to occupy many in succession. In this scenario, the viewer becomes autonomous, much like the viewer of the Maignan frescoes [Fig. 03]. Le Corbusier commented:

> The second house will be something like an architectural promenade. We enter: the architectural spectacle presents itself to our gaze; we follow an itinerary, and various points of view unfold one after the other; we play with the flood of light illuminating the walls or casting shadows. The window bays open up views onto the exterior, and we rediscover the architectural whole.[10]

Le Corbusier's monumental modernist residential housing typology, L'Unité d'Habitation (1952) in Marseilles, is one of many large-scale housing projects that uses colour to showcase his awareness of the destabilising and shocking effects of Maignan's anamorphic strategy. The Maison du Brésil (1959), in Paris, explored in this essay, is another. A journey along the exterior building façades and interior corridors reveals strikingly similar features. The easily accessed Marseille building in Figure 04 reveals his 'promenade' strategy—an attempt to awaken the viewer through a constantly shifting array of façade and interior colour planes [Fig. 04].

At a public building scale, Zaha Hadid's MAXXI Museum (2010) in Rome uses a series of dynamic suspended walkways rather than colour to destabilise and disorient the viewer. Like Le Corbusier, Hadid explored colour's capacity to express volume through an absence of colour. Colour is used to punctuate volumes as a centring device or marker for the viewer to grasp in an undulating sea of airborne pathways [Fig. 05]. For Hadid, where the viewer must navigate multiple decentring and unstable axes; the anamorphic experience is literally delivered by form in motion.

Figure 03.
Interior of La Roche House showing 'promenade' ramp. With permission from Heje Yi, 2022.

Figure 04.
Le Corbusier's L'Unité d'Habitation in Marseille showing the changing composition of exterior façades (top) and interior hallways (bottom). Photographs by author, 2022.

Figure 05.
Aerial walkways in Zaha Hadid's MAXXI Museum.
Photographs by author, 2011.

colour amplified in motion

The six image montages in Figures 06–11 reveal the amplification of colour that emerges as the viewer engages in different scales of the architectural 'promenade'. In the first instance, the processed images show how the journey through the La Roche House amplifies and extends the existing colour palette created by le Corbusier throughout even a short section of the house. By compressing thousands of stills in the 60-second video motion sequence represented by the top six montage images into a single image (cumulative z-axis projection), it is as if the camera's capture of the movement emulates the cumulative effect of movement and transforms it into an immersive and unstable condition. This effect is repeated in the Maison du Brésil as the scale of the building and the diversity of its context expand. The montages unpredictably culminate in the explosive and prismatic colour array of Hadid's MAXXI Museum, amplified by the vertical movement imposed on the viewer by the walkways and, by extension, embedded in the recorded footage. It is as if the colour emerges from nowhere, describing the spatial volume through diffracted prisms of filtered light mediated by the building's dynamic form, operating across multiple axes. Colour histograms created using Image Color Summarizer software supporting the empirical evidence of colour amplification in the processed images accompany these and the following montages.[11]

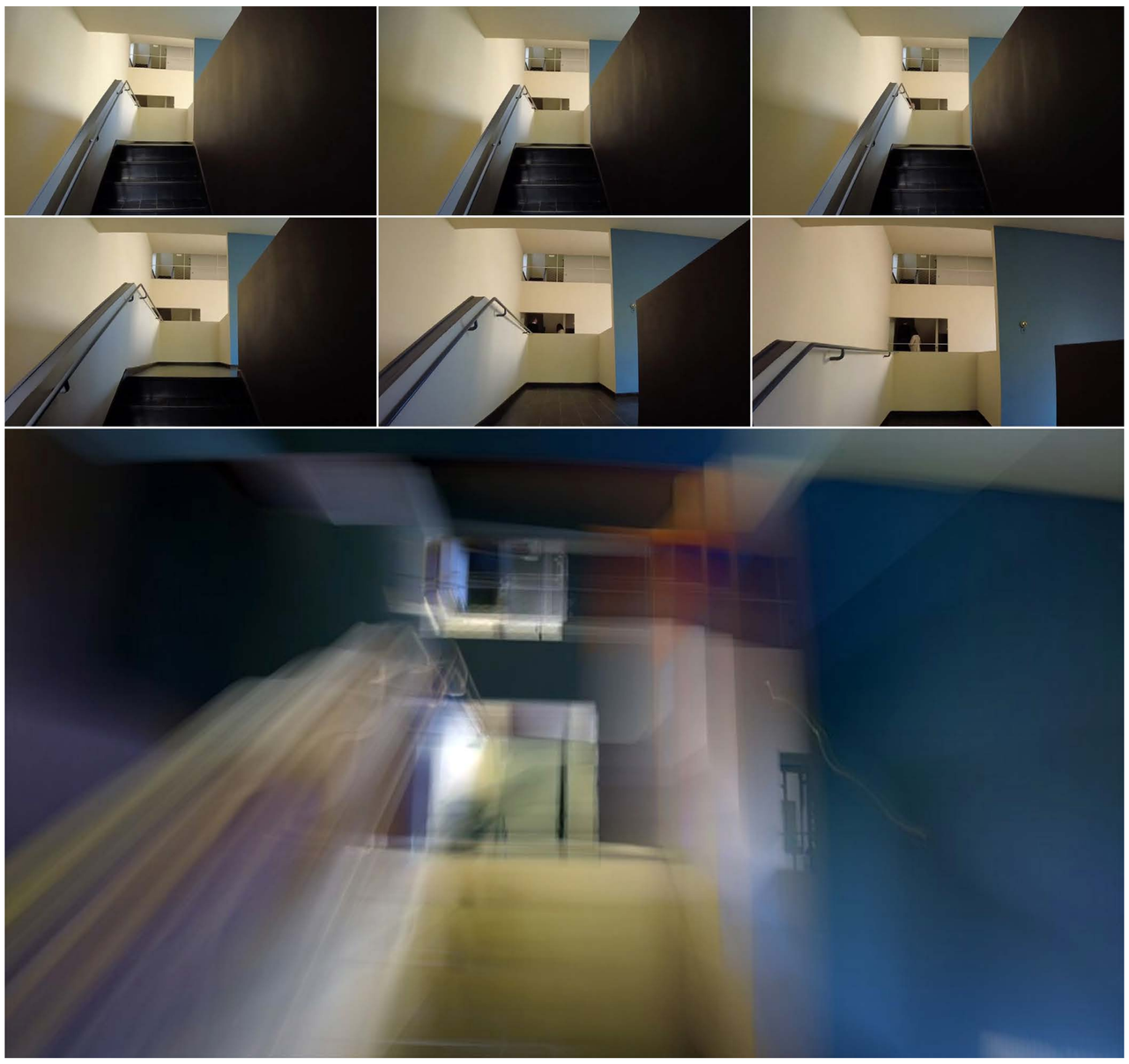


Figure 06.
Montage of unprocessed stills of the interior stairwell in La Roche House (top and centre). With permission from Heje Yi, 2022; Cumulative z-axis projection of the video footage captured at the same location, showing an amplified colour palette (bottom). Image by author, 2023.

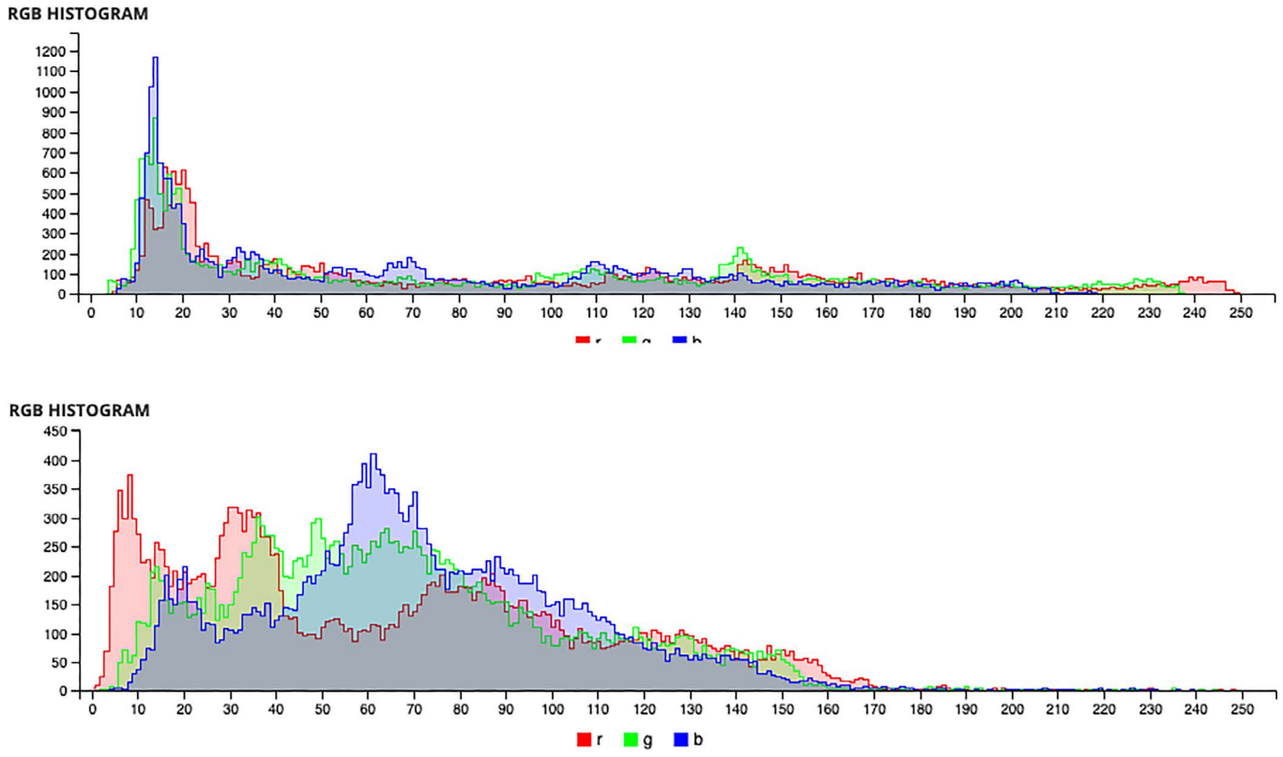
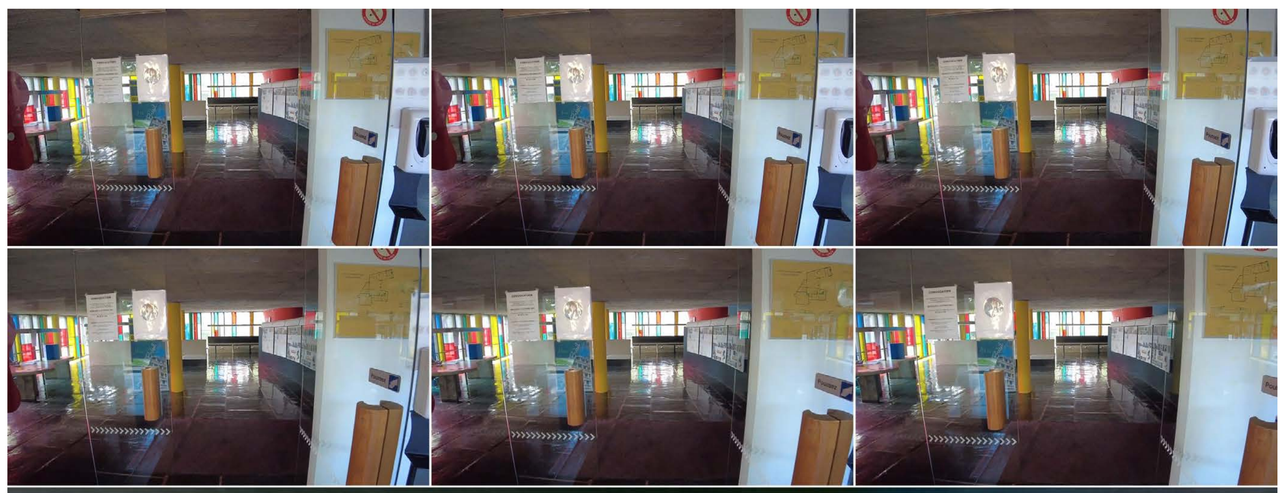


Figure 07.
Colour histograms of an unprocessed still of the La Roche House (top) and of the processed image (bottom), showing a marked increase in colour intensity in the latter. Images by author, 2023.



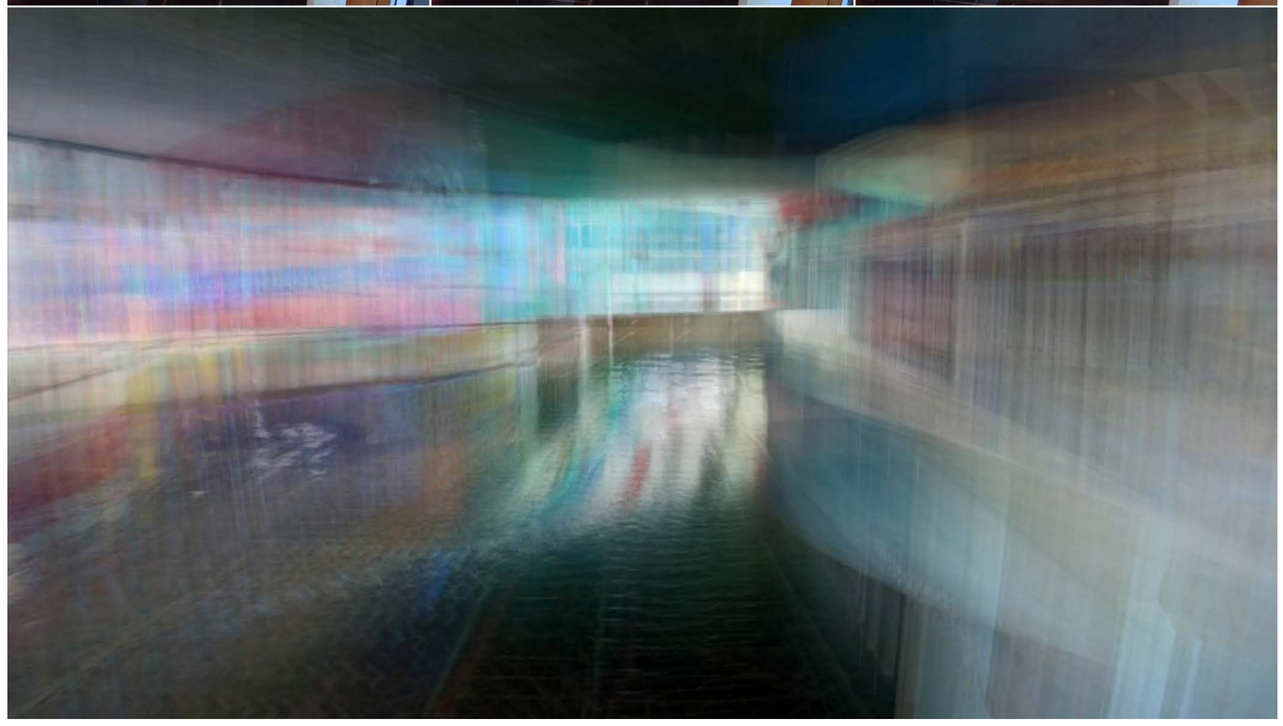


Figure 08.
Montage of unprocessed stills of the interior circulation space in the Maison du Brésil (top and centre). With permission from Heje Yi, 2022; Cumulative z-axis projection of the video footage captured at the same location, showing an amplified colour palette (bottom). Image by author, 2023.

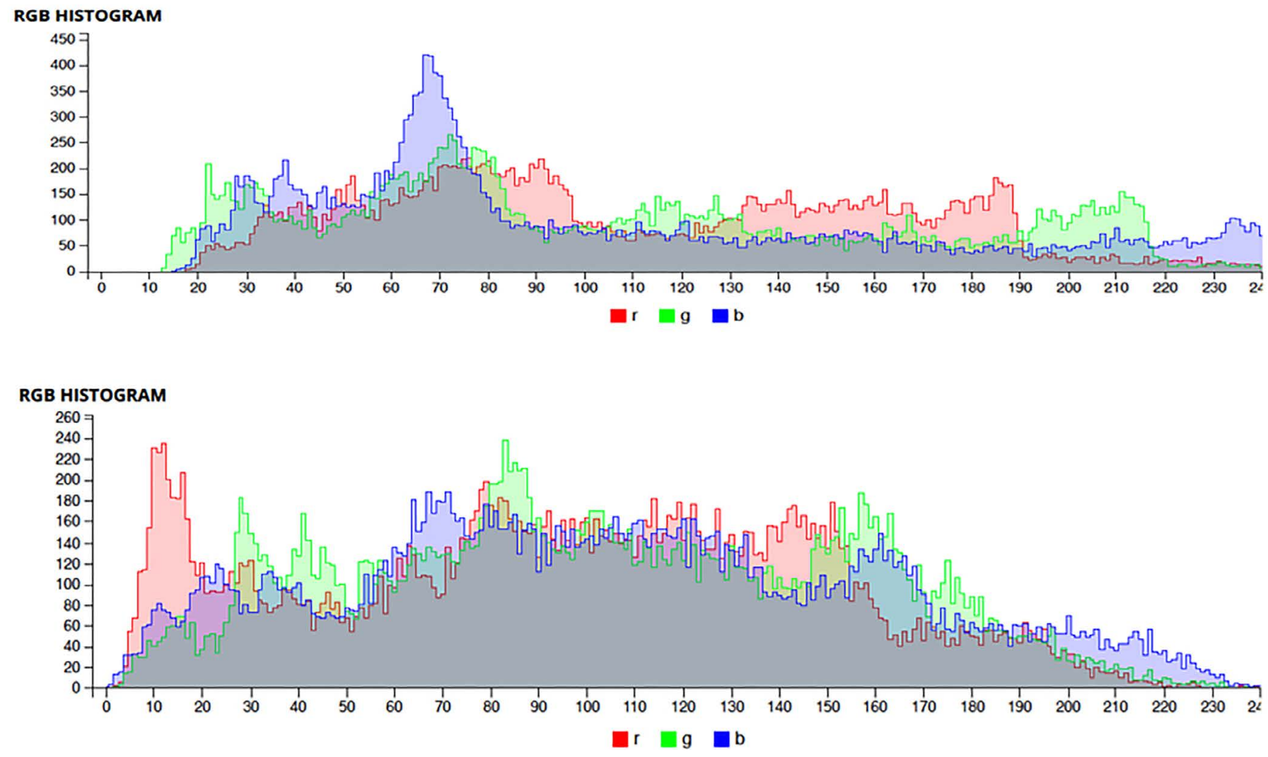


Figure 09.
Colour histograms of an unprocessed still of the Maison du Brésil (top) and of the processed image (bottom), showing a marked increase in colour intensity in the latter. Images by author, 2023.

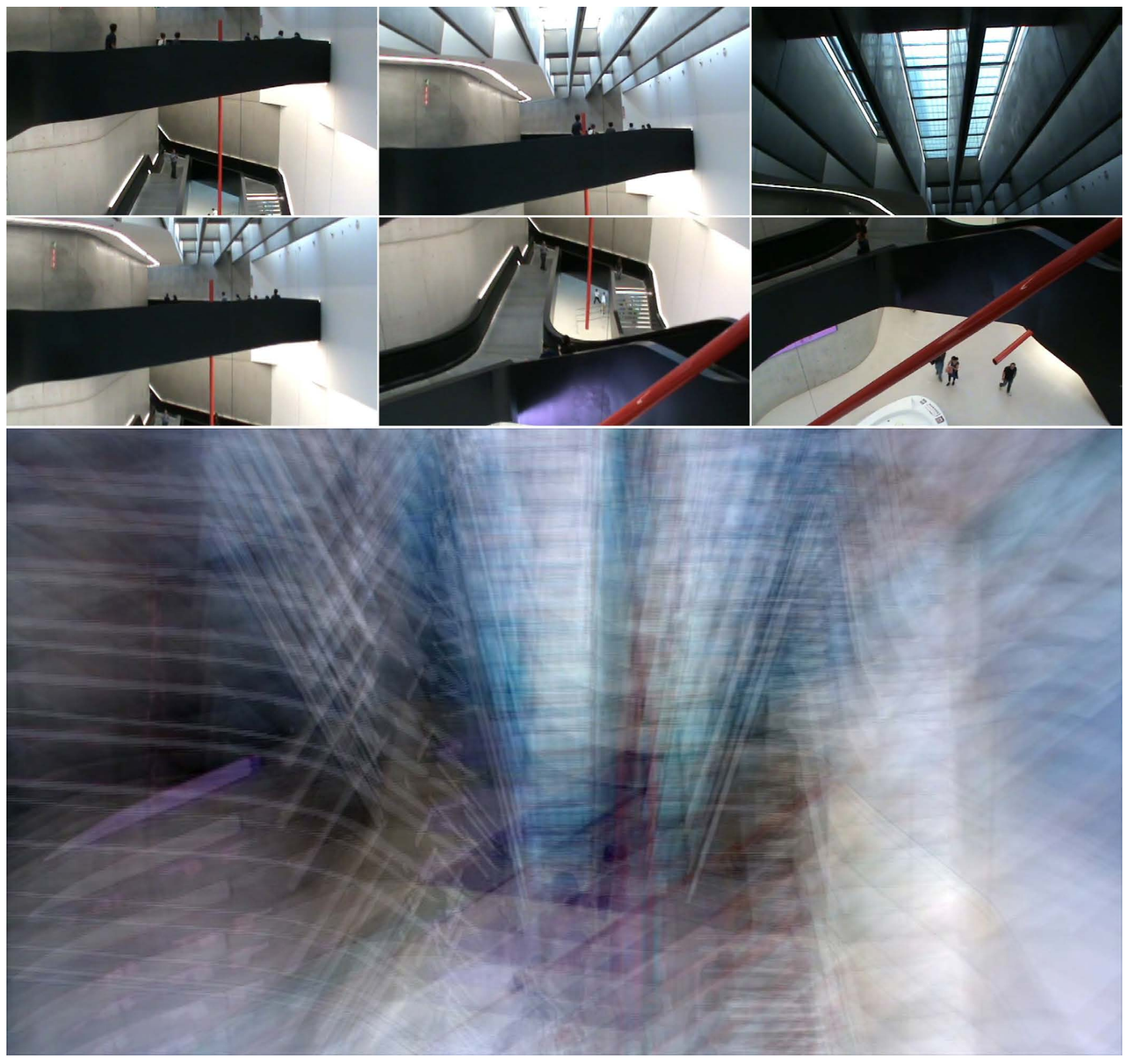


Figure 10.
Montage of unprocessed stills of the interior aerial walkways in the MAXXI Museum (top and centre). Photographs by author, 2011; Cumulative z-axis projection of the video footage captured at the same location, showing an amplified colour palette (bottom). Image by author, 2023.

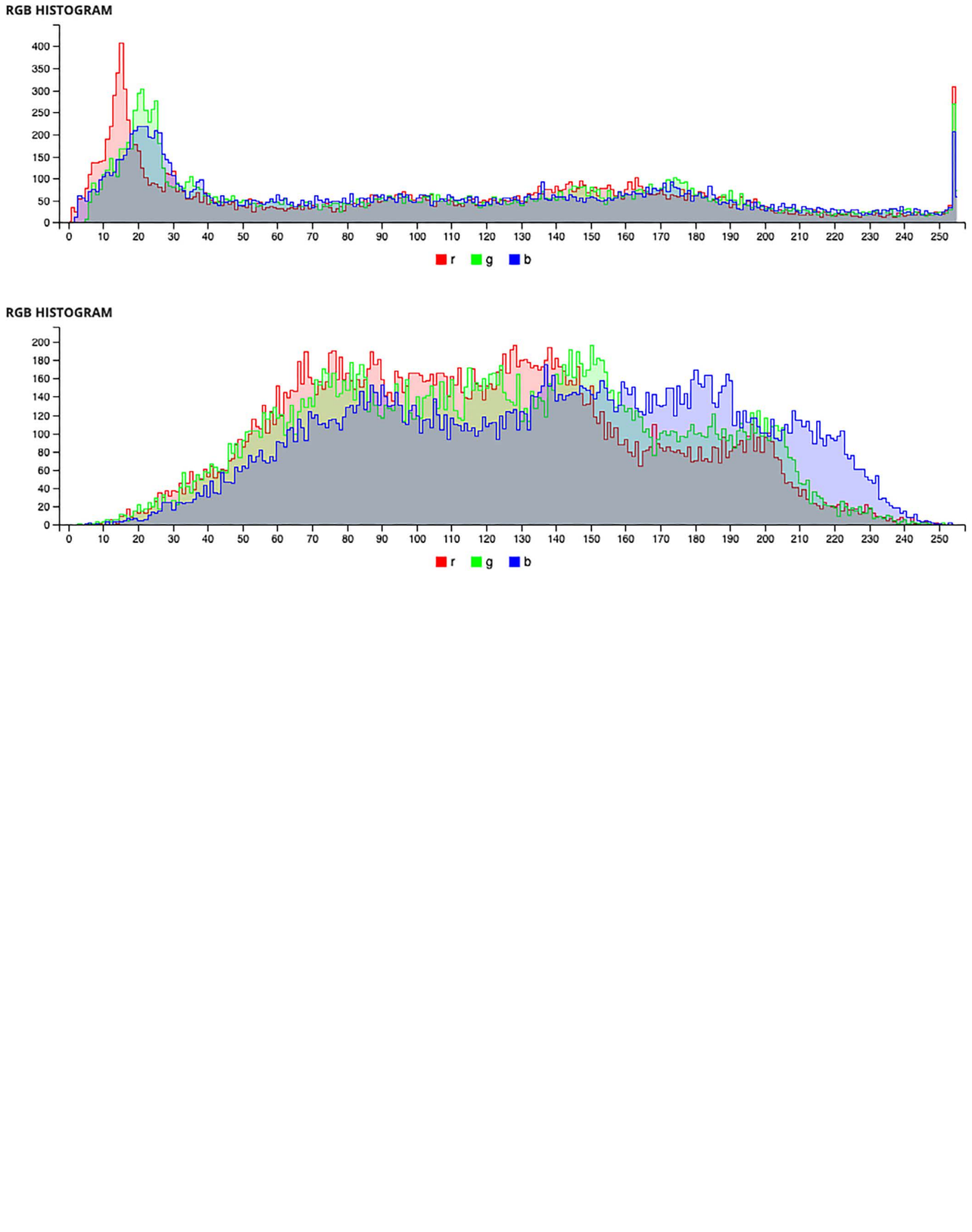


Figure 11.
Colour histograms of an unprocessed still of the aerial walkways in the MAXXI Museum (top) and of the processed image (bottom), showing a marked increase in colour intensity in the latter. Images by author, 2023.

navigating unstable space

The cumulative effect of the body's trajectory through space produces yet another anamorphic uncertainty, in this case, one that describes collective motion as a visual dynamic. By compressing all visual data in the image stack into a series of individual compositions, the form of the interior building spaces becomes visible as paths of light. The progressive instances of compression achievable using *ImageJ* software provide insights into not only the destabilising effect of motion on the perception of the interior space but also its extensive permeation by light not otherwise recorded.

While the dynamic human trajectory tends to flatten urban space, at the same time, it can also be said to expand it, as Leonard Schlain observes: 'Spatial representations also merge at high speeds. As space is compressed, multiple views of objects are possible from a single perspective because planes and volumes become one.'[12] This paradoxical condition is evidenced by the montages in Figures 12–14, in which multiple views are simultaneously compressed into a single image and yet describe the spatial properties of the building interiors as the embedded dynamic of light and colour.

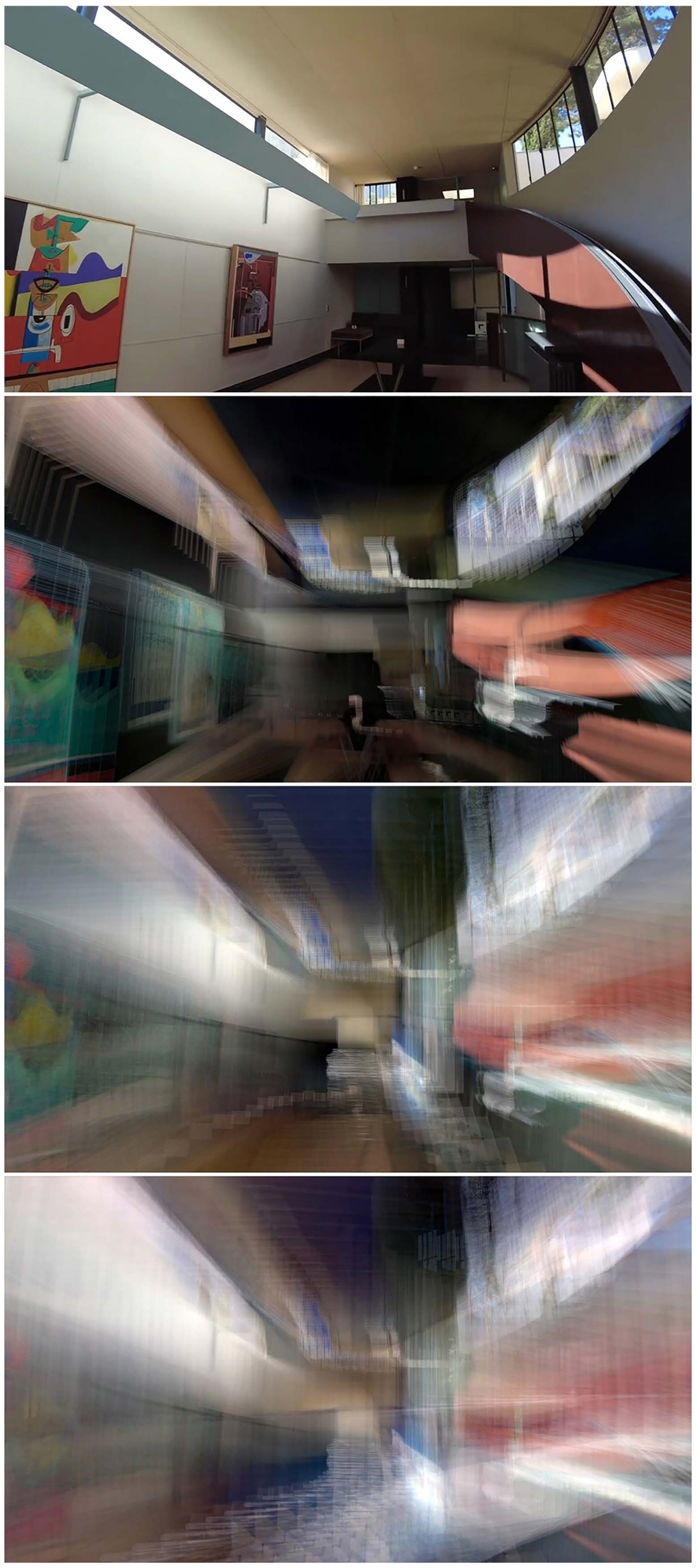


Figure 12.
Montage of unprocessed still of the interior ramp in La Roche House (top). With permission from Heje Yi, 2022; Cumulative z-axis projection stills of the video footage captured at the same location, showing the progressively dynamic composition of light and colour arising from the body's motion in space (other images). Images by author, 2023.

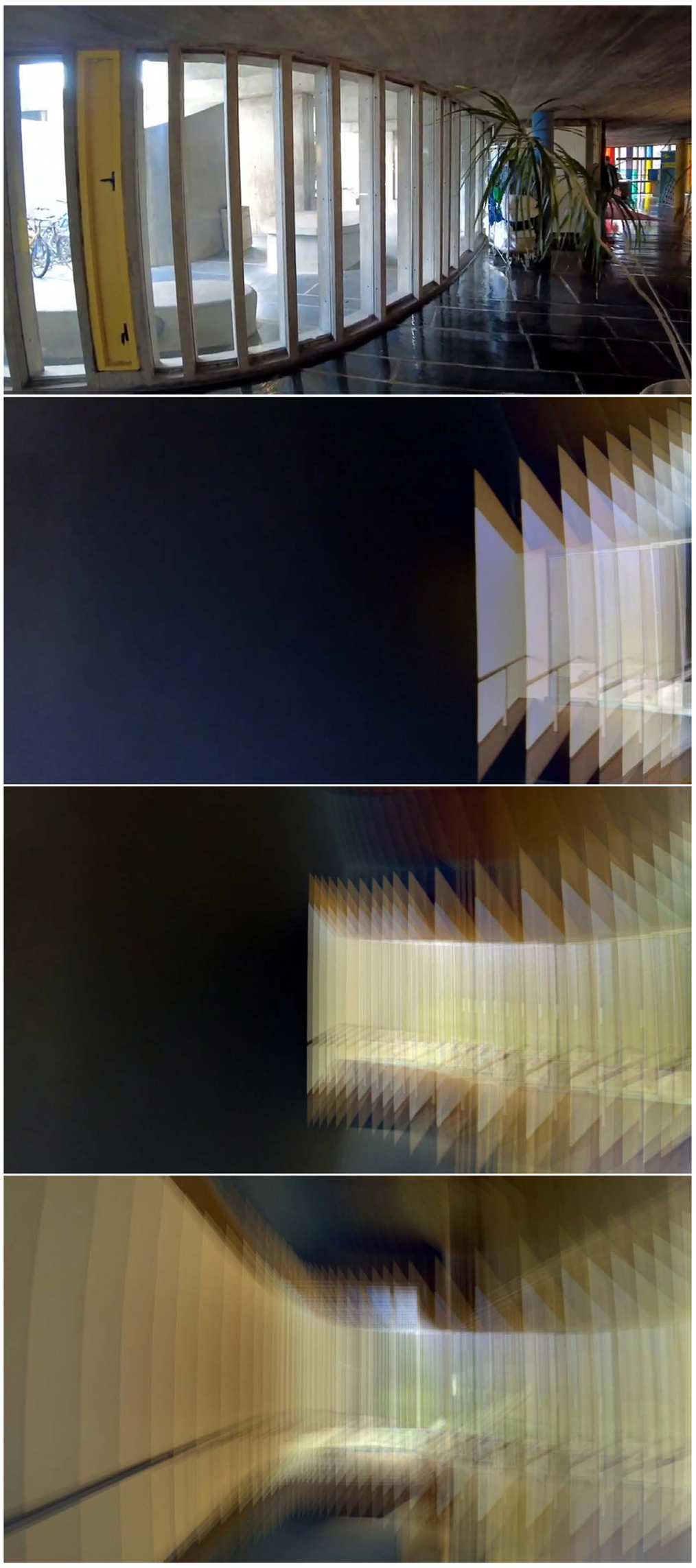


Figure 13.
Montage of unprocessed stills of the interior circulation space in the Maison du Brésil (top). With permission from Heje Yi, 2022; Cumulative z-axis projection stills of the video footage captured at the same location (other images). Images by author, 2023.

