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idea journal

unbuilt interiors

vol. 21, no. 01

2024

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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Launched in 1999, *idea journal* is an international, double-blind peer-reviewed academic journal dedicated to publishing scholarly and practice-based research on interiors and interiority. *idea journal* is an open-access publication that produces one journal issue annually. It is a subsidiary of the parent institution IDEA—The Interior Design / Interior Architecture Educators Association.

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this issue's provocation

In both the research and practice of spatial design, unbuilt projects are often occluded by those that eventuate in built form. Unable to deliver genuine qualities of spatial experience, the intangibility of unbuilt interiors can be relegated to the status of 'never was', 'never made it', ideas on backup hard drives, in discarded plan drawers, and ageing materials studies.

Yet, unbuilt projects frequently foreground the ideological, cultural, and political motivations that undergird their conception. Unencumbered by municipal regulations, costs, and compromises, unbuilt interiors can maintain the breathtaking ideas that are too often redacted, conceded, or simply forgotten by the time a design physically manifests.

From the interior worlds of Étienne-Louis Boullée's *Cenotaph for Isaac Newton* (1784) to Superstudio's critique of hyper-modern domesticity in *Supersurface, The Happy Island, Project* (1971), unbuilt interiors have the capacity to challenge existing power and political constructs by uniquely contributing unassailed opinions. Instruments of persuasion, they expand discourse on the social impacts of spatial design in ways their built compeers cannot.

Conversely, the persuasive power of unbuilt projects can be used to diminish critiques of the status quo. Hyper-realistic renders and the emergence of compelling AI imagery prime our desires to consume unbuildable images of interior luxury and grandeur. Global inflation and supply chain disruptions continue to entrench concerns about the unbuildable within aspirations of home ownership and status, impacting the values and structures of domestic occupation for those who can afford it and those who cannot.

The 2024 issue of *idea journal* sought contributions that explore the history, theory, practice, and futures of unbuilt interiors. In expanded discourses on the social impacts of spatial design, authors were asked to consider what role archived, artificial, and unachievable designs have on the ideological, cultural, and political contexts of their times.

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in this issue

editorial introduction

Welcome to the 2024 issue of *idea journal: Unbuilt Interiors*. This year presents an excellent series of essays that examine, unpack, and establish new discourse on the influence and significance of unbuilt interior and spatial design projects.

Unbuilt often implies an unspoken relationship to its opposite. This view supposes that the unbuilt is only a temporary stage in the progression of ideas from being unrealised, to being realised. And so, the unbuilt interior or spatial design project is habitually relegated to the category of things to be dismissed, minimised, forgotten, or avoided. Yet, the qualities of unbuilt projects are far less diminutive and, when examined for their own merits, speak to a series of engaging and dialogical design practices that aim to inspire debate, provoke discourse, and change minds.

With these essays we see that unbuilt projects are not definitive, fixed, or complete. It is in their incompleteness of site, time, material, or definition that they manifest their great capacity to evidence things unseen and reflect our own incompleteness as designers, peoples, and cultures. Unbuilt projects optimistically imply that some part of designing and engaging with interior environments will always be unknown, which in many ways is a comforting thought when you consider the alternatives.

In this issue the ruin, the sales catalogue, the artwork, the journal, the exhibition, the model, the housing crisis, the space station, the drawing have all been examined for how they manifest the unbuilt in different ways.

Many encounters with unbuilt interiors first occur through fiction or technology. Video games, for instance, allow people to easily explore and create virtual and unbuilt environments. The resonance between the real and unreal is examined by Miriam Osbourn who reflects on the connection between her precarious but cherished rental home and the continuity provided by the interiors she builds and unbuilds in *The Sims* video game.

Two other authors in this issue use their own creative practice to call into question the distinction between built and unbuilt through visual essays. Bayard's illustrations for Jules Verne's futuristic fiction along with Piranesi's labyrinthine imagery influence Craig McCormack's detailed drawings that conceptualise the increasing interiorisation of outer space. Eleanor Suess uses models and photography to explore the uncanny doubling that occurs when models that replicate spaces are brought into relation with both built and unbuilt interiors.

Documents of unbuilt twentieth-century projects can illustrate shifts in social practices that have influenced everything from local commercial spaces to the perception of the family unit. Julie Collins traces how portfolios of speculative Modernist storefront designs reveal social and technological values embedded in their materials and representations. Sarah Blankenbaker examines Archizoom's *No-Stop City* as a critique of modern cycles of unbuilding and rebuilding, while Alex Brown, Tom Morgan, and Charity Edwards discuss Superstudio's *Twelve Ideal Cities*, framing its presentation in architectural magazines as a conceptual act of 'unbuilding'. Executive

cite as:
Luke Tipene and Olivia Hamilton, 'Editorial Introduction', *idea journal*, 21.1 (2024), pp. 7–8, https://doi.org/10.37113/ij.v21i01.574.

Editor Luke Tipene doubles as an author in this issue and examines how Lars Lerup's exploration of poetry and fiction in the unbuildable drawing project *Love/House* challenges late-capitalist commercial imperatives.

From conception to deconstruction, temporary architecture, pavilions, and exhibitions occupy various points between built and unbuilt. Rachel Simmonds finds that Aalto Atelier's temporary exhibition designs can be understood as 'gone-built' and creating ongoing opportunities for experimentation through engaging with the remaining ephemera. Milica Božić looks at the Venice Biennale and its tense relationship with heritage and culture in her essay that discusses the unbuilt proposals for a pavilion attempting to expose these dynamics and challenge concepts of heritage.

Finally, this issue positions the unbuilt as a space for critique and experimentation. Rana Abudayyeh focuses on the iconic Egg Building on Beirut's Green Line. Using its embattled history and proposed future to inform a design studio, her students reimagine the building as both a symbol of destruction and renewal through adaptive reuse proposals, proposing a framework for community-led urban transformation. This essay reminds us that the unbuilt is always political—either for what it offers up or for why it wasn't realised.

This year also sees *idea journal* appoint four new Editorial Assistants: Mia Peeters, Lada Polyakova, Harrison McTavish, and Sarah Witney. These Assistants join *idea journal* care of the RMIT Interior Design industry internship program. The engagement is part of the journal's increasing efforts to support a culture of scholarship with emerging interior practitioners, researchers, and educators.

We would like to extend our deepest appreciation to this year's authors for their contributions to the 2024 issue of *idea journal: Unbuilt Interiors*. It has been wonderful working with you and seeing your essays develop in depth and significance. We extend a special thanks to Professor Eleanor Suess, who in addition to her visual essay has given us permission to use the image of her artwork *Amassing Light (45 Degrees) 4* (2010), as the cover image for this volume. 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. With special thanks to Andrew Wallace — Chair of IDEA, and Dr Penny Wild — Treasurer of IDEA.

Finally, we would like to thank you, our readers of *idea journal*, for your continued efforts to support us by remaining vigilant and curious about the critical exploration of the histories, theories, and practices of interior environments.

Please enjoy the 2024 issue of *idea journal: Unbuilt Interiors*.

Sincerely,

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

‘from the horror of us and our surroundings’: architectures of unbuilding in *le dodici città ideali*

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abstract

Superstudio’s *Le dodici città ideali* (‘The Twelve Ideal Cities’) appeared in various formats within numerous architectural magazines between 1971 and 1974 as a series of collaged drawings of cities accompanied by short texts and occasionally containing cautionary epilogues with reader ‘tests’. Readings of the project often foreground the speculative or ‘visionary’ potential of the city images: unbuilt architectural representations describing a series of terrifying scenarios for the future of the urban environment. This essay looks beyond individual images of *Le dodici città ideali* to examine the textual content and contexts of its multiple published forms, departing from this future-focused framing and instead highlighting the project’s unwavering concern with the past and present.

In the pages of 都市住宅 (*Toshi Jutaku*), *AD*, *Casabella*, *Archithèese*, *Architektur Aktuell*, Αρχιτεκτονικά Θέματα (*Architektoniká Thémata*), and *Cree*, Superstudio’s intertwined textual and image-based descriptions of the city leveraged the architectural magazine to speak directly to the profession. Laminating the language and imagery of science fiction with references to magic, myth, and history, Superstudio choreographed a series of grand reveals: holding a mirror to the architect-reader placed within the late-capitalist conditions of their labour inside the pages of the architectural magazine.

Through a close reading of two published versions of *Le dodici città ideali*—‘Twelve Cautionary Tales for Christmas: Premonitions of the Mystical Rebirth of Urbanism’ in the December 1971 issue of *AD*, and ‘Premonizioni della parusia urbanistica’ (Premonitions on the Mystical Rebirth of Urbanism) in *Casabella* in January 1972—we highlight Superstudio’s deliberate rejection of architectural design as a future-oriented exercise. Focusing on contextualising the work within the architectural magazine format, we suggest that the cities of *Le dodici città ideali* cannot be thought of *purely* as ‘unbuilt’. Rather, the project sets in motion an architecture of unbuilding through its capacity to reveal ‘the horror of us and our surroundings’ as conditions that already exist in the 1970s. By examining *Le dodici città ideali* as an ‘architecture of unbuilding’, we consider how published images and text can *unbuild* existing conditions, prioritising the retrospective and destructive character of architectural design within the context of the architectural magazine.

keywords

Superstudio, utopia, publishing, unbuilding, horror, speculation

cite as:
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introduction

Superstudio’s *Le dodici città ideali* (‘The Twelve Ideal Cities’) appeared in various formats within numerous architectural magazines originating in the United Kingdom, Continental Europe, and Japan between 1971 and 1974. A series of collaged drawings of cities that illustrate short descriptive texts, the published project regularly included versions of a cautionary epilogue with a reader ‘test’. In the pages of 都市住宅 (*Toshi Jutaku*), *AD*, *Casabella*, *Archithèese*, *Architektur Aktuell*, Αρχιτεκτονικά Θέματα (*Architektoniká Thémata*), and *Cree*, Superstudio’s intertwined textual and image-based descriptions of the city leveraged the architectural magazine format to speak directly to the profession. Laminating the language and imagery of science fiction with references to magic, myth, and history, the group choreographed a series of grand reveals: holding a mirror to the architect-reader placed within the late-capitalist conditions of their labour, inside the pages of the architectural magazine.

Despite the growing number of studies that discuss the layered complexity of Superstudio’s work, readings persist that foreground the speculative or ‘visionary’ potential of projects such as *Le dodici città ideali*.[1] Categorised primarily as unbuilt architectural representations, such readings argue that Superstudio’s work describes a series of terrifying—but nevertheless imaginary—scenarios for the future of the urban environment.[2] As speculative, unbuilt architecture, *Le dodici città ideali* risks being appreciated in purely aesthetic terms—thereby neutralising its critical content—or dismissed out of hand as a half-serious and completely cynical withdrawal from the (supposedly) concrete problems of architecture at the beginning of the 1970s.

This dismissal of the work of Superstudio and of *architettura radicale* more broadly was present in the early reception of the work but is particularly noticeable within histories of ‘built’ architecture of the period. For example, Superstudio is mentioned twice in Manfredo Tafuri’s 1986 text, *Storia dell’architettura italiana: 1944–1985* (History of Italian Architecture: 1944–1985).[3] Within Part One of the text and the chapter ‘New Crises and New Strategies (1968–1975)’, Tafuri locates the group, alongside Archizoom and Ettore Sottsass Jnr, as central figures within Italy’s pop-infused radical architecture tendency, chastising their ‘irresponsible […] hasty reading of “New Left” reviews such as *Quaderni rossi*, *Classe operaia* and *Contropiano*’.[4] While Tafuri directs his most scathing criticism toward Archizoom and their invitation to ‘participate in a destructive and cathartic orgy’, the ‘desecrations’ of Superstudio and Sottsass are by no means spared.[5]

Singling out, as others have, Archizoom’s *No-Stop City* and Superstudio’s *Il monumento continuo* in order to describe the nature of these groups’ work in the immediate aftermath of the student and worker protests of 1968, Tafuri emphasised their perceived retreat into the imaginary:

> The intention was to haul a mythical proletariat onto the stage of psychedelic action, rather than into the experimentalism of the Gruppo 1963. The Archizoom Group’s *No-Stop City* and Superstudio’s *Monumento Continuo* of 1969 turned the project into dream material transcribed with an irony “that made nobody laugh”.[6]

Later, within the second part of the text, Tafuri offers something of a redemption arc to Superstudio members Adolfo Natalini and Gian Piero Frassinelli through their involvement in two built projects from the late 1970s and early 1980s: Zola Predosa electricity centre in Bologna (1978–83) and the Alzate Brianza branch of the Cassa Rurale e Artigianale outside Como (1978–83).[7] As a longstanding critic of *architettura radicale*, Tafuri’s disdain for Archizoom and Superstudio is hardly surprising. Despite this, however, his treatment of *i radicals* in *Storia dell’architettura italiana* is particularly revealing for the ways in which it succinctly captures an enduring set of critiques about the somewhat contradictory destructive and useless nature of their ‘dream material’.

Departing from future-focused, image-centred interpretations of Superstudio’s work as a retreat from reality, this essay sets out to explore the ways in which *Le dodici città ideali* might instead be understood as completely concerned with architecture’s past and present through its engagement with the far-reaching and exploitative political conditions of urban environments under late capitalism in the mid-to-late twentieth century. *Le dodici città ideali* issues an invitation—not an easy one, admittedly, but a request nonetheless—for each architect-reader to examine their own complicity in the maintenance of structural and spatial inequalities in an internalised here and now. In doing so, the project is consistent with Pier Vittorio Aureli’s assertion that the Italian radical project was not a form of withdrawal from the world but ‘the radical rethinking of architecture as not merely a producer of buildings but as creative and critical activity focused on the spatial and political reality of the city.’[8]

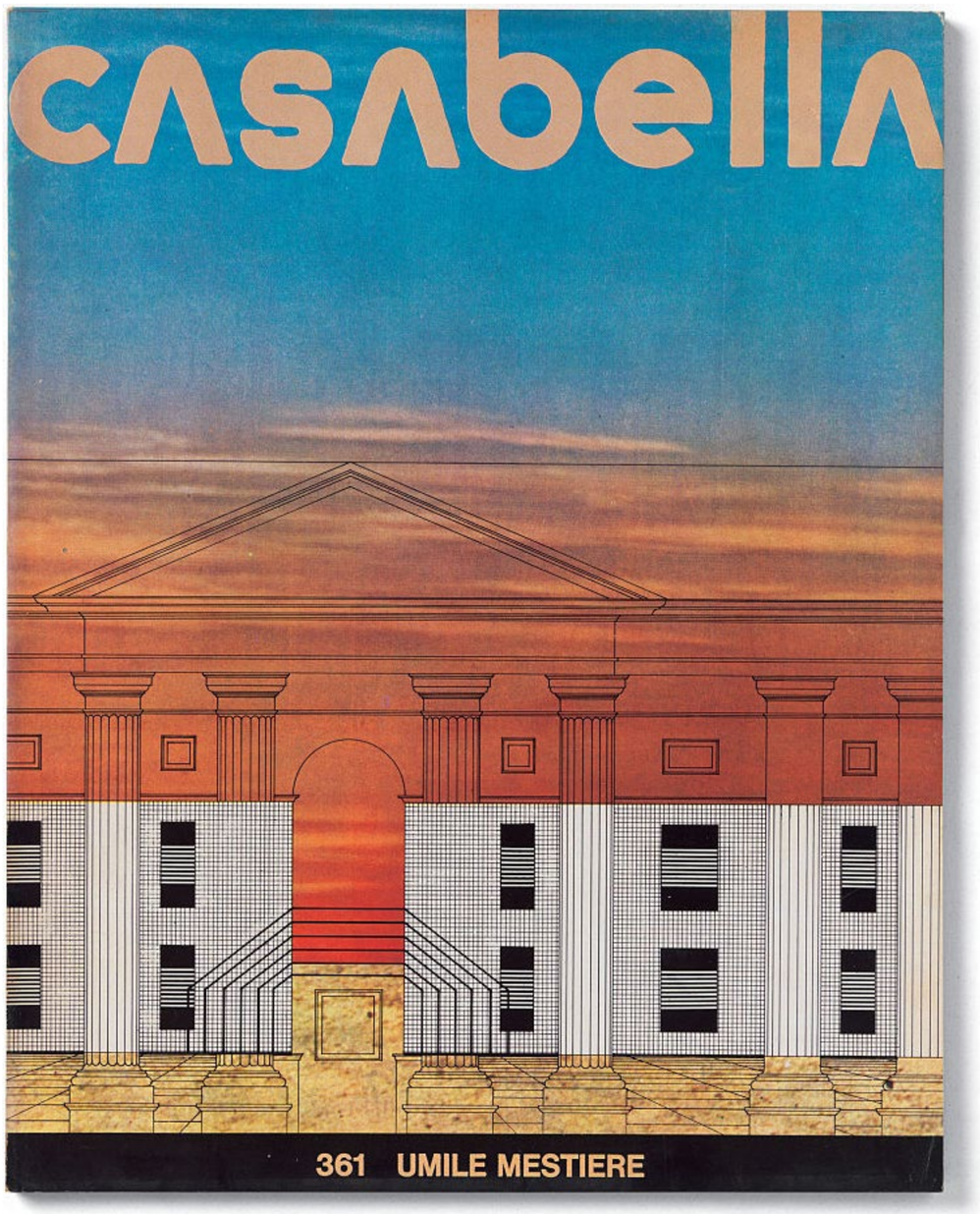

Figure 01.
Cover of *Casabella*, n. 361, January 1972, Milan, Arnoldo Mondadori Editore. Photograph by Marco Covi/Electa/Mondadori Portfolio via Getty Images.

Through a closer examination of two well-known published versions of *Le dodici città ideali*—‘Twelve Cautionary Tales for Christmas: Premonitions of the Mystical Rebirth of Urbanism’ in the December 1971 issue of *AD*, and ‘Premonizioni della parusia urbanistica’ (‘Premonitions on the Mystical Rebirth of Urbanism’) in *Casabella* in January 1972—this research highlights Superstudio’s particular use of the format and distribution of architectural magazines as a strategy for directly addressing the architect-reader *en masse.* Contextualising the project within the architectural magazine format offers a small but significant shift in the reading of *Le dodici città ideali*, through which the cities are understood not as visionary, unbuilt designs but, rather, as part of a targeted call for the architect-reader to engage in processes of *unbuilding* through their reading of the piece. If the category of ‘unbuilt architecture’ frames the project as an as-yet-unmade object, the following exploration of *Le dodici città ideali*’s ‘architecture of unbuilding’ prioritises the project as published material, fully realised within the pages of the magazine interior.

the magazine as a site of dismantling

More recent studies of architectural magazines and their position and location within histories of architecture have been heavily influenced by journalism scholar David Abrahamson’s notion of ‘magazine exceptionalism’. According to Abrahamson, magazines, as distinct from other forms of media, have ‘a unique and powerful role both as a product of its social and cultural moment and as a catalyst for social change. As a result, periodicals can perhaps be usefully understood to lie on a continuum of function, ranging in both intent and effect from the reflective to the transformative.’[9] This marks magazines as important sites of research not just as images of cultural desires or trends, but as *active* forums for the creation and direction of cultural impulses: a ‘mirror of and a catalyst for the tenor and tone of the sociocultural realities of their times.’[10] Extending this thinking to architectural magazines more specifically, architects and architectural historians Stephen Parnell and Mark Sawyer observe that, ‘Architectural

magazines, then, are not only magazines about architecture, but also places where architecture is created.’[11] Thus, they are an interior from where unbuilding can begin.

The following unpicking of *Le dodici città ideali* focuses on what this act of creation can look like and the ways in which the understanding of the architectural magazine as an active site of production might also have been used in transformative acts of dismantling, leveraging the architectural magazine’s dual reflective and directive qualities. That is, we are interested in the short leap between an accepted narrative of architectural magazines and associated works as sites of buildings or projects in becoming, and the possibility that these could also be construed as (equally active) sites of dismantling.

unfolding iterations of *le dodici città ideali* in context

While Superstudio is perhaps most well known for their photomontage images from projects such as *Il monumento continuo* (1969) and *Supersuperficie* (1971–72) , the images of *Le dodici città ideali* (1971–74) also continue to circulate today as disembodied media artefacts, ostensibly made by an architectural collective whose radicality is oversimplified as the refusal to ‘make buildings.’[12] It is important to note, however, that the multiple published versions of *Le dodici città ideali* were first developed not as images, but from a series of short stories written by Superstudio member Gian Piero Frassinelli during 1971. Loosely constructed around visions from inside *Il monumento continuo*, the project’s short stories were later accompanied by a series of ink drawings and collages depicting each city.

Initially exhibited at Mana Gallery in Rome in 1971 as part of ‘Le 12 città ideali, Architettura Interplanetaria’, before being published for the first time in 都市住宅 (*Toshi Jutaku*) later that same year, *Le dodici città ideali* then appeared in *AD* at the end of 1971, followed by *Casabella* at the beginning of 1972. Abridged versions of the project describing three cities were published in *Archithèese*, *Architektur Aktuell* in 1972 and 1973. The latter year also saw inclusion of the project in Αρχιτεκτονικά Θέματα (Architektoniká Thémata) before *Cree* published the work across two separate issues between 1973 and 1974.[13]

Although there are several consistencies across each version of the project, no two iterations of *Le dodici città ideali* are the same (see Figure 02 as an example). With its appearance in each issue of a new publication, key aspects of the text and images were reconfigured, added, and removed. These changes go well beyond the simple adjustment of the project layout to suit each specific magazine’s page format and available space. While they can be partially attributed to the influence of each editorial team and magazine printing and financing structures, it’s also clear that Superstudio treated each published piece as an opportunity to reshape aspects of the project.

Of particular interest to this discussion is also the presence and configuration of the final part of the text for *Le dodici città ideali*, variously referred to as the ‘epilogue’, ‘test results’, or ‘conclusion.’[14] Within each magazine, following the description of the final city, the reader is invariably advised that *Le dodici città ideali* is actually a test. While descriptions of the cities are mostly written in the third person and refer to ‘the inhabitants’ of each, with each revelation that the project is an audition of sorts, the text pivots to directly address the reader/professional audience.[15]

Given this unexpected manoeuvre, it is important to consider the publishing environment at the time. In particular, as pre-war professional architectural magazines with established readerships, both *Casabella* and *AD* navigated shifting identities and new agendas during the early 1970s. For *AD*, this was a challenging moment in which the magazine found itself in the throes of change, pivoting from a staid professional journal toward a more experimental format, although legacies of its traditional format and particularly British remit would be slow to completely disappear.[16] *Casabella*, having already been refashioned by the departure

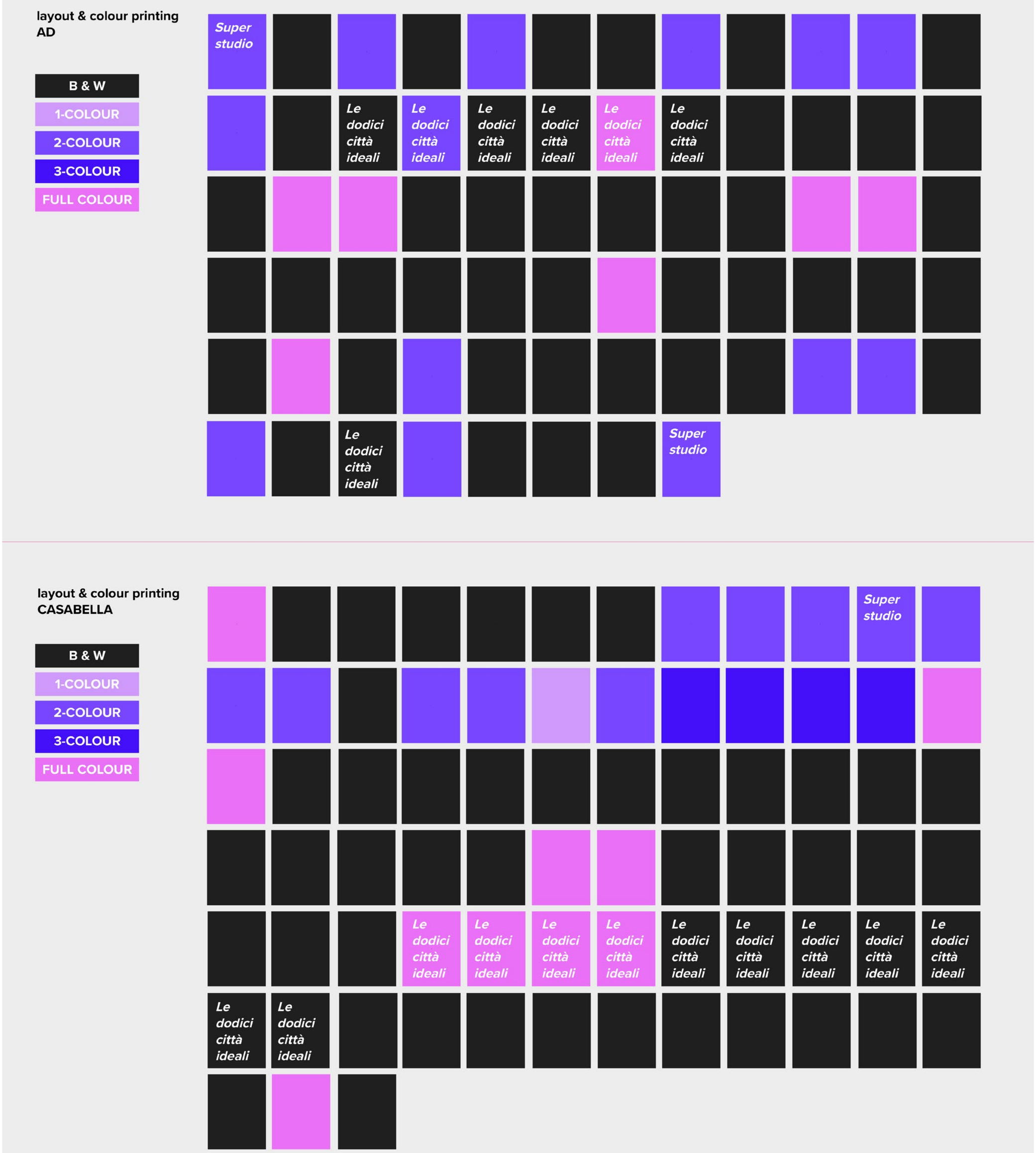

Figure 02.
Composition and colour printing layout—and likely editorial budget—differences in publication: ‘Twelve Cautionary Tales for Christmas: Premonitions of the Mystical Rebirth of Urbanism’, *AD*, 42 (1971) (top) compared to ‘Premonizioni Della Parusia Urbanistica’, *Casabella*, 36.361 (1972) (bottom). Comparative diagram by the authors.

of Ernesto Nathan Rogers in 1965 followed by a five-year interregnum, was also reshaped through the appointment of Alessando Mendini as director and his association with *architettura radicale*.[17] Together, these transformations point toward structural shifts occurring in architecture and media more generally at the time but do not fully account for the processes at play within the many versions of *Le dodici città ideali.*

cautionary tales and quizzes

‘Twelve Cautionary Tales for Christmas: Premonitions on the Mystical Rebirth of Urbanism’ was published in volume 42 of *AD* in December 1971, during a time of significant change to the magazine’s funding model and content direction. While still under the longstanding direction of Monica Pidgeon as editor, and with Robin Middleton and Peter Murray as technical editor and art editor respectively, the publication had recently changed its name to *AD* from *Architectural Design* in 1968 and was sold by the Standard Catalogue Company in 1970, ending a well-subsidised arrangement with Whitechapel Press.[18] Following Middleton’s introduction of the ‘Cosmorama’ section in 1965 and a general shift away from more conventional project reviews, this change in ownership and a new subscriber-funded model marked *AD*’s transition towards a more hybrid ‘little’ professional magazine.[19] As such, the magazine was both sympathetic to the projects of Superstudio and *architettura radicale*, while also sitting in tension with some of the specific political positions of these groups through Middleton’s close alignment with British collective Archigram.[20]

Simon Sadler notes the tensions implicit in the metabolism of groups like Archigram and the way in which Italian radicals were able to refactor them. Both Archigram’s artificial emergence and complexity, as well as their ‘pop’ cultural register were fair game. Proponents of *architettura radicale* were both in dialogue with, and informed by, these projects but consciously ‘replaced indeterminism with overdeterminism, or overdeterminism with indeterminism, in each case exploring the degrees to which architecture and capital can liberate the social body.’[21] Yet the works are sometimes collapsed in discussions highlighting their shared engagement with collage techniques.[22]

The conceptual slippage between Superstudio, Archigram, and countercultural imagery and politics more generally seems to play out in the arrangement and organisation of *Le dodici città ideali* as it appears in *AD*. Positioned relatively early within the issue, between stories of the self-built communities of Libre and the Llama Foundation, the lack of physical structures in ‘Twelve Cautionary Tales’ is immediately apparent.[23] Despite the project’s departure from the West Coast US counterculture-inflected content that underpinned the magazine more broadly (including student coverage of the Instant City Ibiza inflatable later in the magazine), the front and back covers of the issue are both dedicated to portraits of Superstudio made by the artist and illustrator Adrian George, who designed a series of *AD* covers across the early 1970s. The combination of front and back covers unbuilds the sanctity of the designers as a group, contrasting the recognised ‘formal/professional’ guise of the group with an alien and *mystical* set of identities that cast them as monstrous and unsettled. This formulation hints at both the ‘unbuilding’ of the designer/author, as well as the diabolical and implicated figure of the designer writ-large in Superstudio’s own invocation of a reflexive unbuilding.

‘Twelve Cautionary Tales’ was also the first published example of *Le dodici città ideali* to include a ‘Results of the twelve cities test’ at the end of the magazine. Five years after the reader quiz format began appearing in *Cosmopolitan* magazine under its new editor, Helen Gurley Brown, and during the period in which such content became a regular feature, this media artefact undoubtedly draws on the longer history of the personality quiz within women’s magazines and growing popularity of the format among a younger readership.[24]

premonitions and lucky thirteen

As noted earlier, *Casabella* was also undergoing a series of significant shifts in ownership and production conditions at the beginning of the 1970s, coinciding with *Le dodici città ideali*'s publication as 'Premonizioni della parusia urbanistica' in January 1972. Unlike *AD*, however, *Casabella* had experienced controversial editorial team changes following the decision to continue the magazine without the involvement of Ernesto Nathan Rogers in 1965 when it was revived under new ownership, and with new editorial staff (including Mendini) and under the direction of Gian Antonio Bernasconi. As Mendini recalled later, a subsequent shift in ownership and publication structure occurred around June 1970, when Luigi Bellini sold the magazine to Milana (*Casabella*'s printer), coinciding with his appointment as *Casabella*'s director and transformation of the magazine's image and critical approach.[25]

Between 1970 and 1975, Mendini's relationship to and participation in *architettura radicale* is crucial to understanding the magazine's emergence as 'a sacred newsletter for the movement.'[26] When *Casabella* was again acquired by new publishers in 1976, Mendini was abruptly replaced and the magazine quickly pivoted back to a focus on the built object and the centre of the profession. Associated with this shift was the swift dismissal of the magazine's radical detour and a reframing of the content from this period as a disturbing and counter-productive retreat from the *core business* of architecture and planning. As a note from the new publisher that appeared underneath Mendini's final editorial in *Casabella* issue 412, April 1976, explained:

> In light of the innumerable problems afflicting the world today, in such matters as territorial control, planning, the application of new technological systems, and the need to return to a policy of "doing" in these days of ideological and aesthetic crisis, a need has been felt to assign *Casabella* the task of exploring deeply these subjects and debating these key problem areas. This is not a partisan but a specialist role, related directly to today's society and culture.[27]

This emphasis on a 'direct' relationship with 'today's society' and the 'need to return to a policy of "doing"' immediately positions Mendini's editorship and published projects from this period like *Le dodici città ideali* as to some extent disconnected—defined by their failure to 'do' something and their move away from 'specialist expertise' of the profession. The view of *Casabella*'s radical turn in the early 1970s as something that 'did nothing' persisted across the 1970s.[28] In the double issue 440/441 celebrating the magazine's fiftieth year, Gae Aulenti characterised the period after Rogers as 'un buco di nero' (a black hole), going on to say that:

> There was no continuity then also during Mendini's direction, due to promiscuous ideological issues. In order to invent itself, the magazine adopted a figurative system that, to be exotic, invented nothing. Forgetting architecture and its problems ("The ultimate goal of modern architecture is the elimination of architecture itself" Archizoom Associati), meta-considering the image of an object instead of the object itself, its form, and its organisational logic ("Meditation versus action: Social conflict instead of planning process," Alessandro Mendini), the magazine of those years (1970–76) was a bombardment of images.[29]

While such claims of cynical novelty downplay the impact of *Le dodici città ideali*, a closer reading of this piece and its contextualisation within the pages of *Casabella* suggest that, far from being forgotten, 'architecture and its problems' were central to the formation of the project. Departing from the presentation and composition of 'Twelve Cautionary Tales' in *AD* the month before, in *Casabella*, 'Premonizioni della parusia urbanistica' appeared late in the issue and was contained to one section. What was called the 'test results' in *AD* is described here as an 'Epilogue', returning to the format used in the earlier

都市住宅 (*Toshi Jutaku*) version of the project. Also unlike *AD*, *Casabella* issues across this period tended to be grouped around a theme, with the content of issue 361 (including Mendini’s editorial) being dedicated to ‘Umile mestiere’ (‘A lowly job’).[30] Although there are a series of project and practice reviews across the issue, the presence of Florentine radicals in particular is felt throughout the issue through the inclusion of 9999’s scheme competition entry for the new University of Florence, and coverage of the Superstudio and 9999 collaboration S-Space’s 1971 *Mondial Festival* ‘Vita, morte e miracoli dell’architettura’ (‘Life, Death and Miracles of Architecture’).

The format and content of ‘Premonizioni della parusia urbanistica’ is also significant here because of the absence of references to the number twelve within the text and the inclusion of a much larger range of collaged images across the piece. Importantly, the *Casabella* version of *Le dodici città ideali* is the only published version of the work to describe another (thirteenth) city which, unlike the others, only exists in written form. This city appears first in the article following four full-page image spreads of collaged content, wrapping around the description of the first (‘The 2,000 Ton City’) and is the only part of the piece that includes a complete English translation. As Superstudio makes clear in the text, the story of The Thirteenth City will only appear in this version of the project and, through its description of both the unknowable city and those who seek to remember it, was written to reveal more about the cities as a whole. A decoding: ‘We return to you the information that you have provided to us.’[31]

Figure 03.
A series of grand reveals: holding a mirror to the architect-reader and late-capitalist conditions of their labour by perusing multiple versions of *Le dodici città ideali*. As per Elfline, the magazine page does not just render a pre-existing architecture; rather its production and reading is the architectural object itself: ‘there remains a faith in an architecture that does break free from building entirely [...] a role for architecture to create communities via channels of communication.’[33] Photomontage illustration by the authors.[34]

Of importance to this discussion is the role of professional magazines and their legitimising operations. Media theorist Carolyn Kitch reminds us that magazines are both prescriptive and descriptive. They are driven by commercial impulses and also figure as cultural processes; that is, they exist in relation to power, control, and the construction of norms that tell us how imagined professional communities are articulated and where they impact wider audiences and society more generally.[32]

Through representation and rhetoric, the messages contained in magazines promote consensus and a canon via their many fragments (stories, editorials, advertisements, cover images, and the like), which purposely cohere to an overriding perspective. In this context, architectural magazines (like much other professional media) do not just create consumer markets, they also determine future worlds by making new cultural imaginations *public*. Such messages are coded, however, and require readers to decode in turn—introducing unexpected hybridities, where niche audiences resist mainstreamed forms of culture. Superstudio’s various iterations of *Le dodici città*, working across multiple architectural magazines in the 1970s,

appear to invoke this approach, what Kitch calls 'oppositional decoding as an act of resistance.'[35]

Kitch here is quoting journalism scholar Linda Steiner (herself reworking sociologist Stuart Hall's notion of resisting 'preferred readings') as she refers to messaging reframed through *Ms. Magazine:* a widely circulated feminist magazine with recurrent section ('No Comment') that organised reader-sourced items from the broader milieu. The section composited 'preferred' readings of mass media artefacts (advertisements, press-releases, journalism) with little additional information and left it to the audience to reform meanings in these items. Indeed, 'oppositional decoding' should be read as an ongoing argument that emerged from the 1970s and 1980s: a productive method for ways in which communities can construct valid (if temporary) points of resistance to unbalanced images, structures, and codes. This is not a triumphant mode of resistance for Steiner, who freely admits complexities in the re-reading and re-formulating of these positions: at best, 'constructing and maintaining a uniquely, if only partially, satisfying and meaningful world.'[36] This could be a fertile way of considering Superstudio's modes of resistance against those claims of 'doing nothing': *Le dodici città* is not reframing codes for the mass audience, but rather reorients a kind of consciousness in a clearly implicated subject such as working architects of the day.

Considering this nuanced resistance role for *Le dodici città* presents an additional complication in that it sits in and with the consent of a commercial magazine dedicated to the architectural profession. Unlike other forms of oppositional decoding, it orientates itself outward: seeking contexts, it anticipates reading within the broader context of a magazine and at least partially needs to anticipate its potential setting. *Le dodici città ideali* thus communicates with a potentially self-aware audience through the reorganisation of its own symbols, registers, and languages.

This work involves a kind of triple-play: *Le dodici città ideali* needs to situate images and symbols that are recognised by a professional architecture audience, which are understood as standing in for aspects of an ongoing (and hard-fought) debate. This also self-consciously draws attention to its setting and to the tensions in the *mass/popular* aspects of a specialised audience. For example, the sardonic way in which the questionnaire is 'a test no less accurate than those frequently published in magazines.'[37] Both the reflection in symbols and visual language, and declaration of its position within a magazine landscape, are polemical techniques that require some energy from the audience to read and unpack and yet still retain a degree of authorial control.

A final aspect to consider is the actual *situatedness* of the work within the magazine, and within and around other works and artefacts, which presents a challenge to any preferred reading: multivalent forms in multiple venues draw Superstudio's work into a space where the audience can, and need to, code and recode its meaning over and over again. Critically, this involves *Le dodici città ideali* being read in the context of more traditional 'built' building reviews, product advertisements, and even explicitly 'unbuilt' images and imaginaries. Superstudio already had this as part of their toolkit—Craig Buckley provides an example where the background for one of their vignettes of the continuous monument shows children playing in a streetscape that would be recognisable (to readers of *Casabella* at least) from an earlier article about the British industrial city—in turn placing this work in dialogue with that of the Smithsons and by extension Team X.[38] These layouts are an exercise in confronting, contrasting, opposing, and *unbuilding* expectations around the professional architect audience's own role and complicity in the present milieu. We argue this reading emerges from both the visual and tonal register of *Le dodici città ideali*, and its accidental and intentional juxtapositions within the magazine format itself.

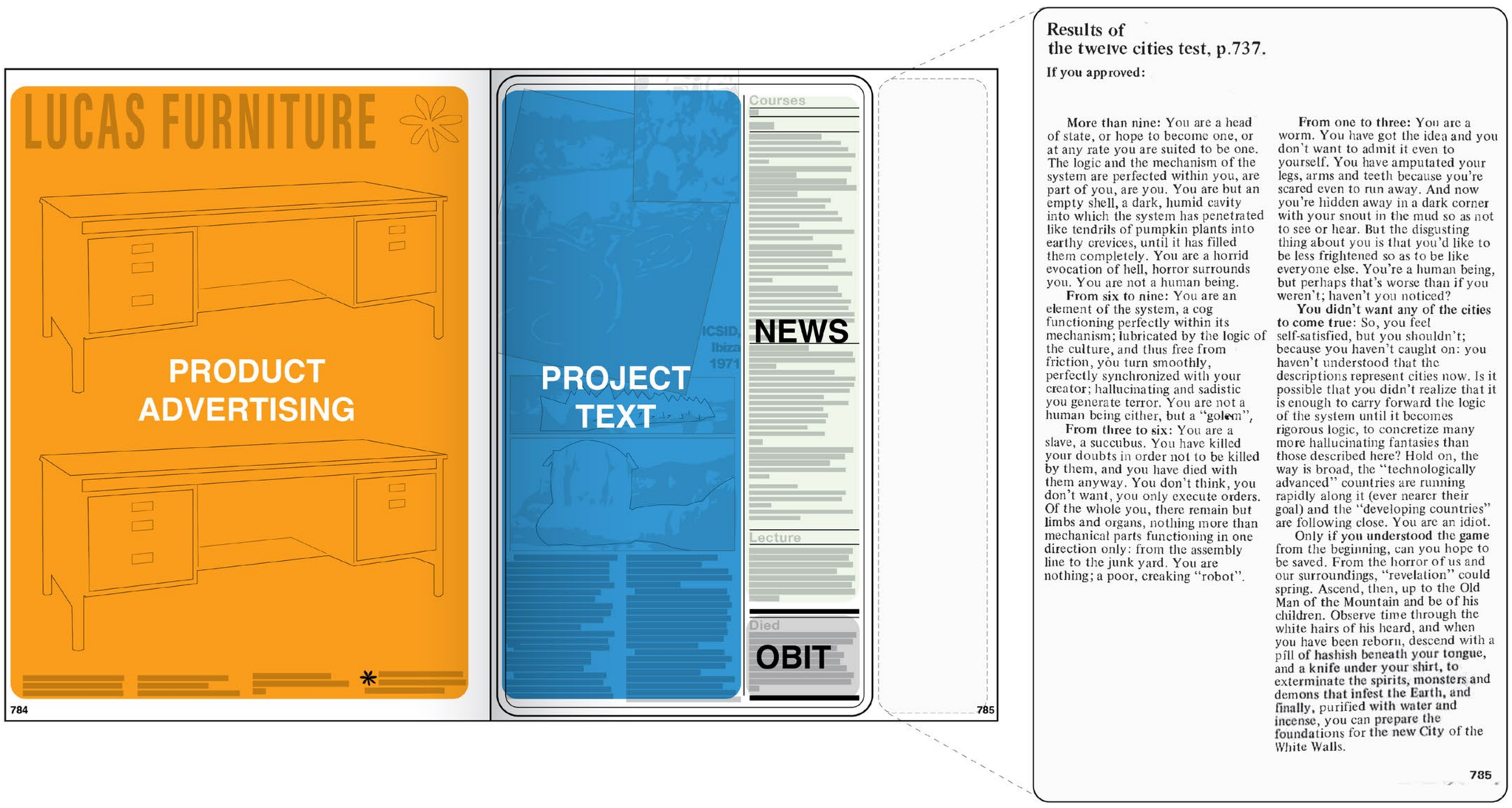

Figure 04.
Test Results from ‘Twelve Cautionary Tales for Christmas: Premonitions of the Mystical Rebirth of Urbanism’, *AD*, 42 (1971), p. 785. Photomontage diagram by the authors.

Acts of oppositional decoding thus require both the creation of a niche community and the *motivation* of its readers as a participant in the event. This highlights another intriguing aspect of the project: a tendency to directly address the architect-reader. This occurs most clearly in the epilogue/quiz sections and the description of *Casabella*’s Thirteenth City. The increasingly aggressive insults of *Le dodici città ideali* are written to speak directly to the reader, as illustrated in *AD* where the results are formatted at the back of the magazine as in Figure 04, and where the results do not include a series of extended quotes that first appeared in 都市住宅 (*Toshi Jutaku*) earlier (in Japanese) and *Casabella* (in Italian) later.[39]

Whether ‘you are a head of state’, a ‘cog’ in the system, a ‘succubus’, a ‘worm’, or an ‘idiot’, the test results unfold as an unrelenting block of text before the reader.[40] Readers who ‘understood the game from the beginning’ are provided with instructions:

> From the horror of us and our surroundings, revelation could spring. Ascend, then, up to the Old Man of the Mountain and be of his children. Observe time through the white hairs of his heard, and when you have been reborn, descend with [a] pill of hashish beneath your tongue, and a knife under your shirt, to exterminate the spirits, monsters and demons that infest the Earth, and finally, purified with water and incense, you can prepare the foundations for the new City of the White Walls.[41]

In another reconfiguration of *Le dodici città ideali*, the Thirteenth City referenced in *Casabella* sets out an important moment of direct reader engagement. The story of those who still gather in the field to remember, recall, or locate the Thirteenth City ends with a note provided directly to the reader, jumping out from the page. The directness of this text is arguably partly obscured in the English translation, which uses a more passive voice, but is clear in the original Italian:

> Lentamente compresero che non si trattava di supposizioni o di piani, né erano descrizioni trasmesse in un bizzarro codice: non erano neppure metafore o parabole. Aggiunsero cosi alla fine una nota (ritrovabile solo in questa edizione) sul come e perché di tali racconti. Il testo della nota era: « Vi restituiamo i dati che ci avete fornito »
>
> Slowly, they began to understand that these were not suppositions or plans, nor were they descriptions transmitted in a bizarre code; they were not even metaphors or parables. They therefore added a note (to be found only in this edition) on the why and the wherefore of these stories. The text of the note was: “We return to you the information that you have provided to us.”[42]

Le dodici città ideali capitalised on what Parnell and Sawyer (following Abrahamson) have described as the architecture magazine’s ‘aim to be read actively in a way that catalyses action.’[43] The magazine context implies corralling a community into an undertaking—and is not remarkable in itself—with these items necessarily collapsing the ‘journalistic distance between magazine producers and consumers’ and constructing a community of action.[44] In this case what is compelling is not the broad way in which a motivation is implied, rather how *Le dodici città ideali* constructs specific effects. These move beyond a simple extortion to make or build, instead becoming a way of reflexively *unbuilding*: a project that requires self-awareness and collapsing of the audience. A key aspect of this, and a modification to the original *Le dodici città ideali*, is the adaptation of the second person ‘you’ as a subject of direct address in each of these iterations.

The second person exists organically within the language of advertising and by association the shared language of the magazine, but criticism also identifies the emergence of this as a *literary* mode in the 1950s and 1960s and unpicks some of the key affordances in the mode. A core component of this as part of a narrative is a re-emphasis on the subjective experience and knowledge of the ‘narratee’ and corresponding construction of a specific community rather than a simple audience. Literary theorist Monika Fludernik, in her early and foundational survey of second person narratives, identifies this as an artefact emerging partially out of oral traditions. While there is an epistolary quality to many of these narratives, there is something new that emerges when the addressee is also an *actant*.[45] For Fludernik, ‘[t]he crucial position of this narrator is mirrored linguistically in his reference to the community as “ours” and in the self referential inclusion of himself as a member of the narrated community.’[46] The foregrounding of community is critical: it highlights the presence (or absence) of the reader in a group. Crucially, ‘second person fiction utilizes this subversive potential for creating an unsettling effect—that of involving the actual reader of fiction, not only in the tale, but additionally in the world of fiction itself, an eerie effect that can be put to very strategic political use.’[47]

More recently, oral history scholar Jarmila Mildorf has extended this notion, suggesting it can sometimes support ways of speaking collectively and constructing collectivity. This collapses the I/you distinction and allows for parallels to emerge. In *Le dodici città ideali*, excoriating language that is addressed to the reader (‘you are a worm’) is as much a reflection on Superstudio’s own conflicted manoeuvres as it is a repudiation of some half-imagined reader, or we are all collectively implicated as worms.[48] As Mildorf argues, ‘these considerations suggest that if we tell someone his or her story we can only justify doing so via the authority of knowing that story ourselves.’[49] The importance of the ‘you’ does not allow the authors to escape judgement, and in fact constructs and reinforces the invitation to unbuild.

Finally, there are explicit ways in which the second person constructs communities themselves.

Narratologist Magdalena Rembowska-Płuciennik reflects on the way in which the second person 'you' catalyses reader engagement and directs participatory practices. For Rembowska-Płuciennik, 'a growing body of print and digital narratives continues to play with the ambiguity of second-person narration, attracting the interest and stretching the skills of its readers. The success of this mode [...] relies on the ability of the "you" form to offer imaginative access to joint actions and shared experiences, analogous to the social context of cognition and to our everyday social interactions.'[50] Altogether, these positions help situate both the figure of the reader as an active participant in *Le dodici città ideali*—as well as the interesting double action of speaking for the reader, and sharing or collapsing the complicit nature of both the authors and readers in the reality of each of the twelve ideal cities.

conclusion, or 'leggete con attenzione e saprete veramente chi siete: la rivoluzione è vicina'[51]

More recent readings of Superstudio have cast work as reaction against building as the object, focusing on expanded practices—the design of spaces, tools, and objects—to resituate their practice as active.[52] As Ross K. Elfline observes in relation to Superstudio's series of *Histograms* investigations from the late 1960s and early 1970s, this also opens up important ideas about the kinds of 'work' involved in engaging with these projects, that is, how the work of architecture presents itself as forming 'work' for the occupant:

> Is engaging with the Histograms mere play, though, or is the act of permuting, enlarging, or shrinking the available objects not also a form of work? The separation between the two is, crucially, hard to make out, but the activity itself – the playful work of habitation – is given over to self-governing users who make of their living environment what they want.[53]

This can also be turned towards a question of work for the designer. Refocusing attention on the professional milieu allows for a sidestepping of the idea of the 'unbuilt' and to instead focus on the actions performed by an 'architecture of unbuilding', with its attendant complications and the nature of the designer as complicit in these systems. This unbuilding was achieved through strategic co-location of material in magazines, as the sites and conditions that 'build' architectural professional sentiment.

As ever, the risk of reducing this project to only its images is to ignore the realities of the moment it is engaging with. In each format, *Le dodici città ideali* appears to be completely speculative but the collection of collages, texts, and tests actually operate as a project review that asks for some unbuilding to be done. *Le dodici città ideali* is akin to the architectural project, exhibition, and product reviews common to both magazines. Like them, it does not propose an alternative vision; it simply comments on what is already there. *Le dodici città ideali* does not *propose* anything as an alternate future; instead, it unbuilds assumptions. In both the *AD* and *Casabella* versions, the project asks the profession to examine what is already there, undoing something rather than speculating in response to it. *Le dodici città ideali* reminds us that this thing—whether architecture, the city, or even the magazine—exists and we can talk about *it as it is*.

Considering the unbuilding of *Le dodici città ideali* as directly engaged with, and acting within, the mind of the individual reader helps to account for the slippery readings of the project as pointlessly speculative, either devoid of critical content beyond beautiful images or wilfully ignorant of the 'real' work of the architect. The imperceptibility of action outside these individual *mental interiors* makes it easy to disregard as frivolous or indulgent. Nevertheless, by looking more closely at Superstudio's highly considered and sustained interactions with the potential of the architectural magazine to facilitate this kind of immediate

conversation with the profession, the significance of *Le dodici città ideali* is expanded and reframed.

Fifty years after the first publication of *Le dodici città ideali*, in a commencement address given to graduating architecture students at Harvard University's Graduate School of Design in 2021, artist and writer Jenny Odell highlighted the power and importance of attention. Identifying the figure of the artist and designer as an 'orchestrator of attention', Odell traces the same line that Superstudio, with trademark crypticism, put forward within *Le dodici città ideali*:

> I believe that we individually have the ability to direct our attention—for example, to see in multiple time frames at once, or at the very least outside of the default temporality of everyday life. But I also believe that we need help in doing this, and that's why the role of the artist and designer that's most important to me right now is indeed one as an orchestrator of attention. Someone who can create the lenses with which we can see a completely different reality—not one that is imaginary or fabricated, but that has in fact been there all along. Of course, doing this requires close attention on the orchestrator's part as well, which is what brings me to the second idea I mentioned, of design as response—not to the world as you want or expect it to be, but a response to the world as it really is, right now, in all of the detail that unfolds if you just give yourself time to see it.[54]

The cities of *Le dodici città ideali* are not unbuilt but have 'been there all along'. As Odell's observations remind us, to see the world around us through this work demands our attention. This is precisely what Superstudio called out for each time they addressed us directly, asked us to read carefully, and warned us that 'revelation is near'.[55] Confronted not just with the reality of the ideal cities, but also with our own complicity in the construction and maintenance of these environments, the architect-reader is subject to something even more destructive than an 'unfolding' of detail through an engagement with *Le dodici città ideali*. Inside the pages of these magazines, inside the mind of the reader, the image of architect and the city could be reconceived through an unbuilding of 'the world as you want or expect it to be'. In examining Superstudio's text and its appearance in various architectural magazines from 1971 to 1974, we too refuse an interpretation of this work—and indeed, perhaps our own—as a speculative vision of the future. A more critical action, Superstudio seems to warn us, is to interrogate spatial practices in the present. In analysing this call to remain attentive through two versions (the December 1971 *AD* publication 'Twelve Cautionary Tales for Christmas' and *Casabella*'s January 1972 'Premonizioni della parusia urbanistica'), which both appeared during tumultuous periods of change in these magazines' editorial direction and ownership, we uncover where *Le dodici città ideali* used the architectural magazine format to engage readers in dismantling existing conditions of exploitation and inequality, rather than presenting futuristic visions of transformation. The project leveraged the magazine's dual role as both mirror and catalyst for change, pushing architects to critically reflect on their profession's role in contemporary urban issues, as it can—alarmingly—do to this day.

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notes

1 For example, a number of important texts exploring the complexity of Superstudio's work were published around the fiftieth anniversary of the collective's founding: *Gabriele Mastrigli, Superstudio: Opere, 1966–1978* (Quodlibet, 2016). See also earlier work such as Marie-Thérèse Stauffer, 'Utopian Reflections, Reflected Utopias: Urban Designs by Archizoom and Superstudio', *AA Files* (2002), pp. 23–36; Ross Kenneth Elfline, 'Superstudio and the Staging of Architecture's Disappearance' (PhD thesis, University of California, 2009).

2 William Menking and Olympia Kazi, 'Radical Italian Architecture Yesterday and Today', *Architectural Design*, 77 (2007); or Stefano Corbo, *Exteriorless Architecture: Form, Space, and Urbanities of Neoliberalism* (Taylor & Francis, 2023).

3 Manfredo Tafuri, *History of Italian Architecture, 1944–1985*. trans. Jessica Levine (MIT Press, 1989). Originally published as Manfredo Tafuri, *Storia dell'architettura italiana, 1944–1985*, Piccola Biblioteca Einaudi (G. Einaudi, 1986).

4 Tafuri, *Storia dell'architettura italiana*, p. 99.

5 Tafuri, *Storia dell'architettura italiana,* p. 99.

6 Tafuri, *Storia dell'architettura italiana,* p. 99.

7 Tafuri, *Storia dell'architettura italiana,* p. 181.

8 Pier Vittorio Aureli, 'Manfredo Tafuri, Archizoom, Superstudio and the Critique of Architectural Ideology', in *Architecture and Capitalism: 1845 to the Present*, ed. by Peggy Deamer (Routledge, 2013), pp. 132-147 (p. 145).

9 David Abrahamson, 'Magazine Exceptionalism: The Concept, the Criteria, the Challenge', *Journalism Studies*, 8.4 (2007), pp. 667-670 (p. 667).

10 David Abrahamson, 'Introduction Scholarly Engagement with the Magazine Form: Expansion and Coalescence', in *The Routledge Handbook of Magazine Research: The Future of the Magazine Form*, ed. by David Abrahamson and Marcia R. Prior-Miller (Routledge, 2015), pp. 1-6 (p. 1).

11 Stephen Parnell and Mark Sawyer, 'In Search of Architectural Magazines', *arq: Architectural Research Quarterly*, 25 (2020), pp. 43-54 (p. 44).

12 See, for example, James Imam, 'Architects Dreaming of a Future with No Buildings', *The New York Times*, 12 February 2021 <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/12/arts/design/superstudio-civa.html> [accessed 30 June 2024]; Stephen Wallis, 'A '60s Architecture Collective That Made History (but No Buildings)', *T: The New York Times Style Magazine*, 13 April 2016 <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/04/t-magazine/design/superstudio-design-architecture-group-italy.html?searchResultPosition=3> [accessed 03 July 2024].

13 Superstudio, '12の理想都市 (the 12 Ideal Cities)', 都市住宅 (*Toshi Jutaku, Urban Housing*), 41 (1971), pp. 5–28; Superstudio, 'Twelve Cautionary Tales for Christmas: Premonitions of the Mystical Rebirth of Urbanism', *AD*, 42 (1971), pp. 737–42, 85; Superstudio, 'Premonizioni Della Parusia Urbanistica', *Casabella*, 36.361 (1972), pp. 45–55; Superstudio, 'Drei Warnungen Ven Einer Mystischen Wiedergeburt Des Urbanismus', *Archithèese*, 1 (1972), pp. 3–7, 36; Superstudio, '3 Volkommene Stadte', *Architektur Aktuell*, 34 (1973), pp. 46–48, 68; Superstudio, 'Δώδεκα Ἰδανικές Πόλεις. Προμηνύματα Γιὰ Τὴ Δεύτερη Παρουσία Τῆς Πολεοδομίας [Dódeka Idanikés Póleis. Prominýmata Giá Tí Défteri Parousía Tís Poleodomías]', Αρχιτεκτονικά Θέματα [*Architektoniká Thémata* - Etísia Epitheórisi], 7 (1973), pp. 84–94; Superstudio, ‹Douze Contes Premonitoires Pour Une Renaissance Mystique De L'urbanisme›, *Cree*, 25 (1973), pp. 34–37; Superstudio, 'Douze Contes Premonitoires Pour Une Renaissance Mystique De L'urbanisme - Suite Et Fin', *Cree*, 26 (1974), pp. 62–66.

14 Versions of *Le dodici città ideali* in 都市住宅 (*Toshi Jutaku*), *Casabella*, and Αρχιτεκτονικά Θέματα (*Architektoniká Thémata*) contained epilogues, while AD contained a section called 'Results of the Twelve Cities Test.' Archithèese, Architektur Aktuell referred to both epilogues and test results, while Cree called this section 'Conclusions.'

15 Two exceptions are when the reader is provided with instruction on how to enter Barnam Jnr's Magnificent and Fabulous City and in the description of the Grand Factory's advertising for the Continuous Production Conveyor-belt City.

16 Steve Parnell, 'Architectural Design, 1954–1972: The Architectural Magazine's Contribution to the Writing of Architectural History' (University of Sheffield, 2011); Lydia Kallipoliti, 'The Soft Cosmos of AD's "Cosmorama" in the 1960s and 1970s', *Architectural Design*, 80 (2010), pp. 34–43.

17 Paolo Scrivano, 'Against the Contingencies of Italian Society: Issues of Historical Continuity and Discontinuity in Italy's Postwar Architectural Periodicals', in *Modernism and the Professional Architecture Journal: Reporting, Editing and Reconstructing in Postwar Europe*, ed. by Torsten Schmiedeknecht, Andrew Peckham and Christoph Allenspach (Routledge, 2019), pp. 184–96; Olympia Kazi, 'Interview with Alessandro Mendini: Casabella Editor-in-Chief, 1970–6', in *Clip, Stamp, Fold: The Radical Architecture of Little Magazines 196x–197x*, ed. by Beatriz Colomina and Craig Buckley (Barcelona: Actar, 2010), pp. 389–392.

18 Robin Middleton, 'Working for Monica', *AA Files* (2010), p. 27.

19 Middleton, 'Working for Monica'. Parnell and Sawyer, 'In Search of Architectural Magazines'; Kallipoliti, 'The Soft Cosmos of AD's "Cosmorama" in the 1960s and 1970s'; Véronique Patteeuw, 'Architecture, Writing and Criticism in the 1960s and 1970s: The Little Magazine as Agent Provocateur', *Architectural Theory Review*, 15.3 (2010), pp. 281–97; Steve Parnell, 'AD Magazine–80 Years in Print', *Architect's Journal* (1 July 2010) <https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/practice/culture/ad-magazine-80-years-in-print> [accessed 21 November 2024].

20 Parnell, 'Architectural Design, 1954–1972'.

21 Simon Sadler, *Archigram: Architecture without Architecture* (MIT Press, 2005), p. 183.

22 See, for example, Jennifer Shields, *Collage and Architecture*. Second edition (Routledge, 2024), p. 99: 'the ephemeral nature of human activity in the city was, to Archigram, more important than the architecture framing it, a concept that was also taken up by Superstudio in Italy.'

23 Both Libre and the Llama Foundation have been in operation since the late 1960s. Libre was founded in 1968 in Huerfano County, Colorado; The Lama Foundation was founded in New Mexico in 1967. The *AD* article contained material from the Foundation's annual reports, as well as drawings

and photographs of Llama Foundation’s first buildings, including the Dome complex by Steve Baer. See: Beatie Wolfe with Linda Fleming, ‘The World Needs More Libres’, *Birdy*, 093 (September 2021) <https://www.birdymagazine.com/text/the-world-needs-more-libres-w-linda-fleming-by-beatie-wolfe/>; ‘About the Lama Foundation’ https://www.lamafoundation.org/about/history [accessed 4 July 2024].

24 Sarah Laskow describes some of the first quizzes to appear in *Cosmo* in 1966. ‘The Test of the Unfaithful Wife’ and ‘Who am I?’ are particularly relevant here for their incorporation of both a cautionary tale and the specific focus on being able to know oneself, respectively. Sarah Laskow, ‘In Search of the Ur-quiz’, *Columbia Journalism Review* (17 March 2014) <https://www.cjr.org/behind_the_news/in_search_of_the_ur-quiz.php> [accessed 21 November 2024].

25 Kazi, ‘Interview with Alessandro Mendini’, p. 390.

26 Kazi, ‘Interview with Alessandro Mendini’, p. 391.

27 Alessandro Mendini, ‘Congedo /Good-Bye’, *Casabella*, 40.412 (1976), p. 3.

28 See, for example, Giorgio Muratore writing about Casabella 1965–75 in the fiftieth anniversary issue: ‘certo è però che la miscela di nichilismo, di cinismo e di misticismo che in qualche modo ne derivò non fu in grado di produrre la benché minima modificazione del contesto.’ (‘What is certain, however, is that the mixture of nihilism, cynicism and mysticism that somehow derived from it [radical architecture and design] was not capable of producing the slightest modification of the context’). Giorgio Muratore, ‘Tra ipotesi tecnologica e crisi della progettazione “Casabella” 1965–1975’, *Casabella*, 42.440/441 (1978), p. 94.

29 ‘Non fu continuita poi anche durante la Mendini, per questioni ideologiche promiscue. Per poter inventare se stessa la rivista adottò un sistema figurativo che per essere esotico non inventò nulla. Dimenticato l’architettura e le sue problematiche (“Fine ultimo dell’architettura moderna è l’eliminazione dell’architettura stessa”, Archizoom Associati) metaconsiderando l’immagine di un oggetto invece che l’oggetto stesso e la sua forma, la sua logica organizzazione (“Meditazione contro azione. Conflitto sociale invece che processo progettuale” Alessandro Mendini), la rivista di quegli anni (1970–1976) è stata un bombardamento di immagini.’ Gae Aulenti, ‘Architettura e forma grafica’, *Casabella*, 42.440/441 (1978), p. 87 (translation by authors).

30 Alessandro Mendini, ‘Umile mestiere/A lowly job’, *Casabella*, 36.361 (1972), p. 5.

31 Superstudio, ‘Premonizioni Della Parusia Urbanistica’, p. 49 (translation by authors).

32 Carolyn Kitch, ‘Theory and Methods of Analysis: Models for Understanding Magazines’, in *The Routledge Handbook of Magazine Research: The Future of the Magazine Form.* ed. by David Abrahamson, and Marcia R. Prior-Miller (Taylor and Francis, 2015), pp. 9-21.

33 Elfline, ‘Superstudio and the Staging of Architecture’s Disappearance’, p. 178.

34 Including collaged content from Adrian George, ‘Superstudio Visualised … in the Future’, *AD*, 42 (1971), back cover; Alessandro Mendini. Ed. *Casabella*, 36 (1972), all pages including front and back cover; Cypress Liu, ‘Reflection of the Eye in a Round Mirror’ <https://www.pexels.com/photo/reflection-of-the-eye-in-a-round-mirror-17987793/> (2023), use of original image in adaptation via Pexels licence <https://www.pexels.com/license/> [accessed 6 July 2024]; David Reed, ‘Adrian George’ <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw77768/Adrian-George?LinkID=mp07896&role=sit&rNo=0> (1980) [accessed 6 July 2024]; FOTO:Fortepan, ‘SZOLNOKTERV, tervező iroda–ID 1316’ <http://www.fortepan.hu/_photo/download/fortepan_4368.jpg> (1976), use of original image in adaptation via Creative Commons (CC BY-SA 3.0) [accessed 3 July 2024]; Jacque Dias, ‘Residential Buildings Reflecting in Retro Mirror’ <https://www.pexels.com/photo/residential-buildings-reflecting-in-retro-mirror-18913021/> (2023), use of original image in adaptation via Pexels licence <https://www.pexels.com/license/> [accessed 4 July 2024]; Monica Pidgeon, ‘Self Portrait’ <https://arquitecturaviva.com/articles/monica-pidgeon-1> (date unknown, c.1970) [accessed 6 July 2024]; Monica Pidgeon, Ed. *AD*, 42 (1971), all pages including front and back cover; Nubhap, ‘A Still Photo of Alessandro Mendini’ <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Alessandro_Mendini_01.jpg> (2016), use of original image in adaptation via Creative Commons (CC BY-SA 4.0) [accessed 5 July 2024]; Superstudio, ‘Twelve Cautionary Tales for Christmas: Premonitions of the Mystical Rebirth of Urbanism’, *AD*, 42 (1971), pp. 737–42; Superstudio, ‘Premonizioni Della Parusia Urbanistica’, *Casabella*, 36 (1972), pp. 45–55; and William Larsen, ‘Photographer Reflection in Convex Mirror’ <https://www.pexels.com/photo/photographer-reflection-in-convex-mirror-20376243/> (2024), use of original image in adaptation via Pexels licence <https://www.pexels.com/license/> [accessed 2 July 2024].

