The Drawing and the Space moves from a shared conviction: that drawing is not merely a tool for representation, but the *locus* where architecture takes shape before it becomes building. Not a medium for illustrating finished ideas, but a field of inquiry in which thought encounters matter, the body meets gesture, and imagination negotiates physical constraints. This volume gathers nearly a decade of work by the Research Group The Drawing and the Space, founded by Thierry Lagrange and Jo Van Den Berghe and developed through design research and pedagogical experimentation. Across these trajectories, drawing is approached as a situated practice, one that unfolds in the interval between reflection and construction, between perception and articulation.

Here, drawing operates as an epistemic device: it cuts, listens, measures, pauses, and stitches. Through lines, sections, layers, perforations, movements, and overlays, it renders perceptible the often-invisible dimensions of space – memory, absence, empathy, rhythm, fragility, ecological entanglement. The page becomes a laboratory in which fragments are assembled, relationships tested, and spatial hypotheses slowly brought into presence.

The contributions assembled in this book do not advance a single theory, but a constellation of practices. From constructive detail to choreography, from Renaissance perspective to emotional topography, from ecological grammars to co-drawing processes, drawing emerges as a threshold: between thinking and building, between subject and context, between space and place.

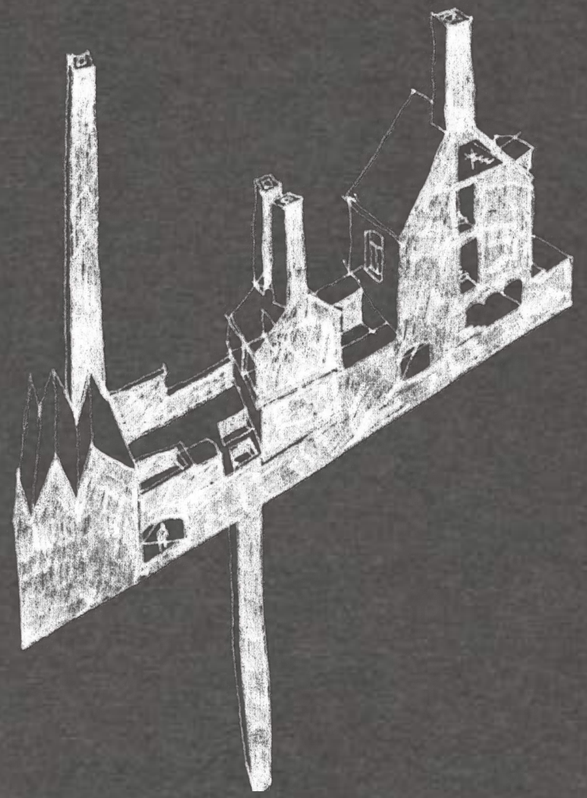
In these pages, to draw is to inhabit the world critically and attentively. Drawing is to slow down, to observe, to attune, and to care. Rather than offering definitive conclusions, the book opens a shared field of research, one in which drawing continues to generate knowledge, relations, and new possibilities for contemporary architectural culture.

Thierry Lagrange, Jo Van Den Berghe, Enrico Miglietta, Liselotte Vroman

ISBN 978-88-32072-81-5

The Drawing and the Space

The Drawing and the Space Reflections on 10 Years of Design Research and Education



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Teaching Interiors

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It was Henry Corbin's gift to enable us to experience in this room thoughts that come from another language and culture, as if they were of our own hearts. He spoke from within his speech; he was his words. This rhetorical imaginative power is himma of which Corbin writes in his study of Ibn 'Arabī. This power of the heart is what is specifically designated by the word himma, a word whose content is perhaps best suggested by the Greek word enthymesis, which signifies the act of meditating, conceiving. Imagining, projecting, ardently desiring – in other words, of having (something) present in the thymos, which is vital force, soul, heart, intention, thought, desire.

James Hillman, *The Captive Heart*

The Drawing and the Space. Reflections on 10 Years of Design Research and Education
Thierry Lagrange, Jo Van Den Berghe, Enrico Miglietta, Liselotte Vroman

Design-Driven Research in Teaching Interiors as an Expanded Field, 09

Cover image:
Jo Van Den Berghe, *My Grandmother House*, Fountain pen, black ink on thin paper.
Original size: 294 x 210mm, 14.10.2010.