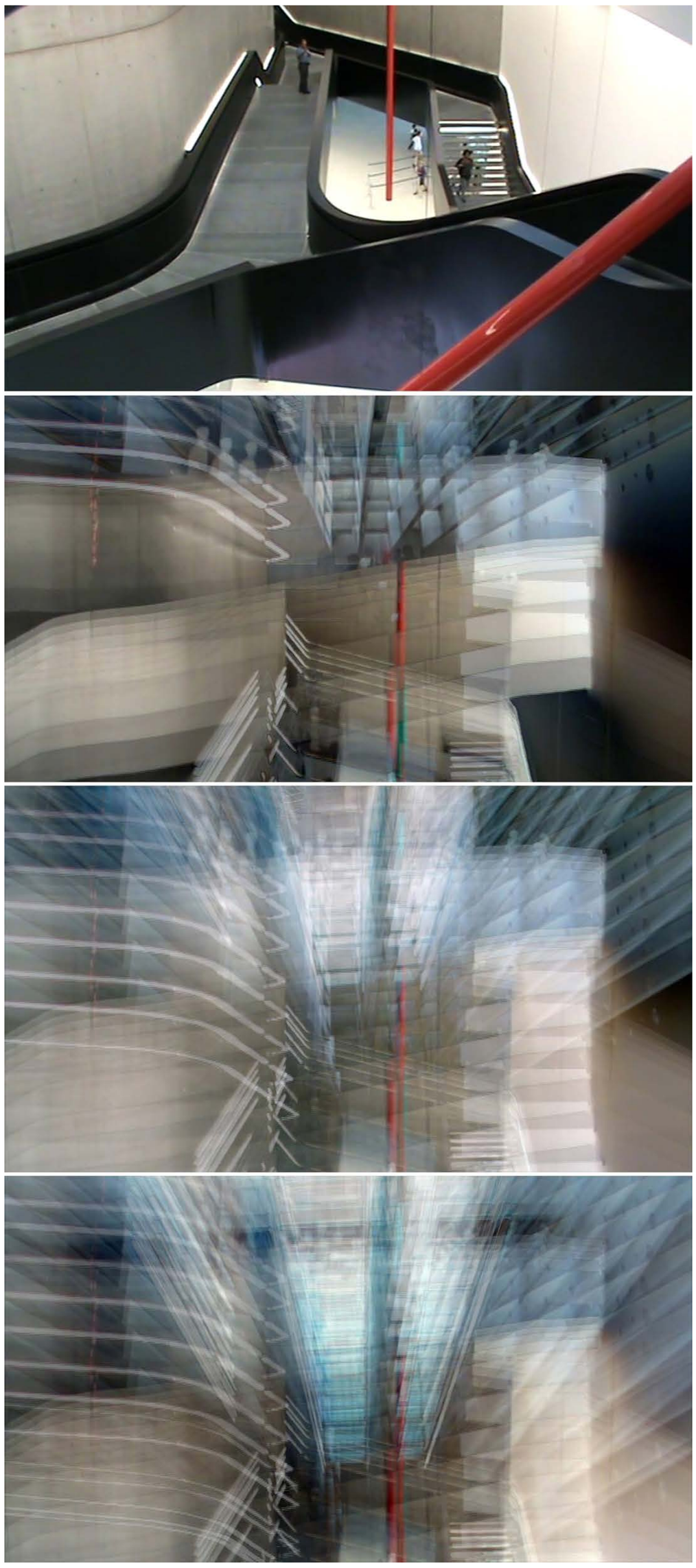


Figure 14.
Montage of unprocessed stills of the interior aerial walkways in the MAXXI Museum (top). Photograph by author, 2011; Cumulative z-axis projection stills of the video footage captured at the same location (other images). Images by author, 2023.

On a residential scale, we see the dynamic of the La Roche House extend the notion of Le Corbusier's 'architectural promenade' with fluid formal shifts merged and blurred with light. The images truly support his theory of motion embedded within form: 'Everything, especially in architecture, is a question of circulation.'[13]

At the larger apartment and public building scales, nothing attests to the prioritising of motion embedded in form more than the fractured prismatic space of the Maison du Brésil and Hadid's MAXXI Museum. Both montages defer to the combined effects of the body's motion in space and, almost to the exclusion of recognisable landmarks, present a complex, exciting, and nevertheless, potentially unnavigable space to the viewer.

uncertain strategies of inhabitation

The montages in Figures 15–17 show how spatial modification is expressed across the simultaneously evolving X, Y, and Z axes of the image stack over a given timeframe (see Figure 02 for an explanation of image stack axes). These axial representations or 'elevations' of space-time can be understood as this location's unseen, anamorphic views. By making the space 'behind' the primary camera view visible, these seemingly illegible representations not only subvert the stability of the primary image but also introduce the uncertainty of temporality through the constantly shifting ground of the image.

Figure 15.
Montage of a single slice from an image stack of the interior of La Roche House, showing combined orthogonal views of the image stack's X, Y, and Z axes (top); Stills of XZ and YZ axes showing a complete reconfiguration of visual content (centre rows); 3D view of a rotated image stack showing the temporal progression of image content along the image stack axes (bottom left); Close-up 3D view of image stack showing unexpected forms and colours emerging along the temporal axis (bottom right). Original photographs with permission from Heje Yi, 2022. Images by author, 2023.

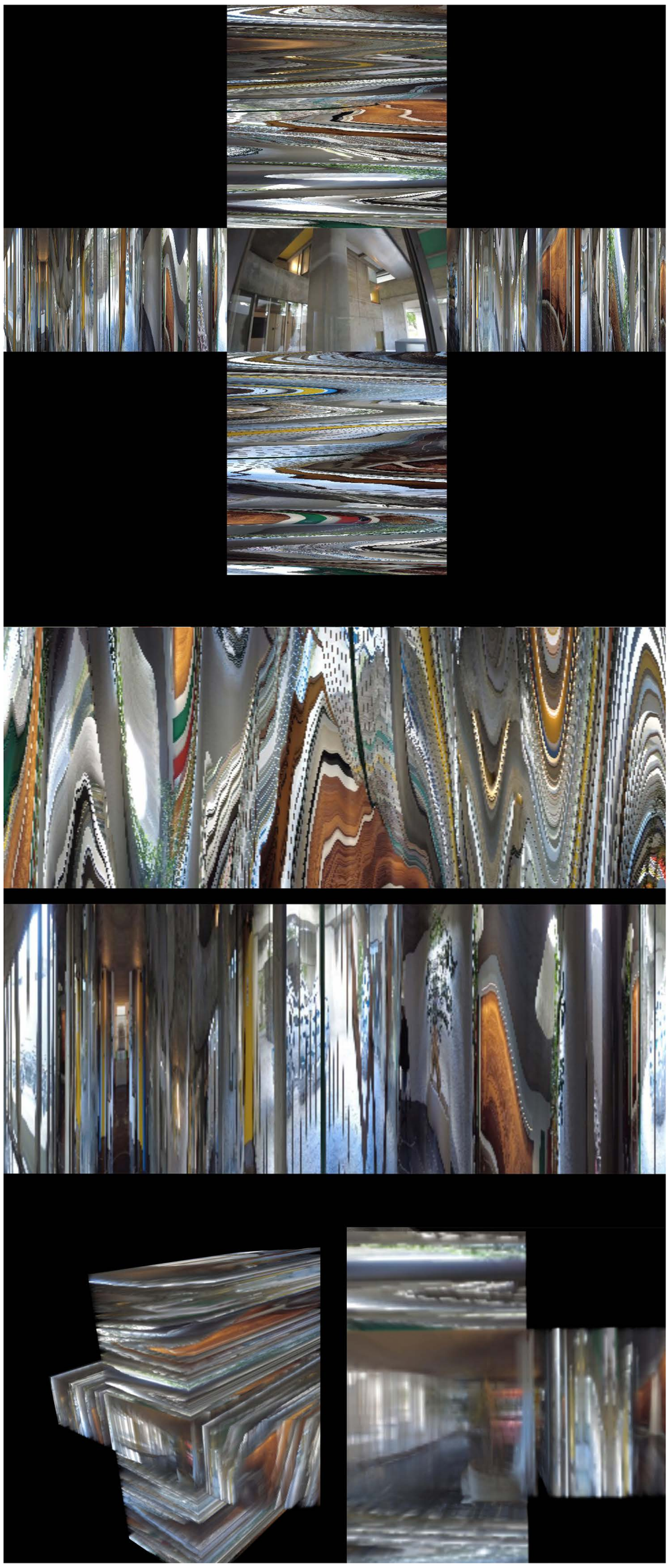


Figure 16.
Montage of a single slice from an image stack of the interior of the Maison du Brésil, showing combined orthogonal views of the image stack's X, Y, and Z axes (top); Stills of XZ and YZ axes showing a complete reconfiguration of visual content (centre rows); 3D view of a rotated image stack showing the temporal progression of image content along the image stack axes (bottom left); Close-up 3D view of image stack showing unexpected spatial conditions emerging along the temporal axis (bottom right). Original photographs with permission from Heje Yi, 2022. Images by author, 2023.

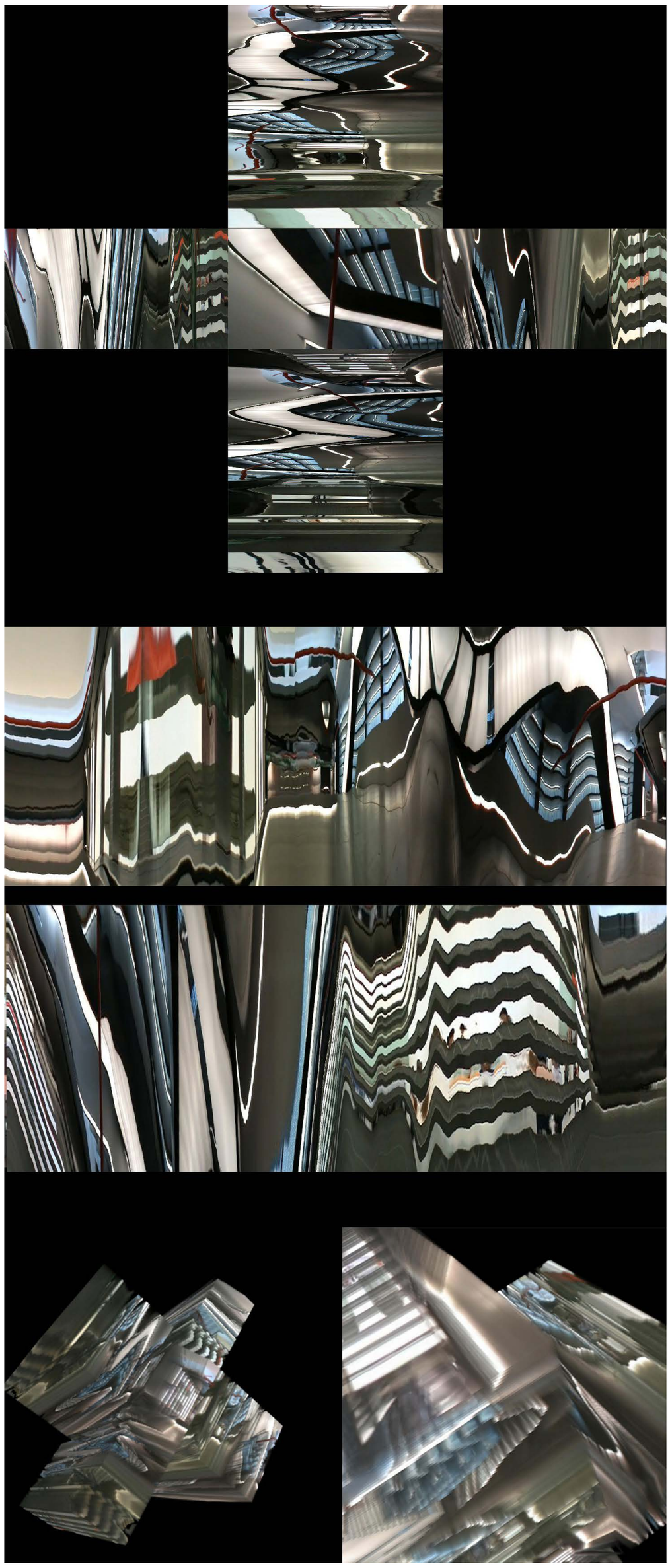


Figure 17.
Montage of a single slice from an image stack of the interior of the MAXXI Museum, showing combined orthogonal views of the image stack's X, Y, and Z axes (top); Stills of XZ and YZ axes showing a complete reconfiguration of visual content (centre rows); 3D view of a rotated image stack showing the temporal progression of image content along the image stack axes (bottom left); Close-up 3D view of image stack showing unexpected spatial conditions emerging along the temporal axis (bottom right). Original photographs by author, 2011. Images by author, 2023.

So, what is the procedural value of these anamorphic micro-scenes? The abstraction of image content seen in the axes removes the visual distraction of traditional, stable arrangements and presentations of form within a scene. With the viewer's response to form sublimated, the scene's new composition can offer insights into the operation of the space or even call it into question.

the qualitative image and affective space

A consequence of deconstructing conventional methods of spatial representation and established experiential contexts is the emergence of affect. In the realm of visual perception, affect is unsettling, triggering a response to the disruption of familiar receptive pathways, making the subject disoriented and incapable of exhibiting a controlled or predictable reaction. Seigworth and Gregg describe this phenomenon as both complex and immanent: 'the name we give to those forces—visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion—that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension.'[14] Brian Massumi draws on scenarios in which perceptual inconsistencies produce an affective and complex outcome within the observer, arguing in favour of the idea that it is not possible to extract simplicity from multi-faceted experience. In the essay *Too Blue*, Massumi indicates how colour's complex properties resist quantification by any reductive procedure.

> The remembered colour exceeds the testable meaning of the word [...] Between 'blue' used as the trigger for the production of memory, and 'blue' used to test the identity of that memory, something extra has slipped in, which the color-word, as the common property of the experimenter and the subject, does not designate.[15]

When considering the relationship between digital images and the surfaces of the urban spaces they depict, a re-presentation occurs of potentially affective conditions characterised by the dominance of qualitative attributes such as colour and brightness as the primary drivers of spatial representation. Significantly, the visual ambiguities associated with these attributes, as described by Massumi, are also present in digital imaging.

This occurs because the fundamental unit of the digital image, the pixel, assigns numerical values to perceptual qualities such as colour and brightness (also shape when considering groupings of pixels within a two-dimensional grid). As a result, conditions of variability and ambiguity related to these attributes are automatically translated into numerical image values and seamlessly integrated into the image. In this way, the ambiguities Massumi discusses, where colour and brightness boundaries blur, become inherent data within the image and constitute a fundamental component of its content. Importantly, this also means that the digital image has the potential to be highly affective because it is not bound to a single, normative visual experience.

With urban space presented by digital imaging devices in terms of qualitative visual properties readily translatable into data, a new approach to its design and construction also becomes possible. Because there is an indexical relationship between the image and digitally 'viewed' space, form can affect the numerical values within the image. However, for affect to be genuinely affective, or unconscious, then it is the capacity of these spaces to disrupt any traditional visual narrative that makes the presence of affect possible.

The ability to index a physical surface to the qualitative properties of the image and, in turn, to the ambiguities of the Human Visual System is thus fundamental to a departure from a predetermined visual narrative. In this respect, both the pixel's numerical basis and camera technology's anamorphic capacity ensure the conditions to produce affect are present.

drawings for digital space

This essay shows how digital platforms and their associated modes of visual representation extend both the viewing experience and representational techniques beyond the constraints of the current practices defining architectural production. It reveals how digital technology activates a new type of embodiment, projecting the body along newly visible axes of space/time to engage with previously unexplored atmospheric properties of the building's interior worlds.

It also proposes that these digital anamorphic representations enter the architectural arena as the new atmospheric 'drawing set' to sit alongside its traditional orthographic counterpart. These digital compositions connect the architect to unique formal and material assemblies informed by atmospherics and ambiguity rather than traditionally recognisable form. The images compose an experiential visual language underpinned by the unknown eventualities of temporal space and, in this respect, provide a new generative agency as working drawings for the digital city.

author biography

Linda Matthews is the Co-Director of the UTS Visualisation Institute and a Senior Lecturer in the School of Architecture at the University of Technology Sydney. Her area of interest is the history, politics, and techniques of representation. Her current research explores new architectural and urban design methodologies that utilise the optics of digital visioning systems to reconfigure and generate non-traditional modes of architectural and urban form.

notes

01 Martin Kemp, *The Science of Art: Optical Themes in Western Art from Brunelleschi to Seurat* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 139.

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04 'Architectural Polychromy', in *Les Couleurs Le Corbusier* <https://www.lescouleurs.ch/en/the-colours/colour-system> [accessed 6 March 2023]

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10 Le Corbusier, *Œuvre Complete*, p. 60.

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vacantly occupied: movements queering materialities (or, becomings from the toilet)

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abstract
This text-based essay investigates and makes uncertain public toilets through ficto-critical writing. The essay is a response to an experimental analysis where I vacantly occupied several public toilets around Melbourne, each for varied amounts of time. This embodied methodology allows the interior itself, relieved of any expected utility or function, to become foregrounded, eventful. The research builds on an existing body of research into the interior subcultures of public toilets and their representation in pop culture. 'Vacantly occupied' refers to the process of occupying toilet cubicles and making uncertain the binary of 'vacant' and 'occupied'. To vacantly occupy queers the binary function of the cubicle lock, the toilet, design, and labour more broadly, and turns it into an open-ended situation. 'Queering' because it blurs categorisation—occupation without *an* occupation—and embodies a functional, utilitarian space in a deliberately a-functional way, as opposed to dysfunctional because design too often looks towards explicit function as reification of 'good/bad'. I argue this kind of majoritarian binary qualification isn't necessarily useful for queering, which unlike identitarian definitions of 'queer' resists certainty. This text deploys queering tactically to move beyond these dynamics in order to destabilise and make uncertain in both content and form, thinking design in different ways. Ficto-criticism is used as a methodology to develop two distinct perspectives: the author's, and through its diverse language loosens normative interpretations of critical writing for the reader, creating a second. The style, much like toilet cubicles themselves, is at times messy, fragmented, and blurred, mixing academic, dirty, common, poetic styles attempting to resist cartographic objectivity in favour of a language that cultivates multiple perspectives that queer the form of a critical research essay. This is reflective of a broader argument that, in the case of public toilets, other viewpoints beyond dominant heterosexist norms are needed now more than ever, that other historiographies and perspectives that create uncertainty in how we assume, use, and design with logics, utility, function, cleanliness, and so on can be embraced to envision radically different interiors.

keywords
toilets; queering; ficto-criticism; embodiment; dirt

editorial note
This essay examines subject matter and uses terms that some readers may find challenging. Reader discretion is advised.

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we need to go

> ‘I really need to shit. There wasn’t any toilet paper in Diane’s guest bathroom, and that’s not something one talks about.’[01]

> ‘[W]e needed for there to be sites where the meanings don’t line up tidily with each other, and we learned to invest those sites with fascination and love.’[02]

In *Tendencies*, Eve Sedgwick writes about their passion for perverse readings of texts. For Sedgwick, perversity charges cultural objects with energy and openness, embracing the autonomy of the reader to re-appropriate, re-embody, reframe. By pressing back into these cultural objects, allowing their charge to pulse through us, we can reshape what’s there, creating other perspectives through uncertainty and, dare I say it, maybe *fall in love with them*.

I’ve recently fallen in love with toilets. An unfortunate fact for some, queer people have always needed to go to the toilet. Perhaps some would even argue we belong there. Putting aside the important work designers are doing to break down binary heterosexism in construction codes and advocating for clients to be more inclusive, queer people have historically and culturally been implicated in these interiors, either by association—we are *dirty*—or by implication—we are there because anything to do with toilets is, like Guillaume Dustan muses above, *not something one talks about*.

That *sub*cultural line, where on one side is perversity, transgression, and the other sits sanitised normalcy makes toilets so interesting. This ficto-critical text-based essay loves that line—loves *fucking with that line*, making its boundaries uncertain—leaning into the cultures, contradictions, and eventfulness in these spaces is what vacant occupation seems to surface. The ficto-critical approach experiments with a way of writing—designing—theory *from*, rather than *about* interiors. It uses embodiment as a creative-practice research methodology to queer the way critical analysis on interiors is written—and read.

The initial design intent was that each section of this essay would become a tableau of a particular interior, adopting a coordinating style. While writing, it became clear this approach wouldn’t allow me to embrace a process of *writing from* these interiors, as the emphasis would be on a return to the location, space, time, and consequently falling back into a methodology, and normative design logic, of *writing about*. To circumvent this, I reflected on the project holistically, embracing a process of selection and extraction. When I bring *myself* to these interiors, what territories and perspectives can be opened through perverse uncertainty? How might they be related, or not, to interior design? Hélène Frichot reminds us in *Creative Ecologies* that ‘every point of view is a point of view on variation, even while standing perfectly still’—literally a good point when vacantly occupying.[03] The approach

became to deploy the text in a way to make uncertain perspectives from my experience, adopting style to design conditions for other perspectives from the reader. This methodology views uncertainty in this text as generative, inviting the reader into the essay, creating another perspective from mine by forming loose interpretations of dirty language. Hopefully you do this with fascination and love.

Fragments are scattered throughout the essay, the result of a writing experiment undertaken during one of the site visits. Following a similar approach to Georges Perec's *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris*,[04] I documented everything I was focused on at the time. Interestingly, this was mainly listening to what was going on outside the cubicle, with little attention paid to what might be happening inside, where I was sitting. I found this approach useful to a certain degree, but ultimately inappropriate to continue in other locations. The reason was two-fold. First, the focus became almost exclusively on the outside of the cubicle. Second, the approach felt too much like labour and conceptually worked against notions of 'vacant occupation' that the project and this essay sought to explore. Nevertheless, it felt right—dirty?—to scatter some decorative happenings into the text, in a similar sense to when you're lost in thought and suddenly a hand-dryer goes off or somebody farts—an interruption that ultimately re-locates you.

certainties

Toilets were never designed for queers.

The first flushing public toilet was designed by engineer George Jennings, situated within the great exhibition of 1851 at the Crystal Palace. To use it one needed to 'spend a penny', coining a popular euphemism in Victorian English society. The Crystal Palace, a structure fabricated predominantly with steel and glass, was designed by Joseph Paxton, known for his work on gardens and glasshouses. The palace, with its near non-existent poché was decorated by Owen Jones, whose subsequent tome, *The Grammar of Ornament*, as with the exhibition itself, can be read as an ostentatious exposition of great British manufacturing and decorative imperialism, featuring works and motifs fabricated from plundered materials and artefacts from across Britain's imperial dominions. Jones opens the book with the somewhat curious aim of aiding:

> in arresting that unfortunate tendency of our time to be content with copying, whilst the fashion lasts, the forms peculiar to any bygone age, without attempting to ascertain, generally completely ignoring, the peculiar circumstances which rendered an ornament beautiful.[05]

Jones sought a décor epistemologically appropriate for the times, a couture for this monumental shift in interior design, itself a reflection of a shift towards industrialisation, a *levelling-up*, to adopt neoliberal language, of capitalism. The building cleverly and

significantly blurred the interior with its exterior, the main interior [Fig. 01] featuring huge gardens with trees, statues, and fountains, surrounded by grand lawns and plump pines. A fluid interior in so many ways, it seems fitting that public toilets would make their debut in Victorian society with a flush of excitement at this event, which sought to aesthetically express what the Victorian English saw as a marvel of their 'civilisation' and, quite legitimately, an innovation in public health and sanitation.

Figure 01.
Interior of Crystal Palace, London, 1878—1890, courtesy Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

The toilets were affectionately known by Jennings as 'monkey closets', named as such because of the shape of the plumbing[06] and box-like mahogany joinery, with later iterations renamed as the more generic, and sanitised, 'water closet', or WCs.[07] WCs were exceptionally ornate cast-iron affairs, detailed in fine timbers and ornate floral patterns that sought to conceal the activities within, deploying visual counterweights to their olfactory effects.[08]

'That which is beautiful is true; that which is true must be beautiful,' Jones declares![09] The WC interiors somewhat anxiously and earnestly focused towards the cleanliness, concealment, and comfort of cisgender men, then later cisgender women. One 'must distinguish between naïve and deliberate Camp,' Susan Sontag notes. 'Pure Camp is always naïve. Camp which knows itself to be Camp ("camping") is usually less satisfying.'[10] Camping myself inside these interiors for hours on end, one can't help but recognise that, from the beginning, modern WCs were really quite queer little things. Oh, the irony of this giant glasshouse! A transparently 'straight', useful, outwardly flexing public interior inadvertently full of *fabulous* mahogany closets!

production

Patricia MacCormack reminds us simply that 'the queer approach is nothing more than an approach.'[11] 'Queering' moves beyond an explicit sexual, and other, categorisation, suggesting a movement towards yet-defined alterity. Always fluid, always moving, never septic. Importantly, for MacCormack it opens:

> each tactical temporary territory to what is needed, to change the assemblages rather than seek the finite point of perception which will tell us what is queer, how to be queer, what metaphors are associated with and applicable to queer. We are all queer and not queer in ways which exceed representation.[12]

Queering as a process of tactical production evades the known, is unknown, pushing beyond binary transgressive dialectics of majoritarian power relations. For a designer this seems impossible. How does a designer, and, more to the point, a design *discipline* framed by an interior/exterior dialectic like interior/spatial design/architecture queer in any meaningful way while still retaining its integrity, its stability, or consistency as a discipline? If radical queering of interior design evades any sense of disciplinary norms and identification, my guess is it probably can't.

Design production typically follows a standard paradigm, one that allows it to functionally coordinate with clients, trades, consultants, and the legal frameworks that govern commercial relations. Theorist Elizabeth Freeman describes this as *chrononormativity*, or 'the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity.'[13] Such temporal hegemonic paradigms form long-standing certainties in design, producing logics and assumptions deeply embedded in design culture. Importantly, these deliver

Figure 02.
Toilet cubicle Melbourne, 2023. Image taken by author.

consistency in product, or something that can be *identified as design*. The discipline of the brief regulates temporal consistency by setting a deadline, and qualifies design from non-design, evaluated by the designer's response against the client's request. This is a problem for queering interior design because these enforce a normativity that should be evaded. Queering, then, might turn to something like an unstructured event, one that is unpredictable, unknown, and not asked for. Interiors that in form and time may not even be recognisable—or immediately useful—to their designers. Let's pretend for a moment Guy Hocquenghem, a queer activist, is an interior designer:

As I leave the [Front homosexuel d'action révolutionnaire] meeting, a boy takes me by the arm and leads me to an obscure passageway.

I enter into a dark, humid hovel where we wade in puddles of water and urine: the toilets of the Beaux-Arts. Half a dozen bodies, anonymous in the dim light, are enlaced in there in what complex circuitries one cannot immediately decipher. I feel burdened by the enforced blindness, the acrid smell of piss chokes me and I recoil, feeling guilty immediately. The boy at my side murmurs in my ear: "*What? Are you ashamed?*" He might just as well have said "*Are you ashamed, comrade?*"[14]

Hocquenghem deliberately places us in an uncomfortable space in two senses: the acrid darkness of the toilet in the Beaux-Arts and, the uncomfortable resonance of a homosexuality, queerness defined by majoritarian categorisations. In this sense the homosexual, the queer, like other minorities, don't exist without definition/relation from the other. Hocquenghem shoves us here and there because for them the project is not about defining, but finding ways of affirming a not yet defined. Ways of becoming queer, but also acknowledging that fucking in a toilet is kind of hot: 'I wish I could,' he says.[15] It's complicated, contradictory, and far from idealistic. It's this chaos, and that fact we're *in it*, that makes it even more attractive. By considering materiality of toilets in an expanded sense that's inclusive of the desires and politics that dictate their creation, we can open up ways of reshaping and reclaiming them. The interior pictured here: a heady materiality of piss, pleasure, and politics. Simultaneously utilitarian—we piss, shit, bleed—social—we chat, have sex, do drugs—and symbolic—a space where majoritarian forces push, flush, condemn, turn away.

Programmatically, the toilet is dynamic and *very* unstable. Cruising, what Hocquenghem viscerally illustrates above, exemplifies this instability. Cruising happens anywhere, but in toilets there is a delicate symbiosis where queering subverts and makes very uncertain dominant heterosexist and toxically masculine behaviour. Men openly present their dick in crowded urinals, often to nobody—they barely even look. The cruiser presents subtle cues to someone who's looking for a good time, evading the gaze of others who are conditioned to not to look at all. What these cues are is irrelevant to this essay—I'm not outing anyone, especially because for some men this is the only safe way to express sexuality—except that their formation facilitates sometimes quite highly performative interiors where multiple programs coexist, are formed, and dissipated instantly. The aversion of majoritarian gaze, like the literal averted gaze of cishet men at urinals, allows subcultural queering to discreetly live and immanently, tactically emerge, pulsating, flowing. If you make eye contact with another man while 'pissing,' it's likely that you either know him, or he's cruising too.

This instability provides a malleability, turning the interior quickly from one thing to another. Its morphological potential is not insignificant. But it is not a simple one-way process of queer liberation, either—if only it could be so reductionist so we could get on with getting off! To be fair, Hocquenghem places an emphasis on how we might escape heteronormative power relations because he laments it a little. Being called a *faggot* is depressing, but labelling yourself one, if you desire, can be liberating. Faggot of course, is a dirty word, a particular one. In the right circumstances, much like a public toilet, its meanings become malleable and can be messed with. Being a faggot fucking in a dark place,[16] and *unthinkingly* emulating cishet sexual dynamics is symptomatic of heterosexual power influencing the inner workings of queer desire. Criticality is key. Others like Bjarne Melgaard[17] and Ashkan Sepahvand[18] swallow Hocquenghem's point but appear more comfortable with and even *enjoy* the concept of faggotry. They reclaim it. Change it. Fuck with it, fuck with him. Fuck with relations that *define* queer bodies.

> shadow lingers, jeans move towards cubicle door, another shadow moves past door, hand dryer, elastic, distant tap, hand dryer, person in front of cubicle gone, hands being washed, someone walks past cubicle and presses on door, moves into cubicle next door, blue jeans, door pads shut, door pads shut, door pads shut, brushing, elastic, foot tapping, quiet.
>
> foot tapping, tan leather boat shoe appears, foot tapping again, quiet.

enchantment

Unlike faggotry seeking to foreground its dirtiness—I'm a *dirty* faggot!—Jennings's toilet paradigm is significant because it *really* separates individuals from their shit. This trend is further progressed by contemporary toilet models featuring 'easy clean drop zones' along with other aesthetic features and interior detailing that make efforts to conceal plumbing and other features inside walls.[19] With some models, a user need only insert a cartridge into a wall to maintain cleanliness.[20] These —are often complimented by toilet cubicles that, apart from the minimal pedestal and a hook on a door, have no other discernible fittings. These obviously have health, hygiene, and cleaning dividends, but also work to create an interior where *very* human functions are symbolically, culturally, and programmatically separated from the body.

Contemporary toilets like these manifest a form of commodity fetish. Anxious about the shit it spends its energy concealing, the means of production is separated from the body through mystification via concealment. WCs turn what was once a communal interior into a space that forges an isolated individual, disconnected literally and figuratively from others and their own body processes.[21] Focusing on responses to the unknown or unfamiliar through declarations of 'dirt' as a form of queering, much like how the contemporary toilet fetishises, we can mystify

our relationship with it through creating a thought-form that deliberately queerly reforms accepted assumptions of dirt: a mystic anus.