35 Kitch, ‘Theory and Methods of Analysis’, p. 12.

36 Linda Steiner, ‘Oppositional Decoding as an Act of Resistance’, *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 5 (1988), p. 12.

37 ‘Un test non meno accurato di quelli frequentemente pubblicati dai rotocalchi’ Superstudio ‘Premonizioni Della Parusia Urbanistica’, p. 55. (translation by authors)

38 Craig Buckley, *Graphic Assembly: Montage, Media, and Experimental Architecture in the 1960*s (University of Minnesota Press, 2019), p. 261.

39 Alex Brown and Charity Edwards, ‘Incanting Twelve Ideal Cities’, *Scroope: The Cambridge Architecture Journal*, 32 (2023), pp. 27-56.

40 While the text uses ableist language in referring to the reader using this term, the overarching point of the test results relates to spectrums of power and moments of realisation.

41 Superstudio, ‘Twelve Cautionary Tales for Christmas’, p. 785

42 The English translation accompanying this phrase is shown as ‘This an information feedback’; however, the Italian phrasing—as with other locations in the text when referring to ‘you’—uses the second-person plural pronoun ‘vi’ to address readers. Superstudio, ‘Premonizioni Della Parusia Urbanistica’, p. 49 (translation by authors).

43 Parnell and Sawyer, ‘In Search of Architectural Magazines’, p. 44.

44 Parnell and Sawyer, ‘In Search of Architectural Magazines’, p. 44.

45 Monika Fludernik, ‘Second Person Fiction: Narrative “You” as Addressee and/or Protagonist’, *Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, 18 (1993), p. 222.

46 Fludernik, ‘Second Person Fiction’, p. 232.

47 Fludernik, ‘Second Person Fiction’, p. 232.

48 Superstudio, ‘Twelve Cautionary Tales for Christmas’, p. 785.

49 Jarmila Mildorf, ‘Second-Person Narration in Literary and Conversational Storytelling’, *StoryWorlds*, 4 (2012), p. 81.

50 Magdalena Rembowska-Płuciennik, ‘Second-Person Narration as a Joint Action’, *Language and Literature,* 27 (2018), p. 161.

51 ‘Read carefully and you will truly know who you are. The revolution is near.’ Note the phrase ‘con attenzione’ can also be translated as ‘attentively’ or ‘with great care’: Superstudio, ‘Premonizioni Della Parusia Urbanistica’, p. 55 (translation by authors).

52 Ross K. Elfline, ‘Superstudio and the “Refusal to Work”’, *Design and Culture*, 8 (2016), pp. 55–77.

53 Elfline, ‘Superstudio and the “Refusal to Work”’, p. 72.

54 Jenny Odell and Sarah Whiting, *Inhabiting the Negative Space: Virtual Commencement 2020*, Harvard University, Graduate School of Design, 28 May 2020. ‘The Incidents’ (Harvard University Graduate School of Design; Sternberg Press, 2021).

55 ‘LEGGETE CON ATTENZIONE E SAPRETE VERAMENTE CHI SIETE: LA RIVELAZIONE È VICINA’, Superstudio, ‘Premonizioni Della Parusia Urbanistica’, p. 55.

‘a new trend in store design’: unbuilt modern retail interiors in postwar usa

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abstract

In 1945 Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company released a portfolio of speculative designs for store fronts and retail interiors featuring glass. Titled *There is a New Trend in Store Design*, it was directed at designers and architects, and, through them, potential customers for their range of products. Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company was just one among many building material manufacturers competing for market share in the United States of America following World War II. This essay demonstrates how a set of unbuilt retail designs that were never intended to be constructed can illuminate prevailing trends of design and the socio-political, economic, and cultural contexts that informed their production. By examining drawings of unbuilt interiors, this essay establishes the types of contextual information that can be gleaned through an interpretive exploration of such works, including economic and social conditions, architectural and retail design trends, typical drawing modes and techniques, developments in building materials and practices, and approaches to advertising.

Through an analysis of the historical circumstances that underpinned the portfolio’s production, it is established that unbuilt design drawings contain clues that foreshadow built designs to come, and by exploring these design ideas alongside the designers’ statements, a richer understanding of the subject of the designs, in this case, post-war retail premises, may be uncovered. This essay explores not only the use made of unbuilt interiors as marketing material but also the role of the glass and interior in the expression of Modernist ideas. Specifically, it reveals the importance of glass in the Modern retail interior, as it developed from being viewed solely as an enclosed internal space into becoming a critical part of the store’s ‘open front’, reconceptualising the façade condition of architecture in the commercial context of urban retail spaces in post-war North America and marking this period as a turning point in design history.

keywords

Modernism; history; retail; glass; marketing

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the unbuilt drawing as a contextual record

In February 1945, a time when most commercial building had been curtailed by World War II, the Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company (PPG) released a portfolio booklet of forty-one retail designs titled *There is a New Trend in Store Design*, ostensibly to stimulate building activity and encourage use of its products [Fig. 01].[1] This was a time when marketing and publicity materials were burgeoning, with trade literature aimed at the designer or builder, supplemented by a further range of catalogues targeting the client. In *There is a New Trend in Store Design*, twenty-two 'outstanding American Architects' and designers presented speculative propositions for post-war store designs. The use types ranged from drug stores and restaurants to furniture stores and automobile sales rooms. Each page layout included a plan, exterior, and/or interior perspectives, details, a statement on PPG products specified, and the designer's portrait photograph and signature. Among those represented were Walter Gropius (1883–1969), Eliel (1873–1950) and Eero Saarinen (1910–1961), J. Robert F. Swanson (1900–1981), Victor Gruen (1903–1980) and Elsie Krummeck (1913–1999), Louis Kahn (1901–1974), and Skidmore Owings and Merrill, being Louis Skidmore (1897–1962), Nathaniel Owings (1903–1984), and John Merrill (1896–1975).

PPG's portfolio stands out not only for its size and physical format as a forty-four-page black and white bound portfolio booklet measuring 510 mm x 385 mm, but also for its content. Available by mail order coupon, the portfolio was promoted in the design press, with a number of featured designs published both as advertising and as editorialised content in architectural journals including the influential *Pencil Points* (1944) and *Architectural Forum* (1945–46). Indeed, *Pencil Points* devoted a special issue to retail architecture with Victor Gruen and Elsie Krummeck's 'Conception of a Haberdashery Store' [Fig. 02] and William Lescaze's 'Conception of a Theatre' [Fig. 03] from the soon to be released portfolio appearing on its cover in August 1944.[2] Designs would also appear in overseas journals, including the Australian *Decoration and Glass* (1948–49).[3] Moreover, PPG republished selected designs from *There is a New Trend in Store Design* alongside built examples in its 1945 booklet, *How Eye-Appeal Inside and Out Increases Retail Sales,* aimed at retailers, property owners, and realtors.[4] The reach of these designs shows how through media communications unbuilt designs had a role in spreading future-looking design ideas and product information beyond their built counterparts, particularly during the time following the Great Depression into the post-war period.

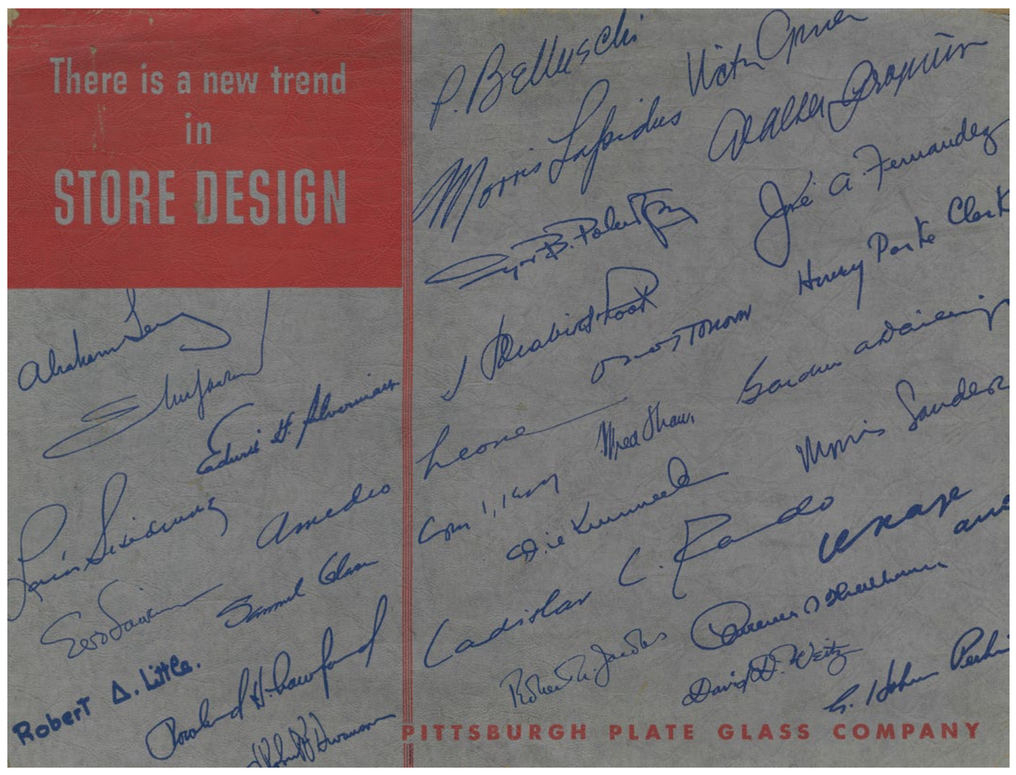

Figure 01.
Pittsburgh Plate Glass Co., *There is a New Trend in Store Design* (Pittsburgh Plate Glass Co., 1945) cover, Architecture Museum, University of South Australia.

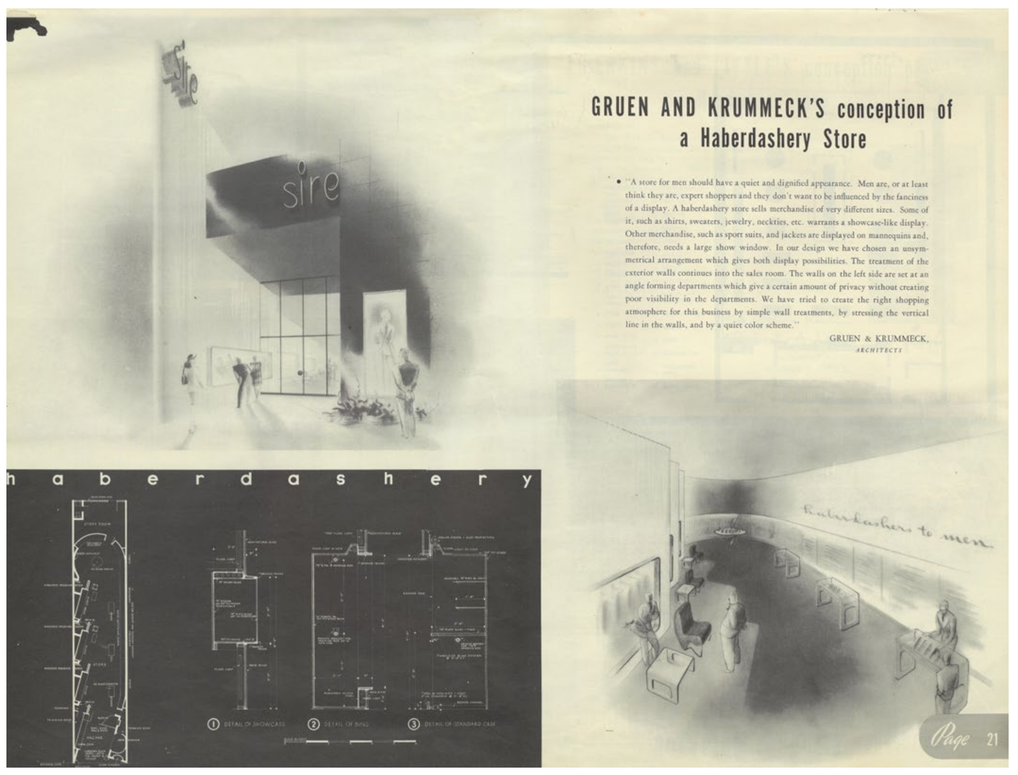

Figure 02.
'Gruen and Krummeck's Conception of a Haberdashery Store' (menswear), Pittsburgh Plate Glass Co., *There is a New Trend in Store Design* (Pittsburgh Plate Glass Co., 1945), p. 21, Architecture Museum, University of South Australia.

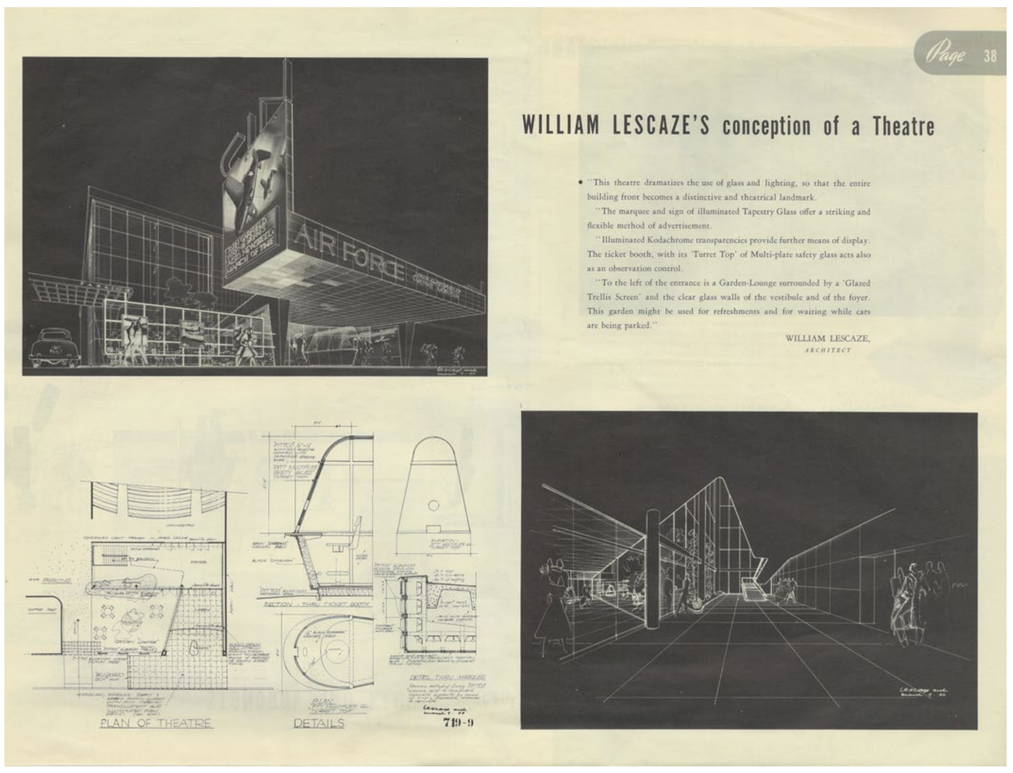

Figure 03.
'William Lescaze's Conception of a Theatre', Pittsburgh Plate Glass Co., *There is a New Trend in Store Design* (Pittsburgh Plate Glass Co., 1945), p. 38, Architecture Museum, University of South Australia.

What is striking about this portfolio of unbuilt retail designs is its emphasis on interiors, with all but three of the schemes including interior perspectives. Of those that didn't (an automobile service station, beauty parlour, and florist) the use of fully glazed store fronts allowed for perspectival views into the building from outside to illustrate interior layouts, fixtures, and furnishings. In part the emphasis on the interior was a response to the trend towards the 'open front', where the street front elevation of a store was designed to be floor-to-ceiling glass. It was also a response to the rise of the enclosed and air-conditioned suburban shopping mall where individual store façades could disappear completely with the interior displays becoming the face of the store. As 'open' glass storefronts proliferated along main streets, it can be argued that their role, and that of the modern interiors on show, were significant in the introduction of Modernism to the public. Yet, to date, Modern store fronts and retail interiors have been an under-researched and under-represented area in architectural and design histories. Indeed, preservation architect Mike Jackson has noted the 'rapid acceptance of modern architecture in the commercial sector, particularly in storefronts' is a part of architectural history that remains relatively unrecognised.[5]

This essay demonstrates how a set of unbuilt designs for store fronts and interiors never intended to be constructed can be used as a prompt to uncover the circumstances that lay behind their production, as well as to illustrate prevailing tendencies in design. It argues that the drawings contained in *There is a New Trend in Store Design* can be interpreted as evidence that designs—and by extension, built forms, when, and if, realised—are not only the result of the designers' creative practice, but also a product of economic, technological, social, or aesthetic conditions and contexts. In the writing of design history, too often the 'architect as hero' approach has limited the exploration of what designs can tell us about wider historical themes. Mark Gelernter has noted that this approach has supported the idea that the designer's 'creative imagination' alone drives the design, something this essay aims to counter.[6] By looking at the way in which unbuilt designs were presented to an audience of fellow designers as well as potential clients, this essay also reveals how architects and designers worked with building material manufacturers and the media to create images of Modernism and the Modern designer, in order to promote and market building products and services. Additionally, it looks at the unbuilt drawings as evidence of the designers' intentions, noting that these were also influenced by the client, in this case, Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company, who commissioned the designs with the intent that they be used in marketing their products.

Employing an interpretive-historical method, this essay explores the phenomenon of unbuilt design drawings through a case study situated in a particular time and place. The selection of a group of designs rather than a single image as the subject of this essay is in part a response to the principle advanced by architectural historian James O'Gorman, who noted that 'many individual architectural drawings have artistic value, but only a series of drawings has architectural value', emphasising the point that drawings can be considered for more than their artistic or aesthetic

values.[7] Throughout the essay the role of the unbuilt drawing in writing architectural and design history is explored, situating the portfolio of store designs within its historical context. Utilising a framework developed by Collins, Collins, and Garnaut exploring the significance of design records as contextual documents, an outline of the types of information that can be garnered from the unbuilt drawings was established.[8] The following sections of the essay will explore these thematic categories: economic and social conditions, architectural ideas and style, building materials' development, retail design, advertising of materials, and the promotion of architects' and designers' work.

setting the scene

Pittsburgh Plate Glass's *There is a New Trend in Store Design* portfolio booklet was released on the cusp of the post-World War II rebuilding era, yet it was undoubtedly influenced by the straitened economic conditions that had carried over from the Great Depression of 1929–1939. Commercial building activity had been hard hit by the severe economic downturn beginning in 1929, and by 1934 it was estimated that around 80 per cent of building industry workers were unemployed, with architects and designers also finding themselves out of work.[9] The subsequent reduced demand for building products and materials led to further unemployment as manufacturers laid off workers.

With an aim of alleviating the effects of the Depression, the United States Government under President Franklin D. Roosevelt increased Federal oversight and control through the New Deal Plan introduced following his election in 1932. The New Deal included banking reform and programmes for work relief, social security, and agriculture.[10] Directly relevant to the recovery of the building industry was the New Deal's *Modernize Main Street* programme introduced in 1934.[11] Its aim was the renovation or, as it was termed at the time, the nationwide 'modernisation' of retail precincts and commercial strips of cities and towns. Facilitated by the Modernization Credit Plan operated by the Federal Housing Administration under the National Housing Act of 1934, the government insured low-interest loans of up to $50,000 from private lenders made available for building renovations.[12]

Retail merchants and property owners were urged to modernise their stores to encourage consumer-led retail trade and give a boost to the construction industry. This encouragement came in many forms, with the New Deal 'thriv[ing] on public relations techniques'.[13] The Federal Housing Administration promoted its programme nationally, seeking and obtaining the cooperation of industry, with the slogan *Modernize Main Street* continuing to have resonance into the post-war era despite the programme's effective end in 1943.[14] Architectural historian Gabrielle Esperdy has noted that modernisation in this period referred to 'exterior and interior alterations, both stylistic and spatial, as well as to mechanical and equipment improvements, modernization implied notions of progress, optimism, and a deliberate embrace of modernity in character and appearance, in form and material'.[15]

It is important to note here that modernisation is not the same as Modernism, and although modernisation may have incorporated aspects of Modernism, its focus was on the improvement and upgrading of the store, which during the 1930s was more likely to have been referencing the Art Deco style. Esperdy has recognised that modernisation, which had been regarded in the 1920s as 'the odd-job alleyway of building', was 'repositioned as a crucial building industry activity, one that would produce jobs, increase demand for materials, and generate economic revival'.[16] This emphasis on renovation, of interiors as well as exteriors, placed a focus on the work of the emerging specialists in interior design, elevating their work both in the eyes of the public as well as the established architectural profession.

While the recovery of the building industry post-Depression benefitted from the New Deal

programmes, the outbreak of World War II again put a dampener on commercial activity with resources directed to defence-related works and supply. Architects were again impacted, and, according to architectural historian Andrew Shanken, 'in 1942, the Committee on Architectural Service warned: "The impact of war on building has made our profession a major casualty".[17] This continued to be the case through the war years as PPG indicated in the foreword to its portfolio of store designs in 1945.

> For several years, there has been almost no store construction or remodelling work done. Necessary building limitations of the war period have prevented it. And as a consequence, store design has not been a subject of active, current importance to architects or retail merchants for a considerable period.[18]

The war brought about advances in technology and materials that held the potential to be harnessed in service of the Modernist movement with its principles of form following function, rational use of structure, and truth in materials. Yet, government-imposed restrictions on labour, as well as materials including metal frames, plate glass, and electrical fittings, created a hiatus in their introduction for commercial uses.[19] In a 1942 article on wartime shopping facilities *Architectural Record* noted that these restrictions meant 'that imagination must be substituted for metal. It is surprising what can be done with glass, gypsum board, paint and wall paper. In terms of construction a restyling can be a minor job; in terms of results it can be a major transformation.'[20]

Architect Morris Lapidus (1902–2001) was a vocal advocate for the modernisation of stores during the war. Lapidus recommended that store interiors be replanned and redecorated for efficiency and increased selling space, believing that modernisation of the interior of the store could be 'carried out [...] without interfering with the war effort' by using 'non-critical material and limiting the structural work entailed'.[21] Lapidus believed 'the interior is the mechanism for selling', as illustrated in his 'conception of a Men's Apparel Shop' in the PPG *There is a New Trend in Store Design* portfolio [Fig. 04].[22] In his design, Lapidus utilises functional planning to organise the interior, which, like most of the designs in the portfolio, is situated in a ground floor tenancy in a main street setting with two solid side walls, rear service access, and store front featuring glass—specifically PPG products.

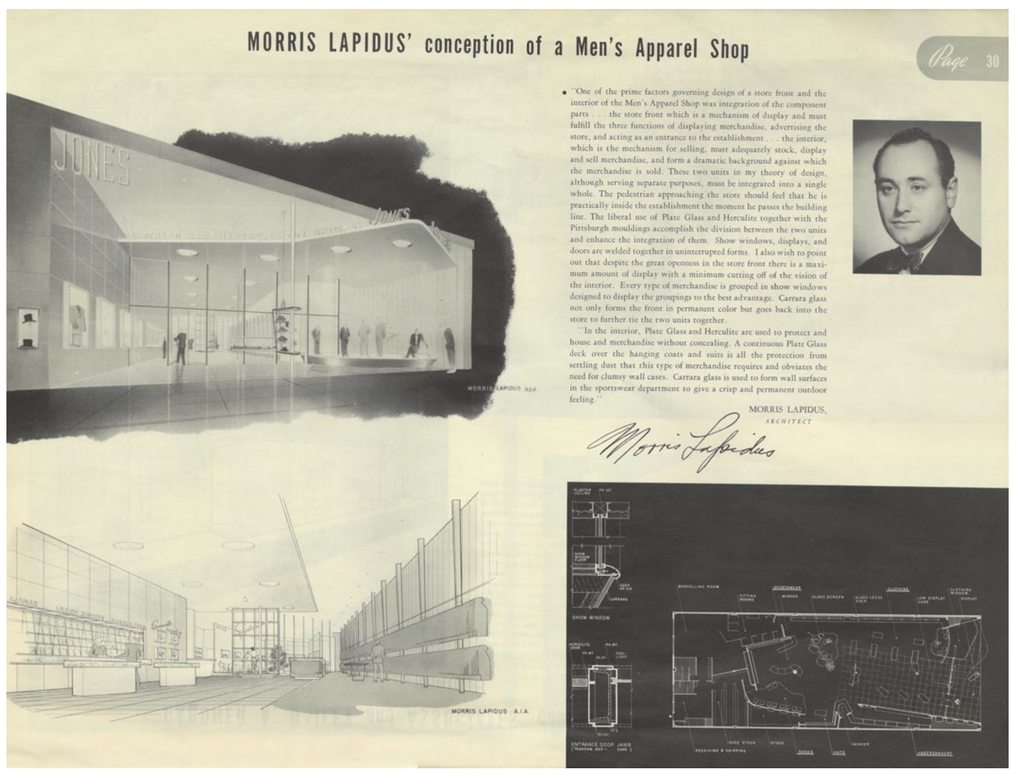

Figure 04.
'Morris Lapidus' Conception of a Men's Apparel Store' in Pittsburgh Plate Glass Co., *There is a New Trend in Store Design* (Pittsburgh Plate Glass Co., 1945), p. 19, Architecture Museum, University of South Australia.

modernisation and modernism

Since the late nineteenth century, storefronts and retail interiors had been regularly renovated to reflect the latest style trends, new materials and technologies, and retail marketing ideas. As early as 1929, architectural periodicals were featuring contemporary European examples of retail architecture, with magazines such as *Architectural Forum* including photographs of Modern stores in an article devoted to the topic by commercial architect Jacques Ely Kahn (1884–1972).[23] *Architectural Forum's* 'Shop and Store Number' of June 1929, points to the trend in its editorial remarks:

> in mercantile, commercial and semi-public architecture, such as clubs and restaurants, the modern expression in architectural design and interior decoration is consistent,

appropriate and inspiring. [...] This new or contemporary style is undergoing a rapid and constantly changing development. As to what form of expression it will show five years from now, it is interesting to speculate.[24]

The stalling of building activity during the 1930s' economic crisis had a significant impact on architects' and designers' thinking, which architectural historian Elizabeth Smith recognised, stating, 'when practice wanes, theory flourishes.'[25] This was a period when European Modernism was gaining attention in the United States of America. In 1932 the Museum of Modern Art in New York had exhibited the work of European Modernists alongside a selection of home-grown proponents in the exhibition curated by Philip Johnson (1906–2005) and Henry Russell Hitchcock (1903–1987) titled *Modern Architecture*, which later toured the country.[26] The expression of the contemporary style, however, was not always pure and Hitchcock would later critique the 'Drugstore modern' style that had proliferated on Main Street, critical of what he saw as the commercial appropriation of only superficial features of what he and Johnson had termed the International Style.[27]

During the 1930s modernised designs of retail storefronts using glazing and enamelled sheet metal transformed earlier façades composed of elaborate metal frames set within walls of stone or brick. Shop interiors, windows, entrances, and displays were modernised while the upper storeys were often left untouched.[28] This increased from the mid-1930s, when, as Richard Mattson points out, 'store front designs in business districts of small cities and towns across America have changed with regularity, responding essentially to [...] commercial competition, new building technology and materials, changing architectural tastes and the automobile.'[29]

However, the architectural profession was reluctant to embrace this category of work, seeing it as beneath their lofty ideals.[30] Store modernisation was generally small in scale and did not carry the prestige of public, civic, or large commercial works. Modernisation, as remodelling rather than building from the foundations up, led to such works being seen as minor architecture by architects.[31] This state of affairs was noted by architect Joseph Weiss, who wrote in *New Pencil Points* in 1943, 'Considering the fact that today almost every store is designed by someone, it is surprising what a small part of this work goes to architects', noting that, 'most store work goes to shop equipment companies and [industrial] "designers".'[32]

While the architectural profession was guilty of not taking advantage of retail design opportunities, magazines such as *Interiors* were aimed squarely at those who were involved, listing its intended readership as 'interior designers, architects, industrial designers, the interior decorating departments of retail stores, and for all concerned with the production of interiors.'[33] This was also the audience PPG hoped to influence. Building on the Federal Housing Authority's work during the *Modernize Main Street* programme in which retail design along main street was seen as having the potential for aiding 'the general beautification of the city', the task at hand for building material manufacturers in this arena was to encourage architects' involvement in retail design, in particular, specifying their products.[34]

marketing glass

The group of store designs featured in the PPG portfolio had as much to do with the promotion of developments in building materials and practices as it had to do with the emergence of new design sensibilities. The historical background to these developments is telling, with PPG just one company among many building material manufacturers that had set about capitalising on the opportunities brought about by the 1930s *Modernize Main Street* programme. During that period, PPG's structural glass, marketed under the name of *Carrara* and available in a range of opaque colours, was promoted as a decorative surface for the lining of

walls. Such structural glass, also known as vitreous marble, is a coloured glass with high compressive strength, and a polished and reflective surface. Earlier in the century its use had been principally as a more affordable substitute for marble in situations that required functional, easy-to-clean hygienic surfaces such as in hospitals, toilets, bathrooms, and cafeterias.[35] With the emergence of Art Deco style in the 1920s came the expansion of coloured structural glass into decorative applications as it became a desired surface for interior settings, from cocktail bars to offices.[36] In the 1930s, during the *Modernize Main Street* programme, PPG began to market its *Carrara* coloured structural glass as an exterior facing material as well, especially applicable for shops, expanding its palette of colours to cater for this use.[37] Glass was seen by many designers as the epitome of contemporary design; as historian Sara Jane Elk noted, structural glass 'held beauty as a machine-made building product, [...] It also conformed to a variety of shapes and illumination, held as symbols of technological achievement. Structural glass with properties of imperviousness and practicality, [...] represent[ed] a new age.'[38]

Yet, PPG was not the only glass manufacturer vying for the attention of designers and storeowners. Competitor, glass manufacturer Libbey-Owens-Ford (LOF) also recognised the commercial opportunities brought about by the desire to modernise storefronts. LOF held the recognisable brand *Vitrolite* for its structural glass products and, in a clever marketing move, sponsored an architectural design competition earlier in 1935 also called *Modernize Main Street* conducted by *Architectural Record* magazine. With prize money totalling $11,000, the brief called for designs for the modernisation of the interior and exterior in four retail categories of food stores, drug stores, apparel shops, and automotive sales and service stations.[39] The competition attracted over three thousand entrants, something Esperdy recognises as 'an indication of either the profession's dire straits or its new commercial interests.'[40]

Following the announcement of the winners in each category, winning designs and honourable mentions were published in the pages of *Architectural Record* and the competition entries were also used in advertising for Libbey-Owens-Ford products.[41] First-prize winning architects received $1000 each with the food store category won by G. Foster Harrell Jr, the drug store category by M. Righton Swicewood, the automobile sales and service station category by Alfred Clauss, and the apparel shop category by Suren Pilafian and Maurice Lubin. All the winning and mentioned designs were published in a colour booklet titled *52 Designs to Modernize Main Street with Glass* for distribution to architects and designers, merchants, and building owners. The jury hoped the competition would raise the standards of store design not only through communicating with other designers but also by 'providing merchants and dealers with a guide as to what an intelligent public taste will demand.'[42]

Competition between PPG and LOF increased during the late 1930s. PPG utilised the retail profit angle in its marketing campaign, and, as Mattson has noted, it wasn't alone, as many 'manufacturers promoted renovations as shrewd business sense.'[43] As a demonstration of this, in 1935 PPG released a mail-order booklet titled *How Modern Store Fronts Work Profit Magic* and launched the Pittsburgh Time Payment Plan in order to make store modernisation easier for store owners.[44] PPG advertised itself as a 'one stop shop' for store front fabrication, with its *Pittco Store Front* including not only the glass products but also metal fixings and paint.[45] It offered architects a range of information material to aid in their specification of these, including sets of detail drawings available by mail order from the Pittsburgh Glass Data Service.[46] Following the release of PPG's Pittco Store Front promotion, LOF introduced its *Complete Storefront* in late 1937 as a rival product.[47] It also released a book titled *I Want the Smartest Store on the Street* (1937) with colour renderings of shopfronts and colour charts.[48]

Glass manufacturers utilised an opportunity to promote their products to the general public at the 1939 World's Fair in New York. With the fair's theme of the 'Land of Tomorrow', the Glass Incorporated Pavilion designed by Shreve, Lamb & Harmon architects with interior exhibits by Skidmore Owings & Merrill, was shared by Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company, Owens-Illinois Glass Company, and Corning Glass Works. PPG also took its campaign on the road between 1940 and 1951, with a Store Modernization Caravan, which displayed scale models of Pittco's 'Open Vision' store fronts and interiors visiting Chambers of Commerce, banks, and architects.[49] An earlier PPG Store Front Caravan had toured the US in 1936–1937 and included scale models of store fronts designed by PPG's in-house architect Walter Dorwin Teague (1883–1960). New technologies allowed for the expanding range of products to be developed.[50] By 1945 the range of PPG products promoted as suitable for store fronts and retail interiors included polished plate glass, structural glass, glass blocks, mirrors, glass doors, and store front metal.[51]

Pittsburgh Plate Glass employed architects on staff in its art department for many years. One of these architects was E. A. Lundberg, who produced a series of speculative store front designs called 'Design of the Month', which ran from 1944 to 1956 with designs mailed out to subscribers for compilation into a large-format portfolio.[52] PPG paid architects for their speculative designs as referenced in *Pencil Points*, which noted that PPG's 'desire for well-designed subjects to use in promoting their store front materials led them to employ the best architectural talent they could discover.'[53] These designs were the basis for *There is a New Trend in Store Design*, which was notable for the range of architects and designers represented in its pages, including a number who had emigrated to the United States of America from Europe in the twentieth century. Architects such as Walter Gropius, William Lescaze, Victor Gruen, Eero Saarinen, and Oscar Stonorov (1905–1970) aided the transmission of Modernism to their new home. Similarities in designs across the PPG portfolio can be understood as indications of the acceptance the Modern or International style had gained in the United States of America during this period and will be further elucidated below.

the interior as store front

In the August 1944 issue of *Pencil Points* in which many of the unbuilt designs featured in the PPG portfolio were also published, it was stated that 'By now it has become almost axiomatic that the entire store front – often the whole building façade – is treated as a display element.'[54] The movement away from coloured opaque structural glass, such as PPG's *Carrara* or LOF's *Vitrolite*, as a façade treatment synonymous with the Art Deco or Moderne, and towards transparent plate glass marked the PPG portfolio designs as significantly different from the LOF *Modernize Main Street* competition entries of a decade earlier. Continuity between street and the interior was a key design move in the unbuilt designs featured in the PPG portfolio. The 'open front', where the display window was transformed into an all-glass store front, effectively gave the entire store interior a new role as replacement for the formerly solid and opaque building façade, thus elevating the interior in importance. The refocusing of architecture on volume rather than mass, as promoted by Hitchcock and Johnson in *Modern Architecture*, can also be seen as giving the interior this new prominence.[55]

With the open front the most significant change to store design in this period, its implications for the arrangement of the interior were demonstrated in the PPG portfolio. These included comprehensive planning, flexibility of layout for changing display fittings and fixtures, the use of colour from a psychological perspective, lighting both natural daylight and for night time, integrated and often concealed artificial lighting, the use of different levels, and awareness of circulation within the interior with angled walls and curves utilised to direct customers' movement in many schemes. Such an approach is manifest in 'Conception of a Jewelry

Shop' by Walter Gropius, in which he recesses the front plate glass wall back from the footpath while giving the side wall a plate glass mirror with the result that the store front effectively disappears [Fig. 05]. The setback additionally allows potential customers to effectively enter the premises before they pass through the transparent glass doors to the interior proper. This stepped alignment of floor surfaces and wall treatments explores the nature of the inside/outside boundary.

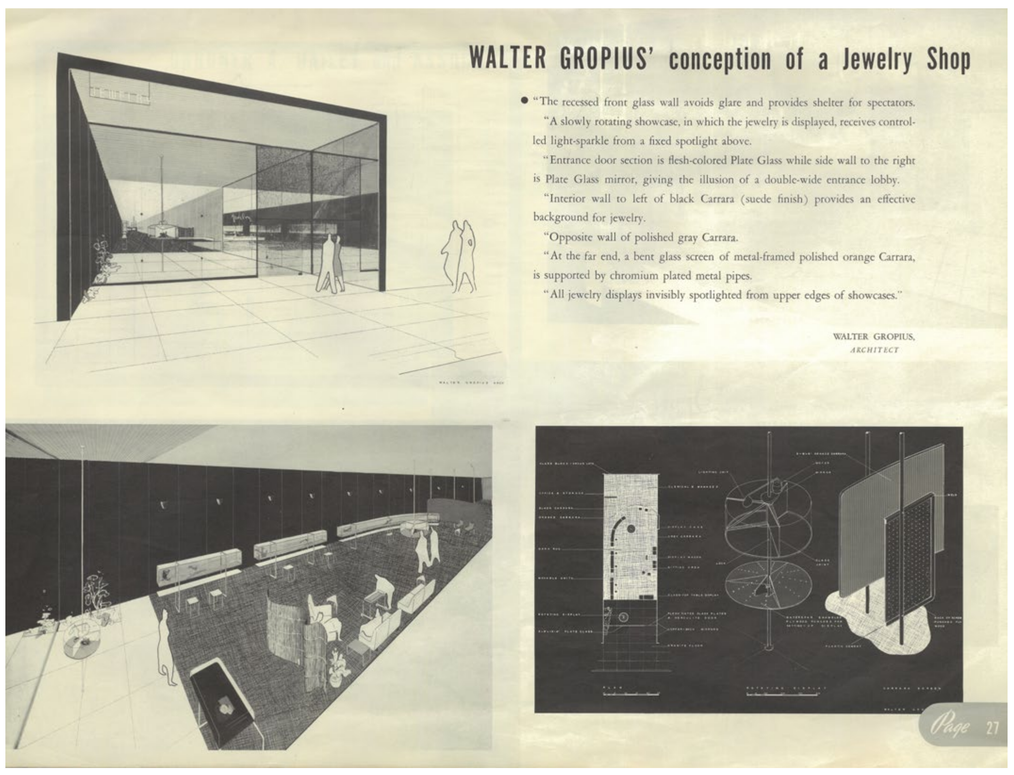

Figure 05.
'Walter Gropius' Conception of a Jewelry Store', Pittsburgh Plate Glass Co., *There is a New Trend in Store Design* (Pittsburgh Plate Glass Co., 1945), p. 27, Architecture Museum, University of South Australia.

Richard Mattson has called the open front 'the most enduring and influential trend in store front design in the late 1940s.'[56] The 'open front' for retail stores had been championed earlier in the *Store Fronts of Tomorrow* competition of 1942 sponsored by Kawneer, a metal store fronts manufacturer, and facilitated by *Pencil Points* magazine.[57] Here, the display window was transformed into an all-glass store front, effectively giving the entire interior a new role and status on the street front. Across the competition entries, illustrations were used in an explanatory fashion to introduce the concept of the open front to readers, with the judges' noting,

> Fundamentally, there are today just two ways of designing store fronts. Either they are closed billboards or open-faced interiors protected by a glass entrance wall. [...] The open-faced type is far more than a store front. By permitting the entire interior to act as a display interior, it opens up new and sometimes dangerous opportunities for the storekeeper. [...] Only by thinking in three dimensions can the designer create a truly successful store.[58]

The open front' was promoted by PPG as a way to 'make the interior an important and valuable display element that extends an invitation to the passer-by.'[59] Competing glass manufacturers composed their own proprietary slogans championing the open front, and 'during the 1940s, Libbey-Owens-Ford frequently advertised its own "Visual Front" designs in the trade journal *Chain Store Age*.'[60] It wasn't only glass that enabled such openness on main street. Extruded lightweight aluminium frames replaced the copper and brass of earlier times, and fluorescent lighting provided a way of extending the hours the interior was on show, with neon signs attracting the passer-by.

The open front also offered a further opportunity with the introduction of regional and local shopping centres and malls, which would grow in popularity following the war. Wartime architectural periodicals had looked forward to the building of shopping centres for post-war housing developments as an opportunity for architects to elevate retail design to a new level and a new scale.[61] Victor Gruen and Larry Smith saw shopping centres as offering a new 'Town Square' where people could gather for community activities as well as shopping.[62] This appealed to architects and planners whose post-war interest in community rebuilding found expression in these centres.[63]

However, there were precursors to the shopping centres from the century before. Philosopher and cultural critic Walter Benjamin's (1892–1940) unfinished *Arcades* project saw the Parisian retail arcade as part of the 'prehistory of modernity', recognising the retail arcades of Paris as 'the most

important architectural form of the nineteenth century', for, among other reasons, their function as forerunners to the department store, and their use of iron, which he termed an 'artificial building material.'[64] The nascent consumerism Benjamin explored in *Arcades* can also be seen to have emerged by the latter half of the twentieth century and is especially evident in the design of the shopping malls and centres of the 1950s onwards, which would eventually threaten the primacy of main street. Shopping centres as locations for proposed retail stores were indicated in several of the PPG designs, including a gift shop and a restaurant design by Saarinen and Swanson Architects. The setting for these conceptual designs was a shopping centre with parking for both cars and helicopters on the roof. Drawn in a cartoon-like manner, the 'Conception of a Restaurant' even featured a mobile 'Serving Suzy' roving the restaurant, 'a small, noiseless, electric-powered jeep' from which the chef would serve the meals of patrons [Fig. 06].[65] The restaurant was integrated into the mall all the more by its use of a plate glass store front.

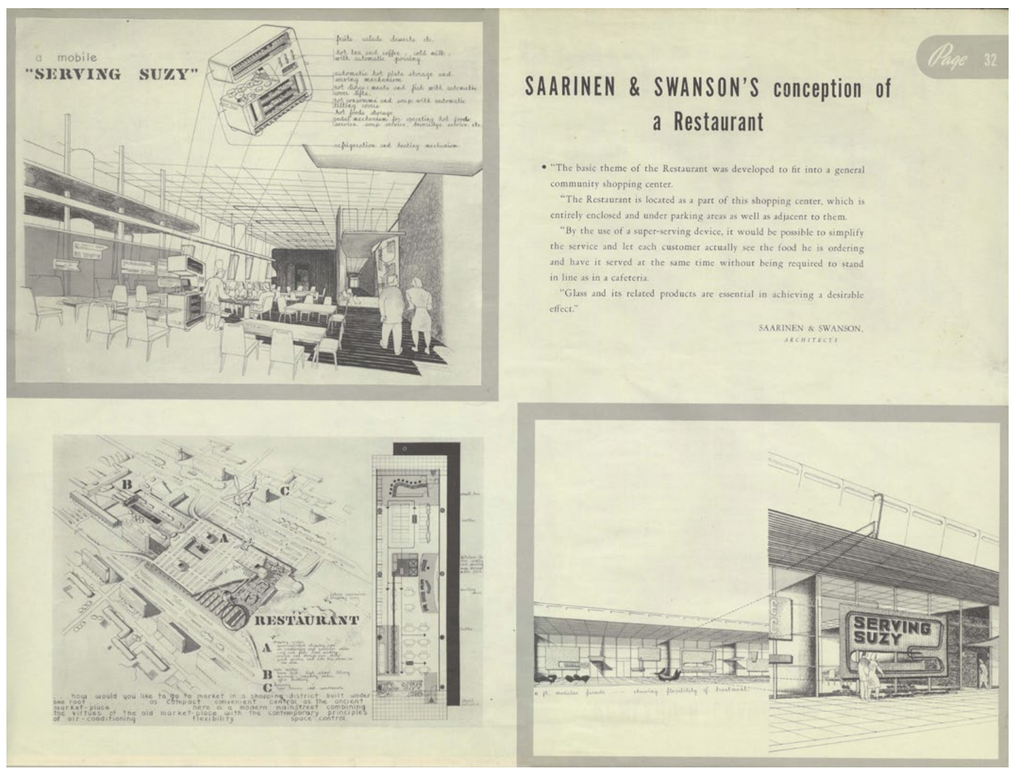

Figure 06.
'Saarinen and Swanson's Conception of a Restaurant' in Pittsburgh Plate Glass Co., *There is a New Trend in Store Design* (Pittsburgh Plate Glass Co., 1945), p. 32, Architecture Museum, University of South Australia.

In the PPG portfolio, Architect José A. Fernandez stated he was 'a firm believer in the principle of the "open faced" store front, and [...] designed this jewelry store with a maximum of glass, in order to reveal the interior to the passerby and prospective customer in a dramatic fashion.'[66] Fernandez was an established retail specialist known for his design for Rebajes' jewellery store built on Fifth Avenue, New York.[67] Fernandez contributed another design to the portfolio, 'Conception of a Women's Apparel Shop', which set back the plate glass that divided inside from outside and was sheltered by a canopy to provide an undercover area for window shoppers [Fig. 07]. Fernandez used elements from his Rebajes design, with the cowhide stools notable among furnishings. The interior as store front can be seen illustrated in Fernadez's exterior perspective taken from eye level and set against a black background. The mannequins in the curved glass window draw the eye, with smaller items in show cases, three under the roof overhang to attract shoppers, while a fourth is situated inside just past the glazed

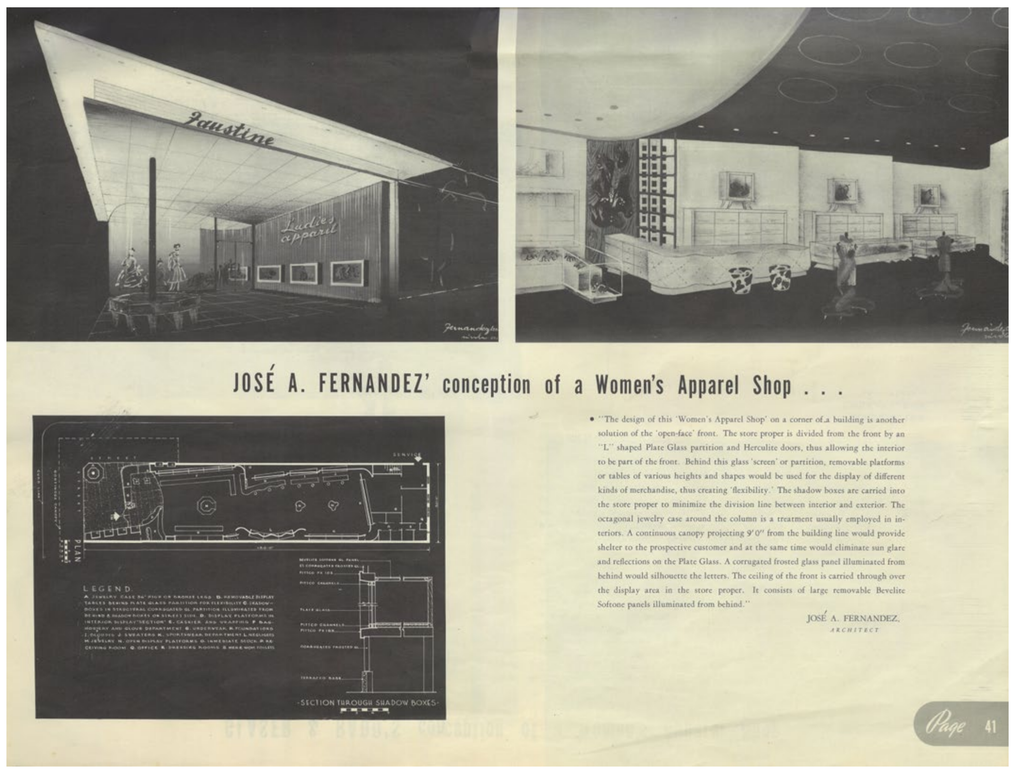

Figure 07.
'José A. Fernandez' Conception of a Women's Apparel Shop' in Pittsburgh Plate Glass Co., *There is a New Trend in Store Design* (Pittsburgh Plate Glass Co., 1945), p. 41, Architecture Museum, University of South Australia.

doors to encourage the customer to continue the browsing experience inside. The use of screens and fittings to direct the movements of the customers are used not only in this design, but also in many throughout the portfolio.

Common across designs in the PPG portfolio were those that emphasised the continuity between outside and inside with forms and materials penetrating openings or repeating on both sides of the glazing appearing as continuous ceiling and

wall planes. As would be expected, glass was the key featured material, often in multiple forms in each design, including glazed ceilings. Architect Morris Lapidus, whose designs for a women's apparel shop appeared in the PPG portfolio, wrote in a statement on his design that 'not only the storefront but the entire interior has been conceived as one large display unit.'[68] While in his 'Conception of a Men's Apparel Shop' [Fig. 04] Lapidus noted it would be the efficiency of space in service of selling that would convince the store owner client of the value of design, something he emphasised:

> The store front is developed as a mechanism to accomplish three separate related functions: display, store advertising, and customer entrance. The interior, considered as a mechanism for selling, has adequate stock space and specially designed display units, organized against a dramatic background. Liberal use of plate glass accomplishes both the division between the exterior and interior and their integration.[69]

Green planting, which linked inside and outside, was another element that appeared in several designs. Notable for the use of plantings in his design was Pietro Belluschi (1899–1994) whose 'Conception of a Beauty Parlor' with its garden forecourt covered in vines led to an interior incorporating planter boxes set inside the full height glazed front wall [Fig. 08].[70] Belluschi was critical of ill-conceived open fronts:

> In my opinion, this idea in many cases has fallen short of success because the attention of the onlooker was divided and confused between an interior which was not designed to be seen from the sidewalk, and an exterior that hated to lose its traditional identity.[71]

His beauty parlour differed from the other retail spaces in that it was selling a service rather than products, with the remainder of the interior beyond the reception area disposed of as private cubicles for treatments.

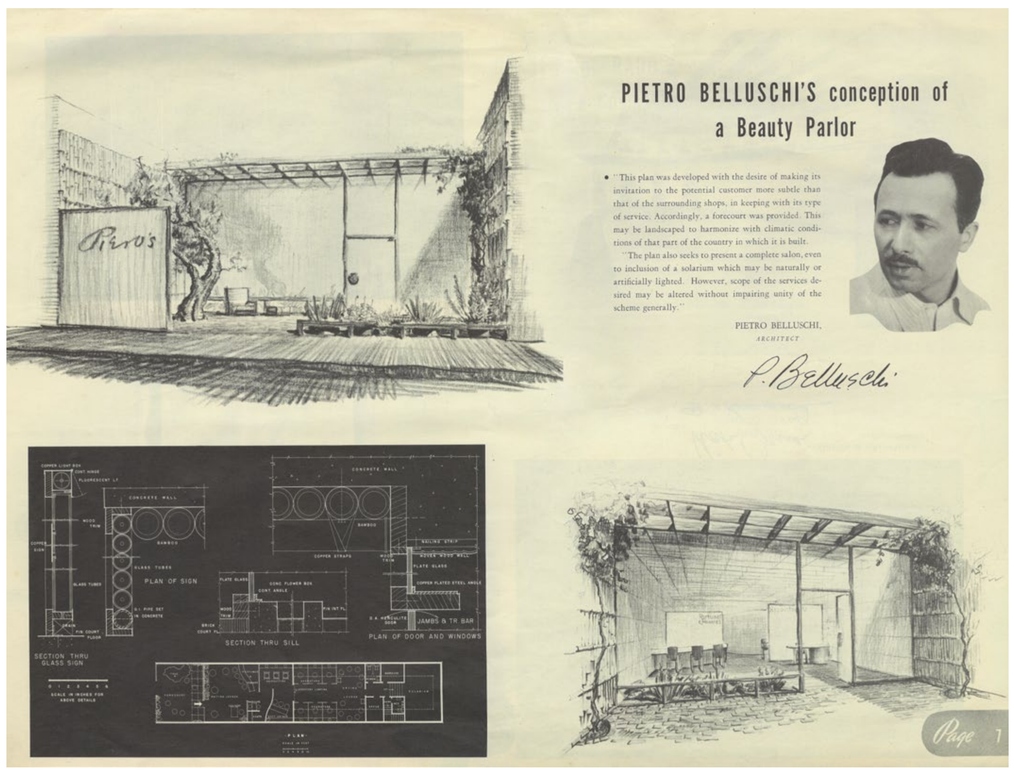

Figure 08.
'Pietro Belluschi's Conception of a Beauty Parlor' in Pittsburgh Plate Glass Co., *There is a New Trend in Store Design* (Pittsburgh Plate Glass Co., 1945), p.7, Architecture Museum, University of South Australia.

Architect Victor Gruen, who would become famous for his work in marketing, in 1947 proclaimed:

> Stores lead a double life. They are factories with machinery behind the scenes; machinery which must be well-oiled, invisible and inaudible. To the outside they present the gayer side of the double-life – they are show places and exhibits with that air of arousing interest in the displayed merchandise.[72]

Thus, the open front presented a challenge as well as an opportunity, with the functions of stock storage, deliveries, and preparation needing to be housed behind the scenes. By 1952 it was being recognised by architect Caleb Hornbostel (1905–1991) that,

> The open front has raised a host of design problems which did not exist before, namely, reflection, sun glare and sun control, new methods of window display, artificial lighting both day and night, a general reorganization of merchandise within the completely exposed store, together with a new approach to the design of display fixtures and casework in general.[73]

The increased visibility of interiors would also place them centre stage in architectural renderings. No longer was the exterior elevation or perspective presenting an opaque façade; the interior effectively became part of the streetscape. The open fronted store created a need for designers to communicate a new concept through the drawing. The challenge was how to express the near invisibility of plate glass store fronts in presentation drawings, both looking from the outside in, but also the reverse view, taken from the inside out.

drawing modes and techniques

The drawing modes and techniques used to communicate architectural and interior design ideas were in constant flux during the mid-twentieth century. Turning away from the Beaux Arts towards Bauhaus ideals, Walter Gropius' approach was influential in the United States through his role at Harvard University and is evident in his unbuilt designs in the PPG portfolio. The graphic style favoured by progressive architects and designers of this period was 'thin black lines of even weight, flat projections, flying planes without real bulk, the absence of indication of materials, and stark black-and-white coloration'.[74] Indeed, Gropius' own contributions to the PPG portfolio demonstrate his attitude to drawing as well as design. In his 'Conception of a Drug Store', which included a soda fountain, the external perspective taken at eye level is drawn as a collision of planes, emphasising the horizontal black *Carrara* glass ceiling while minimising the angled store front by utilising clear frameless plate glass [Fig. 09]. The focus on the volume of the shop interior is emphasised in the interior perspective taken from ceiling level giving a clear view of the layout, which is explicated further by the floor plan on the page. Details of the fittings shown in axonometric projection complete the page layout. Figures are shown in outline, while texture is reserved for the furnishings, screens, and floor surfaces. As with most of the PPG portfolio designs, colours and materials are specified through the text with a palette of black and orange *Carrara* glass with chrome.

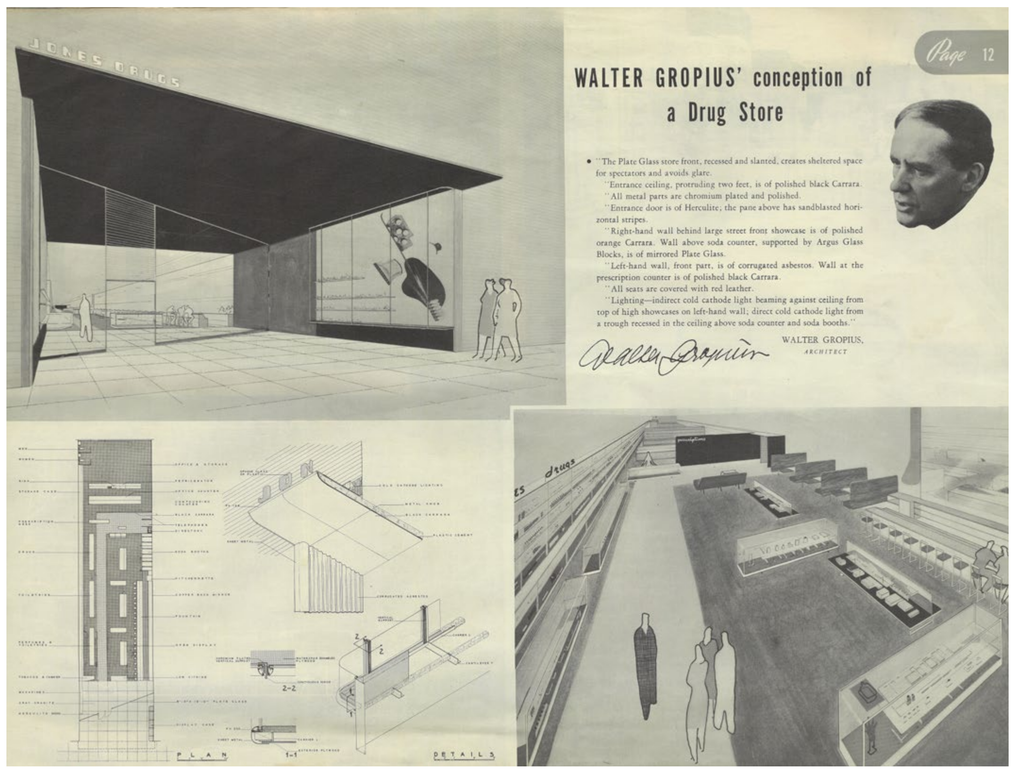

Figure 09.
'Walter Gropius' Conception of a Drug Store' in Pittsburgh Plate Glass Co., *There is a New Trend in Store Design* (Pittsburgh Plate Glass Co., 1945), p.12 Architecture Museum, University of South Australia.

The drawing modes preferred by the Modernist designers usually included perspective, isometric or axonometric projections which were increasingly used in presentation drawings to illustrate the relationship between form and function.[75] This contrasted with earlier Beaux Arts drawing modes, which emphasised the plan, section, and orthographic elevation, with their preference for symmetry and axial geometry in drawing and design. As O'Gorman has recognised, in this period 'architects developed a simplified, often simply linear, graphic style [...] The new, simplified technique suggested a business-like method of problem solving', something that accorded with their functional approach to the problem of store design and echoing the clients' focus on design as a means to increasing business.[76]

Despite the lack of a complete set of architectural drawings for each project, those used on each page of the PPG portfolio go some way to communicating the proposed designs. O'Gorman, in his work on North American architectural drawings, noted that 'only multiple graphics reveal the various aspects of a design, no matter how simple the building: view(s), plan(s), elevation(s), section(s), and detail(s)'.[77] The absence of orthographic elevations and the prominence of the rendered perspective to illustrate

the building facades and interiors is noteworthy in comparison with the earlier glass promotion booklets. For instance, the earlier Libbey-Owens-Ford *Modernize Main Street* competition drawings of 1935 featured external elevation, plan, section, and details as the preferred drawing modes, with no interior views included. Notably, interior perspectives are prominent on each page of the PPG portfolio, used to illustrate the store design in a manner that was easy to understand and convincing for potential clients; on the same page, architectural and fixture details and plans spoke to the architects and designers in a language respecting their professional knowledge. With each layout effectively dividing the page in quarters, the flexibility given to PPG to utilise the images in different layouts for multiple purposes is clear. In the *Pencil Points* 1944 retail issue, the layout of the portrait pages fit the individual drawings and details within the journal's own style. While in PPG's promotional booklet *How Eye-Appeal Inside and Out increases Retail Sales* (1945), only exterior perspectives have been selected to illustrate store fronts of each retail type.

The drawing techniques and modes evident in the PPG portfolio demonstrate commonalities in the media used for rendering as well, but, interestingly, many reflect the Beaux Arts techniques and media many of the designers would have been familiar with from their training, including pen and ink, chalks, pencils, watercolour paints, or gouache. However, newer techniques are also evident with airbrush and several reversed-out drawings with white lines on a black ground popular in the portfolio. Collaged figures in Glazer and Rado's 'Conception of a Cosmetic Shop' point towards this increasingly accepted technique in architectural rendering [Fig. 10].[78]

The illustrative nature of the drawings in the PPG portfolio reflect its hybrid nature as both a design portfolio as well as an advertising catalogue, utilising unbuilt designs as images intended to convince the reader of the desirable nature of the PPG products specified within.

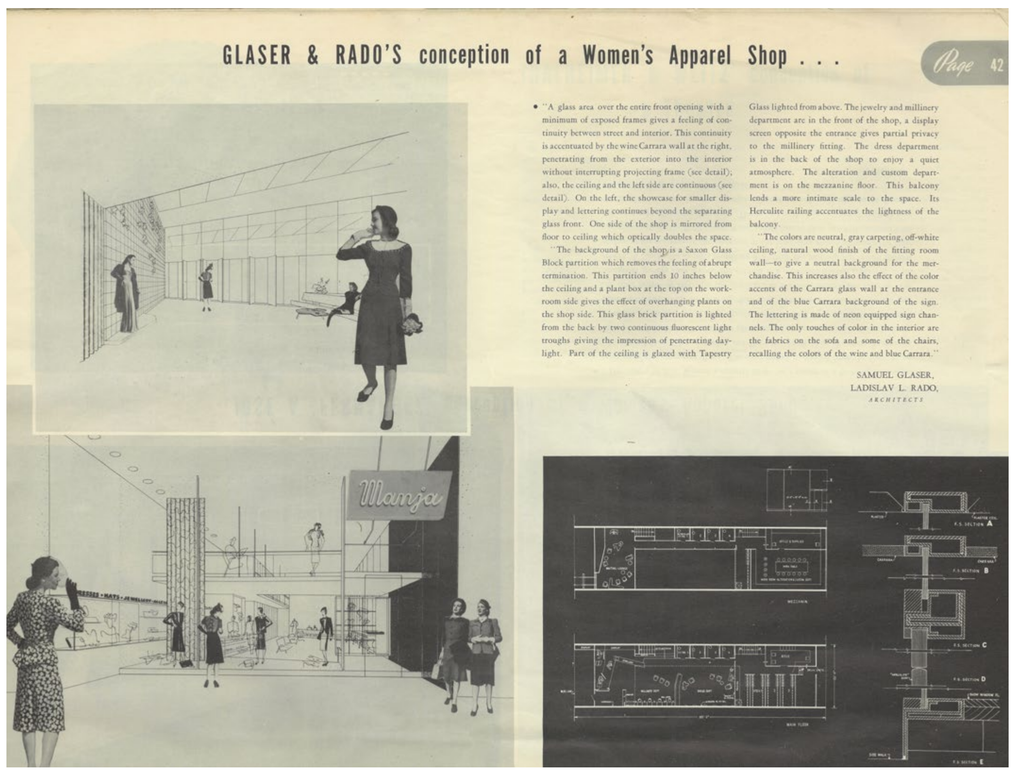

Figure 10.
'Glazer and Rado's Conception of a Cosmetic shop' in Pittsburgh Plate Glass Co., *There is a New Trend in Store Design* (Pittsburgh Plate Glass Co., 1945), p. 9, Architecture Museum, University of South Australia.

architects and advertising

It was recognised by building product manufacturers that their advertising needed to appeal to two market segments, designers and clients, in this case store owners. These two segments, however, had different reading habits, with store owners unlikely to read design periodicals. One approach was for suppliers to advertise in retail trade journals such as *Chain Store Age.* Another was convincing designers to act as intermediaries between supplier and purchaser in recommending their products. Advertising for building materials functioned as a revenue stream for design periodicals and increasing use of images of unbuilt, competition, or ideal projects using specified building materials began to blur the line between advertising and editorial. Traditionally, advertisements were carried in the front and back pages of design periodicals; however, when material manufacturers sponsored a competition or provided content in the form of designs, these pages would appear editorialised in the main body of the journal. It was a synergistic relationship and by the 1940s the relationship between the design press, building material manufacturers, and the architectural and design professions had become an integral part of the functioning of the industry.[79]

Architectural periodicals from the late 1920s regularly published images of contemporary designs never intended to be built, from competitions for ideal homes to speculative sketches of emerging building types. Architectural historian Paul Hogben has investigated the history of building product advertising and found that beginning in the 1920s there was a move away from text, noting how 'the image came to dominate the space of advertising as advertisers attempted to encode products in the language of modernity.'[80] Architects and designers were very often open to promotional work for materials manufacturers not only as free advertising for themselves, but also because speculations and competitions were a way of keeping their hand in when there may have been little else in the way of work on offer, such as following the Depression or during the war.