All essays included in *Contributions* and *Reflections* underwent a double-blind peer-review process, with the exception of the invited contributions by Michael McGarry and Penelope Haralambidou.

Books published in this series undergo a peer-review process.
Any errors or omissions brought to our notice will be corrected in the next reprint.

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The Drawing and the Space Reflections on 10 Years of Design Research and Education

Thierry Lagrange
Jo Van Den Berghe
Enrico Miglietta
Liselotte Vroman

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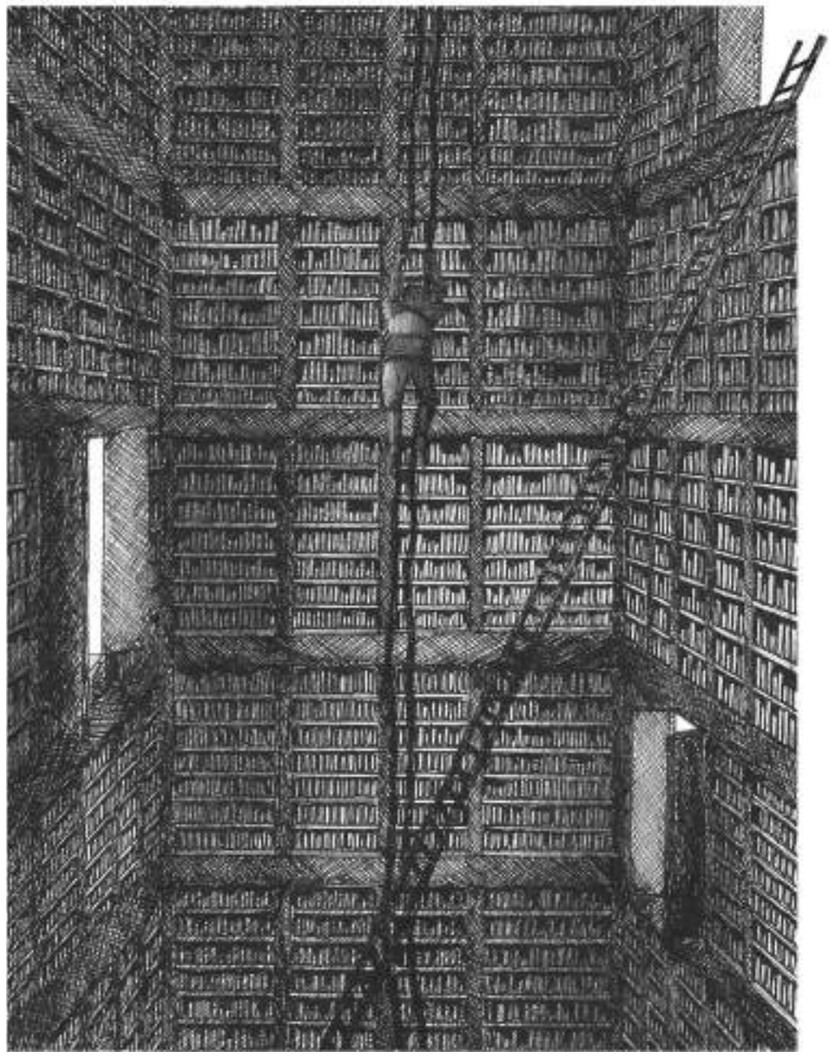


Fig. 1. Cassandra Van Peer, *The Bell-ringer, The Fisherman, His Son, His Wife and His Lover*, Academic work for the Master Dissertation Studio *The Drawing and the Space*, 2022 (exhibition).

For over seven years, our research group has gathered around a shared investigation into the relationship between drawing and space. What begins as a focused inquiry evolves into a dynamic, interdisciplinary collective of researchers, each contributing expertise from the fields of architecture and art. Founded by the two principal authors of this book, the group explores drawing not merely as a representational tool, but as an *agent* – a method of inquiry that generates new knowledge and reveals intangible properties of place.