Our mystic anus dilates with Mary Douglas's now infamous definition of dirt as 'matter out of place.'[22] We know dirt as firmly sociological and consequently subject to change. Douglas, like all of us, has their own toilet story:

> I always remember how unrelaxed I felt in a particular bathroom which was kept spotlessly clean in so far as the removal of grime and grease was concerned. It had been installed in an old house in a space created by the simple expedient of setting a door at each end of a corridor between two staircases. The décor remained unchanged: [...] the books, the gardening tools, the row of gumboots. It all made good sense as the scene of a back corridor, but as a bathroom—the impression destroyed repose. [...] In chasing dirt, in papering, decorating, tidying we are not governed by anxiety to escape disease, but are positively re-ordering our environment, making it conform to an idea. There is nothing fearful or unreasoning in our dirt-avoidance: it is a creative movement, an attempt to relate form to function, to make unity of experience.[23]

Interestingly, Douglas' back-passage toileting experience suggests interior design and decoration are techniques that express cleanliness *through control*. It's also reminiscent of Le Corbusier's bolshie decorative move to place the bidet in the middle of their Paris studio apartment bedroom, in a gesture fitting of Modernist logic, not the *dirty* toilet but the fixture that *cleans*![24] But this definition is obviously linked to what majoritarian 'normative' understandings of dirt and good interiors are, and certainty of what *belongs* inside/outside. This is unacceptable to the mystic anus. An anus is a door that enters the body, but the digestive tract is much more ambiguous, forming a tube between the head and the body, through, and formed of, the viscera. A threshold queerly connecting mind and body. 'Dirt' here can be viewed as morphological: an unstable materiality enabling queering of interiors. As matter out of place it is rogue, other. Its ability to act within any interior should not be understated. Dirtiness has a visceral effect *because* it doesn't belong, not because it is romantically tolerated. A gentrification—*purification*—of dirtiness will only bring us back to where we started, providing nothing more than a warm, fuzzy, authentically-feeling-but-not-actually pastiche. Its power as a tactical queering strategy is to produce otherness, challenging engendered norms of class, quality, sexuality, and gender within interior design. But simply wrecking the joint will not do. It must move past a dirt/clean dialectic because if we define queering as a general resistance to codification then we must see dirt *like* any other material, also *unlike* any other.[25] In an examination of Modernist bathrooms in Christopher Isherwood's novels, Ian Scott-Todd notes more specifically that:

> As a sexually segregated space in which users are brought into contact with the genitals and excretory organs—both their own and, more peripherally, those of other people of their own sex—the bathroom has the potential to give rise to homosexual panic as well as homosexual desire. Anality and excrement have consistently borne associations with queer or non-normative sexual desire and, vice versa, queer sex—particularly gay male sex, often linked in the cultural imagination with the anus—has traditionally signified as dirty.[26]

Indeed, any person who has enjoyed rimming another has deliciously challenged widely accepted notions of 'dirt' through anality, *and* delightfully re-mystified the ass. Scott-Todd's remarks reminds us that what is certain can be horrendously ignorant, and the line between panic and desire dubiously porous. So we enter an ambiguous anus—or perhaps it *circludes* us?[27] In order for it to become productive, we must make it mystical. This must be more than surrealist gestures like painter Paul Nash's silver-glazed wonderland where one can watch oneself as other from a suspended mirror on the ceiling,[28] or how you might piss over Melbourne as some voyeuristic 'fuck you all!' act from the 35th floor urinal at the Sofitel Atrium Bar. No, in taking on the ability of design to fetishise, we should turn towards the mystical not as a site of concealment or surreal play but as an amorphous space of creative opportunity.

Unlike the commodity fetish, creating unknowns through mere trickery, we might reconceptualise a mystic process that joyfully embraces unknowns, cultivating a kind of conceptual perspective where we can learn from mystic a-functionality.

The mystic anus enchants an environment-world of materiality and relations that hold 'powers' beyond moral, binary categorisation, and allows designers to radically, in the transformative sense of the word, reform design's relationship with commodity fetishisation. In the dark of the mystic anus we find both pleasure and excrement, inside and outside, pulsating movement—always movement—but never sanitisation, control. We should be okay with this because, evoking the pleasurable contradictions of dirty faggotry, 'a dick always carries back some shit, because we are always depositing cum in shit or leaving some shit on the dick coming out of us.'[29]

come, as you're not

There's always a body. Queering entangles an embodied subjectivity, a marker of presence, of someone moving through the world, getting lost in it, an *enchantment*.[30] I'm staring at dried, brown, probably cum stains on the cubicle wall as I slowly peel the sole of my shoe off the floor: 'in the sticky fold of desire, alterity is encountered within the self, through the other, and the other encounters the self in ways the self cannot autonomously express.'[31] The materiality of cum in a toilet cubicle holds a beautiful ambiguity as a mucosal substance that is a

Figure 03.
Toilet cubicle Melbourne, 2023. Image taken by author.

mediation between the body and another: 'normatively' a face, an ass, toilet paper, tiles, it once seeped, shot, lubricated, *stuck*.[32] It is a little stuck though, it needs a little lube don't you think? Cum is often delivered in one-way dominant/submissive situations that replicate patriarchal, masculine cultural and economic dominance. It is *given* to another in crass, basic gender performativity defining *alpha* from *beta*, where alpha is always the one that gives and *never* receives. Think gauche money shots; it's *his* orgasm that matters, that marks the crescendo, btm subs, gagging, looking up at their dom tops covered in thick white spunk. It's all a bit basic after a while.

Deep grunts daddy's *got a load!*

Cum is loaded but mucous is non-binary, its connotations potentially transgressive.[33] Shot inside a cubicle and left alone, the dried cum is crusty, static. But the event itself? The event in the cubicle? The moment this sticky mucosa flew from the body into the world as an ecstatic connective tissue, in-situ. A projection without an explicit use, unlike the surrounding glazed tiles that received it. Projections that could engender, become hybrid with another. I think of all the guys that celebrate cum beyond transgressive dynamics, as a connective bonding, post-orgasm, sexual intimacy, lingering.[34] Literally and allegorically present, a way to navigate the gap between self and external force, a way of thinking Spinoza, practising them.[35] Enchanted by the mystic anus, connective mucus can be brought into hybridity with a figure, recognisable yet beyond convention, ambiguous, but importantly making something, *bonding*. Cum's queering potential is literally and allegorically how it spasms from the body and ambiguously, fleetingly connects another.

> indistinct chatter, 'so nice!', cubicle next door used again, rubber pads on laminex, chatting continues, 'fucking hurt!', flush, door closes, pissing, flush in distance, closer pissing, further pissing, closer pissing again, hits water, acrid smell, door unlocked, hand dryer, hand dryer, flush, door still shut, flush, clang of plastic on ceramic, toilet seat clanging loudly, flush, distant flush, toilet paper rustles,

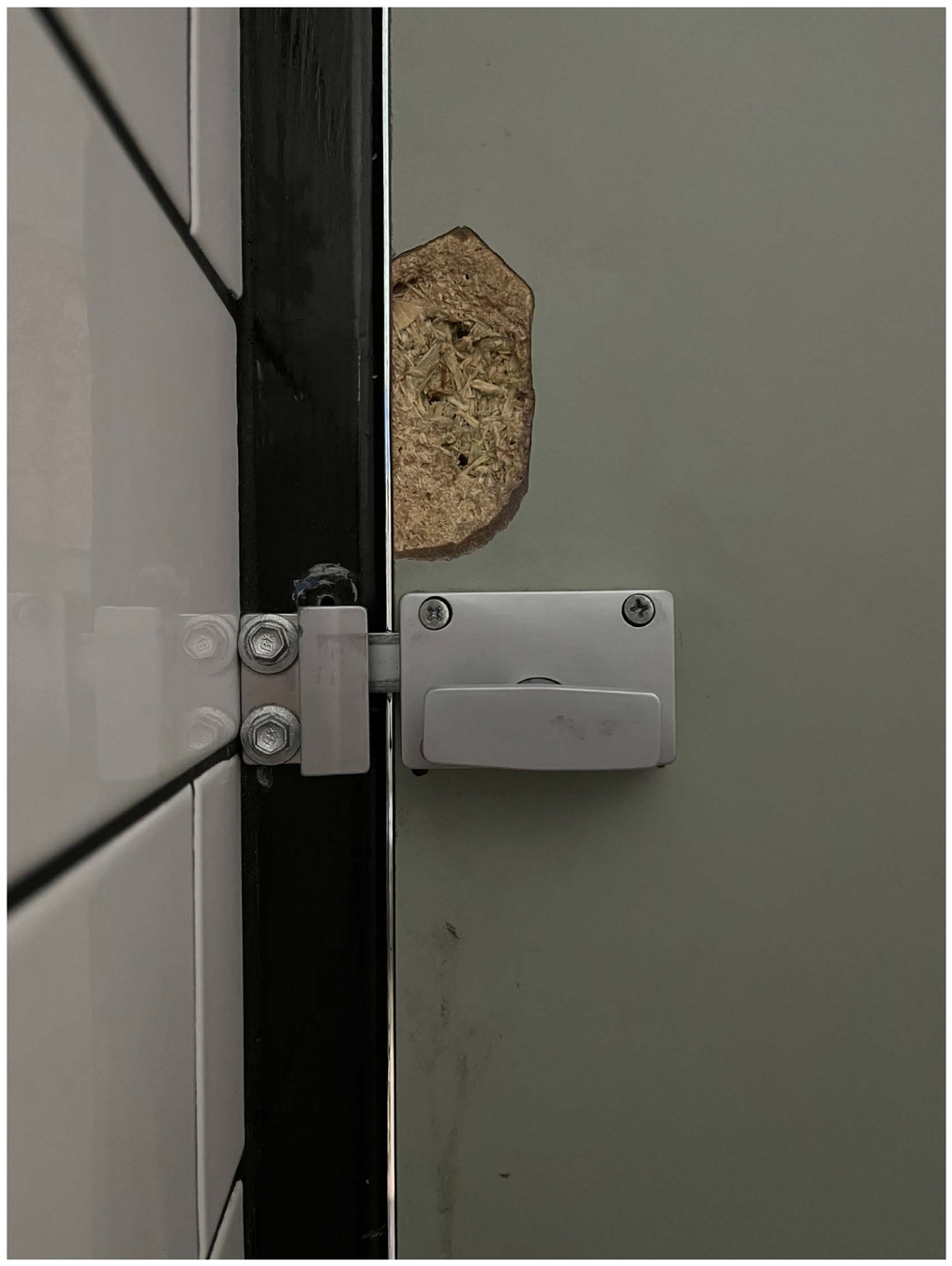

Figure 04.
Toilet cubicle Melbourne, 2023. Image taken by author.

vacancy

An attempt to use form to collapse interior and designer, this section deploys textual uncertainty to destabilise the reading experience based on Byung-Chul Han's proposition that the contemporary, 'with time', experience is by its very nature uncertain because so much is constantly happening.[36]

Tourists, Susan Sontag notes 'unsure of other responses [...] take a picture', because 'using a camera appeases the anxiety which the work-driven feel about not working when they are on vacation and supposed to be having fun'[37] the anxiety Sontag identifies resonates widely within the creative neoliberal subject: they experience a constant negotiation of shifting boundaries between themselves, their loves, and their labour sometimes, I felt guilty simply sitting in a cubicle, I felt a compulsion to *perform* analysis, to know who, what was sharing these interiors with me and why, a compulsion to do labour that ends in knowing, that ends with a product, I was anxious about 'getting something' from these experiences, that my doing nothing would lead to a form of failure, is this a betrayal of 'queering' in some way, *touring* these interiors, touring them for reasons other than their function but what is their function, really? I am forced into spectatorship but it's not a detached form of watching rather a watching that comes from within these interiors and is actually more of a listening because I can only see so much and I see a small flimsy lock on a cubicle door[38] this small and flimsy lock is itself a very vague suggestive little thing that could mean anything these locks are more signifier than lock they are so flimsy and small, they signal a body is inside, occupied—it could be pissing or shitting but it could also be crying, bleeding, fucking, gossiping or doing drugs it could just be staring at a crater in the door above a little lock where there was once another little lock that got kicked in for whatever reason evidence how the lock is more signifier than actual lock precarious and often only certain in its symbolism I've never been in a toilet when the door was kicked in this always happens when I'm not around and I'm sad I don't see the violence and have an eventful story but a more complex question emerges from behind this little lock that I

guess the little lock can't keep out how being vacant but present can be used to *design with* how to use the useless thing while still keeping it useless? queer? designers are occupied with normal things: doing big projects, small projects, lucrative projects, passion projects passion projects are the worst because they're almost always done for free they are so exploitative this is where the paradox of vacancy could be a point to think about design labour that transcends Sontag's anxious fun-work one that embraces the blurred lines of neoliberal subjectivity, subverts it, reworks it, leans into it, maybe it's uncertainty that's inside vacancy? creative director Babak Radboy in a cute video for DIS.art explains to children that money is theft of time and that just by *living* bodies add value *into* the world you shouldn't have to work, they say, it's how GDP works, stupid! they encourage the children to think about a model of value that is more than profit/loss, one that is morphological to living: it grows moves to where it's needed and dies when it's not[39] what's important is that this form of value comes from the body, comes from life—is *éros*—and is a-functional because functions often end up drowning in money or debt, it's a kind of love, a movement from one thing towards another a love that is fluid but not necessarily made of fluids a love that is eventful multiple one of many loves not based on recognition in a dialectic but it's more like being bitten by a vampire[40] or following MacKenzie Wark, getting fucked in the ass so hard you lose yourself to the world[41] these loves are transformative they take your body and dissolve it, a radically open movement, and crucially about the body not being *laborious* but being joyful within a space and a time a kind of love that can come about through a rearrangement of space-time-labour emerging through an uncertain vacancy.

Byung-Chul Han recognises that one does not need to draw conclusions of contemporary experience as they might miss out on further connections of content. Consequently:

> a space made up of possibilities for further connection does not have any continuity. In it, again and again, decisions are made anew, and new possibilities are constantly pursued, making time discontinuous.[42]

This approach to contemporary experience can cause burnout, exhaustion, anxiety, but also lends itself to endless reconfiguration.

a here anywhere

Maybe it's just a mundane Berlin,

Or Glasgow, Bristol, London, Marseilles,

Or probably you've forgotten where you are, Past the view of the toilet walls.

Here, now in the wet.

But perhaps there's an escapism in whatever this is?

This water-world acting as a fertile ground for an elated form of feminism.[43]

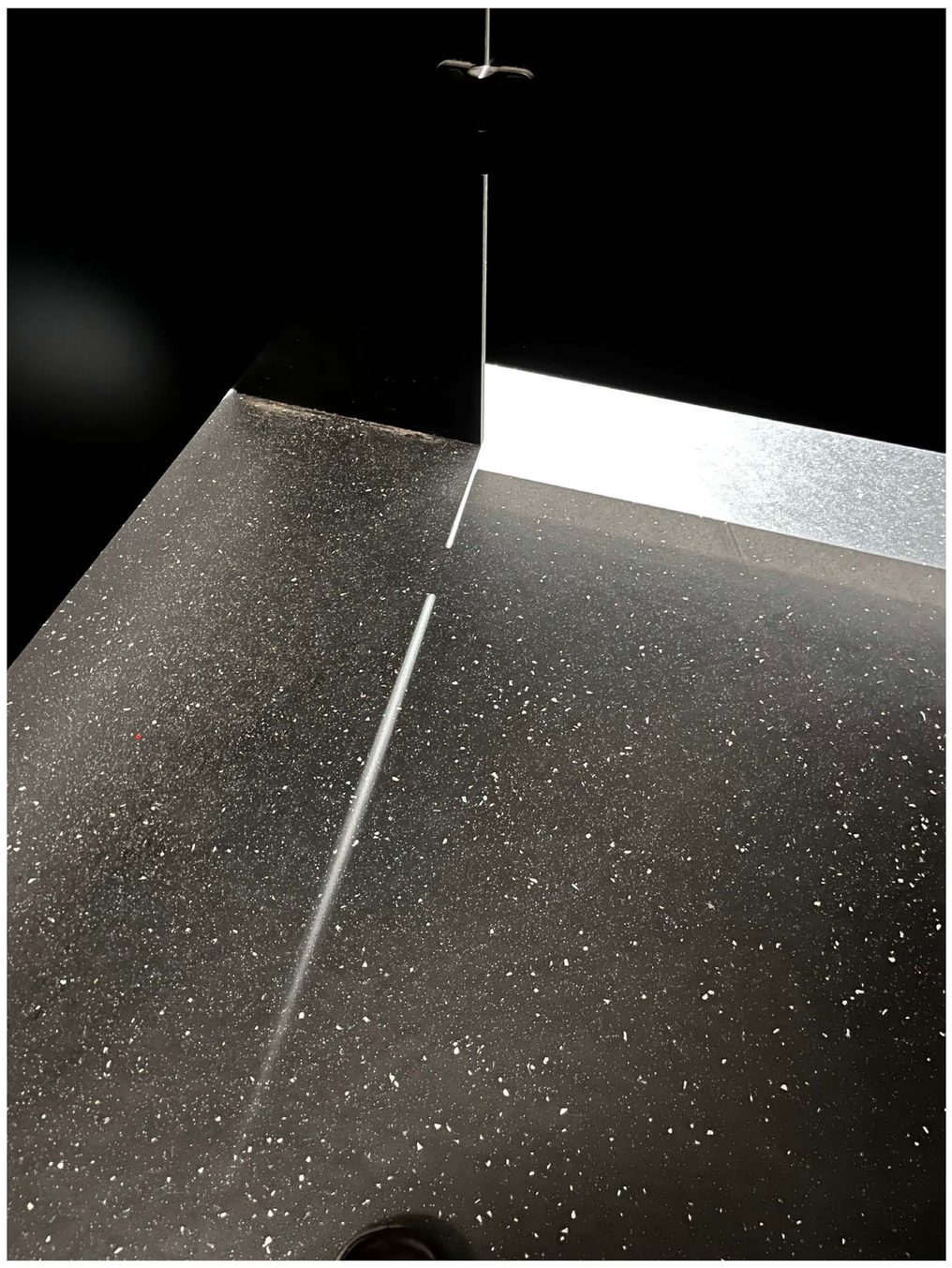

Figure 05.
Toilet cubicle Melbourne, 2023. Image taken by author.

In this spoken-word pop song, artist Katie Shannon talks about an undefined moment of time spent with their lover in the bathroom: drinking, smoking, sitting, talking. Generally, just hanging out, vibing. The scene is tender and delicate. Consequently vulnerable but not at all clichéd. They sing in a Glaswegian accent. Having lived in Glasgow, I imagine the bathrooms inside the cavernous tenement flats, tiled, painted in bold colours, dusty, cold. Steamy when used and forever damp when not. An inflection of the city itself. Dodgy landlord-led renovations typical of the cheap-but-sexy accommodation creatives make homely the world over. For them, this moment temporally 'expands and contracts', is uncertain and ambiguous. How for a moment in time, an event, one might escape a contemporary capitalist system that 'simultaneously leaves us over-stimulated and exhausted'[44] for something that only ever remains partially defined, but desirable because of this, then encapsulated in a fully defined pop song.

'[A]nd I can't quite remember feeling real/ amongst the series of disjointed things,' Shannon confides as they craft an uncertain space where different places and times are brought together in an open-ended way. Shannon takes those contemporary conditions that cause the burnout Byung-Chul Han theorises and, with *éros*, transforms them into delicate and tender events. Past experiences and intimacies are shared anew, distributed through song, allowed to form new relationships. It's polyamorous, yet poppy, and that's significant. The song could be described as a kind of meta-critique bringing a self-awareness of the interior depicted and the fragility of the theoretical poetic proposed—'perhaps there's an escapism whatever this is?' It depicts what it seeks to be its effects through several overlapping temporal and unstable interiors.

Putting aside for a moment the scene, the formal structure of the song provides a technique of embodiment, allowing an almost three-way interpolation: the listener embodies the pop song, the song the listener, which is in turn a reflection of the artist who is attempting to impart a theoretical sensibility in a poetic, visceral way. Pop is used as an

emotive form of embodiment. That moment in the commodity-form of a pop song, one with many streamable remixes in different temporalities inflecting each other, becomes this moment where the listener is invited simultaneously into a queer scene, queerly.

The scene itself offers another queer temporality in the ambiguous use of 'toilet.' Listening to the song one could be forgiven for visualising being inside a nightclub toilet cubicle somewhere that all of a sudden turns into a domestic bathroom. This feels deliberate, a spatial and temporal shift from the generic western European nightclub to the tenderness of coming down with a lover the following day. This scene is an interior temporally driven resisting chrononormativity.[45] In 'The Last Song/ present', representation and effect collapse on each other in the vacant occupation of a toilet, perhaps *toilette*, accessible through an unstable and amorphous temporal interior, one drawn from the fragility of 'whatever [that] is.'

> smooth synth keyboard perfect showroom pop cold yet soft generic and repetitive, can't feel foot again, distant cubicle door thuds shut on rubber pad, water gushes through wall, door lock clicks shut, hand dryer, flush, hand dryer, steps in leather-soled shoes, faux-marble digital print with tiny stipples under gloss, rustling, wiping, hand dryer somewhere else, distinct dry fart, wet fart, plop, finger prints smeared across door, quiet.

Figure 06.
Toilet cubicle Melbourne, 2023. Image taken by author.

0

'Death on the toilet is fantastically banal,' Max Porter writes. 'It is not humiliating because it is gloriously normal, and you are dead.'[46] Porter is writing about Francis Bacon's *Triptych May–June 1973* depicting their lover George Dyer's death on the toilet. Bacon trained as an interior designer, and was largely closeted about that fact. An interior reading beyond the obvious content understands Bacon's figures not as abstracted from the world, but as abstracted by the world. Victims shaped by forces beyond them, shaped by their interiors in perverse ways. The painting is three views from the same point, the

interior perverted. We're disoriented as we shift from a body on the toilet, to one under a light, and finally heaving limp over a sink. The interior shifts as much as the body. A transformation is happening here; Bacon makes space uncertain. It's hard not to see Dyer's contorted, twisted form as becoming meat, becoming interior. We see references to both mouth and anus but not *as them*.[47] As plumbing. As othering. George Dyer is like the toilet. Their twisted, white, rough trade muscles glisten like ceramic. They *are* that toilet.

In death, the body remains. Perhaps *that* the body remains, void of agency, limp like a shit, that's the problem? We see it as what it was, not what it is. Following this perverse line of thinking, we can consider the subject enveloped by their environment as a source of uncertain *potential*. The certainty of a positive 1 becomes the uncertain 0. In Tarot death means 'end' but also signals 'renewal' because death as an event *transforms*: something else *must come*. Tarot of course, can be used in two ways: foretelling a future that enforces a linear time; and as reflexive intervention into the present, re-focusing on something in a different, enchanted way. To think about its second use is to open the cards and death to other becomings.

For materiality, death is collapse of signification. It's powerful because it threatens ontology. 'It is no longer I who expel, "I" is expelled,' Julia Kristeva writes, concisely describing the spectre of corpses.[48] Tarot's death, in a similar way to Kristeva's abject, or Bacon's painting, challenges the border between the I and Other. Moving from 1 to 0 is drawing challenging lines towards radical immanence, and can be thought about by designers as a way to reconfigure—not just what we do, but when and how we do it. We see excitement in dirt, shit, piss, cum. It comes over heterosexist spatial planning, bad habits, mean social conditions, and disciplinary tethers that block the movement of thought to practise something else. We can, and I argue should, see materiality, the relations that designers have to materials that form interiors and our experiences of them, in this radical, transformative, uncertain way, because something else *will* come. At the very least, we should make movements before it shits all over us.

we need to stay

Vacant occupation, like theory, is what it does. Designing thought from these interiors, not of them, seeks ways of queering passages within the substance of their materiality. Passages that are not representational, but experiential in their own way, through the materiality of design-writing. Toilets try desperately to be certain, upholding majoritarian values and closeting anxieties. Their insistence on binary organisation—including functionality and utility—betrays a naïve, pure camp closeting bodies, viscerally pissing, shitting, bleeding, and squirting their abject back into the world, while the gaze remains averted. They are instrumental in the production of this relationship with our abject, what we choose *not* to see, smell, hear.

Looking back towards what happens inside these interiors, Hélène Frichot reminds us that, with the thinking-doing of design, 'epistemology, animated and extended [...] can be approached not in a strict way, but in an opportunistic and situated way, [...] an approach that allows the bringing together while remaining sufficiently distinct of thinking and doing via disjunctive syntheses.'[49] In vacant occupation, territories are *created*, that is to say, *more than* claimed or observed, and the designer-thinker forms relations with the spaces in which they, *I*, was situated.

The embodied methodology in this project invites a relationship to grow between the designer-thinker and the environment-world they are a part of, and eventually collapse 0-1-0. One that's subjectivity-forming and formed by that subjectivity, drawing attention to the multiple perspectives that can, and I would argue *must* exist to make uncertain assumptions and opinions on which design so often lazily relies. In the case of public toilets, we must remind ourselves that what we assume as 'normal', pragmatic, potentially useful is not what it appears, and space for other perspectives has never been more needed. Toilets express so much about ourselves and culture—but, evoking Guillaume Dustan again, 'that's not something one talks about.'[50] This is no easy task, because we must learn to be happy in dark rooms, creating complex, pleasurable circuitries, *loving* uncertainty's productive potential. This picks at who we are as designers, and how we approach what we do. In case we lose our nerve, Bacon paints an arrow on the outer canvases of their triptych: '*Look* here. Don't you *dare* turn away,' they say.

acknowledgements

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biography

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notes

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03 Hélène Frichot, *Creative Ecologies* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), p. 44.

04 Georges Perec, *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris* (United States: Wakefield Press, 2010).

05 Owen Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1868), p. 1.

06 Bethan Bell, 'London's Long-term Lav Affair: A History of Public Toilets in the Capital' (2022) <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-59785477> [accessed 22 January 2023]

07 Science Museum, 'Model of Jenning's patent water closet' <https://collection.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk/objects/co146940/model-of-jennings-patent-water-closet-model> [accessed 20 January 2023]

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12 MacCormack, *Posthuman Ethics*, p.110.

13 Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities and Queer Histories* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2012), p. 3.

14 Guy Hocquenghem, *The Screwball Asses* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2011), p. 8.

15 Hocquenghem, *The Screwball Asses*, p. 9.

16 This is not a critique of people who identify with such terms or actions.

17 See Travis Jeppesen's writing on Bjarne Melgaard's artistic practice: Travis Jeppesen, 'Splat', *Bad Writing* (London: Sternberg Press, 2019), p. 213.

18 See: Ashkan Sepahvand, 'La Pute Arabe' *Phile: The International Journal of Desire and Curiosity*, 2, (2018), pp. 69-83.

19 Caroma, 'Toilet Pans' <https://www.caroma.com.au/category-product/toilet-pans> [accessed 15 January 2023]

20 Reece, 'Smart Toilets' <https://www.reece.com.au/category/smart-choice/smart-toilets> [accessed 15 January 2023]

21 Social toileting cultures have a long history (too long for this text). The flushing toilet marked a significant turning point in how we relate to our own excrement through the automation of flushing and waste management with the individualisation of the act of shitting inside a closet. Prior to this in, the medieval period, gong farmers manually collected waste from communal latrines, which were often social spaces known as 'houses of easement' (in England). Further back, ancient Roman communal *xylospongium* (sponge on a stick) were shared by citizens in often lavishly mosaic-filled public latrines, which is another example of social toileting cultures, and by extension offering different spatial relationships with human waste.

22 Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1966), p. 34.

23 Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 2.

24 Beatriz Colomina and Mark Wigley, 'Toilet Architecture: An Essay about the Most Psychosexually Charged Room in a Building', *PIN-UP*, 23 (2017–2018) <https://archive.pinupmagazine.org/articles/toilet-modern-architecture> [accessed 30 July 2023]

25 Travis Jeppesen, 'Queer Abstraction (Or How to be a Pervert with No Body): Some Notes Toward a Probability', *Mousse* <https://www.moussemagazine.it/magazine/queer-abstraction-travis-jeppesen-2019/> [accessed 28 December 2022]

26 Ian Scott-Todd, 'Christopher Isherwood's Bathroom', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 38.4 (2015), 111–25 (p. 111).

27 Theorist Bini Adamczak's concept of 'circlusion' seeks to move beyond penetration/penetrated in sexual language by allowing the penetrated agency to effectively envelop the phallic organ or prosthetic. See: Bini Adamczak and Sophie Lewis, 'Six Years (and Counting) of Circlusion', *The New Inquiry* (2022) <https://thenewinquiry.com/six-years-and-counting-of-circlusion/> [accessed 28 December 2022]

28 This example is still a very interesting domestic interior in its own right, now part of the V&A collection. See: RIBApix, 'Paul Nash Bathroom' <https://www.ribapix.com/search?adv=false&cid=0&mid=0&vid=0&q=paul%20nash%20bathroom&sid=false&isc=true&orderBy=0> [accessed 30 June 2023]

29 Hocquenghem, *The Screwball Asses*, p. 15.

30 Jeppesen, 'Queer Abstraction'.

31 MacCormack, *Posthuman Ethics*, p. 110.

32 MacCormack, *Posthuman Ethics*, p. 109.

33 Patricia MacCormack and Ruth McPhee, 'Creative Aproduction: Mucous and the Blank', *InterAlia. A Journal of Queer Studies*, 9 (2014), 146–64.

34 More broadly, this obviously includes women with penises; however, the commentary and example here is on masculinities. I am also referring to practices of 'snowballing' among others who do not conform to the penetration/penetrated dynamic common in cisgender gay male-on-male sex.

35 MacCormack, *Posthuman Ethics*, p. 109.

36 Byung-Chul Han, *The Scent of Time* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017), p. 96.

37 Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin Books, 2008), p. 10.

38 For this point I must thank Korina Zaromytidou from Camberwell College of the Arts for an inspiring conversation and lecture.

39 'Circle Time: Money with Babak Radboy', *DIS* <https://dis.art/money-with-babak-radboy> [accessed 13 December 2022]

40 Patricia MacCormack, 'Unnatural Alliances', in *Deleuze and Queer Theory*, ed. by Chrysanthi Nigianni and Merl Storr (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp. 134–49 (p. 142).

41 McKenzie Wark, *Reverse Cowgirl* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2020), p. 64.

42 Han, *The Scent of Time*, p. 96.

43 Katie Shannon, 'The Last Song/ present' *Soundcloud* <https://soundcloud.com/katieshannon/the-last-song-present> [accessed 10 January 2023]. There are several remixes of this song; each plays with temporalities in a different way.

44 Shannon, 'The Last Song/ present', 2:10.

45 Freeman, *Time Binds*, p. 3.

46 Max Porter, 'Dying on the Toilet', *The Paris Review* (2016) <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2016/06/13/dying-on-the-toilet/> [accessed 7 October 2022]

47 Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (New York: Continuum, 2003), p. 80.

48 Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 3–4.

49 Hélène Frichot, 'Five Lessons in a Ficto-Critical Approach to Design Practice Research', *Drawing On: Journal of Architecture Research by Design*, 1 (2015), 22.

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[with]drawing-room: surveying the uncertain, the estranged, the monstrous

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abstract

This visual essay presents the design research project focusing on Gao Xingjian (b. 1940), who is a Chinese-born novelist, playwright, and painter in exile. He is also a Nobel laureate in literature (2000) for the universal validity, bitter insights, and linguistic ingenuity of his writings. This essay explores the under-researched architectural and spatial allegories of Gao's literary and theatrical works by interpreting his acts of withdrawal in search of a new perspective for meaning making in a time of crisis and violence most notably marked by the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–45) and the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966–76). First, this essay examines the traumatic process of Gao's threefold withdrawal into the uncertain interior of the self. It then focuses on how such experiences of withdrawal have led to Gao's post-exile play *Between Life and Death* (1991), and his literary invention of 'fugitive pronouns' to represent an interior that is unsettled, obscure, and vague. Finally, to explore the architectural potential of Gao's play, the design research project *[with]Drawing-Room* translates the narrative of withdrawal into a spatial performance in three acts through methods of scanning, burning, and tracing. Engaging with notions of darkness and uncertainty through thinkers such as Giorgio Agamben and Francois Jullien, the essay argues against the light of certitude often uncritically associated with modern technology and a rationalistic mind set.

keywords

breath-image; Chinese poetics; ficto-critical; interiority; LiDAR scan

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introduction

Reflecting the turbulent age of darkness within the shadow of modernity, Gao Xingjian's artistic and literary works are characterised by the creation of ambiguous images [Fig. 01, 02, 03]. These images often appear to belong to 'the order of the night and dream rather than the ordinary world.'[01] Gao's works can be interpreted in relation to the sinologist Francois Jullien's notion of 'vague-drab-indistinct' conceived through traditional Chinese paintings.[02] According to Jullien, based on Taoist thought, 'vague-drab-indistinct' is where the opposition between presence and absence, life and death, subject and object is dissolved. It represents a 'return to latency, when forms dissolve, features blur together, life comes undone, grows silent, and undergoes transformation.'[03] In this sense, the images and atmosphere Gao creates are referred to as 'breath-image' (*qi xiang*), a notion used in traditional Chinese paintings; where 'the energy of the undifferentiated fount comes into actuality and takes form, that image spreads as a breath-atmosphere.'[04] In relation to the creative methods and aesthetic qualities of Gao's artistic and literary works, which are driven by his never-ending journey into the interior, this essay poses several thought-provoking questions. Can Gao's creation of the 'breath-image', characterised by the sense of 'uncertainty' and 'darkness', offer a methodological detour in an era that predominantly values reason, science, and certitude? Does the visual and linguistic process of withdrawal into the latent and the fusional realms of the interior enable the conception of a new language within architectural and spatial practice, which is currently driven by quantifiable measures and predetermined outcomes? Can the Chinese poetics of the 'nonobject' and the 'unthought', in its quest for the unobjectifiable 'fount of things', provide insights for us to reconsider the gaps within the rationalist cognition framework grounded in Western science and philosophy?