The 1940s was a time when the architectural profession was beginning to accept self-promotion as appropriate conduct. For a large part of the profession's history, the advertising of architects' services was frowned upon. Under the watch of the American Institute of Architects, it had long been expected that 'reputation, as opposed to self-promotion, was the invisible hand directing architectural practice.'[81] However, this began to change during the twentieth century as the role of the architect itself changed, with them increasingly serving as 'consumer advocates', something used to advantage both the materials manufacturers and the profession. Andrew Shanken noted that 'The architect-experts had become pitchmen, endorsing products, [... and], the building industry now blanketed the public with advertising that served the architectural profession.'[82]

This was demonstrated in the PPG portfolio, where the featuring of designs alongside the designers' portraits allowed exploitation of the grey area between reputation and promotion. This offered architects 'public exposure that freed them from both the expense and the indignity of having to pitch themselves directly.'[83]

Within the PPG portfolio, design, product, and designer were combined together on the page. The use of the architect's image in the layout is of note and reflects an amendment of the American Institute of Architects rules in 1941 to allow a photograph of the architect to be used in advertising for building materials or services.[84] On many pages, photographic portraits of the designers and their signatures were part of the layouts, with the cover of the booklet a pattern of these signatures, adding to their fame and the notion of the celebrity autograph. This flattered the designers themselves, but also played to the potential client who was encouraged to see the modern designer as an expert, not only lending authority to the product but also being promoted as a 'starchitect' in today's parlance.

Manufacturers regularly used a range of materials for promotion, including letters and flyers sent to architects, designers, and business proprietors, mail order booklets and portfolios, targeted magazine advertisements, building product catalogue files such as appeared in *Sweets Architectural Catalog File* throughout the twentieth century, retail equipment directories, as well as visiting salesmen, films, and displays at trade fairs, product exhibitions, and in travelling caravans. As Hogben notes in his exploration of building material promotion, 'two concerns that come into play in the promotion of new materials and products to architects [... were] creating desire and establishing credibility.'[85]

> Credibility depends on technical reliance and also on professional, intellectual and theoretical associations and backings. Generally, advertising cannot contain detailed arguments but rather presents signifiers of integrity and trustworthiness: Images, messages and endorsements that provide an aura of seriousness and believability.[86]

It can be argued that in relation to the PPG portfolio, the architects themselves were a target audience, as it offered them not only crafted and artistically presented modern designs but also an image of

themselves. This was part of a wider trend, and it wasn't only glass companies that took advantage of the relaxed rules around using architects as experts to promote their products. A look through design periodicals of the era reveals advertisements by numerous product companies featuring images of architects alongside their designs, selling everything from carpet to steel.[87] It was also not unusual for material manufacturers to hire architects to create marketing material as PPG did, with Revere Copper employing Oscar Stonorov and Louis Kahn to contribute to their neighbourhood planning booklet *You and Your Neighbourhood* in 1944.[88]

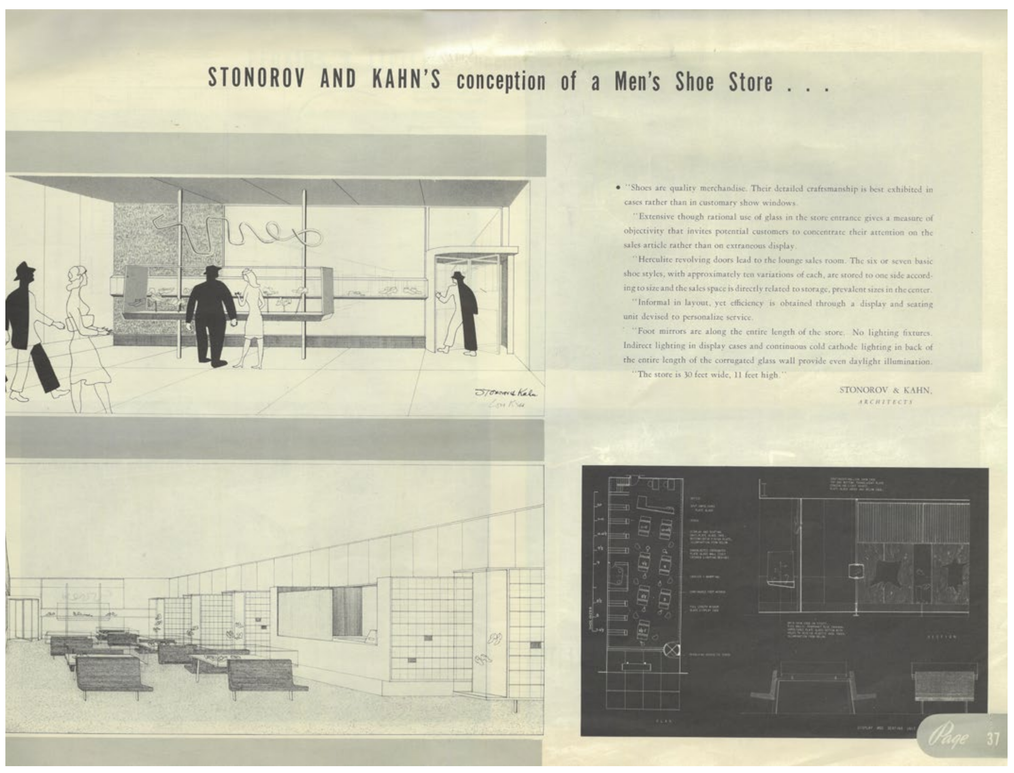

Figure 11.
'Stonorov and Kahn's Conception of a Men's Shoe Store', Pittsburgh Plate Glass Co., *There is a New Trend in Store Design* (Pittsburgh Plate Glass Co., 1945), p. 37, Architecture Museum, University of South Australia.

conclusions

While it is unknown if any of the designs from the PPG's *There is A New Trend in Store Design* were ever built, a 1952 building types study in *Architectural Record* stated, 'store design has gone through a complete overhauling in the postwar years', noting that 'the open front has become an accepted formula', also observing that the 'store is becoming more and more of a stage set which adjusts to seasons, sales volume and buying trends.'[89] Despite not knowing how these individual designs may have influenced built works, one that has been found likely to have influenced a built outcome is the 'Conception of a Men's Shoe Store' design by Oscar Stonorov and Louis Kahn. This has been thought by architectural historian William Whitaker to have influenced the commission for the Coward Shoe Store of 1949 in Philadelphia by Stonorov and Kahn with its all-glass façade and showcases [Fig. 11].[90] Yet, the realisation (or not) of these projects directs attention away from their impact not only at the time of production, but also today, as evidence of the ideological, cultural, technological, and economic contexts of their times.

Without an actual site, individual client, budget, or defined regulatory setting, the designers of these unbuilt retail stores could be free to experiment and express their design ideas and explore future-focused concepts. This essay has built upon Nevins and Stern's observation that while buildings 'are often torn down, neglected, renovated, or added on to', the drawing 'offers valuable evidence' about not only the context in which the designs were produced, but also the intent of the designer, albeit within the constraints imposed by the commissioning client, Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company.[91]

The types of information that unbuilt drawings hold the potential to unveil are numerous, including evidence of 'big picture' historical events or periods, such as the effects of war and economic conditions. Wider social and cultural indications may also be found in the unbuilt drawings, including traces of prevalent business or work practices, and, by interpreting the aesthetic cues present, intended cultural signifiers may be found. What they also tell us are the cultural and social assumptions the designers made about who the shoppers were likely to be, with well-dressed middle-class men and women indicated in silhouette in many designs. The status of building technology at the time of drawing production can also be uncovered through an analysis of the materials, and particularly the details. Moreover, the intended audience for the drawing can be intimated through the locating of the drawings in their context and exploring their role as marketing tools, with presentation views used as artwork to attract the eye.

The unbuilt drawings examined in this essay have revealed the ideas prevalent in post-war retail design as modified by the requirement for the incorporation of glass by Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company. Among the benefits of investigating these unbuilt retail design drawings is the snapshot in time they have provided through the incorporation of the designer's rationale in text alongside the drawings. Additionally, the primacy of presentation drawings and their effectiveness in explaining both the interiors and the store fronts has aided in unpacking themes, not only of architectural and retail design trends, drawing techniques, and use of building materials, but also wider contextual evidence of economic and social conditions that tell a more expansive story of their significance of design in history.

acknowledgements

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author biography

Dr Julie Collins is Research Fellow and Curator at the University of South Australia's Architecture Museum. With a background in architectural history, Julie's work has focused on histories of health-related buildings, with her book, *The Architecture and Landscape of Health: A Historical Perspective on Therapeutic Places 1790–1940*, released in 2020. She is also interested in the histories of architects and interior designers and their works, particularly in South Australia.

notes

1 Pittsburgh Plate Glass Co., *There is a New Trend in Store Design* (Pittsburgh Plate Glass Co., 1945), p. 19, William Mason collection, S236/5/13, Architecture Museum, University of South Australia.

2 Cover, *Pencil Points*, 25.8 August (1944).

3 'Individual Personalities for Stores', *Decoration and Glass,* 14.4 (Nov–Dec 1948), pp. 10–11.

4 Pittsburgh Plate Glass Co., *How Eye-Appeal Inside and Out increases Retail Sales* (Pittsburgh Plate Glass Co., 1945).

5 Mike Jackson, 'Modernism on Main Street: The dilemma of the Half Modern Building', *APT Bulletin: The Journal of Preservation Technology*, 48.2–3, (2017), pp. 29–36.

6 Mark Gelernter, *Sources of Architectural Form: A Critical History of Western Design Theory* (Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 7.

7 James O'Gorman, *On the Boards: Drawings by Nineteenth Century Boston Architects* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), p. 2.

8 Julie Collins, Susan Collins and Christine Garnaut, 'Behind the Image: Assessing Architectural Drawings as Cultural Records', *Archives and Manuscripts*, 35.2 (2007), pp. 86–107.

9 Gabrielle Esperdy, 'The Odd-Job Alleyway of Building: Modernization, Marketing, and Architectural Practice in the 1930s', *Journal of Architectural Education*, 58.4 (2005), pp. 25–40 (pp. 24–40; p. 26), doi: 10.1162/1046488054026714.

10 D. M. Kennedy, 'What the New Deal did', *Political Science Quarterly*, 124.2 (2009), pp. 251–68.

11 'Modernize Main Street', *Architectural Forum*, 63.1 (July 1935), pp. 51–62.

12 Esperdy 'The Odd-Job Alleyway of Building', pp. 25–26.

13 Andrew M. Shanken, 'Breaking the Taboo: Architects and Advertising in Depression and War', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 69.3 (2010), pp. 406–29 (p. 409).

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an interactionist's view: people, planning, and unpredictability in lars lerup's unbuildable *love/house* drawings

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abstract

This essay examines the unbuildable architectural and interior design drawings of *Love/House* (1984) by architect and professor Lars Lerup. Developed at University of California, Berkeley, and the Canadian Centre for Architecture, Lerup's work is shown to use fictional narratives in drawings to explore certain poetic ideas about the human experience from Roland Barthes's 1977 book, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*. His deliberate exploration of artistic, fictional, and unrealisable aesthetic effects aimed to offer a critical revision to the rise of American West-Coast suburbanisation, and the commercialisation of domestic, social behaviours in an increasingly commoditised media culture of the 1980s.

Through a close reading of several of Lerup's lesser known texts from the 1970s and 1980s that foregrounded the *Love/House* project, this essay shows there was more to his work than the somewhat cryptic and idiosyncratic employment of fictional drawings to challenge the commercial rhetoric of late-capitalism. It argues that his largely unexamined approaches to spatial design resulted from a deeper theoretical derivation that human action was irreducibly unpredictable, and unable to be categorised into behaviourist models or functional planning. By unpacking the qualities of his 'interactionist view' of people, objects, and the built environment from his first theoretical text, *Building the Unfinished* (1977), the unbuildable compositional effects of the *Love/House* drawings are shown to have resulted from his earlier attempts to establish the complex and unpredictable nature of human action as the central tenet of spatial design. For Lerup, exploring ideas of poetry and fiction in drawings played a crucial role in cultivating his theory of space that reflects people's unfinished search for meaning.

keywords

unbuildable interiors, architectural drawings, postmodernism, planning, Lars Lerup

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the shadowy, unbuildable world

In 1987, the architect Professor Lars Lerup published a small book entitled *Planned Assaults* with the Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal (CCA).[1] This book chronicled the qualities and properties of three of Lerup's architecture and interior projects*: The Nofamily House* (1982), *Love/House* (1984), and *Texas Zero* (1984), with seventy-four of his drawings, sketches, plans, and paintings. In the foreword to the book, Phyllis Lambert, the Director of the CCA, described these projects as belonging to a rarely explored genre of spatial design that is unique because it is unbuildable.[2] Lambert explains that Lerup's projects were not unbuildable in the sense of fantasy or festival architecture, nor unbuildable due to their inclusion of 'technologies not yet available.'[3] Instead, she suggests these drawings were unbuildable because they were 'proposed as critical and philosophical discourse.'[4] Lerup had developed drawings of spaces that could not be built in order to provoke dialogue and debate about the agency of architecture and its impacts on how we live our lives.

What is particularly significant about this theoretical endeavour was how seriously Lerup proposed that exploring *unbuildability* was a substantial method to impact spatial design, and, consequently, the extent to which Lerup's methods expand our understanding of ideas about how we occupy, interact, and ultimately make meaningful connections with real spaces. Lerup's ideas of unbuildability are the subject of this essay. Through a close reading of several of his early and lesser known texts from the 1970s and 1980s, it unpacks his cryptic, underexamined, and highly idiosyncratic use of poetic ideas in unbuildable projects to develop his 'interactionist view' of spatial design, people, and objects. This view would be the foundation for his later ideas of 'vitalism'—as the shared, interactive relationship between buildings' 'material and dweller(s)'—he later explained in *After the City* (2000), and has recently expanded on in his new book *The Life and Death of Objects* (2022) and accompanying Drawing Matter essay, 'Objects That Meet' (2022).[5] By revisiting his early projects that have largely been relegated to an era of architectural drawing concerned with artistic, whimsical, and inconsequential aesthetic effects, this essay shows it was the very impracticality of exploring unbuildable, poetic design ideas that, for Lerup, established new theoretical grounds to humanise architecture in retort to the hyper-conflation of functional planning and economic rationalism of the 1980s.

Turning to the drawings, Lerup's unreserved focus on *unbuildability* appears to have been driven by his unique interest in exploring textual and rhetorical ideas from poetry in spatial design prior to the 1987 publication of *Planned Assaults*. The aim of this was an attempt to explore questions about how spaces can evoke certain emotions and sensory responses in viewers and occupants. As recognised by Lambert, the key to Lerup's novel approach was a coupling of poetic discourse on certain emotional states with imaginary spatial conditions illustrated in the three drawing projects. In her foreword, she observes that these projects depict 'states of being rather than to the physical reality of use.'[6] And Lerup himself, when speaking specifically about the project *Love/House*, introduces the idea that the architectonic decisions for its interior composition and spatial arrangements were based on the poetic description of the emotional state of 'lovers'—a state of waiting—which he developed with an allegory of a waiting lover from the 'amorous figures' of Roland Barthes's 1977 book, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments* [Fig. 01.].[7]

Lerup explains that his figures should not be understood as real people able to populate reality. Instead, like Barthes's amorous, fictional figures that describe particular poetic aspects of lovers' emotional states, Lerup similarly suggests his figures should be understood as the 'acceptation'—or general idea—of similar states, yet now transmuted from the fictional pages of Barthes's text to the fictional pages of his architectural drawings.[8] He suggests that, like Barthes's poetic descriptions,

Figure 01.
'Amorous Drift: Enigma of the Night (Amnesia of the Day).' From: Lars Lerup, *Planned Assaults: The Nofamily House, Love/House, Texas Zero* (Centre Canadian d'Architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture; Distributed by MIT Press, 1987), p. 68. Image used with permission from Lars Lerup.

when the qualities of these figures he describes in drawings resonate with our own experiences, we as viewers flesh out their general qualities by indulging their idiosyncrasies.[9] In this way, Lerup's amorous figures can be understood as virtual prompts, never intended to reflect real people but instead act as a kind of poetic narrative of occupying architecture that—in a way similar to poetry's capacity to provoke our emotions—stimulates sensorial effects for viewers when reflecting on their own experiences of inhabiting buildings.

As an exercise in housing these virtual figures, *Love/House* is conceived as an unbuildable place within which they reside, an imaginary architecture Lerup describes as a kind of 'armature' for the qualities and properties of this discourse on poetry, a 'house never to be built, a place for the imagination: such is the scaffold for the waiting lover.'[10] In a similar approach of transmuting Barthes's ideas of figures from text to drawings, Lerup transmutes properties of a real house into a shadowy 'dream house' as a means to conceptualise the qualities of *Love/House's* imaginary design.[11] Within the pages of *Planned Assaults*, his drawings and paintings chronicle this transmutation in images of architecture that manipulate conventional representations of a conceivable building into metamorphic depictions of an unrecognisable structure [Fig. 02].

Concurrent with the manipulation in drawing, Lerup describes a parallel shift in the parameters affecting his decisions about spatial design. He suggests that, for instance, the certainty of physical laws to impact a building's structure—such as gravity—lose meaning and are displaced by the enigmatic properties of dreams that are characterised by the capacity to evoke the 'most tentative of interpretations.'[12] He goes on to describe this new shadowy house as 'the upside-down world of the dream', and by conceiving it as the literal antonym of reality, its invention—for all its unbuildable imaginary qualities—follows a specific logic of designing real architecture.[13] This enables Lerup to endow it with a great level of detail and complexity

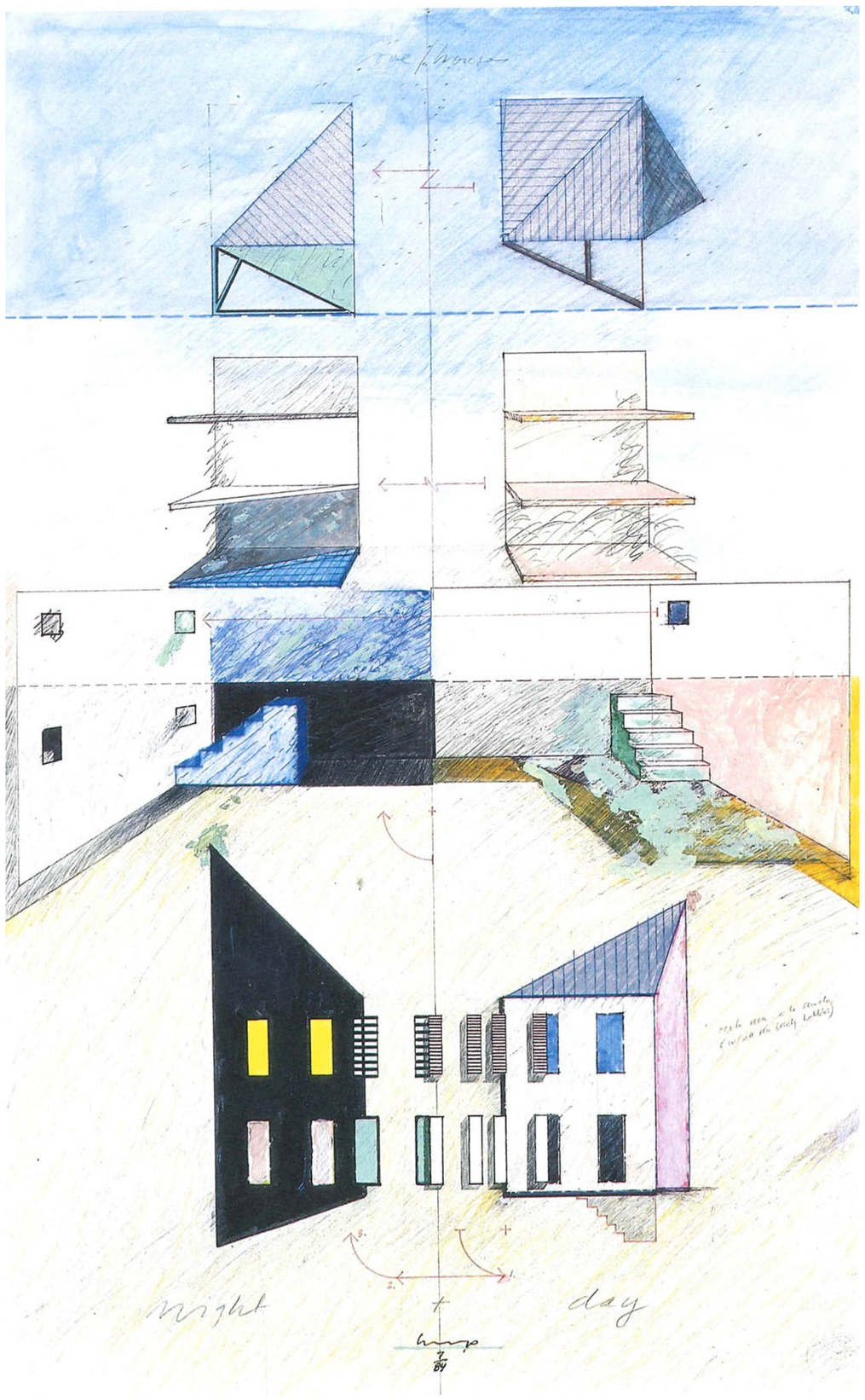

Figure 02.
'Love/House: Transformation (Night and Day).' From: Lars Lerup, *Planned Assaults: The Nofamily House, Love/House, Texas Zero* (Centre Canadian d'Architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture; Distributed by MIT Press, 1987), p. 64. Image used with permission from Lars Lerup.

by systematically inverting the conceivably real elements of architecture into ones that can only exist in the fictional space of the drawing.

Beyond the sentimental exploration of emotive ideas in *Love/House*, the relevance of this method of poetic enquiry is apparent in its attempt to provide insight into the persuasive, rhetorical influence of architecture and its drawings on our perceptions and experiences of inhabiting buildings. In *Planned Assaults*, Lerup establishes the argument that assumptions and social biases about inhabitation are literally illustrated into conventional building plans, and assert indirect

influences on our lived experiences of real spaces once built.[14] He focuses on the suburban single-family house as the typology that most acutely articulates this phenomenon, and unpacking this idea is the central tenet linking these three unbuildable drawing projects. What is particularly unique about Lerup's approach is the emphasis he places on the drawing. Acknowledging that the house plan is a 'graphic abstraction' and 'can never be experienced directly', he suggests its influence on inhabitation is nonetheless 'rigid and finite', and that it defines the 'interior landscape' of the house as the 'primary territory of the American Dream.'[15]

To substantiate this claim, Lerup situates the plan, and its influence on the built form of the suburban home, in a category of 'numerous additional structures of influence' of media and rhetoric of the 1980s.[16] These include, the 'rhetoric of politics and law, ceremonial oratory, the language of everyday life, and various texts and image assemblies, from the codes of behaviour whose sources range from advice columns and advertising to television soap operas.'[17]

In this sense, he situates the drawn plan as operating like the fashion magazine or sit-com of commercial media culture, which presents an idealised illustration of gender roles, cultural norms, and aspirational identities to maintain media-driven ideas of social etiquette and relations that together establish the new 'fundament of order and discipline for the family.'[18] Lerup argues that inhabiting both the physical structure of the house and its imagined social conditions established by the plan produce a grand narrative of suburban occupation, a type of 'morality manifested in form', which he characterises with Michel Foucault's term 'disciplinary mechanism', to describe a system of power in suburban domestic interior spaces that order and control our perceptions, relations, behaviours, and customs in a late-capitalist cultural imaginary.[19]

Within this context, the unbuildable drawings of *Love/House* operate as a critical revision of suburban occupation. They 'assault' the grand narrative of the suburban house by interrupting the underexamined order and discipline of its structural and social forms.[20] Inhabiting the shadowy space of lovers is the impetus for this assault. Lerup suggests the poetic, emotive experience of lovers has been excluded from the grand narrative of the suburban house and, by attempting to design a place for Barthes's fictional amorous figures, *Love/House* transgresses the limits of accepted suburban behaviour.[21] Like Foucault's heterotopic 'other' space of the mirror, that 'invert[s] the set of relations [it happens to] reflect', the shadowy, unbuildable drawings of *Love/House* operate as a 'counter-site' to critique the suburban home through exploring the properties of lived experience it excludes.[22] With this approach, ideas of what is real and unbuildable are drawn into question, as the authenticity of emotive experience, captured in poetry, questions the legitimacy of commercialised, suburban reality.

Lerup's assaults on late-capitalist built environments with poetic ideas of unbuildable, shadowy 'other' spaces appears to have been part of his broader critical commentary on the failings and limitations of late-twentieth-century cities he was developing throughout the 1980s—before his later well-known texts on the subject, such as *After the City* (2000). For instance, as a critical review of the new additions to the Stockholm subway system by Michael Granit and Per Reimers, Lerup wrote a short article in 1984 for the University of California, Berkeley, journal *Places*.[23] This was the same year that the original exhibition for *Love/House* was shown at the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA) gallery, also at UC Berkeley.[24]

In this article, Lerup established an opposition between the construction of buildings in the above-ground world of Stockholm and the production of its new subterranean interior spaces. He paints a picture of Stockholm as maturing into an uncomfortable and derivative type of late-modernist urban rigidity, 'governed by an increasingly turgid and standardized attitude, leaving all innovation stranded on the shores of rules and regulations.'[25] He contrasts this

condition by describing a 'newfound liberty below the surface', which he characterises as a type of poetic, creative space in 'the depths of the bedrock that forms the datum of the city' [Fig. 03].[26]

Like his architectonic explorations in the drawings of *Love/House*, Lerup similarly employs the idea of transmuting real spaces into shadowy unreal environments, though here at an urban scale. To describe the conception of this new subterranean interior, he uses the imagery of 'blasting the rock' that was required to create the spaces for the subway as a metaphor for blowing up the dominant modernist narratives concerning the city's functional planning.[27] He describes how as the 'very grammar of the "real" world has been altered for a freer and more inspired structure in the depths', the objects displaced from their established positions in the grand narrative of the city above are transmuted into a field of disassociated things in the shadowy, subterranean interior with no dominant code to decipher their meaning.[28] The literal process Lerup is referring to was the decorative strategy for the subway's interior that left large surfaces of the subterranean rockface exposed and adorned its surfaces with artistic, historical, and popular references from the city above, such as large paintings, murals, and historical statues that were either cast as copies or directly emplaced. With poetic sentiment, Lerup describes the scene of fragmented and colliding artistic references in the subterranean interior as a kind of *field* of detritus:

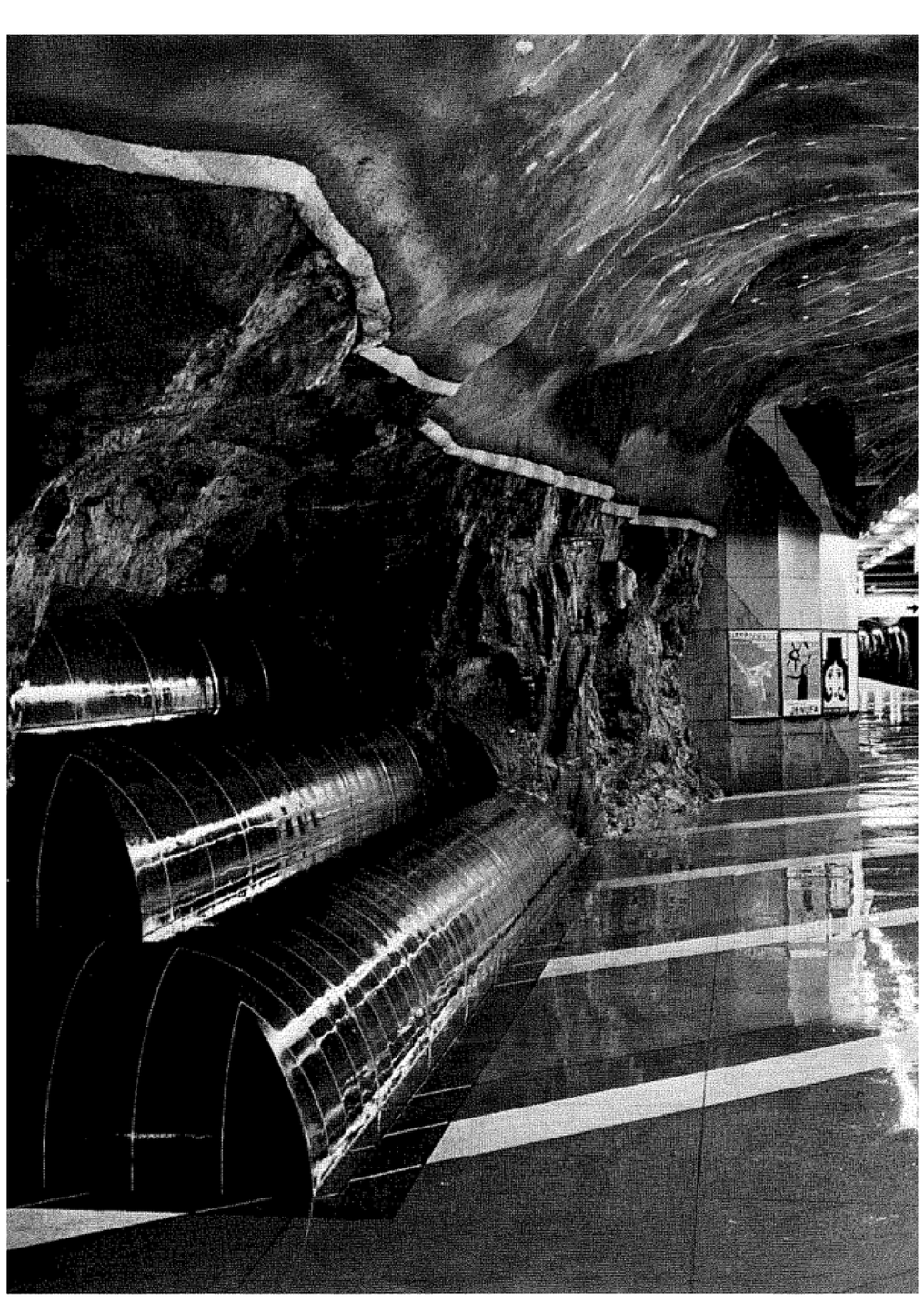

Figure 03.
'Half-cylinders form an artificial waterfall; in the back, opera events are posted on a giant pilaster.' From Lars Lerup, 'Below the Surface', *Places*, 1.3 (1984), pp. 3–9 (p. 3). Image used with permission from Lars Lerup.

> Giant cola tabs are represented on the floor next to equally flat, but almost real, fossils. Cast cement figures occupy almost-niches in the walls. All these fragments from the world above have been brought underground, but the 35 meters has disfigured, transformed, and displaced them. Almost insubstantial, both painted and cast objects have lost not only some of their form but also their meaning.[29]

This descriptive imagery of a dissociated, meaningless field of fragmented objects echoes popular compositional studies from the period that significantly impacted postmodern discourse on architecture at this time. Manfredo Tafuri's groundbreaking analysis of Giovanni Battista Piranesi's plan of Campo Marzio (1762) engraving, for instance, describes similar effects of the bricolage collision of Rome's historical monuments in a fictional urban plan of the city, and its impacts on dismantling dominant narratives of history and syntactic structures of meaning.[30] Indeed, Lerup himself acknowledges the relationship between the disruptive compositional effects in the drawings of *Love/House* and discourse of a 'postmodern era.'[31] He describes the dominant narrative of the single-family house as an 'aesthetic play on modernism', and suggests his assaults are attempts at the 'undermining of dogma, be it modernism, historicism, or behaviourism', by similarly collapsing the syntactic structure of the house plan that holds these dominant narratives together.[32]

In the article on the Stockholm subway, Lerup frames this new subterranean interior as deriving from the same processes of dismantling dominant narratives that resulted in *Love/House*. And, that its similar transmutation of elements from the city above into the shadowy, subterranean interior—like *Love/House*—appear to equally operate as 'corrosive forms of antihistoricism.'[33] However, his further description of this process in the subway goes beyond the postmodern dilemma Tafuri identifies as 'the reduction of space to a tangle of *things* that question one another's meaning interchangeably in an impossible colloquy.'[34] Instead, he extends the metaphor of transmutation from the overall space of the subway to the new artworks that ornament its rocky walls. Referring to the works of Ulrik Samuelson, for instance, Lerup describes how his Harlequin paintings and sculptures take 'operatic references' from the world above, and transmute them into the 'shadow world' of Kungsträdgården Station, to '[establish] a set of symmetries between the park and the institutions above.'[35] He observes:

> Their petrification has given them new life, radically contradicting their insubstantiality. Harlequin's tights have gained new force, their rude flattening has burst the seams so that his body has been fully erased—the references to the opera above fade away; liberated, the cloth of the buffoon is no longer a mere wrapping but rock itself.[36]

The critical shift in Lerup's thinking about these shadowy worlds, from their perception as negative commentary on the late-modern city to the constructive exploration of new spatial ideas, occurs in relation to his use of the term 'flattening.'[37] When first referring to the symbols of 'giant cola tabs' and 'fossils,' he implies that within the process of transmuting these elements from the world above to the world below, they have been reduced to images and objects displaced from their meaning as insubstantial representations.[38] However, when discussing the references to the Harlequin figure, Lerup suggests that in the process of flattening it into a fragment, an opportunity arises to produce new meaning between the observer and the painted image, or, in the case of sculpture, between the subway's inhabitant and the physical object. In the process of transmutation, similar to the dismantling of the real house for the shadowy *Love/House*, Lerup suggests that—in as much as these objects are freed from their meaning that is defined by the historical and commercial narratives of the rigid, modern city above—they are also freed from the systems of knowledge that govern our way of perceiving them. And so, they are able to become something new [Fig. 04].

Important to this critical shift is the construction of new meaning through an engagement with the 'rock itself.'[39] By acknowledging the material experience of these displaced images and objects in the subterranean interior, Lerup suggests that—beyond their implied description as detritus—they hint at a new, and complex, interrelationship between their immediate presence and inhabitant's search for new meaning. In this challenge to the limits of late-modern ideas of functional planning, the shadowy, virtual world of *Love/House* and the Stockholm subway interior articulate new interests in the space of perception and interpretation in the gaps between things. The complexities of this gap, and its capacity to contest functional planning through compositional strategies for unbuildable architectural and interior designs, can be understood by examining key ideas that emerged in Lerup's first theoretical text on architecture, *Building the Unfinished*.

building the unfinished

Articulating a theory on the space between people and objects is the central theme of Lerup's book *Building the Unfinished: Architecture and Human Action* (1977). Published ten years before *Planned Assaults*, this book 'cast new light on the relation between people and the built environment' by establishing and sharing a new understanding of the 'complexity and evasiveness of the relation between people and things.'[40] Apparent in Lerup's research from this period is an uneasiness with the suggestion that one can predict and control how

Figure 04.
Harlequin's tights painted onto the exposed rock and concrete surfaces of Kungsträdgården subway station, Stockholm. 'Kungsträdgården Metro station, Stockholm. West entrance/exit' (2014). Arild Vågen CC BY-SA 3.0

designed objects are used. Even in Lerup's most pragmatic texts from the period, he alludes to an unknown complexity between objects and their use. In another of his early written texts on transit systems in pedestrian environments that appears to preface several ideas explored in *Building the Unfinished*, for instance, he foreshadows his future interest in this area of spatial design by compellingly describing this complexity as something 'intimate and highly inter-dependent', and worthy of great consideration.[41]

This interest in the relationship between people and objects appears to have been shaped by a desire to question the pragmatic narrative between user behaviour and the physical environment indoctrinated through ideas of functional planning. In *Building the Unfinished,* Lerup describes this ideology as a 'super-functionalist' and 'behaviourist' theoretical model that attempts to govern human action with architectural form.[42] Arguing against the implementation of such ideas in 'modern mass housing' he suggests that,

> The desire to reduce architecture to a tool, in service of people's utilitarian needs only, is both arbitrary and unreasonable. Arbitrary because utility is traditionally the minor function of architecture, unreasonable because architecture by nature performs this function poorly.[43]

This two-fold critique is compelling in both its simplicity and its ambition to refute pragmatism in spatial design. By arguing against an inherent, proscribed, or even easy relationship between

people and objects, it challenges the unifying idea of functional planning based on performance. And simultaneously—by describing architecture's value as historically being greater than its function—it alludes to the presence of an unseen and more meaningful relationship between both things. With this critique, Lerup both acknowledges the failings of functional planning *and* identifies the need for a 'new view of the interplay between people and the physical setting' beyond pragmatic and practical limitations—establishing the foundation for his later foray into the impractical and capricious exploration of poetic and unbuildable ideas in drawings.[44]

Lerup titles his new approach to the interplay between people and objects as an 'interactionist view', a term he appropriates from the concept of *Symbolic Interactionism* by philosophers and social theorists George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer.[45] Interestingly, he begins to describe this view by considering the relationship between objects, their meaning, and their context in a manner that resonates with his later description of the Stockholm subway as a shadowy field of detritus in 1984, and his illustrated dismantling of the house plan's syntactic structure in the 1987 *Love/House* drawings. He states, '[e]ach building is a stage with an assortment of props on, in and with which the dwellers live out their dramas.'[46]

This conceptual image of the built environment as a field or stage of fragmented and disassociated objects is a significant conceptual frame for Lerup, and first appears in his visual surveys of use patterns in urban settings from the early 1970s. In 1972, for instance, in an earlier study of Kungsträdgården, Stockholm, twelve years before his analysis of its subway station, he introduces the idea of the urban space as a stage or backdrop on which unrelated and disassociated objects are placed and on which moments of human interaction and experience occur.

> The public space is the arena where these many acts of freedom can be pursued, and from the user's perspective, it should support this need. The built environment is the support structure, the scene and backdrop where these acts can be performed.[47]

Later, in the same article, Lerup describes his observations of human activity as, 'irregular, spontaneous, and erratic', and with an equal amount of disassociation from the built environment.[48] These observations of people and objects at Kungsträdgården conjure imagery of a fragmented microcosm, a spectrum of indeterminate human actions and experiences playing out on an open stage, with little governing structure to order their unrelated trajectories [Fig. 05].

Importantly, upon this stage, Lerup suggests meaning is derived from a 'congruence' between the variable states of people's actions and their engagements with the objects in the urban setting.[49] The term congruence is a significant descriptor for Lerup, and he quotes William Michelson's use of the term in order to convey its conceptual relevance:

> Thus the model I suggest is not of determinism or the dominance of one system over another, but rather one of congruence of states of variables in one system coexisting better with states of variables in another system than with other alternative states.[50]

Despite his appropriation of Michelson's use of the term, this description acutely reflects Lerup's conception of his interactionist view. Congruence refers to a state of momentary agreement between the attributes of an object and a person's intentions. Unlike modern aphorisms such as 'form follows function' that suggest a discrete and linear relationship between an object's conception and its use, congruence implies objects have no fixed use or implicit meaning, and only constitute one half of the object/people interactionist coupling. The other half of the coupling is people's 'experience, their bias and temperament' they bring to objects, making them useful and meaningful by how they intend to use them.[51] One example Lerup uses to

demonstrate this idea of congruence is Marcel Duchamp's ready-made sculpture *Trébuchet* (1917): a simple coat rack, which when removed from the wall and placed on the floor by the artist operates as a trap to catch prey.[52] Importantly, he goes on to explain that the meanings and uses people assign to objects are not fixed but in a state of 'constant self-reflection and persistent interpretation'.[53] This fluidity of meaning and use, based on people's interminable questioning of identity, significance, and need appears to only condense towards a momentarily static state when people interact with objects for whatever purpose they intend to achieve through the interaction.

Lerup identifies the important role of the stage itself—as the built environment we populate—in these congruent interactions of people and objects. Describing the built environment as an extension of objects—like the way a chess board is an extension of its pieces—he states, 'the physical setting is the anchor of the interaction and self-reflection',[54] and that people 'bring their lives to these stages', and in doing so assign meaning 'to the stage and its props, in a constant interaction between past experience and new'.[55] He goes on to describe the congruence between people and the stage of objects as 'a dialectic between the internal and the external [where] the meaning of space is momentarily confirmed'.[56] Rather than assuming space is a neutral, inert, and stable phenomenon, he argues that people's production of meaning through 'self-reflection and interpretation', 'causes the meaning of the physical setting to become highly unpredictable'.[57] For Lerup, space itself, or a discrete and unified perception of our built environment, is only part of the fleeting experience of congruence between people and objects.

This reconfiguration of space, and its meaning, as a relativistic phenomenon was an approach to conceptualising built environments that was apparent in postmodern discourse at the time. Robert Venturi, for instance, in 1966 and later in 1977 introduced the idea that the complexity and

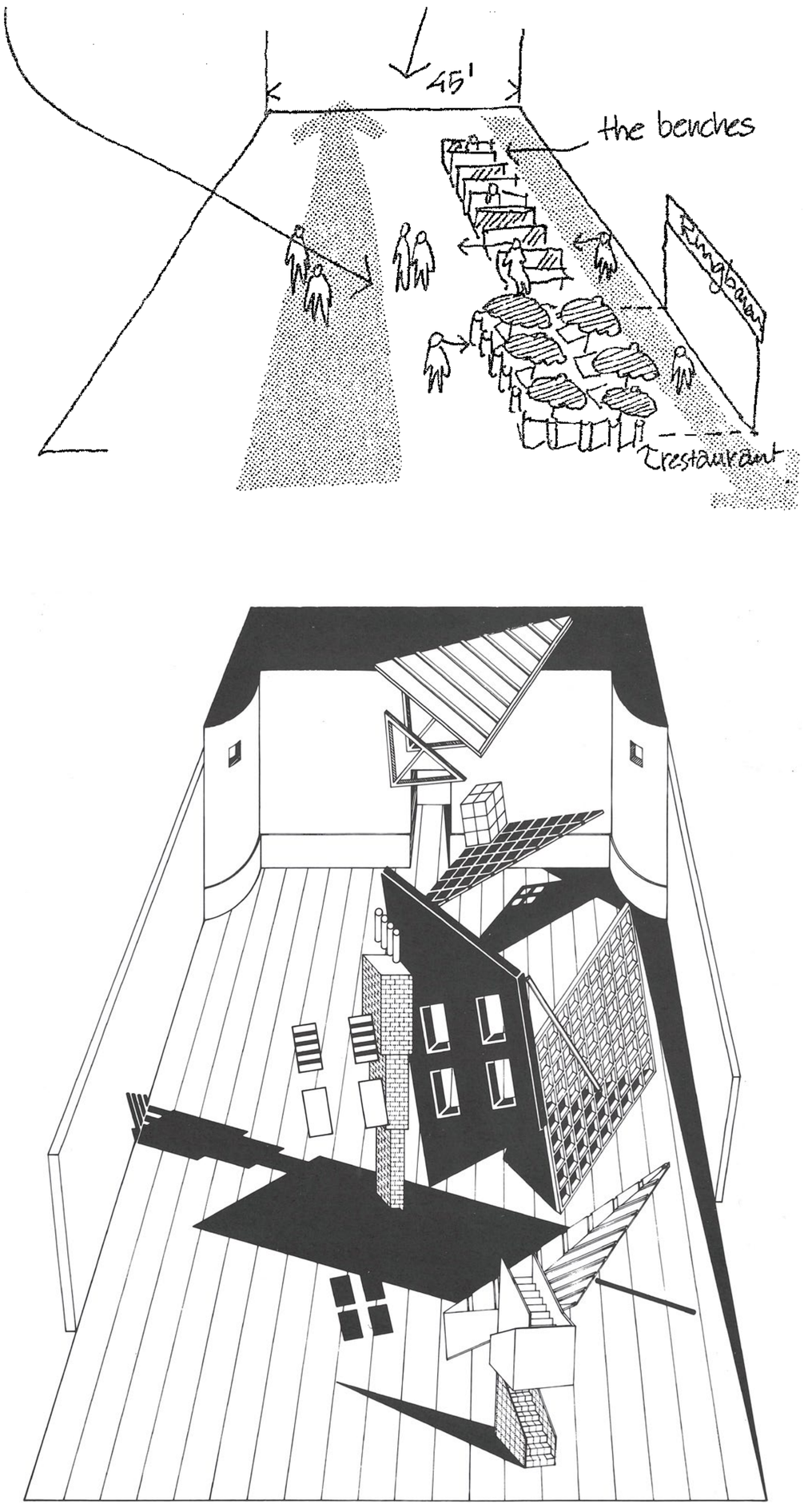

Figure 05.
Comparison of Lerup's illustrations from people's irregular movement on a 'fragmented stage of objects' at Kungsträdgården (1972), and his later unbuildable illustration of a 'fragmented stage of objects' depicting the shadowing interior space of *Love/House.* See Lars Lerup, 'Environmental and Behavioral Congruence as a Measure of Goodness in Public Space: The case of Stockholm', *Ekistics*, 34.204 (1972), pp. 341–58 (p. 350); 'Love/House: The Final Transformation', from Lars Lerup, *Planned Assaults: The Nofamily House, Love/House, Texas Zero* (Centre Canadian d'Architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture; Distributed by MIT Press, 1987), p. 80. Images used with permission from Lars Lerup.

contradictions in the compositional configurations of Christ Church in Spitalfields and St George church in Bloomsbury, London, impacted people's perception of the consistency of space in the built environment, noting, 'This is especially true as the observer moves through or around a building, and by extension through a city: at one moment one meaning can be perceived as dominant; at another moment a different meaning seems paramount.'[58] Similarly drawing from poetry, Venturi frames the importance of people's experiences in this idea of spatial relativism through Cleanth Brooks's analysis of 'paradox and ambiguity' in poems, and the significant role of the reader to unify a poem's meaning 'into a new pattern.'[59]

In relation to this discourse on spatial ambiguity and relativism, what is most significant about Lerup's interactionist view is the greater emphasis he gives to maintaining the complexity of people, rather than the compositional configuration of the built environment. Instead of reducing people's behaviours to assumed needs, he gives agency to their unpredictability and indeterminacy. And he uses this agency to critically shift the power structure in built environments from architects to occupants. Describing how 'people are not *responding organisms* but *active individuals* who in their approach to things produce meaning', he argues that inhabitants should not be subjected to 'architectural ideology' such as 'functionalist' and 'behaviourist' models that attempt to determine the value of the physical environment by simplifying occupants' use and actions.[60] Rather, with the congruence of object and meaning, each inhabitant determines their own value of built environments.

The foundation for this emphasis on people's complexity first appears in Lerup's writings on architecture in 1973, when examining the role of the architect.[61] In an article that proposed the centrality of anthropocentric values as the foundation for social and cultural meaning-making in the built environment, he suggests such centrality was forgotten during industrialisation due to the separation—by the architect expert—of the architectural object from the people who inhabit it.[62] By emphasising the agency in people's unpredictability, Lerup later uses this idea to wholeheartedly conclude that 'functionalism' is 'absurd', 'shaky', and 'vulnerable to criticism', and goes on to suggest the role of the architect must be reconsidered to 'relinquish control of the meaning making to occupants themselves.'[63]

Examining these origins of Lerup's interest in complexity is significant, because, like his later assault on the grand narrative of the suburban home in *Love/House,* his interactionist view describes a similar disruption of the underexamined order and discipline of structural and social forms in architectural design. In *Love/House,* Lerup appears to aggressively reject ideas of functional planning by attempting to open discourse on the complexities of the relationship between built objects and people's emotive experiences. Similarly, Lerup's interactionist view destabilises the same principles, not because his interactionist view is an aggressive or destructive assault, but because it demonstrates how the principles of functional planning—by not addressing the complex agency of users and inhabitants—were flawed to begin with.

In the context of destabilising the pragmatic and practical narratives of spatial design, Lerup introduces his title term 'unfinished' to reframe design practices through the lens of his interactionist view.

Human action, in the perspective of interaction, is a complicated matrix with unknown combinations—the result of which is considerable unpredictability, a marvelous unfinishedness and openness. When this fact is brushed aside, ignored or forgotten, the importance of architecture becomes simply utilitarian, design itself becomes dull, repetitive and mechanical.[64]

With this description, the impact of conceiving the built environment as 'unfinished' significantly impacts common perceptions of architecture and interior spaces and the role of people to determine their value. For instance, implied in a simply pragmatic reading of the idea of 'building the unfinished' is the suggestion that architecture and interior spaces are participatory, and should be delivered to their inhabitants literally unfinished, leaving opportunities for people to finish the design through their own occupation. Yet, based on the idea that the destabilising force of functional planning is an agitated and unending search for meaning in the human experience, 'unfinished' here appears to describe something entirely different. With this term, Lerup suggests objects, architecture, and the built environment are always unfinished because people are unfinished. Building the *unfinished* is a proposition that, as long as the search for purpose in the human experience is the central focus of design, the meaning we make with objects we build will remain in a perpetual state of progression.

the bridge

After establishing the search for meaning in the human experience as the central mechanism in his definition of 'unfinished' architecture and interior spaces, Lerup returns to consider the role of objects in this process. Now disassociated from the practical and pragmatic grand narratives of functional planning, Lerup questions what properties objects may have in themselves to affect the process of meaning-making in the interactionist coupling.

In order to explore the role of objects in detail, Lerup introduces the analogy of 'a small foot-bridge'—as a de-contextualised thought experiment—in the presentation of his ideas in *Building the Unfinished*.[65] He describes our first interaction when viewing it from afar, suggesting that in these initial moments the bridge 'asserts itself to us.'[66] He goes on to suggest that in this assertion something about the bridge itself 'gathers our attention.'[67] Interpreting the phenomenologist philosopher Martin Heidegger's 'κατηγορία' (category) of assertion, Lerup describes our sensation of the bridge in five ways: its 'quality', referring to the nature of the bridge's material appearance; its 'extent', referring to its scale and proportion in relation to the size of the body as a unit of measure; its 'relation', referring to its distance from the viewer and position in reference to other objects in the field; its 'place', which he describes as the significance of its position to the viewer; and its 'time', which he infers as the extent to which it occurs to us in the 'here and now.'[68]

Importantly, Lerup explains that these five categories are the 'domain of the designer' and only outline the designable choices for the bridge's construction that are visible and physical.[69] They say nothing of the shift in the role of meaning-making with those who use it. And, 'no physical science, no reduction into categories' can identify or explain qualities of this interactionist experience.[70] Lerup's introduction of philosophical ideas from the field of phenomenology to explore this space of interaction was not an unprecedented approach to theoretical exploration in architecture during the 1970s. As described by Jorge Otero-Pailos, for instance, the exploration of aesthetic experiences in various approaches to spatial design was a key method to shift from modernist narratives that new technology and scientific advancement would underpin social betterment.[71] And, the 'search for authentic, original human experiences' was one major theoretical foundation for the expanded practice of artistic architectural exploration during the postmodern period of the 1970s and 1980s.[72] Lerup's interest in phenomenologist theories appears to subscribe to similar circumstances and, in this respect, his later exploration of the persuasive capacity of objects and spaces to evoke certain emotions and sensory responses in his *Love/House* project appear to emanate from this interest in wanting to understand our interactions with the immaterial qualities of things, apparent in this unbuilt analogy of the bridge.

Lerup goes on to suggest that poetry is one such method that may 'come close' to exploring people's interactionist experience of the bridge's presence.[73] Alluding again to Heidegger, Lerup proposes

that poetry is a means to explore the real and identifiable effect of a thing's presence, in spite of the immateriality of its 'nature and essence.'[74] He demonstrates this idea in Chapter Two of *Building the Unfinished* by exploring the qualities of a series of real bridges from Smögen, Sweden [Fig 06].[75] Rather than critically analysing the spatial condition of these bridges, Lerup presents his exploration as a fictional narrative of walking through the bridged landscape. The imagery of these bridge structures scattered over the barren, rocky shoreline of Smögen resonates with his later descriptions of Stockholm, and the *Love/House* drawings as fields or stages of fragmented and disassociated objects. Without analysis or conclusion, this fictional approach cultivates a prolonged provocation of an imagined experience of these bridges. Poetry and narrative, like his unbuildable *Love/House* drawings for Barthes's amorous figures, enable Lerup to evoke virtual experiences that sustain the immaterial presence of these bridges in the imagination, and through our own memories and reflections on bridges we've experienced in our own lives, co-create the emotive meaning and value of these largely pragmatic and practical structures.

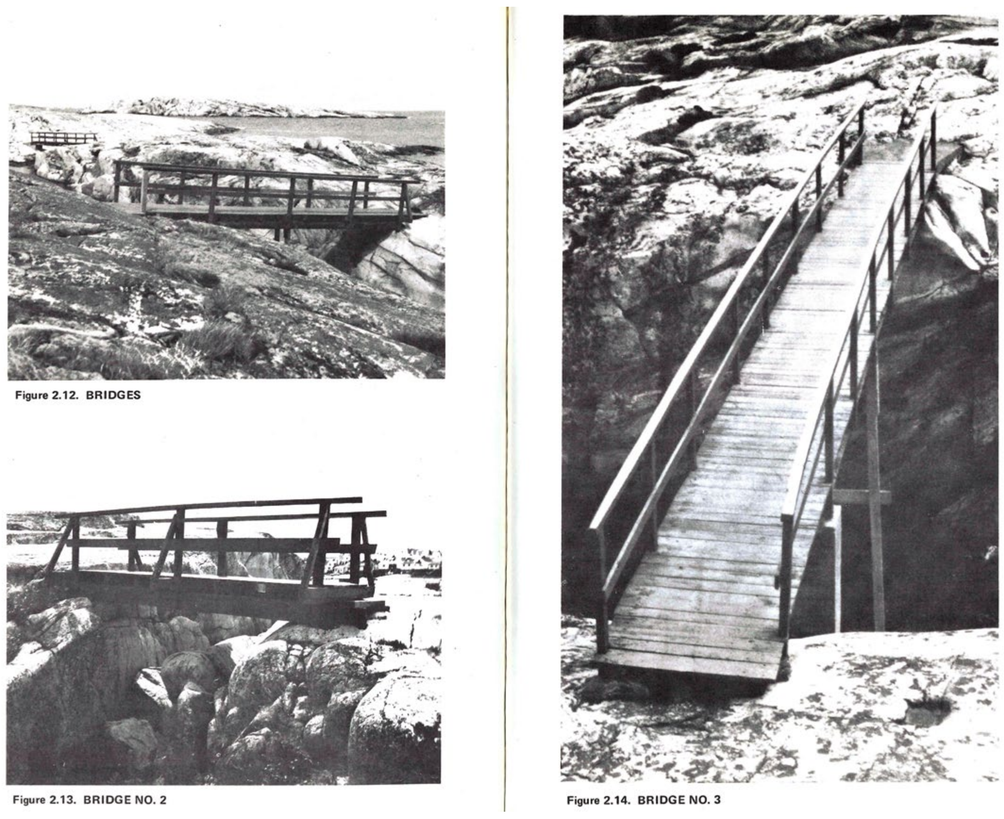

Figure 06.
Figures of the bridged landscape of Smögen, Sweden. See Lars Lerup, *Building the Unfinished: Architecture and Human Action* (SAGE Publications, 1977), pp. 40–41. Images used with permission from Lars Lerup.

Freed from the suggestion of a dominant narrative of functional meaning, these bridges—like any object reframed by Lerup's methods of poetic enquiry—gather our attention, and, through the exploration of their unbuildable qualities in narratives and drawings, are sustained in our imaginations, enabling us to configure their meaning with our own experiences. Ultimately, we can use that meaning to make momentary sense of our built environment from an inconsequential stage of dissociated things.

Concluding on the relevance of poetry in establishing this 'life-object' link, Lerup explains the principal purpose of his interactionist view is to address questions on the nature of the human experience. He suggests that, due to the link between people and their designed world, questions on the nature of objects is an avenue to raise questions about the nature of being human:

> Of course the fundamental question is, "What is a thing?"; a basic question asked by philosophers time and again. Embedded in this question lies its double: "What is man?" Because life and object are interdependent, one question implies the other. This interdependency, implying the entire interactive process, is volatile, dynamic, hard to capture and impossible to domesticate (if domestic means fully predictable).[76]

Here then we find the foundation for his later exploration of poetry in the unbuildable *Love/House* drawings. In as much as the authentic experiences of lovers is excluded from suburban domestic behaviours, Lerup argues that so too is the suggestion that human action can be categorised and commoditised. This position is not an unexpected or unprecedented resistance to the maturation of corporate architectural design cultures and the commercialisation of social behaviours in media during the 1980s. Yet, by looking at the foundations for these ideas in Lerup's work over the preceding decade, we find it was a deeper motivation to respect the fact that human action, at some level, will always be uncertain and unpredictable that led his later enquiries into the ideas of his interactionist view. And,

in as much as 'functionalist' and 'behaviourist' models attempt to abate our anxious, distrusting, and cynical concerns about the future, Lerup's work suggests such concerns will only be exacerbated when these models inevitably fail. In this respect, despite being unbuildable, Lerup's explorations through drawings, art, poetry, and narrative of our emotive interactions with objects and the built environment establish a space for debate on the capacity of predictive spatial design methods to determine our actions, be it functionalism, behaviourism, or the commodification of suburbia. It puts the claims of positive impact and social betterment—often attributed to spatial design—back into the hands of the people who actually inhabit built environments by optimistically arguing there is always some part of our actions that remains complex, irreducible, unpredictable, and can never be controlled.

conclusion

The impossibility of domesticating Lerup's interactionist view of people, objects, and their environments in many respects explains his unbuildable assaults on the 'disciplinary mechanism' of the single-family house.[77] Rather than vandalism, these assaults can now be understood as an attempt to sustain change in his theories and practices of spatial design after rejecting dominant and rigid modes of functional planning to define human action. In Lerup's theory of the unfinished, the predominantly postmodern idea of fragmentation is saved from the endless shattering of meaning by making the relationship between people and objects the purpose of this action. In this respect, his idea of our built environments as forever remaining unfinished appears less as an antagonism against pragmatism and more an adjustment of values. It critically shifts the focus of spatial design onto questions about the necessarily uncertain nature of people's experiences as they continually face unpredictable change.

In the process of this shift, Lerup's poetic exploration of the shadowy, fictional spaces of unbuildable architecture and interiors is justified. These 'other' spaces consigned to drawings, paintings, and the imagination are highly valuable tools to enable him to break the apparent logic of spatial design for new discourse on our actions and experiences. Through the poetic drawings of the unbuildable *Love/House,* Lerup attempts to sustain the immaterial experience of lovers, and—like the narrative descriptions of the Kungsträdgården subway station or the Smögen bridges—encourages each of us to make meaning with these ideas in our own ways. Fragmentation and his rejection of imitating reality in drawing make his unbuildable explorations of spatial design so useful in creating moments to gather our attention and extend discourse on questions of meaning. His work reminds us that if we are looking for accuracy in the predictive power of our built environments to bring about better futures, perhaps we should look for how accurately the art and poetry of spatial design moves us to make our own meanings with today's fragmented reality, rather than aspire to emulate the appearance of an ossified era.

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notes

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14 Lerup, *Planned Assaults*, pp. 15–16.

15 Lerup, *Planned Assaults*, p. 15.

16 Lerup, *Planned Assaults*, p. 16.

17 Lerup, *Planned Assaults*, p. 16.

18 Lerup, *Planned Assaults*, p. 15.

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58 Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (Museum of Modern Art, 1992), p. 32.

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constructing an endless interior: a relentless, unbuilt modernism

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abstract

Manfredo Tafuri, writing on Piranesi's prison etchings, contests that from the period of the Enlightenment, the understanding of the city-as-inside and nature-as-outside has been permanently altered: the built environment is now everywhere, and nature subjugated within its global system. Through a series of increasingly complex artificial habitats, this ongoing terrestrial project of global interiorisation has extended outwards, culminating in the extraordinary vernacular space architecture of the International Space Station (ISS).

On the one hand, this nascent cosmic extension of Piranesi's labyrinth represents the summit of Earth's interiorisation—a process that extends to incorporate its orbital systematisation and the transposition of its instrumentalised environment. However, as this essay illustrates, the built environment's access to outer space is not only the acme of terrestrial interiorisation but also the genesis of a potentially limitless, unbuilt interior project.

This visual-based research essay deploys a series of hand-drawn illustrations that reference and pay homage to the engraved plates of the Carceri series and Émile-Antoine Bayard's illustrations that accompanied Jules Verne's proto-modern fiction. Concrete poetry mediates and informs the relationship between these illustrations and the written text. This doubly illustrative methodology seeks to synthesise and augment the abstract aspects of the essay visually. The purposeful ambiguity inherent in the referenced graphic style of the selected illustrators advances the viewer's interpretation. As per its graphic precedents, it provides a tangible spatial reference for the progressive conceptual interiorisation of outer space as a consequence of the built environment's expansion beyond terrestrial horizons.

keywords

outer space; interiority; horizon; corridor; modernity

cite as:
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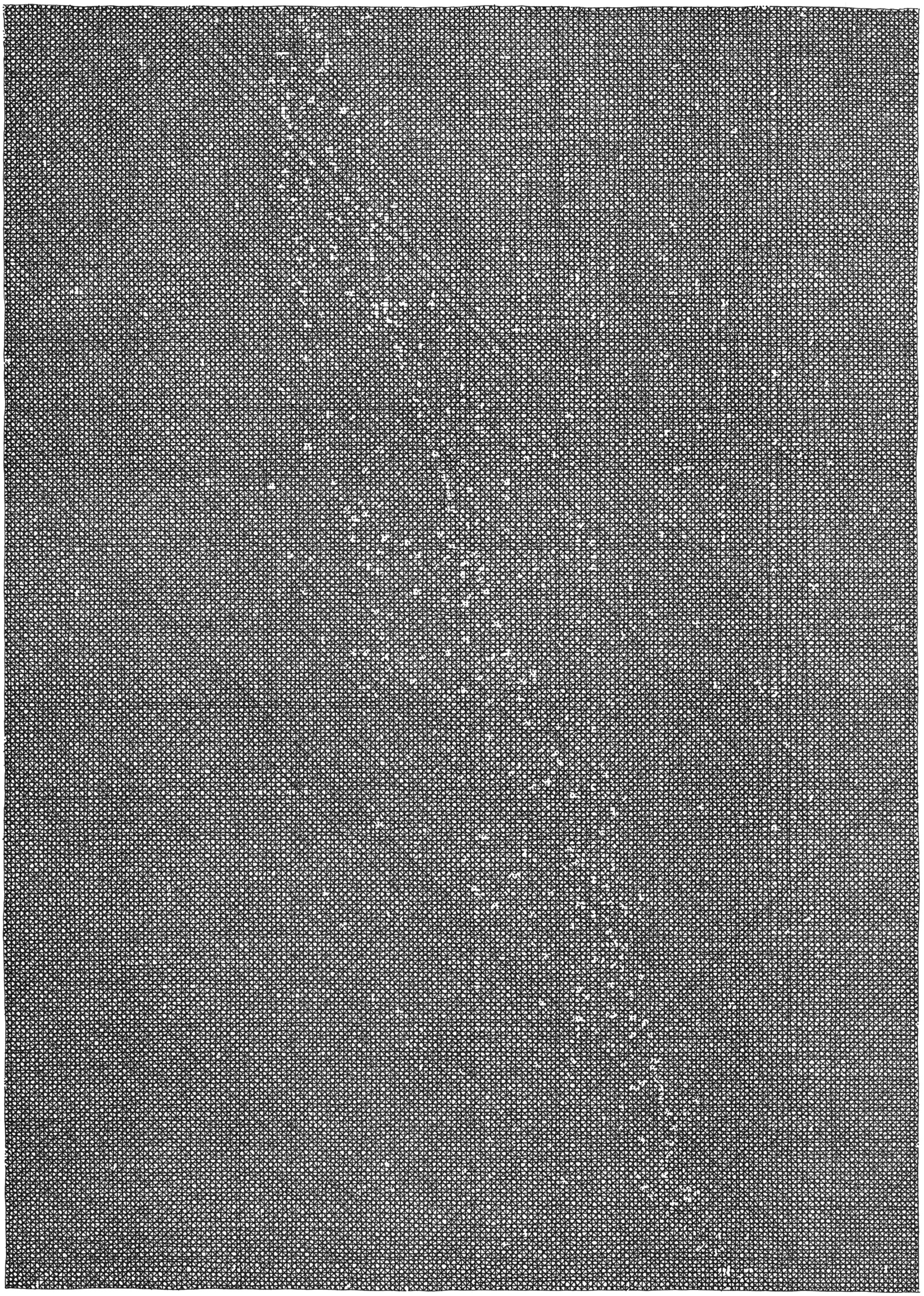
The lines represent the limit to humanity's understanding. They are the attempt to break things down to the overlapping, intersecting and unseen

trajectories, forces, vectors,

... systems devised by humanity to make sense of the world but ultimately limited by physiological comprehension.