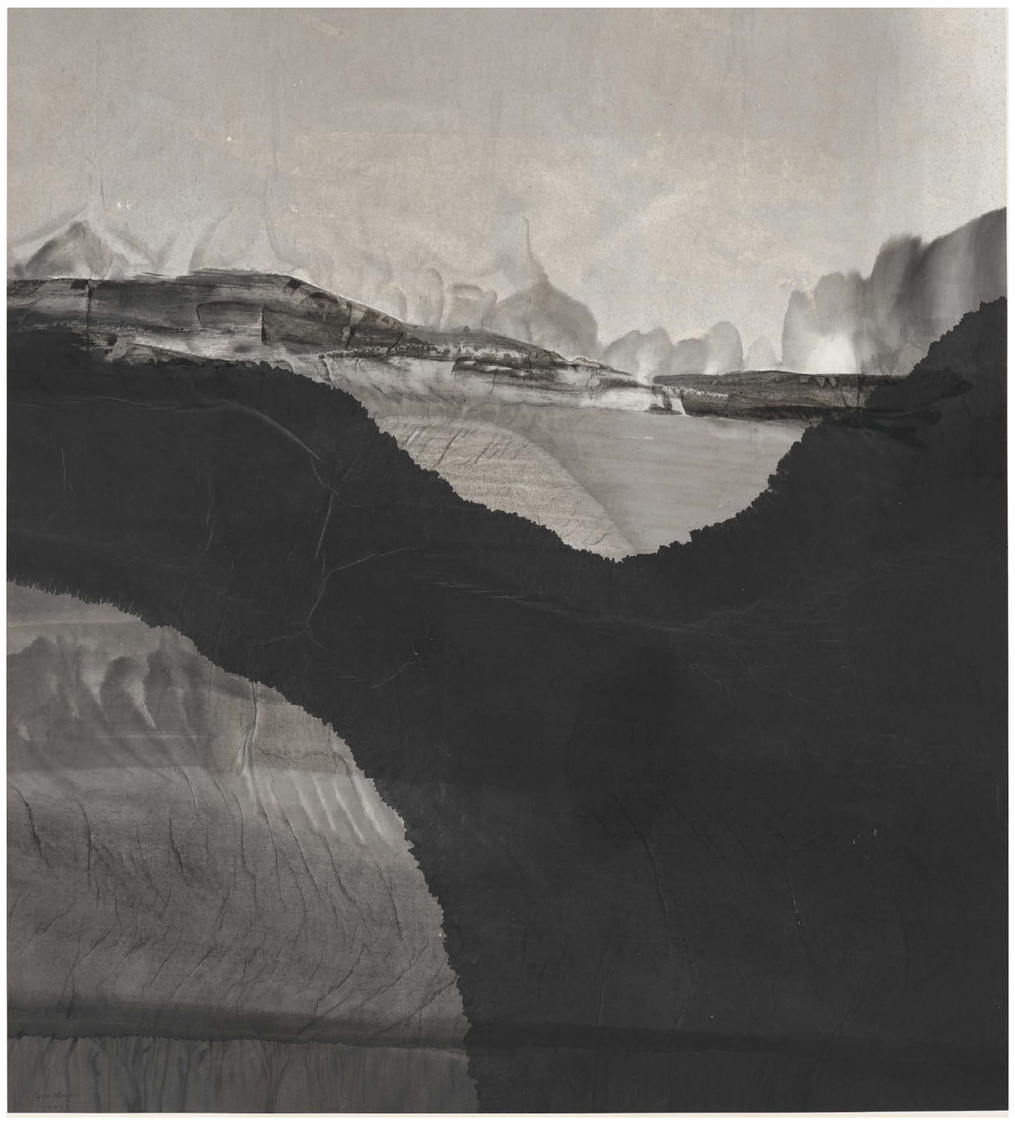

Figure 01.
The Floating City. Gao Xingjian, 2005. Courtesy of the Chinese University of Hong Kong Library.

Figure 02.
Phantasmagoria. Gao Xingjian, 2003. Courtesy of the Chinese University of Hong Kong Library.

Figure 03.
Ink Sketch. Gao Xingjian, 1999. Courtesy of the Chinese University of Hong Kong Library.

the threefold withdrawals

At the height of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, aware his works could be accused of failing to comply with prescribed guidelines of the Communist Party and realising that it was increasingly difficult to hide them, Gao Xingjian was 'forced to burn kilos and kilos of manuscripts—burn them in secret, in fear for his life, a logistically maddening process of keeping a flame alight without creating any smoke that would give him away.'[05] Such was his initial act of self-censorship during a politically turbulent time. Gao Xingjian was born in war-torn China in the aftermath of the Japanese invasion in 1940. A Chinese émigré and later a naturalised French citizen, Gao's formative years of growth as a writer largely overlapped with the Cultural Revolution, a decade of crisis when the intellectual and creative activities of individuals were suppressed, and literature and the arts were considered distorted representations of reality. Writers and artists whose works were primarily about expressing their creative selves were unceasingly silenced. During this time, Gao developed an 'irrepressible urge for artistic self-expression resulting in several hundred works of prose, plays, poems.' Eventually, these works could no longer be hidden, and they were all burnt to ashes under the disguise of the night.[06] The night of burning manuscripts marks his first withdrawal.

In the year 1983, a politically ambiguous time after the Cultural Revolution, Gao's absurdist play *The Bus Stop* was banned from performance and criticised by the Party as 'the most pernicious work since

the establishment of the People's Republic.'[07] He was threatened with the political death sentence of being sent to the notorious prison camp in Qinghai province. In a routine health check in the same year, he was diagnosed with cancer as a shadow was discovered in his lung through an X-ray scan. Having already accepted his imminent death, Gao was brought back from the brink of death when a later scan revealed the shadow in his lung had disappeared, revealing a misdiagnosis. The shadow of the double suspended death sentences marks his second withdrawal.

The reprieve was a moment of epiphany. He made a quick decision to flee Beijing and journeyed into 'the remote forest regions of Sichuan province and wandered along the Yangtze River from its source down to the coast.'[08] His third withdrawal was an odyssey into the dark forest through the Chinese countryside, covering 15,000 kilometres. He surveyed the fringes of Han Chinese civilisation and the margins of modernity, a landscape that unfolds in his autobiographical novel *Soul Mountain* (1990). It tells the story of one man's quest for roots, inner peace, and liberty. In the novel, Gao records an episode in which the protagonist accidentally encounters a Nuo mask, a horrifying face with beastly features, during his interior journey. This triggers deep reflection and a quest for his own uncertain identity:

> Man cannot cast off this mask, it is a projection of his own flesh and spirit. He can no longer remove from his own face this mask which has already grown like skin and flesh, so he is always startled as if disbelieving this is himself. He cannot remove this mask, and this is agony. But having manifested itself as his mask, it cannot be obliterated, because the mask is a replica of himself. It has no will of its own, or one could say it has a will, but no means of expression and so prefers not to have a will. Therefore, it has left man with an eternal face with which he can examine himself in amazement.[09]

The reflection on the mask brings him to the borderline between memory and imagination, between history and fiction. The mask becomes a fictional alter ego of Gao Xingjian's forbidden memory, and expresses his sense of loss, fear, and horror in the silent voice of a persona. As a result, his novels and plays are his intense examination of human interiority through the 'eternal face' of the mask he discovered during his withdrawals.

fugitive pronouns

The vision of darkness through Gao's threefold withdrawals into the night, the shadow, and the dark forest becomes an endless source of inspiration for his creation. These seemingly opaque and impenetrable traumatic events are interpreted in his novel and plays as an inner journey of the self that is restless, unstable, and constantly transforming. Influenced by Beckett's theatre of the absurd, Brecht's epic theatre, and traditional Chinese opera, the 'fugitive pronouns' are key to Gao's invention of the

'cold theatre.' Gao's theatre is one of uncertain interiority and is shaped by the aesthetics of exile. Within the traditional dual relationship between the self and the role, Gao introduces a neutral actor who freely mediates between the self and the role to create a sense of uncertainty. Through this tripartite structure, the very process of the neutral actor getting in and out of the role is presented as theatre. Through this invention, the theatre represents an interior space where a rigorous and critical reflection of the self can be conducted. Technically, it is made possible by dissecting the self into the threefold pronouns 'I', 'you', and 'she.' All three pronouns are used to refer to one person, the self. Gao believes the use of shifting pronouns to address the self creates multiple distances that form an unstable psychological space. Together these pronouns constitute a composite protagonist that is always in a dynamic and unsettled inner relationship. In the solitary journey, 'you' is created out of the acute loneliness of 'I' as a reflection so that dialogue becomes possible. For the same purpose, 'she' is often created out of 'you' to allow the author to project into a woman's psyche.[10]

In his 1991 post-exile play *Between Life and Death*, one of his most architecturally and spatially rich and daring experiments, Gao adopts this technique to represent a room as an architectural allegory of the Woman's alter ego, where the killing of the Man takes place.[11] Focusing on the boundary condition and existing in the intangible realm between life and death, reality and dream, the play is a detailed study of the uncertain human psyche and especially the dark side of the human being's inner world. It aims to reveal and examine 'the internal psychical experience in all its nakedness' that is hidden behind an ordinary façade.[12]

The play is set on an empty and dimly lit stage with a few props or spatial devices that act as symbolic signifiers during the process of the Woman's performance of a long monologue. The props include male clothes, a toy model of a house, a mannequin, and a jewellery box. The Man, who is killed, turns into a heap of folded clothes, and the toy model of a house triggers the Woman's recollections of her childhood. The fragments of the mannequin symbolise the mental collapse of the Woman and the jewellery box serves as an allegory of a sarcophagus containing the woman's precious belongings and memories.[13] The play is written as a monologue in a stream of consciousness entirely using the pronoun 'she' to address the self with a tone of extreme coldness and detachment. The obscure psychological space of the Woman is conceived as 'an inner world that is not governed by simple rules of logic' but rather as a meeting place for 'consciousness and subconsciousness, thoughts, feelings, desires and memories.'[14] After the act of killing, the room unfolds into a journey where the Woman encounters the hallucinatory figures as her alter egos. Blurring the boundary between the subjective emotion and the objective space, the constant unfolding of the Woman's uncertain interior is intertwined with the unending withdrawal of her room.

Tracing the aftermath of the killing of the Man, the room, now transformed into a monstrous slaughtering machine, is mapped as the Woman's inner landscape and marked by the never-ending process of dismemberment of her body: half a wooden leg slowly stretches out from under her skirt; an arm appears from inside the shawl; an arm falls off from the shawl; a body is being butchered; a hand covered in oozing blood of purple red. The fragmented body parts are imagined as islands scattered in a labyrinth, with each island representing a site of her hallucinatory encounter: a shrouded island with a woman in white; a shadow island with a woman carrying an umbrella and marking time; an island with a semaphore flag held by a masked man; an island made of cracked icy layers surrounded by a mass of blackness; an island in the form of a grey kasaya with a nun dissecting herself; an island like a long black robe cloaking an immeasurably tall and thin man with a painted eye in the middle.[15]

One feature of the aesthetics of exile, as a Gao Xingjian scholar Izabella Łabędzka points out, is the privileged position Gao gives to uncertainties, dreams, and oneiric poetics that 'embarrass the rational mind'.[16] In Gao's own words, his plays are 'set up on the premise of non-reality' and aimed to 'fully mobilize the imagination'.[17] The playwright suggests that the actors, while performing his play, should avoid relying on anything that belongs to the realm of rationality; rather they are encouraged to trust only their imagination. Another key feature of Gao's aesthetics is the notion of metamorphosis. Gao's theatre focuses not only on the transformation process from actor to character, from character to object, from object to illusion, but also more broadly on the transformation from good to evil, from love to hate, and from life to death.[18] Within the inner landscape of uncertainty, as Łabędzka also suggests, it is the modern man's 'scattered identity' that Gao's theatre so masterfully represents. The Woman in the story 'has to construct and reconstruct her identity by unending review of the tapes of her memory with recorded, overlapped, or blurred, incoherent fragments of her own life and the life of some other person, [which] reflects the lack of coherence, continuity, and order'. In Gao's theatre, there is no unity nor completeness; everything is in a constant flux of mosaic particles.[19]

[with]Drawing-Room

The performative act of the Woman in *Between Life and Death* imagines an interior that is ambiguous and uncertain. Through a structure saturated by the images of dreams, the play conveys a sense of vagueness and formlessness that escapes the logic of everyday language and any prescribed guidelines of meaning-making. Reflecting on both Gao's traumatic memories, his paintings, and his play, the design project *[with]Drawing-Room* traces the threefold withdrawals and translates them into architectural and spatial performance in three Acts.

Act I: Scanning. Echoing Gao's terrifying event of discovering a shadow in the scan of his lung that led to his withdrawal and reflecting on the autobiographical nature of his play, an act of LiDAR 3D scanning of my room is conducted. The scan is not to be taken as a survey in a conventional and rational sense but rather as a threshold towards a poetic interpretation. Gao's event of withdrawal is interpreted in the design research project as an act of masking through the 3D scan. By doing so, my room and garden are masked by a point cloud model with moments of shadows and uncertainties [Fig. 04, 05]. Shadow constantly haunts Gao at a deeply personal and existential level; hence, it has been a persistent subject matter in almost all his novels, plays, and ink paintings as if his creations are means of embodying the shadow image he once encountered. The 3D scan acts as an initial contact point with reality waiting to be completely transformed into an inner landscape.

The emphasis on the moments of obscurity within the 3D scan can be related to philosopher Giorgio Agamben's notion of 'darkness.' Agamben posits that 'the ones who can call themselves contemporary are only those who do not allow themselves to be blinded by the lights of the century, and so manage to get a glimpse of the shadows in those lights, of their intimate obscurity.'[20] He further suggests that in relation to the 'contemporary,' 'darkness is something that—more than any light—turns directly and singularly towards him. The contemporary is the one whose eyes are struck by the beam of darkness that comes from his own time.'[21] Rather than attempting to rationalise, correct, or clarify the aspects of the scan image that remain obscure, in this Act, we bring these obscurities to the forefront of our attention and engage in speculation about an existence that appears impenetrable through the grasp of the intellect. This Act is a critique against the certitude often uncritically associated with modern technology, epitomised by the LiDAR scanner.

Figure 04.
LiDAR Scans of My Room. Digital model created by the author.

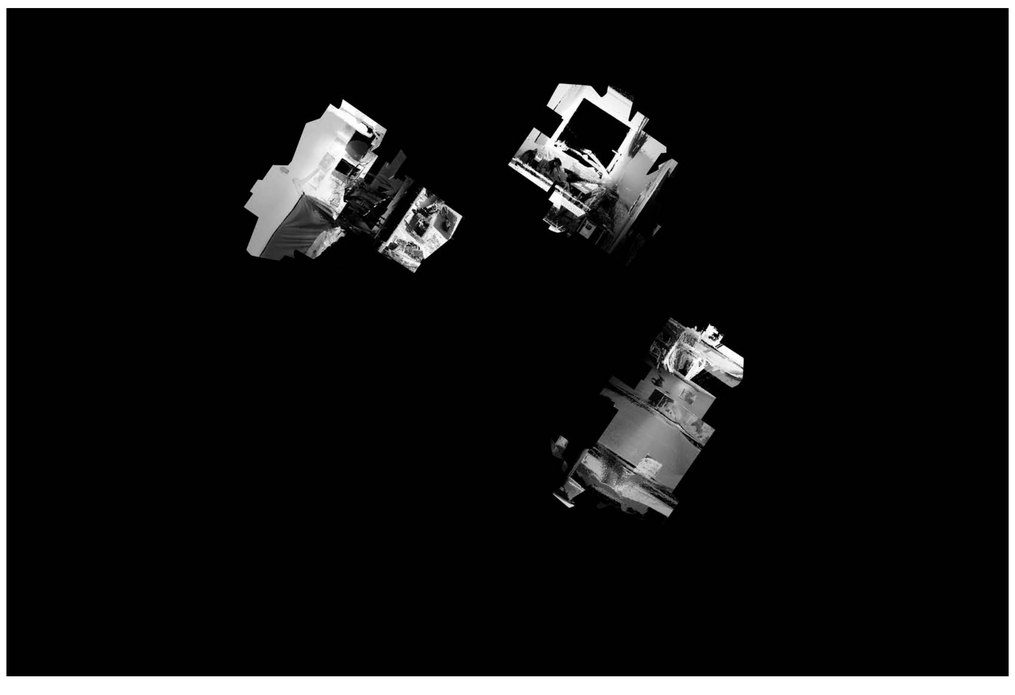

Figure 05.
LiDAR Scans of My Room. Digital model created by the author.

Agamben's understanding of 'darkness' as 'intimate obscurity' finds resonance in the notion of 'presence-absence' within Chinese poetics, as articulated by Francois Jullien. Perhaps we can get a glimpse of a certain insight by examining the 3D scan of my room in relation to Gao's ink paintings [Fig. 01, 02, 03]. Gao's paintings, recounting his experience of withdrawal into darkness, portray inner landscapes that evoke an atmosphere characterised by a 'as-if-there-were-as-if-there-were-not' quality.[22] In terms of aesthetic quality, they bear resemblance to traditional Chinese landscape paintings, such as those by Dong Yuan (934–962), where 'peaks appear and disappear', and 'clouds and mists now reveal, now conceal' [Fig. 06, 07].[23] As noted by Jullien, 'Taoist thought targets that opposition through its evasive formulations expressing the evanescence of the *tao*. That is what Dong Yuan paints, shrouding mountaintops in mist, making paths come out and go back in, treetops protrude and recede.'[24]

Jullien observes that 'painters and poets in China do not paint distinctive, much less disjunctive, aspects. They do not paint things to show them better and, by displaying them before our eyes, to bring forth their presence. Rather, they paint them between "there is" and "there is not", present-absent, half-light, half-dark, at once light-at once dark.'[25] When we view the 3D scans as an evasive shroud undergoing a process of transition, they begin to incite a poetic imagination of a very subtle and atmospheric quality.

Figure 06.
Riverbank (Detailed View 1). Attributed to Dong Yuan, Southern Tang Dynasty (937–976). Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Figure 07.
Riverbank (Detailed View 2). Attributed to Dong Yuan, Southern Tang Dynasty (937–976). Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Figure 08.
Riverbank (Detailed View 3). Attributed to Dong Yuan, Southern Tang Dynasty (937–976). Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Act II: Burning. The Act of burning re-enacts the night on which Gao burned his manuscripts. The Act is a 'poetic incitement' that interprets the traumatic event of the night. Through burning, the model of my room is turned into fragments and ashes [Fig. 09]. It also invokes the 'burning house' parable, one of the best-known stories from Buddhist teachings on the process of purification and the journey towards inner peace and freedom. Burning is here understood as a process of returning to latency and the undifferentiated origin of things.[26] It creates an obscure image and is the second threshold into an inner landscape. A few small caskets are designed to contain the burnt remnants that, through rescaling, also act as islands on the stage of the play. Each casket relates to an encounter with an imaginary figure during the Woman's inner journey. Reflecting the unending transformation of the Woman's interior, the stage is scripted to be reconfigured based on the positions of the caskets through design gestures of 'rescaling', 'shifting', 'rotating', 'layering', and so on [Fig. 10]. The Act of Burning as a drawing method thus creates 'obscure distance' from the logics of the everyday.

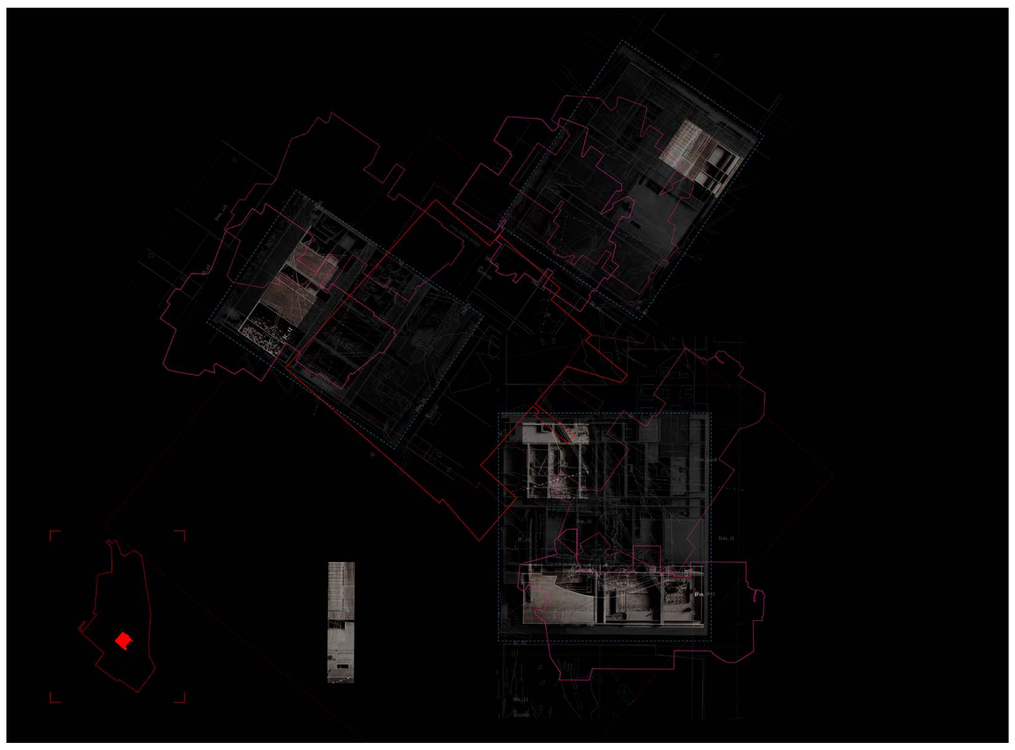

Figure 09.
Turning the scan of my room into burnt remnants. Digital drawing created by the author.

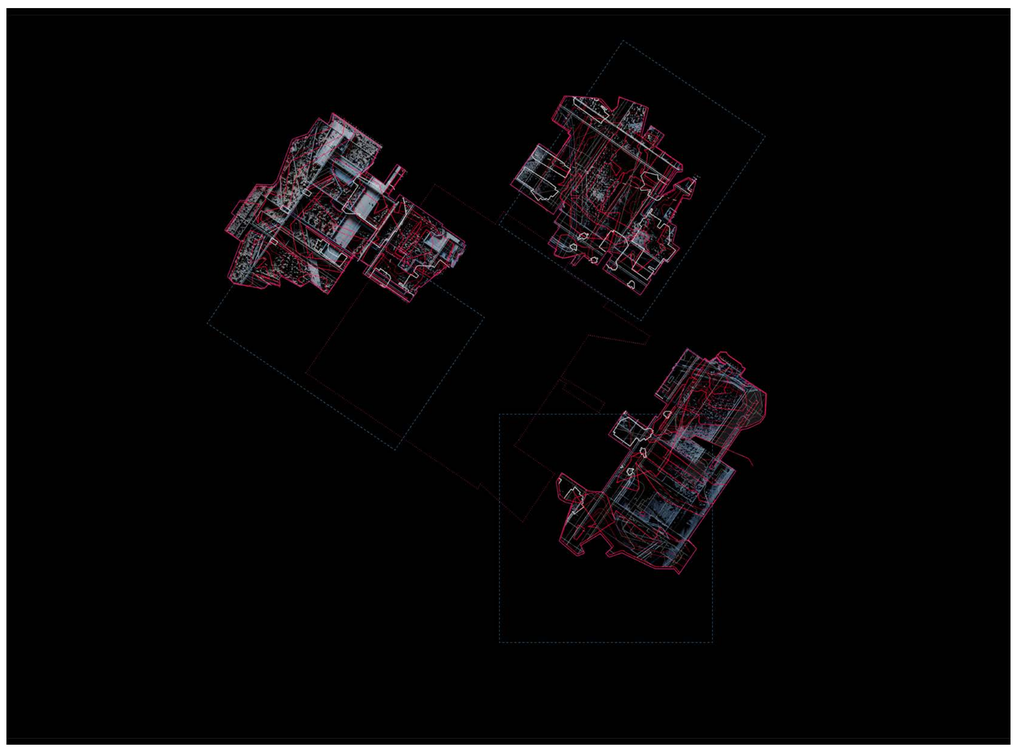

Figure 10.
Curating the caskets of ashes as islands. Digital drawing created by the author.

The twelfth-century Chinese theorist Han Zhuo developed a typology of 'obscure distances' in Chinese landscape painting and the various modalities of uncertainty and dimness:

> Sometimes 'the riverbank is close and the water flows wide, the space is empty with mountains in the distance':

that is the sparse distance. Sometimes, 'mists and clouds create indistinction and, on the other side of the river, one has the impression of no longer seeing anything': that is the blurry distance. Sometimes, 'the landscape is at once extraordinarily entrancing and subtle-evanescent': that is the concealed distance.[27] [Fig. 08]

The three traditional modalities of obscure distance are also discernible in Gao's ink paintings of the inner landscape. They invoke elusive images resembling a frozen river, a wide-open valley, or a range of snow-covered mountains [Fig. 01, 02]. Jullien's observations regarding the undifferentiated fount of *tao* (the way) equally apply to Gao's paintings. These images 'do not picture but rather depict [...] The de- signifies not completion but the reverse: effacement, undoing [...] It signifies, from within the figuration itself, a silencing and softening of representation's power to figure. Here, whether these traces hold back instead of moving outward or merge together and recede instead of bringing forth, they are anti-traces, taking one to the brink of the undifferentiated.'[28]

Consistently monochromatic and solemn in their treatment through layers of ink washes that follow spontaneous body movements and brushwork, Gao's paintings envision an interior world described as 'vague-drab-indistinct'. In response to the obscure qualities of Gao's paintings, the Act of burning within the design project introduces multiple 'obscure distances', dissolving the distinctiveness of everyday spaces and objects. Consequently, the image reflects layers of a repetitive process involving burning, scanning, and tracing, which in turn blurs the features of my room [Fig. 09]. In essence, the notion 'vague-drab-indistinct' is not to be interpreted as attributes or specifications to characterise a particular quality of things. Instead, they are meant to be articulated 'in sequence, all on the same plane, in such a way as to dispense with the differences among them, so that we do not grab onto any one of them in particular'; hence, they are 'linked together in a single intuition'.[29]

Act III: Tracing. A stage is envisioned by tracing the burnt remnants and gathering and curating the fragments to construct a scripted surface [Fig. 11]. It is scripted based on the narrative of the play to trace the immanent relationships between characters. The burnt remnants are thus like masks that are charged with the narrative potential of the play. Reconfiguring the bodily and architectural allegories of *Between Life and Death*, the third act translates my room into an inner landscape by taking these burnt fragments as imaginary islands described in the play [Fig. 12, 13].

Concerning the in-between, undifferentiated, and uncertain realm of Chinese poetics that escapes concrete attributes, Jullien poses a provocative question: 'could a mere preposition ("between") have more philosophical import [...] than what we usually recognise as accredited notions?'[30] While the concept of trace in Western

philosophical tradition 'appears to beckon openly even while enigmatically keeping the signified waiting', the trace (*ji*) in Chinese poetics 'has remained indifferent to that hermeneutics of the trace and conceives of the trace in terms of its pure phenomenality, in its mode of appearing, and hence in terms of presence-absence.'[31] In this sense, the trace is 'preciously between the "there is" and the "there is not" [...] It is present but inhabited by absence, and, if it is a sign of, it is of taking leave. Both empty and full, concretely form and evasive, tangible, and yet escaping at the same time.'[32]

The Act of tracing becomes a quest into the in-between realm of Gao's play. Following the tradition of literati painting, the trace resides in the intricate relation between painting and writing: 'The verb "to paint" (*hua*, to trace outlines, to delimit) was increasingly accompanied or even replaced by the term "to write" (*xie*). The painter no longer found it surprising to say that he wrote rocks, trees, a landscape.'[33] Within the interweaving of Gao's enigmatic images of painting and writing, the stage is carefully designed through layers of traces: traces of the burnt fragments, traces of the hazy boundaries of the 3D scan, and the traces of the words and sentences from the play [Fig. 11]. Some of these traces are perceived as absences, represented by voids, incisions, and erasures. Other traces are interpreted as presences, featuring distinctive elements such as a toy house, a jewellery box, a pair of old shoes, a pile of folded clothes, cabinet boxes, masks, and a mannequin [Fig. 12, 13].

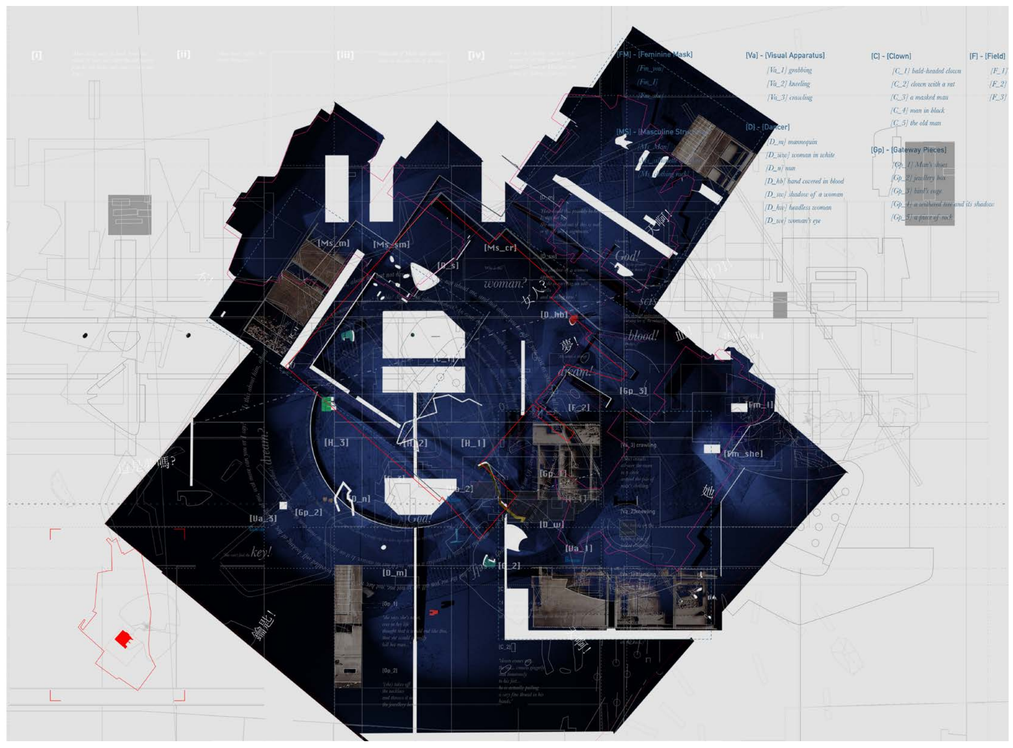

Figure 11.
Drawing the scripted surface as a stage. Digital drawing created by the author.

Figure 12.
Drawing a scripted surface as a stage with imaginary characters based on the play. Digital drawing created by the author.

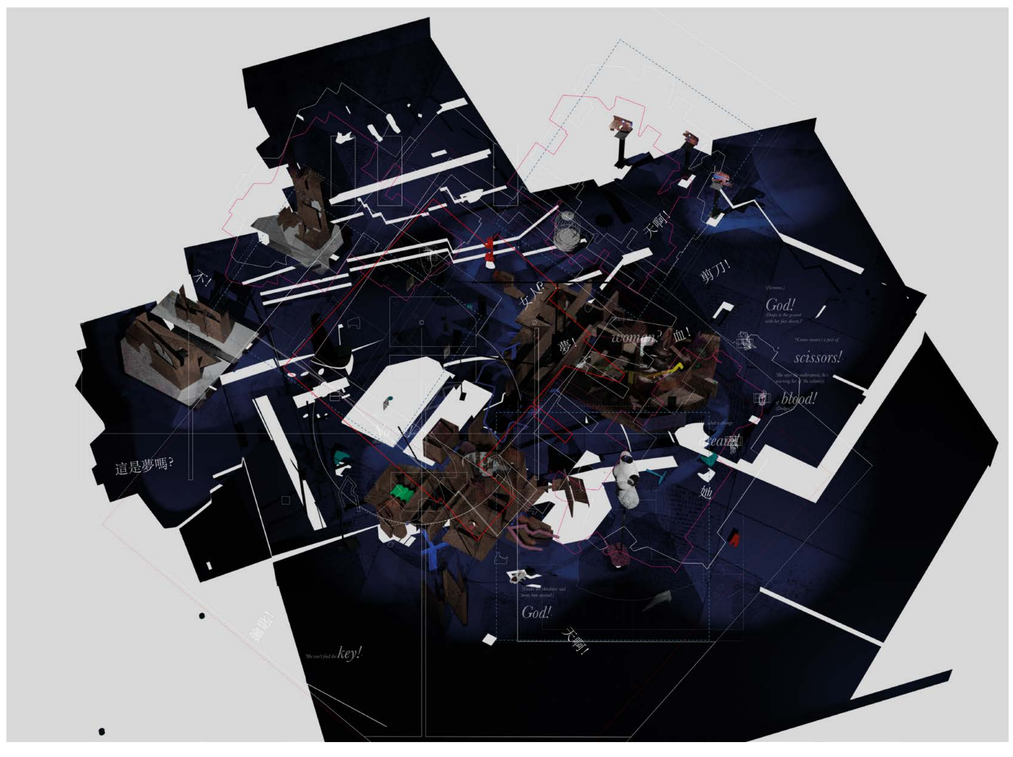

Figure 13.
Drawing a scripted surface as a stage with imaginary characters based on the play in perspective view. Digital drawing created by the author.