Their resolution is representative of the incomplete picture that we have of the cosmos. The gaps in the lines created by placing, lifting, and re-placing the pen to the paper conciously mimic those lines in a wood cut engraving that, through a consistent ambiguity, provide enough information to allow the viewer to percieve an image. Such an image requires the viewer to engage their imagination and to make it their own.

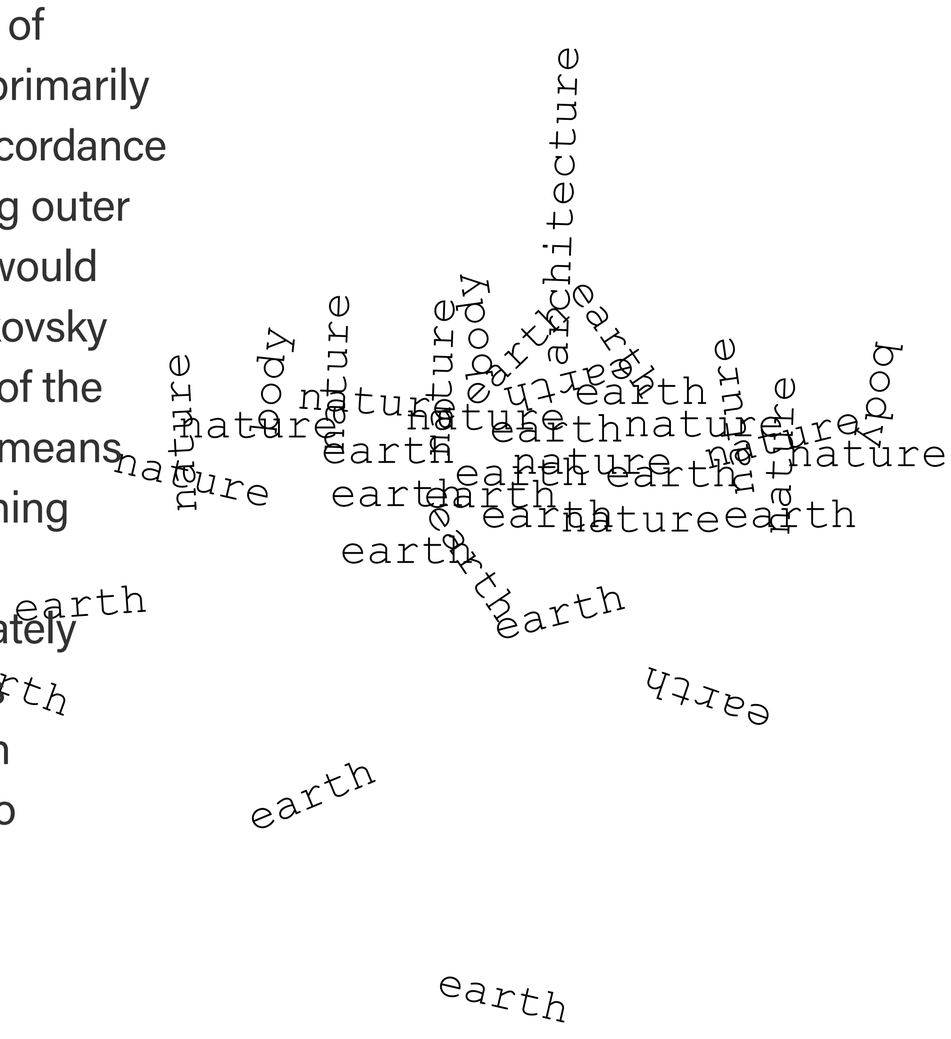
Laugier's *Primitive Hut* represents architecture set against nature and is an early, graphic representation of the dialectic between the two.[1] While the text, along with its pictographic frontispiece, provides a key architectural precedent, it no longer adequately represents the form and function of terrestrial architecture and the built. As the latter assume a domineering position in relation to the natural, world they find themselves on the periphery of the Earth's environs, only returning to the condition of the primitive hut via a context of a significantly different scale: the infinity of outer space. This tentative foothold has thus far manifested itself in a series of artificial satellites of varying capability and complexity, from mid-twentieth century vernacular architectures, in Low Earth Orbit (LEO) to the present-day International Space Station (ISS). These orbital space stations are examples of contemporary vernacular space architecture, but they are also a continuation of the terrestrial built environment, dominated by utility and infrastructure.

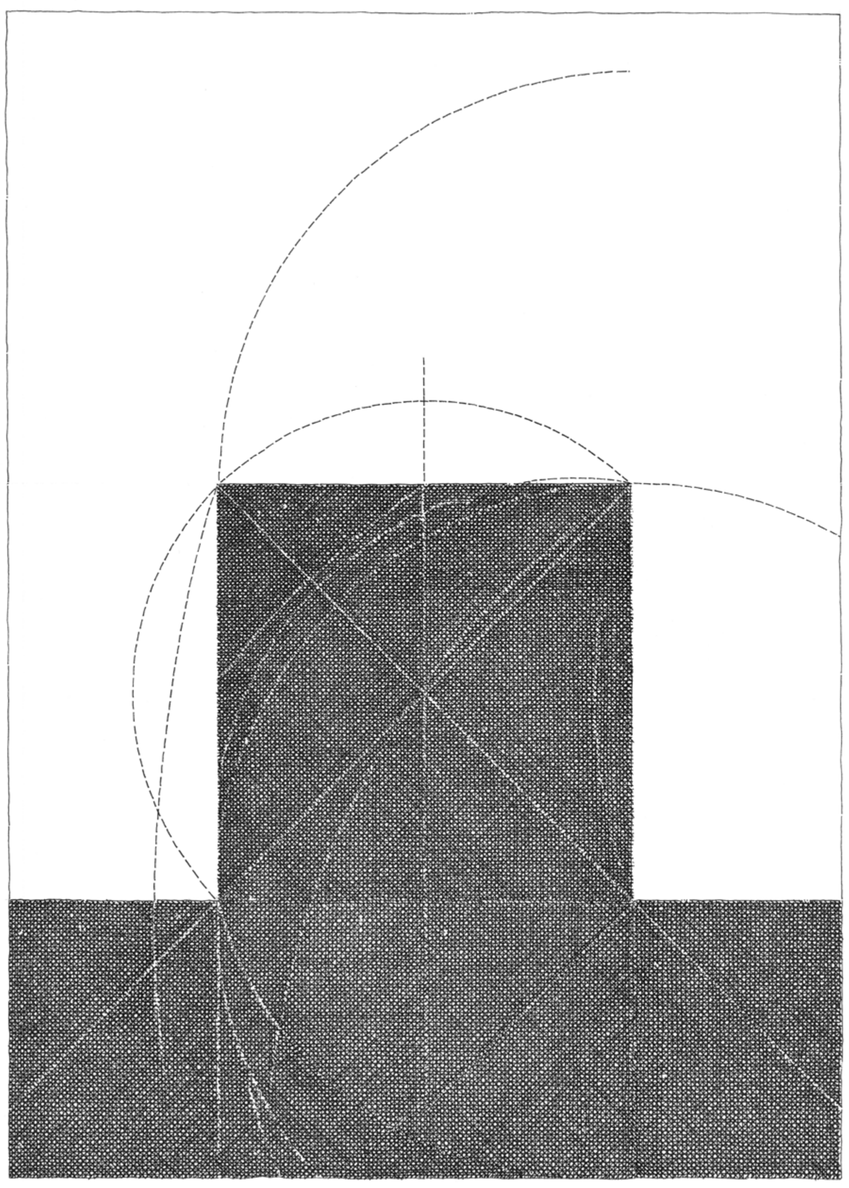


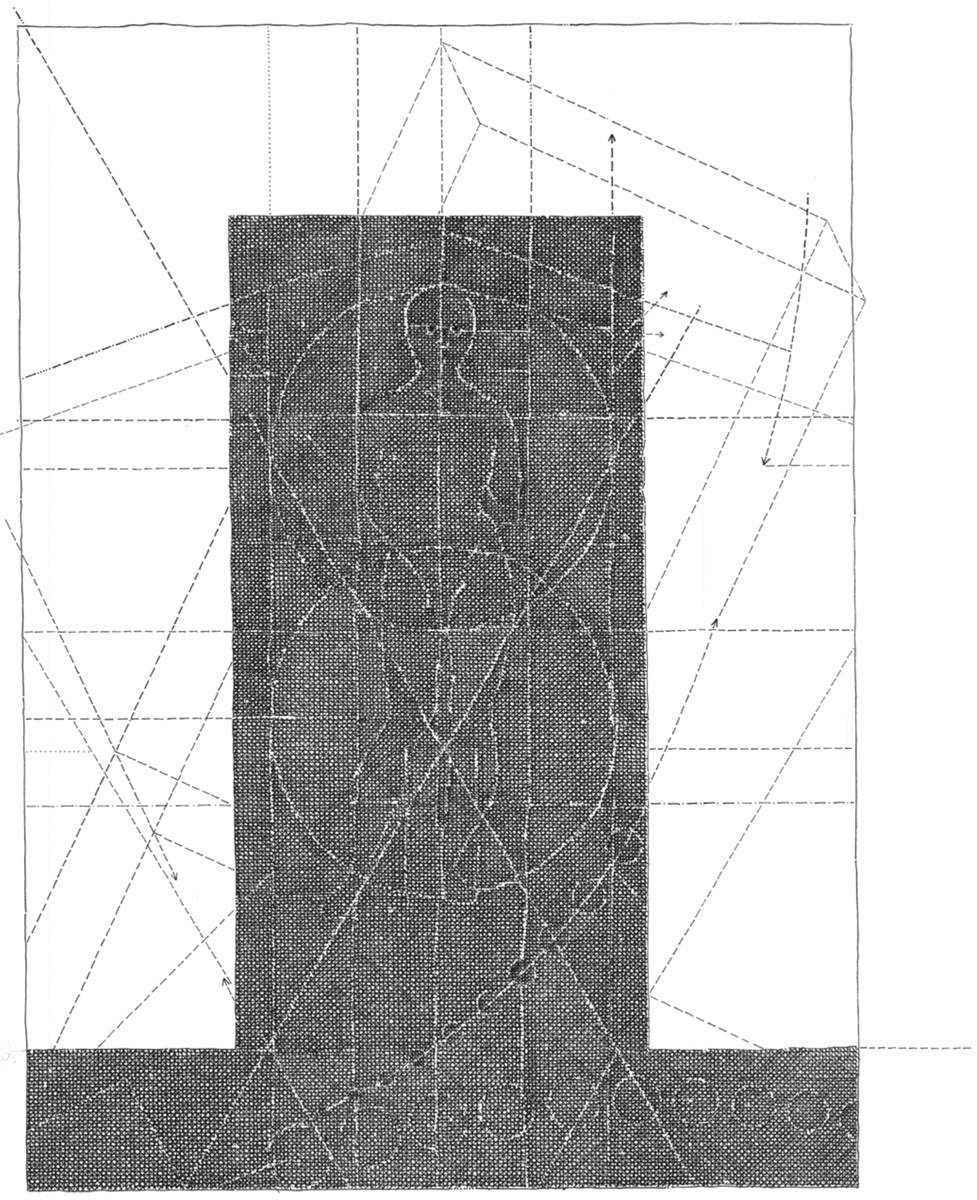
I understand architecture to be an expression of humanity in built form for good or for bad. It has emerged from within the Earth governed by nature's rules as its precedent and has, for thousands of years, moved outwards with ever-increasing velocity.
Timber, bricks, concrete, steel, humans, economics, hopes, dreams, pneumatic tyres, waste removal services, and the internal combustion engine are but several of the complex confluence of forces that have contributed to the outward trajectory of the built environment that now encapsulates our little rock.

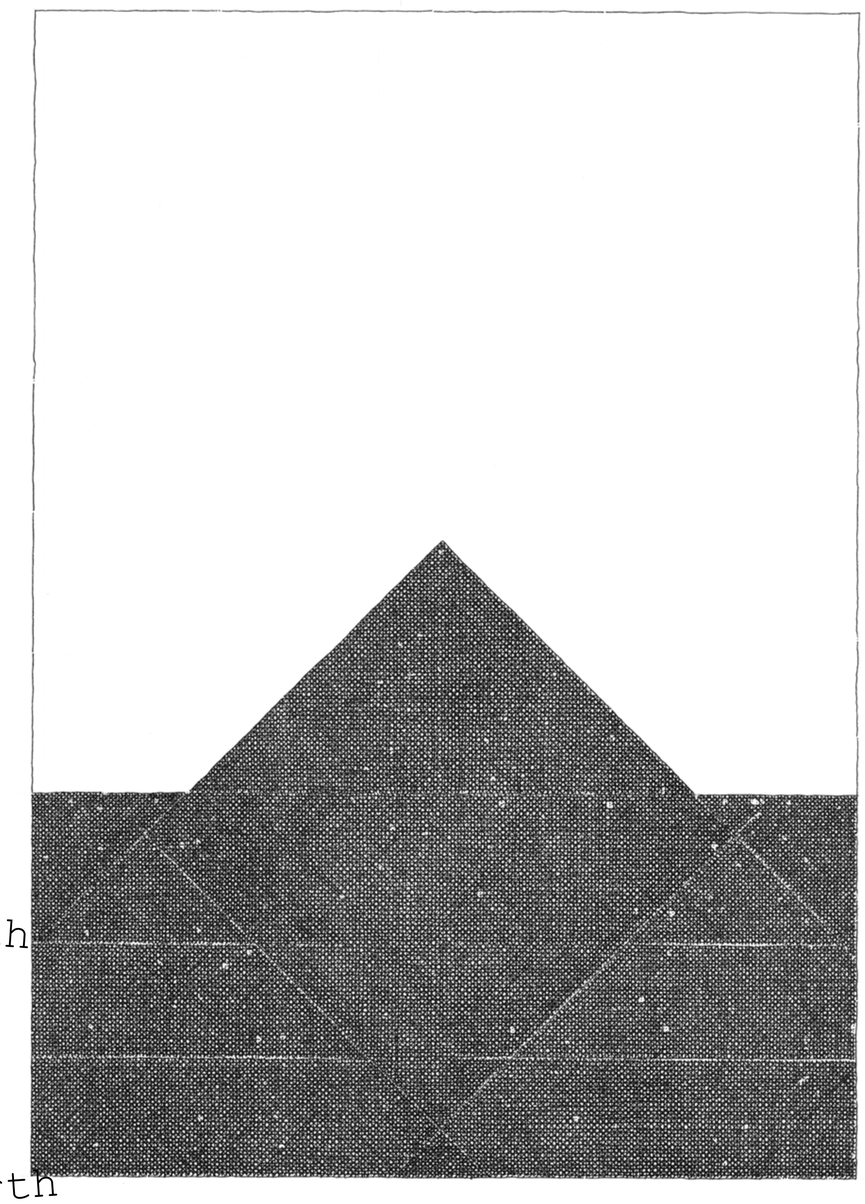
Theorists have long conjectured upon architecture's meaning by drawing out its correspondences with the human body. In his *De architectura*, Marcus Vitruvius Pollio (writing in 30–20 BCE) argued that the development of architecture should refer to the proportions of the ideal human body, particularly in the design of temples, as a model of natural perfection.[2] Initially, the body was used as a system of measurement to understand the external world and, as a result, to internalise it. This body-based metrology was developed in Vitruvius' text and reappears in Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man, Neufert and Dreyfuss's statistic bodies, and Corbusier's account of the Modulor Man.[3] However, transferring the body to the environment of microgravity would radically destabilise and decentre it, undoing the possibility of anthropocentric metrology and the human as an organising punctum.

At the core of this decentring is the loss of the terrestrial gravity that defines the body's order (and its environments). Prior to the abandonment of this condition in the late twentieth century when humans arrived in space, figures including the Russian Cosmists understood gravity as an element that would be transformational in its absence.[4] Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, the Russian 'father of rocketry', did not see the body entering space as either a primarily military or colonial strategy of expansion. Instead, and in accordance with Cosmist beliefs, he understood the potential of visiting outer space was to provide freedom to the human body, which would no longer be restrained by the Earth and its gravity.[5] Tsiolkovsky thought of space as a vehicle for the purposeful evolution of the body and that visiting outer space would provide it with a means of liberation. He and other Cosmists believed that overcoming terrestrial gravity and entering space would equate to the determination of humanity's own destiny and would ultimately elevate humanity to a god-like status.[6] Melding aspirations and pragmatics, Tsiolkovsky would also be instrumental in developing the scientific theory that would allow rockets to overcome the force of gravity.





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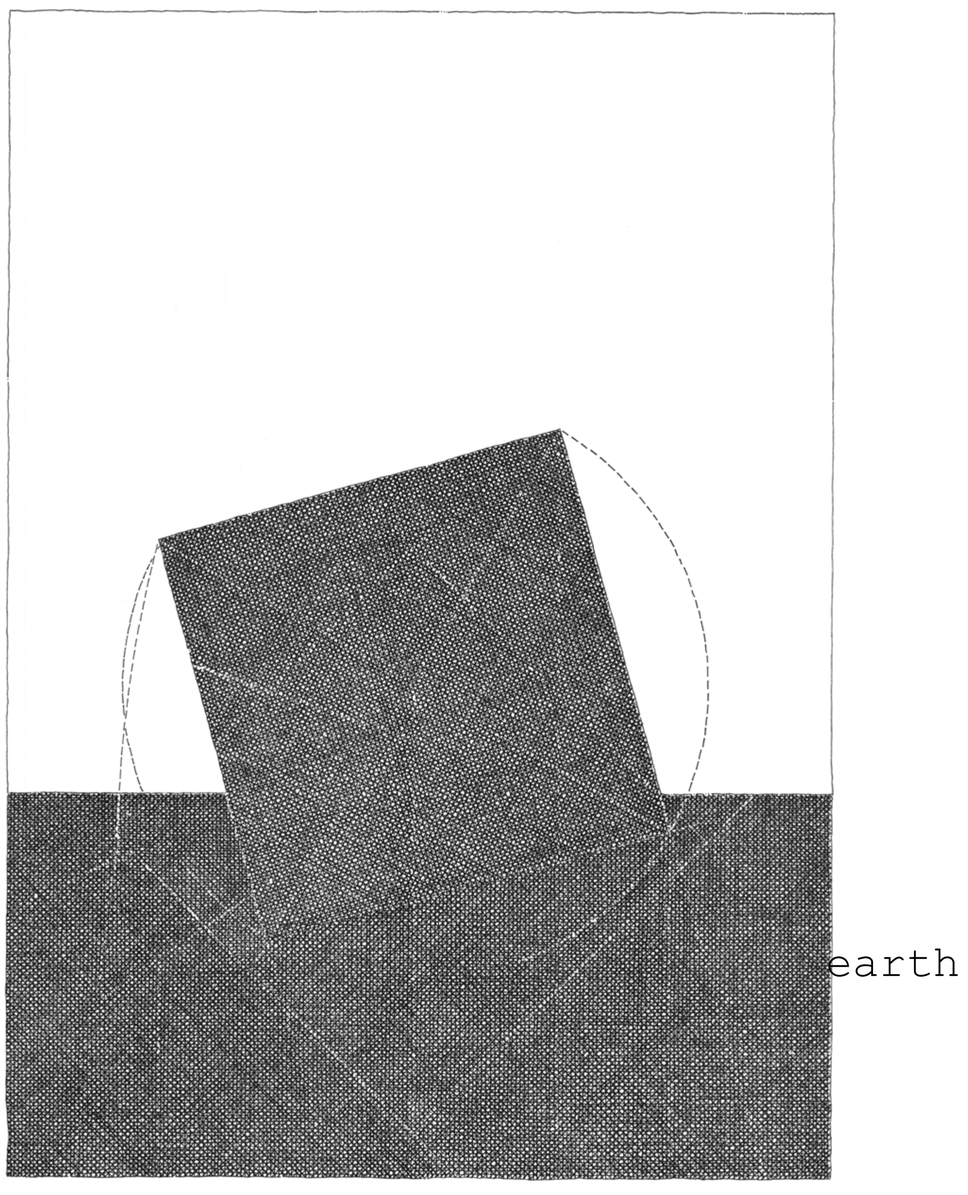
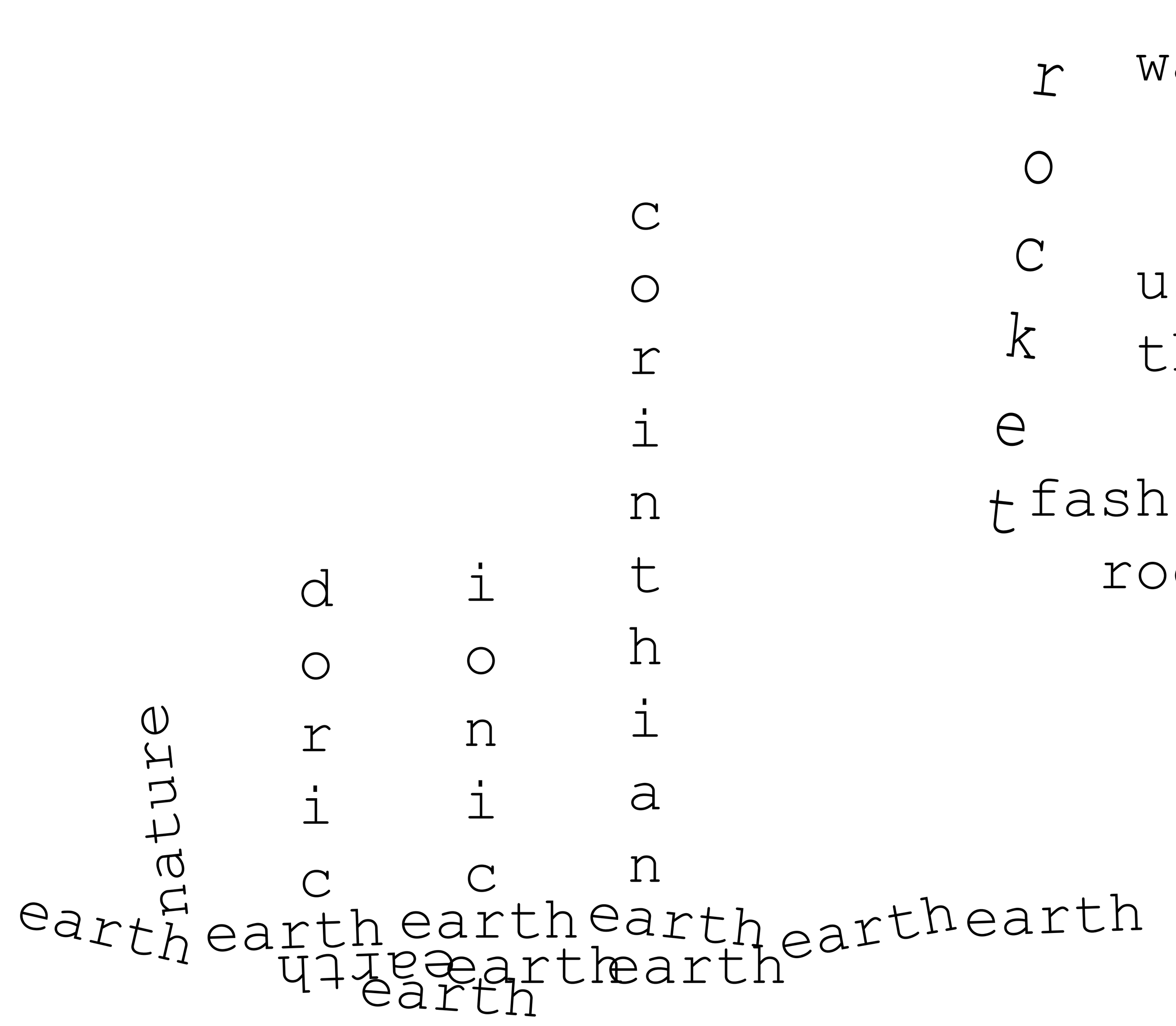
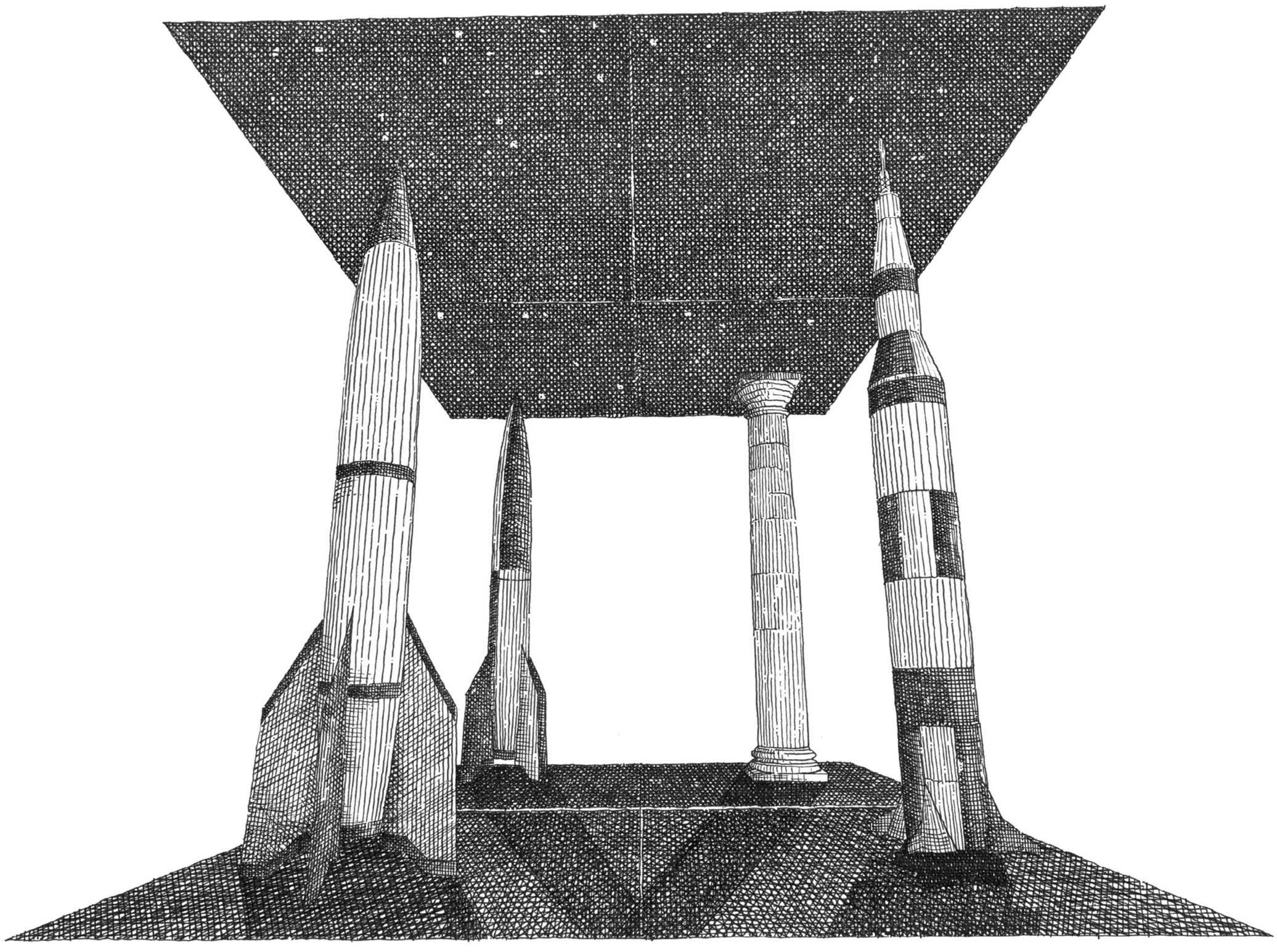

earth

At the same time Tsiolkovsky was considering the absence of gravity, Antoni Gaudí was reflecting on the embodiment of gravity in Greek architecture. What he described as the essential nature and simplicity of its form became 'the superposition of the pieces subject only to the action of gravity […] achieved with a delicacy of outline and joint, of mass and carving,' leading to a description of the Parthenon as a 'product of necessity.'[7] Here, Gaudí expresses a particular affinity for the Doric column and its predominantly structural purpose. Rykwert writes of Gaudí's hypostyle within his 1914 Parc Güell that 'he considered all structural forms (and this included "his" Doric columns) as in some way "natural" responses to the ultimate architectural problem of resisting gravity.'[8] While Gaudí is then known for his elaborate, curvilinear architecture, the hypostyle at Parc Güell is in fact a tacit example of his interest in gravity and his belief that the Doric column was a formal resolution by the Greeks to the challenge of overcoming gravity.

The rocket, by contrast, assumes a more overtly unnatural or artificial response to the challenge of resisting and overcoming gravity. And yet, in its essence the rocket is the modification and launch of a high-tech column as the apogee of scientific and technological knowledge's defeat of gravity. Aesthetically, the rocket is a highly functional and practical device. There is no room on a rocket for superfluous anthropomorphic or arboreal filigree—every ounce of weight is reflected in an exorbitant cost penalty when breaking free of the gravitational forces generated by the Earth. As the most materially efficient and structurally pure, the Doric order is the rocket's most direct ancestor. Like the unadorned Doric column, the rocket aligns itself perpendicularly to the Earth's surface and, like the column, is in direct opposition to the effect of gravity. The rocket is the descendant of the column.

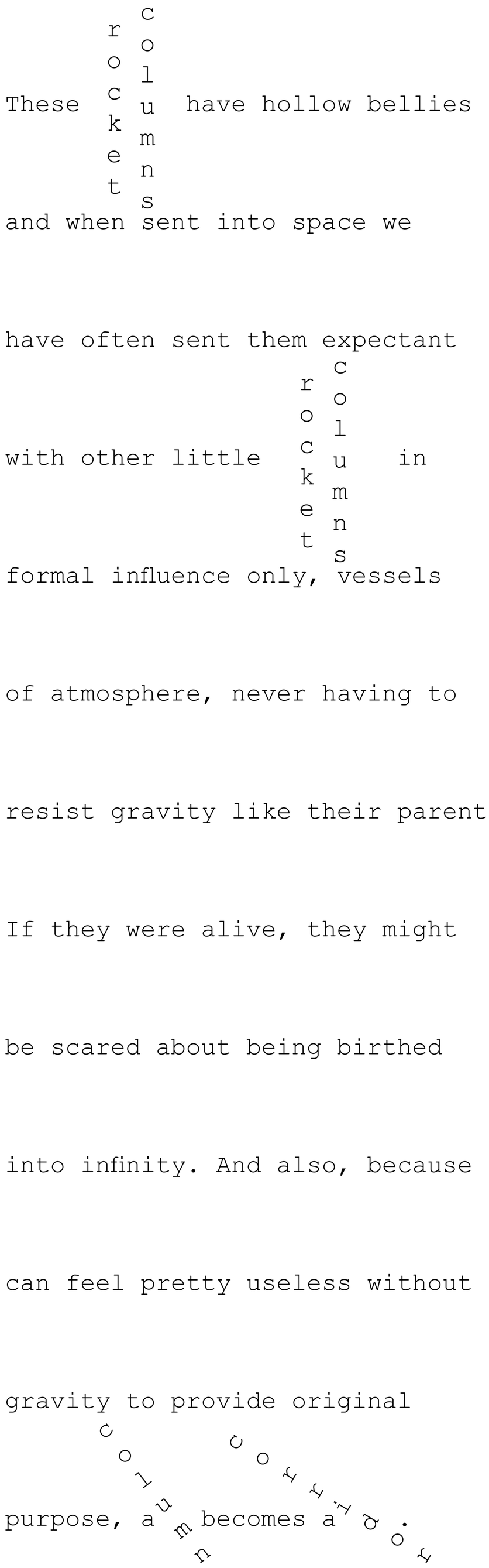
I see the rocket as an evolution of the column, one that has the potential to be inhabited, similar to a gigantic combustion engined skyscraper. Like the column that serves as a weapon in the war against gravity and its inherently compressive forces, the rocket is a technological development that moves us further outward from the surface of the Earth. It is the built environment continuing outward in an aggressive fashion. Where the column could support a roof, the rocket promises access to the universe as its ceiling.

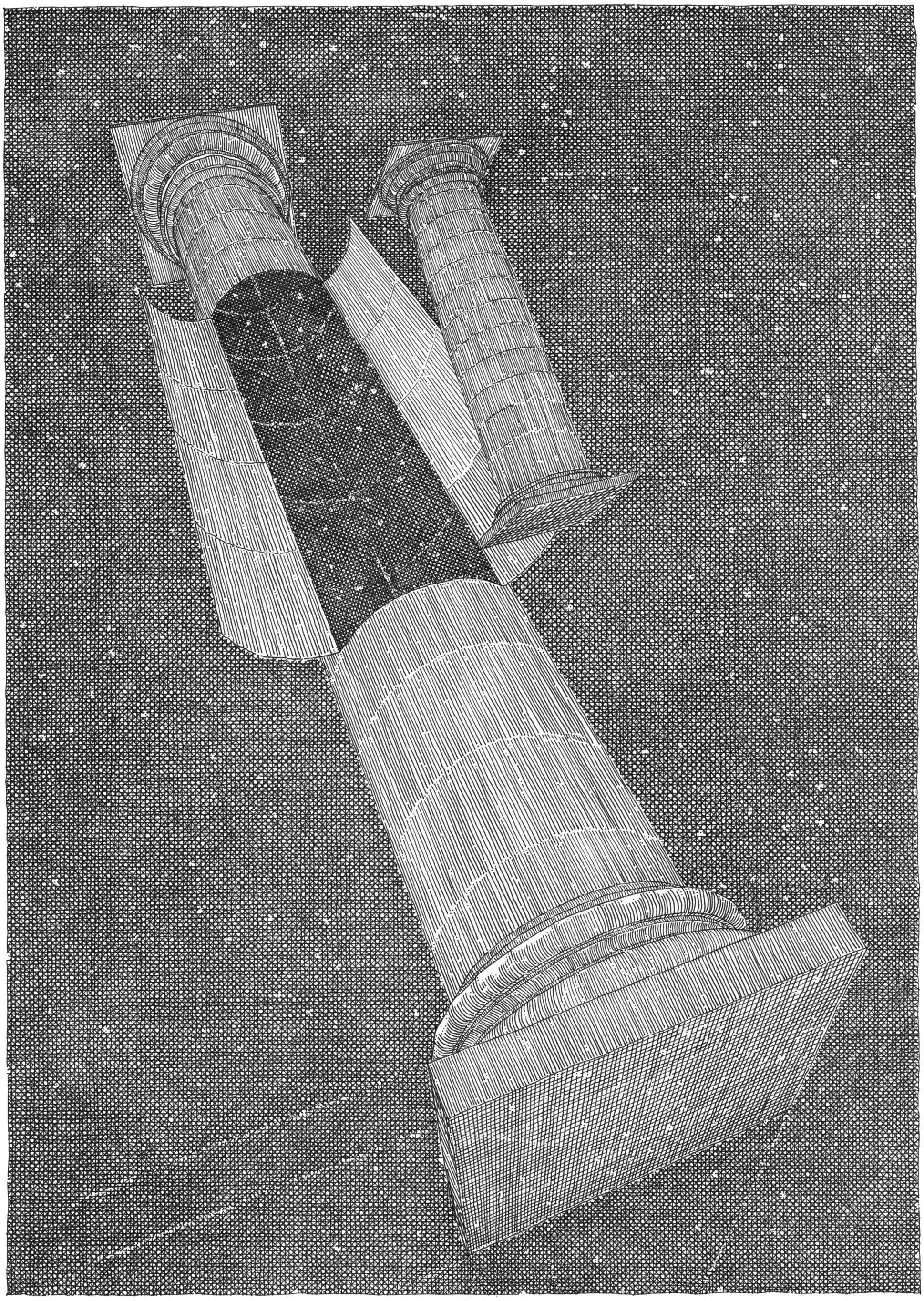




Yet by pursuing existence among the stars, the body brings its terrestrial environment along with it in the belly of the rocket. The term 'cabin ecology' was initially used 'in the late 1950s to describe the environment inside a space vehicle.'[9] American ecologists and brothers, Eugene and Howard Odum, would introduce systems theory into cabin ecology research 'By diagramming the flow of energy in the natural world as input and output circuits in a cybernetic ecosystem.'[10] The Odum brothers believed the way to construct a closed environment was to relieve the Earth of 'a little piece of [its] biosphere [...] and try to build a wall around it so that it would be materially closed but not closed to energy flux.' It was Howard Odum who referred to these systems as being 'steady state', suggesting a predetermined limit of a particular space vehicle's 'carrying capacity.'[11] Lydia Kallipoliti describes these steady-state environments as 'closed resource regeneration systems' or 'closed worlds.'[12] She explains that, in 'contrast with an open system, which is part of an exterior world and linked to its surroundings, a closed system [...] implies an architecture of "un-rootedness"; it suggests not only a physical reality secluded in its geographical and spatial borders, but also an existential separation of the individual from the urban fabric and eventually from the social sphere.'[13]

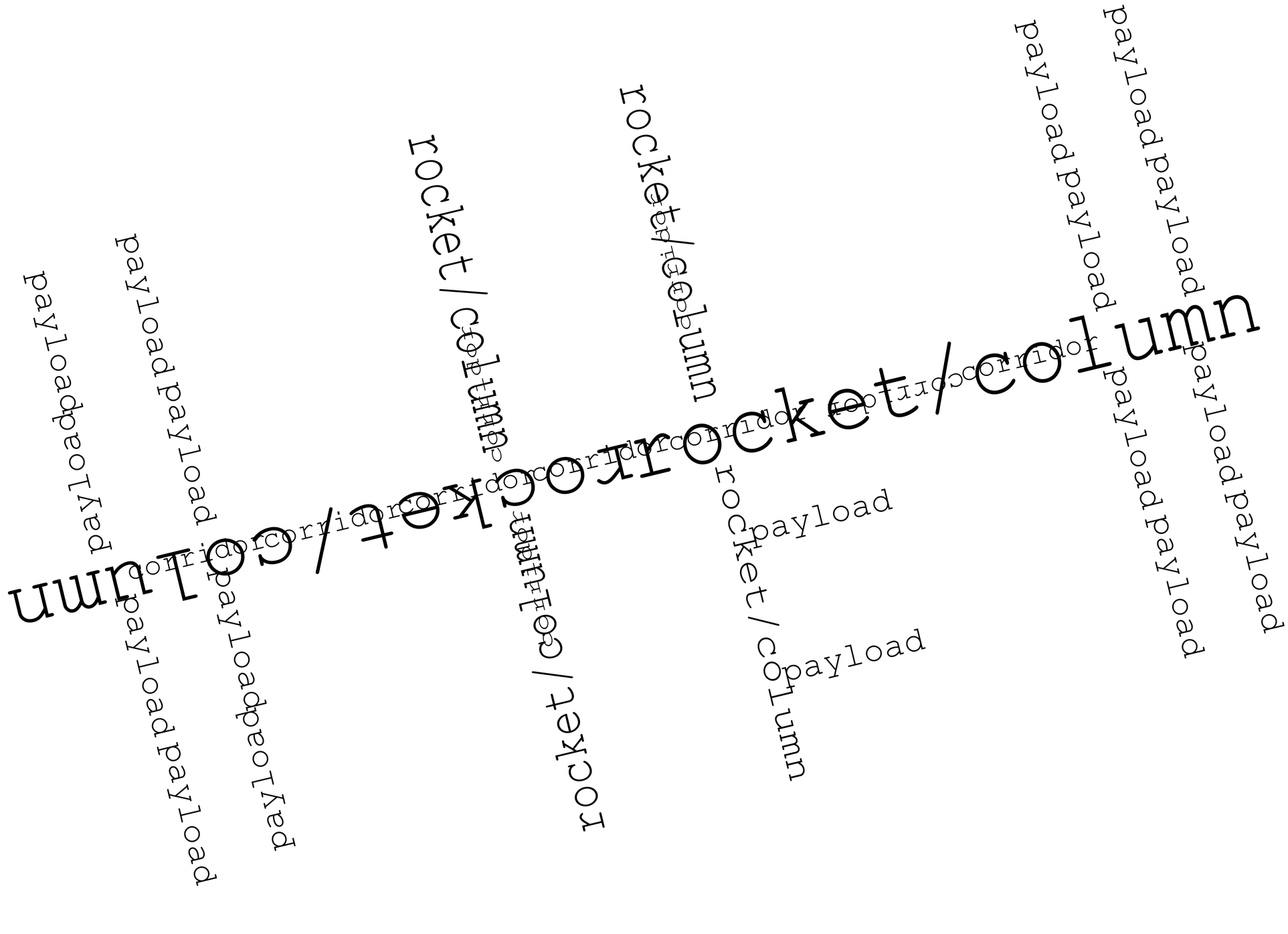
The synthesis of nature and natural processes requires a systematisation of the body. The reduction of the individual in the rocket to that of a series of inputs and outputs manifested 'a new integrated structure where [hu]man—the physiology of his ingestion and excretion—becomes part of the system [it] inhabits, as a combustion device.'[14] The body becomes, quite literally, an ancillary device like a water pump in an engine bay, where at times, such as for the processes of urination and defecation, the body must physically connect to the system. Far from providing a release from a terrestrial condition, the rocket transposes it, along with a newly enmeshed and instrumentalised physiology, to an environment that can never be intimately engaged with. It becomes the ultimate, if paradoxical, instance of terrestrial interiority.

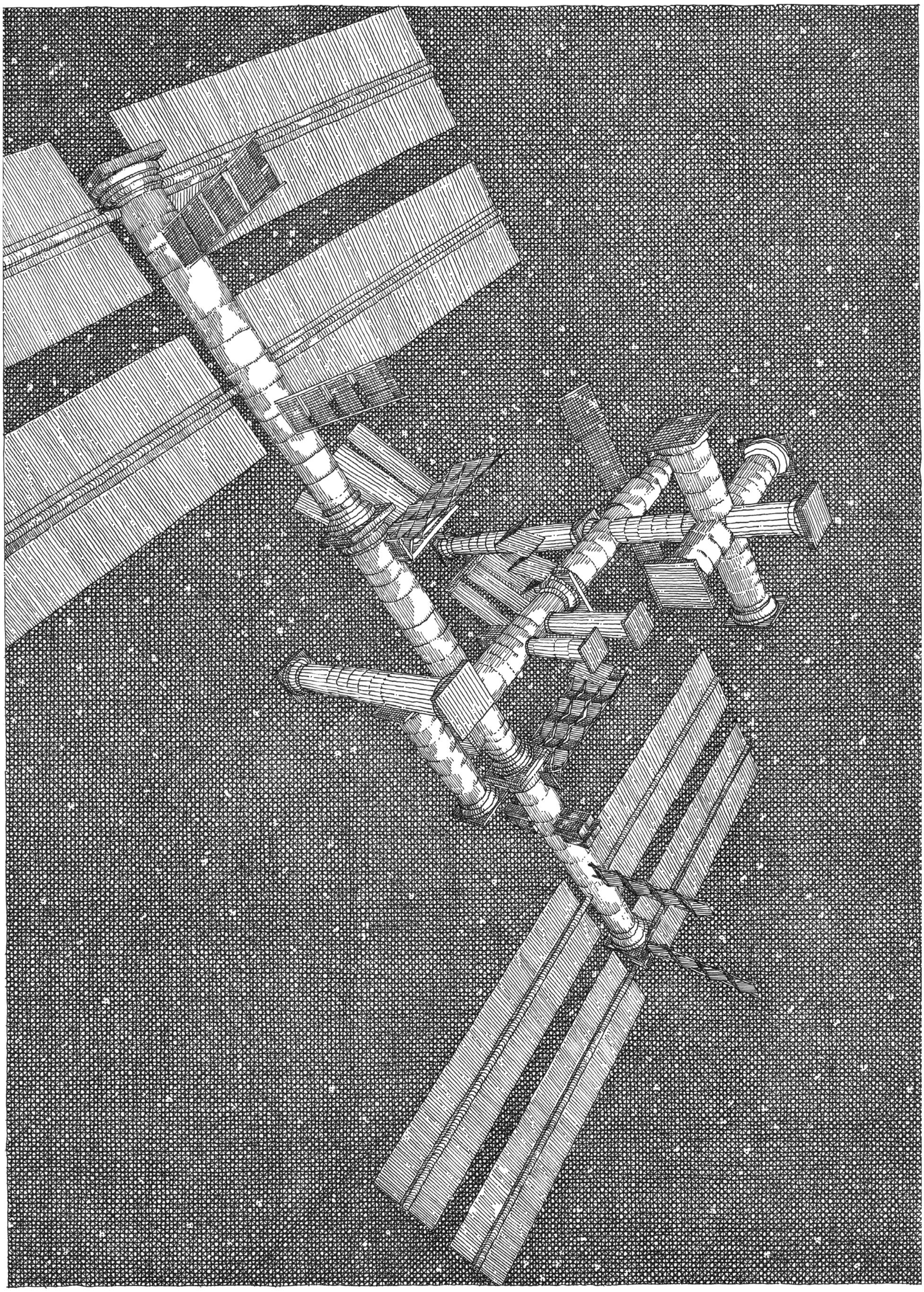


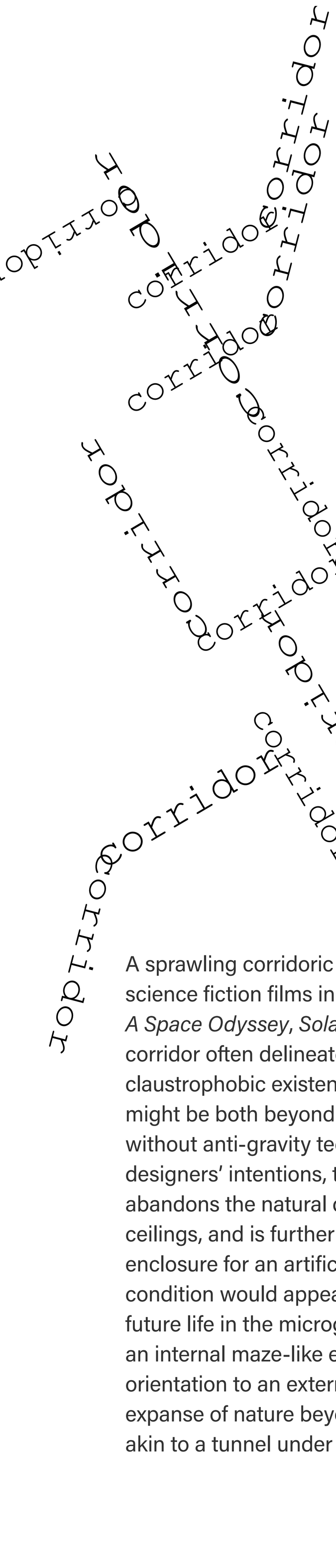


Beginning with the earliest, single-module space stations including the Russian Salyut space station and the US Skylab space station and continuing to the contemporary, modular space stations that include Mir and the ISS, the corridor has been established as the primary architectural typology within the vernacular type of space architecture. This result is primarily due to the modular construction methods enforced by the strict, volumetric limitations of a rocket's cargo bay. Cylindrical rockets, possessing cylindrical cargo bays, have historically delivered payloads in the form of modules with a cylindrical external boundary. Conversely, the ISS's internal storage systems have resulted in a rectilinearly rationalised internal space.

As the rocket and its payload (the module) leaves the influence of terrestrial gravity their orientation is released from the relevance of orientation in the microgravity environment of outer space. Here it is subject to the application of the programmed orientation. The terrestrial, or localised, verticality of the rocket and its progeny is replaced with a localised horizontality with respect to each of the modules in the majority of orbital space stations. The alteration in the orientation is a direct result of the application of a terrestrial physiognomy of space onto the space station interior by the astronauts who inhabit it and the designers who are responsible for the internal layout. The result is an internally corridoric condition in space stations constructed from a series of multiple interconnected modules. This state is opposed to a shaft condition where the internal volumes are orientated in a vertical, rather than horizontal, manner.







This interior, corridoric condition, appears as an instance of a persistent modernity in outer space, with Mark Jarzombek affirming the corridor as modernity's ultimate architectural index, and its instrument.[15] A space of relatively recent development that finds its origins in the fourteenth-century Spanish *corridor*, a courier who was employed to deliver information, the corridor evolved into a military context, to allow for battlefield reports. Later, in the seventeenth century it was included as an architectural element where previously there had only been interconnected rooms. The corridor was now a place of reception and entertainment. It then evolved into a space that ran deep into a building, becoming part of its circulation system and, in turn, losing its significance as a large, grand space. It had become a place of movement and incidental meetings. Corridors in literature are places where secrets were exchanged, and clandestine rendezvous occurred; hierarchies disappeared in corridors. Corridors then evolved again to become ubiquitous, utilitarian spaces for buildings, associated with maintenance, ducts, heating, ventilation, and cooling services. It is here, due to its association with communication, speed, power, and industrialisation that Jarzombek describes the corridor as indexical of modernity.[16]

A sprawling corridoric vernacular has proliferated within science fiction films including *Alien*, *Red Dwarf*, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Solaris*, and *Silent Running*. Here the corridor often delineates a meagre, damp, leaky, inescapable claustrophobic existence, creating conditions of fear for what might be both beyond and within. Outside science fiction, without anti-gravity technology to right oneself, and despite designers' intentions, the high-tech corridor of outer space abandons the natural delineation of walls, floors, and ceilings, and is further diminished to become simply an enclosure for an artificial environment. Such a corridoric condition would appear to foreshadow humanity's potential future life in the microgravity environment of outer space, an internal maze-like existence devoid of horizon, and orientation to an external nature. Indeed, despite the infinite expanse of nature beyond it, the corridor in outer space is akin to a tunnel under the earth.

In 1961, a human was sent purposefully beyond the shadow cast by the Earth's horizons, emerging above it only momentarily. Yuri Gagarin's entire voyage lasted for a short one hundred and eight minutes.[17] At that time, this event arguably represented the culmination of humanity's effort to free itself from its terrestrial bonds and briefly glimpse the heavens, in the context of what can be *terro*-spectively interpreted as an attempt to establish ultimate control of the Earth during the Cold War and, in doing so, relieve humanity of the burden of mortality. This significant accomplishment, on the back of an earlier Sputnik mission, had given the impression that the Soviet Union and, by proxy, humanity, was now on the verge of the perceived mastery of outer space, a mastery that had been exerted over the Earth by way of its systematisation through its orbital internalisation.

Beyond the visible horizon, such a conceptual interiorisation of the Earth had been achieved prior to its orbit through the deployment of the true and the astronomical horizons. The true horizon is a 'circle defined by the line of sight from an observation point that is a tangent line to a sphere' and exists even if it cannot be seen due to visible interruptions, caused, for instance, by alterations in topography.[18] The astronomical horizon takes this further, dividing a celestial body into two halves perpendicular to the observer. This horizon is employed as a reverse ceiling plan projection relative to the observer (referring to the star-filled sky above), to be used as a navigational tool, relating the celestial sky to the Earth, and essentially fashioning *it* into a ceiling.[19] Not only are the various objective horizons evidence of humanity's understanding of its place in relation to the Earth, and later an application of science to facilitate a global conceptualisation, but they are also a framework that objectively internalises the planet.

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idea journal:
unbuilt interiors

visual
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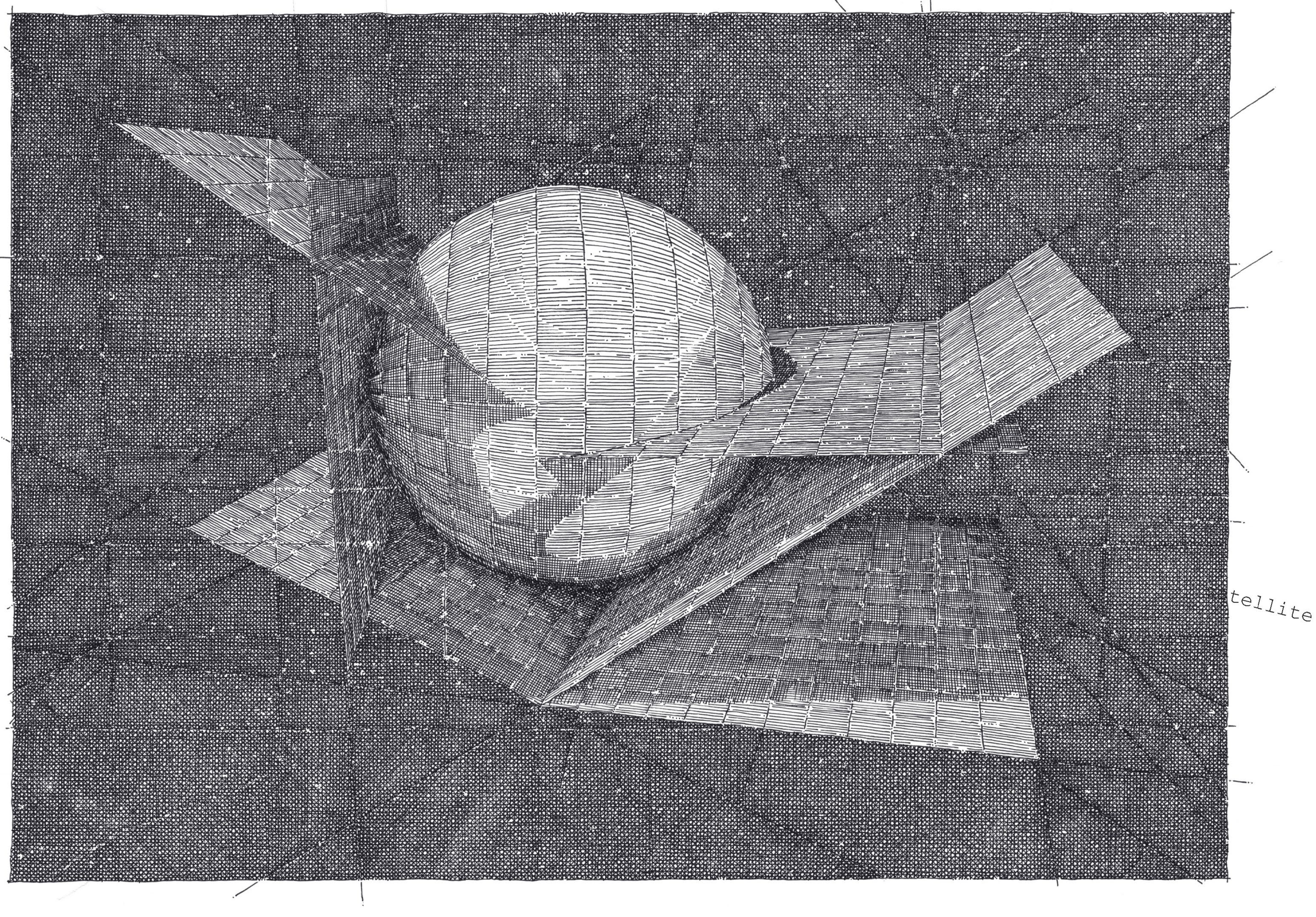

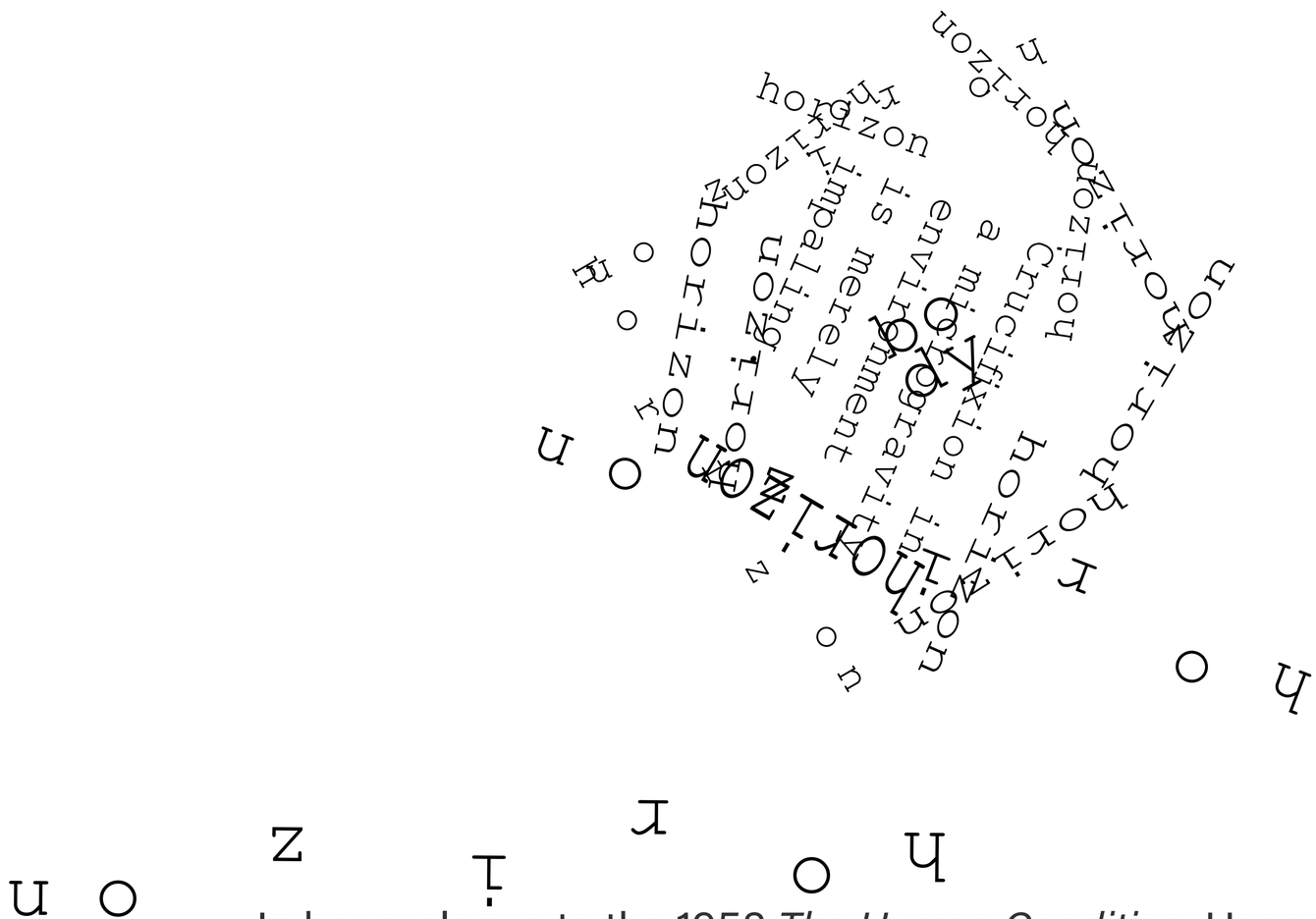

In her prologue to the 1958 *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt writes that the desire to leave the Earth was symptomatic of the modern condition.[20] Though Arendt does not name Gagarin in her 1961 *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, she accurately describes the astronaut, 'shot into outer space and imprisoned in his instrument-ridden capsule.'[21] For Arendt, the astronaut assumes the position of the once-imagined celestial observer of the objective horizon, as well as that of all other objective scientific postulations, including those of Copernicus, Newton, and Einstein. When Gagarin momentarily emerged beyond the horizon, he did so in an engineered total-built environment that may well have been an extension, or continuation, of the all-encompassing modern project, which foreshadowed Superstudio's *Continuous Monument* project, as it sought to take an opportunistic foothold in the newly entered territory of outer space.

Yet the instrumentalised astronaut finds themselves devoid of any new horizon; they are trapped within the physiognomy, and thus the horizons, of their supposedly abandoned terrestrial condition. The astronaut now inhabits an Archimedean point that was once imagined but has now been reached and is unable to be supplanted by another due to its limitless and ungraspable cosmic environment. Such an instrumentalised existence within a systematised environment corresponds with the reduced stature of humanity Arendt described in her account of the astronaut and the increasingly meaningless reality of the terrestrial condition.

The interiority that a vernacular space architecture poses in relation to the Earth, one that grows out of modernity's fascination with interiorisation and is anticipated already in Piranesi's *Carceri* prison etchings, coincides with the impossibility of delineating exterior and interior, as only the latter is an option. If modern architecture was predicated on the provision of machinic living through developments in engineering, technology, and functionality, then outer space is the vehicle for its continuation. Yet it is one that now demands a totalising interiorised built environment.

Reflecting on the text, Tafuri suggested the spectator of the *Carceri* was 'invited [...] to participate in the process of mental reconstruction proposed.'[22] It is the current author's optimistic hope that through the accompanying visual methodology, the reader not only engages with the conceptual notion of an endless interior but is also prompted to construct one that will likely remain infinitely unbuilt.

acknowledgements

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author biography

Craig McCormack is a lecturer in architecture at The University of Melbourne. His research concerns the limits of architecture in microgravity environments and involves a variety of drawing, theoretical, and ficto-critical writing.

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*sim*ulated interiors: unreal estates and *the sims*

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abstract

This essay explores the complex theoretical and psychological landscape surrounding the digital interiors within the *The Sims* video games. *The Sims* is a popular life-simulation video game, first released in 2001 by Maxis with several sequels and hundreds of additional content packs produced by EA Games. The distinctly 'unbuilt' and 'unbuildable' interiors within the digital world of *The Sims* are seen to have a strong emotional and atmospheric pull, consequent to the insecurities inherent in contemporary housing markets. The essay aims to reveal cross-pollinations or 'leakages' between *The Sims* interiors and the volatile, financialised interiors typically occupied by the contemporary subject. It does so through both theoretical discussion and a more narrative interrogation based on the conflict between the author's real-life eviction from their house in Sydney, Australia, resultant from a current housing crisis, and their construction of a virtual simulation of their once-home. This essay comes to find that these 'leakages' may be a mechanism through which we might elaborate our understanding of, and relationship to, interiors in our increasingly digitised and mediatised present. It argues that life simulation games like *The Sims* may impact, or have impacted, user and inhabitant perceptions of the secure interior, and may act as proxy-interiors in the face of housing crises.

keywords

interiors; video games; real estate; simulations; domesticity

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On my first day of university I followed an introductory script in my classes that was neurotically crafted to be playful and charming: 'My name is _____, and *The Sims* made me want to be an architect.' I expected laughs, but I received knowing nods. *The Sims* simulates life—bodies, friendship, work, world, and home. I spent countless hours playing *The Sims* during my upbringing. I always created characters in the same way. My *Sims* had straight brown hair instead of my orange curls, were thin and tan rather than soft and pale, and wore high heels while I sat, seven years old, playing *PlayStation 1* in my Grandma's spare bedroom during the school holidays. I would rarely *live* my character, though—my focus was the home. There is a childhood wonder in the space-of-one's-own. The bedroom, the treehouse, the cubby, the secret lair: all involve ownership of an interior and its atmosphere. Digitised, these spaces have infinite potential beyond a child's material world, speaking to adult lifestyles of dinner parties, work, and sex. The secure interior, though, is increasingly unattainable outside one's imagination.

This essay involves a narrative exploration of the complex theoretical and psychological landscape surrounding the DIY digital interior of *The Sims*. *The Sims* is a popular life-simulation video game, first released in 2001 and rereleased in multiple editions and permutations. While the ostensible aim of *The Sims* is to create characters and control their lives, the construction, decoration, and renovation of their homes is, for many, the primary goal, with players often dedicating days to this process and eschewing the 'live mode' gameplay of their Sims altogether.[1] As such, the distinctly unbuilt and unbuildable interiors within the digital world of *The Sims* can be seen to have a strong emotional and atmospheric pull, which can be explored in tandem to that of real-life interiors. Notably, this essay interrogates this connection in relation to housing insecurity resulting from current global housing crises, including that in my home city Sydney, Australia. Through this, it aims to reveal leakages between *The Sims* interiors and the volatile, financialised interiors of the real estate market.

one's own

The Sims was developed by game designer Will Wright, co-founder of *Maxis Games*.[2] Following from the resounding success of the *SimCity* franchise, first released in 1989, Wright created various other simulation games in which the timeline is infinite and the player is 'God.' It wasn't until 2001 that Wright zoomed in to the domestic interior. He cites the move from 'city-simulation' to 'life-simulation' as a response to losing his house and possessions in the 1991 Oakland Firestorm—refurnishing and decorating each room in his house became a provocative foundation to recreate the American lifestyle digitally.[3] *The Sims* was released in 2001 and, despite the initial trepidations of *Maxis* at producing a game with such a quotidian focus, it was extremely well received by the general public.[4] Even so, while *The Sims* has been a veritable cultural sensation for almost twenty-five years, it has garnered few academic treatments. After all, video games are rarely given the time of day in the academic institution and, for *The Sims*, the assumption of frivolity is only further evidenced by its necessary banality and, of course, its feminine associations. A 'digital dollhouse,' *The Sims* has long attracted girls and women in lieu of the typical male users who dominate the gaming world.[5]

My attraction to *The Sims* was twofold: I always aspired to be an architect, and I always wanted a place of my own. As a child, I loved books where little girls had clubhouses, forest cabins, or a *Secret Garden*.[6] I decorated my room obsessively from a young age. My childhood best friend Erin and I shared the nesting bug, but while hers was induced through emulation of her mother's homemaking skills, mine was developed in lieu of it. My parents couldn't care less about domestic beauty, and to this day when I visit, I often bring several warm toned lightbulbs to surreptitiously replace their Cool Sun 400W fluorescents. Erin and I became *Sims 2* obsessives when it was released, playing for hours each afternoon. We restlessly snatched the mouse from each other, back and forth, to arrange pixelated furniture and test wallpaper schemes. We

downloaded bootleg carpets and kettles from 'mod' websites, which were full of custom objects built by other users, embedding them into the game with cheat codes so well memorised they may as well have been tattooed on the backs of our freckled hands as we typed: *testingcheatsenabled True, motherlode, motherlode, motherlode, motherlode*.[7] The house was a constant project. I would occupy it for days, *pan-zoom-rotate*, perfecting the interior. My *Sim* houses gave me an early taste of material aspiration for a dream home.

build, buy, live

Uniquely, the first *Sims* game included a recommended reading list intended to 'enhance' the user's understanding of the game and its intent.[8] Several of the texts in the reading list deal with psychology, game theory, or romance, though all through an extremely analytical or scientific lens. Most of the architectural references in the list are fundamental organisational texts, including the famous educational volumes *A Pattern Language* by Christopher Alexander and *Architecture: Form, Space & Order* by Francis D. K. Ching.[9] Another, *Housing by Lifestyle: The Component Method of Residential Design*, considers a method of modular design in which houses are organised systematically through highly controlled component parts according to one's particular demographic needs.[10] One text on the list caught my eye in particular: *Home: A Short History of an Idea* by Witold Rybczynski.[11] In *Home*, the author relays a history of trends and developments in interior styling. The book works from a largely Western and an apologetically bourgeois perspective, but, after all, so does *The Sims*. The game has typically emulated North American contexts in its landscapes, lifestyles, and domestic stylings, and homeownership and consumption are necessitated in the gameplay. Rybczynski organises the history of the interior through categories including nostalgia, privacy, and delight to develop a lineage for today's domestic priorities with a focus on 'comfort,' which is understood in the text as the dominant characteristic or ideal of the contemporary dwelling. The author's act of dissecting and categorising the factors that contribute to seemingly intuitive ideas like home and comfort is reflected in *The Sims*, where character satisfaction is assessed according to specific criteria like 'environment' and calculated through a points-based system.[12] Comfort is proposed in *Home* as a result of both interior adaptation, like the development of private bedrooms and centralised heating, and the development of objects towards leisure and pleasure, like the design and placement of furniture. Rybczynski's general contention is that the development of the space-of-one's-own and objects of leisure have brought comfort and, with them, contemporary domesticity.

Practices of domestic occupation through objects have been well explored in both sociological and architectural literature. Architect and theorist Iñaki Ábalos, for example, describes the 'phenomenological inhabitant' of domestic spaces, who pursues a 'scalar breakdown' of the hierarchy in the house, wherein occupation as a practice of interior intimacy becomes on-par with the house as structure.[13] In this reading, the house is understood as but a shell to hold objects, simply an infrastructure demarcated by property lines. The real domestic experience of Ábalos' 'phenomenological inhabitant' takes place through a continual negotiation between oneself and one's objects within the shell.

This negotiation between the inhabitant and their possessions is vital for creating a sense of home, especially when one's shell is insecure. Objects allow one to 'territorialise' one's interior where necessary, to provide a sense of 'ontological security' where the constancy that might otherwise represent home is under threat.[14] In lieu of the security of ownership, it is common to engage with 'homemaking practices' that 'include embodied interactions with material objects that, in turn, create social meaning; turning a dwelling into a home.'[15] That is, through interior work like cleaning, painting, or decorating, tenants or others

in precarious living situations are able to create a 'place of privacy and security where [they] can exercise autonomy over their dwelling.'[16] Security, here, is inseparable from the idea of comfort. The feeling of domestic security and the practice of nesting are intertwined.

The aforementioned reading list has a disclaimer that all included texts 'are filled with provocative ideas; *Maxis* disavows any responsibility for encouraging deep thought.'[17] This tongue-in-cheek quip reflects assertions from Wright that *The Sims* was intended as a satire of homemaking culture, wherein consumption reigns supreme and objects of desire that might at first produce joy impolitely obsolesce.[18] In Wright's view, the continuous practices of construction, decoration, and repair that define *The Sims* plainly represent the perpetual, fruitless tasks defining the lives of the contemporary consumer. Some, however, contest the efficacy of Wright's claim of satire, or at least its functional relevance in the context of a gamified simulation—for many, interior creation within *The Sims* is not a metaphor, but rather a great, great comfort.

the dollhouse

My partner, my two housemates, and I were recently given three months' notice of eviction from our house in Sydney. While this situation is distressing, it was hardly a surprise. Our house might seem run-down and regular to most, but the Australian housing market is currently extremely inflated, leading to widespread rent hikes and evictions across most capital cities.[19] The landlord is planning to renovate the house and sell it for 2.3 million dollars. As I write this, we have two months left on the lease. The house is a two-storey terrace, also sometimes known as a rowhouse or townhouse, so an interior is about all it has, one of many interiors slipped between high Federation brick walls that stumble down the hill like the drunk teenage revellers we hear from our window on a Friday night. We have lived here for five years, and we have heavily nested. Objects, paintings, and furniture, as well as the residual smells of meals cooked and cats held, have stratified into something gentle—a warm enclosure. I feel soft here, pliable. Friends of mine have fallen in love in this house. I have screamed and cried after I knocked the chilli oil off the top of the fridge, scrambling around the liquid and broken glass in my underwear to clean it up, only to end up rubbing it like a hot polish into both the unsealed slate floor and the fresh cuts on my fingers. I sit on my bedroom floor as the sun streams through the balcony doors, on the dining table with friends and cigarettes, on the toilet on my phone. I will miss this house, which has become my own, yet after putting $200K in his bank account over five years of renting, my landlord doesn't remember my name.

I don't claim precarity for myself—I'm a yuppie who only toys, conceptually, with artistic poverty. Like millions of people, though, I do operate at the whims of a volatile, financialised housing market that does not permit me to mortgage my way to a secure future on what I earn. This is a common experience in Australia, reflected in hundreds of articles, papers, and reports from the past decade detailing an increasingly global housing crisis. An article from *The Australia Institute* noted that the average Australian dwelling throughout the 1990s cost 9.5 times the annual household income. This grew to 13.5 times the average household income in 2020, only to rise to 16.4 times in late 2023.[20] A recent report produced by *Everybody's Home*, a campaigning body comprising several hundred affordable housing and charity organisations, includes data from 1528 survey respondents on personal experiences of the housing crisis. Of the group, 98% noted their concern for the housing crisis, and 67% attributed that concern in part to uncertainty about the future.[21] This uncertainty and subsequent feelings of insecurity are well-understood to negatively impact mental health.[22] My housemate has only lived in Sydney for eight years but has bounced from sharehouse to sharehouse nine times due to evictions and rent increases. While he might be the end of both his tenure and tether, these experiences would seem like child's play to those who experience extreme precarity at

the very edge of the social support net. The current social housing waiting list for New South Wales, Australia, is sitting at 59,671 households as of August 2024.[23] In truth, I'm lucky to have been able to form such a bond with my interior over time—*thanks landlord, I'm ever so grateful!*

Even so, my dream home—that is, a house that is truly mine—seems both unbuilt and unbuildable. *The Sims* allows those without the means to have their own home to vicariously experience domestic creation and comfort, and of course, aspiration. This experience is discussed on multiple online forums dedicated to *The Sims*:

> 'I have downloaded ALL of the Australian Suburb Houses, I am in love with them, just what I would like to own in real life. *sigh*' (2008)
>
> 'I made a dream home and a goal apartment for me and my partner. It makes me feel so hopeful.' (2020)
>
> 'Just having a house in general is giving my sim the life I could only dream of.' (2024)[24]

As suggested in an online lifestyle magazine, 'you don't need a vision board, a five-year plan or even decent credit; a laptop, PlayStation or Xbox will do.'[25] One can play at the impossible interior bliss of accumulation, decoration, and housework, yet stay in bed: 'The game provides a virtual outlet for domestic signification.'[26] Indeed, one of the 'aspirations' to choose from in *The Sims 4* itself is 'Home Renovator', which requires a pricey home and an oddly specific number of windows [Fig. 01]. Conversely, the very immateriality of the unbuilt *Sims* interior is also part of its appeal. *The Sims* allows accumulation without material burdens. It allows a complex and dramatic interior life, *drag-drop*, rotate, and the ease of having a broken oven or ugly painting disappear without a logistical trace.

Figure 01.
The 'aspiration' pop-up window in *The Sims 4*, showing the 'Mansion Baron' aspirational goal set, 2024. Screenshot by the author from *The Sims 4* (Electronic Arts Inc., 2017).

These acts of consumption and care-by-proxy present in *The Sims* have precedent. In the 'Domesticity' chapter of Rybczynski's *Home*, he describes a type of simulated interior care that emerged in Dutch society in the seventeenth century.

> The Dutch affection for their homes was expressed in a singular practice: they had elaborate scale models built of their houses. These replicas are sometimes—inaccurately—referred to as dollhouses. Their function was more like that of ship models, not playthings but miniature memorials, records of dearly beloved objects. They were built like cupboards which did not represent the exterior appearance of the house. But when the doors were opened the entire interior was magically revealed, not only the rooms—complete with wall coverings and furnishings—but even paintings, utensils, and china figurines.[27]

Rybczynski is describing an object that is less a dollhouse and more a devotional tool: a memorial to the interior that gives it life beyond its destruction

Figure 02.
End-of-lease photo of my house, now an empty interior, 2024. Image by the author.

Figure 03.
My front hall, simiulated, 2024. Screenshot by the author from *The Sims 4* (Electronic Arts Inc., 2017).

[Fig. 02]. I decided to create my own, using the favoured medium of my childhood. I downloaded *The Sims 4* and began to build my soon-to-be-lost house in an impossible approximation of itself. On first glance, it is eerily accurate [Fig. 03]; however, one soon encounters kitchen cupboards that are rotated and stacked to resemble a washing machine, and several long, thin benches that are scaled small to form the top rod of a quasi-clothing rack held up by two rotated easels. Every artwork on my walls is imprecisely emulated using layered posters. Random trinkets and clutter are piled on the mantle—a mute representation of my complex arrangement of found treasures. For me, striving for accuracy has become an obsession, but daily, my *Sim* will begin to feel unbearable discomfort at how poorly decorated her house is—the objects available on *The Sims* that best approximate those in my house are often shabby and mismatched, adding few, if any, 'environment' points to my *Sim*'s overall wellbeing [Fig. 04]. As I've worked on the model in the past weeks, I've become disorientated in my own home, encountering objects not yet represented in my memorial and having to quickly jump back into the game to sketch them in using cheat codes and miscellaneous junk. If you leave all the doors open in my (real) house, you can sit on the toilet and get a sliver of a view through four rooms, out the front door, across the street and into the neighbour's hallway. I tried in vain to emulate this bizarre experience in *The Sims*, but the pixelated walls kept snapping rudely to the unwieldy construction grid. My *Sims* house is less a description and more a love letter: a false replica, an impossible *dearly beloved*.

realism and the real

In a somewhat masochistic turn, the common desire among many for realism in *The Sims* has led to expansion packs and mods that seek to exacerbate wealth inequality, housing insecurity, and cost-of-living crises in the game itself. *Sims 4: For Rent* (2023) is a $50 expansion pack that allows players to create multi-residential developments, become landlords, and evict tenants in arrears, or alternatively pay a simulated rentier *Simoleans*-per-

Figure 04.
A view from the stairwell, 2024. Screenshot by the author from *The Sims 4* (Electronic Arts Inc., 2017).

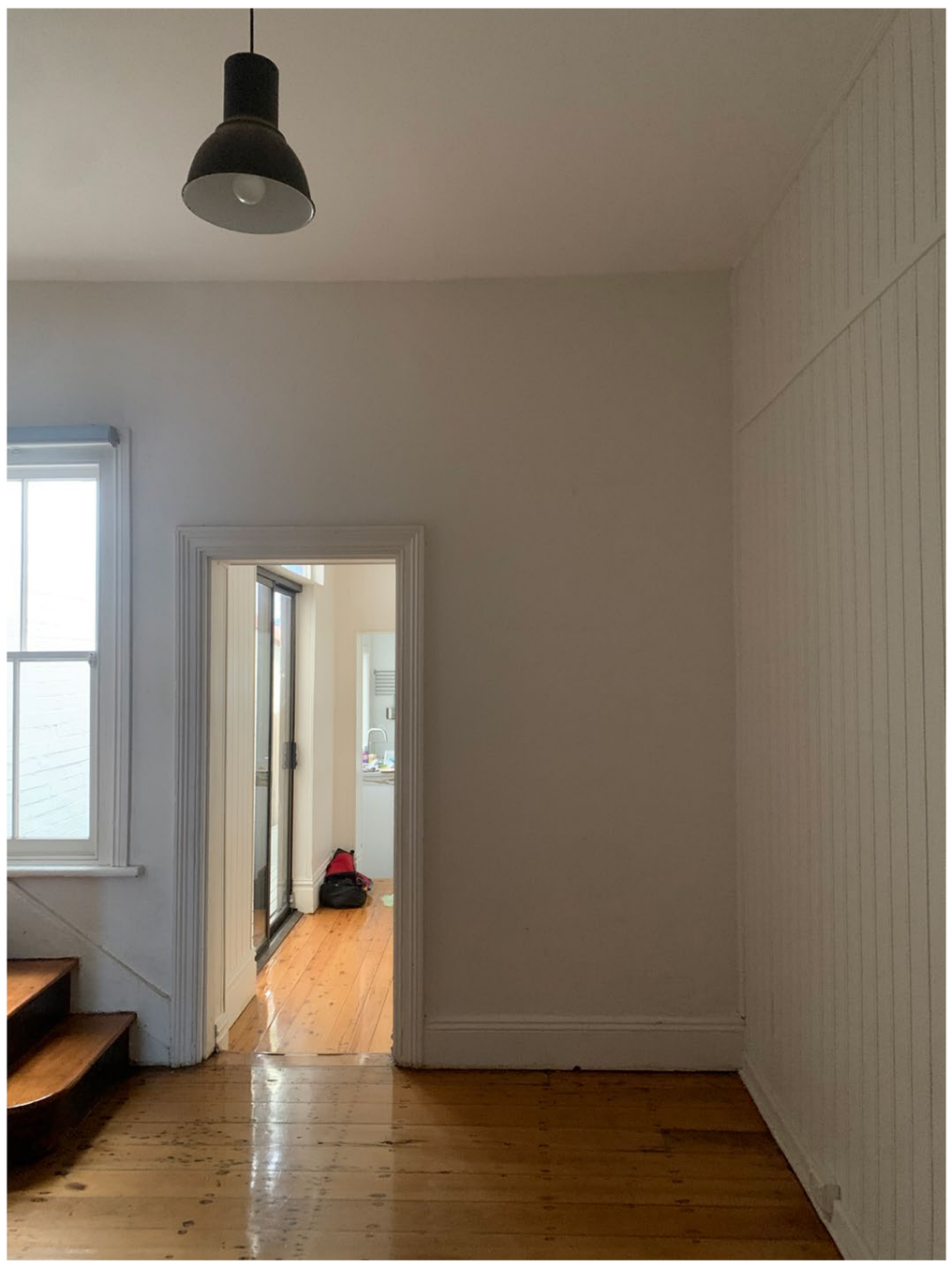

Figure 05.
End-of-lease photo of my living room, 2024. Image by the author.

square-metre each month. Similarly, the object-only expansion pack *Tiny Living Stuff* (2020) provides space-saving furniture for downsizing, including fold-down Murphy beds that can kill your *Sim* instantly if they malfunction. A handful of user-created mods allows one to drastically increase all lot prices across the game, multiplying them by one hundred or more to provoke a more lifelike and immersive living experience.[28] One creator suggests combining this mod with another to allow the player to take out a mortgage on their now exorbitantly priced digital property. This creator's motivation to produce increased realism hits very close to home:

> 'I live in Melbourne. Our city is about the 6th most unaffordable place in the world to buy a house—with the median house price going above $1 million dollars during the 2021 lockdown. So really, this game still is on easy mode.'[29]

While it may seem bizarre that 2485 gamers have downloaded mods to reproduce something as bleak as a housing crisis, media theorist Ann McGuire suggests that *The Sims* functions as a 'degenerate utopia', a 'distilled extrapolation from the social' in which the destructive norms of our reality—property ownership, consumption, hierarchy—are intensified and reinforced rather than dismantled.[30] Through ease of gameplay and accessible cheat codes, the user is granted a position of power within the proxy world. This facilitates 'a space for pleasurable engagement and immersion' akin to a utopian fantasy, without the material disadvantages, insecurities, or risks of one's reality.[31]

In her paper on the relationship between the housing crisis and the game *Animal Crossing*, which boasts similarly quotidian themes to *The Sims*, Emma Vossen argues that the game facilitates the 'fantasy of homeownership, of stability.'[32] She notes that she is constantly 'decorating and redecorating [her] Animal Crossing home as an act of control more than anything else in the game.'[33] As such, Vossen observes the game is 'playing into, and maybe even capitalizing

Figure 06.
My *Sim* watching a world on fire in my living room, 2024. Screenshot by the author from *The Sims 4* (Electronic Arts Inc., 2017).

Figure 07.
End-of-lease photo of my stair, 2024. Image by the author.

on [...] larger desires to fantasize about a middle-class stability that feels otherwise unattainable.'[34] This escape to the mundanity of stability through the practice of decorating precisely mirrors what could be seen as the large appeal of *The Sims* in its excitingly banal building and gameplay [Fig. 06].

Mckenzie Wark writes similarly on *The Sims* in her book *Gamer Theory*: 'the game itself works as an escape from the agony of everyday life, where the stakes are real and uncertain, to the unreal stakes of a pure game.'[35] Unlike 'pure game', though, 'The Sims lends itself to play that transforms it from a world of number back to a world of meaning.'[36] That is, the themes and practices asked of the user in *The Sims* run close to reality, drawing the user into real life and the real life into gameplay [Fig. 07]. The outcome of all these threads is a coming together of both *world*-making and *home*-making. In *The Sims*, one can not only embed oneself within a degenerate utopia but also engage in the (dis-)embodied practice of immaterial nesting. The user can engage in both escapism and _____*scape*, absence and presence.

We can see here several skins, within which we can see several *interiors*. Within my street lies walls, within which I lie, reclined, laptop resting precariously on my skewed knees just as I rest precariously in my once-home. Through the tender membrane of the screen, I project my aspirations into a degenerate utopia that will accept them gladly. Then, *Build, Buy, Live*: I must create a new place to be *within*, *drag-drop*.

In turn, this process can be seen to operate in reverse. Property markets are increasingly gamified, and we are all chips in this game. In *Gamer Theory*, Wark poses *The Sims* as a perfect allegory, or in her stylings, an 'allegorithm,' for all the capitalist evils involved in its making—from worker exploitation at EA games to the extractivist mining involved in building game consoles or computers. In short, 'the "great game" of colonial exploitation.'[37] In his book *Being and the Screen*, media theorist Stéphane Vial discusses the well-understood commercialised gamification of everyday processes, such as

Figure 08.
Walls automatically dissolve for a better view of my dollhouse and doll, 2024. Screenshot by the author from *The Sims 4* (Electronic Arts Inc., 2017).

Figure 09.
My Sims bedroom, complete with a pile of (clean) laundry on the bed, 2024. Screenshot by the author from *The Sims 4* (Electronic Arts Inc., 2017).

Figure 10.
My bedroom, now empty, 2024. Image by the author.

consumption practices (like spinning the Temu wheel) and communications (like Tinder). He extends this to suggest a transverse phenomenological and ludic flow between the digital and real: that through the 'ludogenic' potential of the digital, our 'experience-of-the-world' flows into it, and ludic qualities can leak out, distilled through gameplay.[38] Social media, for example, can be understood as a gamified social space, in which images of interiors become part of a financialised process of dopamine activation. This, in turn, leaks out into real space, with private interiors emulating public images, eliciting in the inhabitant a similar chemical comfort—that of achieving a spatial aspiration. I noticed this 'leaking' after a few evenings of building my Sim interior—walking around my real house, I began to feel disassociated, like a wax doll right-clicking objects and obediently fulfilling bodily requirements.

Wark's 'great game' is always modding itself. Once based in real space, real estate is increasingly fragmented, algorithmic, and atomised. Architecture theorists Frichot and Runting write on the 'proptech' sector, in which inhabitation and ownership seem almost otherworldly:

> The fractionalized, blockchain-enabled real estate products of the proptech sector are less buildings, though, than instances of financialized capital, atomized. The real estate on offer targets the immaterial satisfaction of existential needs by feeding a speculative impulse: you are invited to partake in the real estate game not at the scale of property measured in square meters, but by way of infinitesimally small chunks of circulating capital pegged to spatial products elsewhere. Just one click and you can share with your virtual and anonymous community in the ownership of an apartment in Rio de Janeiro, a condo in Miami, a pad in Manhattan. This is a mood-altering architecture that is available in micro-doses. You inhabit its spaces mentally, in fleeting and snatched moments of screen time.[39]

Eerily immaterial, *proptech* operates on a similar temporal scale to a simulated interior. It's hyper-stimulating and infinite. It gratifies a new need brought into our lives through the flow of the feed: the comfort of speed, of the new, of property as something you can delete and create and recreate without the shackles of the physical.

Working with the digital is rife with paradox, as we wade our way through to a semblance of the concrete. Somehow, my Sims house is both comfort and terror. It is both false and impossible, yet more real than my home in that it purports to be mine and will remain mine two months from now. It is both within and without my control, and it is both built and unbuilt [Fig. 09 & Fig. 10].

conclusion

I was never a benevolent omniscient in the Sims—after all, once the house was done, I quickly grew tired of my character and was ready to begin a new bout of placemaking. So, a virtual murder-suicide: the quintessential *Sims* interior is one without doors and windows. The one in which one's character declines at three-times speed, all their status bars dropping into red, regressing into pissing on the carpet, going mad with loneliness, slowly starving, all while waving their hands at you, *God*, to save them. This might sound wickedly violent to the uninitiated, but it was just another banal evil of procedural gameplay. Trapped within their perfect and impossible interior, the Sim takes only a few weeks to die. In the game of life, the house always wins.

While the housing crisis seems set to continue amid increasing global uncertainty, examining new practices of fabricating interior space—however unbuildable—provides insights to the vital role that housing security plays for the contemporary inhabitant. In this context, and in our current condition in which we are straddled between the physical and the digital, the 'leakages' explored in this essay can be seen as a means to expand and elaborate 'the interior' and our relationships to it through the digital membrane. We can see through these 'leakages' that life simulations can act, or be made to act, as proxies of secure interiors, and thus, have potential to be further explored both in research and in the player's personal entanglements with digital worlds.

acknowledgements

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I would like to acknowledge Erin, my childhood friend, without whom I never would have played thousands of hours of *The Sims*.

All efforts have been made to contact *Electronic Arts*, the copyright holders of *The Sims 4*, to obtain written permission for the images included in this essay. The images are screenshots from *The Sims 4* taken by the author of digital interiors constructed by the author, and are used in the spirit of *Electronic Arts'* definition of 'fair use' of their intellectual property.

author biography

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notes

1 'Live mode,' 'build mode,' and 'buy mode' are the three primary types of gameplay in *The Sims*. 'Live mode' is a running simulation, while 'build' and 'buy' modes pause the simulation for purchasing objects, building, renovating, or rearranging objects.

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no-stop city as building

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abstract

Archizoom's hypothetical project of 1969–72 is the ultimate interior. Comprised of a floor, ceiling, and grid of columns, *No-Stop City* stretches infinitely in all directions, potentially consuming the whole world in its fluorescently lit belly. The project and its aims are commonly thought of in relation to other radical and speculative projects of the 1960s and 1970s—those of Archigram and Superstudio, for example—and to the sociocultural critique they posed. However, it also belongs within another lineage of architectural discourse, which might be said to run from the polemic image of a co-op interior published by Hannes Meyer in 1926 to the diagrams and sketches of Claude Parent and Paul Virilio arguing for the oblique as a mode of inhabitation for *Architecture Principe* (1966) to the perspective drawing of boxers inside a locker room made by Madelon Vreisendorp for Rem Koolhaas's seminal publication, *Delirious New York* (1978). This second set of unbuilt projects is inseparable from the critique engaged by those of the first group, yet the discourse is differently centred. While all are equally theoretical in nature, the first set ultimately led away from buildings and toward their contents—to furniture and installations—while the second reinforced buildings and their constituent elements as the domains of influence. This essay examines the double life of *No-Stop City* by comparing it to these two sets of projects, each of which raise questions about the notion of building. In place of building-as-form, these readings of Archizoom's unbuilt interior offer building-as-act, as an action tied to unbuilding, rebuilding, and reconceiving of the limits and possibilities of both contemporary life and the discipline of architecture.

keywords

No-Stop City; Archizoom; section; open plan; building

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One of many 'utopian' projects undertaken by groups of young architects in the 1960s and early 1970s, *No-Stop City* was never intended to be built. As the authors explained, 'the utopia we use is solely instrumental: it represents itself, but not as a prefiguration of a different Model of the System [...], but as a critical Hypothesis related to the system itself.'[1] That is, unlike earlier idealist projects that sought to bring about a better society through building or planning, Archizoom Associati endeavoured only to expose existing and emerging urban conditions through their delineation of a hypothetical city. This disclaimer, however, did nothing to prevent the project's dismissal by contemporaneous architects and architectural writers for being insufficiently apolitical.

No-Stop City existed primarily as drawings, images, and texts for architectural journals between 1970 and 1972 and as spin-off projects and accompanying essays for exhibitions between 1972 and 1973.[2] At the same time as it was being written into existence, *No-Stop City* was being written off in the same forums. Architect Massimo Scolari, for example, described the project and its progeny as too embedded in the world of consumerism and thus not invested enough in the incremental advancement of the discipline of architecture in an essay written for the Milan Triennale of 1973.[3] Historian Manfredo Tafuri critiqued the project as inherently capitalist and pointed it out in multiple publications. In the same year as Scolari's text, for example, he assessed that the vehicles of Archizoom's work, designed objects and metropolitan images, were detached from their supposed popular audience. Disseminated through exhibitions and institutions that appealed to a select crowd, they served to reify the existing system rather than participate in any real critique.[4] To this, Tafuri later added that Archizoom gave 'a form of expression to the phenomenon of mass consumption' and that *No-Stop City* was 'transcribed with an irony "that made nobody laugh"' in later books.[5]

On at least one point, Tafuri was decidedly correct. To give expression to an emerging consumer culture was exactly what Archizoom was after. They saw that the advent of electronic media and post-Fordist production made Modernist functional plans, with designated spaces for different activities, living and working and moving, obsolete. Manufacture and trade had become possible anywhere, regardless of planning. Thus, the city, formerly a centre where trade took place, was no longer tantamount to the market. Instead, in Archizoom's words, 'the metropolis ceases to be a "place", to become a "condition"'.[6]

Perhaps, as some have suggested, *No-Stop City* was ahead of its time in foreseeing shifts in the economic and cultural landscape. Current architectural writers Kazys Varnelis and Pier Vittorio Aureli have separately argued that Tafuri, in particular, was blind to the changes to production and consumption then underway.[7] Consequently, the project's merits may not have been visible from the outdated lenses through which it was viewed. Even so, given Archizoom's output, which never evolved beyond images and objects before they disbanded in 1974, we might still ask: Did *No-Stop City* really set the discipline of architecture aside? And did the project leave anything more for architects than designing things to circulate in a consumerist world, as their critics would contend?

no-stop city, photographs

Formed in 1966 as its founding members, Andrea Branzi, Giberto Corretti, Paolo Deganello, and Massimo Morozzi, completed their architectural education at the University of Florence, Archizoom was familiar with Tafuri's writing before they became part of it. After Dario and Lucia Bartolini joined the team, their first text for *No-Stop City* was published in *Casabella* in 1970 under the title 'Ville, Chaîne de Montage du Social: Idéologie et Théorie de la Métropole.'[8] Despite the fact that Tafuri would later admonish the group, their essay picked up on many of the themes laid out in his text for *Contropiano*, 'Per una critica dell'ideologia architettonica', from the

previous year.[9] Like Tafuri, Archizoom sought to put forward a critique of Modern architecture relative to capital, albeit in another form: 'To carry forward this endeavor, we have used a classic written language along with a graphic language that is more specific to our discipline.'[10]

To do this, Archizoom drew and produced images for a thought experiment accelerating consumer culture to its logical conclusion. Among these, photographs of models depict spaces containing consumer goods—Ritz crackers, canned cherries, a tent, and a motorcycle, among other things—within sterile, office-like environments composed of round columns, drop ceilings, and carpeted floors. Acting as ideograms, the objects appearing in each image construct the world of their inhabitation. Everything is small, readily available, and easily moveable, suggesting a common and nomadic population. Taken as single-point perspectives and aided by mirrors enclosing the models on three sides, the photographs describe an infinite space without obvious architectural quality [Fig. 01].

Figure 01.
Model photos of No-Stop City and its contents. *Domus* 496, March 1971. Archivio Domus © Editoriale Domus S.p.A.

archigram, supersurface, and building

Archizoom was hardly alone in exploring the failures of Modernism and the dissolution of boundaries inherent in the global economic system emerging at the time. Earlier, in 1961, Archigram, themselves a group of young architects, published the first issue of what would become a ten-issue eponymous magazine (or nine and a half, in their terms). It declared their rejection of Modernism in two pages, and later issues elaborated on what might replace it. In addition to providing a forum for publicising their own unbuilt work, the magazine allowed them to establish a dialogue with other architects, architecture students, and academics in adjacent fields, many of whom were also published on their pages. While the group was founded in the UK, the magazine would be sold across Europe and the US, at stores in London, Paris, New York, Berlin, Florence, Los Angeles, and Stockholm.[11] In it, architecture students in Florence would have read about the virtues of consumer culture and expendability, architecture as a commodity, pop culture and comics, and the metropolis. Across all, the attitude was irreverent and saw the future of architecture as embracing life in its myriad forms, as opposed to dictating it through the abstract moralism associated with Modernism.

From its first themed issue, number three, Archigram explored the contemporary world of expendability and obsolescence [Fig. 02]. While others might find fault with these qualities—decreased quality, increased waste, environmental pollution, and so on—the group insisted on seeing the bright side and offering a positive reading of them. They offered up expanded possibilities for disposable goods, including scaling them up to the size of habitable buildings. By the time the eighth issue was printed in 1968, the call for less permanence had coalesced into a thesis around choice. In it, Archigram

announced their exhibition for the fourteenth Milan Triennale around the theme of 'Greater Number' with text that read:

> Several themes crop up in the exhibition that recurrently interest the Archigram group. These themes are all to do with the personal choice that one can have over one's environment and the ways in which new combinations of parts can catalyse that choice.
>
> The ability of objects and assemblies could metamorphose over a period of time, so that we are no longer stuck with monuments of a forgotten day...the ability to use the world's surface and mobility to achieve personal freedom, the nomadic instinct and the nomadic potential of cars and car-based enclosures...the relinquishing of old hang-ups about determinism and the purity of hierarchies and preferred values....[12]

For Archigram, then, popular consumer culture offered a way to correct against the top-down dictates of Modernist architecture. To enable this, the group proposed flexible frameworks into which inhabitants could insert themselves and their dwellings, such as *Plug-in City* (1964), and dwellings as goods, such as *Living Pod* (1966), all of which existed solely in print and exhibitions.

Under the influence of Archigram, among others, and in the wake of the post-war 'Italian economic miracle'—the period from 1958 to 1963 in which Italy's economy boomed due, in part, to an influx of foreign aid for reconstruction—many young Italian designers of the 1960s turned their attention toward designed objects to both participate in a growing consumer market and to break into the architectural scene. Motivated by the twin fixations of Modernism's failures and a future enabled by choice and consumption, they invented objects that could act as architecture and take it in a new direction. The well-known 1972 exhibition at MoMA

Figure 02.
Page from Archigram 3 highlighting the qualities of 'limited life-span objects.' Page 5 of *Archigram Magazine* No. 3 © Archigram 1964.

in New York, *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, captured the scale and range of this effort, as nearly one hundred designers, most Italian, participated. Divided into two parts, the exhibition included 'objects'—furniture, fixtures, and other household items—and 'environments.' Designed specifically for the show as part of an invited competition, the latter were to create domestic environments for new events and old rituals of urban, family, or private life.[13] Most entries appeared as extensions of the 'objects' portion of the show and included things like furniture sets, designed appliances, mobile living units, or reconfigurable domestic cells.

While all the installations reimagined inhabitation, distinct among them was *Supersurface*, by the group Superstudio. It resisted designed objects as the new locus of domestic life and instead took to heart the idea of a domestic landscape. In their view, designed objects, as opposed to mass-produced or functional ones, connote status and class, things to be abolished. In place of these, their entry consisted of a scaled-down room, or model, circumscribed by mirrored walls, possibly borrowing from Archizoom's earlier photographs for *No-Stop City*. The two groups were friendly, having been classmates in Florence and participated in gallery shows together. On the lower surface of the model, wires emerged from a grid of tiles. On the upper one, 'meteorological events', such as sunrise and the passing of clouds, were projected while a recording explained the setup. Inspired by such mass events as Woodstock in 1969 and the Isle of Wight Festival in 1970, the domestic landscape, they explained, is whatever people make it.[14] Transformed into a strange and endless landscape of artificial ground and natural sky, the miniature room conveyed a place both primal and futuristic. Inhabitants could be nomadic or stationary, alone or with others, with possessions or without. In this utopia, or perhaps dystopia, the only necessity is a technical ground plane to plug into. The rest can be organised spontaneously and freely across it.

The emphasis on personal freedom underwriting projects by both Archigram and Superstudio is easy to read into Archizoom's images for *No-Stop City* by extension. All objects displayed in it are mass-produced, readily available, fast, mobile, and individually sized, and an open and endless space allows for their continual reconfiguration. Less celebratory in tone than Archigram, Archizoom nonetheless shared an understanding of consumerism's connection to individualism. Less oppositional than Superstudio, they saw openness as a requisite for freedom from both Modernism and the imposition of externally determined social values. According to a retrospective account by group member Andrea Branzi, *No-Stop City* endeavoured to set the conditions for 'freeing people from culture' without being 'an opportunity to formulate a different culture.'[15] That is, rather than invent a new shared culture, inhabitants were liberated from any dominant culture entirely, effectively making each person a culture-of-one.[16]

To this end, Archizoom designed marketable goods, such as sofas, chairs, and clothing, to be used toward the formation of these new cultures for exhibitions, including *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, both before and after the *No-Stop City*'s production. Most of their quirky items endeavoured to overturn traditional ways of using such object types. Their 1967 sofa, *Superonda*, for example, made an upright posture challenging to maintain while also encouraging new and more varied ways of sitting or lying down. Similarly, *Dressing Design: Nearest Habitat System* explored the fashion of *No-Stop City* through androgynous and oddly combined clothing: trench coats with leotards, neckties with boas, and the like.

For people like Scolari and Tafuri, these artefacts and the images produced for and around *No-Stop City* and the venues they were shown in are what call into question the project's true purpose. However, when read beside the projects of Archigram and Superstudio, it is evident that *No-Stop City* was more than a collection of things. Along with the projects of Archizoom's contemporaries, it reimagined architecture not as spaces defined by solid boundaries, markers of interior and exterior, but instead as the assembly and reassembly of bodies and things, a constant act of building, whether a space or ourselves, rather than a finished product.

And yet, distinct from the work of Archigram and Superstudio, *No-Stop City* can also be understood as an interior in the traditional sense. Even while hypothetically infinite in the horizontal direction, it is bounded below by floor and above by ceiling. The very instruments of the ideology it critiques are fundamental to its articulation. Air

conditioning, elevators, electric lighting: these Modernist technologies for the conditioning of the interior are what enable its otherwise impossible endlessness. So, just as *No-Stop City* was a 'city freed of architecture', as Andrea Branzi claimed, it was simultaneously a city co-equal with the interior.[17] Archizoom's critique of Modernism both called for the end of architecture as building and also reinforced it.

'die neue welt' and interior

The Modernism that Archizoom built upon belonged most squarely to that of architect Hannes Meyer. As part of a book series, *Collana Polis*, his writing was translated into Italian in 1969, alongside that of Ludwig Hilberseimer, who is a better known and undeniable influence on the group.[18] In *Scritti 1921–1942: Architettura O Rivoluzione*, Meyer's essay 'Die Neue Welt' laid out his views on architecture from the vantage point of 1926. Accompanying the essay were many images of recent artwork, industrial design, and built and speculative buildings authored by others. Also included was an image by Hannes Meyer himself.

In this image, Hannes Meyer photographed the corner of a room as though it was a model. The space, an interior, was lit to produce shadows resembling those of an amateurly imaged architectural model and imprecisely covered over with white cloth, exaggerating the scale of the seams between surfaces [Fig. 03]. The reverse operation—photographing an architectural model as though a building—lends an aura of reality to an idea, but Meyer's photograph turns 'reality' into an idea.

Titled, 'Co-op Interieur', the photograph and accompanying essay celebrated the standardisation of both architecture and objects, or Fordist production. Cars, planes, microphones, radios: the objects Meyer extolled allowed people, goods, or information to move easily and quickly across great distances. Derby hats, pre-sized stationery, beef extract: mass-produced goods were impersonal and transcended individual, local, or national

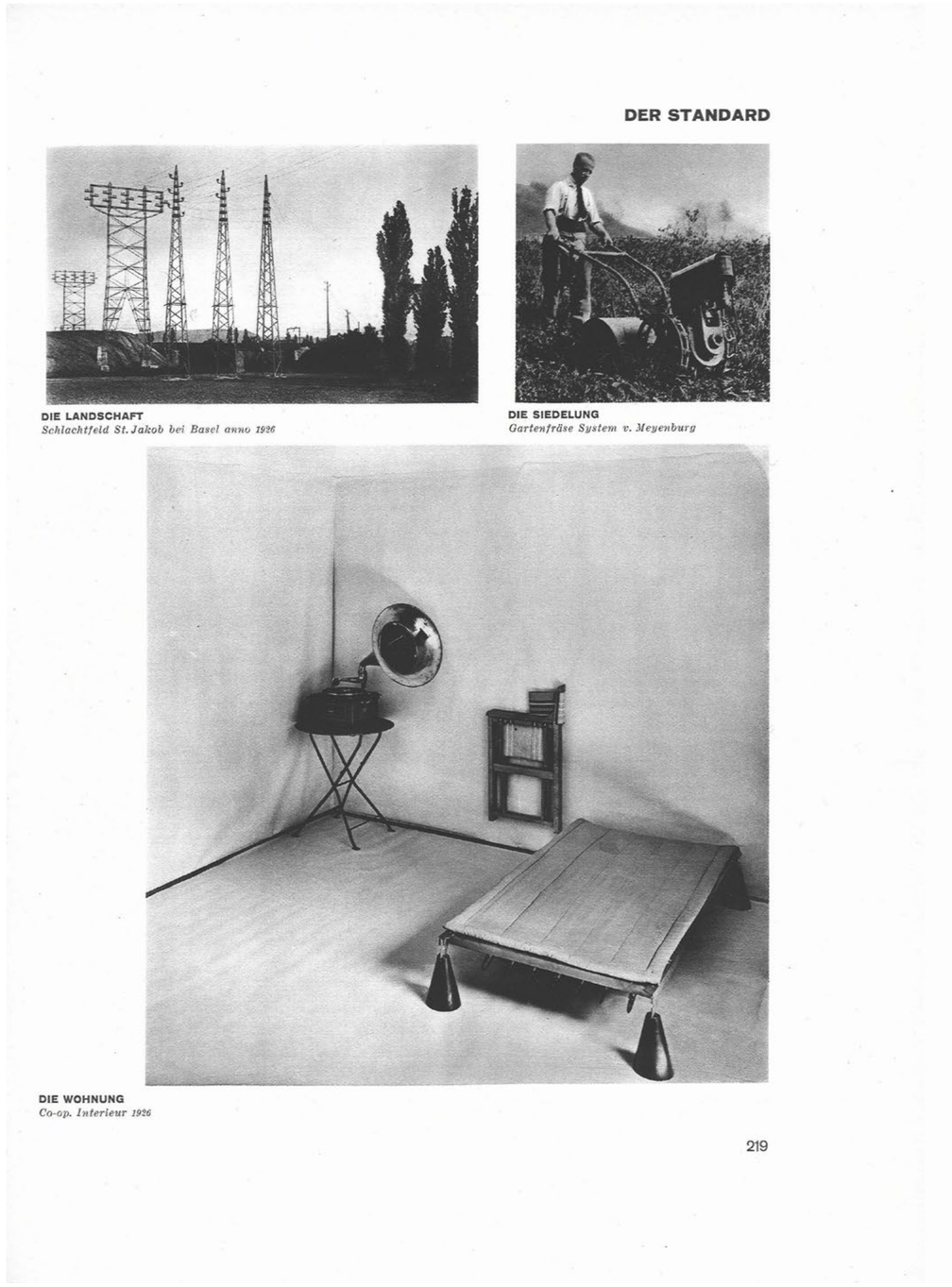

Figure 03.
Page from *Das Werk* magazine with the Co-op Interieur photo. © *Das Werk*, 7 (1926), p. 219.

differences. Important in the wake of World War I and the growing scepticism toward nationalism that followed, the ability to effectively erase distances, cross boundaries, and obscure identity opened the potential for a new, conflict-less society. Through these objects, Meyer claimed, 'We become citizens of the world.'[19]

Meyer's photograph displays a gramophone, a chair, and a cot within an all-white interior. The three objects are manufactured and portable, and together they describe this new, emerging society. The gramophone, for instance, detaches music from place, transporting it from a music hall in a specific location to any home. The chair and cot are both lightweight and easily moved, and thus free to roam, as are the inhabitants. Mass-produced and lacking markers of individuality, the items can belong to anyone and go anywhere.

In addition to evoking a particular way of life, the objects tell of the architecture that contains them. It is blank, a backdrop composed only of white surfaces: two walls and a floor. They do not speak of place, but rather serve as a container for the things that go in or on them. The space is utterly without the kind of identity imposed by style; like the objects, it could be anywhere. To be sure, nothing indicating an exterior, such as a door or window, is shown. Equally, it is receptive to any inhabitant, or to many inhabitants over time, as the curation of objects replaces décor and individual taste. For Meyer, then, the objects he selected serve as a fulcrum between the conceptualisation of a mode of living and the concrete form necessary to sustain it.

Yet, despite the reliance on consumer goods to convey his utopian dream, Meyer did not espouse individualism through choice. For him, the erasure of boundaries and identity made possible by mass production and new technology leads instead toward collective association. He says:

> Grock and the three Fratellini weld the masses—irrespective of class and racial differences—into a community with a common fate. Trade union, co-operative, Lt., Inc., cartel, trust, and the League of Nations are the forms in which today's social conglomerations find expression, and the radio and the rotary press are their media of communication. Co-operation rules the world. The community rules the individual.[20]

Thus, the world Meyer imagines is flat, without hierarchy or difference, which enables people previously held apart, whether by distance or division, to finally find commonality, and it is a non-descript architecture that allows this.

no-stop city, plans and sections

No-Stop City is a framework for people and goods (Archigram), a surface for free distribution (Superstudio), and a minimal interior (Meyer). In this mix, Archizoom makes a discovery. Even while describing the apparently contradictory ideas found in these projects, individual choice (capitalism) on one side and collective cooperation (socialism) on the other, the conditions and outcomes are the same.[21] In an essay for *Domus*, Archizoom explains:

> Production and Consumption possess one and the same ideology, which is that of Programming. Both hypothesize a social and physical reality completely continuous and undifferentiated. No autres realities exist. The factory and the supermarket become the specimen models of the future city: optimal urban structures, potentially limitless, where human functions are arranged spontaneously in a free field.[22]

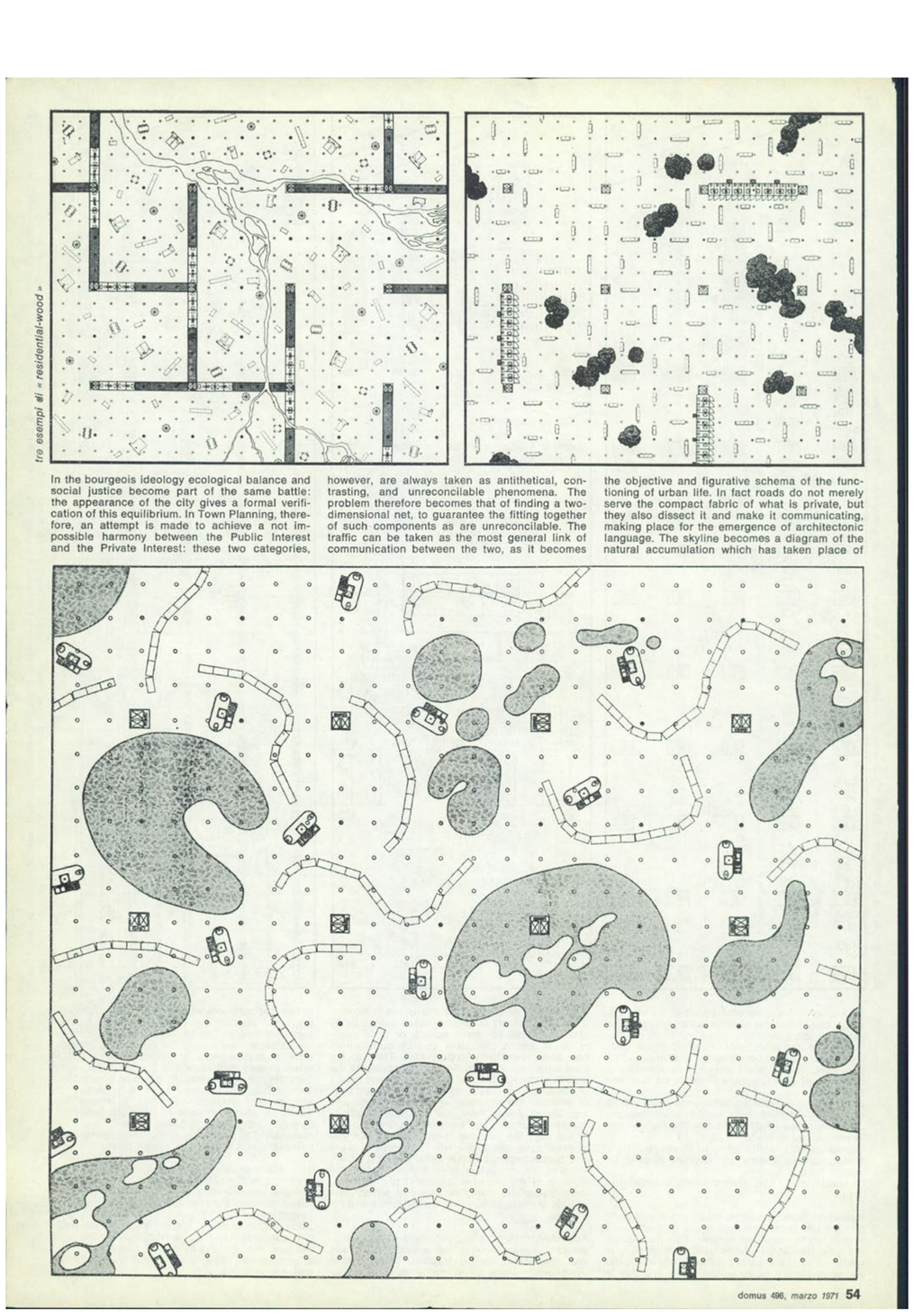

Figure 04.
Three plans for No-Stop City. *Domus,* 496 (March 1971). Archivio Domus – © Editoriale Domus S.p.A.

Plan drawings of *No-Stop City* depict a literally flat plane upon which various elements are strewn in relatively equal measure—'a bath every 100 metres, or a computer every 40 metres' [Fig. 04].[23] Neatly divided into five categories—structure, ascension, services, containers, and green—the bare necessities are each distributed according to their own logic. Columns exist on square grids, for example, while toilets or containers often follow looser, yet still equidistant, patterns. In some drawings, furniture is also shown. Across the many plans created between 1969 and 1972, which range from abstract representations using typewritten characters to proper architectural delineations, all share a quality of evenness. There are no walls, no centres or nodes, no direction, and no hierarchy. Across these open plans, imaginary inhabitants are unrestricted and free to move anywhere. They are nomads within a 'residential parking lot.'[24]

Parallel to exploring the possibilities and shortcomings of a consumer culture centred on portable and impermanent goods and the space they imply, *No-Stop City* demonstrates the limits of the open plan as an idealised architectural construct. Commonly associated with office towers, open plans lack internal division and thereby allow for mobility, temporal change, and functional overlap or drift. Extending this device past the boundary of a single building, Archizoom explored these qualities as totalities.

While freeing both architect and inhabitant from the constraints of closure, the world envisioned by Archizoom was, paradoxically, inescapable. Running off each edge of paper onto which it was drawn and stretching past any vantage point, *No-Stop City* is endless. An infinite and totalising system, it contains all oppositions, such as public and private, nature and technology, and quality and quantity, simultaneously. However, where Modernism sought to balance between opposites by means of functional planning, according to Archizoom, all distinctions collapse here: private is public, technology is nature, and quantity is quality. Everything exists everywhere and simultaneously, so there are no boundaries between one thing and another.

Without boundaries, there are also no images of the city, as there had previously been. Borrowing the idea of the urban image from Tafuri, Archizoom identifies the image of a city, its skyline, say, as a signifier of its operation under Fordism.[25] Through it, urbanism is understood as accumulation. When the distance between the metropolis and its hinterland is erased, as in *No-Stop City*, and the two become the same thing, the image of each disappears to the other. The only possible escape from this homogeneous, imageless landscape is the elevators, which are drawn into every plan along a grid coincident with that of the columns.

While numerous plans were drawn for *No-Stop City*, each showing a different possibility for what might happen in its stripped-down space, only one section was ever created. Originally produced for a version of the project entered in an architectural

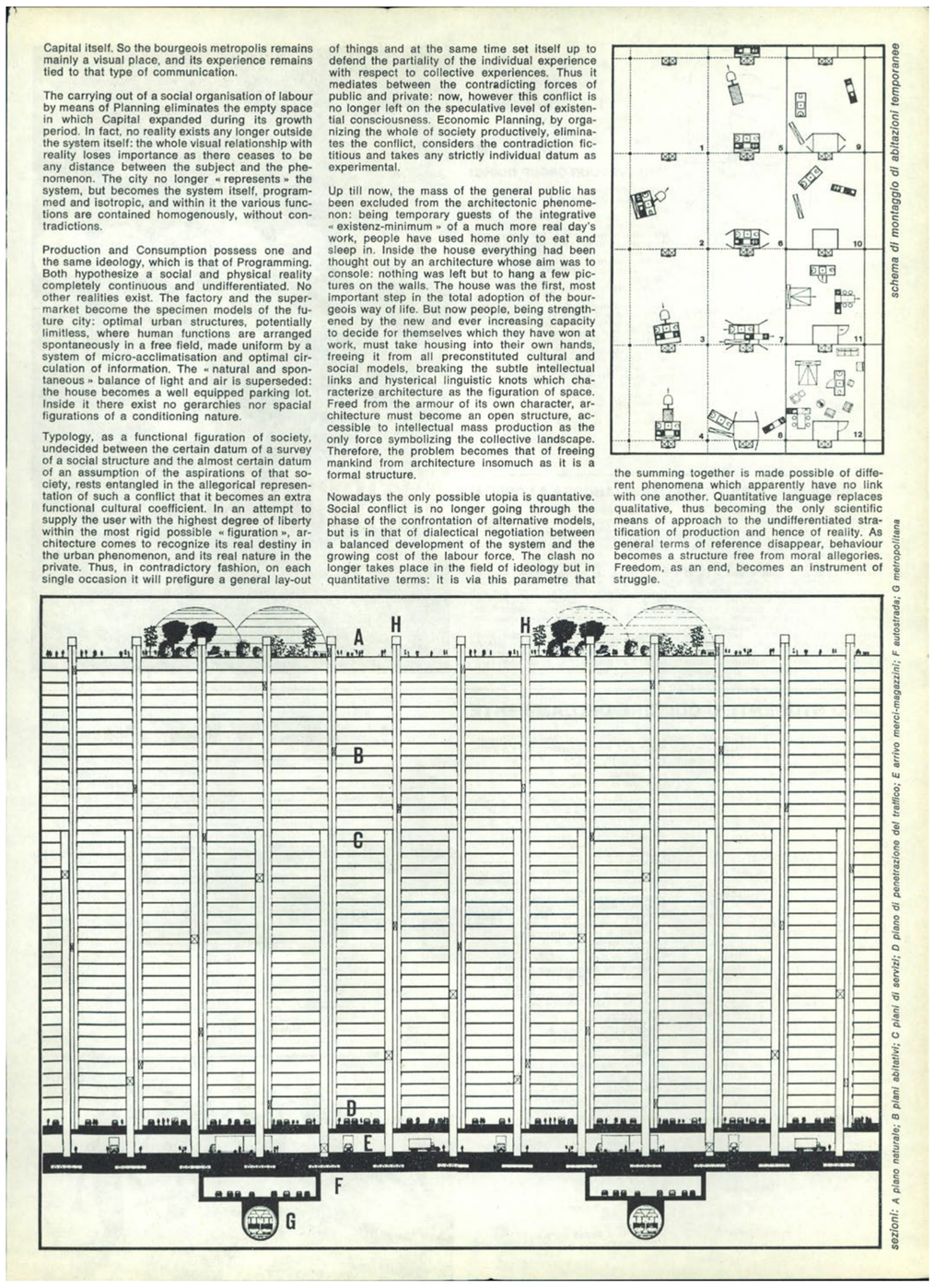

Figure 05.
The single section for No-Stop City. *Domus,* 496 (March 1971). Archivio Domus – © Editoriale Domus S.p.A.

competition in Florence in 1970 and titled 'I Progetti si Firmano', the section, like the plans, ran off the right and left sides of the page containing it.[26] It was not, however, endless in the vertical direction. Rather, repeated standard floors were sandwiched between lower circulatory levels containing parking and public transportation and an upper green roof with trees, and all are connected by elevators leading from one level to another [Fig. 05].

In text published in *Casabella* the same year, the group explains that the section is the 'stratification of homogeneous "free plans"' served by a regular grid of 'communications' (elevators, mechanical systems, and so on).[27] The separation between standard floors and green roof is justified as a move that eliminates the 'image' between the two. One is only ever in a single environment, and it is never visible from another. Therefore, as for the city, each level lacks an image.

delirious new york, *architecture principe*, and building

Overlooked by most, the section drawn by Archizoom was eventually picked up by Rem Koolhaas, although it's unclear whether the connection was direct. Numerous essays by him, such as 'Bigness', 'Generic City', and 'Typical Plan', mediate on the substance of *No-Stop City*, even when not explicitly stated. In 'Bigness', for example, Koolhaas describes 'bigness' as an outcome of Modernism's obsession with technology and employment of systems such as air conditioning, elevators, and artificial lighting. With these things, buildings were freed to become so large, nearly infinite, that their connection to the exterior could be lost. In 'Typical Plan', he describes the qualityless open plans of American skyscrapers, even illustrating the essay with a *No-Stop City* plan. Before these, though, Koolhaas examined the Manhattan skyscraper through its section.

In his 1978 book, *Delirious New York*, Koolhaas, like Archizoom before him, returns to ideas contained in Tafuri's essay, 'Per una critica dell'ideologia architettonica', to retrospectively unravel the urban condition of New York. Where Tafuri writes:

> Using a regular grid of arteries as the simple, flexible support for an urban structure whose perpetual changeability is to be safeguarded, allowed the Americans to achieve a goal that the Europeans had been unable to realize. In the United States, absolute freedom is granted to the single architectural fragment, which is situated in a context that is not formally conditioned by it.[28]

Koolhaas contends:

> The Grid is, above all, a conceptual speculation. [...] The Grid makes the history of architecture and all previous lessons of urbanism irrelevant. It forces Manhattan's builders to develop a new system of formal values, to invent strategies for the distinction of one block from another.[29]

That is, by introducing a homogeneous system of separation—the grid—to order the urban landscape, each building within it is freed to be singular. When applying this observation to a skyscraper, a building type made of repetitively stacked open plans, Koolhaas sees the same thing in a new direction. Just as the streets of Manhattan separate unique entities, the floors of a skyscraper separate different environments or programmes. The absolute separation of one typical floor from the next sets the conditions for differences to emerge between them. An office may occupy one floor and a day-care centre the next, for example, because each floor is independent of the rest.

As if to recall earlier discussions about objects and consumer culture, Koolhaas's observation about the reversibility of plan and section at the level of organisation is illustrated by a drawing of naked boxers eating oysters in a locker room on the nth floor of the Downtown Athletic Club in New York [Fig. 06]. The odd assortment of things in it demonstrates the range of possible differences that arise through this diagram, differences that are accumulated as objects (oysters and boxing

gloves) or their removal (clothing), as occupants move through the building. In this way, one may design oneself as one moves between floors and acquire accessories, much as one might with the mismatched clothing Archizoom proposed for *No-Stop City* as an expression of one's autonomy within it. Even as the section is apparently 'closed', in contrast to its corresponding open plans, it does not operate as did the functional plan or planning, which served to create equilibrium between oppositional pairs: public and private, living and working, and so on. Instead, it elicits only arbitrary differences.

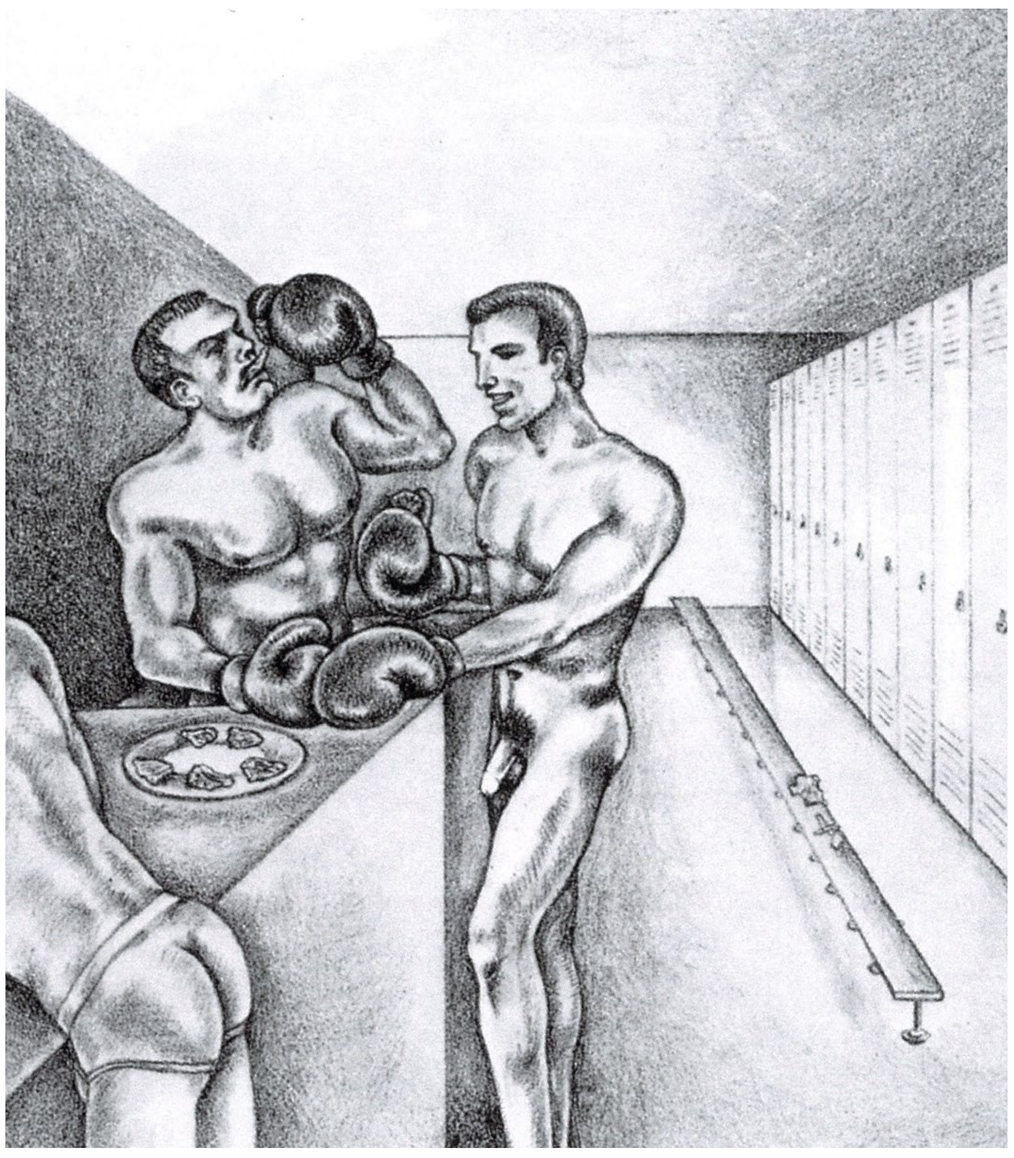

Figure 06.
Eating oysters, naked, with boxing gloves. Madelon Vriesendorp, 1978. © Madelon Vriesendorp.

Here, Koolhaas' exploration points to a fundamental contradiction in Archizoom's project, made apparent through the section of the Downtown Athletic Club. The *No-Stop City* section, it turns out, is an exacerbator of differences made possible through a multiplicity of detached interiors, while the plan is a totalising system of openness and evenness in which all oppositions cancel out. Archizoom's own vacillation on the matter magnifies the issue. In one publication, *Casabella*, the section is justified as a means for subverting image via separation. In another text, Archizoom explains that traffic 'would no longer divide the city into sections but would be arranged in an autonomous, optimal fashion, uniformly distributed throughout the land' and nature would remain separated from the interiors, so that 'no longer would the individual have his contacts with nature contaminated by architectural elements that tend to attribute to it some cultural significance.'[30] And yet, plans published in *Domus* include green elements—a river, rocky outcrops, groves of trees—as part of the interior landscape, alongside columns and toilets and kitchenettes, even as the section was printed alongside them.

In their effort to describe the inevitable endpoint of Modern architecture, Archizoom stumbled into a problem. The logic of the technical infrastructure (artificial lighting, air conditioning, elevators, and so on) underwriting *No-Stop City* implies not only outward expansion to infinity, but also upward expansion. However, this upward expansion challenges the very premise on which the project is based—the frictionless, ubiquitous space of the then-contemporary metropolis. For the Downtown Athletic club, the divide between homogeneous plan and heterogeneous section is not a problem—it is a found condition on Manhattan circa 1931 within a finite, if big, building. But for *No-Stop City*, because it wasn't built, and because it couldn't be built, and because it was nonetheless a building, it poses a question for others.

One possible answer to that question was developed roughly contemporaneously to the delineation of *No-Stop City*. Architect Claude Parent and theorist Paul Virilio explored a parallel set of concerns to those of Archizoom and endeavoured to solve Modernism's shortcomings. Their diagnosis: in the move from the universal, which can be understood as ideally accommodating anyone, to the standard, as applauded by Hannes Meyer, architecture had become purely organisation and people, mere quantities. The solution: life lived on a slope.

Together, Parent and Virilio developed a theory of the oblique through a short-lived, nine-issue pamphlet called *Architecture Principe*, published in 1966. Parent then prototyped oblique living for the *Venice Architecture Biennale* of 1970, although it had already previously been deployed at a small scale in a limited number of buildings. By tilting a floor at some angle between zero and forty-five degrees, Parent and Virilio argued, choice and participation are recovered. Inhabitants must choose, up or down, and exert varying amounts of energy in either direction.