These traces are intended to evoke the Woman's visions of fragmented body parts and the enchanting encounters she experiences during her inner journey. Inscribed at the centre of the stage, in a spiral form, are the words uttered by the Woman as she traverses a boundless sea with no end. In this profound moment, where she has no more thoughts, no more words, no more feelings, and everything is veiled in a vast chaos of darkness, she questions: 'Is this a story? A romance? A farce? A fable? A joke? An admonishment? An essay not good enough to be a poem, or poetic prose which is not quite an essay? It's not a song, because it has meaning but no spirit, it resembles a riddle, but it has no answer. Is it an illusion, no more than the ramblings in an idiot's dream?'[34]

conclusion

Embedded within Gao's vision of darkness, this design research project explores in three Acts a new architectural and spatial language that examines the uncertain identity of the self at multiple boundary situations: between subject and object, fiction and history, memory and imagination, form and formlessness, reality and dream. The vision of darkness is not unique to Gao but rather intrinsic to Chinese poetics. The renowned Chinese historian Zhang Hao (1937–2022) suggests the term 'dark consciousness' to describe 'the polemics of crisis and contingency ingrained in Chinese thought.'[35] In the Taoist canon *Laozi* there are teachings that 'the luminous *tao* (way) is seemingly dark', 'the advancing *tao* (way) is seemingly withdrawing', 'the great image has no form'. Let us return to Francois Jullien on the notion of the 'breath-image': 'The breath-image breaks free from the mire of forms and unfurls figuration beyond figuration, or rather upstream from it, opening it to the undifferentiated and making it available as the "great image."'[36] Gao's theatre, most directly manifested through *Between Life and Death*, is constructed through an unending series of 'breath-images' with rich bodily and architectural allegories that break free from the constraints of logic. It calls for a return to the formless state of pure potentiality [Fig. 14, 15].

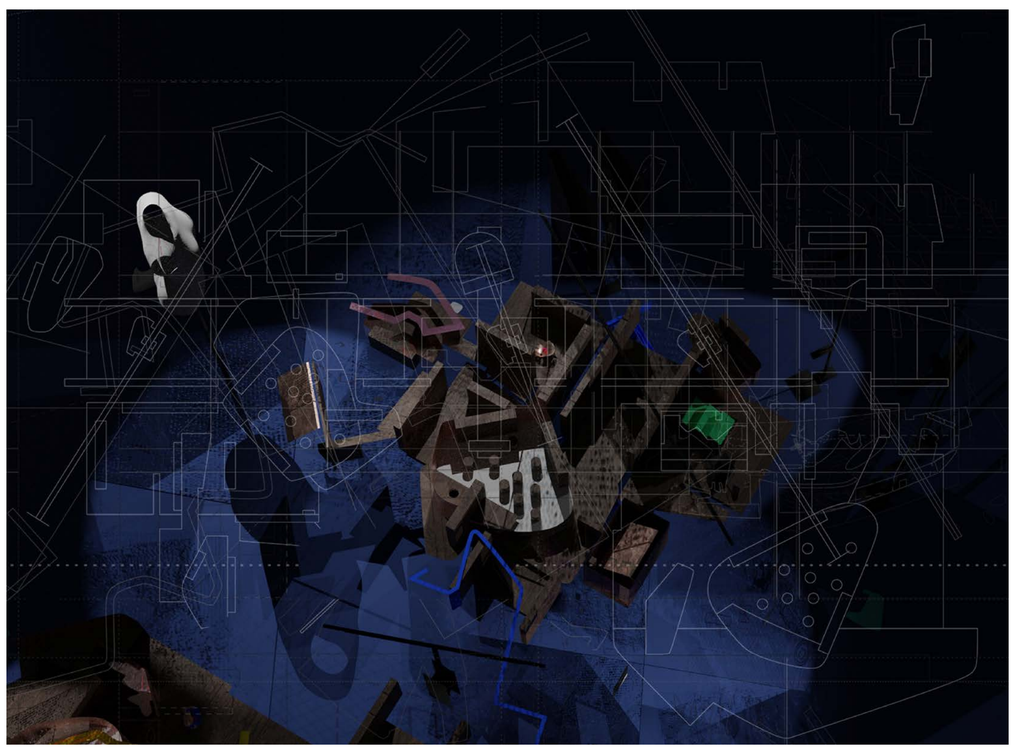

Figure 14.
Perspective view of the design research project [with]Drawing-Room. Digital drawing created by the author.

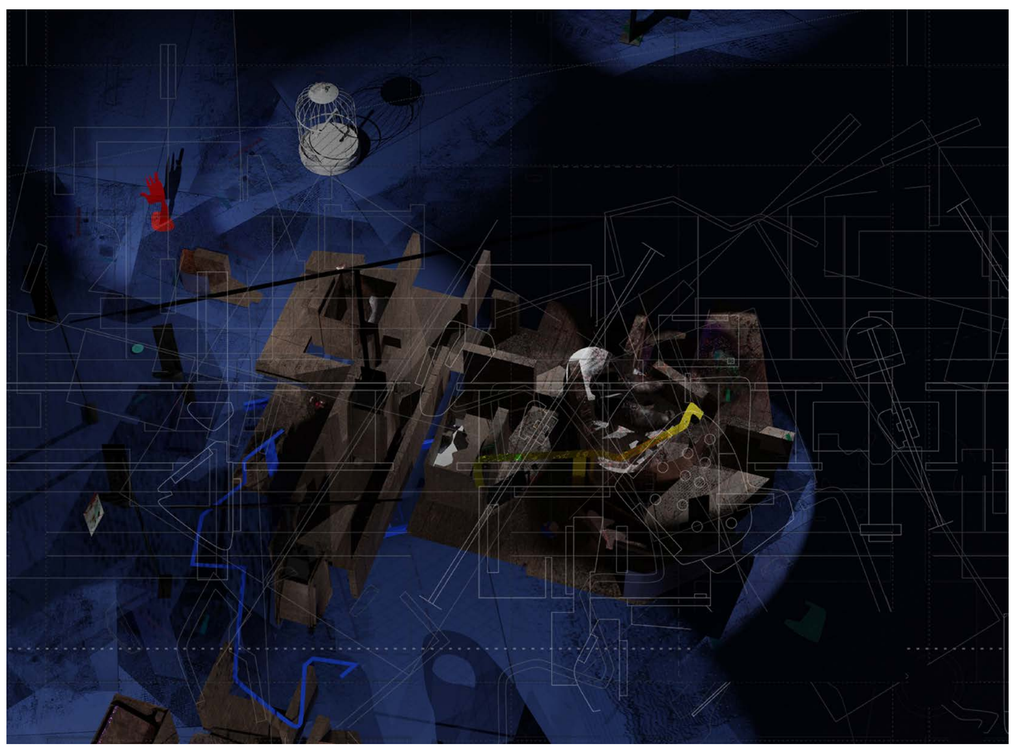

Figure 15.
Perspective view of the design research project [with]Drawing-Room. Digital drawing created by the author.

The play ends with the Woman, questioning her own identity and her thoughts in disarray within her uncertain inner world, exhaling her last words through a stream of departing thoughts: 'Is it about him, about you, about me, about her who is that girl, about her but not her, not about you, not about me, and not about you and all of you, just as what you all see is not her, not me, and not you, it's merely the self, but the me you all see is not me, not her, it's only that so-called self looking at her, looking at me, what more can you and I say?'[37]

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biography

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29 Jullien, *The Great Image Has No Form*, p. 34.

30 Jullien, *The Great Image Has No Form*, p. 94.

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a note to readers for essays:

waewae taku haere: stepping into belonging in storied landscapes

and

whakamana: embracing uncertainty in relationally responsible spatial design studio pedagogy for a flourishing aotearoa

These two essays and the projects they discuss exist in relation to one another. Both emerge from the Spatial Design undergraduate programme at Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa Massey University, in Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand. They describe two approaches to spatial design pedagogy embedded in place, in indigeneity, and in bicultural partnership. The first—*Waewae taku haere*—describes Indigenous modes of learning and coming to belong to place that are immersive, embodied, and collective. The second—*Whakamana*—explores expanded partnership modes of learning and design that are mana-enhancing, restorative, and regenerative. The different tones of the two essays reflect two complementary aspects of the work we are doing to decolonise and re-indigenise spatial design pedagogy, in ways that build on existing stories of place. At the heart of this work is an aspiration to create relationally responsible design communities in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous designers and knowledge-holders work together to shape flourishing futures. First, however, we must look to the stories in the land, and become attuned to working with(in) Indigenous paradigms. Shaking loose the certainty of dominant paradigms makes room for the possibilities that lie in uncertain, plural, and more-than-human ways of knowing, being, and designing

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cite as:
Jen Archer-Martin (Ngāpuhi, Pākehā), Stuart Foster (Tangata Tiriti), Kura Puke (Te Āti Awa, Taranaki Whānui), and Georgina Stokes (Ngāi Tahu), 'A Note to Readers for Essays: Waewae Taku Haere: Stepping into Belonging in Storied Landscapes and Whakamana: Embracing Uncertainty in Relationally Responsible Spatial Design Studio Pedagogy for a Flourishing Aotearoa', *idea journal*, 20.1 (2023), 150 <https://doi.org/10.37113/ij.v20i01.529>

waewae taku haere: stepping into belonging in storied landscapes

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abstract

The sites of spatial design practice are storied landscapes. Most spatial design projects begin with site analysis—a research process of coming to 'know' site, context, parameters, and opportunities. Even more fundamental is a process of listening; of attuning. In colonised countries such as Aotearoa New Zealand, the contexts of site include histories of colonisation and the marginalised stories of the Indigenous peoples whose lands, place names, and histories are often over-written by settler-colonial stories, education systems, and built environments. How might spatial designers attune to Indigenous stories in the land? What new processes, modes, relationships, and understandings are required? How and to what extent should those who are not mana whenua (tribal groups with local territorial rights, relationships, and responsibilities) have access to this knowledge, often located within oral traditions of story and song? How do we prepare to work with these stories—a journey often filled with uncertainty and emotion—and keep ourselves and others safe throughout the process? These are essential skills for spatial designers in a decolonising/re-indigenising world. This text-based research essay constitutes a journey of critical reflection and conversation around an experimental studio project the authors ran with third-year undergraduate spatial design students. Led by tangata whenua (Māori), tangata Tiriti (non-Māori treaty partner), and mana whenua researchers, the project was conducted within a bicultural framework informed by mātauranga and tikanga Māori (Māori knowledge systems and protocols). Students were introduced to a waiata pātere—a Māori chant that 'maps' places in a landscape—that had been composed for our learning community. They employed embodied methods of research and representation to generate immersive experiences that responded to the pātere and the stories in the land, as a way of coming to belong to, rather than to 'know', place.

keywords

re-indigenising; decolonising; spatial design pedagogy; embodied experience; bicultural practice; reconnection to place

cite as:
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karakia tīmatanga

Whakataka te hau ki te uru
Whakataka te hau ki te tonga
Kia mākinakina ki uta
Kia mātaratara ki tai
E hī ake ana te atākura
He tio he huka he hauhū
Tīhei mauri ora!

This karakia (chant) was used to open sessions for the kaupapa (project) discussed in this essay. It speaks of beginnings, having likely been composed by an early voyager to Aotearoa embarking on a fishing expedition at dawn.[01] When working with our students to step into the uncertain space of a bicultural studio, we used the alternative ending 'haumi e, hui e, tāiki e', in which everyone joins in with 'tāiki e'. This common ending performs the function of binding together everyone present.

mihi:[02] jen

Ko Ngātokimatawhaorua te waka, ko Hokianga te moana, ko Ngāpuhi te iwi. Nō Ingarangi, nō Kōtarangi, nō Aerangi hoki ōku tūpuna. Ko Jen tōku ingoa.[03] My ancestors (Māori, English, Scottish, and Irish) all sailed across oceans to Aotearoa,[04] facing uncertainty in pursuit of new beginnings. Over the last decade I have embarked on my own journey to reconnect with my Māoritanga (Māori identity)—which was sadly not part of my upbringing—and identify as both Pākehā (of New Zealand settler descent) and Māori. As a spatial designer, researcher, and educator, I have learned the importance of being open about my identity and cultural positionality, uncertainties and all. I am committed to processes of re-indigenisation, and to equipping students with skills for a decolonised, Te Tiriti-led[05] future in Aotearoa. Tēnā koutou.

mihi: stuart

I am fifth-generation tangata Tiriti (non-Māori New Zealander, here by right of the Treaty of Waitangi); my ancestors landed in Aotearoa in 1862. They were working-class immigrants escaping a post-famine Ireland that was entering a stage of major political conflict and upheaval as a result of British colonisation. Just over twenty years after the signing of the Treaty, my ancestors were unwittingly entering a land where the impacts of colonisation were both freshly present and still emerging. I stand today in a place where my identity as a tangata Tiriti spatial designer, educator, and researcher can occupy a space of true partnership in upholding Māori rights and values, as we navigate the challenges of building and living within a bicultural society.

mihi: kura

He puawai au nō runga i te tikanga
He raurengarenga nō roto i te raukura
He taku raukura he manawanui ki te ao

Ko Tokomaru te waka, Ko Taranaki te mounga, ko Te Ati Awa te iwi, ko Kura Puke tōku ingoa. As part of the developmental team of Te Rau Karamu, our Pukeahu campus marae (communal meeting grounds/complex), I participated in prestigious wānanga (forums/deliberations) with the cultural experts, and received ongoing guidance where aspects such as roles,

responsibilities, values, intentions, and protocols were deliberated carefully and consistently, creating a pathway of certainty for the design, build, and opening of this marae. One of my ongoing roles is as a mauri (caretaker of the energetic dimension of place) with the understanding that the marae is for all staff and students. Composed to be shared with all, the marae's waiata pātere (chanted song) 'Waewae Taku Haere'[06] locates the community within the landscape, providing knowledge, identity, and belonging. Tēnā koutou katoa.

whakatuwhera o tēnei kōrero

This essay outlines the beginning of a journey we hope will evolve into a pou (pillar) of our creative arts pedagogy. We are motivated by the need to take seriously our institution's commitment to becoming Te Tiriti-led (honouring the spirit and principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, Aotearoa New Zealand's founding document that established terms for co-existence of Māori and Pākehā in this land). This involves the work of both decolonising the institution and re-indigenising—that is, restoring the rightful place and power of Māori knowledge systems and pedagogies—in equitable partnership. Given it was only in 2022 that the history of Aotearoa's colonisation became part of the mainstream school curriculum, many staff and students are under-equipped for this journey. Conversely, as a new generation of well-equipped Māori-immersion school leavers enter tertiary education, the purportedly Te Tiriti-led learning environment may fall disconcertingly short of their expectations. We have a responsibility to rise to the occasion, to become ready to prepare all students for success in a Te Tiriti-led Aotearoa, not just within the dominant Pākehā paradigm. In order to achieve the university's Te Tiriti-led aspirations, it must first become commonly recognised that a different, Indigenous, paradigm exists, with its own knowledge systems and ways of being in the world. To that end, we developed a six-week project to introduce students to te ao Māori (the Māori world) and stories in the land. This essay reflects on the design and delivery of the project from the perspective of the rōpū kaiako (teaching group), as part of our ongoing efforts to decolonise and re-indigenise our pedagogy.

te rōpū ako

Our rōpū ako (learning group) for this kaupapa consisted of the three of us and a group of twenty-seven students (Grace Apperley, Hilary Armstrong, Kate Ashworth, Shyla Chhika, Nina Cole, Samuel Dunstall (Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Ngāti Kahungunu), Hannah Fahey-Quine, Briar Grounds, Celia Hamling, Amba Hancock, Lottie Harper-Siolo (Iva, Savai'i, Samoa / Palagi), Kate Healy, Rhiannon Higgs, Aidan Johnson, Kate Jowsey, Sabina Lacson, Mollie Nicol, Holly Patchett, Tegan Pirimona, Marie Preuss, Kezia Redman, Annie Sansom, Maddy Thompson, Libby Tonkin, Nhi Tu and Keeley Waller) from a third-year undergraduate spatial design studio. While our roles might conventionally be understood as that of the teaching team (Jen and Stuart) and

an expert, guide, or collaborator (Kura), we consider ourselves as a rōpū kaiako (teaching group) engaged in a reciprocal relationship of learning with one another and the students. This is in line with the Māori concept of ako, which means both to learn and to teach, revealing learning as a relational activity. For the three of us, our relationships and learning together began well before this kaupapa, something that was an essential precondition for the mahi (work) we will discuss. It also continues beyond the mahi with the students as an ongoing process of wānanga (deliberation), of which the development of this essay is part.

The students are a diverse group including Māori, Pacific (Samoan), Pākehā, and other tauiwi (non-Māori). We thus avoid homogenous references to, or assumptions about, identity and lived experience with te ao Māori. This also applies to Māori students, some of whom may have had limited access to te ao Māori due to colonisation. Even those immersed in their own iwitanga (tribal identity) may not be familiar with stories and practices of other iwi/hapū (tribal/sub-tribal groupings). None of the students in this particular group identified as mana whenua (from an iwi or hapū with local authority in this place). In terms of local knowledge, therefore, we were all in the learning journey together, with Kura as our mana whenua guide in the creative arts domain. This sense of collective endeavour was also embodied by the entry of the student work in the 2022 Best Design Awards, with all twenty-seven students named as designers.[07]

ngā taonga

As a rōpū ako, we were also guided on our journey to decolonise our relationship to place by three taonga (treasures). The first is the land itself—the whenua—the living manifestation of Papatūānuku (the ancestral earth mother). The second is a pātere, gifted to our learning community for the opening of Te Rau Karamu by Kura Moeahu, a leader of the local iwi on whose ancestral lands we learn. The pātere—'Waewae Taku Haere'—names important sites in the landscape, taking us on a journey and breathing life into the stories in the land [Fig. 01]. The third taonga is a person—Moana Jackson—a leader in Māori thought, particularly around Te Tiriti, and author of a guiding text for our kaupapa: 'Where to Next? Decolonisation and the Stories in the Land.'[08] Jackson's writing has a way of cutting through the noise around Tiriti politics and the culturally inflected semantics around the nature of 'stories', returning us to the hopeful promise of reciprocal relations of care between people of the land and people of the treaty. The stories in the land give voice to the relationship between land and people as a living history of inhabitation, and the possibilities of stories yet to be written. We would like to acknowledge this great man—he tōtara i te waonui-a-tāne—who passed away last year.

Figure 01.
Authors and students, 2022. Illustration mapping the eight verses of 'Waewae Taku Haere' in the landscape, and student responses. From Best Design Awards entry.

part one: setting

beginning to begin

For those who are newcomers to engaging with te ao Māori, there is often much uncertainty about how to begin, or even if it is okay to begin. This includes both non-Māori, and Māori who may not have been brought up in te ao Māori due to the varied impacts of colonisation. For non-Māori students, teachers, and researchers engaging with tangata whenua (the Indigenous people of Aotearoa), relationships may be 'tricky, contingent, uncertain and constantly under negotiation.'[09] Some may be tempted to act as cultural tourists of sorts, 'look[ing] for a simplified and neatly packaged instant experience, while the process through which an iwi hands on its knowledge to others (including its rangatahi) requires them to serve a period of apprenticeship first, both to demonstrate their worthiness to receive that knowledge, and to gain the maturity necessary to appreciate its worth.'[10] Requiring comfort with not-knowing, this space of apprenticeship 'eschews certainty, solutions, and judgement, and embraces uncertainty, contingency, reflexivity and engagement.'[11]

As we move toward a Te Tiriti-led institution and society, the idea that one might somehow avoid these kinds of engagements becomes untenable. Therefore, in order to prepare students for success, it is imperative to create safe spaces for modelling and engaging in cross-cultural contexts and partnerships. Penny Allan and Huhana Smith present one model of a design studio at the interface, stating that any bicultural learning environment should 'be preceded by an apprenticeship in the culture, its history, cosmogony, customs and language.'[12] We note it would be dangerous to assume any such apprenticeship could be a finite, commodifiable thing—a short course or box to be ticked that would then give anyone licence to proclaim themselves 'Te Tiriti-led certified'. It must also be safe and meaningful for Māori students. So how might we begin to offer the sort of cultural apprenticeship that is, itself, a meaningful beginning? And how might we embrace the necessary uncertainty of this journey rather than reaching for neatly packaged and readily co-optible knowledge?

the sea of uncertainty

> When the ancestors crossed Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa, they overcame what seemed impossible and realised that courage is simply the deep breath you take before a new beginning.[13]

To begin a journey into a new paradigm can challenge the very foundations of certainty in one's own worldview, which, if it sits within a dominant paradigm, may have been thus far invisible. This can be destabilising or, at best, offer up the exciting potential of the uncertain. In this era of change—climate change, socio-political change, pandemic-induced change, changes of hearts and minds—many of us already feel at sea, as if the land under our feet has liquefied. This was the undercurrent in our

teaching team at the beginning of 2022, as we faced a confluence of uncertainty. We questioned whether these were appropriate conditions in which to introduce a bicultural studio kaupapa and ask students to step into the additionally vulnerable space of apprenticeship. Ultimately, we decided that this was in fact an opportunity to reframe our relationship to uncertainty: to create āhuatanga ako (conditions for learning) that would help the rōpū ako to take a deep breath as we began a journey of preparation.

orientating ourselves for the journey

In order to embark on any journey, one must know where one stands, and what direction to head. Designing for the built environment, we often start with a site analysis, which generally frames 'site' as something on or within which to build. In Indigenous thought, the land is not a resource, but a living entity, with which we are always already in relation. What happens if we use spatial design methods to better understand the whenua and our relationship with it, rather than trying to 'know' site in order to commodify it? The kaupapa of our project became not to design a built outcome, but to employ 'spatial design fundamentals of embodied, multisensory experience [to] facilitate embodied engagement with stories of place, enhancing wellbeing, care and connection.'[14] This raised a key area of uncertainty around ways of 'knowing' the whenua.

storied landscapes

When colonists arrived in Aotearoa, they set about obtaining 'knowledge' of the land through surveying and mapping, with the intent to demarcate 'certain' boundaries and claim possession. Tangata whenua had different ways of knowing and recording landscapes, often through oral mechanisms such as story or song. Storied landscapes are relational; living histories of occupation, events, tūpuna (ancestors) and phenomena. Pātere are one way in which these stories are recorded and relayed to others, whether to uphold identity and belonging via reciting connections to whenua and tūpuna, or to facilitate the intergenerational transfer of knowledge. 'To be a mokopuna of an iwi or hapū was to know the stories in the land [...] part of an archive of belonging that was never far away.'[15] Colonisation attacked these mechanisms of belonging through land dispossession, dismantling of knowledge systems, and writing over the stories in the land. Honiana Love describes how the erasing of her ancestor's place names from the landscape coincided with the coloniser's attempt to also erase the people. The impact of this loss is still being felt today, not just for mana whenua 'no longer able to find themselves in the landscape,'[16] but for Pākehā who, in neglecting to 'listen to the stories that were already in the land,'[17] were themselves dispossessed of the opportunity to flourish in the context of a balanced relationship and develop a Pākehā identity as 'a diverse people [...] defined by living in Aotearoa and relating to Māori, not by being in opposition to Māori.'[18] As Rebecca Kiddle puts it, 'colonisation sucks for everyone.'[19]

decolonising relationships to the land

For Honiana Love, the task of bringing back mana whenua place names is 'part of the journey of bringing ourselves back.'[20] Similarly, Wildcat et al. suggest that 'if colonization is fundamentally about dispossessing Indigenous peoples from land, decolonization must involve forms of education that reconnect Indigenous peoples to land and the social relations, knowledges and languages that arise from the land.'[21] There is an opportunity for spatial designers to work together with mana whenua as Te Tiriti partners in this kaupapa, through supporting such moves as restoring Indigenous place names or making Indigenous narratives visible on the landscape. In order for these acts to meaningfully re-write relationships to the whenua across both sides of the Te Tiriti partnership, however, tangata Tiriti must first learn how to listen to the stories in the land. First Nations professor of education Jo-ann Archibald calls this 'becoming story-ready.'[22]

becoming story-ready

In *Decolonizing Research: Indigenous Storywork as Methodology*, editors Archibald, Jenny Bol Jun Lee-Morgan (Māori professor of Māori research), and Jason De Santolo (Aboriginal Australian creative researcher) gather accounts of Indigenous storywork across Canada, Aotearoa New Zealand, and Australia. The Aotearoa section focuses primarily on pūrākau (stories) and the emergence of a pūrākau approach across a range of disciplines: 'a unique methodology and pedagogy grounded within a Māori cultural framework.'[23] The diversity of sophisticated Māori narrative practices is also acknowledged to include waiata (song) and whakataukī (proverbs). In the Foreword, Linda Tuhiwai Smith warns that Indigenous storywork necessarily inhabits Indigenous and decolonising paradigms, rather than coming from 'a dominant perspective that has assumed the right to tell the stories of the colonized and the oppressed that they have re-interpreted, re-presented, and re-told through their own lens.'[24]

In her work with Indigenous knowledge holders in Canada, Archibald recounts how she 'had to learn more about the nature of and protocols for telling and using Indigenous stories, and had to get herself culturally worthy to work with these precious stories.'[25] She refers to practices of doing cultural work with Indigenous stories as 'Indigenous storywork,' in which 'storytellers, story listeners/learners, researchers, and educators can pay better attention to and engage with Indigenous stories for meaningful education and research.'[26]

Archibald offers an ethical framework for becoming story-ready that includes respect, responsibility, reverence, reciprocity, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy,[27] and begins with an invitation to work with the story. In an Aotearoa context, we approached our mahi through existing Māori frameworks that included consideration of tāonga, tikanga (protocols), manaakitanga/kaitiakitanga (reciprocal care) and aroha (love/respect). These sit within a relational Māori worldview in which everything is interconnected, linked

by whakapapa (genealogy) in which humans, non-human beings, natural phenomena, and atua (ancestral deities) are related as kin. Becoming story-ready involves developing an understanding of the relational network affected by the storywork. In our case, this network was activated by a pātere.

pātere as a mechanism for orientation and shared learning

Our own storywork began with an invitation in the form of a precious gift. In 2018, Kura Moeahu (Te Āti Awa) composed a pātere called 'Waewae Taku Haere' for the learning community of Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa Massey University located at the site of the new Pukeahu campus marae, Te Rau Karamu. The rangi (melody) was created by Ngātaihururu Taepa. The chanted pātere breathes life into the stories and place names of the local landscape and its histories of mana whenua occupation. 'At the heart of the pātere,' Moeahu says, 'is the gift of shared knowledge'; it is intended as a mechanism of shared learning.[28] Accompanying the gift is an unspoken challenge: to find ways of working with it that align with the spirit in which it was given; this includes becoming story-ready. In taking up this challenge, it was important that both we and the students understood the pātere, and its sharing of mātauranga (Indigenous knowledge), as a tāonga. Tāonga are not just objects of art or design, but purposeful entities with the ability to 'weave descendants to land, travel beyond tribal horizons and ameliorate life-crises [...] powerful symbols of tribal identity [that] remain inseparably layered within a wider genealogical cloak of knowledge which shrouds the whole of [...] Aotearoa-New Zealand in a living ancestral past.'[29]

establishing our kaupapa

In becoming ready to engage with the pātere as tāonga, we followed ethical principles to ensure the work was culturally safe, and did not inadvertently perpetuate colonial practices of co-opting and redefining stories.[30] This was part of affirming our commitment as educators to doing storywork that unsettles settler-colonial landscapes. We took up Kura Moeahu's gift of the pātere as a mechanism of shared learning, along with the accompanying challenge: to begin to remove layers of colonisation, decolonising place names replaced without mana whenua permission, and revealing te kura i huna—the hidden gifts of knowledge.[31] With the pātere as a guide, we explored the potential of a project-based cultural apprenticeship of sorts, in which students participated in storywork in a safe space, as a way of becoming story-ready.

learning as ceremony

The learning context in which this project was situated was already filled with potential for storywork. In 2014 our College introduced a curriculum framework informed by the Māori ceremony of pōwhiri—a ritual of transformation from outsider to one who belongs.[32] In the first studio block of third year, the framing concept is whitiwhiti kōrero, which refers to sparking of and engagement with conversation. We understand whitiwhiti kōrero to carry with it such whakaaro (ideas)

as permissions to engage, engagement as event, and potential for energetic transformation. Conceptualising the project as an event within a larger ceremonial framework parallels Shawn Wilson's notion of research as ceremony:

> *Something that has become apparent for me is that for Indigenous people, research is a ceremony.* In our cultures an integral part of any ceremony is setting the stage properly. When ceremonies take place, everyone who is participating needs to be ready to step beyond the everyday and to accept a raised state of consciousness. You could say that the specific rituals that make up the ceremony are designed to get the participants into a state of mind that will allow for the extraordinary to take place.[33]

As well as allowing for the extraordinary, ceremony also protects. Māori concepts of tapu and noa differentiate between the sacred and the everyday. These are spatial concepts, in that one moves in and out of states of tapu, with rituals such as karakia, waiata, and kai (food) activating the transitions. Tikanga serve as navigational guides, informing what we might consider holistic health and safety—a kind of physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and relational safeguarding. Undertaking this storywork necessitated determining the tikanga that would create the conditions for both safe and extraordinarily transformative experience.

part two: story

In this final section we provide further examples of how tikanga were applied as we stepped into and through each phase of the kaupapa. In the context of mutual, interdependent, and reciprocal relationships, the benefits of following tikanga were mutual, safeguarding both mana whenua and the knowledge in the land, as well as us and our students as we embarked on the journey of becoming story-ready and doing storywork. We use a narrative mode of storytelling to bring to life aspects of the ahuatanga ako (learning conditions) created for and by the project, shaped by our experiences of the eight verses of the pātere. Adopting a spatial conceptualisation of cultural apprenticeship, attunement, and learning as ceremony, we walk through incremental processes of 'stepping further and further in'. This is not a comprehensive or replicable 'step-by-step' process, but a non-linear series of relational acts. The steps are woven together with the pātere verses and student responses: immersive spatio-temporal experiences employing a range of embodied modes of narrative and atmospheric representation, developed across six weeks [Fig. 02]. We invite you to join us on our storied re-presentation of the ahuatanga ako that allowed us to safely step beyond the certainty of the everyday and open ourselves to the extraordinary.[34]

Week	Ceremony/project phase	Studio/site activities
1	Whakatakoto tūāpapa (grounding)	intro, site visits, site mapping, developing initial 1:1 experiential response
2	Whakaeke (stepping in)	critical and contextual research, concept generation, 1:1 testing
3	Whakatuia (intertwining—1)	concept selection and development, 1:1 testing, critical reflection-in-action
4	Whakatuia (intertwining—2)	developed design
5	Whakatau (exchange/settling)	design refinement and communication
6	Whakakapi (concluding)	design communication and (re)presentation

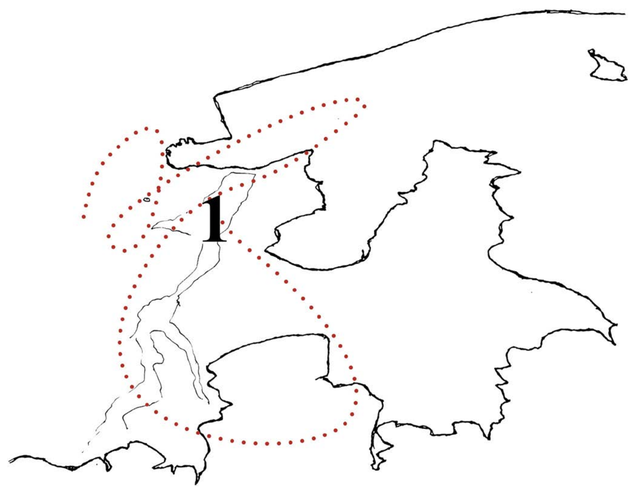
Figure 02.
Table showing six-week project schedule, weaving together a ceremonial and design process framework. Ceremony phases were inspired by pōwhiri framework. Note that extensive kōrerorero (discussion) also occurred each week.

1

Figure 03.
Ranga-a-Hiwi site qualities, documented by students Rhiannon Higgs, Aidan Johnson, and Maddy Thompson, 2022. Composite image by authors.

[Click here for the sounds of Ranga-a-Hiwi]

Figure 04.
Audio from *Ka eke* immersive experience by Rhiannon Higgs, Aidan Johnson, and Maddy Thompson, 2022.



Before we embark on our story journey, we orientate ourselves. We attune to our bodies, to where we stand, to the easterly and southerly winds, and to a primary landmark—the Ranga-a-Hiwi ridgeline. We speak the names of those who once occupied this land, both people and tupua (ancestral phenomena), giving voice to a storied understanding of place. We name the sensation of the wind on our skin. We acknowledge that this place where we stand is the site of a historic pā (fortified stronghold), now zoned for houses of education.

Steps taken to orientate ourselves to where we stand included:

→ hīkoi (walking the land)—as a teaching team in preparation for the project, and then with the students in the first week
→ listening to kōrero (oral communication) of the histories of this place—beginning outside our studio building, on the remnants of a decapitated hill—gathering at the memorial to the prisoners from Parihaka—spending time with the stories of this place
→ reciting karakia (chants) to open and close our sessions—acknowledging the pātere and the stories in the land as taonga (things of great significance and power that must be treated with care)—and creating a protected space within which to engage with them.

The students' response to the opening verse of the pātere embodies 'an anticipation in the dawn. The earth is warm and the air begins to vibrate with awakening life, heralding the long summer day ahead. Before the cicadas chirp and the first light rays blink, there is an almost-stillness [...] With every breath, the hau (breath/breeze/essence) ripples in the slowly rising light. [...] [Making] use of projection, sound and air movement, captured in the gossamer-like folds of draped sheer fabric', the immersive experience 'bring[s] to life the atmospheric sensations of wind, ascent, and finally descent onto the ridge, nestled amongst the trees [...] [A]udio draws attention to the breath and heartbeat, awakening the senses in an elongated instant of otherwise fleeting anticipation.'[35]

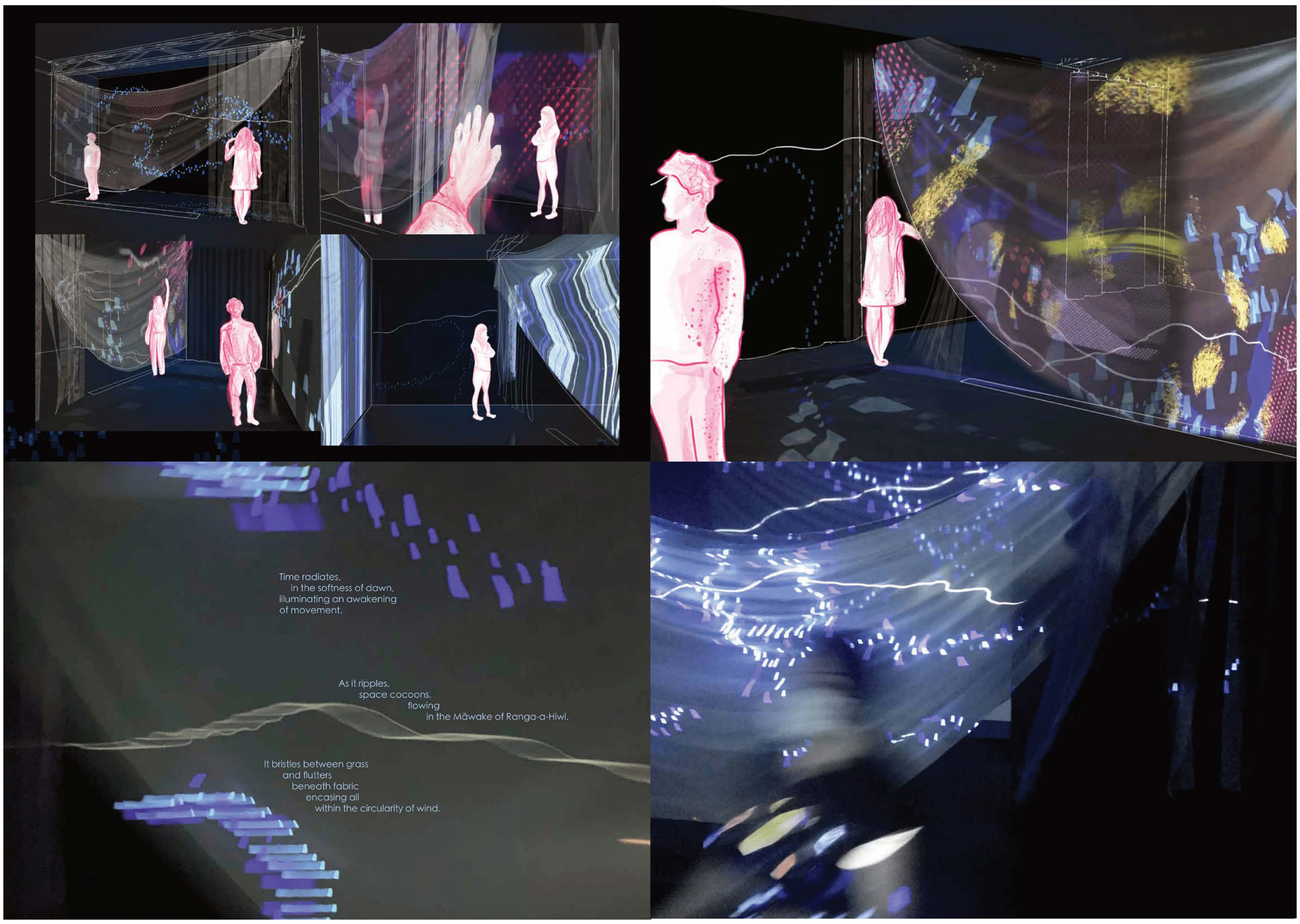
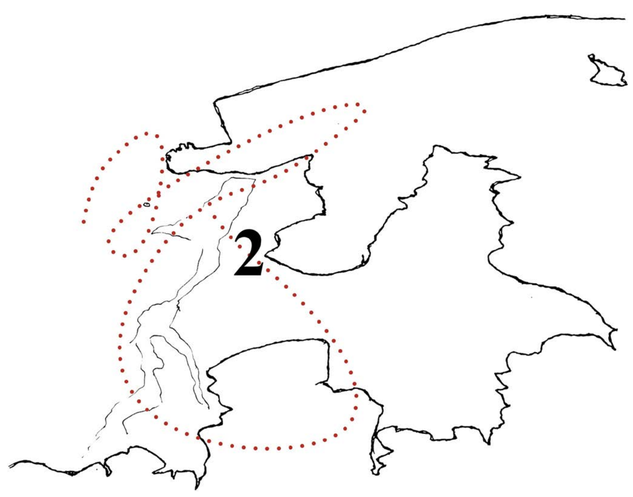


Figure 05.
Excerpts from *Ka eke*—a proposal for immersive experience by Rhiannon Higgs, Aidan Johnson, and Maddy Thompson, 2022.

2

Figure 06.
Waipapa site qualities, documented by students Nina Cole, Samuel Dunstall (Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Ngāti Kahungunu), Kate Healy, and Tegan Pirimona, 2022. Composite image by authors.



Click here for the sounds of Waipapa

Figure 07.
Audio from *Rukuruku au* immersive experience by Nina Cole, Samuel Dunstall, Kate Healy, and Tegan Pirimona, 2022.

In order to listen to human and more-than-human stories in the land, we must decolonise our modes of perception and ontological understandings. We follow the journey of wai (water) as it travels down from the ridge, becoming a stream and flowing out to the bay. Its path is alive with the deafening sounds of birds, insects, and then waves, resounding on the rocky shore. This is the landscape as it existed before the dual upheavals of earthquakes and colonisation.

Steps taken to re-learn how to listen included:

→ reading about and discussing the relational and interconnected nature of being in te ao Māori, understood through whakapapa that links people, environment, and other beings as kin descended from common spiritual ancestors

→ asking how we might listen to land and water as living and lively matter—practising listening with our whole bodies, and expressing what we ‘hear’ via this embodied listening through visual, audio, and spatial modes of representation.

The students' response to the second verse of the pātere 'follows on from the opening call and awakening of the senses, envisaged as a welcome and offering a form of mihi or pepeha [...] embodied through following the whakapapa journey of wai (water) as it starts from a single drop falling from te rangi (the sky), making its way from the maunga (mountain), through the whenua (land), to become the awa (river) and finally the moana (sea). Sound and projection are employed to spatialise the journey, simultaneously capturing the past atmosphere of the thriving waterway and its current shadowy existence as a piped stream.'[36]

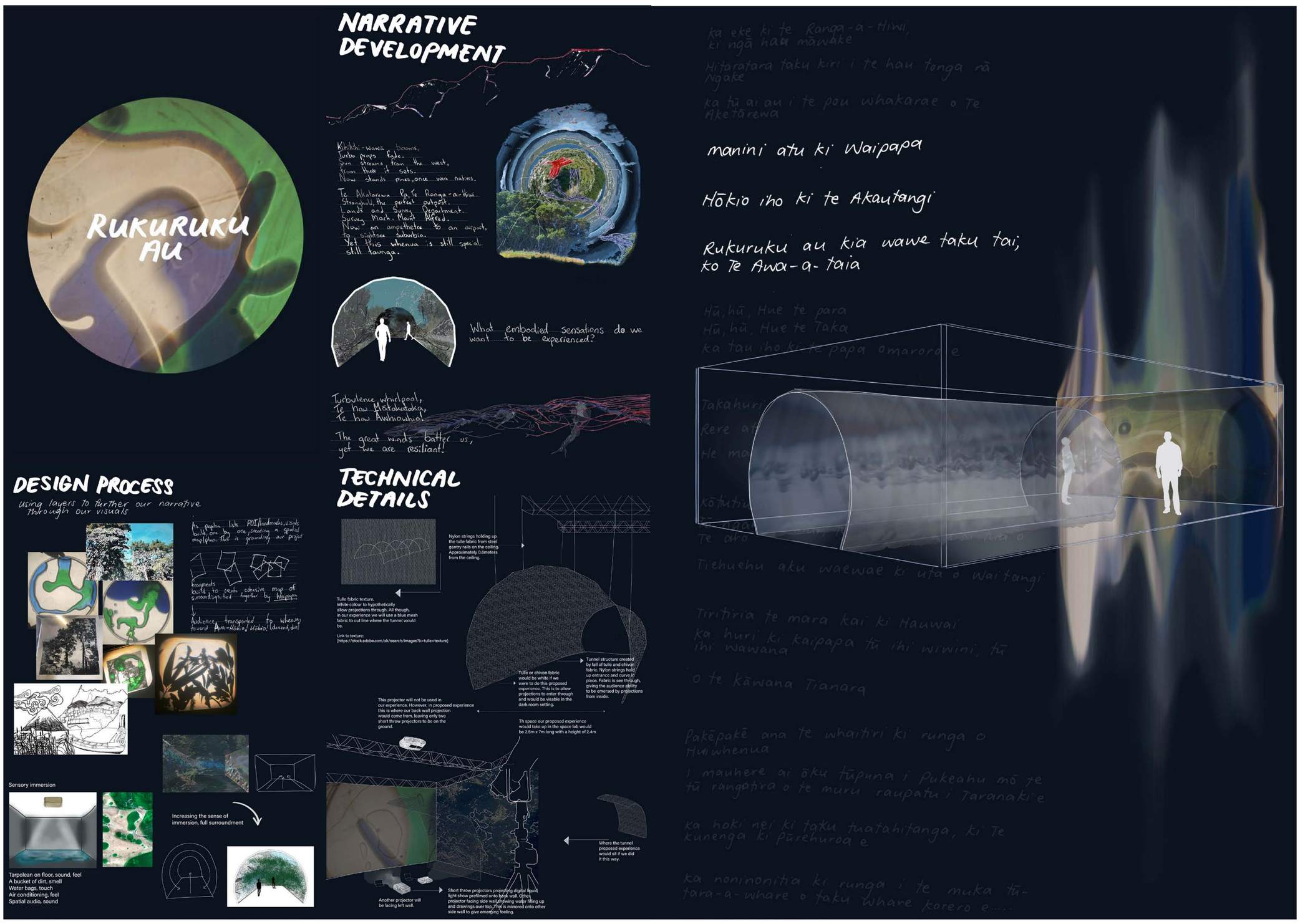


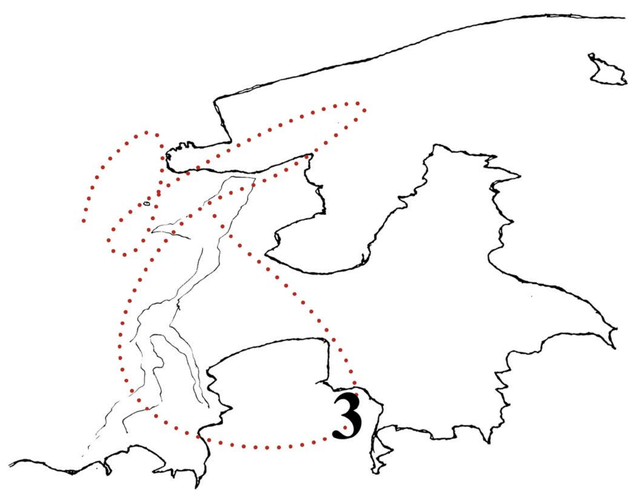
Figure 08.
Excerpts from *Rukuruku au*—a proposal for immersive experience by Nina Cole, Samuel Dunstall, Kate Healy, and Tegan Pirimona, 2022.

3

Figure 09.
Hue te Para site qualities, documented by students Grace Apperley, Kate Ashworth, Lottie Harper-Siolo (Iva, Savai'i, Samoa / Palagi), and Nhi Tu, 2022. Composite image by authors.

Click here for the sounds of Hue te Para

Figure 10.
Audio from *Āio* immersive experience by Grace Apperley, Kate Ashworth, Lottie Harper-Siolo, and Nhi Tu, 2022. Audio samples taken with permission from Whāia Te Māramatanga by Rob Thorne [Extended Mix], Rob Thorne (Ngāti Tumutumu), 2014, © Rob Thorne.[37]



The third verse names two south coast bays shaped like hue (gourds), and calls our attention to the booming of the waves. These sites have, in recent times, been places of sewage out-flows, airport in-flows, and daily tides of recreation and consumption. As we voice these names and that of a food cultivation area further inland, we are reminded of our interdependent relationship of care with the moana and whenua as that which sustains us. We recognise our collective responsibility to one another (manaakitanga) and the environment (kaitiakitanga).

Steps taken to care for our collective and relationships to land and sea included:

→ preparing to welcome the students by inviting them to tell us of any particular needs so we might design inclusive learning activities
→ forming the groups around shared connections to the natural world as a way of acknowledging the embodied knowledge individuals already brought to the collective
→ rituals of care and protection such as karakia and tautoko (a practice of indicating support—responding to each group's presentations by singing their verse)
→ regular talking circles to check in and share the load

→ approaching the project as a collective endeavour, with each individual and group contributing to the whole—and celebrating the success of the project in the same way.[38]

In the students' response to the third verse of the pātere, 'we are guided through a ritual designed to support, ground and hold us on our learning journey [...] we engage with the philosophy of kotahitanga (oneness) [...] Listening for the silent karanga (call) of [a] stone [...] we gather, hold, and bathe this taonga, then tuck it carefully into a kete [basket]. During learning sessions, the taonga are taken from the kete and placed in our hands, the warmth of our bodies slowly transferring to the cold stone [...] the stones are cleansed again, before being returned to their places on the shore [...] on the day of the moon Hina, a day of giving back to Tangaroa.'[39]

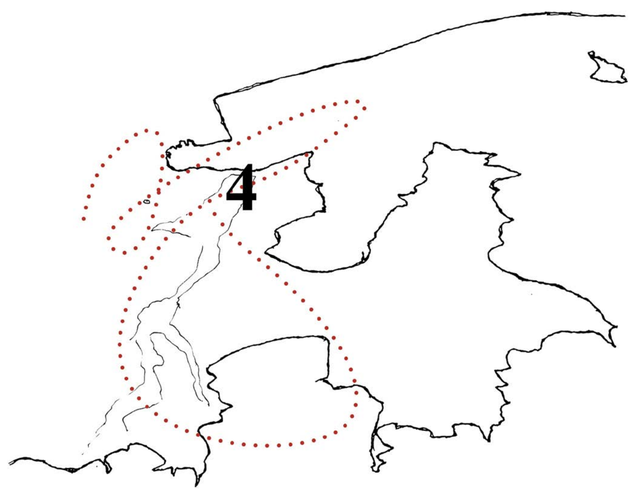
Figure 11.
Excerpts from *Āio*—a proposal for immersive experience by Grace Apperley, Kate Ashworth, Charlotte Harper-Siolo, and Nhi Tu, 2022.

4

Figure 12.
Matairangi site qualities, documented by students Hilary Armstrong, Shyla Chhika, Hannah Fahey-Quine, and Keeley Waller, 2022. Composite image by authors.

Click here for the sounds of Matairangi

Figure 13.
Audio from *Matairangi* immersive experience by Hilary Armstrong, Shyla Chhika, Hannah Fahey-Quine, and Keeley Waller, 2022.



Verse four of the pātere flies us over another food gathering/growing site—Te Ō—up to the maunga Matairangi, the nearest high peak from which to view the stars, commune with the atua, and observe te taiao (the environment). We are reconnected to deep time and the movements of the heavens and earth. We are reminded of the cyclical nature of existence as embodied by the piercing rays of the dawn.

Steps taken to consider time and reflection in our work included:

→ structuring the six weeks as ceremony
→ incorporating unstructured time for discussion and reflection: Lottie (Samoan) observed ‘that the conversations and reflection[s] […] took up quite a bit of time but I think creativity is often produced best through talanoa and times for reflection […] I wish there were more papers like this as I believe it would open up a whole other world to university and working collectively’; Rhiannon (Pākehā) reflected on ‘the importance of reaching beyond what you know […] it really felt like there was a shift that was beginning to happen within me—in being more confident and aware of perspectives and beliefs beyond the one I have grown up with […] There were times in which I felt

like this was more than an assignment, but a gateway into our future practice'[40]

→ engaging in ongoing wānanga as a rōpū kaiako—a process of deep reflection, kōrerorero, and writing as a transformative practice.

The students' response to the fourth verse of the pātere offers 'a meditative space for reflection [...] a place from which to face the night sky [...] Audio and projection [evoke] the atmosphere of the hilltop at dusk—wind, rustling trees and harakeke, cicadas. As the sun sets in the west [...] the bright stars of the night sky appear, stretching from one horizon to the other [...] time suspended in an elongated night [...] a time for reflection [...] for sharing those conversations that flow more easily in the dark [...] [as] the sun rise[s] in the east [...] we emerge from the tranquility and closeness of the shared experience back into the energy of the day ahead.'[41]

Figure 14.
Excerpts from *Matairangi*—a proposal for immersive experience by Hilary Armstrong, Shyla Chhika, Hannah Fahey-Quine, and Keeley Waller, 2022.

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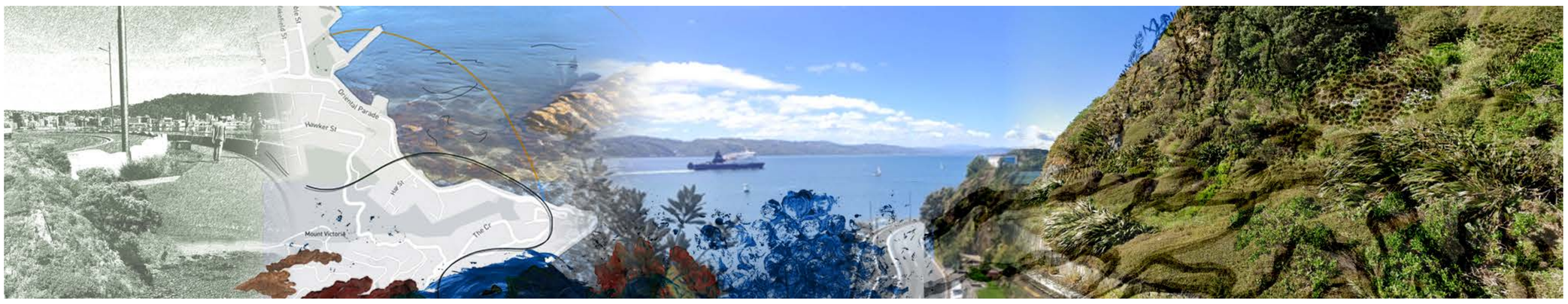
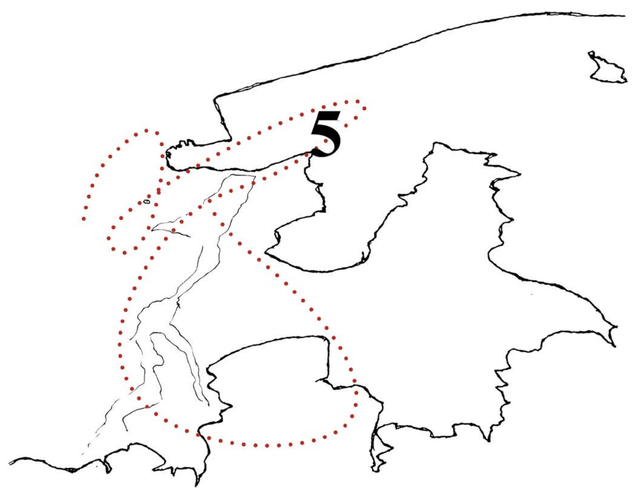


Figure 15.
Waihirere site qualities, documented by students Briar Grounds, Celia Hamling, Sabina Lacson, and Millie Nicol, 2022. Composite image by authors.

[Click here for the sounds of Waihirere]

Figure 16.
Audio from *Kōtiutiu* immersive experience by Briar Grounds, Celia Hamling, Sabina Lacson, and Millie Nicol, 2022.



In verse five, our attention is drawn to the rushing energies of water—gushing over a cliff and building as waves that strike the shore. Standing in the face of these energies were once Māori settlements. We are reminded that, despite the forces of colonisation that attempted to sweep them away, they remain—rooted to the land, caretaking the stories, embodying strength and continuity. We splash inland through wetlands, doing the work of gathering food and resources.

As we write this, communities in the north and east of the North Island are recovering from severe weather events and flooding. The power of water to endanger lives and livelihoods is amplified by climate change and the ways in which the settler-colonial built environment has neglected to listen to the stories and signs in the land. It is imperative that we attune to both the nourishing and dangerous characteristics of water, and similarly, of flows of knowledge. In pre-colonial Māori society, the ability to read stories and signs in the land was carefully protected through tōhunga (spiritual experts) and whare wānanga (sacred schools of learning). Knowledge was passed down intergenerationally through storytelling, song, dance, and material practices such as carving and weaving. Disrupted by colonisation, many generations of Māori have worked tirelessly to restore these flows. We must therefore abandon any sense of entitlement to knowledge and certainty. Without the necessary cultural apprenticeship, access to both nourishment and the required protection from these flows of knowledge may be compromised.

Steps taken to understand the flows of knowledge and accept uncertainty included:

→ ensuring that the knowledge we were working with did not exceed the level of that already accessible to the descendants of those connected to the land and the stories

→ becoming okay with not knowing, and acknowledging what we didn't know

→ embracing embodied ways of knowing, through the senses, that privilege face-to-face relationships and plural, subjective experience over objective certainty.

The students' response to the fifth verse of the pātere 'resumes at Waihirere pā, where [...] heavy rain brings a flood that sweeps through and surges out to sea.' The proposed experience, incorporating projection mapping, sound, light and large-scale installation, 'embodies a flowing body of water [...] [it] invites people to become water, feeling the sensation of its movements, before returning to our bodies with a new sense of our shared relations with water and site.'[42]

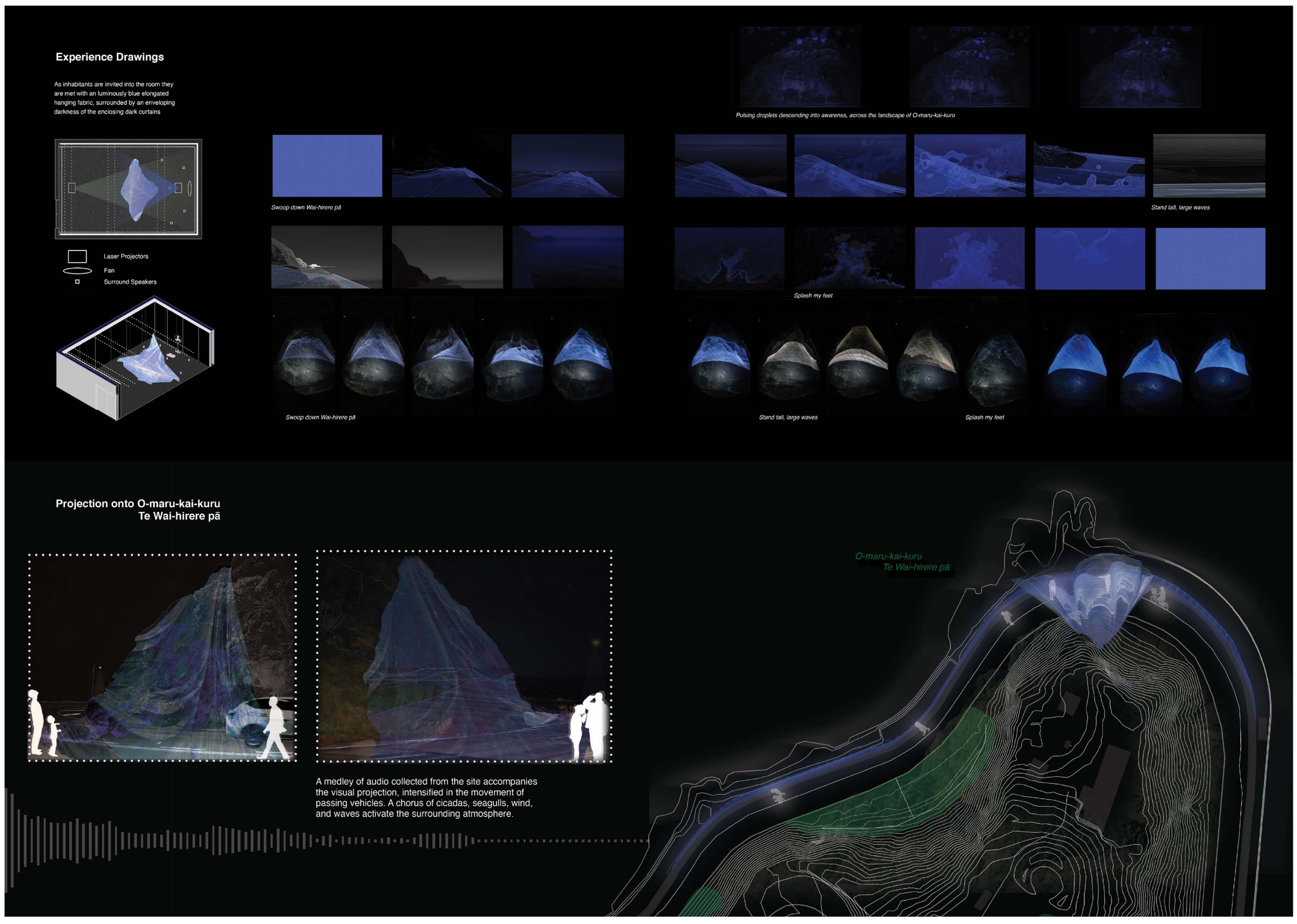


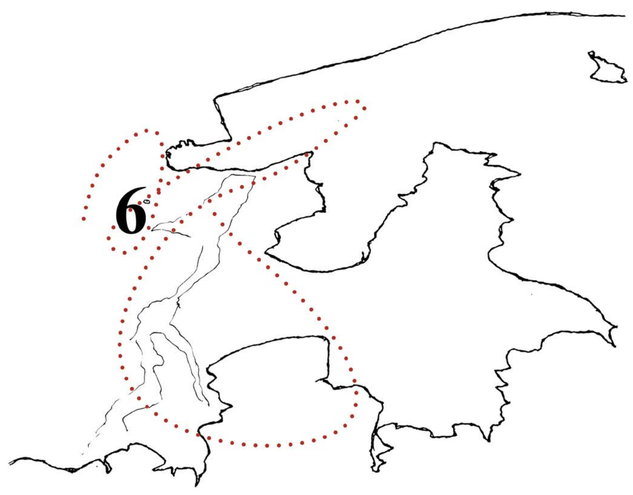
Figure 17.
Excerpts from *Kōtiutiu*—a proposal for immersive experience by Briar Grounds, Celia Hamling, Sabina Lacson, and Millie Nicol, 2022.

6

Figure 18.
Hauwai site qualities, documented by students Amba Hancock, Kate Jowsey, Holly Patchett, and Kezia Redman, 2022. Composite image by authors.

Click here for the sounds of Hauwai

Figure 19.
Audio from *Tiritiria* immersive experience by Amba Hancock, Kate Jowsey, Holly Patchett, and Kezia Redman, 2022.



In verse six, we turn to what was once a thriving wetland and food gathering area, with extensive cultivations nearby. The former was drained by natural then settler-colonial forces and prisoner labour. The latter became the grounds and residence of the seat of the Crown's power in Aotearoa—Government House. We ponder questions of land rights, food sovereignty, and the over-writing of the stories in the land by colonisation and the contemporary urban environment.

Steps taken to grapple with the colonised landscape included:

→ reading about and discussing Te Tiriti and the history of colonisation in this place
→ learning from Moana Jackson's 'Where to Next?'—embracing the promises of reconciliation offered by Te Tiriti, of an 'ethic of restoration,'[43] a 'politics of love,'[44] and the power of the stories in the land to 'allow a different way of thinking about how to ease the hurt and hara [violation] that colonisation causes'[45]
→ turning to notions of renewal and growth.

The students' response to the sixth verse of the pātere took the form of 'a light and soundscape, experienced behind closed eyes—a seeing without seeing [...] the pātere conjures landscapes of rich wetlands and cultivation areas [...] no longer visible through the eyes of the colonised mind [...] But beneath our feet lies the same earth, ready to be turned, to at once reveal the past and prepare for new growth. Driven by an impossible desire to till the soil beneath the concrete, [we adopt] a non-human lens in order to see differently [...] We are transported to the sensorium of the cicada as it journeys from subterranean hibernation up into Te Ao Marama—the world of light.'[46]

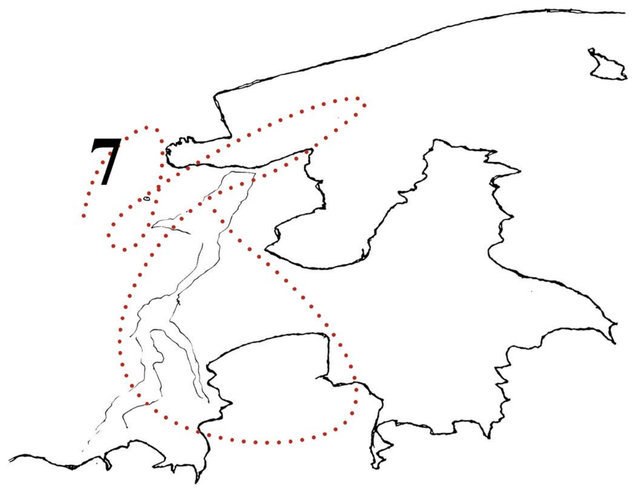
Figure 20.
Excerpts from *Tiritiria*—a proposal for immersive experience by Amba Hancock, Kate Jowsey, Holly Patchett, and Kezia Redman, 2022.

7

Figure 21.
Huriwhenua site qualities, documented by students Marie Preuss, Annie Sansom, and Libby Tonkin, 2022. Composite image by authors.

Click here for the sounds of Huriwhenua

Figure 22.
Audio from *Pakē pakē* immersive experience by students Marie Preuss, Annie Sansom, and Libby Tonkin, 2022.



In verse seven, energy and emotion rise up and burst forth as we follow the sound of thunder up toward Pukeahu. This sacred hill was flattened to form the prison where Parihaka tūpuna were incarcerated without trial and put to hard labour making bricks and building roads that still comprise the fabric of our city. Such unjust treatment for passively resisting land confiscation by continuing to plow their land, and 'encouraging Māori to lead a pacifist, non-violent way of life [...] [led to] inter-generational trauma and whakamā (shame) [that] is still evident today.'[47]

Steps taken to process anger and other strong emotions included:

→ kōrerorero in which confronting histories and emotions were acknowledged
→ returning to messages of strength and hope for the future, uplifted by Kura, the words of Moana Jackson, and the spirit of shared learning offered through the pātere itself
→ working to redirect negative emotion into positive action.