There were many iterations of this idea, some built, such as the interior of Parent's apartment in Neuilly (c.1973) and the Church of Sainte-Bernadette du Banlay (1963), and many not. All relied upon one or more slopes to create a continuous, if enclosed, environment. The diagonal rectified the opposition between wall and floor; it was both at once. One could walk, sit, or stand easily in the same place. Parent and Virilio referred to this as 'habitable circulation.'[31] The diagonal also resolved the difference between city and nature, just as Archizoom sought to do by either removing their images or drawing them into the same space. Virilio explained:

> After the HORIZONTAL order of the rural habitat in the agricultural area, and the VERTICAL order of the urban habitat in the industrial area, the next logical (or, rather, topological) step was for us the OBLIQUE order of the post-industrial era.[32]

While not one-to-one with *No-Stop City*—Parent and Virilio's project insisted on finitude and enclosure for practical and conceptual purposes—the oblique offers a possible solution to Archizoom's sectional problem. Just as importantly, however, it underscores the architectural nature of their project. Within the discipline, and particularly within Modernism, plan and what can be seen in it—walls and thresholds, or borders and openings—have traditionally been considered as the fundamental elements involved in its modulation or lack of modulation of the social and political lives it contains. The plan is the generator, after all. This is the entire reason for doing away with walls in *No-Stop City*, a move that also seemed to erase building altogether. What is invisible in *No-Stop City's* plans but becomes evident through its section, and what the oblique underscores, is that the floor is equally essential as a conceptual and technical apparatus when considering the intersections between life and building.

Later, perhaps with this in mind, Koolhaas and his architecture firm, the Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA) 'corrected' Archizoom's section. Their design for the unbuilt Jussieu Library (1992), for example, treats flat floors like paper and bends or slices them to create sloping and ramping floors, much as Parent and Virilio had advocated. There is no break between floors; each becomes the next. When a single section is drawn through a gross circulatory path, it appears as one long, continuous, sloping line ascending the equivalent of roughly twelve floors—a diagonal open plan.

Of course, the solution is imperfect. It is finite, an enclosed building, and doesn't address transit or green. But the exact solution is not the point. Nor is the building, built or unbuilt, the important outcome. Rather, what matters is the formulation of a problem through the attempt to describe and discover an impossible to build building and the recognition of that problem later on. When conceived this way, *No-Stop City* sets the conditions for another kind of endless building—what Massimo Scolari might have considered the incremental advancement of the discipline. For him, this advancement is a collective project that entails adding to an ever-accumulating mountain of architectural history through the revision of what has come before. It is decisively not about contemporary conditions or cultural debates, but is instead focused entirely on a kind of call and response between one architect and others. While Scolari was prone to seeing Archizoom as part of an avant garde that had abandoned building and discipline, the situation of their *No-Stop City* project relative to works by earlier and later architects, such

as Hannes Meyer, Claude Parent and Paul Virilio, and Rem Koolhaas and his firm, OMA, shows that it in fact operated at both levels, as an exploration of the found, non-architectural world and as an imperfect, but perfectable, architectural statement made manifest primarily through unbuilt buildings.[33]

conclusion

Contrary to what Archizoom's critics would contend, *No-Stop City* abandoned neither the disciplinary basis of architecture nor the field's concern with building in favour of objects and exhibitions. Rather, it used objects and occupied exhibitions to question building. It did this alongside projects by other groups of young architects in the 1960s and 1970s by turning from building-as-form to building-as-act. In place of drawings for the construction of buildings, Archizoom and others produced drawings and photographs to convey the building, unbuilding, and rebuilding of new modes of life, and mobile or disposable objects were the materials enabling this shift.

No-Stop City also did this within the context of a broader range of projects spanning the twentieth century. Among these, the objects of Archizoom's discourse take on a different meaning. Rather than stand alone, they provide evidence of the kind of architecture containing them, just as Hannes Meyer's objects did decades earlier. *No-Stop City* is an open plan, a space without walls or formal articulation, taken so far that its corresponding section loses sense. In this very fundamental articulation of an architectural problem, however absurd, Archizoom engages with the disciplinary, or interior, dimension of the field, even while using it to describe exterior, or social and cultural, concerns.

That all this played out in architectural journals and exhibitions read or visited by architects, critics, and enthusiasts should be no surprise, however *No-Stop City* is understood. In the end, it was not a sofa or printed image Archizoom was selling in these venues, but instead a way to think about—to build, unbuild, and rebuild—architecture itself.

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notes

1 Archizoom Associati, 'City, Assembly Line of Social Issues: Ideology and Theory of the Metropolis', in *No-Stop City*, ed. by Andrea Branzi (HYX, 2006), pp. 156–74 (p. 157).

2 For an accounting of the project's timeline, see Pablo Martinez Capdevila, 'The Interior City. Infinity and Concavity in the No-Stop City (1970–1971)', *Cuadernos de Proyectos Arquitectónicos*, 4 (2013), pp. 130–32 (p. 130).

3 Massimo Scolari, 'The New Architecture and the Avant-Garde', in *Architecture Theory Since 1968*, ed. by K. Michael Hays (MIT Press, 1998), pp. 126–45 (p. 129).

4 Manfredo Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*, trans. by Barbara Luigia La Penta (MIT Press, 1973), pp. 141–42.

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6 Archizoom Associati, 'Residential Car Park: Universal Climatic System', in *No-Stop City*, ed. by Andrea Branzi (HYX, 2006), pp. 176–79 (p. 177).

7 Kazys Varnelis, 'Programming After Program: Archizoom's No-Stop City', *PRAXIS: Journal of Writing + Building*, 8 (2006), pp. 82–91 (pp. 84–85); Pier Vittorio Aureli, *The Project of Autonomy* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2008), p. 78.

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14 Superstudio, 'Superstudio', in *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, ed. by Emilio Ambasz (Museum of Modern Art, 1972), p. 244.

15 Andrea Branzi, 'Postface', in *No-Stop City*, ed. by Andrea Branzi (HYX, 2006), pp. 139–55 (pp. 147–48).

16 Archizoom, 'Archizoom', in *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, ed. by Emilio Ambasz (Museum of Modern Art, 1972), pp. 232–39 (p. 234).

17 Branzi, 'Postface', p.152.

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19 Hannes Meyer, 'The New World', in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, ed. by Anton Kaes, Martin Jay and Edward Dimendberg (University of California Press, 1994), pp. 445–48 (p. 446).

20 Meyer, 'The New World', p. 446.

21 A similar point is made in Capdevila, 'An Italian Querelle', pp. 130–32.

22 Archizoom Associati, 'Residential Car Park', p. 178.

23 Varnelis, 'Programming After Program', p. 89.

24 One of Archizoom's *No-Stop City* texts, published in *Domus* in 1971, was titled 'No-Stop City: Parkings Résidentiels, Système Climatique Universel.'

25 Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*.

26 For more about Archizoom's entry for the competition, see Francesco Marullo, 'Climatic Universal System', *Journal of Architectural Education,* 73.2 (2019), pp. 168–77.

27 Archizoom Associati, 'City, Assembly Line of Social Issues', p. 173.

28 Tafuri, 'Toward a Critique of Architectural Ideology', p. 13.

29 Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York* (Monacelli Press, 1994), p. 20.

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31 Claude Parent, *Architecture Principe 3*, reprinted in *The Function of the Oblique*, ed. by Pamela Johnston (AA Documents, 1996), pp. 67–68.

32 Paul Virilio, 'Architecture Principe', in *The Function of the Oblique*, ed. by Pamela Johnston (AA Documents, 1996), pp. 11–13 (p. 12).

33 For Scolari's point of view, see Scolari, 'The New Architecture and the Avant-Garde', pp. 126–45.

gone-built: exposing an interior phenomenon of ephemerality through the exhibitions designs of the aalto atelier

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abstract

Built interiors do not last indefinitely, or indeed stay untouched, but interiors cannot be categorised so clearly as built and unbuilt, existing and not existing. There is another state to recognise in relation to them, and that is what this essay explores and refers to as the *gone-built* interior. These are interiors that were designed for a specific function for a defined period of time. During their existence they remained untouched, and while no longer physically around, they have left behind traces in archives. The remaining artefacts and ephemera of their existence allow us to investigate this phenomenon of temporariness in more detail, and consider elements of their definition that have relevance to our wider interiors discourse. They allow us to consider our processes as designers in ways that other categories of the unbuilt do not and invite experimentation and boldness of design in a way that more permanent interiors cannot. This essay uses the Finnish architectural practice the Aalto Atelier as a study, due to the form and number of exhibitions they undertook, and the long time period over which this engagement happened. It unpacks three key themes around the gone-built, in relation to their exhibition designs: elemental spolia, indicative representation, and propaganda. Finally, it demonstrates how the gone-built is an important state to understand as interior designers, and how we can use it to support our interior design ideas and practices by engaging with the opportunity for experimentation in design, sustainable practice, and dissemination of ideas it provides.

keywords

exhibition design; interiors; photography; ephemeral; Aalto Atelier

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introduction

In considering the difference in human engagement between built and unbuilt interiors we tend to focus on the fact that the built is a tangible space that creates narratives, images, and experiences that continue to be disseminated, and the unbuilt remains in our imagination. This arises because of the social interactions that occur in built space. As the philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre explains, 'nothing disappears completely, nor can what subsists be defined solely in terms of traces, memories or relics.'[1] Lefebvre's comments relate to ideas explored by the architectural historian and theorist Sophia Psarra, who has investigated how our relationship with physical spaces is due to how the space was initially conceived by the designers, how we perceive it as we experience it, and the cultural context that occurs due to the interaction of these two states.[2]

An unbuilt project, while following the same initial design stages as a built one, has had its potential and experience curtailed by its failure to be physically realised. We can only imagine what it might have been like, and the narratives we create are purely speculative and usually focused on the positive. However, in the world of interiors there are very important projects that sit between built and unbuilt that we all too often overlook. These are what this essay refers to as the gone-built—projects that were built, but no longer exist. More specifically, as defined by Lefebvre, they are spaces that can no longer be occupied, in the sense that by occupation of a space we understand it more completely both physically and experientially.[3] As the Finnish architect and theorist Juhani Pallasmaa explains, we experience these physical spaces 'through our embodied existence and capacity of projection and identification.'[4] Within this less examined category there are two very clear distinctions to make—projects that did exist and are now no longer (for example, interiors within buildings that have now been demolished or redesigned completely), and those that were built purely to be ephemeral and stayed unchanged during their relatively short lifespan (for example retail pop-ups, stage sets, and exhibitions). It is this last category and group, namely exhibitions, this essay will examine in more detail, as they uniquely have been designed as a form of parasitical interiors, moulding to their host location, creating an interior with a clear purpose of information dissemination, which then evaporates, leaving no physical trace behind. This ethos of 'in and out', rather than the 'stay as long as you can' mantra we as designers hope our interiors will adhere to, is what makes exhibitions particularly relevant in the gone-built genre. As the historian Paul Greenhalgh notes in relation to such projects, they disappear 'into an abrupt oblivion, victims of their planned temporality.'[5]

Exhibitions do, however, leave behind some trace from which important information can be discerned, be it photographs of installation, newspaper and journal articles, or archive drawings. Very occasionally an element of the exhibition will reappear later in some other format. To understand the nature of this type of project and its importance in our interior lexicon, it is necessary to analyse this residual material. For gone-built projects archives are extremely important in gaining an understanding of them. As the political scientist and academic Lavinia Stan notes, they are invaluable for 'data gathering for case study research that is focused on the past and its impact on the present.'[6] She also reminds us to remember that 'the reality as reflected in the archived records might differ from the reality as experienced by the people who lived it.'[7] Indeed, that is a point to consider in relation to our understanding of any interior where we have not been directly involved in its creation or visited it. This essay uses the exhibitions of the Aalto Atelier to consider the gone-built under the categories of interior spolia, indicative representation, and propaganda, the meanings of which will be exposed in later sections of this essay. Their archive, now managed by the Alvar Aalto foundation, contains the material explored.

The approach undertaken by the Aalto Atelier has been chosen to explain these categories due to the practice's longevity and position in architecture and interior design history. It was established in 1923 and operated in Finland until it closed in 1994. Its three principals Alvar (1898–1976) and his wives Aino (1894–1949) and Elissa (1922–94), ran one of the most significant architecture and design practices of the modern movement, and the most iconic practice to emerge from Finland. Their work in various fields including housing, public buildings, and churches is well documented in numerous books. Alongside the practice, Aino and Alvar, in collaboration with fellow Finns the art collector and patron Maire Gullischen and art historian and writer Nils Gustav Hahl, also established the interior company Artek in 1935. An acronym for art and technology, the aim of the company was to 'engage in furniture trade and promote, through exhibitions and other means, modern housing culture.'[8] Aino held the role of managing director until her death, and the company is still operating to this day.

It is this timespan, and the fact that exhibitions were not their main project field, that allows us to investigate how they evolved this type of project throughout the practice's existence. While their projects such as Paimio Sanitorium (1929–33), the Church of the Three Crosses (1956–58), and Finlandia Hall (1971) are internationally recognised, their exhibition projects are not explored in any detail. The Aaltos engaged with exhibition design in various ways. Initially, the focus was on elements of National Fairs in Finland. This then developed to pavilions representing Finland at the World's Fairs in Paris (1937) and New York (1939), along with the Venice Biennale (1956). The practice also undertook several retrospectives of their and Artek's work in various countries, along with exhibitions focusing on the themes of standardisation and housing. Their projects also formed elements within travelling exhibitions of Finnish architecture, run by the Museum of Finnish Architecture (MFA) and other organisations.

The question of why this aspect of their work is less explored is simple to respond to. Social media, the internet, and various forms of printed publication allow the dissemination of imagery and information of interiors to be easily accessible. However, if there is not a physical space to visit and engage with, or we cannot even read about someone else's recent experience in that space, then these projects become less accessible, or of less interest. By understanding the following elements of the gone-built in this context, we can consider how as designers we can learn about elemental reuse, design experimentation, and ways to expose our ideas through the media from these types of projects.

interior spolia

The architectural term spolia relates to the reuse of stone from one building to another, often as the result of pillage and plunder, reducing what was once a building to building materials to be used to construct something new.[9] However, we rarely apply this term in relation to interiors, when in fact we are reusing and adapting existing elements in an interior context much more often than we might in the shell of a building. As British interior educators Graeme Brooker and Sally Stone note, 'spolia is an overlooked and meaningful tactic for reuse and is a method of designing that is particular and unique to the creation of interior space.'[10] Therefore, within interiors the concept of spolia is a less violent phenomenon, and one that still has an important contemporary relevance.

Within exhibition design, the reuse and reinvention of display stand systems and cases is not uncommon. Public institutions, such as galleries and museums, often have an in-house kit of parts that can be adapted for temporary exhibition, as opposed to stands that are designed for permanent displays or specific objects. In these situations, these modular elements play a secondary role to the exhibition's focus and the related artefacts on show. There is also the scenario where an exhibition may travel to more than one venue, and as such display elements are installed in various

venues with different spatial layouts. The contents will also undergo some form of rearrangement within the overall exhibition design, due to variations in room formats between venues. While the contents may be the same, the presentation changes and this alters how visitors experience and respond to it. However, there is a more specific feature of interior spolia that the gone-built can contain within the exhibition context, and that is an element that reappears in other situations, and in doing so gives us a sense of its original use, but not always successfully.

This phenomenon can be explained, in relation to the Aaltos' work, through the example of a column from their Finnish pavilion at the Paris World's Fair of 1937. World's Fairs first came to international attention in 1851 with the Great Exhibition in London. This idea of taking a large area of a city and inviting different nations to build pavilions to showcase their identity through trade and national themes continues to this day with international Expos. These types of exhibitions usually have an overall theme the exhibitors respond to in their designs and content. In 1937, this theme was *Art et Techniques dans la vie moderne* (Art and technology in modern life). As well as designing the pavilion, the Aaltos were also responsible for the interior design and curation of the exhibition within it. Their brief was to present an overall cultural picture of Finland through export trade promotion.[11] The Finnish pavilion was located by the Trocadero in central Paris, on the other side of the River Seine from the Eiffel Tower. Situated on a sloping site with trees to the south of the Palais de Chaillot, the resultant two-storey building followed the contours of the ground, sitting between the trees and engaging visitors with both the interior and exterior. Built entirely of timber, it was a series of spaces connected by colonnades and mezzanines, conveying the essence of Finland not just in its form but also in its materiality.

A review of remaining photographs of the exhibition show there were several different column designs used in the pavilion. They are all made of wood, and clearly demonstrate a design evolution by Alvar and Aino of the timber column from raw trunk to modernist structural form. With these designs they have suggested their own classical order. This essay focuses on the most refined of these orders. As the drawing shows, it was formed from a central section of boxwood, with Douglas fir forming the feature fins [Fig. 01].

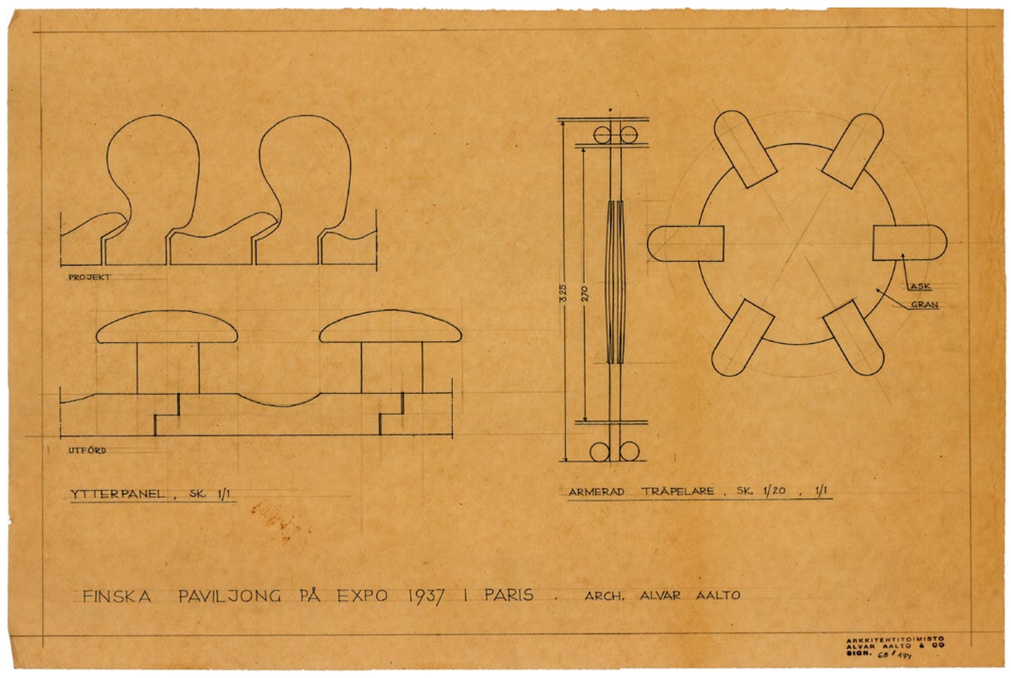

Figure 01.
Drawing of the column in elevation and plan on right-hand side of the sheet. Drawing reference 68-174. With permission from the Alvar Aalto Foundation.

Columns like this can clearly be seen in this photograph of the exhibition in use, as part of the internal courtyard colonnade structure [Fig. 02].

Figure 02.
Close up of columns on the colonnade canopy in Finnish Pavilion at the Paris World's Fair 1937. Photograph reference 68-06-031. With permission from the Alvar Aalto Foundation.

Once the exhibition closed the pavilion was dismantled, and there are no real records of what happened to it. However, one of these columns has reappeared in several exhibitions by the Aaltos since. The first was the twenty-five-year retrospective of the practice's work entitled 'Alvar and Aino', which was held in 1947 in the *Taidehalli* (Art Hall), in Helsinki. Here we see it as part of a wider display about the pavilion [Fig. 03].

It is located between two display boards, each displaying photographs of the pavilion. It has been mounted on a small, square stand so it can be exhibited vertically. Behind it is a mocked-up panel of the main pavilion cladding. In this context, the interior spolia function still has some reference to the original function; however, the format of presentation focuses more on its materiality than its function in the original pavilion. As such it feels more like a mood board than a 1:1 part of the building. When it next appeared in public it was displayed in a different scenario.

In 1965–66, a retrospective exhibition of the practice's work was held in the Palazzo Strozzi in Florence. The exhibition was designed in conjunction with the Italian architect, and previous Atelier employee in the 1950s, Leonardo Mosso.[12] We can see the column displayed in a space created within the gallery from plywood display boards for walls and timber planking for the ceiling. It is between some photographs and a plan of the atelier's Maison Carré (1956–63) and a display of light fittings designed by the Aaltos [Fig. 04].

Figure 03.
Column on display as part of the Alvar and Aino retrospective exhibition at the Taidehalli, Helsinki, 1947. Photograph reference Akn 15-8. With permission from the Alvar Aalto Foundation.

Figure 04.
Column exhibited as part of the Alvar Aalto exhibition at the Palazzo Strozzi, Florence 1965–66. Photograph reference 105715. With permission from the Alvar Aalto Foundation.

In this setting it has more of a sense of being a structural element than it did in the 1947 exhibition. However, it still feels detached from its original context, as none of the photographs around it are of the 1937 Paris exhibition. Its role therefore, while appearing structural, is more related to the interior space Mossi has created than as a representation of its original use. The height and form of the ceiling in this part of the exhibition is like that in the original pavilion. As such, while reappearing in a totally different context, it still has a functionality in the overall essence of the exhibition. This is a much more comprehensive example of interior spolia, where the original is creating a new interior through its format or reappropriation and representation.

The following year, Alvar and Elissa presented a further exposition of their work at the Ateneum in Helsinki, this time designed in conjunction with the architect Kristian Gullischen, a previous employee

and the son of Maire Gullischen. The column then appears in this exhibition placed next to an iconic photograph of the clustered wooden columns in the pavilion [Fig. 05]. However, in this presentation of the column it appears as an afterthought, rather than a considered part of the display design. To present it out of functional context, that is, showing it more as a sculptural element than a structural one, weakens its relationship to the pavilion and in turn the design ethos of that building.

While a physical link to the original exhibition existed through this one element, when exhibited in isolation in later exhibitions it lost its original impact. It is therefore clear that gone-built projects physically change once the project is dismantled and removed. Within gone-built then true elements of the exhibition's essence, however small and secondary they may seem, are redolent of the original exhibitions. However, the column becomes a rather awkward object in its later uses, due to a lack of consideration in some scenarios for how this reuse happens. It is useful in understanding the scale of the original building, but even that is somewhat lost when there are no other physical expressions of the pavilion adjacent to the column in the exhibition. Within the context of interior spolia, the reuse of an element, regardless of the context, is only successful if its role within the new interior is well considered and resolved. In architectural spolia a piece of stone that is reused becomes part of a much stronger whole. With gone-built the element of spolia can diminish in impact, as can be seen in this example. Due to the nature of exhibitions, this elemental reuse is possible; you would not, for example, be able to remove elements from more permanent interiors in such a way, and if you were to do so then their reinstallation would likely be much more permanent and functional, such as a historic door being installed in a new space.

In gone-built projects elements of interior spolia are not subsumed into the interior in the same way that architectural spolia is. As designers therefore we need to be mindful of how we reuse these elements.

Figure 05.
Column on display in the Alvar Aalto exhibition at the Ateneum, Helsinki 1967. Photograph reference 107396-62. With permission from the Alvar Aalto Foundation.

Engaging with sustainable, reusable, and circular economy-focused interiors is vital in the interiors industry if we are to support the United Nations Agenda 21 on Sustainability.[13] As the architectural educator Simone Ferracina notes, 'the functional value of an object is not necessarily determined by its intrinsic properties (rigidity, porosity, weight, texture, etc.), but by the object's equipmental fitness – by how well it adheres to and augments an ecology of interconnected tools.'[14] The opportunity and success of interior spolia's ability to be reused is key to this, as the Aaltos' exhibitions have shown. Its relevance is more easily perceived by the viewer where it reinvents and reappropriates, within a comparable context. By considering this on the scale of interior spolia, then we can start to improve the balance between ephemeral materials and the environmental impact of exhibitions.

indicative representation

The second element to consider is indicative representation. This is the process by which aspects of the interior are manifested slightly differently to how we would normally expect them to be, but not so differently that we experience them disparately. Within exhibitions this is elements of display that have a specific purpose but are presented slightly differently from how we might experience them

usually, often in a way that hints at a reality, rather than presenting something exactly as is. This is where the timescale of the gone-built is important, both in duration of exhibition and the visitor experience. For exhibitions that are designed for a high footfall, or limited time for visitor engagement, how the key message is communicated is vital. To explain this scenario, the 1930 *Pienasuntonäyttely* (Minimum Apartment Exhibition) in Helsinki's *Taidehalli,* arranged by the Aaltos, will be used.

The themes of housing and standardisation were dominant in this period in European architecture, due to the need to provide better housing in the aftermath of World War I. Discussions around minimum dwellings were key to the agenda of modernists. In 1928 the *Congres Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne* (CIAM) was established, with the aim to promote the Modern Movement in architecture. Its 1929 Frankfurt meeting, to which Alvar was invited for the first time as the Finnish representative of the organisation, focused on the topic of defining the minimum habitable dwelling.[15] Then in 1930, the *Stockholmsutställningen* (Stockholm Exhibition) opened. Focusing on Swedish arts and crafts and home industries, it is recognised as the first European exhibition where the exhibition halls and pavilions were designed in the functionalist style of architecture. It was based around the three key themes of architecture, street, and home, with particular focus on new ideas around housing.[16] The exhibition itself was designed by the Swedish Architect Gunnar Asplund, a friend of the Aaltos. They followed the exhibition closely, and it influenced their own exhibition work, particularly the design of the 1929 Turku Fair, which they designed in conjunction with the Finnish Architect Erik Bryggman.[17]

Alvar, while very positive in general about the Stockholm Exhibition, was not so content with the interiors of the model dwellings on show. He felt the standard was good but that 'the furniture, its grouping, the lighting etc, has often not risen above clichéd standards of comfort.'[18] He wanted to present ideas around new ways of living to the Finnish people, in relation to layout and interior content. This was significant in Finland, as at that time it was undergoing a period of reconstruction following its independence from Russia in 1917. The subsequent civil war of 1918 had increased migration to the cities, resulting in housing becoming an urgent topic for architects to address.

In the Minimum Apartment Exhibition, Alvar and Aino were responsible for the design and furnishing of a kitchen, living room, and two bedrooms. The concept of indicative representation is evident in the way they designed these spaces. They created a display that allowed direct engagement with the ideas, but not exactly as you would experience them in a real home. Although the rooms were at 1:1 scale, the walls you would usually find in a house were not all there. If they had been, it would not have been possible to see the rooms connected. The overall flat layout was also slightly altered to create a much wider corridor between kitchen and living areas and the bedroom. This was to facilitate the movement of visitors through the space [Fig. 06]. While the experience was like entering a real flat, abstracting the visual experience in relation to the angle and depth of view across the apartment allowed the visitor to see all the elements together, thereby more easily connecting the experience

Figure 06.
View of Minimum Apartment showing the end of the kitchen area noted as keittio (kitchen) on the cupboard visible bottom left, with living areas beyond and the two bedrooms to the right. Photograph reference 103216. With permission from the Alvar Aalto Foundation.

in their memory. That it was not a real apartment meant visitors connected with the familiar and subconsciously filled in the gaps of the unfamiliar. In the bedroom areas, for example, full-size windows were installed in walls that were built to waist height [Fig. 07]. This allowed multiple visitors to view the proposals without going into the spaces, and also flow smoothly around them. This installation is manipulative in that it makes the reality of a 50–60 sqm apartment seem much more open as the walls are not presented as the barriers they would be.[19]

What the Aaltos have also done with this form of indicative representation, with the dominance of the window in the space, is to engage us with the idea of light in the room. They have managed in this one simple move to restore significance to the window, altering it from being an absence in a wall, as described by Pallasmaa, to a key element of focus of light and transparency.[20]

With the Aaltos, though, this style of presentation is not a one-off occurrence. What we are seeing experimented with here in the Minimum Apartment Exhibition is this idea that visitors' engagement from above connects them directly with the exhibit and in doing so creates an instant memory of the space. You are immediately invited to engage, even before you are physically in front of that element of the exhibition. They were to use this idea in later exhibitions such as the Paris World's Fair in 1937 [Fig. 08] and the Artek Pavilion at the City of Hedemora, in Sweden's 500th Anniversary Fair in 1946 [Fig. 09].

Using voids in interiors to provide views to other areas of the exhibition can also be seen in permanent gallery spaces, such as the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. As Psarra notes, the use of atriums, walkways, and cut outs in floors reveals to the visitor to the space like a 'three-dimensional map.'[21] In the Minimum Apartment Exhibition, the Aaltos are doing this not to the building, or indeed the interior, but the exhibit itself. Just as the phenomena of interior spolia explored

Figure 07.
View into the bedroom areas of apartment at the Minimum Housing Exhibition, Helsinki 1930, showing possible furniture layouts. Photograph reference 103215. With permission from the Alvar Aalto Foundation.

Figure 08.
View from upper level of the Finnish pavilion at the Paris World's Fair 1937, looking down into room layouts below. Photograph reference 68-006-037. With permission from the Alvar Aalto Foundation.

the removal of an element and its relocation impacting memory and connections, in this element of indicative representation, it is the manipulation of aspects of the element in its original form that creates a memory for the visitor. For exhibitions like this that focused on the domestic interior, it was a very important social message the Aaltos were getting across. Its aim was to encourage people to live in a new way, one that would benefit not just them but also the Finnish nation in its reconstruction. It also creates a format that can be evolved within later exhibitions to continue this

response from visitors. This creation of reality from the unreal is not something that can happen in more permanent built interiors.

propaganda

The final element considered in this essay is propaganda. While the term itself, in the early part of the twentieth century, was commonly associated with specific organisational doctrines and the deliberate spreading of harmful information, Aino and Alvar were not considering it in those ways, nor were they part of those ideologies. For the Aaltos, the term propaganda, in this context, refers to their way of promoting and disseminating their design ideas, and their own image through publicity. That these were often tied to issues relating to the political situation in Finland and further afield was not something they necessarily shied away from. When they co-founded Artek, they were heavily involved in the creation of its manifesto, of which one of the three key elements was propaganda—the other two being industry and interiors, and modern art.[22] Throughout their time in practice, they disseminated their ideas through the use of imagery, both of their projects in publications and in the case of exhibitions, within them. Alvar had close connections with architectural journalists and wrote for various architectural periodicals during his life. In this way he was aware of the power of the press and the opportunities it offered for the promotion of their work. He was very involved in deciding not only which photographs were taken of their completed works, but also which ones were used and where.

Photographs, on the surface, appear to provide us with an image of the exhibition; however, there is more to consider within that image. As the French philosopher and theorist Roland Barthes explains, the photograph is the result of three practices: to go, to undergo, and to look. For the image to exist it requires someone to take it (the photographer), something to be in it (the person or object being photographed), and someone to look at it (the spectator).[23] The Aaltos, especially Aino, were very engaged with photography from their student

Figure 09.
View from upper level to lower level within the Aalto-designed Artek pavilion at the Swedish city of Hedemora's 500th anniversary Exhibition 1946. Upper level exhibition of housing by Ernst Sundh, who also built the pavilion, with room layouts by Artek visible on the lower level. Photograph reference 101256. With permission from the Alvar Aalto Foundation.

days. The practice was known to manipulate photographs of their completed project, to show them in the best way. They became close friends with the Hungarian artist and photographer László Moholy-Nagy, with whom Aino shared an abstract style of photographing buildings.[24] When taking photographs of their Viipuri Library (1935) on completion, for example, it is documented that to give the right setting for the entrance, one of their assistants, Aarne Ervi, had to stand on a ladder holding a branch to frame the shot.[25] Here we clearly see them controlling the image of this building that was promoted to the public, who were not able to visit it. However, it is the view of photographs, relevant in the time of the Aaltos and today, that also needs to be considered. The American writer and critic Susan Sontag explains that historically images have always been ways for us to interpret reality, and as our connections to religious iconography lessened what then strengthened was our connection to other types of images, especially photographs in modern society.[26] In response to her thoughts on photography, the art critic John Berger elaborates by saying that although photographs preserve an appearance or a moment in time, what they fail to do is preserve meaning, as they do not narrate.[27]

Within the Aaltos' exhibitions photography occurs in two main formats: photographs within the exhibitions themselves and photographs of the exhibitions. These have relevance both at the time of the exhibition's existence and subsequently. They could be considered to have an overlap with concepts of interior spolia; however, their function, or indeed form, does not change. Once a preferred photograph of a project has been taken, it tends to get used every time that project forms part of an exhibition. In the second format, then, photographs taken to record an installation of an exhibition, once open, are really the only visual connection we have to these gone-built projects. It is important to recognise that photographs themselves, whether they be in historic analogue or modern digital format, are important conveyors of propaganda. As the architect and theorist Petra Ceferin notes, we receive photographic images without noticing, and they influence our thoughts and actions without leaving us much choice.[28] Propaganda is the last strand of gone-built to connect us to these projects from the past. By its nature it is also the most endemic and powerful, yet the one we tend to question the least.

Propaganda in the gone-built can be explained through Alvar's 1945 exhibition *Amerikka Rakentaa* (America Builds), which was held in the Ateneum in Helsinki. Here we see ideas around propaganda directly linked to actual narrative, as opposed to physical narrative, which interior spolia and indicative replication embody. This exhibition was influenced by the Aaltos' connections in America and the political situation in both that country and Finland in relation to the impact of World War II. For the Aaltos, this exhibition was both strategic and design focused. The exhibition itself evolved from the 1942 'Built in the USA: 1932–1944' exhibition organised by MoMA. Its purpose, as noted in the accompanying catalogue by the architect and MoMA board of Trustees member Philip L. Goodwin, was to show the excellence of modern buildings in the USA in that twelve-year period.[29] It was then restaged in a slightly different format in Stockholm in 1944 as *Amerikka Bygger* (America Builds). Overseen by the *Sverige-Amerika Stiftelsen* (Sweden-America Foundation), the aim was to develop ties between Sweden and America. The exhibition was split into five sections of display along with a reading room for the visitor.[30]

Alvar was instrumental in bringing *Amerikka Rakentaa* to Finland due to his connections in America and Sweden. The exhibition was supported jointly by the Finnish Architects Association *Suomen Arkkitehtiliitto Finlands Arkitektförbund* (SAFA), of which Alvar would become Chairman from 1943 to 1958, and the Finnish American Association. He had worked closely with America during the war in his role as Chief of Reconstruction Propaganda in the State Department of Information.[31] MoMA had also afforded Alvar and Aino their first solo practice show in 1938 with the 'Alvar Aalto: Architecture and Furniture' exhibition. The aim of America Builds was to expose America to Finland, but for the Aaltos this was a key form of propaganda. It exposed them further in their home country, where their reputation was already established, and in America where they wanted to develop their reputation further. Alvar wrote an article about this in the Finnish architectural magazine *Arkkitehti* (*Finnish Architectural Review*), which was highly illustrated and descriptive. Although the images were in black and white, descriptions of colours are noted under some of them, which is unusual in articles of this nature at that time. This supports an even greater understanding of what the exhibition was like, with the photographs on their own depicting an exhibition design composed of form, texture, and areas of intrigue. However, for the professional readers of *Arkkitehti*, this way of presenting the exhibition both in the flesh and in print was an important reminder of the impact of the show. As noted in the inner page of the catalogue accompanying the exhibition, its printing was made possible by sponsorship from key American companies at that time: Ford, Nobel Standard, Vacuum Oil Company, and Metro

Goldwyn Mayer Films.[32] This funding allowed for a much more opulent and visually engaging style of exhibition than had occurred in its earlier versions in America and Sweden.

We can see also the use of photography as propaganda within the exhibition itself in its design, and in the location and types of photographic images that formed the display. There is also a strong Finnish context explored in the design of this exhibition. The use of timber and reference to nature is evident in the wooden screens and planting used throughout [Fig. 10]. With this exhibition Alvar was not just promoting America in Finland, but Finland to America.

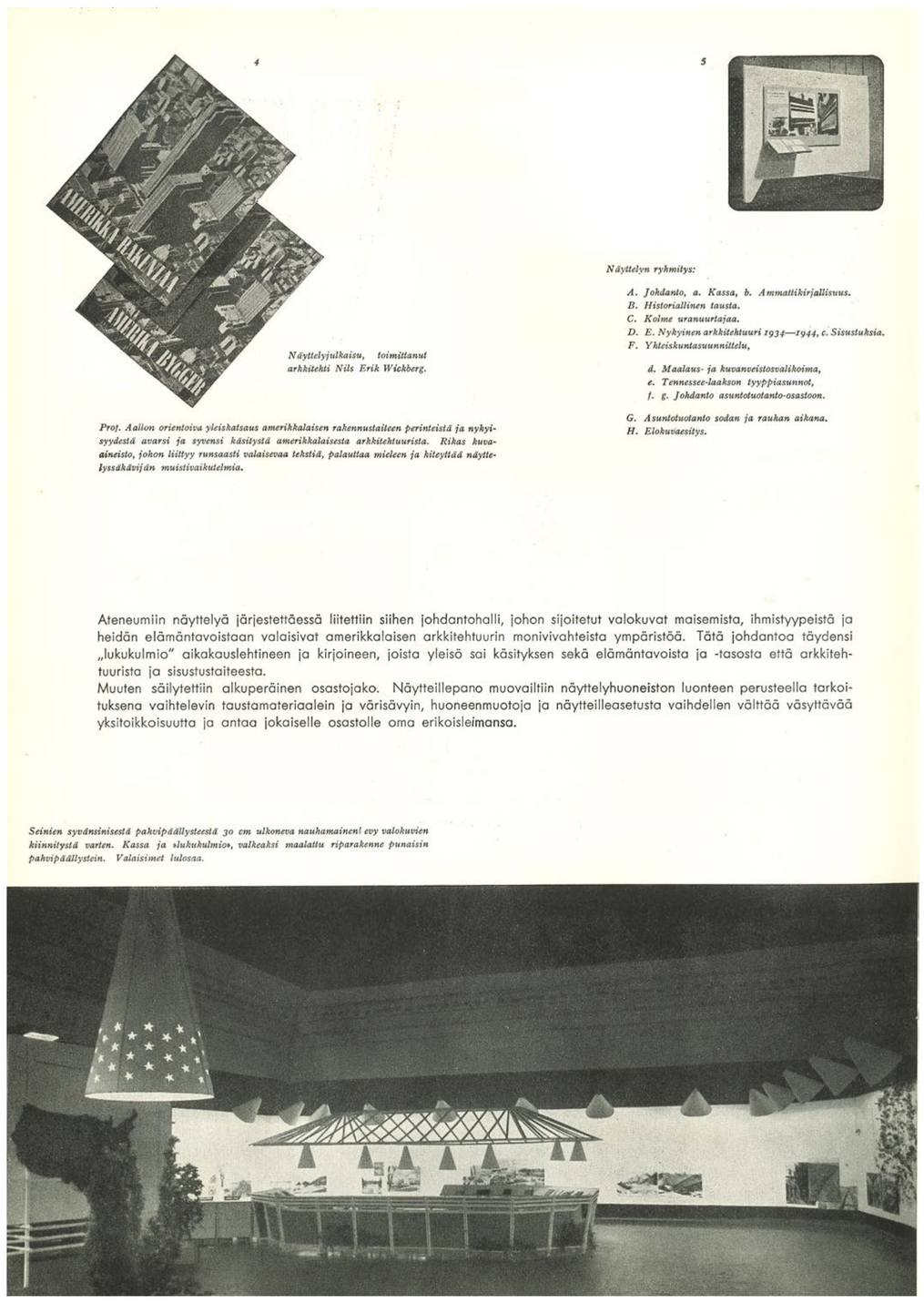

Figure 10.
Page 4 from article on *Amerikka Rakentaa* (America Builds) 1945 exhibition, from page 4 of *Arkkitehti* (*Finnish Architectural Review*) Issue 1–2, 1945. The bottom image notes, 'The deep strip around the top is blue, the central structure is painted white, with red infill panels. There is also a 30cm band within this for attaching photographs to. The light fittings are available to buy.' With permission from *Arkkitehti* magazine.

It is this calculated use of photography as propaganda that delivers the final element of gone-built and with it the ability to engage with a wider audience beyond the physical visitors at the time. Of course, this could be said about all projects in some way, but with gone-built exhibitions it is about creating an interior that provides impact, and exposing that impact directly through other media sources. It is an interior cluster bomb of information and narrative, and through the process of contemporary reflection, we can also engage with it as an interior with more to teach us about promotion and dissemination of ideas beyond its initial function as an exhibition.

The engagement of the Aaltos with publicity and image was evident in both the throwaway and takeaway elements of exhibition propaganda. When an exhibition has a catalogue, that is a takeaway element, bought by those wanting to remember or refer to the exhibition later. Even though these usually include high-quality photographs and text to explain and discuss the exhibitions' themes and content, rarely do they contain images of the actual exhibition. This is due to print lead-in times for publication, meaning the catalogue is completed well in advance of the exhibition being installed. The throwaway element is the publicity in periodicals and newspapers. This can have a more intense engagement, but for a much shorter time. It is also likely to be the format in which photographs of the actual exhibition appear to the public. For that reason, the design elements, along with their descriptions, are key to the propaganda associated with the America Builds exhibition. As with any travelling exhibition, visitors only concentrate really on the show they are seeing, not its previous or future incarnations. Most visitors would not have been aware of, or been interested in, what it looked like in New York or Stockholm, and this allowed Alvar to make the changes he did and to expose it in the way he did in the media. With America Builds, the timescales to promote the political message that Finland was now more aligned with America than Germany was key, not just to the Aaltos as architects, but to Finland as a country.

conclusion

In thoughts and discussions around aspects of interiors, there is very rarely a clean-cut way of categorising something or explaining its importance. We pigeonhole interiors in many ways and on many different levels. This is true of the work of the Aalto Atelier, where publication and analysis has focused on their completed buildings, especially those that are still in existence today. What this essay shows is that within the accepted—built and unbuilt, existing and lost, successful and forgotten—diaspora of interior categorisation there is space for gone-built projects. These are not once-built, and therefore have their own important place in the interior lexicon. It is their ephemerality and process of design we need to consider. They are projects that provide us with criteria and guidelines within which to develop our wider interior discourse around sustainability, materiality, and form. They afford us opportunities that other types of projects often overlook in relation to design experimentation within built projects and the changing impact of the dissemination of our work over time.

By comprehending the challenges of interior reuse in relation to spolia we can understand that, unlike in architecture when an element becomes subsumed by the whole it becomes part of, then with interiors' reuse or repositioning greater consideration is required to ensure successful integration. With gone-built exhibitions, the element of interior spolia, due to the temporal nature of the exhibition, needs to be reused in a well-considered way. If this does not happen, then our comprehension of it is affected. Interior spolia within this context can easily fall short of its potential impact. This has parallels to Austrian-American designer Victor Papenek's ideas around the importance of synthesis in design to ensure a sustainable future.[33] Within interiors we need to consider this as the relationship of synthesis of interior elements.

In relation to timescales, it is the gone-built exhibition's predetermined lifespan that impacts design decisions. To engage large numbers of visitors and ensure they leave with a lasting memory of the exposition, then, as the Aaltos have shown, sometimes reality must be reinterpreted. In relation to interiors, they enhanced the focus on the interior by partially removing the perceived exterior element of the display, to allow the interiors to be easily viewed. In doing so, they exposed the importance of this form of manipulation, of space and visitor, within their exhibition designs.

Finally, the gone-built exhibition's relationship with propaganda has been explored through the importance of photography and the way in which images are used. Photographs taken of the exhibition interior are key to promoting it once it is open. The way in which Alvar undertook this, including a more interior focused description, means that even today we can understand what these interiors were like more clearly. This is of relevance when the exhibition itself has a more important message to disseminate than just design. In times of conflict, it exposed a way to signal a positive and focused message of change through the gone-built interior.

The gone-built has shown how ideas around interior spolia, indicative representation, and propaganda have assisted in expanding our understanding of this type of project. Analysing what has successfully, and in some cases unsuccessfully, come from the gone-built is a valuable lesson for designers. The temporary exhibition design projects undertaken by the Aaltos explored in this essay show us the importance of experimentation with design ideas, especially in relation to form and materials within our designs. They also demonstrate how to engage audiences with important messages through manipulation of design elements such as domestic interior spaces and new ways of living. These messages, while of their time, do have future relevance, and it is through retention of both construction information and as built information on projects that we create a wider legacy from which the history of design ideas, their context, and impacts can be disseminated.

For spatial design today there are lessons to learn from the gone-built in relation to how we engage users with spaces. They allow us to test design ideas in a way that other fields do not, and we should transpose that approach to the design process of more permanent projects. While the financial and, in some cases, reputational risks within an ephemeral project may seem less than in a more permanent one, we should not restrict ourselves as designers to experimentation in the ephemeral. Our ever-changing society will benefit from bolder moves within more permanent spaces. When this relates to reuse, then we must consider not just the reuse of existing elements in new work, but how new elements themselves can become future spolia. Considering the life-cycle costs of materials, and their ability to be reused is important. Alongside this we must also consider the usefulness of the element of the interior they are part of, so that functionally they become an integral part of the interior space in the future. Finally, our engagement with the gone-built must not end at the point of construction. We need to ensure we record all stages of the process, in particular installation and in use. It is the archives we create today that allow others to engage with our work in the future. Cataloguing our spaces, however temporal, through a variety of means, will create archive material future designers can engage with. We need to be aware of the role of propaganda in design to ensure when disseminating our work in publications, we are presenting reality and not a sanitised version.

The Aaltos have shown us how design experimentation within exhibitions that encompassed ideas around reuse and propaganda was occurring almost 100 years ago. We benefit today from learning from them, but we must also remember we have a responsibility to ensure future designers can learn from us. We must continue engaging with the gone-built, both as designers and researchers to ensure that happens.

acknowledgements

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author biography

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notes

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uncanny doubling: the architectural model explored through mise en abyme

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abstract

The architect and spatial designer necessarily treats as 'real' the unbuilt building latent in their representations, doubling their conceptual and perceptual understanding of what is simultaneously there and not-there. One form of architectural representation particularly embodies this nature of presence and absence—the physical model. Inhabiting the same space as the designer, the materially present artefact of the model projects a larger version of itself into the mind of its viewer, while maintaining its own small 'realness'. I suggest that in the reading of the physical model, and potentially in photographs and films taken from the model, this uncanny doubling lends an increased level of viewer spatial engagement than other forms of three-dimensional representation.

In my transdisciplinary art/architecture practice I explore the uncanny nature of the physical model in relation to built and unbuilt architectures. Through the employment of recursive models of models, of models, of models, I foreground the viewer's acts of perceptual construction, while challenging their understanding of what is 'real'. Forms of *mise en abyme* permeate cultural references, where doubling occurs and reoccurs, producing in their viewers that fundamentally uncanny place of the 'abyme', or abyss. I seek to make work that magnifies the viewer's uncanny experience through the production of physical model replicas of existing rooms and galleries, which each contain a model replica of the model, and so on, until the physical limitations of the material halt the recursive iteration. These pieces ultimately bring the built 'real' interior/building into the realm of model, of the unbuilt, but still physically, materially, and spatially present.

keywords

architectural representation; model; mise en abyme; uncanny; analogy

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preface: an uncanny analogy

As architects and spatial designers, we create at a distance from our final intended object. We make drawings and models (and many other things) that allow us to engage in the cosmopoiesis (worldmaking) that defines our disciplines, and this relationship between the representational artefacts we make *now*, to bring our spatial designs into being in the *future*, is described by Robin Evans as 'reversed directionality.'[1] We learn, in our training, to treat the imagined future that resides in our representational artefacts if it was already manifest at full size—discussing our as-yet unbuilt buildings, rooms, and cities as spatial, material, experiential edifices, manipulating their materials via their analogical equivalents in our drawings and models.[2] This 'belief' (or a suspension of disbelief) in the drawn/modelled building as building, not drawing/model, is a creative and constructive process, and necessary for architectural poiesis. Our perceptual, experiential engagement with the buildings, rooms, and cities living in our representations parallels the experiential nature of the constructed (if they ever *are* constructed) spaces themselves—the two are analogically related; they are the same, but different.[3] Analogical processes are 'at the core of cognition' and are what allow us to draw upon what we already know, and have experienced, to project something that doesn't yet exist, to begin to know it even before it is born into the material world.[4] Designing through a variety of representational types, architects and spatial designers overlay our conceptual and perceptual understanding of what is simultaneously there and not-there, what is the same and yet clearly different. Operating through such forms of doubling the analogical relationship between representation and building (perhaps like all analogies) is fundamentally uncanny.[5]

a spatial doppelgänger

One form of spatial representation, more than any other, embodies this uncanny nature of presence and absence—that of the doppelgänger of the physical model.[6] Inhabiting the same space as the architect, the materially present artefact of the model projects a larger double of itself into the mind of its viewer, while maintaining its own small 'realness.' This doubling may explain why photographs and films made inside a model can provide their viewer a higher level of spatial engagement than other forms of three-dimensional representation.[7]

> [W]hen working on a scale architectural model, the architect knows that it represents a fiction since the depicted building does not (yet) exist; but they will still select and transform their modeling materials as if these were the real building materials at the prescribed scale. The conflation of the faithful and the false, the real and the fictitious, is the locus of an architect's imagination, which must dream fictions in the space of reality.[8]

The model is a made thing (and I am referring to largely handmade models and do not include those ghostly apparitions of the digital model manufactured predominantly through 3d-printing); it is formed of materials that have been worked by hands—it has a relationship to the body of its maker/s and its viewers. It finds ways to mimic larger things, to abstract out the detail that cannot survive miniaturisation, and to pay attention to what will, in some way, however small, contribute to the *affect* and the *affordance* of the model as a whole.[9]

When we interact with a scaled physical model in person, we continuously negotiate the relationship between our (full-sized) bodies and the small space in front of us. If we are able, we might directly interact with that small space (with our large hands), but we *always* engage with it perceptually, to project ourselves into that space, imagining ourselves in a small body, empathising with the world inside the model.[10] We thus understand the model (and its represented space) from within and without, another uncanny doubling that we integrate into our understanding of the artefact in front of us and the large space it implies.[11]

> The dollhouse is a materialized secret; what we look for is the dollhouse within the dollhouse and its promise of an infinitely profound interiority.[12]

When a model replicates the space within which it dwells, these levels of doubling are compounded, uncanny analogy upon uncanny analogy. Dwelling inside a larger house, the doll's house exerts a tension upon the human that occupies this simultaneously exterior and interior domain.[13] Only later becoming toys for a child's imaginative play, early doll's houses mirrored the full-sized signifiers of wealth of their adult owners.[14] The uncanny 'doll's house' makes an appearance in fictional works, often as a double of the full-sized spaces in which the narrative unfolds. Edward Albee's play *Tiny Alice* (1964) includes 'a large architectural model of the very castle within which it sits [... and the play's] characters interact with this model; they wonder and make observations about it, referring to the model and the mansion as the same thing.'[15] In *Hereditary* (2018) director Ari Aster's draws upon Albee's work, conflating a model replica with the 'real' space in which it is housed, using tracking shots to move from scaled space to its larger version.[16] Aster's work specifically uses this uncanny pairing as a device for tension and evolving horror.

into the abyss

> Mise en abyme has become the accepted shorthand for referring to any part of a work that resembles the larger work in which it occurs.[17]
>
> The disquieting effects both of the uncanny and of the mise en abîme arise from a disparity between the reader's expectations and the experience of reading.[18]
>
> *[M]ise en abyme* unsettles the structure of representation, opening up an epistemological "black hole" that swallows certainty. An uncanny procedure, it induces in the reader a sense of vertigo, of gazing into the abyss.[19]

The *term* mise en abyme 'was christened by [author] André Gide in 1893 after a type of a heraldic escutcheon [...] comprising a small-scale duplication of its own emblem and contours' but the use of such recursive devices are 'as ancient as art itself', with 'examples of mise en abyme [...] found in medieval and ancient literatures.'[20] The French term does not have a version in English, but is roughly translated as 'putting into an abyss', and reflects the impact of such recursive embedding upon the reader/viewer 'creating an impression of widening and deepening a work, of opening a vertiginous abyss ("abyme") before [them].'[21] While scholarship of mise en abyme evolved though *literary* theory (despite first emerging in reference to a *visual* artefact), the form transcends discipline and media.[22] Indeed, this recursive form permeates

cultural references in a variety of media, from Matryoshka (Russian) Dolls, to the self-referential mosaic in the entrance to the Hagia Sophia, the play within a play in Hamlet, the Droste cocoa packaging, to Wes Anderson's play doubly performed within a film in *Asteroid City* (2023). Metareference theorist Werner Wolf advocates an expansion of the discourse of mise en abyme beyond the literary, to draw in a variety of forms, and argues that such medial inclusivity will generate new strands of knowledge that can feed back into literature studies, as well as contributing to their own disciplines.

Mise en abyme draws attention to the nature of the representational artefact, reminding the reader or viewer they are engaging with a made thing, and they have an active role in the construction of the fictional world that forms in their imagination.[23] Within a fictional work, such as a play (*Tiny Alice*), or a film (*Hereditary*), a model of a house situated within that house is a form of mise en abyme, the constructed model reminding the viewer that the play or film is also constructed. A model of a room within that room is also a form of mise en abyme, the model a reminder that the room is *also* constructed. A model of that model (and a model of the model of the model) manifests a version of the 'infinite regress' evoked by mise en abyme.[24]

You are reading words,
probably on a screen.

[redacted]

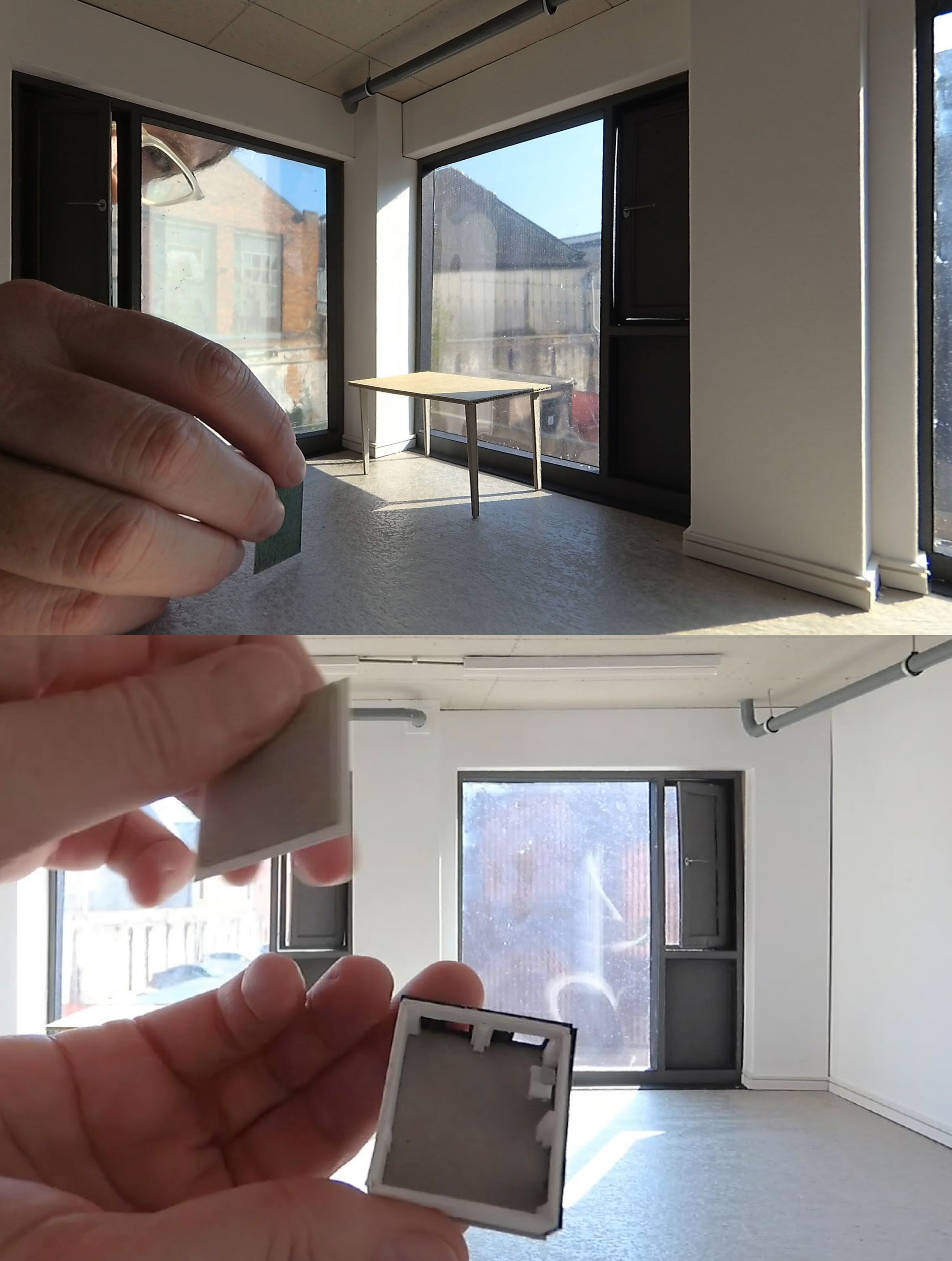
You are making
meaning through your
reading, building
knowledge through eyes
and brain, through
memory, utilising
the constructive
power of analogy.

You are going to be
looking at images of
models, reading these
images, seeing space
through the flat surface
in front of you.[25]

You will not be
looking at models
(you do not dwell in
the same space as these
artefacts) but you are
none-the-less having an
embodied experience, one
that is analogical to
the performative act of
standing before a model,
aware of your body in
relation to the material
artefact, projecting
your own body into the
small (real) space in
front of you.[26]

Small Studio F23 (2020)


magpie



@scandalous_artefacts And will your model include a tiny 1:225 model of your studio tucked into the corner of it?

— *I guess it must do!*

— *which then needs a 1:3375 model in its corner.*

@31_44 Is your world not small enough through isolation?

— *maybe I could live inside my model.*

@lucycarterart I thought this was an actual real life room!

— *it is, just a really small one made of cardboard!*

@redmond_bridgeman Is that you visible going up and down ladders from the window to the right?

— *sadly, no. It's on an adjacent property.*

@redmond_bridgeman I thought you were perhaps making a M. Snow tribute film - Up and Down....

@31_44 You need a 1:15 squeegee for those windows. Filth.

— *the windows in my studio are always mucky, so it is quite realistic! They have only cleaned them once in the last 18 months and they didn't do a very good job!*

@redmond_bridgeman I'm confused-which is the model, which is the reality …

— *ah... that's the question....*

@jolaw7200 Do you ever get confused?

— *sometimes when I glance into the model I get an odd sensation, looking into the small version of the room I am in.*

@brunosilvestrearchitecture Turn the lights on?

— *I never turn the lights on in my studio so these are fairly accurate!*

@orojoo Where's the mini you?

— *I only come in one scale.*

@jolaw7200 Oh my gosh! This can get confusing!

@redmond_bridgeman Is that a real (actual) dog or a model of a dog - woof woof…?

@twj.vwx Is there a 1:550 one to go inside of that, too?!'

— *it would need to be 1:3375 to be to scale! I think I will make a box to stand in for it but it will only be about 5mm on each side!*

@twj.vwx 'that's absolutely brilliant hahaha

@scandalous_artefacts 1:15 "Used for some animal figures and automobile models" Wikipedia informs me

— *I need some to populate the model! Quick! Surely that is an essential item that we can still buy online?*

@jamesrogers_artist 'I'm so confused what's happening, is that a mini model on the desk in the model, or is it the model on your desk in real life?'

— *both! It's meant to be confusing in just that way! And inside the mini model of the model is another model table and another model.*

@cyan_o_type But does the model in a model have a model in it?'

— *of course it does!*

@terry.howe2018 You're messing with our heads!

— *yes!!!*

@jolaw7200 iteration and recursion .... ad infinitum... road to maddness!

@redmond_bridgeman So now we are dwelling in your model of your studio?

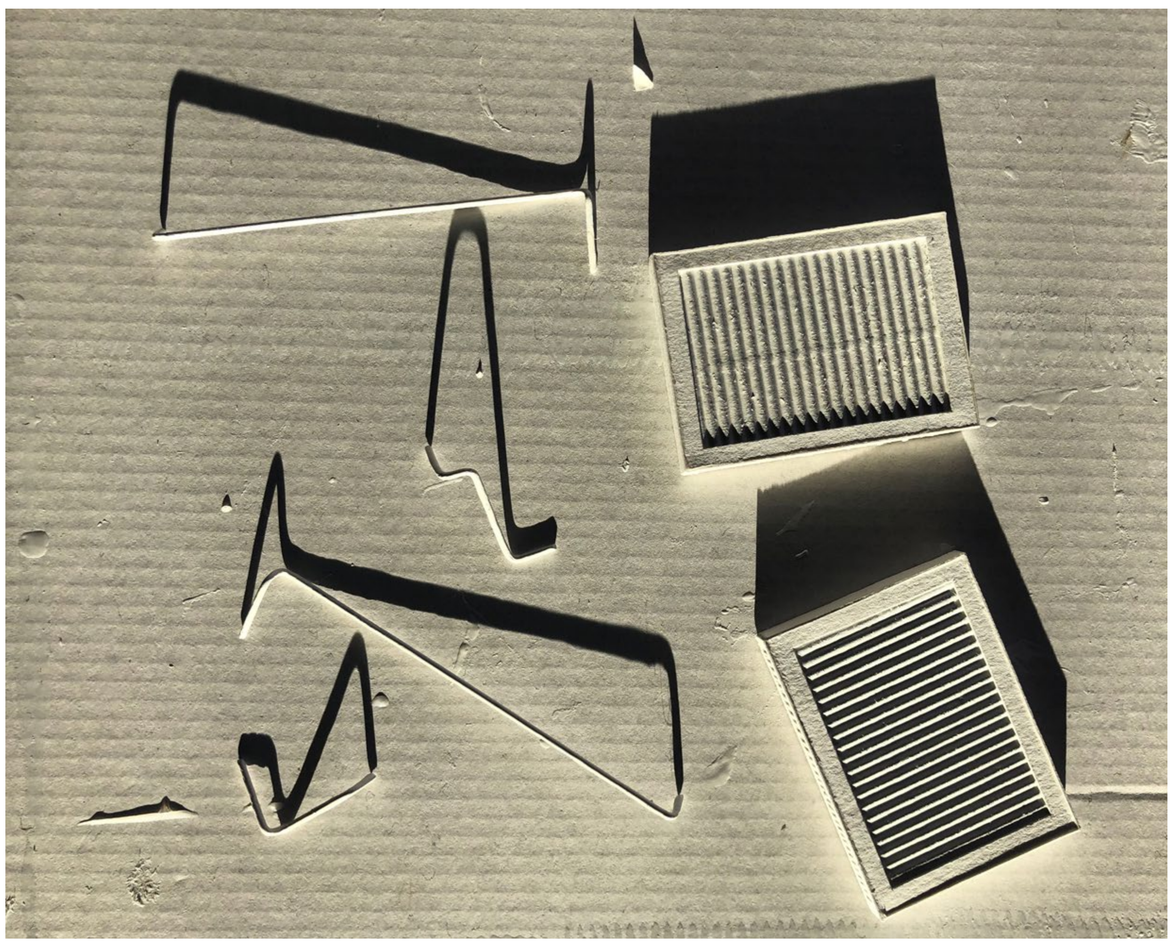
@jolaw7200 Gosh! Now I am really confused!