The students' response to the seventh verse 'shifted from ignorance, to disbelief, grief and anger. This coalesced into motivation to channel that strong emotion into care through knowledge and labour, [paving] a new ground for meaningful action that honours and learns from the past. The experience follows the journey of the soils of Pukeahu out into the city. It reveals

an understanding of land as whenua, as placenta, as life-blood. [...] Sound, visuals and colour are employed to surface the emotive narratives, acknowledging their affective power. [This is] converted into action through [...] physical labours of working with clay [...] [through which] our understanding of this place shifts from conceptual, to emotional, to embodied.'[48]

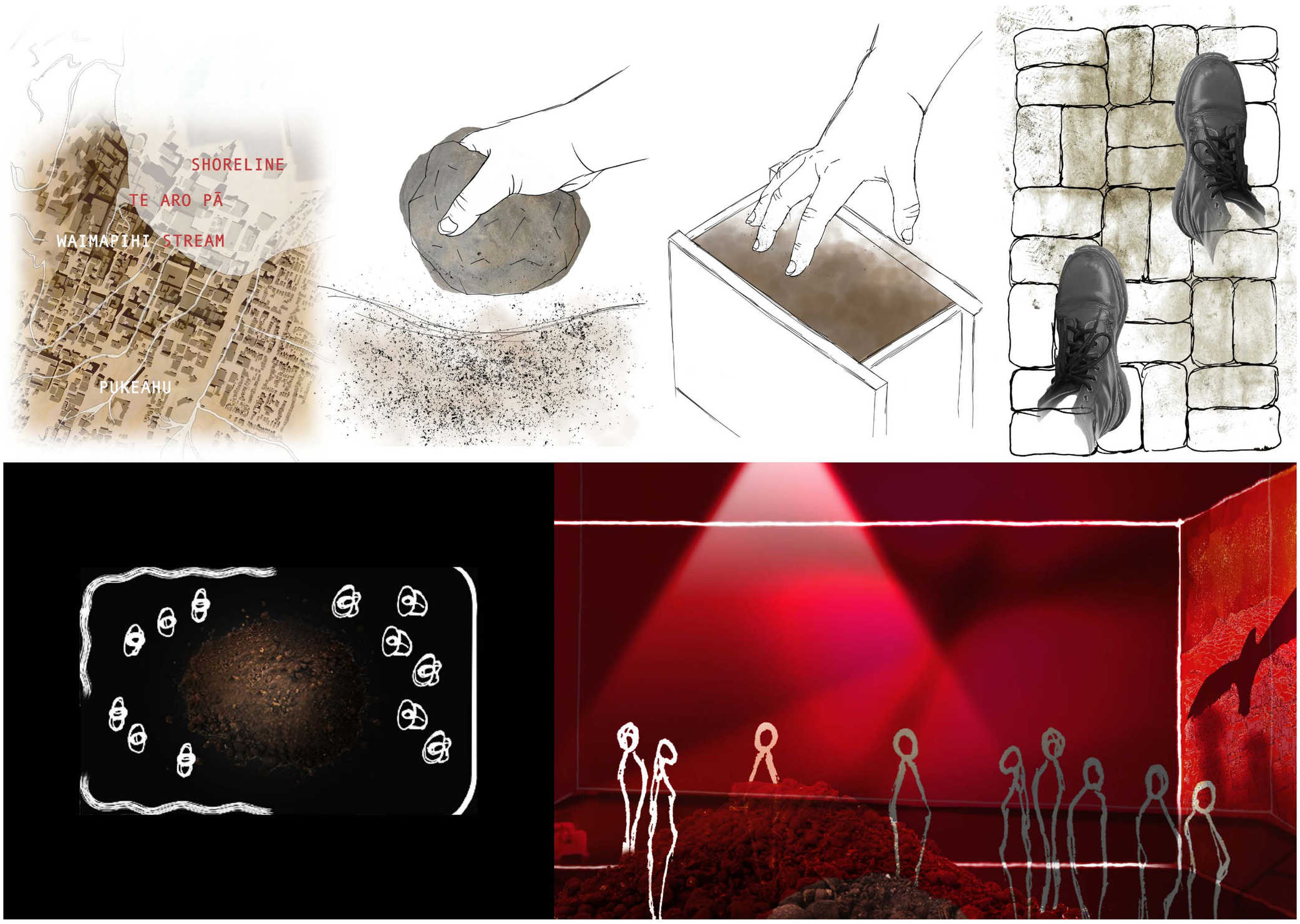


Figure 23.
Excerpts from *Pakē pakē*—a proposal for immersive experience by students Marie Preuss, Annie Sansom, and Libby Tonkin, 2022.

8

Figure 24.
Authors, 'He ata te taonga. The awakening dawn over Te Ranga-a-Hiwi', 2022. Closing image and text for Best Award competition entry. Produced by the rōpū kaiako as a form of tautoko for the students' mahi.

The final verse of the pātere lands us back at the marae. A pātere is an identifier of who you are and where you belong. Our marae—Te Rau Karamu—is for the students, and for us; we all belong here. Our identity is imprinted in the walls of the house of dialogue. The pātere has helped us to step into this belonging, to a certainty that comes with belonging rather than with knowing, and that knowingly admits both uncertainty and plurality. This space we have stepped into offers a new way of learning that is specific to this time and place: a Te Tiriti-led, Te Rau Karamu way of learning. Once we are ready to take that learning out to the world, the pātere becomes our way of defending it, of naming our place in the storied landscape.

Steps we might take to develop and practise a Te Rau Karamu way of learning include:

→ understanding the place where we stand and work, and its stories
→ embracing uncertainty and not-knowing as fundamental to becoming story-ready
→ centring relationships—sitting with uncertainty requires aroha
→ learning the tikanga required to provide the certainty of safety—to a point—along with the understanding that even tikanga are not certain and can change

→ developing practices of rongo (sensing, commonly referring to hearing) as embodied listening
→ acknowledging that listening, feeling, and knowing are not only human activities
→ struggling and succeeding together, co-creating new knowledge as a collective
→ understanding the responsibilities that come with knowledge and story-work.

'The journey up to this point has provided us with the opportunity to come to know the land on which we gather, and the stories with which ours now intertwine. We orientate our bodies and our minds to the places around us and to the land on which this wharenui stands. [These] experiences have prepared us to step onto the marae [...] We enter understanding why we are here and what this means for the many ara (pathways) that now open to us. We acknowledge the pātere as a taonga that will continue to guide us. And as this phase of the journey comes to a close, we join voices, and sing.'[49]

karakia whakamutunga

Ki runga
Ki raro
Ki roto
Ki waho
Hau pai mārire

Tēnā koutou katoa.

he mihi

Along with the aforementioned students, we would like to acknowledge Kura Moeahu (Te Āti Awa, Taranaki Whānui), Ngataiharuru Taepa (Te Āti Awa, Te Arawa), Josh Ambler (Ngāpuhi) and Georgina Stokes (Ngāi Tahu). We also mihi to Te Rau Karamu marae and all the descendants of the people and places of the pātere, to whom this knowledge belongs.

notes

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03 Our pepeha are given in te reo Māori (the Māori language), but henceforth we provide contextual interpretations in brackets for Māori words. We prefer 'contextual interpretation' to 'translation', as words and concepts often do not have direct English equivalents.

04 Aotearoa refers to our country of Aotearoa New Zealand.

05 We use Te Tiriti to refer to both the Māori and English versions of Te Tiriti o Waitangi / The Treaty of Waitangi.

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student responses to waewae taku haere: stepping into belonging in storied landscapes

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This was a really unique, Indigenous way of learning, and a spark to bring my own Māori identity into my spatial design practice. Pūrākau, waiata and pātere are like Indigenous knowledge banks for intergenerational, embodied learning. Engaging with place-based knowledge in this way was very grounding, and one of the key ideas our group explored was how pepeha acts as a grounding element when you mihi or introduce yourself. The maunga and the awa that are spoken about in Waewae Taku Haere relate to the whakapapa of the people of Te Whanganui a Tara, just like my own identity is tied to my relationship to the maunga and awa where I'm from. Whakapapa is understood as a genealogical tie to the environment and environmental beings. Coming to seeing the awa as an ancestor was a pivotal learning moment for our group. From then on the development of the project looked quite different—it became much more embodied.

Embodied listening and experience was central to understanding the pātere and its narratives, and that was emphasised by our hīkoi up Matairangi at the very start of the project. The knowledge of the pātere is felt, not written. There's a certain energy that is activated in the moment of singing it. Designing immersive experiences responded well to that—the narratives weren't just shown on a wall, but were felt in an embodied, time-based way. It was also significant that the pātere was in te reo Māori. That was a way of holding safe all the cultural knowledge; retaining mana motuhake by using the language of the knowledge-holders. The reo was at the forefront of every interaction we had with the project, because we were learning from those voices. Likewise, having Kura there as mana whenua was essential to holding the sanctity of the pātere. Her presence solidified to me the meaning and teachings of the waiata, because it's her whakapapa and tīpuna that it's speaking of, and she feels everything that is said. It's really quite powerful.

cite as:
Samuel Dunstall (Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Ngāti Kahungunu), Marie Preuss (Tauiwi – German), and Lottie Harper-Siolo (Iva, Savai'i, Samoa / Palagi), 'Student Responses to Waewae Taku Haere: Stepping into Belonging in Storied Landscapes', *idea journal*, 20.1 (2023), 180–182 <https://doi.org/10.37113/ij.v20i01.530>

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My group and I intially struggled with how to position ourselves. There was so much we didn't know about the stories of our site. I'm not from here, but during a class kōrero we discussed how the teaching of Aotearoa's colonial history in schools was not mandatory until recently, and we realised many of us had no idea about the history of this place. This far into learning, you're often so stuck and settled in your mindset, so this project was an unsettling process in a good way. The story of our verse and site was a challenging topic. Realising that we had been going to uni on this land for three years blissfully unaware of what had happened here, and that this was not common knowledge in the area, was quite confronting. One of the most difficult things was how to share this knowledge without making people feel attacked—like 'your ancestors did this.' Initially we felt angry about what we had learned; I remember getting into arguments with people who were a bit resistant to acknowledge the history of conflict. I ended up approaching it more thoughtfully rather than just going with the initial emotion, and this translated into design.

It's important to know about the past in order to make more conscious choices in the present—to understand place and your place in it, to reduce the risk of doing harmful activities on the site. Being tauiwi and having moved here when I was eighteen, I had some understanding of trying to figure out my place, in a place that's already existing. I now realise that you first need to know what's underneath your feet in order to do anything meaningful on top of it. I feel like this has informed the thinking and practice of our entire year group. There are so many really meaningful projects, and I don't think that aspect of meaningfulness would have come if we just did building fitouts the whole time, for example. It's a different kind of learning. One is about answering a brief in this capitalistic world we're living in. The other is outside of that—asking how we might actually change mindsets and approaches. My work now is all about community and placemaking, and you can't do placemaking without first understanding the stories of people and place.

lottie harper-siolo (iva, savai'i, samoa / palagi)

The learning in this project was holistic and place-based. We were given space to sit in the site, to experience it and to bond as a group. Spatial expertise is about being about to smell, breathe, touch and feel the tangible and intangible elements of site. We would just hang there; do a couple of drawings but also walk about or hop in the ocean at six in the morning. We spent time doing the internal thinking and relational work, which was really important for this kaupapa. From a Pacific perspective, everything has its own mauli or life force, and vā is the relational space between everything. Funnily, vā doesn't come up much with family, except maybe when there is a break or disconnect in a relationship and it's about healing that. It's used a lot in academic spaces where we often try to define Indigenous terms and methodologies, but in reality they're fluid and embodied.

As Pacific peoples in Aotearoa, or as tangata Tiriti, being responsible to tangata whenua and the environment is about the vā. Being together as a group in the site, or regarding stones as taonga and washing them in the sea, was all the vā, and caring for that space—teu le vā. It's also about understanding that everyone has mana and has something to bring to the table. The dynamic between Jen, Stu and Kura fed into the way we started to relate to each other in mana-enhancing ways. I remember Stu saying to leave your ego at the door. Learning about everyone's different backgrounds and migration stories helped us to understand both our positionality and our interconnectedness. That's the true meaning of being tangata Tiriti—relational care. Those underlying methodologies of vā and talanoa—a space where everyone has a voice and contributes—also help to hold the space when there's conflict. You've just got to go through it and hope that no-one is going to let go of the rope and that it will somehow balance. And that was grounded in site. We were able to build a relationship with one another, connected by the moana, or sea. People in other places will have their own shores, Indigenous peoples, methodologies and migration stories; their own relationships with the communities and sites around them. Again, the sea is what connects us; the moana is the teacher.

whakamana: embracing uncertainty in relationally responsible spatial design studio pedagogy for a flourishing aotearoa

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abstract

Socio-culturally restorative and ecologically regenerative futures for Aotearoa will be co-produced only in the context of mana-enhancing, Te Tiriti-led partnerships that embrace uncertainty and 'possibilism'. What are the implications of this for spatial design pedagogy? In this text-based research essay, we explore how Te Tiriti-led pedagogy might be integrated in a meaningful and fundamental way in undergraduate spatial design studios, including projects in which students self-select topics as part of developing their own design identities. These types of projects do not lend themselves to external partnerships, being too broad in scope, not initiated by the partners, and unable to adequately ensure tangible mutual benefits, particularly within institutional timeframes. Te Tiriti-led futures, however, will require a diversity of practices, not all of which can be conducted within the context of direct co-creative partnerships.

This presents a particular pedagogical challenge: whether mana-enhancing partnership and ethical engagement with Indigenous knowledges is possible in undergraduate studio projects where the 'partnerships' are only hypothetical. We analyse a third-year studio in which we introduced an expanded model of partnership, combining identity-driven student-centred pedagogy with Te Tiriti-led design for restorative and regenerative futures. This model rejects certainty/uncertainty binaries and reframes uncertainty as a fundamental condition of ethical engagement across cultural difference. We turn instead to Māori concepts of mana and manaakitanga, exploring ways to empower agency and overcome paralysis, and draft a relationally responsible framework for engagement with Indigenous knowledges. This employs a weaving metaphor that both protects the identity and autonomy of each knowledge source and enhances its mana as part of the woven fabric.

Offering this up as a case study of situated, ethical design pedagogy, we critically reflect on the effectiveness of these strategies, and find our own opportunities for transformational learning in the student work. We reject the toxic certainties of the dominant, degenerative paradigm, envisaging a joyfully uncertain pluriversal future in which ecologically regenerative and socio-culturally restorative processes facilitate human and environmental flourishing.

keywords

pedagogy; spatial design; Te Tiriti-led; pluriversal; regenerative

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Tēnei te mihi mahana ki a koutou.

mihi: jen

He uri ahau nō Ngāpuhi ki Hokianga. He Pākehā hoki au. I whanau mai au i Te Awakairangi ki Tai. E noho ana au i Te Whanganui a Tara. My ancestors are Ngāpuhi and Pākehā, from the Hokianga in the north of Aotearoa, and from England, Scotland, and Ireland. I was born and raised in Te Awa Kairangi ki Tai Lower Hutt for most of my childhood and adolescence, and currently reside in Wellington. Ko Jen Archer-Martin tōku ingoa. Tēnā koutou katoa.

mihi: georgina

Ko Ngāi Tahu te iwi. Ko Ngāi Te Ruahikihiki te tangata. Ko Motoitoi Driver oku tīpuna. Nō Ōtautahi ahau. Kei Te Whanganui a Tara e noho ana ināianei. I whakapapa to Te Waipounamu where my whānau live on the Canterbury Plains. England, Scotland, and Ireland were home to my Pākehā ancestors. I have recently bought my first home on the hills of Te Awa Kairangi ki Tai. Ko Georgina Stokes tōku ingoa. Kia ora koutou katoa.

a note on language

Our writing includes words and concepts from te reo Māori (the Māori language), with contextual interpretations in brackets the first time the term is introduced. We prefer 'contextual interpretation' to 'translation', as Māori words and concepts often do not have direct English equivalents. We use 'Māori' and 'tangata whenua' to refer to the Indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand, acknowledging that Māori are not a homogenous group but retain identity and rights as iwi, hapū, and whānau (tribal, sub-tribal, and family groups). 'Pākehā' refers to New Zealanders of European settler-colonial descent. 'Tangata Tiriti' refers to all non-Māori New Zealanders with rights and responsibilities under Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Indigenous-language and therefore binding version of the Treaty of Waitangi).

introduction

> …we are at the opening.It is the time of the unfinished, of wonder. Life walks on tiptoes.[…]There is the one, and the many; the one is the many. […]Earthly and celestial roots join together without usurping the limits of others.Everyone remains in his or her birthplace, but the whole opens.[01]

As spatial design educators, how do we prepare students to design for a world in transition—a time of converging uncertainties, of ecological crises and socio-cultural shifts? In Aotearoa New Zealand, these include reckoning with ongoing impacts of colonisation on people and the environment, restoring Indigenous rights to land and culture, and re-imagining a society grounded in cultural identity and connection to te taiao (the natural world).

Designing for this transition will necessitate moving beyond 'doing no further harm', instead looking to regenerate thriving natural ecosystems and restore human flourishing.

Rather than succumbing to sugar-coated optimism or paralysing pessimism in the face of these complex challenges, our response is to join voices with those who embrace a 'possibilist' mindset and ways of being with uncertainty.[02] Within uncertainty, we see an opening to a pluriverse of possibilities—a 'world where many worlds fit'.[03] These possibilities emerge from co-creative processes of futuring, in which we all participate as separate but intertwined roots of a human-nature whole. Rejecting toxic certainty, we envisage a joyfully uncertain pluriversal future.

In this future, twin processes of decolonising and re-indigenising care for our unravelling ecological and socio-cultural fabrics by both hastening the unlearning of degenerative settler-colonial paradigms and uplifting regenerative Indigenous paradigms. Bringing together Māori ways of knowing and being with critical Pākehā perspectives reveals possibilities of healing, learning, and creating together. This is particularly important given our context as a bicultural nation founded on Te Tiriti o Waitangi—a promise of collective flourishing; since broken yet still leading the way to restoration.[04]

To us, being led by the promise of Te Tiriti includes working to uplift the mana (sacred force) of all. In order to lead to collective flourishing, Te Tiriti-led processes must be mana-enhancing (uplifting the dignity of all parties involved). We elaborate further on concepts of mana and manaakitanga (hospitality; care for others) in Part Two.

We believe that regenerative and restorative futures for Aotearoa will be co-produced only in the context of mana-enhancing Te Tiriti-led partnerships that not only embrace uncertainty, but reframe it as a fundamental condition of ethical engagement across cultural difference. We ponder the implications of this for spatial design pedagogy through the case study of an undergraduate spatial design studio. Our university is committed to becoming Te Tiriti-led. In a 2010–2014 bicultural partnership, our college reconceived the undergraduate curriculum as a pōwhiri framework, following the stages of a Māori ceremonial welcome.[05] Te Tiriti-led educational frameworks only become transformative, however, if activated through pedagogy.

In our third year studio we run a project-based immersive introduction to Indigenous modes of understanding place. The student collective is guided in this by mana whenua (Māori with enduring authority and relationships to local land).[06] This has been an effective and safe way to prepare students to work in and with Indigenous knowledge systems, to begin to grasp the need for, and different worldviews at play in, Te Tiriti partnerships. In this essay, we interrogate how to expand Te Tiriti-led approaches across all studio teaching, including projects in which students self-select topics. This project typology does not lend itself to external partnerships, being too broad in scope, not partner-initiated, and without tangible mutual benefits, particularly within institutional timeframes. Te Tiriti-led futures will require a diversity of approaches beyond direct co-creative partnership. We therefore introduce an expanded understanding of partnership, in which student-centred projects sit within a model of Te Tiriti-led design for restorative and regenerative futures.

In this undertaking, we join an emerging set of Te Tiriti-led pedagogies for built environment education, including Ako Aotearoa's 'Te Whaihanga' (2019)[07] and AUT Huri Te Ao Hoahoanga's 'A Transformative Architectural Pedagogy and Tool for a Time of Converging Crises' (2022).[08] The former offers resources for engaging with Māori, while the latter goes further to anchor regenerative built environment practice in Te Tiriti partnership and mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge). These are valuable educational frameworks and tools for built environment professions such as engineering and architecture. Our offering adds to this conversation from a spatial design context within which diverse practices cross over with architecture, landscape and urban design, while also being grounded in understandings of spatial experience stemming from the fields of interior design and performance.

We focus on a particular pedagogical challenge: whether mana-enhancing partnership and ethical engagement with Indigenous knowledges is possible in undergraduate spatial design studio projects where the 'partnerships' are only hypothetical. We explore approaches to uncertainty and difference that empower agency and overcome paralysis, and draft a relationally responsible framework for engagement with Indigenous knowledges, seeking to avoid unethical inaction and facilitate ethical action. We critically reflect on strategies employed and offer a case study of situated, ethical, pluriversal design pedagogy.

part one: uncertainty in te tiriti-led pedagogy

An opportunity arose in 2022 to explore transformative pedagogies in our twelve-week second semester third-year Spatial Design studio. Already in place was the pōwhiri framework curriculum framing—tuakiri (collective and individual identity) within contemporary contexts[09]—and a School of Design focus

on problems of wellbeing. Together with colleague Meg Rollandi, we had previously developed a Spatial Design studio pedagogy that facilitates the development of students' individual practices as a bridge to their final year research thesis projects. This involves locating their critical spatial practice in the spatial design pluriverse, in relation to diverse communities of practice, discourse, and concerns, underpinned by relational understandings of identity and positionality.

Students explore their place in the pluriverse through a response to a given site, and in 2022 we were looking for a new site. This opening coincided with two overlapping opportunities. The first was a design competition run by Nature-Based Urban design for Wellbeing and Adaptation in Oceania (NUWAO), which called for 'nature-based urban design solutions, rooted in Indigenous knowledges, that support climate change adaptation and individual and community wellbeing.'[10] The second was an invitation from Dr Rebecca Kiddle (Ngāti Porou, Ngāpuhi), then head of urban development at Te Awa Kairangi Hutt City Council, and involved with NUWAO. She was seeking student engagement with local kaupapa (agendas) such as re-indigenising Te Awa Kairangi, supporting non-human vitality and biodiversity, climate change, and social justice.[11]

Both calls were open enough to accommodate a pluriversal approach addressing diverse concerns, discourses, and practices, and both dealt with relationships between wellbeing and identity of people and place. We saw this as a chance to explore something we had been interested in for a while—the intersections between tuakiri-led learning, restorative Te Tiriti-led pedagogy, and design for regenerative futures—with Te Awakairangi ki Tai (Lower Hutt) as the site. Our educated hunch was that Te Tiriti-led socio-cultural restoration and ecological regeneration were interconnected, and this appeared to be supported by both the NUWAO and Te Awa Kairangi calls.

Both centred re-indigenising and Indigenous knowledges as pivotal to imagining better futures, pointing to a correlation between worldview and human-nature relationships.

paradigm shifts for flourishing futures

We share the view that our futures are dependent on deep and transformative shifts in the very systems that structure our thoughts and actions, and that the most effective shifts take place at the level of paradigms and worldviews, and of metaphysics and cosmologies.[12] This view recognises that ecological crises are linked to dualist Western ideologies of separation from and domination over nature, and that flourishing futures require an alternative conception of earth as 'a living relation, rather [than] a resource to be exploited.'[13] We join those seeking to instead uplift Indigenous traditions of stewardship that nourish a diverse ethnosphere and biosphere, replacing degenerative paradigms with regenerative ones in which all may flourish.[14]

In Aotearoa, Māori ways of knowing, being, and caring sit within a relational worldview and cosmology. All beings and our environments are related through whakapapa (genealogical ties). The mountains and rivers of our lands are ancestors, and the non-human life they sustain are our kin. The identity and wellbeing of people and the natural world is thus interdependent, and the severing of ties to whenua (land) by colonisation and degenerative settler-colonial paradigms has had lasting impacts on both. This also means that the healing of people and place is interconnected.

te tiriti as the foundation for restoring regenerative paradigms

We see Te Tiriti-led pedagogy as fundamental to a paradigm shift in Spatial Design education, and a way to simultaneously address both socio-cultural restoration and ecological regeneration. This position draws from Indigenous scholar Moana Jackson (Ngāti Kahungunu), whose relational 'ethic of restoration' seeks to restore Indigenous kawa (protocols) that 'helped us sustain relationships, and whaka-tika or restore them when they were damaged.'[15] These were the values tangata whenua brought to Te Tiriti, envisioning 'a relational nation in which politics was never just the art of the possible but the promise of reconciling difference across what was only ever meant to be an intimate distance.'[16] The Māori-language Tiriti speaks of equal, prosperous relations between Māori and Pākehā that would be mutually mana-enhancing.[17] However, 'the newcomers came as colonisers [...] they had a different view about treaties as well as of relationships and the land.'[18]

These settler-colonial views became the dominant structures of Aotearoa society, undermining the agency and autonomy—tino rangatiratanga—of iwi and hapū Māori over the whenua (land) and built environment and, by extension, the social and cultural equity needed for people, Māoritanga (Māori cultural identity), and Aotearoa's living systems to thrive. In our work as designers and educators, we have a responsibility to recognise and dismantle the settler-colonial paradigms to which we are conditioned, and to restore and uphold the relational values of Te Tiriti. It is our hope that our students, both tangata whenua and tangata Tiriti, understand this history and 'commit to the ongoing fight for Māori self-sovereignty.'[19] As summarised in Figure 01, this requires being equipped to recognise dualist, settler-colonial and degenerative paradigms, and to

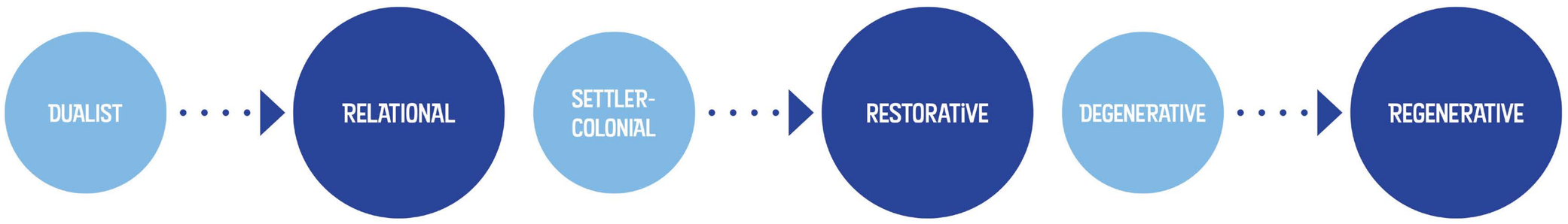


Figure 01.
Diagram of paradigm shifts.

instead work within relational, restorative and regenerative paradigms. This is the first step to fostering meaningful and mana-enhancing Te Tiriti-led partnerships that uplift agency and autonomy, restoring relationships and balance.

uncertainty as a fundamental condition of mana-enhancing partnership

Critical to this kaupapa is the facilitation of ethical engagement with Indigenous knowledges. In Aotearoa, ethical 'research at the interface'[20] is often characterised by kanohi ki te kanohi (face-to-face) practices of co-governance and co-creation. Such direct partnerships, while vitally important, are not always possible or desirable in the context of the undergraduate design studio, particularly if not initiated by Indigenous partners. While students will likely benefit from engagement with mana whenua, project scope and institutional timeframes often pose barriers to that happening in ways that are Indigenous-led and mutually beneficial. When flows of Indigenous time, labour, and knowledge are not matched or reciprocated, the engagement or partnership cannot be considered ethical. Te Tiriti-led pedagogy must therefore also account for types of work that do not add to the existing burden of labour carried by colonised peoples.

In considering what an indirect or expanded understanding of partnership might look like, we must consider 'legacies of colonialism and entrenched systems of "othering"'.[21] The long history of harmful settler-colonial practices includes researching from a distance rather than in partnership with Indigenous communities, and consuming Indigenous knowledges through Eurocentric paradigms. We suggest these practices of knowledge appropriation and misuse are predicated on a Western sense of entitlement to certainty. Uncertainty and difference are viewed as things that must be overcome in order to act.

Inspired by the words of Luce Irigaray, we instead look to 'take care of the difference between us'[22] and 'recognis[e] that the other is and will remain a mystery to me.'[23] In our expanded partnership model, mystery and uncertainty are liberated from the certainty/uncertainty binary and reframed as fundamental conditions of ethical engagement across cultural difference. Figure 02 illustrates key aspects of the relational possibilist paradigm that underpins this model, made possible by the rejection of toxic certainty and binaries.

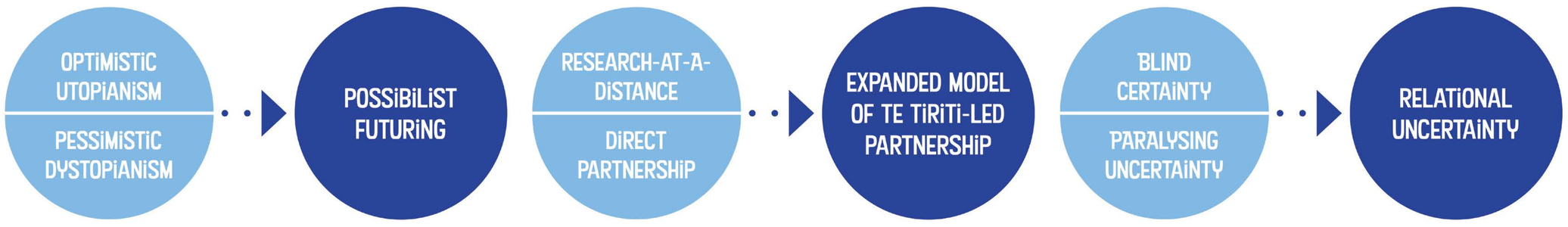


Figure 02.
Shifting from dualistic/binary notions of futuring, partnerships, and uncertainty, to a relational possibilist paradigm.

perils of the certainty/uncertainty binary: when uncertainty leads to harmful inaction

Uncertainty can lead to non-Indigenous students and researchers avoiding engagement with Indigenous knowledges. Sociologist Martin Tolich described how supervisors and ethics committees, attempting to manage cultural risk, actively discouraged non-Māori students from including Māori participants in their research.[24] He argues that this risk mitigation in fact violates the ethical principle of harm, particularly in relation to Tiriti responsibilities.[25] Tolich calls this 'Pākehā paralysis', characterised as an inability to differentiate between research for Māori, which should be Māori-led, and research for Aotearoa society, which may be by non-Māori but must include Māori. Māori educationalist Alex Barnes takes this further, describing Pākehā paralysis as 'the inability of Pākehā to be active participants in social and cultural relations with non-Pākehā people or groups. This paralysis can come about due to fear of "getting it wrong" or negative cross-cultural encounters and experiences.'[26] Pākehā paralysis exemplifies harmful inaction driven by uncertainty.

when false certainty leads to harmful action

The opposite of paralysis also occurs: some non-Māori simply '"blunder" into relationships with Māori unaware or blind to the power relations between them.'[27] This may change as the historical contexts of colonisation begin to be taught in schools. In the meantime, non-Māori students and researchers may blindly utilise Māori concepts, stories, art forms, and/or language in their work, despite the work itself not being Te Tiriti-led. This might be driven by an infatuation with things Māori or a genuine desire to recognise the embeddedness of Māori culture in contemporary Aotearoa, and is perhaps symptomatic of an awkward adolescence in our collective journey toward a re-indigenised Aotearoa. However, the co-opting of mātauranga Māori to further non-Māori interests as a 'cultural garnish' or 'clip-on perspective to [...] narratives of cultural respect and responsiveness'[28] carries a real danger of loss or warping of meaning. Similarly, notions of 'blending' Indigenous narratives into existing dominant practices reveal blindness to histories of Pākehā-centric assimilation policies.[29] Harm can inadvertently be caused through false certainty and a sense of entitlement to knowledge, including Indigenous knowledges.

strategies to avoid unethical action/inaction

Our task therefore turns toward strategies for avoiding the twin perils of harmful action and inaction. Shifting away from certainty/uncertainty binaries and toward relational, pluriversal paradigms, we acknowledge uncertainty as a fundamental condition of ethical cross-cultural partnerships. Tolich's and Barnes's strategies for overcoming paralysis involve knowing one's own identity, understanding the context of power relations, and becoming comfortable 'being with the complex and unknown.'[30] Furthermore, Barnes suggests moving from a one-sided perspective

of harm avoidance and obligation, toward a relational perspective of mutual benefit. Our strategy development was guided by core values of caring for the space of relations and the differences between us, embodied through Māori concepts of mana and manaakitanga.

part two: toward strategies for mana-enhancing te tiriti-led pedagogy

Mana—a dynamic, relational concept—has long informed the actions of our tūpuna (ancestors). Mana is often described as a type of energy, vital force or power held by all living things that must be protected and respected. Mana can be diminished, but one can also whakamana—give, endorse or empower mana. Mana-enhancing practice 'cares for the spiritual, emotional, physical, and intellectual dimensions' of an individual as they engage with people and places.[31] Underpinned by respect, integrity, and dignity within relationships, mana-enhancing practices are reciprocal and multi-directional, demonstrated through acts of manaakitanga. Commonly understood as 'hospitality,' or 'the process of showing respect, generosity and care for others,'[32] manaakitanga is inherently relational: 'The root [...] is mana; "aki" indicates reciprocal action. [This] captures the notions of mutual care and respect for people, honouring one another or power sharing.'[33] Manaakitanga is, therefore, a mutual uplifting of one another's mana. In the context of Te Tiriti-led practice, these relational concepts underpin how we uphold tino rangatiratanga within ethical partnerships.

Figure 03 illustrates a set of four mana-enhancing strategies that empowered our students to embody manaakitanga in their critical spatial design practice through care and service. These are positioned along two axes of relationality in which ethical practice is required: processes, from relating to acting-in-relation, and ways of being, from self-in-relation to the relational collective. The four strategies are expanded on below.

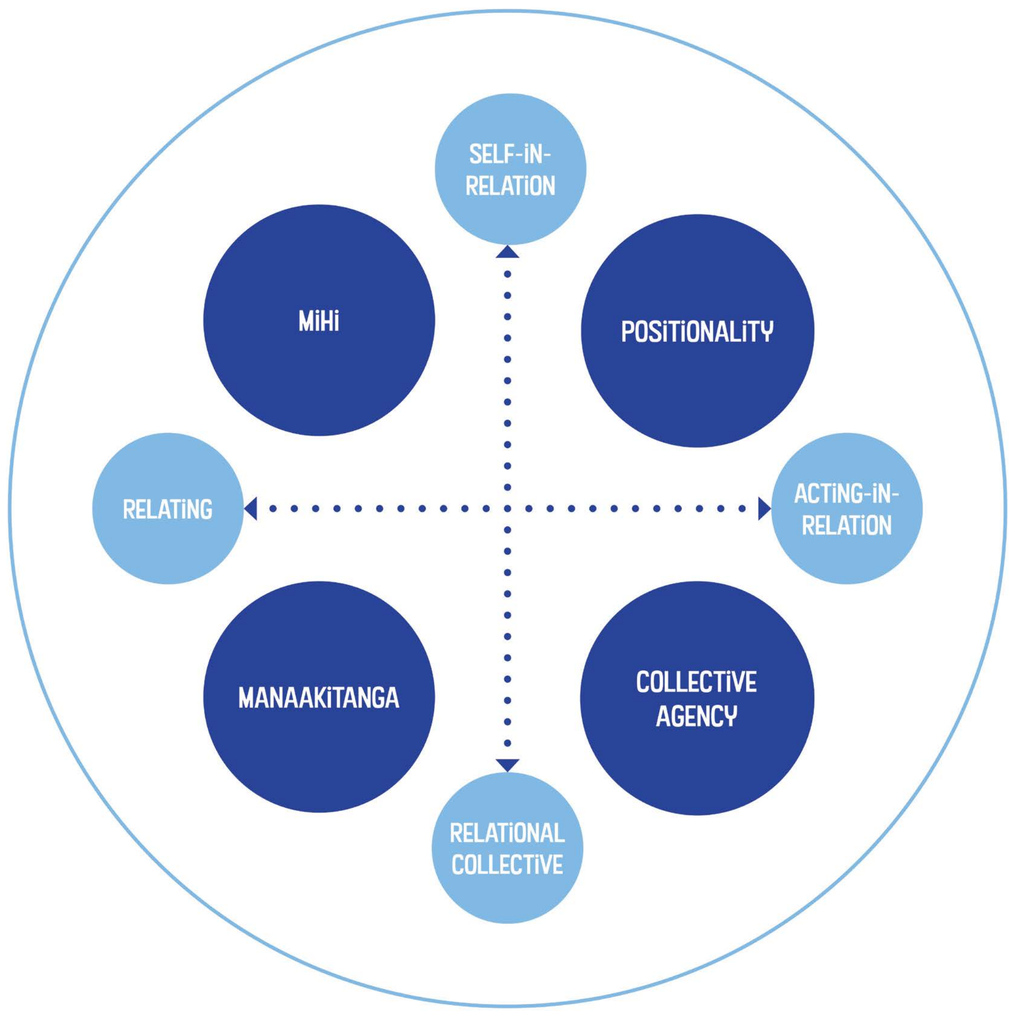


Figure 03.
Diagram of strategies for relational ethics in mana-enhancing Te Tiriti-led spatial design pedagogy (2023).

strategies for overcoming paralysis

Our first set of strategies target paralysis or unethical inaction, which can harm the mana of both students/practitioners and potential partners. In our experience, most students care deeply about the world's problems and want to make a difference through design. However, care alone is

insufficient when the scale and complexity of problems combines with a lack of tools to address them effectively. While we can address scale through the project brief, introducing a local scale where problems have more tangible causes and effects, it is mana-enhancing practices that empower agency. Urbanist Sarah Ichioka and architect Michael Pawlyn name agency as key to a possibilist mindset, in which we all have agency to effect change.[34] They acknowledge the difficulty of empowering agency when faced with high levels of uncertainty, yet state that 'the combination of uncertainty and agency can be hugely energising if people can see that change is something they can be part of and influence.'[35]

strategy 1: mihi

Mihi (greeting) also encompasses notions of acknowledgement and gratitude.[36] While the practice of mihi depends on the context, it generally begins by recognising the people, place, and context that one is meeting with, then introducing oneself in relation to them. Mihimihi (the process of exchanging greetings) opens a space of relations, inviting the possibility of whakawhanaungatanga (building relationships) and manaakitanga. This became our first step in developing a proposal for critical spatial practice.

For students, this included bringing their identities, lived experience, aspirations, and values to the table. Time and space was afforded to learning to communicate who they were in relation to land and people, including their identity as tangata whenua, tangata Tiriti, or both. We discussed pepeha—a relational form of introduction stating whakapapa connections to land and ancestors—and how they might find their own forms that did not co-opt pepeha as a deeply Indigenous practice. Mihi were encouraged when presenting to anyone new, and informed the critical positioning of each project.

strategy 2: positionality

Western academia often discourages students from introducing such explicit subjectivity into their work. Consequently, they might avoid talking about themselves (unless the work is autoethnographic), and lack the tools to do so. Critical subjectivity is addressed in various fields through notions of positionality. We employed Dr Lesley-Ann Noel's 'Designer's Critical Alphabet' card deck, which empowers users to clearly see themselves in their work and to 'access multiple points of view, concepts and definitions' beyond their own,[37] prompting students to reflect on positionality and biases. Readings also helped students to navigate their tangata whenua or tangata Tiriti positionality, including Tina Ngata's 'What is Required from Tangata Tiriti'. Opening with 'Be tau (at peace) with your position', Ngata encourages understanding how identity and worldview is shaped by colonisation in a manner that is 'not ridden with guilt, not trying to evade or explain it, but ready to respond to the legacy of that story.'[38]

strategy 3: manaakitanga

Acknowledging the often heavy tasks of unpacking one's worldview and encountering new positions, we established moments for kōrero (conversation) and whakarongo (listening). In weekly 'manaakitanga circles', students shared concerns, questions, reflections, insights, and aspirations. The name 'manaakitanga circle' foregrounded the spirit in which discussion would take place and the shared aim for everyone to come away with their mana intact and uplifted. Sitting in a circle, we would centre ourselves in the moment before opening the floor for anyone to speak. We encouraged becoming comfortable with being together in silence when sharing didn't feel necessary or possible; the act of being present, kanohi ki te kanohi, was in itself a demonstration of manaakitanga. The collective energy of the circle nourished the space of relations, helping us to become tau with uncertainty. As teachers, we were enabled to attune to the students' needs, facilitating responsive, reflexive, mana-enhancing pedagogy.

strategy 4: collective agency

Collectivity infused the ways in which individual student projects and practices emerged within the relational space of the project community. Rather than a collection of unrelated offerings, the diverse proposals formed a 'project ecology.' This resulted from mapping the projects against urban development kaupapa provided by Te Awa Kairangi Hutt City Council, possible sites within the geographic project area, and kaitiaki (guardians of mana whenua) strategies for caring for the awa (river), people, and ecologies. Understanding their projects in relation to those of their peers allowed students to hone their own offerings, as well as unburdening themselves of the desire to 'do all the things' they found important, as they could see them being taken care of by others. Students gained agency, 'not alone but as part of a mutual enterprise.'[39]

toward a framework for ethical engagement with indigenous knowledges

The aforementioned strategies were pivotal in enabling mana-enhancing student agency and overcoming paralysis. In this section we outline complementary tools for ensuring that the actions thereby empowered are mana-enhancing to others. Responding to the re-indigenising provocations of NUWAO and Kiddle, we developed a framework for avoiding unethical actions when engaging with Indigenous and other knowledges outside of direct partnership. A weaving metaphor reinforced that recentring Indigenous knowledges 'doesn't mean appropriating Māori thought, but the weaving of ideas and approaches.'[40] This protects the identity and autonomy of each knowledge source, as well as enhancing its mana as part of the woven fabric.

Len Hetet's (Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Ngāti Maniapoto, Ngāti Apa) cultural design strategy for the Te Awa Kairangi Riverlink project was a key inspiration. Hetet conceptualised the landscape of the river valley as a korowai (cloak) gifted by the

ancestral tupua (phenomenon) Ngake to the people of Te Awa Kairangi. Tasked with opening the 'mouth of the fish' of Te Ika a Māui (the North Island), Ngake broke through to the sea, shaping Te Awa Kairangi by the thrashing of his tail as he did so.[41] Invoking a raranga (weaving) technique called whatu, Hetet relates the aho (horizontal/weft threads) to the eastern and western land masses of the valley, and the whenu (vertical/warp threads) to the north-south flow of the river and interconnected waterways. Restoring connections between land, water, and people regenerates the korowai of Ngake.[42]

We applied this metaphor to student engagement with three place-based knowledge streams: Indigenous knowledges of mana whenua, storied and more-than-human knowledges of place, and lived knowledges of communities. Alongside these sat three external knowledge streams generated by the students' enquiry and positioning, relating to communities of concern, practice, and discourse. Each stream has its own tuakiri, whakapapa, and ways of thinking, doing, and discussing.

The students' first task was to gather the threads of knowledge streams running through their projects. Whereas in direct partnerships this knowledge would emerge through a process of kōrero (oratory) and wānanga (forums of learning/discussion), in indirect partnerships there is no face-to-face relationship with knowledge holders. Acknowledging this absence, we introduced the notion of the proxy, referring to 'the function or authority of serving in another's stead.'[43] In this instance we consider proxies to be published sources in which knowledge holders have offered their knowledge into the public domain. This is a more nuanced understanding than being merely a 'primary' or 'secondary source'. It is important that these sources are authored by or with consent of the knowledge holder, and that the relational and situational context within which the knowledge was given is understood. Knowledge holders and their webs of relations are not abstract but retain their identity and autonomy. An example is the knowledge referred to by Hetet above, which comes not from him but from mana whenua narratives by way of Kura Moeahu (Te Āti Awa),[44] in the context of ethical tangata whenua relations.

To begin the whatu weaving process, students were encouraged to traverse the knowledge landscape of their project (aho) by mapping ways in which their own tuakiri, whakapapa, and methods might come into dialogue with the various knowledge streams (whenu). They then engaged in an active process of diagonal weaving (similar to whāriki, a harakeke mat weaving technique) to explore the various knowledge stream intersections, creating a foundation for action upon which opportunities for critical spatial practice were identified. Figure 04 gives a diagrammatic depiction of this framework, along with excerpts from one of the whāriki exercises. In this example, the student is utilising quotes from research in

each knowledge stream to generate rapid ideation sketches at each intersection. This created a foundation for action upon which opportunities for critical spatial practice were identified. We then returned to whatu as a process of reflecting upon how the conversation between the student's own identity, woven together with the other knowledge streams, had informed the project. Through the use of proxies and the whatu-whāriki framework, we attempted to uphold tino rangatiratanga, avoiding cultural appropriation, misuse, and the continued colonisation of Indigenous knowledges.

We wish to clearly articulate our intentions in creating and sharing this framework. Hinekura Smith (Te Rarawa, Ngāpuhi, Te Ati Awa) cautions against the use of mātaurangi Māori 'as vague metaphors that simplify and commodify our knowledge [...] often as a well-intentioned attempt to address bicultural aspirations.'[45] We acknowledge that our use of these metaphors would benefit from deeper engagement with whatu and whāriki as embodied weaving practices. However, we believe their activation within a kaupapa infused with meaningful discussion about Indigenous knowledges and bicultural partnership resists a simplifying or commodification of knowledge. We do not present the framework as a formula, but as a project-specific, place-based scaffolding of mana-enhancing approaches to engagement with Indigenous and other knowledges in critical spatial practice. Desna Whaanga-Schollum (Ngāti Rongomaiwahine, Ngāti Kahungunu, and Ngāti Pāhauwera), Yoko Akama, and Penny Hagan highlight the problematic nature of replicable frameworks that cause harm to Indigenous knowledges, warning of 'the consequences of misplaced enthusiasm for [...] toolkits for beginners that emphasise a bias for action, without due process and consideration for duty of care, safety or ethics.'[46] We do not intend to offer tools that may be extracted as 'portable methods'[47] for application elsewhere, but rather to illustrate a rigorous process of relational responsibility[48] tied to the specificities of context, people and place.

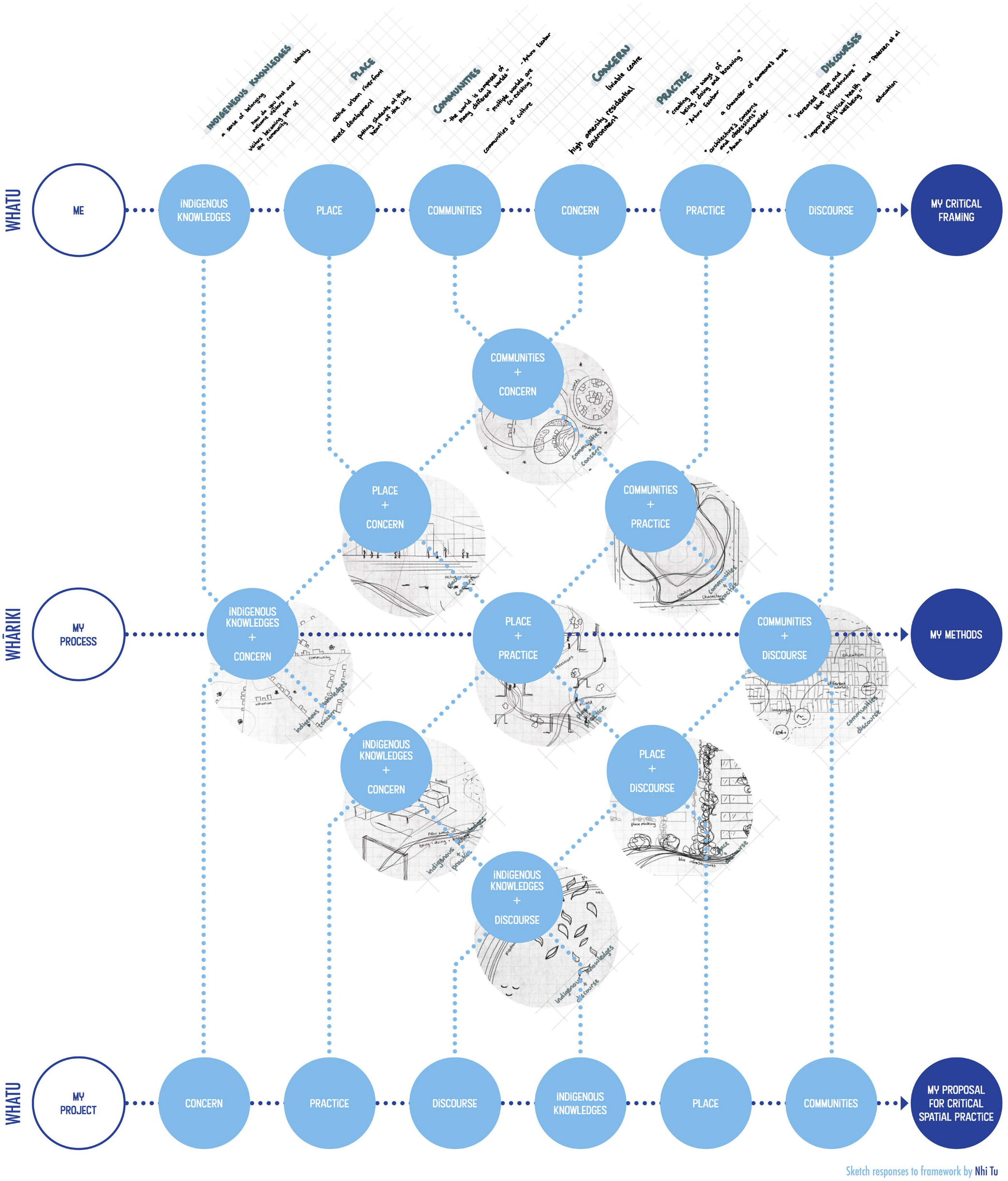


Figure 04.
Whatu/whāriki framework with example sketches by student Nhi Tu.

reflection

The notion of relational responsibility returns us to the primary relationship within the studio—the one we have with the students. Reflecting on our shared responsibilities, we revisit the learning intentions around tuakiri/identity within a context of indirect partnership:

> This semester we won't have the opportunity to partner with mana whenua, so our challenge is to explore how we continue to honour the bicultural context of our work in a way that authentically acknowledges the identity, experience and knowledge each of you bring to the table, and uplifts your own mana along with that of mana whenua as kaitiaki, and all of the human and non-human inhabitants of this place. Our aim is to consider how Spatial Design might contribute to a livable future in Aotearoa, for the wellbeing of future generations. What is your role in that? How do you want to serve others, through design, in a way that also enriches your own sense of identity and wellbeing?[49]

To evaluate the effectiveness of our Te Tiriti-led pedagogy, we analysed the student work with an emphasis on both individual and collective processes and outcomes, and the relational impact within the Te Awa Kairangi project community and NUWAO competition. Focusing on identity, mana, and agency, we looked for indicators of how students navigated uncertainty as a fundamental condition of ethical partnership, avoiding both paralysis and unethical action. Surprisingly, evidence of success did not appear in the way we expected. This is, of course, the purpose of such discursive processes aimed at producing new knowledge. The insights shared below illustrate our own transformational learning and paradigm shift.

Where the project was most successful in enhancing mana and agency was in relation to identity (students being tau with their position), and in producing outcomes that were socio-culturally restorative, ecologically regenerative, or both.

Notions of identity were not individualistic but situated each student within a network of relations, as part of a project ecology and wider community with a shared goal of uplifting te mana o te awa; the mana of the river. This was embodied through the emergence of critical practice clusters formed around shared kaupapa and by the ultimate coming-together of all twenty-seven kaupapa in an exhibition. Figure 05 curates each student's contribution to the exhibition: a hero image and 'what if…?' question. Installed in the local community library, the exhibition embodied a collective form of social dreaming.[50] Inviting members of the public to contribute their own 'what if…?' questions, this pluriverse of possible futures ignited public imagination and agency.

Where our Te Tiriti-led pedagogy initially appeared less successful was in demonstrating engagement with Indigenous knowledges through the work. Many of

the projects did not explicitly engage with or include representations of mātauranga Māori. Our sense of success in the ways the project community was energised by the process and outcomes was at odds with this apparent failure to engage tangibly with these knowledges. One reason might be that learners are at different stages of overcoming paralysis, with some perhaps less ready or equipped. This may point to a broader deficit in the curriculum, but may also indicate indirect learning as part of a learning ecology, in which those who are already equipped model behaviour for those who are not.

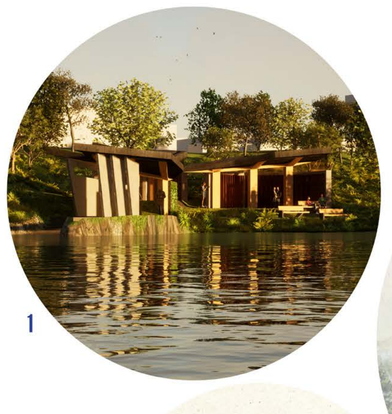
Ultimately, however, this revealed a misguided assumption that ethical engagement with Indigenous knowledges would be explicit in the outcomes in the first place. In coming from a place of their own identity, student work can align with mana whenua aspirations for restoration and regeneration without having to co-opt Indigenous narratives, language, or art forms. This is empowering both for Indigenous students, for whom the use of their own cultural practices may become visible in an authentic way, and non-Indigenous students, who can practise being good tangata Tiriti without adopting tangata whenua practices.

Evidencing this is the work of three students who received awards or commendations in the NUWAO competition. While an entry from a Māori student spoke directly to Indigenous knowledges and spatiality, the Pākehā students' kaupapa aligned with Indigenous aspirations for te mana o te awa in ways that were authentic to them [Fig. 06].

We offer this pātai (question) for future wānanga (deliberation): What might we expect the design outputs from a Te Tiriti-led studio with a diverse group of learners to look like? This risks being equated with making things 'more visibly Māori', or making attempts to 'integrate mātauranga Māori' by having students use Indigenous knowledges as content for what are ostensibly still Eurocentric design practices. Through this reflection on our studio, we offer a pluriversal approach that centres diverse student identities and empowers students to become both more themselves, and better tangata Tiriti. Shifting away from tokenistic 'dressing up' of work that remains within a colonial worldview, we look instead to Indigenous and partnership paradigms that uplift each student's identity and relational project networks.

Te Tiriti-led education equips graduates with the skills to serve their communities and environments in ways that are mana-enhancing for all. It recognises that overcoming Pākehā paralysis involves distinguishing between working directly with Māori knowledge (which should always be Māori-led) and working as part of a Te Tiriti-led community that actively includes Māori and mātauranga Māori. We could therefore state that student work is Te Tiriti-led by virtue of a) demonstrating a strong sense of identity and agency in transforming care into service for communities, in ways that b) align with Te Tiriti and mana whenua aspirations for restorative and regenerative futures. These were evidenced across the entire learning group.

From initial uncertainty about whether a student-centred studio with diverse outcomes would be compatible with Te Tiriti-led pedagogy and expanded models of partnership, we ultimately arrived at the realisation that centring identity is precisely what is required. Architect Jade Kake (Ngāpuhi) and artist Desna Whaanga-Schollum emphasise the importance of diversity in the built environment industry, and Te Tiriti o Waitangi as the 'korowai over everybody' that makes this possible.[51] To 'go forward as yourself' is not only about authentic self-representation, but representing your ancestors and descendants.[52] It is also a way for non-Māori to situate themselves within a Tiriti landscape by acknowledging their own values and how they align with Indigenous kaupapa, rather than adopting Māori values as their own. Through shared kaupapa such as the wellbeing of people, environment, and lived spaces, 'there's always the potential for stronger connections.'[53]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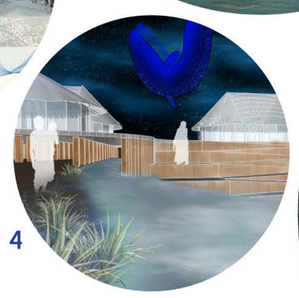
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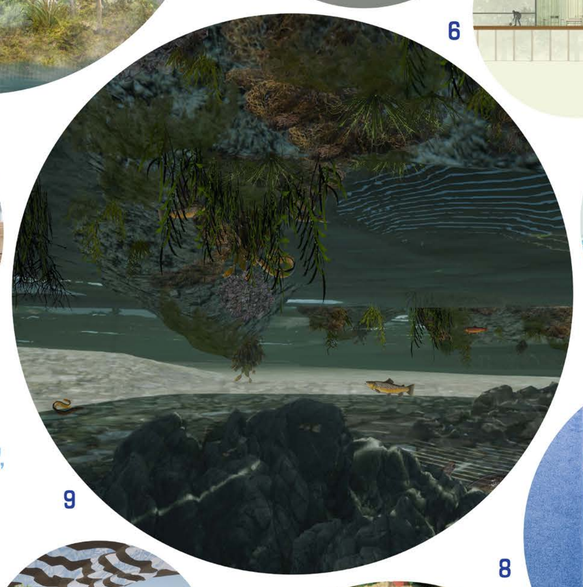
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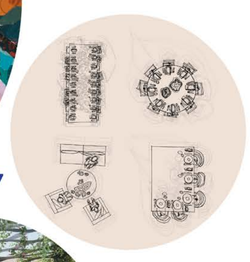
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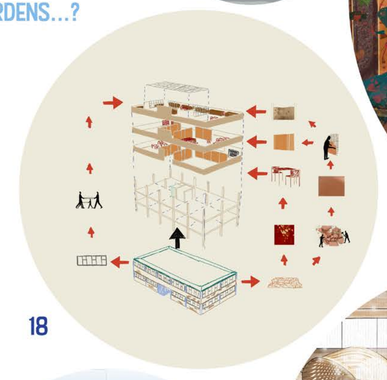
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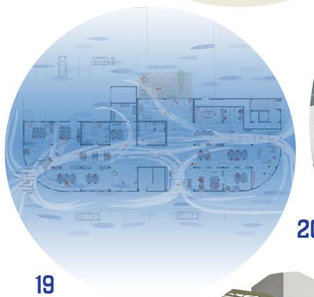
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1/ WHAT iF
WE UPHELD THE MAURi OF
TE AWA KAiRANGi, ALLOWiNG HER
DESiRED COURSE—ARO MAi TĀTOU
TE WHAKAPAPA O TE AWA...?
2/ WHAT iF iN 2200 THERE WAS A NEW WAY OF LiFE iN
TE AWAKAiRANGi AND HUMANS iNHABiTED THE SKY ABOVE THE VALLEY,
LEAViNG THE VALLEY FLOOR TO REGENERATE...?
3/ WHAT iF WiTHiN THE CiTY WE COULD ENJOY SMALL MOMENTS OF
REFLECTiON AND ENGAGE WiTH THE ViTAL ESSENCE OF THE LAND—
TE MAURi O TE WHENUA...?
4/ WHAT iF MAORi AND PACiFiC PEOPLE HAD ACCESS TO
EQUiTABLE HEALTH CARE...?
5/ WHAT iF THERE WAS A SPACE WHERE YOU COULD BE
WHOEVER YOU WANTED—WHERE YOU BECAME LiKE THE
SOUND OF WATER, BUBBLiNG WiTH LiFE AND FLOWiNG FREELY...?
6/ WHAT iF A SERiES OF RiVERSiDE SHELTERS MUTUALLY
NOURiSHED THE PEOPLE AND ECOLOGiES OF THE RiVER...?
7/ WHAT iF DOORWAYS TO EVERYDAY MEMORiES iNSPiRED
CARE, CONNECTiON AND OPPORTUNiTiES TO LiSTEN TO
COMMUNiTiES AFFECTED BY CHANGE...?
8/ WHAT iF YOU COULD SLiP THROUGH LAYERS OF TiME,
SPACE AND MEMORY, CARRiED BY THE AWA...?
9/ WHAT iF WE DESiGNED STRUCTURES ON THE RiVER
THAT WERE MUTUALLY BENEFiCiAL TO THE WELLBEiNG OF
BOTH HUMAN AND AQUATiC iNHABiTANTS?
10/ WHAT iF A RiVERSiDE PAViLiON BASED ON HOLiSTiC
WELLBEiNG FRAMEWORKS SUPPORTED THE WHAKAHOA
COMMUNiTY GROUP AND LOCALS TO REGENERATE
NATiVE PLANTiNG...?
11/ WHAT iF WE CELEBRATED WATER AND iTS POWER
TO NOURiSH US...?
12/ WHAT iF YOU COULD iNHABiT A STAR LANTERN
AT A FiLiPiNO PAROL FiESTA iN RiDDiFORD GARDENS...?
13/ WHAT iF PEOPLE COULD TAP iNTO THE
EVER-PRESENT ESSENCE OF TE AWA KAiRANGi
FOR SPiRiTUAL GROUNDiNG DURiNG THE
TRANSFORMATiON OF THE CiTY...?
14/ WHAT iF THERE WERE MOMENTS ALONG
THE RiVERSiDE PATHWAYS THAT HELPED TO
MATERiALiSE THE CONNECTiONS BETWEEN
PEOPLE AND THE ECOLOGiES OF THE
RiVER'S EDGE..?
15/ WHAT iF THERE WAS AN ALTERNATiVE
ECONOMY MARKET THAT FACiLiTATED
TOGETHERNESS, SUSTAiNABLE TRADiNG
AND FOOD SOVEREiGNTY FOR
THE COMMUNiTY...?
16/ WHAT iF THERE WAS A CO-LiViNG
APARTMENT BUiLDiNG WHERE YOUNG
HiNDU ADULTS FELT EMPOWERED TO
CELEBRATE THEiR CULTURAL iDENTiTY...?
17/ WHAT iF A NEiGHBOURHOOD CAFE
THAT FELT JUST LiKE HOME WAS AT
THE HEART OF A ViBRANT NEW
ANDREW'S AVE COMMUNiTY...?
18/ WHAT iF THE COLLECTiVE LABOUR
OF MAKiNG AND RE-MAKiNG A BUiLDiNG COULD
CREATE AND UPLiFT A COMMUNiTY REGARDLESS
OF SOCiO-ECONOMiC STATUS...?
19/ WHAT iF THE RHYTHMS AND RiTUALS OF A
COMMUNiTY CO-WORKiNG HUB AND MAKER-SPACE
WERE iNTERCONNECTED WiTH THE FLOW OF TE AWA KAiRANGi...?
20/ WHAT iF RiVERSiDE LiViNG FOR iNTERNATiONAL STUDENTS
COULD EMBODY MANAAKiTANGA AND CREATE LONG-LASTiNG FRiENDSHiPS...?
21/ WHAT iF THERE COULD BE AFFORDABLE HOUSiNG ON THE RiVERSiDE THAT
FACiLiTATED WELLBEiNG AND SUPPORTED A SUSTAiNABLE COMMUNiTY ECONOMY...?
22/ WHAT iF A NEW QUEENSGATE LANEWAY BROUGHT A
SLiCE OF HONG KONG TO TE AWAKAiRANGi SO THAT LOCAL AND
iNTERNATiONAL PEOPLE LiKE ME COULD FEEL AT HOME...?
23/ WHAT iF MARGARET STREET TRANSFORMED iNTO A
PLAYSCAPE, USiNG PUBLiC ART TO ACTiVATE
THE MAiN CORRiDOR TO THE RiVER...?
24/ WHAT iF, iN A POST-PANDEMiC WORLD, STREETSCAPES
COULD ADAPT AND RESPOND FOR THE SAFETY, RESiLiENCE
AND WELLBEiNG OF OUR COMMUNiTiES...?
25/ WHAT iF THERE WAS A SPACE TO EXPERiENCE
THE BEAUTY OF NATURE AND RESTORE MENTAL CLARiTY
WiTHiN THE HEART OF THE URBAN ENViRONMENT...?
26/ WHAT iF GOiNG TO WORK WAS LiKE GOiNG FOR A
WALK iN NATURE, SiTTiNG DOWN BESiDE THE RiVER AND
BREATHiNG THE FRESH AiR OF THE VALLEY...?
27/ WHAT iF REST-STOPS BETWEEN WATERLOO STATiON
AND THE RiVER MADE THE PEDESTRiAN JOURNEY
BETTER FOR PEOPLE LiViNG WiTH DiSABiLiTY,
AND ENJOYABLE FOR EVERYONE...?

1/ Samuel Dunstall (Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Ngāti Kahungunu) / Kātao o te maunga, Hōkio ki te tai
2/ Annie Sansom / Garden City in the Sky
3/ Keeley Waller / Vitality
4/ Lottie Harper-Siolo (Iva, Savai'i, Samoa / Palagi) / Body of an Eel
5/ Aidan Johnson / Water Within
6/ Summer Hardie / Shelter
7/ Rhiannon Higgs / 17 Doors
8/ Kate Ashworth / A Living Tapestry of Watery Bodies
9/ Nina Cole / Mutuality
10/ Hannah Fahey-Quine / Whakahoa
11/ Hilary Armstrong / Places of Watery Interest
12/ Sabina Lacson / Parol Fiesta
13/ Holly Patchett / Creating Our Way Home
14/ Kate Healy / Riparian Pathways
15/ Tegan Pirimona / Handpicked
16/ Shyla Chhika / Bhavan
17/ Kate Jowsey / Local
18/ Marie Caecilia Preuss / 100 Ways to Build a Community
19/ Celia Hamling / Flow
20/ Nhi Tu / Moments of Intercultural Connection
21/ Grace Apperley / From Commerce House to Commerce Home
22/ Chung Tin Chow / Homecoming
23/ Libby Tonkin / The March on Margaret
24/ Mollie Nicol / Healthy Streets
25/ Amba Hancock / Passage of Tranquility
26/ Briar Grounds / Nature's Office
27/ Madeleine Thompson / Traverse

Supervised by Jen Archer-Martin & Georgina Stokes

Figure 05.
Curated work of Toi Rauwhārangi 300 Level Spatial Design students from 2022 'What if...?' exhibition (2023).

KĀTAO O TE MAUNGA, HŌKIO KI TE TAI
Samuel Dunstall (Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Ngāti Kahungunu)
Special mention / NUWAO competition student category

MUTUALITY
Nina Cole
First equal / NUWAO competition student category

A LIVING TAPESTRY OF WATERY BODIES
Kate Ashworth
Special mention / NUWAO competition student category

Figure 06.
Curated selection of 2022 work from students Samuel Dunstall, Nina Cole, and Kate Ashworth (2023).

conclusion

This mahi affirms our commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi as the foundation for restorative and regenerative futures in Aotearoa. It has seen us develop tools for an expanded model of partnership in which we practise relational responsibility as treaty partners, contributing to collective flourishing through critical spatial practice. These tools are not replicable methods but rather examples that emerge from and remain rooted within situated, relational practice. We offer this essay as part of a wider discussion that will require wānanga. We do not position ourselves as experts disseminating 'certain' knowledge, but as part of a learning ecology facing the uncertainty of a world in transition.

In this work, we hope to join hands with others to turn Te Tiriti commitments into meaningful Te Tiriti-led pedagogy, underpinned by paradigm shifts and the unconditional welcome of Indigenous epistemes in the academy.[54] Shifting from a fixed mindset of certainty to possibilism and ways of being with uncertainty, we develop pedagogies of manaakitanga as 'a continuous relation, not another academic policy, programme or guideline that can be forgotten once implemented.'[55] We assert that mana-enhancing practices are fundamental to healthy partnerships for restorative and regenerative futuring, founded on ethical relationships across and within difference, and characterised by love, respect, and readiness to learn.

Perhaps, most importantly, Te Tiriti-led design is not just 'working with Māori and things Māori,' but working together, as people of Te Tiriti, to co-create flourishing futures for all. This is pivotal to realising the academy's commitment to Te Tiriti, as we can no longer applaud ourselves for pockets of Māori/Tiriti work while the majority continues to uphold degenerative paradigms. This mahi has been our wake-up call to bring all our research and teaching under the korowai of Te Tiriti. Our own transformational learning has come from the students who, in demonstrating what this might look like, held up a mirror to our assumptions. What they showed us was not co-opted Māori identity reduced to 'cultural garnish,' but themselves, as people ready to authentically serve all the people of Te Tiriti, working together to clear the undergrowth of degenerative paradigms and heal our world. In a flourishing Tiriti landscape, 'everyone remains in his or her birthplace, but the whole opens.'[56]

> Tungia te ururua, kia tupu whakaritorito te tupu o te harakeke.[57]

Tēnā koutou katoa.

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