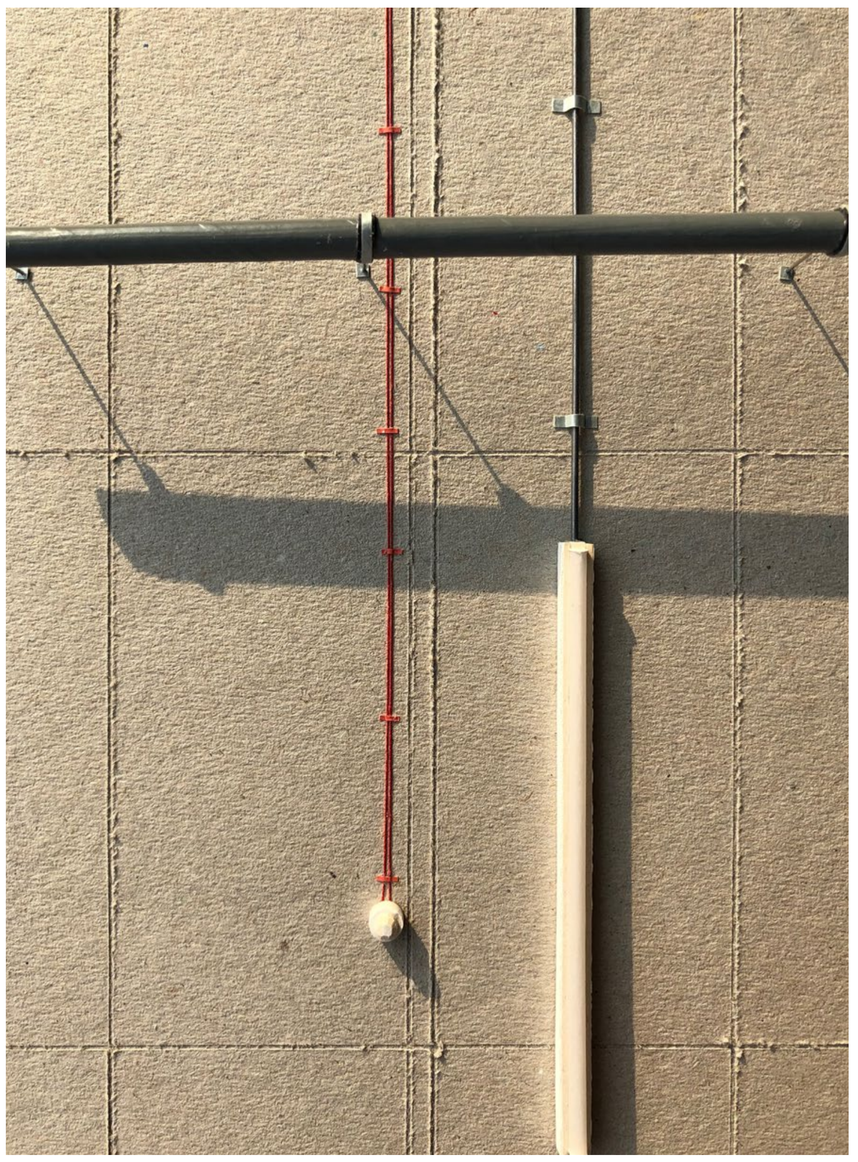
@kate_nicklin I am loving this! Every day it just gets better!

— *I know! The radiators will blow your mind (when I work out how to make them).*

@brunosilvestrearchitecture what do you have in mind? butter or cream cheese plastic cases?

— *actually, I have some fine corrugated card which I can paint white.*





@31_44 Ahem, Pompidou? Lloyd's?

— *yeah yeah....*

— *M&E was never so exciting!*

@cyan_o_type This is so good. I thought the first image was a photo of your studio!!

@illan_santos When are you doing model cyanotypes? Inside the model, in a model table?'

— *yes!*

— *the scale of the sun is whatever you want it to be!*

@jolaw7200 Oh my goodness! I did think to myself: I wonder whether she will make her plan drawers....

— *I am thinking I am going to make miniature versions of some of my cyanotypes inside the model itself, while filming my hands reaching in to do it!*

@terry.howe2018 Love this! Your arm takes on a Life of its own.'

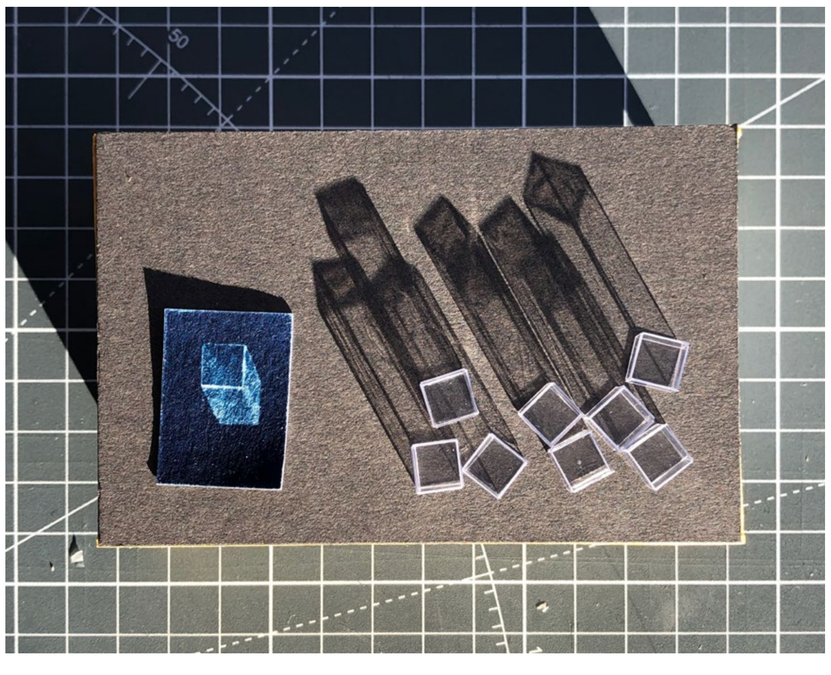
@joshuamcalister You're a giant now!

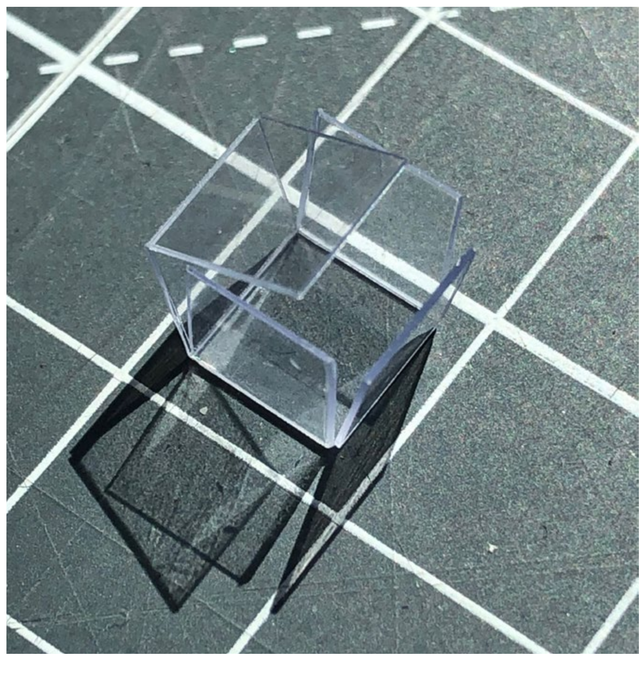
@mirroredimagesart Looks like Lilliput!

@bloemen_and_blue I'm absolutely loving your work in construction- your mini cyanotype the icing on the cake - fabulous. Love it.

@31_44 'our 1:15 M&E subcontractor was neater than your 1:15 picture hanger.'

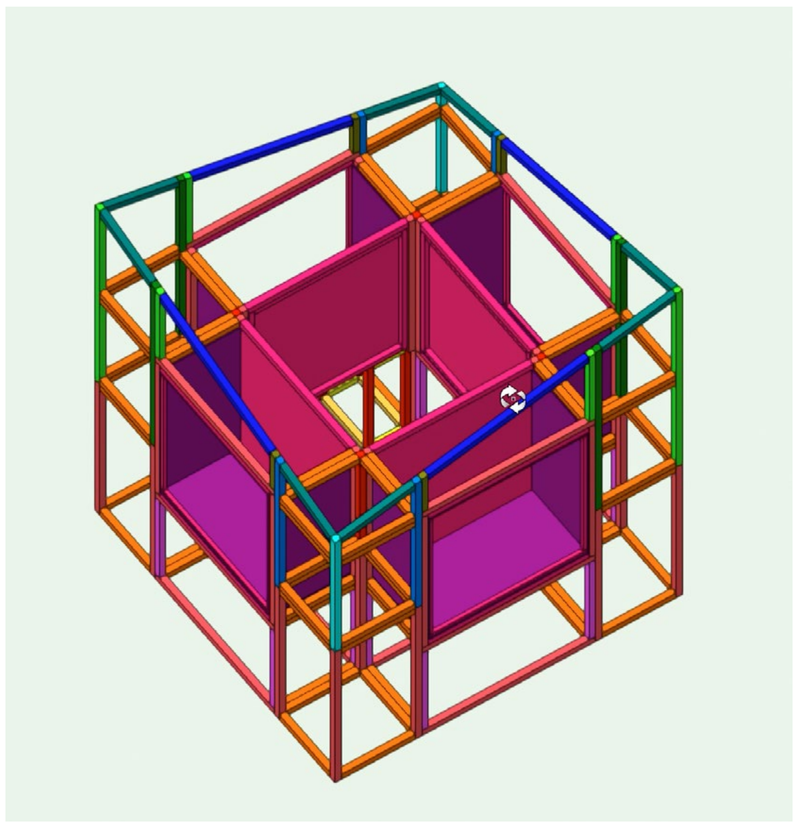
— *'I know - shocking, right?*





The Cube at Scale (2021)


29
14

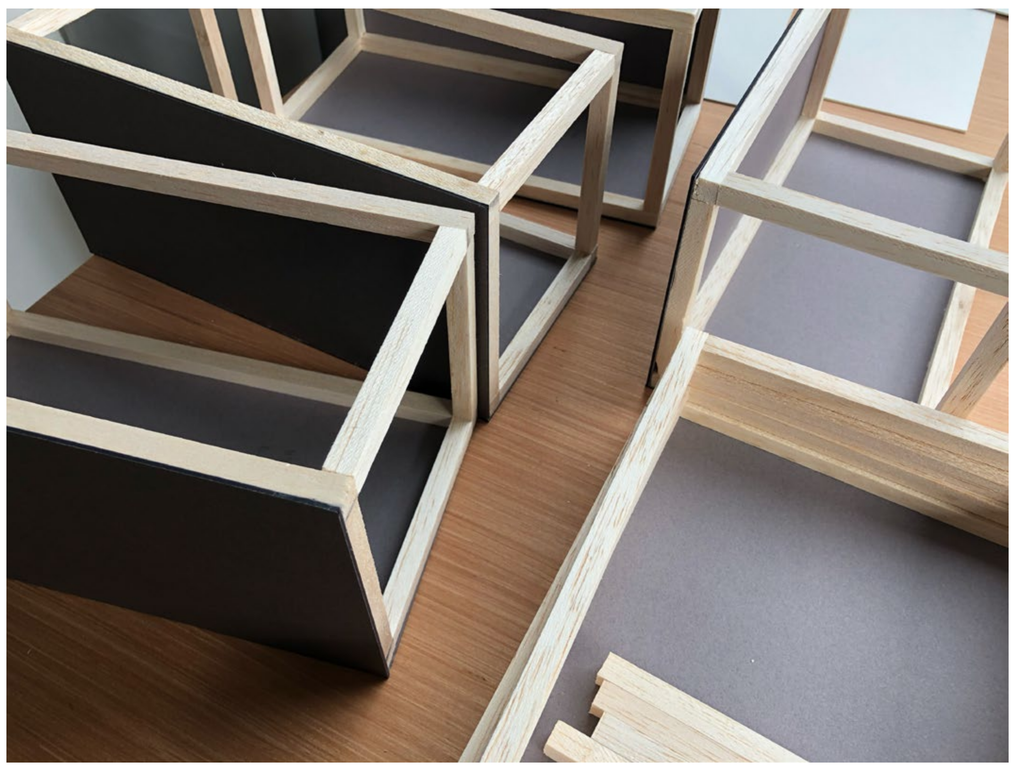


@darren_c_obrien Brilliant

@berntporridge An up-market revision of Mike McGhie's white cube at the Gulag?
— *I never saw that!*

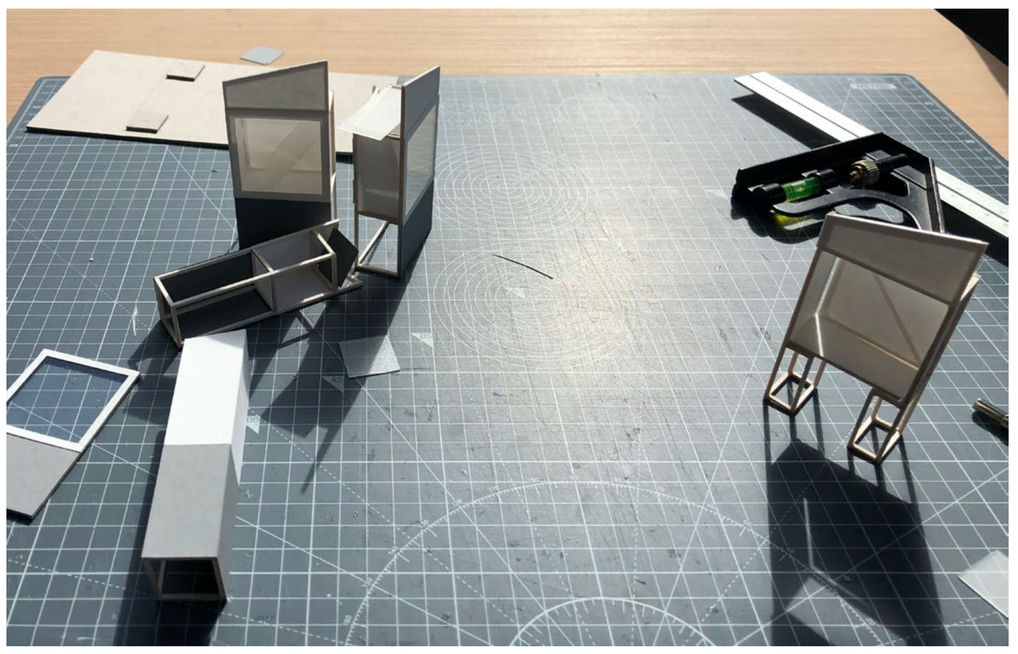
@redmond_bridgeman Love your cubby house!
— *ha!*

@jolaw7200 What's this about?
— *it will all slowly be revealed!*



@jolaw7200 Intriguing... the plot thickens.....

@seanawyatt Fantastic!



@andrewjhoulton And in many multiple scales.
Looking good
— *it's all about scale!*
— Certainly is and fee scales too

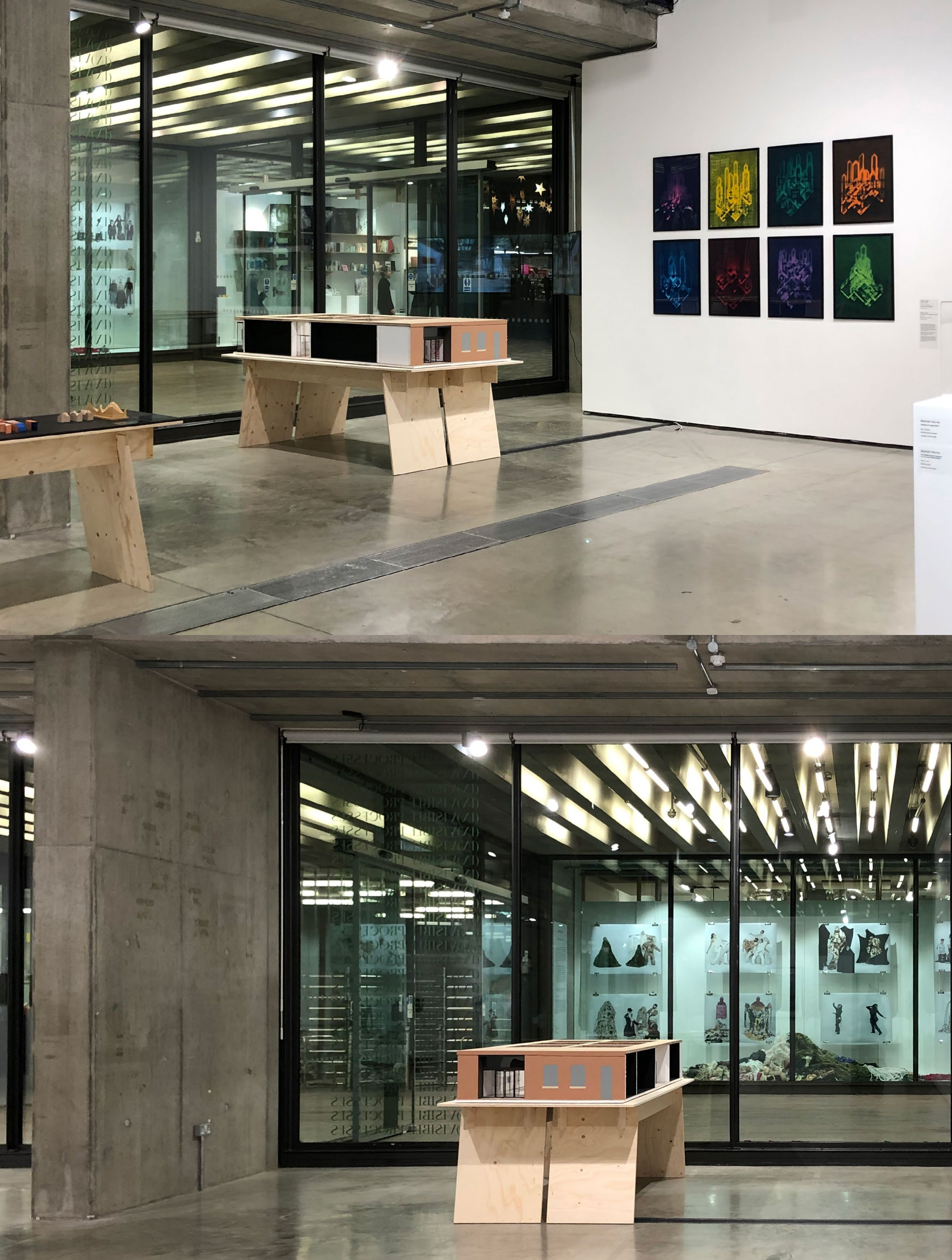
@alluvial_fan So cute the little one
it's only 2cm wide!

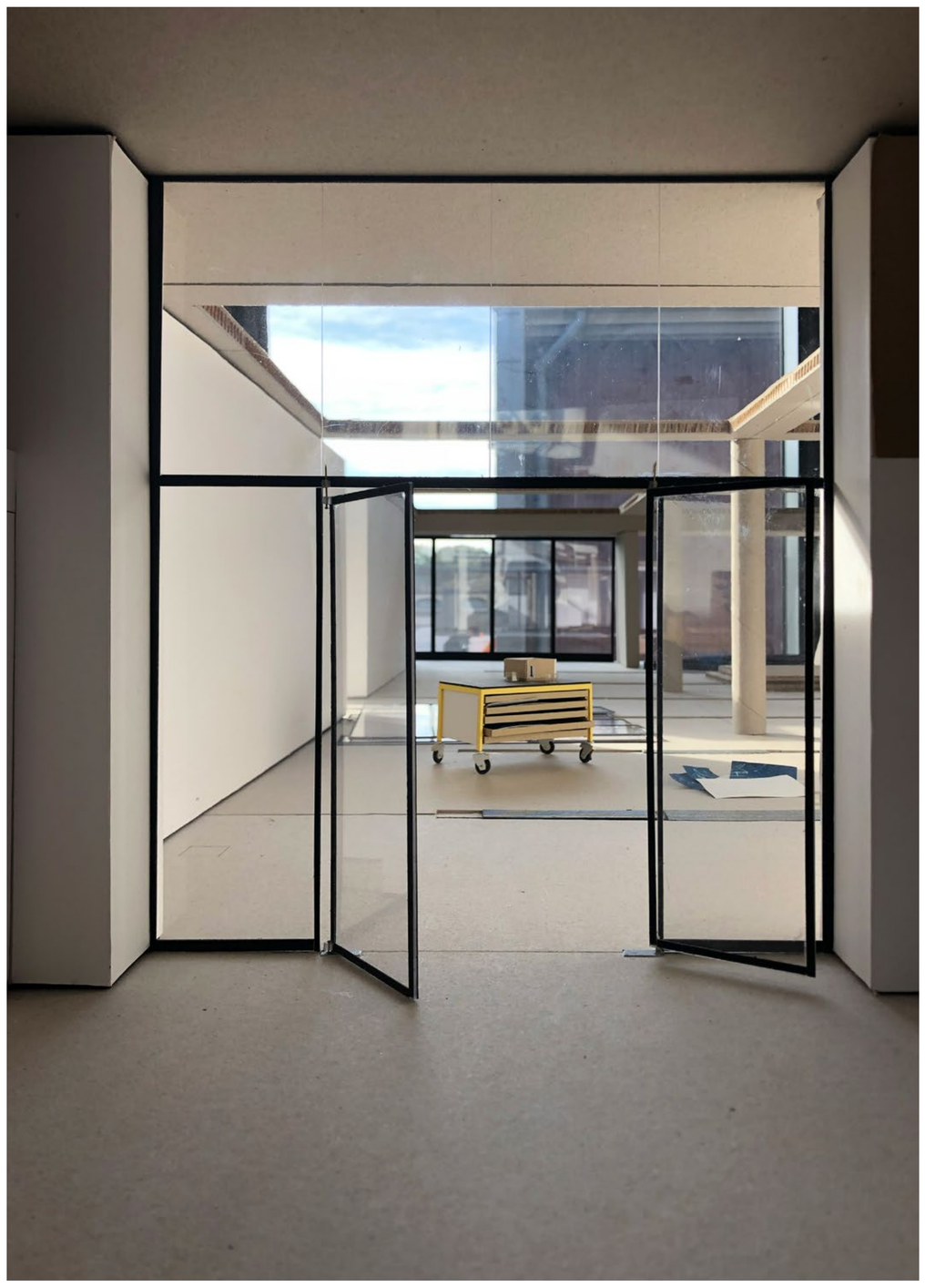
@31_44 It's massive!
— *1:5!*

@cyan_o_type Inception🤯
— *that is what's it's meant to do to your head!*

@jolaw7200 Can't wait to see it in the 1:1 gallery!
— *me too!*

Little Lethaby (2021)





@terry.howe2018 Love the first image, it's looks like a huge abstract on a wall. Brilliant!

@leslie.bill cool. just need to know size! :-£

— *the model is 1:15, with an internal floor to ceiling of about 280mm.*

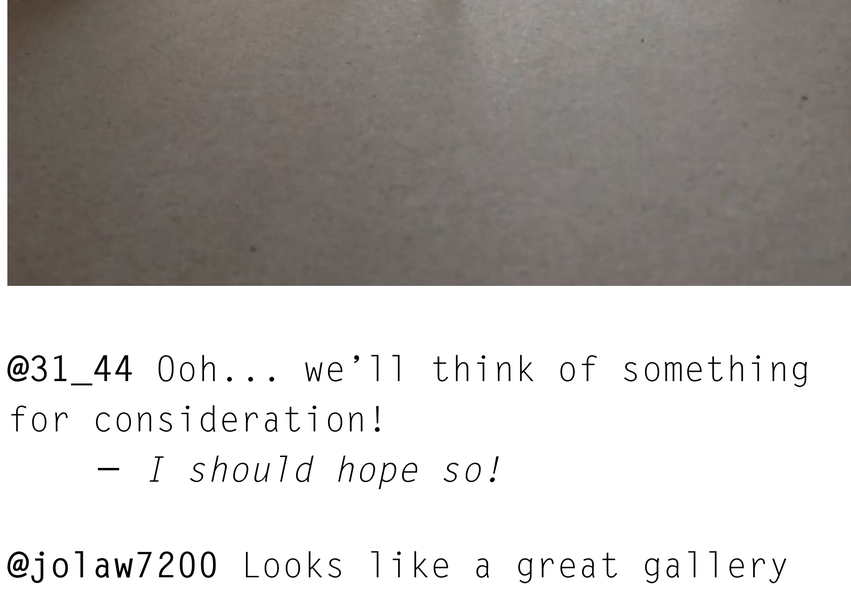
— ok let me get my ruler out and I'll send you some pics. I'm working in Hammersmith on Monday so could run them over to you then?

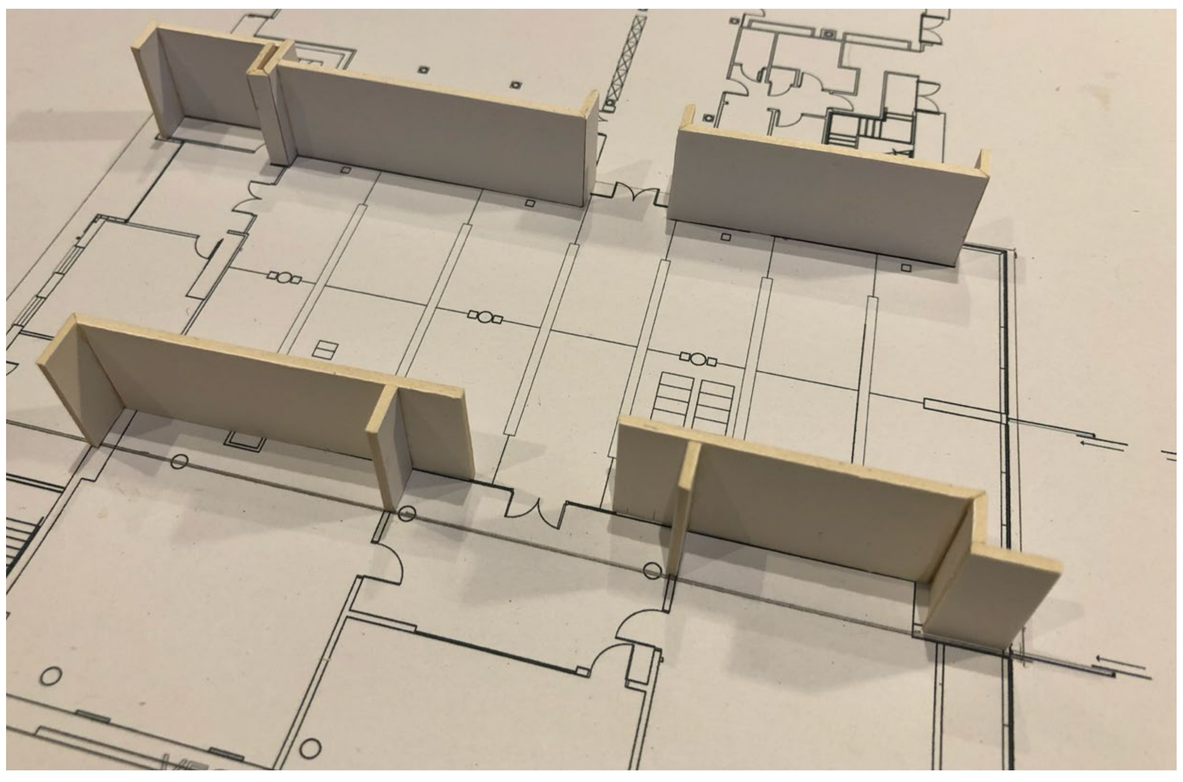
@31_44 Ooh... we'll think of something for consideration!

— *I should hope so!*

@jolaw7200 Looks like a great gallery space!

— *it is! Although the model is still missing quite a lot of things at the moment.*





@joshuamcalister Obsessed

— *it would seem so!*

@steve_kenna Awesome sockets!!

@cyan_o_type Urgh I miss model making

— *do you not get to do it any more?*

@jolaw7200 Can’t wait to exhibit in this amazing gallery!

@howlandevans a little Cuban clay dome! (@porticoandpatio)

@elizabethhatz Brilliant

@beth_george So cool!

@jolaw7200 I love this!!!!!
— *thanks for contributing the work!*
— my absolute pleasure!!! So good to see the prints exhibited again!!

@cyan_o_type Oooo. Can I do a tiny cyanotype?
— *yes please! I was hoping you might suggest that! You can do more than one!!*

@djhavercroft is this at scale too? I never know any more
— *it is at scale - Will made scale versions of some of his large cyanotype prints to go in the 1:15 model.*

@jolaw7200 A tour de force!!

@all_a_storm_in_a_teacup That is awesome!!!!

@cyan_o_type These look amazing!!!
— *they do, good job Will!*

@jolaw7200 What needlework!!!!!!
— *it’s magnificent!*

@violetamchugh It looks amazing! Watching your stories I really couldn’t tell if it was the model or the real size room! Such a great job!

@mqinhq I can’t believe it’s not real - real for my feet!

@darren_c_obrien Looks great Eleanor

@aoife_ni_d Excellent Eleanor!!!

@alluvial_fan Look so good Eleanor!

9 Columns (2024)

DEAKIN LIBRARY EXHIBITION

FORM / SHADOW / SPACE

ANALOGICAL PERCEPTUAL ARTEFACTS

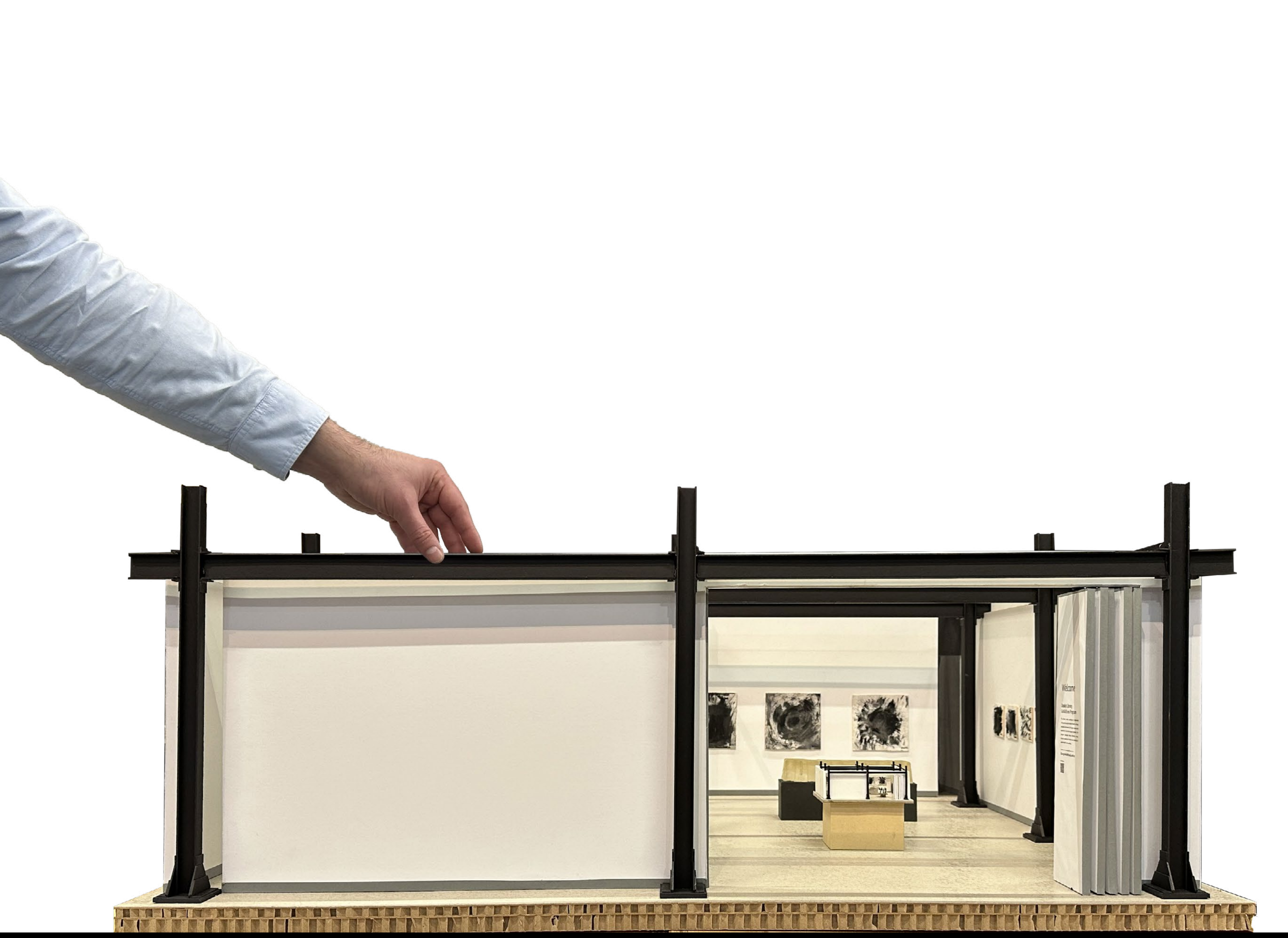
ELEANOR SUESS | MAYCON SEDREZ

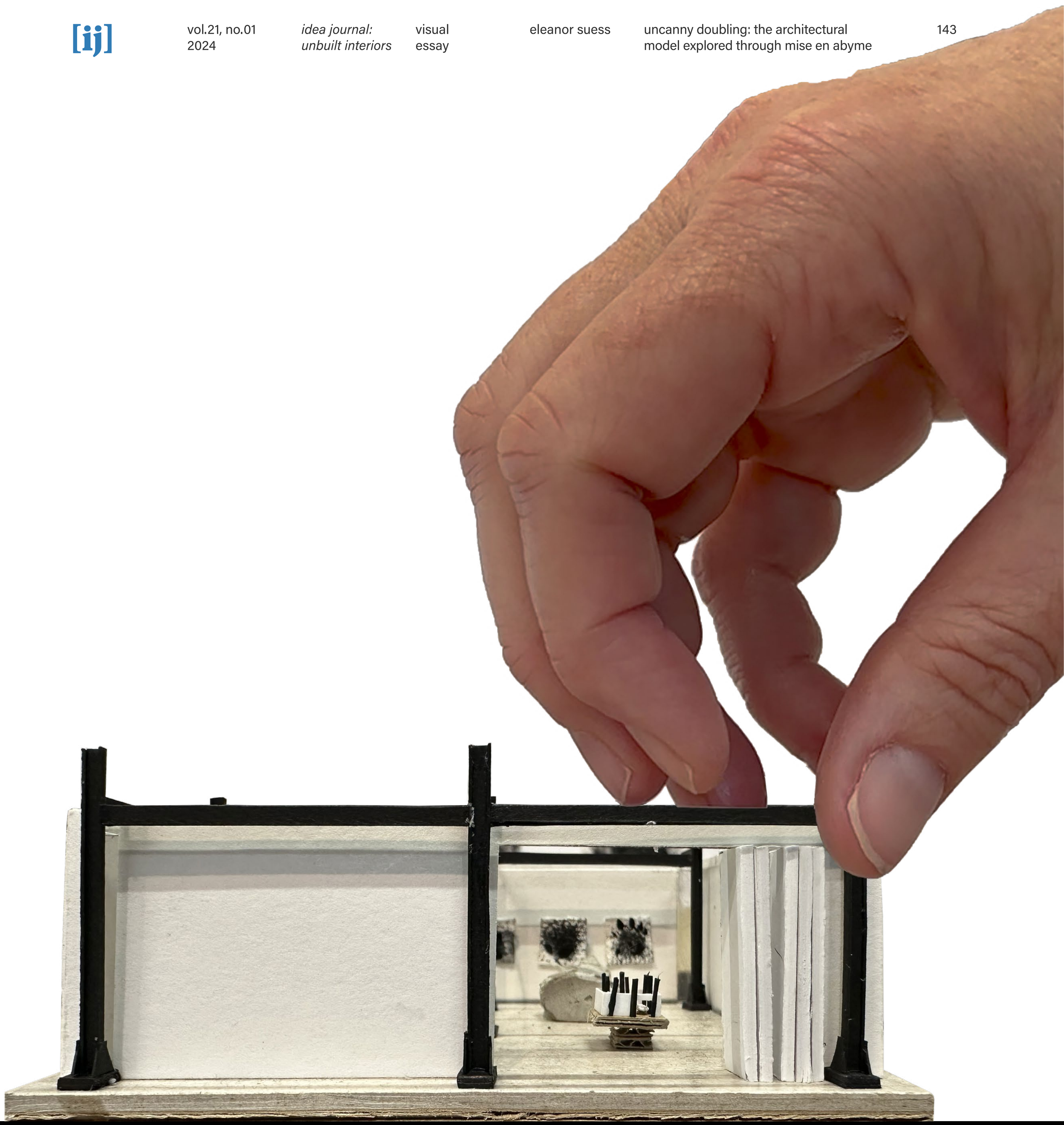
This exhibition showcases practice-based research by Professor Eleanor Suess and Dr Maycon Sedrez from Deakin's School of Architecture and Built Environment. Through their respective work, Sedrez and Suess each seek to explore ways in which artefacts of architectural representation induce spatial perception.

Sedrez works with two-dimensional media, drawing out architecture from memory by employing unconventional painting tools to investigate the generation of spaces and void. Suess starts with three-dimensional artefacts, using cyanotype printing to record the shadows of compositions of objects, and unsettles an understanding of scale through architectural models.

In much of the work, Sedrez and Suess present expanded forms of architectural representation, drawing upon techniques from artistic practice to explore architectural concerns such as space and void, shadow and light, scale, and time. Both artists intentionally question how images are formed through different approaches and how this perception instigates new architectural knowledge.


Welcome


Welcome

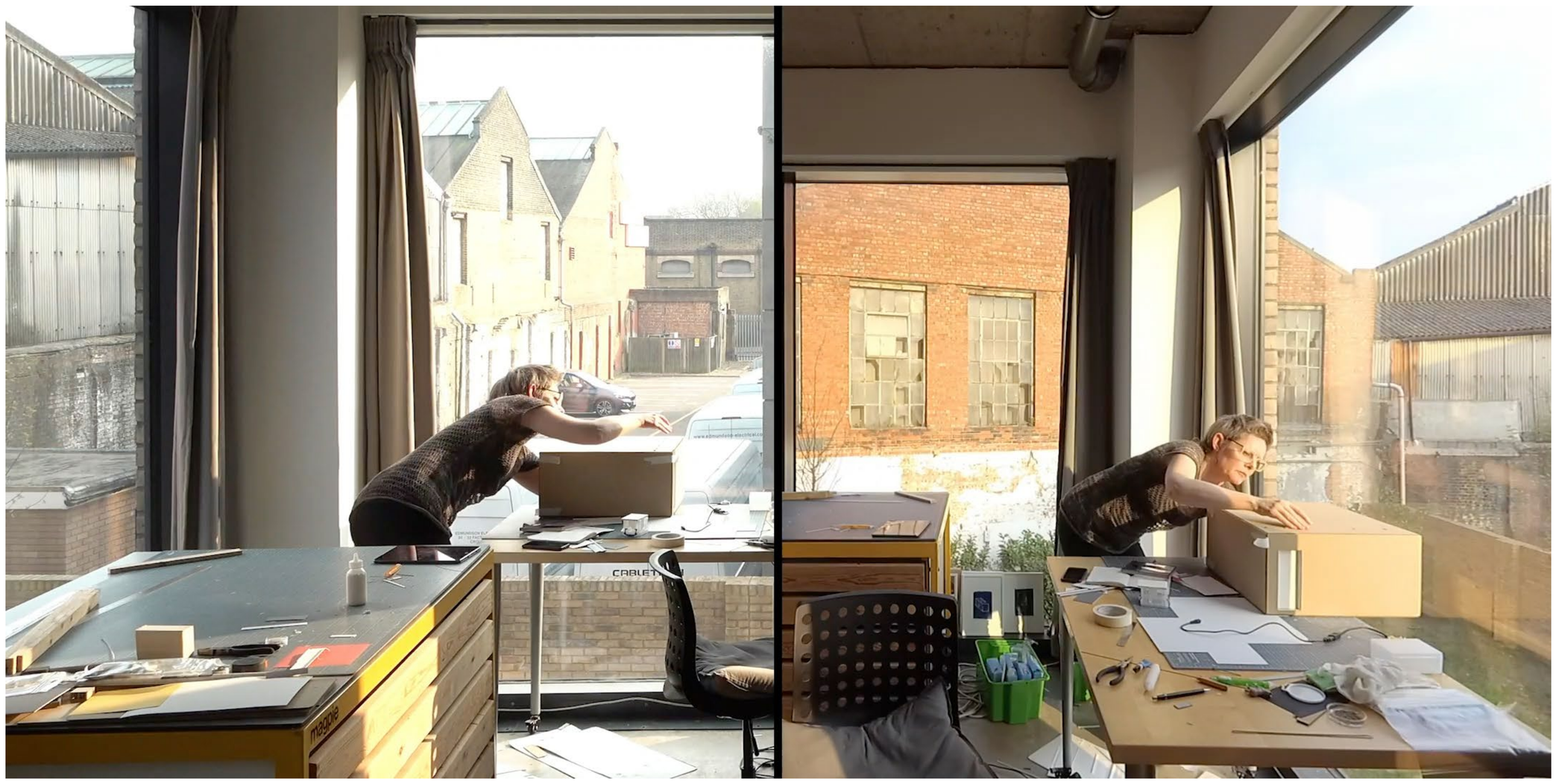


epilogue

The work contained in this document (that you are reading) is extracted from my transdisciplinary art/architecture practice, which, by its nature is also fundamentally uncanny—being between and also moving across two disciplines, looking back at one home discipline from the location of another, to be simultaneously inside and outside a discipline—'at once inside and added on, always already at home yet an outsider.'[27] In this practice I use mise en abyme as a device to draw viewers' attention to the process at play in physical models, to engage them with the small spaces inside the models, and to explore the uncanny nature of the physical model in relation to built and unbuilt architectures. Through this employment of recursive models of models, of models, of models, I foreground the viewer's acts of perceptual construction, while challenging their understanding of what is 'real', and seek to amplify the uncanny qualities of the experience. The *abyss*, in a mise en abyme, is a fundamentally uncanny place, where doubling occurs and reoccurs and reoccurs, invoking the void of infinity, but pulling us back from that abyss as the physical limitations of the model materials halt the recursive iteration.

The use of models emerged from a desire to develop my existing architectural filmmaking practice beyond its reliance upon existing built edifices, and, through this process of making, I recognised the relationship between the room I worked within and the model spaces I was crafting, understanding the performative nature of my practice, and its relationship to the performative qualities and potential of its artefacts. In the re-presentation of this work here, another layer of performance has taken place—new forms of engagement and 'reading' of the work have been performed (by you).

small studio f23 (2020)



Small Studio F23 was produced in the first Covid lockdown—a 1:15 paper and card replica of my South London artist's studio remade my space of making from within, using the limited supply of materials I had to hand.

With lockdown preventing the public exhibition of the physical work for the foreseeable future, I utilised Instagram as a device to 'exhibit' the work, including the process of its production, and thus have viewer input to the work as it developed.

Paired photographs from within and outside the model showed the miniature room first, revealing its made nature only after a screen swipe. Placed against the studio windows, the interior view drew in the world outside, the 15x scale difference being absorbed without notice by the camera's artificial eye.

Possibly prompted by @scandalous_artefacts' Instagram comment 'And will your model include a tiny 1:225 model of your studio tucked into the corner of it?', I produced my first version of a mise en abyme—within the model studio dwells a 1:15 replica of the 1:15 model (resulting in a scale of 1:225) in the same relative location in the studio window on a replica table. Not stopping there, this model of the model contains a 1:15 version of itself (now at 1:3375), also sitting on a model of the model table, again in the window. At this point the recursion halts—the final model of the model of the model is only a few millimetres on each side, without an interior of its own in which to contain its own replica. These layers of replication and self-reference destabilised the reading of photographs and films taken within the model—by containing a model within its own interior space, the model room is situated as 'real' via its counterposition to that which is 'made.' The model of the model of the model continues to disrupt the reading of scale and the understanding of real versus representation even further.

the cube at scale (2021)

In 2021, as we were emerging out of nearly a year of lockdowns, a collection of timber studs and cementitious panels that had been stored in a corner of the communal spaces in my studio complex became transformed into the *Cube Gallery*. An iteration of the late architect/artist Ken Taylor's 4 x m2 Gallery Pavilion, the Cube Gallery was placed in a double height atrium in the centre of the studio complex, to become a site for the studio tenants to share their work with each other.[28] While having a strong sculptural presence, the structure has a life of its own with its 'interiority' allowing artworks to change in the 1m2 windows.

The Cube at Scale (2021) responds to the artefact of the pavilion—the construction of a mise en abyme of recursive model replicas draws this original 1:1 artefact into the work. The first model was 1:5, filling one of the 1m2 vitrine windows of the pavilion gallery, and this scale afforded the model construction a direct tectonically analogical relationship to the 1:1 version—balsa was sawn and connected using nails and pins in holes made with a jeweller's micro drill bit.

As the recursion reduced the respective scales to 1:25, 1:125, and finally 1:625, the modelmaking process abstracted out the tectonics of its precursor, and halted at a version 4mm wide, this miniature enchanting to the human viewer but crude to the mechanical eye of the camera.[29] Each model was a model of the version one scale larger, not the original at 1:1, and therefore took that other model as the primary reference.

A relocation of this installation to another 4 x m2 Gallery Pavilion (at Ken's studio in Peckham) severed the link to the Cube Gallery 'original', thereby causing the first recursive element to be lost.[30] However, this move instead established a more complex relationship to the model-like artefact of the gallery pavilion, sharing many formal and spatial qualities of its new home, but with different external cladding materials (which changed over the duration of the exhibition).

little lethaby (2021)

Little Lethaby took the production of mise en abyme to a fully public venue—viewers' reading of the work conditioned by their embodied experience of dwelling in the same space as the model, within the large room that repeats itself at smaller scales directly in front of them.[31] Made for the *(In)visible Processes* exhibition at Central Saint Martins, the project included a 1:15 model of the gallery space, a model of itself, and a model of that model, and was positioned in the gallery by windows onto a public walkway.[32]

Dwelling in a far corner of the 1:15 model, a small video camera looks across the model gallery, towards the windows, capturing passers-by pausing to look into the gallery, peering into the 1:15 model, and the 1:225 model, and seeing the 1:3375 model.[33] A large screen broadcasts the camera's view, affording a view inside the model to both gallery visitors and passers-by, seeing themselves appearing though the model windows and roof cutaways. In addition to its own recursive replicas, the larger model housed a series of exhibitions of its own, creating an exhibition inside an exhibition, adding another set of referential relationships to the mise en abyme.[34] In the 'main' exhibition in the 'real' gallery, a series of eight of my large cyanotype photograms on coloured card were displayed—in the first exhibition in the *Little Lethaby* gallery a corresponding set of miniature cyanotypes on coloured card were hung in the equivalent location. These were not replicas of the large prints, but little artworks in their own right, produced from the shadows of small objects. These were joined by other small artworks made by others—a small clay architectural precedent model; a small original painting; a miniature knitted textile piece; scaled digital prints of Jo Law's *The Illustrated Almanac* offset lithographic prints; and replica cyanotypes by @cyan_o_type.[35] The exhibition also contained objects from my own practice—models made for *The Cube at Scale*; clear acrylic blocks for making cyanotypes; video work on an old iPhone screen; plaster casts of single-use packaging; and furniture from my Small Studio F23 model. Model hazard cones (made many years earlier by @cyan_o_type when they were one of my architecture students) appear throughout the space, which, along with my model plan chest spilling out its contents of small cyanotypes, imply the exhibition isn't quite finished.

9 columns (2024)

9 Columns (2024) was a 1:10 model created for a joint exhibition with a colleague, Dr Maycon Sedrez, titled *Form Shadow Space: Analogical Perceptual Artefacts*, which used our respective art/architecture practices to explore ways in which artefacts of architectural representation induce spatial perception.[36] Moving to this larger scale afforded this model three further recursive iterations—starting with the original space of the gallery their scales were: 1:1, 1:10, 1:100, 1:1000, and 1:10000, the last of which was a millimetre square. The scale and size of the original gallery allowed the second recursion to also hold its own small exhibition—Maycon produced versions of his large paintings for each of the largest two models, both spaces then becoming doubles of the original as sites of exhibition. This mise en abyme was placed in the entrance to the gallery, drawing viewers though one opening into a space through another, and another, and another, and then back out into the full-sized room they and the largest model shared.

The models are understood as made objects and as spaces in their own right—the enchantment by the varying technical intricacy of the hand-made models parallels the immersive engagement of projected spatial perception—these double readings paradoxically, uncannily, overlaid.[37] In this enchantment/engagement of artefact/space respectively, viewers relate their architectural elements to those of the gallery—the nine columns that structure all versions of the gallery ('real' and model alike) become sculptural figures in every iteration.

As with *Little Lethaby*, a small camera lurks inside the largest model, its linked screen positioned to face viewers as they approach gallery and gallery model(s). The live image also affords its own uncanny reading—seeing the screen before noticing the camera, a viewer would interpret the space shown as full-sized, and as they bend down to peer into the model their own face looms large in the doorway, and they become a Lilliputian giant looking in to a world too small for them to enter.[38]

acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the contribution everyone who has interacted with the physical artefacts of my models—whether in person or at a distance via images on screens—has made to the ongoing development of the work. It is only through the responses of others from their own readings of the work that I can understand the affect it might have. When you are playing with perception it is the active viewer who creates meaning and brings the abyss into existence—without them it is just a model in a model.

This essay has been written in parallel with its double—an essay for the *Routledge Handbook of Interior Architecture*. That essay focuses on the performative nature of the physical architectural model, and, like this essay, draws upon ideas of analogy.

author biography

Professor Eleanor Suess is an architect, artist, and educator and is Head of Architecture at Deakin University, Australia. She studied fine art and architecture in Perth, Australia, then London, completing her doctoral studies at Central Saint Martins. Eleanor has over twenty years' experience teaching and leading architecture courses and academic teams, drawing upon a decade's experience in architectural practice. Her research responds to her dual-disciplinary grounding and involves critical practice and writing in the field of architectural representation, with a focus on the temporal and experiential. Eleanor's writing and the artefacts of her practice have been published and exhibited widely.

notes

1 Scholars of architectural representation frequently build upon Nelson Goodman's discussion of 'worldmaking'—see: Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Harvester Press, 1978); Marco Frascari, 'Models and Drawings—the Invisible Nature of Architecture', in *From Models to Drawings: Imagination and Representation in Architecture,* ed. by Marco Frascari, Jonathan Hale and Bradley Starkey (Routledge, 2007), pp. 1–7 (p. 4); Thea Brejzek and Lawrence Wallen, *The Model as Performance: Staging Space in Theatre and Architecture* (Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2018), p. 1; Dalibor Vesely, *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation: The Question of Creativity in the Shadow of Production* (MIT, 2004), pp. 13–14; Robin Evans, 'Architectural Projection', in *Architecture and Its Image*, ed. by Eve Blau and Edward Kaufman (Centre Canadien d'Architecture, 1989), pp. 19–36 (p. 19).

2 Kester Rattenbury, 'Introduction', in *This Is Not Architecture: Media Constructions,* ed. by Kester Rattenbury (Routledge, 2002), pp. xxi–xxiv; Sonit Bafna, 'How Architectural Drawings Work—and What That Implies for the Role of Representation in Architecture', *The Journal of Architecture*, 13 (2008), pp. 535-564; Matthew Mindrup, *The Architectural Model: Histories of the Miniature and the Prototype, the Exemplar and the Muse* (MIT Press, 2019), p. 48.

3 Barbara Maria Stafford, *Visual Analogy: Consciousness as the Art of Connecting* (MIT Press, 2001), p. xvi.

4 Douglas R. Hofstadter, 'Epilogue: Analogy as the Core of Cognition', in *The Analogical Mind: Perspectives from Cognitive Science,* ed. by Dedre Gentner, Keith J. Holyoak and Boicho N. Kokinov (MIT Press, 2001), pp. 499–538. Analogy finds itself part of many disciplines—for an excellent overview of analogy as used across disciplines: Marcello Guarini and others, 'Resources for Research on Analogy: A Multi-Disciplinary Guide', *Informal Logic,* 29 (2009), pp. 84-197.

5 Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny* (Penguin, 2003 [1919]); Ernst Jentsch, 'On the Psychology of the Uncanny [1906]', *Angelaki,* 2 (1997), pp. 7-16; for a thorough overview on the ideas and history of the uncanny, see Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester University Press, 2003).

6 Thea Brejzek and Lawrence Wallen, 'Architecture, Model, Performance', *E-flux Project,* On Models, a collaboration between e-flux Architecture and the Museum of Contemporary Art Toronto (2022) <https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/on-models/489648/architecture-model-performance/> [accessed 10 December 2024] (p. 2).

7 Jamie Fobert, 'Working in Architecture' (Lecture, University of Toronto, 2016).

8 Mindrup, *The Architectural Model*, p. 48.

9 Stachowiak, 1973, cited in Brejzek and Wallen, *Architecture, Model, Performance*, pp. 4–5; Jörg Jozwiak, 'Miniature Appreciation – What's So Great About Little Models?', *World Art*, 11 (2021), p. 152.

10 Frances Glessner Lee referenced in Corinne May Botz, *The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death*, (Monacelli Press, 2004), p. 47; Jozwiak, 'Miniature Appreciation', p. 156.

11 Jozwiak, 'Miniature Appreciation', pp. 154–56.

12 Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Duke University Press, 1993), p. 61.

13 Stewart, *On Longing*, p. 61.

14 Stewart, *On Longing*, p. 62; Simon Garfield, *In Miniature: How Small Things Illuminate the World* (Canongate Books, 2018), p. 110.

15 Mindrup, *The Architectural Model*, p. 45.

16 Liam Lacey, 'Original-Cin Interview: Hereditary's Ari Aster Is a Cinephile Who Told Crew to "Feel the Evil"', *Original Cin* (2018) <https://www.original-cin.ca/posts/2018/6/6/original-cin-interview-hereditarys-ari-aster-is-a-cinephile-who-told-crew-to-feel-the-evil> [accessed 29 June 2024].

17 William Nelles, 'Mise En Abyme', in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory,* ed. by David Herman, Manfred Jahn and Marie-Laure Ryan (Routledge, 2005), pp. 312–13 (p. 313).

18 H. L. Dubnick, '"Mirrors and Fatherhood": Doubling, Mise-En-Abime, and the Uncanny in the Fictions of Jorge Luis Borges', *Romance Notes,* 44 (2003), p. 72.

19 Brian McHale, 'Cognition En Abyme: Models, Manuals, Maps', *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas,* 4:2 (2006), p. 177.

20 Dickmann Iddo, *The Little Crystalline Seed: The Ontological Significance of Mise En Abyme in Post-Heideggerian Thought* (SUNY Press, 2019), p. 1; Nelles, 'Mise En Abyme', p. 313; McHale, 'Cognition En Abyme', p. 175.

21 Nelles, 'Mise En Abyme', p. 312.

22 Werner Wolf, 'Introduction', in *Metareference across Media: Theory and Case Studies,* ed. by Werner Wolf, Katharina Bantleon and Jeff Thoss (Brill, 2009), pp. 7–8.

23 Iddo, *The Little Crystalline Seed*, p. 7; McHale, 'Cognition En Abyme', p. 181.

24 McHale, 'Cognition En Abyme', p. 177.

25 All images are by the author except those as follows and used with permission from: Matthew O'Donnell (pages 138, 139, 140 (top), 141), Alessandro Zambelli (pages 146, 147), Maycon Sedrez (page 148).

26 Eleanor Suess, 'The Model Interior as an Analogical Performative Space', in *Routledge Handbook of Interior Architecture*, ed. by Nisha A. Fernando (Routledge, 2025).

27 Royle, *The Uncanny*, p. 19.

28 <m2gallery.com/about> [accessed 10 December 2024].

29 Ralph Rugoff, 'Homeopathic Strategies', in *At the Threshold of the Visible: Minuscule and Small-Scale Art 1964–1996,* ed. by Ralph Rugoff and Susan Stewart (Independent Curators Inc, 1997), pp. 11–71 (p. 64).

30 The Peckham iteration was the Mark II of Ken's 4 x m2 Pavilion, with my model replicating the fourth version <https://m2gallery.com/projects>; <https://eleanorsuess.works/portfolio/the-cube-at-scale-peckham/> [accessed 10 December 2024].

31 Eleanor Suess, 'Little Lethaby' (Lethaby Gallery, 2021).

32 '(in)Visible Processes ', ed. by MA Culture Criticism and Curation students (Lethaby Galllery: Central Saint Martins, 2021).

33 In Eleanor Suess, 'Projective Views', in *Flow: Between Interior and Landscape* ed. by Patricia Brown et al. (Bloomsbury, 2018), pp. 134–41. I explore Vivian Sobchack's notion of how the 'film's body' functions when the camera is filming within the small world of a model in *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton University Press, 1992).

34 <https://eleanorsuess.works/portfolio/the-little-lethaby-gallery/> [accessed

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35 Jo Law, 'The Illustrated Almanac' (Big Fag Press, 2014) <https://www.bigfagpress.org/buy-prints/jo-law-the-illustrated-almanac-print-edition> [accessed 10 December 2024].

36 Maycon Sedrez and Eleanor Suess, 'Form Shadow Space: Analogical Perceptual Artefacts' (Deakin Library Waterfront Gallery, 2024).

37 Alfred Gell, 'The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology', in *Anthropology, Art and Aesthetics,* ed. by Jeremy Coote and Anthony Shelton (Clarendon, 1992), pp. 40–66; Brejzek and Wallen, *The Model as Performance*, p. 3; Jozwiak, 'Miniature Appreciation', p. 156.

38 Stewart, *On Longing*, pp. 67–68.

tales from the green line: unbuilt interiorities and the post-war imaginary

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abstract

Beirut, Lebanon, is a city marked by a complex and often turbulent history, reflected in the resilience and endurance of its built environment. The intertwining narratives of destruction and recovery are vividly embodied in the city's architecture. This essay examines the adaptive reuse of Beirut's iconic Egg Building, located on the Green Line that divided the city during the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990). As both a war ruin and cultural landmark, the Egg Building symbolises Beirut's past turmoil and its aspirations for renewal. It encapsulates the multifaceted processes of post-war recovery and transformation.

Drawing from the visionary ideas of Lebbeus Woods and the critical theories of Paul Virilio, this essay presents the Egg Building as a catalyst for narrative reconstruction in Beirut. Virilio's analysis of war relics provides a framework for understanding the historical layers ingrained in the building, while Woods's focus on unbuilt architecture offers a theoretical basis for redesigning its interior spaces to facilitate healing and revitalisation. Through the work of Lebanese architects and a third-year interior architecture design studio at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, this essay explores how the Egg Building's scars and stories can be woven into the collective memory of a city recovering from conflict. These unbuilt proposals illustrate how speculative interiors can inspire new narratives and contribute to Beirut's ongoing regeneration by reframing the building as a domain of active engagement, where past traumas are negotiated rather than erased, and future aspirations are envisioned. Through experimental design approaches, these proposals empower communities to reimagine their urban landscape, turning a symbol of conflict into a living archive of resilience and possibility.

keywords

post-war, speculative interiors, adaptive reuse, narrative reconstruction, Beirut

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introduction

Beirut, Lebanon, is a city marked by a complex and layered history of destruction and reconstruction.[1] Its built environment stands as a testament to its enduring resilience amid continual periods of civil war and political unrest. The city bears the marks of perilous and progressive narratives that intertwine: the old and the new, the ruined and the recovered, the local and the international, the forgotten and the memorialised, the temporary and the permanent. This essay positions itself at the intersection of unbuilt interiorities and the post-war imaginary, exploring the speculative recovery and reuse of the iconic Egg Building in Beirut [Fig. 01]. Situated on the Green Line—the demarcation line during the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990)—the Egg Building stands today as both a war ruin and a cultural landmark, embodying the duality of Beirut's turbulent past and its hopeful future.[2]

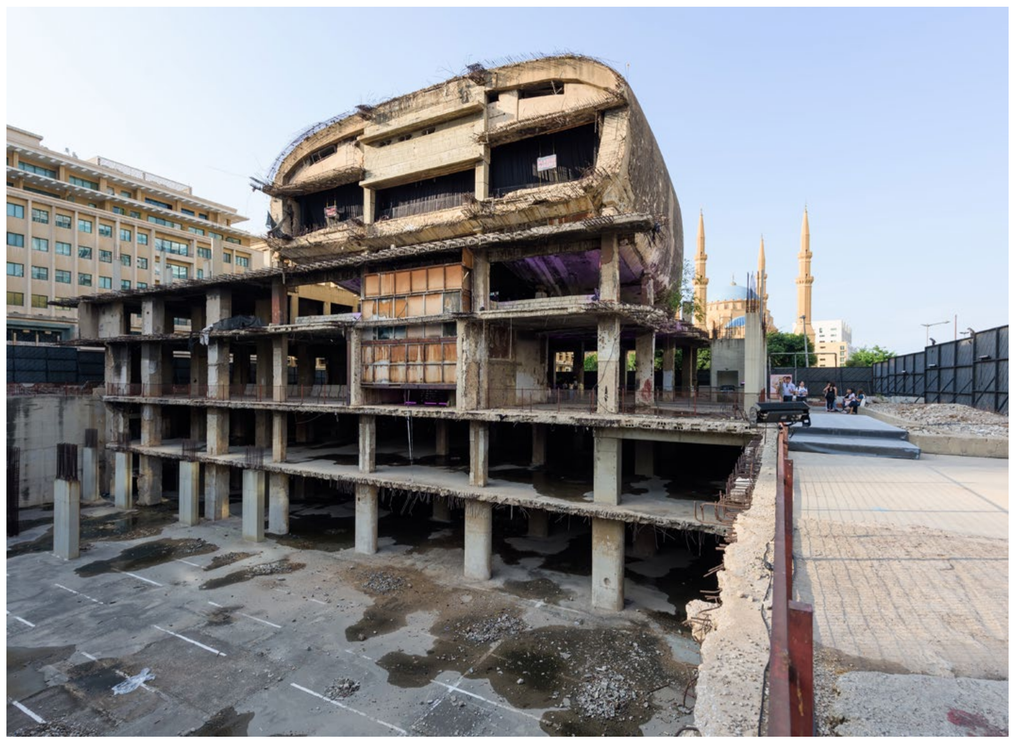

Figure 01.
The Egg Building, Beirut, Lebanon, northern façade and underground parking. Photograph by Emmanuel Campos (Emmeca), CC BY-SA 4.0.

Figure 02.
The Egg Building, Beirut, Lebanon, northeast corner. Photograph by Emmanuel Campos (Emmeca), CC BY-SA 4.0.

While physically unbuilt, efforts to reimagine the Egg Building reflect broader societal aspirations for change and equity, encapsulating the complexities of post-war recovery. Concurrently, such efforts are a testament to architecture's transformative power, transcending conflict and reshaping the civic milieu. Drawing inspiration from the critical perspectives of Paul Virilio and the visionary works of Lebbeus Woods, this essay explores unbuilt interiors as a catalyst for narrative reconstruction in the city. Virilio's reflections on war relics and the consequences of conflict, as illustrated in *Bunker Archaeology* and other works, provide a critical lens for interpreting the historical layers imprinted on the Egg Building. Meanwhile, Woods's emphasis on unbuilt architecture and post-war intervention offers a theoretical framework for reimagining its interiors. These perspectives unravel the imaginative dimensions latent within the building's spaces, probing how the unbuilt contributes to the city's recovery and renewal.

The regenerative potential of unbuilt interiors, focusing on the Egg Building, is illustrated through the work of Lebanese architects Bernard Khoury and Anthony Saroufim, and tested in a third-year interior architecture design studio at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. The studio explored how the Egg Building's scars and stories become integral to the collective consciousness of a city emerging from conflict. Through the lens of narrative reconstruction, speculative reuse becomes not only a design exercise but also a means of rewriting the city's story—an opportunity to honour its past while inspiring new possibilities. In this process, the studio envisioned unbuilt interior architecture as a transformative force, breathing new narratives into dormant, war-scarred segments of Beirut's storied landscape.

By its nature, unbuilt architecture offers a realm of possibilities that extend beyond the constraints of traditional building practices. It is a conceptual and imaginative space where new ideas about everyday living, cultural identity, and community resilience can be explored and tested. Unbuilt projects allow for the preservation of collective memory and historical narratives while simultaneously providing a platform for new ideas to emerge—an essential balance for communities grappling with difficult histories.[3] In the case of the Egg Building, its imagined futures bridge the gap between past traumas and future aspirations. By engaging in the redevelopment of the Egg Building through unbuilt proposals, the community can partake in a collective act of healing, transforming a site of pain into one of hope and possibility. Ultimately, unbuilt architecture is more experimental and conducive to envisioning progressive resolutions. More importantly, it democratises the design process, empowering diverse voices to shape and reshape urban landscapes, fostering inclusive, community-driven progress.

the egg: a brief overview

The Egg Building, officially known as 'the Dome' but colloquially referred to as 'the Egg' due to its distinctive shape [Fig. 01 and Fig. 02], is an iconic structure.[4] It was constructed during the 1960s as a modernist building designed to serve as a state-of-the-art cinema. It symbolised the city's futuristic aspirations, which was often referred to at that time as the 'Paris of the Middle East.'[5] Designed by Lebanese architect Joseph Philippe Karam, the Egg was intended as part of a more extensive commercial and entertainment complex called the Beirut City Centre embodying the ideals of progress and sophistication of Beirut's golden age.[6] However, the outbreak of civil war in 1975 placed the Egg on the frontline of the conflict.[7] The once vibrant cinema quickly fell into disuse, its sleek surfaces scarred by bullets and shrapnel. During the fifteen years of civil war, the Egg transformed from a symbol of modernity to a stark reminder of the devastation wrought by conflict. Despite its abandonment, the Egg retained a potent symbolic presence, standing as a silent witness to the atrocities of war and the resilience of Beirut's inhabitants. Following the end of the civil war in 1990, Beirut began a long process of reconstruction, but the Egg remained largely untouched, a relic of the past amid the burgeoning new city.[8] In the post-war period, the Egg's significance evolved into a focal point for discussions about heritage, memory, political reform, and urban regeneration. Its dismantled interiors offered a unique opportunity for architects, designers, artists, and urban planners to reimagine its potential, highlighting the concept of unbuilt architecture as a design practice that holds significant value to sites of memory and trauma. The nature of these design responses sparked conceptualisation that allowed for the cultivation of shared civic visions for the Egg and Beirut.[9] Unlike constructed works that present a final, fixed outcome, unbuilt architecture remains a fluid and adaptable framework, responsive and sensitive to the ever-changing needs of society. Though not materialised, it provides a space for intellectual exchange and creative expression. It also challenges conventional measures of architecture, revealing experiential conditions that exist not in its physical realisation but in its anticipation—conditions rooted in imagination rather than tangible structures.[10]

Today, efforts to reimagine and adaptively reuse the structure have been ongoing. Although yet to be realised, these efforts reflect broader societal aspirations for renewal, reformation, and equity. With these ideals, various proposals envision the Egg Building as a space for cultural events, artistic exhibitions, and community gatherings, transforming it from a symbol of destruction into a beacon of hope and resilience, from a symbol of division to a node of communal assembly. The Egg Building's unfinished state continues to inspire innovative ideas and projects, serving as a testament to the regenerative power of architecture and highlighting the potential for spaces marked by conflict to be repurposed for communal healing and cultural expression.[11] Its journey from a modernist

cinema to a war-torn relic and now a symbol of regeneration encapsulates the broader story of Beirut itself, reminding us of the city's capacity for change, and underscoring the vital role that unbuilt architecture can play in operating in a post-war context and shaping urban futures.

integrating post-war theory: the relevance of virilio and woods to beirut's egg building

Operating in a post-war context, the theoretical frameworks of Paul Virilio and Lebbeus Woods provide profound insights into the adaptive reuse and reimagining of architectural spaces such as Beirut's Egg Building. Both theorists delve into the complexities of post-conflict urban landscapes, proposing concepts beyond mere physical reconstruction to address the socio-political and speculative dimensions of architectural practice.

Virilio emphasises the interlaced nature of war, warfare, and the modern city, each being a product of the other.[12] Accordingly, integrating the historical scars of conflict into reconstruction is integral to urban advancement.[13] Virilio argues that war and representation are closely connected, and this correlation extends to the post-war context.[14] While resisting their disappearance, architectural projects should preserve and highlight the physical and emotional traumas inflicted by war, serving as potent reminders of the past and acknowledging the resilience and endurance of the affected communities.[15] The city centre of Beirut, with structures reminiscent of Virilio's concept of the 'Monolith' that was introduced in his book *Bunker Archaeology* and refers to massive structures that survived multiple attacks and became de facto monuments, exemplifies this preservation approach.[16] In this light, the Egg Building's bullet-ridden, decayed shell becomes a powerful testament to Beirut's turbulent history and the strength of its people.[17]

Likewise, in the book *Radical Reconstruction*, Lebbeus Woods calls for the preservation of the damages resulting from war as both a visual reminder and a reification of a past that should not be forgotten.[18] War ruins carry traces of memory that are integral to the narrative of the place and its successive evolutions. In his reflection on post-war architectural transformation, Woods uses the metaphor of a scab to describe the initial phase of rebuilding war-torn structures. A scab, though aesthetically unpleasing, serves an essential function in protecting and facilitating healing.[19] Woods argues that true healing and reconstruction in architecture are not about cosmetic fixes but about embracing and transforming the scars of violence.[20] He asserts that architecture should confront and incorporate the evidence of past violence, transforming it through concentrated human effort into something meaningful.[21] Woods further elaborates that scars represent a deeper level of reconstruction, merging the old and new without erasing the past. War scars honour both loss and growth, symbolising resilience and new beginnings. Accepting scars is crucial to civic existence and fostering a society that values individual experiences and stories over conformity. This approach to architecture promotes authenticity, resourcefulness, and innovation, creating a city that tells a unique, evolving tale marked by both hardship and recovery.

Between ruin and rebirth, the recovery and historic preservation of conflict-driven environments propagate socially conscious solutions that acknowledge the victims while reflecting a resolve toward collective healing. Yet, in many conflict-driven sites, past traumas are still too raw for actualised interventions, and present conditions too restrictive to mediate physically. Therein, speculative, unbuilt projects formulate robust roadmaps for future progress. Both Virilio and Woods advocated for speculative architecture and theoretical postulates, viewing unbuilt works and decayed buildings as opportunities for creative intervention and new narratives.[22] These approaches encourage architects and designers to envision spaces not only as they were or are but as they could be—transforming ruins into sites of innovation and renewal and deploying

the speculative unbuilt as a call to action. In the case of the Egg Building, this perspective frames its unfinished, war-scarred architecture as a canvas for artistic and cultural reinvention, rather than merely an artefact of the past.

While the physical impact of war is often visible and thus recognisable (think rubble, bullet holes, decayed structures) the invisible scars are often harder to spot. Lebanese sociologist Samir Khalaf indicates that one of the most profound consequences of the war has been grievous erosion of the rudimentary social fabric of Lebanese society.[23] Hence, the Egg Building's transformation involves a dual approach. On one hand, the building's war-torn state should be preserved and commemorated, honouring the memories and experiences embedded within its walls. On the other hand, the building should be reimagined as a dynamic space for cultural and civic mending, employing its programmatic framework towards repairing the war-induced societal ruptures. This dual approach not only preserves Beirut's complex history but also leverages unbuilt architecture's fluidity, allowing it to symbolise perseverance and drive for progressive change. By embracing both the tangible scars of the past and the intangible possibilities of the future, the Egg Building can play a vital role in the city's ongoing narrative of recovery and renewal.

fragmented remains, design uprisings

a. the egg building in the lebanese post-war imaginary

The need for a post-war imaginary in Beirut is not merely an intellectual exercise but also a critical social imperative. This imaginary serves as a means to overcome the physical and psychological scars of conflict, nurturing a collective identity crucial for the city's development. Rather than preserving the remnants of war as static monuments, this approach actively reintegrates them into the city's fabric and daily life, reinterpreting spaces like the Egg Building as icons of resilience and creativity. Here, unbuilt proposals for adaptive reuse go beyond traditional interventions, offering a dynamic form of narrative reconstruction. They present imagined, transformative layers within the urban landscape, honouring Beirut's past while opening avenues for new possibilities—reinventing the city's story without altering its physical structure.

After the Lebanese Civil War ended, numerous Lebanese architects conceptualised unbuilt proposals for the rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of Beirut's Egg Building. These proposals aimed to transform the war-scarred structure into a symbol of cultural memory and modern innovation. Seeking to balance the preservation of historical narratives with contemporary architectural practice,

Figure 03.
Exterior perspective of Bernard Khoury's proposal for the Egg Building, 2004. Rendering by 'Bernard Khoury / DW5' <www.bernardkhoury.com> [accessed 30 June 2024].

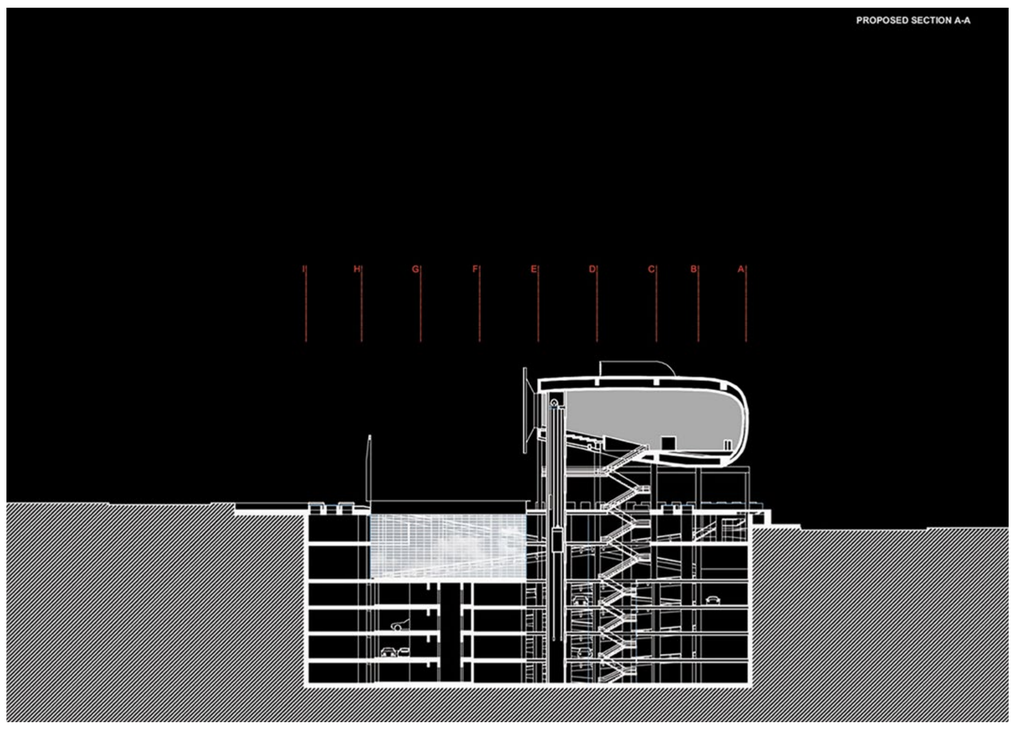

Figure 04.
Section of Bernard Khoury's proposal for the Egg Building, 2004. Drawing by 'Bernard Khoury / DW5' <www.bernardkhoury.com> [accessed 30 June 2024].

Bernard Khoury, one of Lebanon's most prominent contemporary architects and a protégé of Lebbeus Woods, put forward one of several unbuilt proposals for the Egg Building in 2004.[24] The New City Centre, as Khoury referred to it, augments the existing Egg structure with a 16.8 by 11.3 metre screen prosthesis [Fig. 03], to be located on what Khoury describes as the amputated southern facade of the Egg theatre shell.[25] While paying homage to the Egg's programmatic cinema roots and its revolutionary evolution, this electronic space is designed to host exhibitions, performances, concerts, and interactive events, transforming the site into a vibrant information portal.[26] His approach involves significant structural changes, including the demolition of certain floors to create open, light-filled spaces, and a process of excavation [Fig. 04] that reveals lower slabs of the building.[27] As shown in the rendering in Figure 03, the exterior of the theatre volume is covered in a mosaic of mirrors, reflecting its surroundings and preserving its war-torn scars as part of a dynamic new facade.[28] Although unbuilt, Khoury's vision catalyses alternate ways of engaging with post-conflict urban spaces.

In more recent design iterations, Lebanese architect and photographer Anthony Saroufim encases the structure with dense scaffolding as part of a radical take on its preservation [Fig. 05]. The scaffolding fortifies the scarred shell and supports new circulation paths, as well as a series of curated large optical lenses that allow visitors to view and interact directly with the building and the city. By transforming the Egg Building into a massive camera obscura, Saroufim's design gives the building a dynamic new role as the bullet holes in the structure are converted into additional optical devices [Fig. 06], with magnifying lenses inserted into the voids.[29] This unpredictable transformation allows the holes to serve as unique visual connectors to the other side and project the city's image onto the interior.[30] Through this design approach, Saroufim creates an immersive experience that reflects the dynamic interplay between the past and the present. As such, the Egg

Figure 05.
Exterior view of Anthony Saroufim's proposal for the Egg Building, 2015. The density of added scaffolding corresponds to the war damage on the Egg. Image by Anthony Saroufim.

Figure 06.
View to the city from one of the lenses integrated in the scaffolding in Anthony Saroufim's proposal for the Egg Building, 2015. Image by Anthony Saroufim.

evolves from a passive witness to the city into an active participant, its scars turned into powerful tools for reflection and memory, bridging the past with the present and the future.

b. the egg building in the global imaginative: toward resonance and resilience

Thousands of miles away from Beirut, the stories of the Green Line and the Egg Building have captivated a global audience, resonating deeply with architects, designers, and scholars worldwide. The College of Architecture and Design at the University of Tennessee exemplifies this engagement, as a third-year interior architecture studio embraced the Egg Building and Beirut's narratives, using them as a foundation for exploring themes of resilience

and regeneration in a post-war context [Fig. 07 and Fig. 08]. The fascination with the Egg and Beirut's complex history reflects a broader, global imaginative effort to understand and engage with the transformative power of architecture in the wake of conflict. This endeavour echoes today's evolving and distressing realities of war and destruction that have erupted in the past year in the Middle East and elsewhere. Now more than ever, the exploration of sites like the Egg Building becomes a crucial exercise in empathy, empowerment, and global solidarity. By engaging with Beirut's past and present through unbuilt architectural discourse, students contribute to a broader and urgent dialogue on how design can serve as a prompt for healing, reconciliation, and the envisioning of more inclusive urban futures.

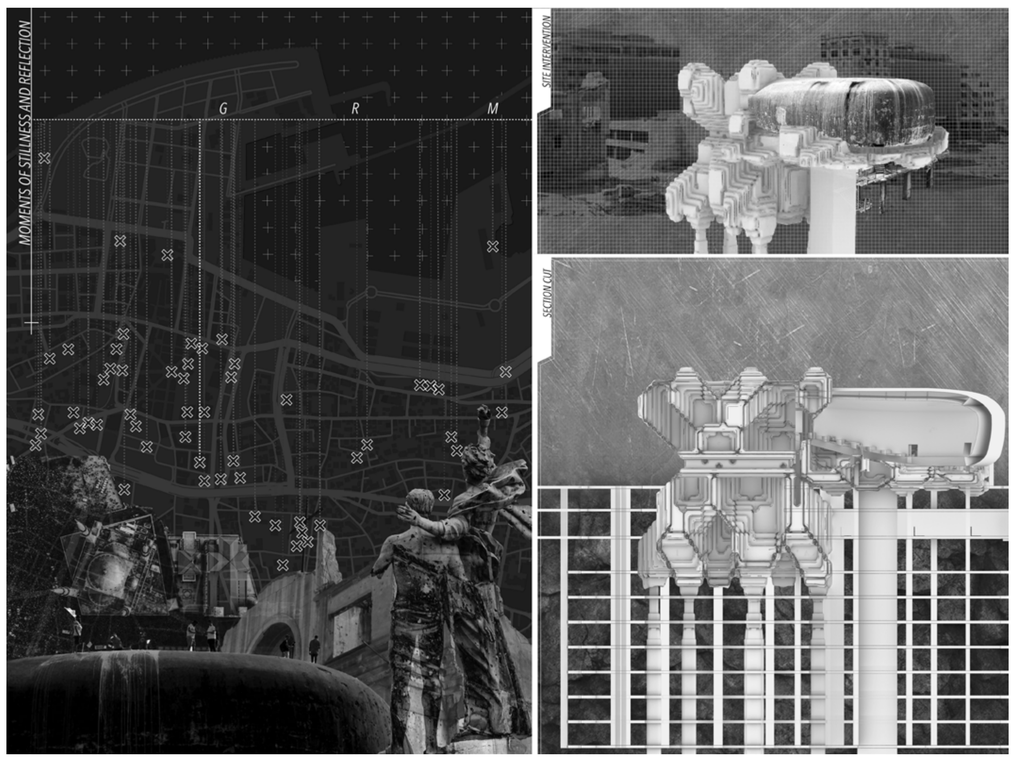

Figure 07.
Student work by Faith Stevenson, showcasing site analysis and a conceptual design proposal for the Egg Building. By integrating an archival library into the southern damaged façade, the proposal engages with Woods's concept of the scab/scar as a framework for spatial interventions and recovery. Images by the author, with the permission of the student.

new tales from the green line: the design studio as a medium of storytelling

a. the studio process

Using the Egg Building as the primary focus, the studio explored the adaptive reuse and parallel preservation of war-generated urban ruins. As outlined in Woods's and Virilio's theories, preservation through adaptive reuse, particularly through unbuilt proposals, is a multifaceted mode of producing and reproducing spatial narratives. Aimed at fostering preservation and healing, the studio sought to employ this unbuilt design agenda while maintaining the history of the site and its role as a contextual rouser, addressing the politics and ethical commitments involved [example in Fig. 09].

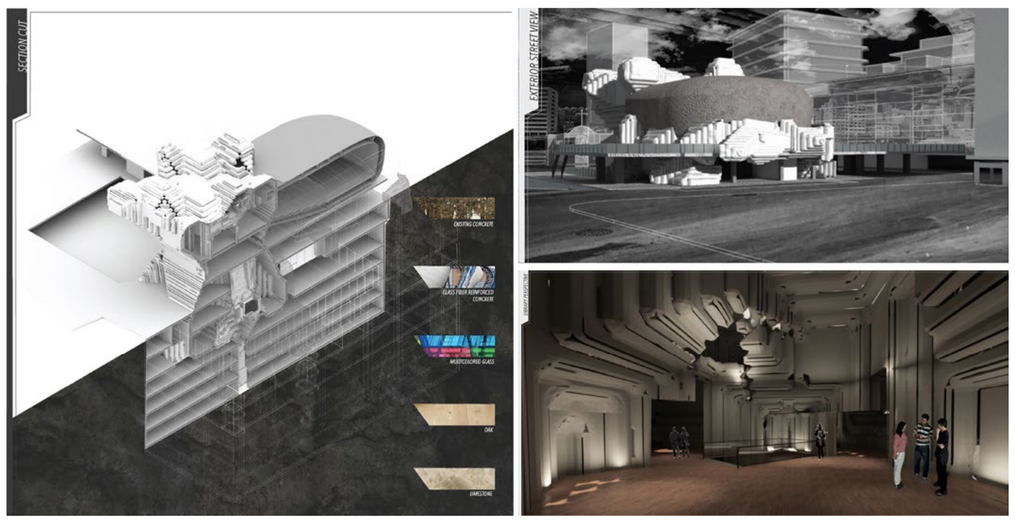

Figure 08.
Student work by Faith Stevenson, featuring a section perspective, exterior perspective, and interior perspective of the archival library design proposal shown in Figure 07. Image by the author, with the permission of the student.

Figure 09.
Student work by Elisabeth Walker, presenting various images of her design proposal for a graffiti museum and community space in the Egg Building. Graffiti, a significant part of the Egg's present-day narrative and a powerful form of political expression, is preserved along with the building's bullet holes. The design showcases these elements through the addition of layered viewing and circulation balconies and platforms. Image by the author, with the permission of the student.

An important consideration in the studio's premise was the students' status as outsiders to the regional and local contexts, with no direct access to the site. This distance challenged them to engage with the building's history and significance through research and imagination. The lack of physical presence required a deeper reflection on the monumentality of the site for the people of Beirut, adding another layer of complexity to the design process. However, this detachment also fuelled their speculative approach, allowing the students to envision possibilities that

were unbound by the constraints of reality. The speculative nature of their work enabled them to engage with post-war imaginaries in ways that might not have been possible through traditional design practices. For this new generation of designers, this speculative process became a powerful tool for merging historical memory with forward-thinking interventions, giving their designs a new dimension of relevance and vision. This approach, coupled with their external standing, allowed them to propose engaging strategies centred on the unbuilt potential of the building, redefining its role in Beirut's cultural and urban landscape and offering fresh perspectives that extend beyond the immediate realities of the site.

To become more familiar with the site and the building, the studio collaborated with Lebanese architect and photographer Anthony Saroufim, who gave several virtual lectures and critiques to the students and took the studio on a virtual site visit through Zoom. This invaluable engagement allowed the studio to bridge cultural gaps and better understand the parameters and implications of practising within the complexities, opportunities, and contradictions of Beirut. Moreover, this pattern of translocational practice reflects a new era of design pedagogy beyond regional boundaries, facilitating new frontiers for design education and practice through rich global exchanges.

The studio process was carried out in three phases. To break away from preconceived stylistic notions about the region and its architecture, the first phase focused on deriving design strategies based on natural precedents. Organic systems and processes of armouring (sheltering), regeneration, and preservation that occur in nature were analysed for their ability to adapt and regenerate. Students examined the organic systems' exchanges with environmental stimuli, translating these processes into conceptual and formal tactics for resilient interior interventions [Fig. 10]. This conceptual phase, rooted in analysis, formal translations, experimentation, and digital tooling, provided the foundation for the formal ideas of the main project. In the second phase,

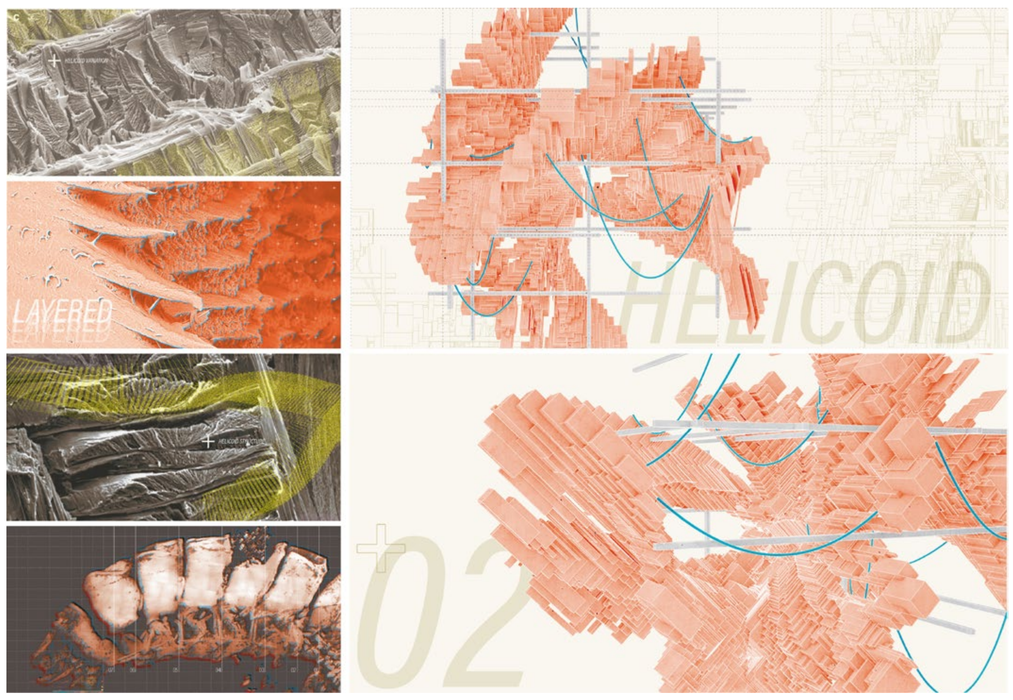

Figure 10.
Student work by Cecilia Torres-Panzera, showing phases 1 and 2 of the studio's design process. Phase 1 explores natural organisms for conceptual design strategies, while Phase 2 focuses on site analysis and conceptual development. Image by the author, with permission from the student.

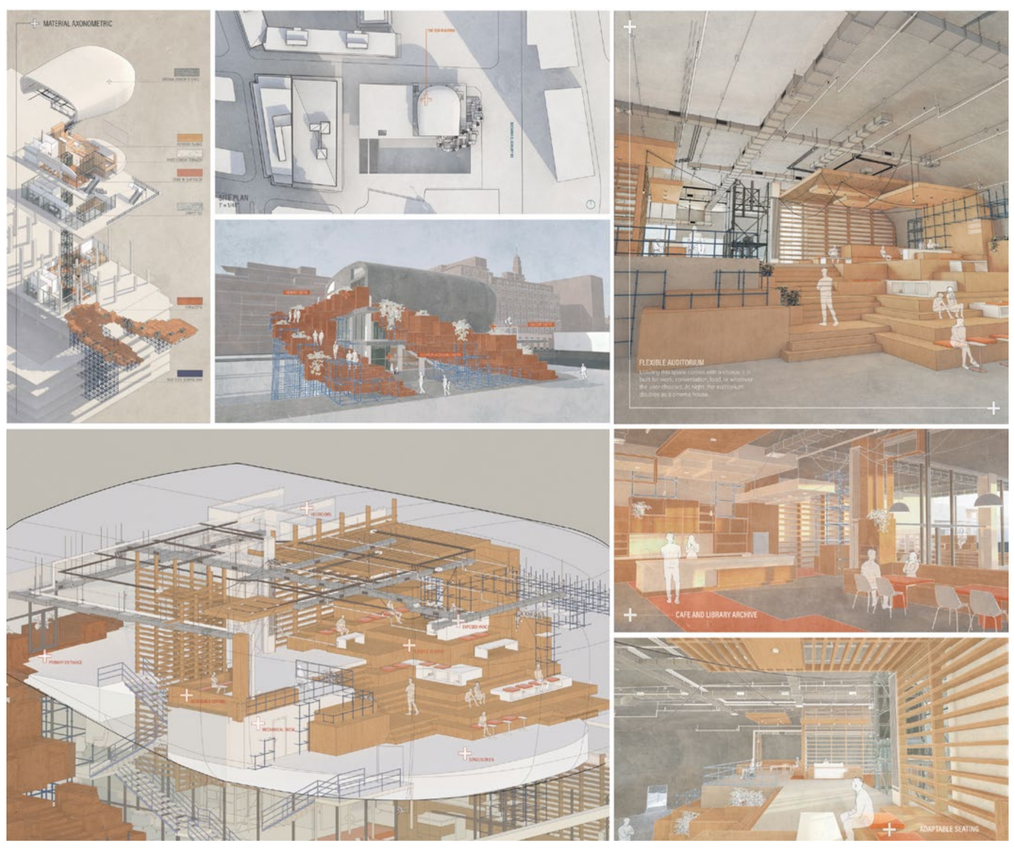

Figure 11.
Student work by Cecilia Torres-Panzera, showing various images of the final design proposal (Phase 3) for a collaborative community workspace in the Egg Building. The design builds on Phases 1 and 2, as shown in Figure 10. Image by the author, with the permission of the student.

students conducted intensive mapping of the site and devised conceptual diagrams from the findings of Phase 1, yielding innovative spatial possibilities and occupancy patterns for the design [Fig. 10].

In the third and final phase of the studio [Figs 08, 09, 11, 12, and 13], building on the previous phases and studies, students explored how interior architecture can contribute to planting seeds of peace and enabling prosperous and sustainable futures driven

by Beirut's residents. The main project involved redesigning the former cinema house and creating a healing community hub within Beirut's Egg Building. Each student determined the programmatic details of the community hub based on their analyses and reflections on the intricate realities of the site and city. The interventions aimed to recover the Egg Building through infusing community-based storylines into the space. Collectively, the work sought to understand local, regional, and global narratives, conveying new tales from Beirut's Green Line and other areas from the region and beyond. Throughout the design the process, interiority's aptitude for reappropriating space and contextual conditions was emphasised, mobilising the power of unbuilt interiors to drive change.

b. studio proposals for the egg building

The studio proposal engaged with the Egg Building not as a static monument of the past but as a living space capable of fostering new forms of urban engagement. In this context, conflict was not merely something to be repaired or erased but rather a condition to be negotiated through design. By embracing the building's damaged and incomplete state, the studio encouraged students to consider how interior architecture can mediate between the past and future, allowing for a more nuanced and layered approach to post-conflict reconstruction.

A key aspect of this process was leaving the programmatic narrative of the design to the students themselves, who were tasked with utilising programming as a tool for narrative reconstruction. This approach invited students to engage critically with the historical and cultural layers of the Egg Building, allowing them to propose programmes that reflect both the unresolved history of the site and the future aspirations of Beirut's urban landscape. Some projects revolve around modern work environments, as seen in Figure 11, providing users with shared public workspaces that engage both the interior volumes and exterior streetscapes. Another project celebrates Beirut's robust nightlife by designing a nightclub that transforms into a coffee shop and parkour course during the day [Fig. 12 and Fig. 13]. Other projects celebrate graffiti as a form of protest and artistic expression [Fig. 09], while some focus on adding an archival library that preserves the city's body of knowledge from erasure [Fig. 07 and Fig. 08]. Collectively, the work of the studio emphasises interiority's aptitude for reappropriating space and contextual conditions, aiming to create more stable, just, and inclusive societies through design, mobilising the power of unbuilt interiors to drive change.

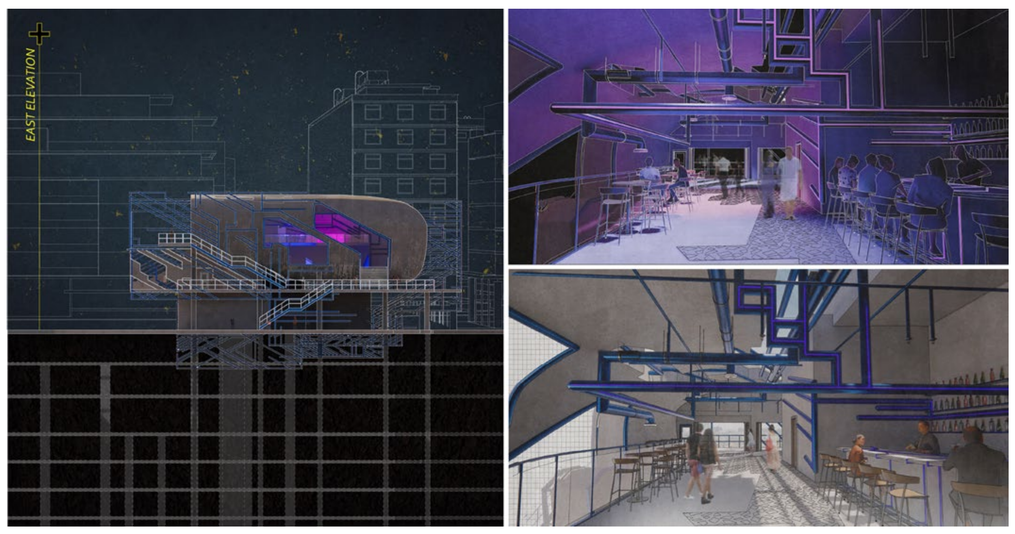

Figure 12.
Student work by Nancy Yang, featuring various images showing the final design proposal, which celebrates Beirut's robust nightlife by designing a nightclub that transforms into a coffee shop and parkour course during the day. Image by the author, with the permission of the student.

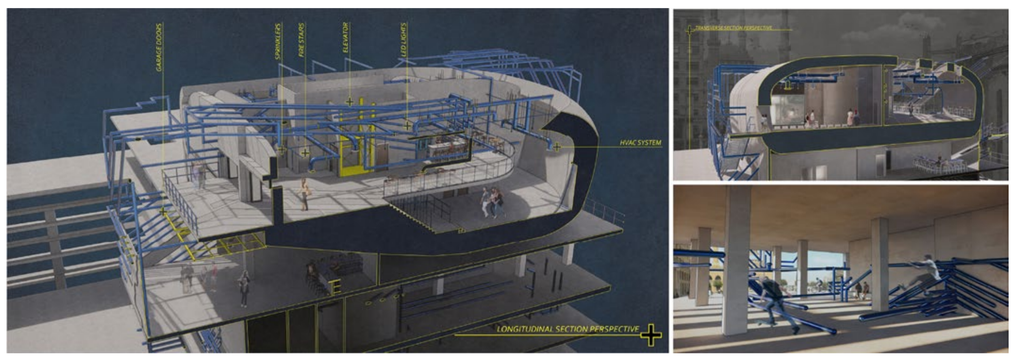

Figure 13.
Student work by Nancy Yang, featuring a section perspective and a perspective view showing the nightclub and parkour course proposal for the Egg Building. Image by the author, with the permission of the student.

This act of reprogramming the Egg Building became a way of retelling new stories from the Green Line. Each intervention in the building carries with it a narrative of hope and renewal. In a city still marked by the scars of division, the speculative, unbuilt proposals serve as a bridge between past wounds and future healing. The students' interventions transform the building into a living space of reconciliation, where every corner speaks of survival, resilience, and the potential for

transformation. Yet, this transformation extended beyond the building and the city. It reshaped the students themselves, along with others who engaged with the studio, challenging stereotypes and dispelling misconceptions about a culture often misrepresented by mainstream channels. Through this work, the students not only reimagined the future of a city but also deepened their understanding of a place and its people, bridging divides with empathy and creative vision.

In this way, the Egg Building became more than just a relic of war—it transformed into a canvas for new narratives to emerge, some woven into the fabric of Beirut's future, others seeded within the students themselves. In this context, unbuilt interiors allow both the building and the designers to evolve, opening new avenues for dialogue and engagement. The Egg Building thus stands as a symbol of both the unresolved and the hopeful in Beirut's ongoing urban story, while also reflecting our shared humanity and collective potential for renewal.

conclusion

As Beirut faces the ongoing destruction of yet another war, the state of the Egg Building remains uncertain.[31] Nonetheless, whether physically standing or not, the Egg Building continues to symbolise the resilience and endurance of Beirut and its people amid cycles of devastation and recovery. Its adaptive reuse, whether through real or imagined interventions, demonstrates how architectural spaces—both built and unbuilt—can facilitate dialogue, preserve history, and inspire new social narratives. Now more than ever, the unbuilt stands as a promise—a beacon of hope and possibility, reminding us that even in the darkest moments, there is potential for renewal and rebirth.

The third-year interior architecture studio at the University of Tennessee demonstrated the profound potential of unbuilt projects in reimagining the Egg Building. The students engaged deeply with Beirut's complex socio-political fabric, producing designs that dismantle cultural divisions and showcasing the ability of unbuilt interiorities to inspire hope and foster resilience. These projects offer not only physical transformations but also new social narratives that promote inclusion, diversity, and peace. In the face of renewed conflict, these speculative designs and architectural imaginaries now take on even greater significance, acting as lifelines for the city. They remind us of architecture's enduring capacity to heal, resist, and rebuild. The Egg Building, and Beirut itself, remain powerful testaments to how unbuilt architecture can shape not only spaces but also the collective identity of a people. By harnessing the potential of unbuilt projects, designers can challenge existing paradigms and envision spaces that foster solidarity and inspire future possibilities. Ultimately, it is in this imaginative realm that the seeds of a more inclusive, resilient, and hopeful future are planted.

acknowledgements

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partecipazione: trajectory and implications of an unbuilt exhibition

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abstract

This essay investigates *Partecipazione*, the exhibition curated by architecture collective AKT based in Vienna and Hermann Czech for the Austrian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale of Architecture, 'The Laboratory of the Future', held in 2023. *Partecipazione* was conceptualised as an interior intervention dividing the pavilion space into two parts—one for the Biennale and one for Venice. The pavilion, connected with the city through the proposed bridge crossing over the wall of Giardini, would host various activities open to the residents of Saint Elena Island. Although *Partecipazione* sought to engage a broader audience and foster community participation, concerns appeared regarding its impact on the pavilions' and Giardini's architectural heritage, leading to the suspension of the proposal in the process. However, curators decided to expose the rejection and exhibit the unfinished interior of the pavilion while, at the same time, shifting the focus to preservation issues present within the institution of the Biennale. Despite remaining unbuilt as initially conceptualised, *Partecipazione* initiated a dialogue about the challenges of architectural preservation in Venice and the Biennale's role in shaping the city.

The essay critically examines *Partecipazione*'s trajectory, from the conceptualisation and design to rejection, and considers its broader implications on contemporary architectural and exhibition practice and audiences. The essay will draw on the interview conducted with AKT, which provided valuable information and insights into the curatorial and architectural processes surrounding the exhibition. Through analysing tensions between experimentation and preservation narratives, the essay offers insights into the evolving role of architectural exhibitions as platforms for expanding architectural discourses and practices. It argues that precisely due to remaining unbuilt, *Partecipazione* exemplified the transformative potential of an architectural exhibition to challenge architectural discourses. Finally, this essay aims to contribute to the legacy of *Partecipazione* by examining how its unbuilt nature and incompleteness provoke critical questions about the role of architectural exhibitions, the coexistence of temporary interventions with heritage, and the transformative potential of experimental and open-ended exhibition practices.

keywords

Partecipazione; the Venice Biennale; architectural exhibition; heritage; pavilion

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introduction: on the biennale's relationship with venice

The Venice Biennale is one of the most significant cultural institutions for art and architecture globally. The first Biennale took place in 1895 and has since then continued to grow in size and influence, expanding to incorporate diverse art forms. Today, the Venice Biennale hosts art, architecture, cinema, dance, music, and theatre editions, fostering an immense cultural production that interconnects influential figures and ideas from these fields and draws numerous visitors to Venice. However, the Venice Biennale is also an institution shaped by various political, geopolitical, cultural, economic, and social influences, raising broader questions about the relationship between cultural institutions and the cities they inhabit.

The Giardini Gardens is the central exhibition space of the Biennale precinct. It was created under Napoleon Bonaparte by demolishing a neighbourhood to make space for a public park. As the park was not frequently visited, the Biennale was permitted to use it. Today, the Giardini is home to national pavilions. All pavilions in the Giardini, apart from the French one, belong to their host countries. The Biennale has followed the format of national representations in pavilions since its inauguration in 1895. The pavilions were gradually built from the end of the nineteenth century through the fascist period in Italy in the 1930s and after World War II. Since then, most of the already present pavilions made significant changes to their façades and interiors to remove ornaments from the previous regimes. One by one, most of the pavilions were heritage listed by the Superintendency in Venice due to their extraordinary architectural heritage and cultural and historical significance. Today, the Giardini is a public garden that remains publicly inaccessible, occupied and used exclusively by the Biennale. The Biennale also uses the Arsenale, a former military shipyard, and multiple spaces spread across the city.[1]

Throughout the twentieth century, the Venice Biennale transformed Venice into a modern city though the effects of intense cultural activity. The expansion of the Biennale has influenced Venice's urban fabric, transforming public spaces and changing existing buildings' typologies and programmes, resulting in an ambiguous relationship with the city. The Biennale is recognised as an essential institution for cultural production that occurs in a unique setting in Venice, but it also brings immense pressures to the fragile city. This complex situation has been present and addressed at the Venice Biennale of Architecture and is becoming increasingly important. The concerns produced by this dynamic affect exhibitions' content and design, individual and national participation (re)presentations, and the choice of themes.

biennale of architecture and its thematic histories

Over the Biennale's recent history, there have been key shifts in its evolving relationship with Venice and with global architectural discourse. The earliest editions of the Biennale of Architecture were dedicated to Venice and working with its contextual issues through, for example, public competitions for re-conceptualising public spaces in the city. They included *The Presence of the Past* (1980), curated by Italian architect Paolo Portoghesi, *Progetto Venezia* (1985), curated by Italian architect Aldo Rossi, and *5th International Architecture Exhibition* (1991), curated by Francesco dal Co, Italian historian of architecture. As the Biennale of Architecture expanded, it shifted its focus from the city to global topics. This expansion is evident in the themes of the following editions, such as *Sensing the Future: The Architect as Seismograph* (1996), curated by Hans Hollein, which focused on architecture's speculative and experimental futures. More recently, *Fundamentals* (2014), curated by Rem Koolhaas, included an exhibition titled *Elements* that sought to map out the histories of core architectural elements. Post-COVID-19, the Biennale *How will we live together?* (2021) curated by Hashim Sarkis, was concerned with issues

surrounding different possible ways of co-existing, particularly regarding multiculturalism and human and non-human relationships.[2]

Even though the Venice Biennale has operated on the system of national participation for years, the formats and themes of exhibitions are constantly changing. Simultaneously, the dynamic between the Biennale and Venice keeps transforming too. Today, the complex and delicate situation of hosting a massive event in the UNESCO-protected city, within heritage-listed Giardini, Arsenale, and other spaces spread across the city, has become exceptionally provocative and more than ever relevant for the Venice Biennale. Despite the Biennale being a place for global discussions, these concerns have forced the re-evaluation of its immediate context and what the institution represents for Venice and Venetians.

This situation raises pressing questions about the balance between preserving the architectural heritage of the pavilions and the cultural heritage of the Biennale, as well as the transgressions of exhibition formats in relation to national, international, and global geopolitics and representations. For instance, the latest edition of the eighteenth International Architecture Exhibition at the Venice Biennale, *The Laboratory of the Future* (2023), curated by Lesley Lokko, a Ghanaian-Scottish academic and novelist, addressed pressing topics of decolonisation and decarbonisation, mainly by focusing on African architects' work. However, several national participants made statements also on the problematic aspect of the Biennale concerning how it communicates with the city. One of the significant contributions on this topic was made by the Austrian Pavilion, curated by AKT, an architecture collective from Vienna, and Hermann Czech, a renowned Austrian architect, titled *Partecipazione* [Fig. 01]. An exhibition of the proposed design for *Partecipazione* featured as part of the Architecture Biennale from May to November 2023, but, interestingly, the originally planned intervention remained unbuilt. This situation not only raised but also amplified the tensions between preservation and contemporary social, cultural, and political needs for architectural transformations in Venice.

Figure 01.
Clelia Cadamuro, Divided pavilion (2023). La Biennale 2023 Press Release. The Austrian Pavilion has been in Giardini Gardens since the early twentieth century, as it was completed in 1934. It was designed by Joseph Hoffman, a well-known Viennese Secession architect, and it was one of his last works. In the photograph from the outside, the unfinished interior intervention involving a plaster wall dividing the pavilion into two parts is visible from the inside. Image used with permission from the AKT Collective.

the trajectory of partecipazione

Partecipazione is the Italian word for participation, an 'act or fact of sharing or partaking in common with another or others; [an] act or state of receiving or having a part of something.'[3] It is not a coincidence that the curators of the Austrian Pavilion, AKT and Hermann Czech, opted for an Italian word. Their intention with this gesture was rooted in context-based responsiveness to the previously addressed ambiguous relationship between the institution of the Venice Biennale and the city of Venice. *Partecipazione*'s trajectory was a complex process that included two proposals around the issues of connectedness and separateness of the Biennale from the city. Eventually, it ended up exhibiting an unfinished spatial intervention.

Partecipazione was conceptualised as a spatial intervention dividing the pavilion's interior into two sections. The idea was to open a part of it to the residents of Saint Elena, one of the islands of the city of Venice, who could enter the pavilion without buying a ticket and be able to perform or be a part

of various activities that would take place inside the pavilion. The core value of this proposal referred to Henry Lefebvre's *The Right to the City*, focusing on creating 'the places of social wealth such as inner-city infrastructure, places of knowledge, the relevant networks and scenes', allowing the interrupted flow of life of the city to occupy and take place within the context of an international exhibition and also proclaiming the pavilion itself as a space of participation and connectiveness.[4] For this essay, the author met with AKT collective to discuss *Partecipazione* and its surrounding circumstances.[5] From this interview the trajectory of *Partecipazione* developed over three significant propositions: the first proposal to open a new entrance in the Giardini wall to connect the pavilion to the city, the second proposal to construct a temporary bridge over the heritage wall to achieve the same goal, and the third proposal, which transformed the pavilion into a space of institutional critique, exposing the challenges of preservation and participation through an unbuilt exhibit.

The first design proposal introduced the idea of opening up the existing but covered door in the wall of the Giardini behind the Austrian Pavilion to create a new, decentralised entrance into the pavilion. This move would allow direct access into the pavilion's backyard to the city, where the residents would be able to walk in and out [Fig. 02]. Therefore, the Austrian pavilion was initially supposed to be realised as follows: the entrance hallway would have split the pavilion into two parts: 'One half for the Biennale, one half for Venice' [Fig. 03].[6] This first proposal was intended to allow the external life of the city to leak inside the pavilion and give access to the activities taking place there. In the words of AKT, this is where 'the neighbourhood becomes tangible in the pavilion', 'the residents of the city and the Biennale visitors see and hear each other', and the gesture represents 'an opening of the Biennale, not by spreading to the city, but by reversing this spatial practice'.[7] The idea behind such an intervention was to provide a space for the residents of Saint Elena Island to gather, discuss, create, and create a

Figure 02.
AKT & Hermann Czech, Giardini wall (2022). La Biennale 2023 Press Release. The place on the Giardini wall that was supposed to be opened to connect the pavilion with the city. Image used with permission from the AKT Collective.

Figure 03.
Theresa Wey, Model photo (2022). La Biennale 2023 Press Release. The first proposal: the red area represents part of the pavilion that would have been open to the residents of Venice free of charge, while the white part would have stayed a part of the Biennale exhibition. Image used with permission from the AKT Collective.

physical interior and exterior space for reconciliation and re-connection of the Biennale with the city of Venice and its residents. AKT's website stated that:

"Participation" was already one of the critical demands of the first architecture exhibitions at the Biennale in the 1970s, as was the demand that they address Venice's political, social and spatial realities. The aim was to ensure that the constantly growing large-scale exhibition played an economic and preservative role for the city of Venice and its people.[8]

However, the curators presumed this proposal was rejected in preliminary negotiations with the Biennale and the Superintendency—the office responsible for preserving Venice's architectural and cultural heritage—given the fact that the wall of Giardini is a heritage-listed element. The curators were advised to rent additional space in the city to host the planned activities or sell tickets for Venetians. Since the curators were not interested in this idea, they started working on a second exhibition proposal.

The second proposal moved away from going through the wall to avoid the complications around the heritage elements of the Giardini. It introduced the idea of building a temporary bridge structure, going over the wall of Giardini without touching it, to achieve the same outcome of letting the people of Venice access the pavilion freely [Fig. 04]. This proposal still contained a dividing wall between the parts belonging to the institution of the Biennale and the city. It would have exhibited previously conducted research along with various Venice organisations that expose the city's social and preservation housing issues. It would have contained a temporary amphitheatre and a meeting space in the publicly accessible area.

The second proposal was submitted to the Biennale and Superintendency in January 2023. In April, just before the opening of the eighteenth International Architectural Exhibition, this proposal was also rejected. In the interview, AKT revealed that the Superintendency delivered the decision and explained that the proposal was still threatening the heritage of the pavilion and the wall of Giardini. However, according to AKT, their primary concern lay in establishing a precedent, which could continue in following editions of the Biennale and potentially threaten its well-established structure.

The curators eventually realised their project could not be built and had to consider alternatives for the outcome of this process. With this unexpected turn of events, they finally decided to introduce a third proposal to expose their rejection, and to have their pavilion remain unfinished to initiate a dialogue about the challenges of architectural preservation in Venice and the Biennale's role in shaping the city. The interior walls that were in the process of being painted were left unfinished. The main room

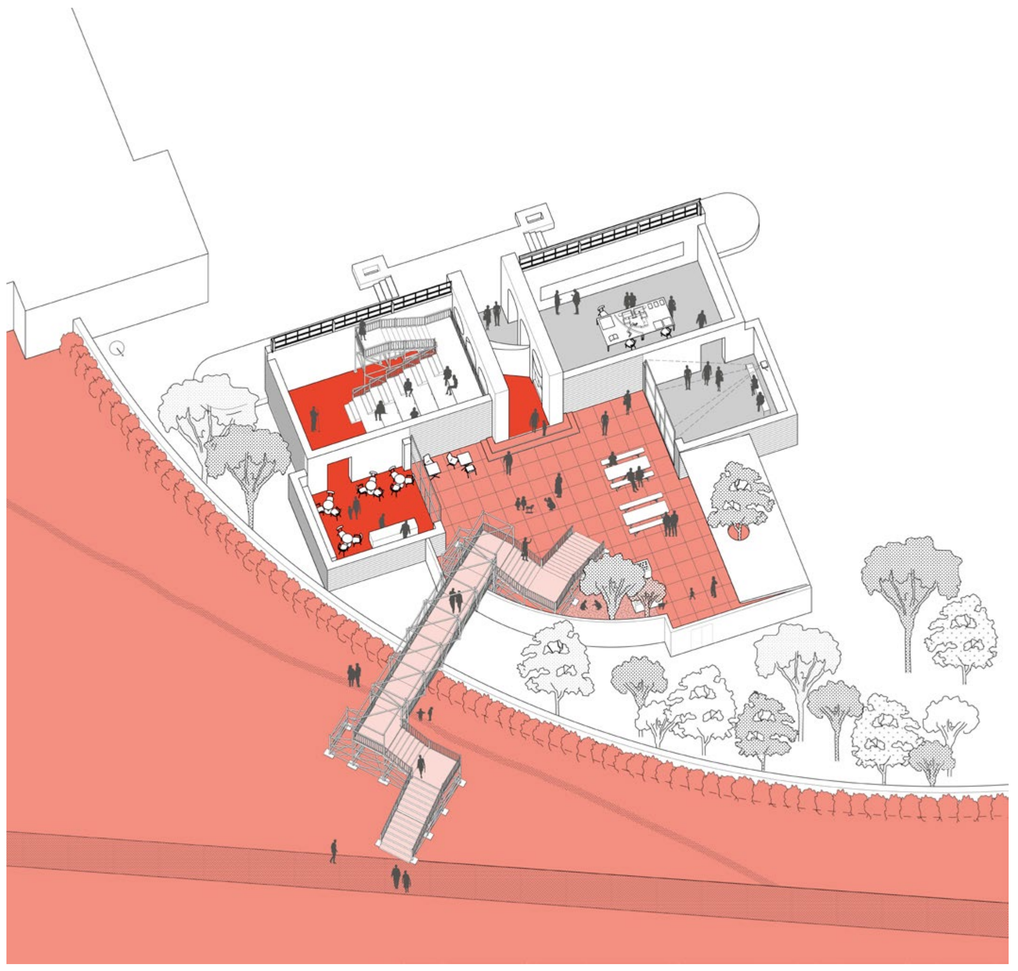

Figure 04.
AKT & Hermann Czech, Axonometric image (2023). La Biennale 2023 Press Release. The second proposal: axonometric drawing of the pavilion. Instead of going through the wall, the second idea included going over the wall with a temporary bridge structure. Image used with permission from the AKT Collective.

Figure 05.
Clelia Cadamuro, Installation view (2023). La Biennale 2023 Press Release. This image depicts what was finally realised as an exhibition for the Biennale following the rejection of the original proposal. From the ceiling is a crossed-over Partecipazione sign, symbolising the current impossible conditions for participation. In the back, the wall dividing the pavilion was left unfinished. Research on preservation issues of Biennale present within the institution was exposed on the central table and the walls to the left and right. Image used with permission from the AKT Collective.

exhibited the exhibition's trajectory, including the proposal, with the physical model and drawings of the planned intervention. On the main room's walls, one could see extensive research on the problematic preservation aspects of the central Biennale spaces, the Giardini and the Arsenele, and their relationship with the city. There were also maps showing the expansion of the Biennale spaces within Venice. The pavilion seemed like an interrupted construction site, with a half-built bridge, amphitheatre, and material leftovers in the rear courtyard [Figs. 05, 06, and 07].

The final exhibition sought to highlight the architectural and social issues surrounding the Biennale–Venice relationship through extensive research, offering an institutional critique. The *Partecipazione* website explained:

> What is in the focus of AKT & Hermann Czech's architectural intervention is the issue of the power of disposition over space in a city whose land is limited, and thus the issue of social sustainability of the world's most important architecture exhibition in the context of the old town of Venice.[9]

By leaving parts of the pavilion incomplete and displaying the rejected proposals, the curators transformed the pavilion into a tangible reflection of the Biennale's impact in the city of Venice. This act of turning the unbuilt into an exhibition not only questioned the Biennale's spatial and institutional practices but also invited a dialogue about Venice's urban challenges. This layered approach emphasised the urgent need for the Biennale to rethink its relationship with the city and its residents. The conceptual depth of this new approach was explained by Hermann Czech when reflecting that *Partecipazione* was 'no longer a mere building that houses exhibits, an exhibition structure containing information about the notion of division, of "participation", the pavilion becomes an exhibit in itself that represents division."[10]

Figure 06.
Clelia Cadamuro, Courtyard with the planned connection (2023). La Biennale 2023 Press Release. The half-built bridge structure. Image used with permission from the AKT Collective.

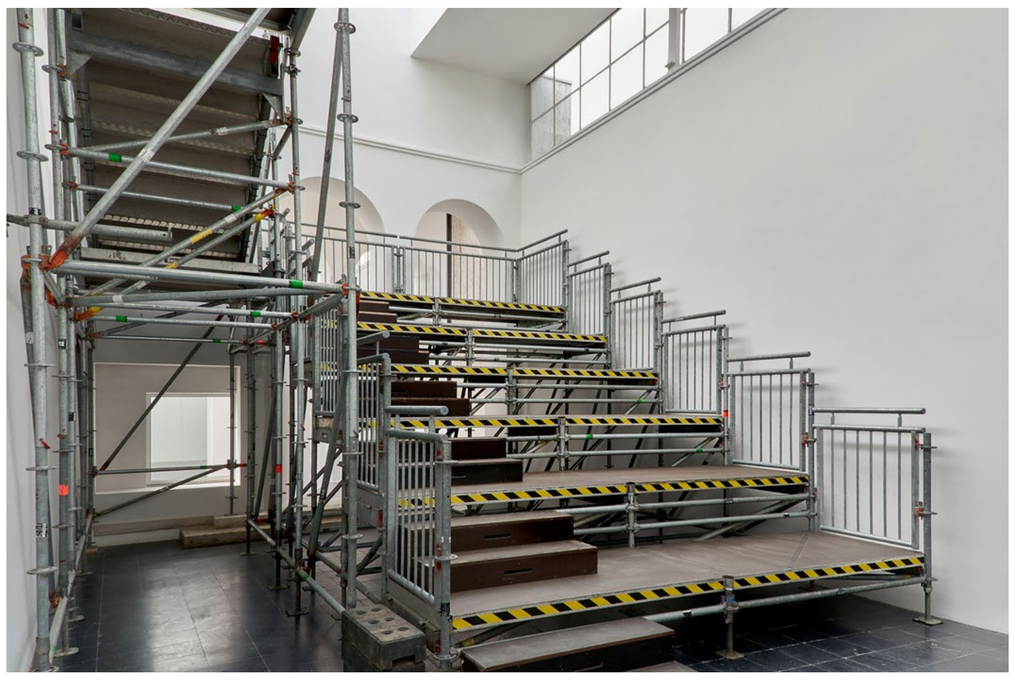

Figure 07.
Clelia Cadamuro, Assembly room (2023). La Biennale 2023 Press Release. The amphitheatre was supposed to host events organised by the residents of Saint Elena Island. Image used with permission from the AKT Collective.

As the programmes could not be hosted in the pavilion, additional events in Italian and English were held around the city of Venice. The programme included daily guided curators' tours through the city, several workshops titled *The Transformation of European Historical Shipyards and Arsenals Workshop*, public meetings (*Politiche per la casa: Viena e Venezia a confronto*), public discussions (Venezia—La Biennale), exhibition finissage (Model case Venezia), an exhibition Model case Venezia, and a city walk by C.U.R.A.—Castello 2.0. The programming aimed to connect the visitors and the Venetians and to thematise the urgent social issues regarding the housing crisis in Venice.

To realise the exhibition and the accompanying programmes, the curators cooperated with several Venice-based organisations such as Biennale Urbana, Ocio (Osservatorio CivicO sulla casa e la residenza), Forum Futuro Arsenale, and We are Here Venice (WahV), which, in the end, made it a collaborative and participatory project.[11] The *Partecipazione* team also produced a book and a website, gathering together the research on the exhibition's topics. Because of the inability to perform the exhibition as planned, the whole process gained significant media attention, with the curators being interviewed and published on platforms such as *e-flux* and KoozArch.[12] Despite this positive attention, the dissatisfaction the curators felt with the inability for the exhibition to go ahead as originally planned led to them joining forces with other pavilions, forming a group called Biennale Pavilions, which calls upon re-thinking the national boundaries in Biennale, physically and conceptually.

After the exhibition, a resident of Saint Elena Island visited AKT's design studio in Venice and shared in an interview how much their work meant in helping the residents feel recognised and valued. In AKT's words:

> The beautiful thing about it is how it was perceived. The activities in the neighbourhood of Saint Elena that we wanted to engage with were self-organised. Over six months, more than seventy events occurred, from small gatherings to chess tournaments. One of the participants even travelled to Vienna when we had the closing event. The idea of the project was accepted and shared by the people living there. The exhibition had a long-lasting effect on the city. And that's golden.[13]

This insight shows that what *Partecipazione* did, particularly in terms of surrounding activities, was acknowledged and deeply appreciated by the residents of Venice. The long-lasting effect of the exhibition eventually lay in breaking down the division between what happens behind the wall of Giardini and in the city through programming and acknowledging the Venetians' voices by providing space and time for their practices.

implications of an unbuilt exhibition

Partecipazione remained unbuilt and exhibited unfinished, opening discussions on the broader cultural, political, social, and other issues surrounding the Venice Biennale. *Partecipazione*'s trajectory and the processes surrounding its realisation shifted the understanding of the relationship between temporary interventions of architectural exhibitions and the preservation of architectural heritage. Further, *Partecipazione* eventually opened up several vital issues concerning the role of architectural exhibitions, the thinking of how temporary spatial interventions and preservation of the architectural heritage can coexist, and, finally, implications for future exhibition practices.

Partecipazione oscillated between working with and against the city in different ways, questioning various temporalities of the long-term historic urban fabric and short-term exhibition. Zooming out to the general thinking about exhibitions and unbuiltness, the essential value of *Partecipazione* might be, in the words of the Professor of Art History and Visual Studies at the University of Oslo, Aron Vinegar, in 'preserving potentiality.'[14] This relates to the opening of the Biennale to become a portal for new spatial and temporal experiences rather than preserving the same model it has been operating on for more than a century. Preserving potentiality is about endorsing the tension between the old and the new and thinking about different ways of experimental preservation that welcome the potential, the chaos, and the in-between. In that sense, the pavilion space or an exhibition can be used to address urgent matters through a temporary action, making the invisible visible, letting unbuiltness and incompleteness happen, and influencing ideas in particular contexts in unexpected and open-ended ways.

Reflecting on the role of *Partecipazione* and architectural exhibitions more broadly leads to questioning the relative roles of exhibitions and architecture. In the book *Architecture on Display: On the History of the Venice Biennale of Architecture*, Aaron Levy and William Menking notice that all Venice Architecture Biennale curators agree on 'the impossibility of creating exhibitions on architecture.'[15] However Mario Ballesteros, Mexican design curator and instigator, for instance, finds that in relation to architecture, 'An exhibition opens up new questions that [we] weren't able to address initially.'[16] Mirko Zardini, an Italian architect, former Director, and member of the Board of Trustees of the Canadian Centre for Architecture, agrees there is value to exhibitions and describes how an architectural exhibition 'is not only a place for the classification, conservation, and presentation of objects and documents but is also a place of production and a generator of activities.'[17] Although these views point to the complexities surrounding displaying architecture, they also open the debate on exhibitions' open-ended and experimental nature. Curators of architectural exhibitions are challenged to re-invent and re-think the content, display, and curatorial approaches to transmit the message to the audience clearly and innovatively. Suppose the power of architectural exhibitions lies in their short life span and event character, then what happens when an exhibition is unfinished, unbuilt, and incomplete? How does this affect their ability to create a statement or provocation, problematise the occupying ideas of the practice, and impact the potential for reflection on open questions facing the profession? To address these questions, it is important to closely consider the implications of *Partecipazione* further.

The temporary nature of an unbuilt gesture like *Partecipazione*, for instance, holds particular significance concerning new ways of working with heritage and conservation practices in the built environment. After the eighteenth Biennale of Architecture finished in November 2023, as it usually happens, the Austrian pavilion, like all the other national pavilions, was brought back to its 'original' state and adapted for the next edition of the Biennale of Art that took place from May until November 2024. However, by highlighting aspects of preservation and heritage, *Partecipazione* foregrounded the tension between exhibitions' experimental, short lifespan and the tendency to preserve architectural and cultural values in urban contexts. It showed us that it is impossible to return to the 'original state', as the pavilion's condition before and after the interventions can never be exactly the same. The materials will change, and the perception of the space will change. In this sense, the unbuilt nature of *Partecipazione* allowed it to act as a spatial and temporal portal, providing new experiences of the existing spaces and challenging existing approaches to protecting architecture's history.

Beyond its temporariness, the incompleteness of the *Partecipazione* exhibition equally challenged common preconceptions on display formats and curatorial intent. By remaining incomplete, it invited individual interpretations of what the pavilion could have been, leaving us with endless possibilities. For example, the half-built bridge structure emerged because of the impossibility of opening up the entrance inside the wall of Giardini. George Simmel compares a bridge and a door in his essay *Bridge and Door*: 'Whereas the bridge, as the line stretched between two points, prescribes unconditional security and direction, life flows out of the door from the limitation of isolated, separate existence into the limitlessness of all possible directions.'[18] In that sense, the door–bridge–half-bridge relations symbolised the limitless possibilities that could have been introduced into the pavilion but never will, and this impossibility becomes materialised in incompleteness.

Because of these temporal and incomplete qualities, *Partecipazione* was able to transform in real-time, shaped by different audiences and shifting meanings, without a clear sense of its outcome. By walking into the unfinished pavilion, the audiences were prompted to question why it looks as it does, leading to other important questions and encouraging audiences to see the architectural

exhibition not as a space of representation but of experimentation and as a mode of architectural and interior design practice.

Partecipazione enabled thinking around how preserving architectural heritage and (con) temporary architectural interventions can coexist. In Eurocentric heritage and conservation practices, for instance, preserving architectural heritage focuses on maintaining its material integrity for as long as possible.[19] In other cultures, for example, in West Bengal, preserving can mean changing every season, painting with a new colour, and giving a significant building a new life or function.[20] For years, preserving pavilions at the Biennale in a particular state has fitted the Eurocentric understanding of preservation. It supports the Biennale's history and legacy, which is a crucial part of its branding and reputation. However, *Partecipazione* proposes that pavilions at the Venice Biennale might also be preserved by allowing them to transform through interventions that shift established narratives and, in that way, create new conversations and relationships with the city, which, in the long run, will be essential for the Biennale to prevail. Suppose the curators of the Austrian pavilion had been able to proceed with their initial idea and temporarily transform it. Perhaps that would demonstrate the adaptability of heritage and potentially, in that way, ensure its longevity through ongoing engagement, participation, and discourse. Could it also foster new perspectives on preservation, especially within the complex context of the Biennale and the social, cultural, and housing issues facing the city of Venice?

It is important to note that *Partecipazione* and the Austrian Pavilion were not alone in focusing on the ideas around the flexibility of a cultural institution and its relationship with the city of Venice at the latest edition of the Biennale of Architecture. Similar gestures were made by the Swiss Pavilion, titled *Neighbours,* and curated by artists Karin Sander and Philip Ursprung. They removed a wall separating their pavilion from the Venezuelan pavilion and proposed a combined floor plan mid-way through the renovation of both buildings. The German pavilion, titled *Open for Maintenance* and curated by ARCH+ and the Büro Juliane Greb collective, started its intervention from the fifty-ninth International Art Exhibition intervention of Maria Eichhorn. Titled *Relocating a Structure*, parts of the walls and floor were removed to explore the pavilion's history. The German, Swiss, and Austrian Pavilions all discussed the issues of the Biennale's heritage in relation to the city by centring on processes of unbuilding. Through interventions that removed existing structures they intended to undo existing narratives of national independence and equally explore ideas of preserving potentiality by using acts of unbuilt to provoke open-ended interpretation.

conclusion

The unbuilt *Partecipazione* opens a broader dialogue about the evolving relationship between architectural exhibitions and preserving architectural heritage. By leaving the pavilion incomplete, *Partecipazione* offered an open-ended experience that challenged the notion of architectural exhibitions. The tension between the permanence of architectural heritage and the temporality of exhibition interventions becomes a central theme, not only questioning the role of the Biennale within Venice's historical fabric but also posing important questions about what heritage preservation truly means in a contemporary context.

The fragmented nature of the pavilion highlights the importance of the possibilities that remain open when an exhibition is left unfinished. Furthermore, the discussions arising from *Partecipazione* resonate beyond the exhibition space, intersecting with broader cultural, political, and social debates in Venice. The exhibition also touched upon the future of the institution of the Venice Biennale, suggesting that perhaps true preservation involves allowing these spaces to evolve over time. *Partecipazione* challenged the nature of architectural exhibitions by highlighting the power of incompleteness to inspire new ways of thinking. Through its open-ended approach, it proposed that the act of leaving

an exhibition unfinished can be a catalyst for further inquiry, bringing new perspectives on how temporary interventions can coexist with heritage. In doing so, *Partecipazione* provided a platform for extra-disciplinary explorations at the intersections of architecture, interior design, and heritage.

Ultimately, *Partecipazione* opened the questions that relate to the relationship of the Biennale with the city of Venice, the structure and *modus operandi* of the Biennale as an institution, and how transgressing exhibition formats can communicate with heritage spaces. Most importantly, and precisely due to remaining unbuilt, *Partecipazione* managed to bring together various audiences and actors around issues much broader than the exhibition itself, finally initiating a powerful political, social, and cultural statement that is yet to be reflected in the pavilions at the Biennale and in the city of Venice [Fig. 08].

Figure 08.
Clelia Cadamuro, the part between the walls to be bridged (2023). La Biennale 2023 Press Release. Partecipazione: the unbuilt exhibition. Image used with permission from the AKT Collective.

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