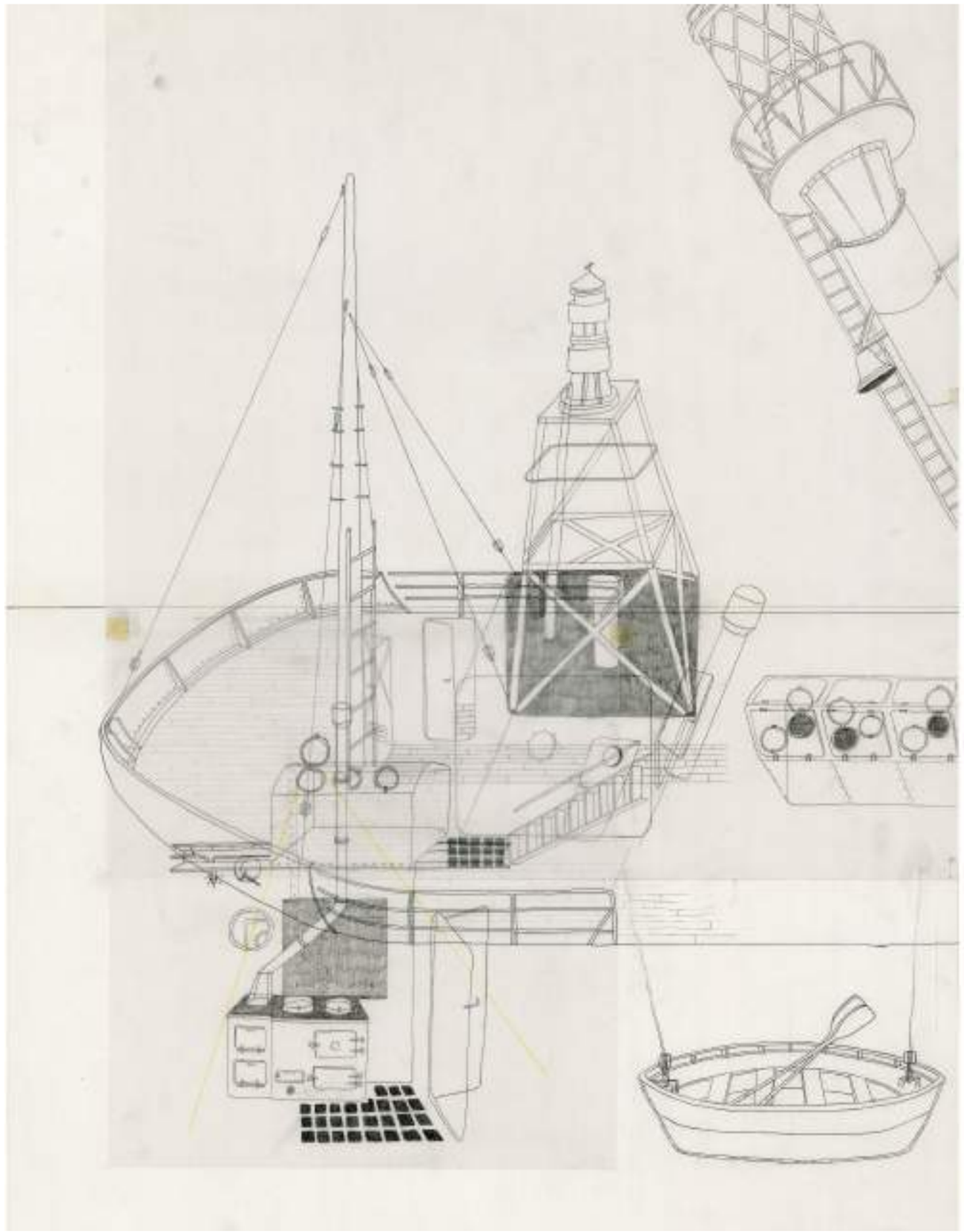
This book presents outcomes from this ongoing journey. It brings together research and educational work that foregrounds drawing as an active producer of spatial understanding. Several members pursue PhD projects within the framework of the group, each contributing to a growing body of knowledge on the *agency of the drawing*. These investigations move beyond the physical to engage with the affective, symbolic, and immaterial dimensions of space. In doing so, the group continuously develops new spatialities – ones that make visible the unseen, the ephemeral, and the emotional textures of place.

A key element of the group's methodology involves the integration of research and pedagogy. Design studios function as experimental spaces where students directly engage with drawing as a mode of thinking and discovery. Here, drawing acts not only as a tool for communication but as a speculative and investigative force.

The student work featured in this book reflects this approach – exploring how drawing intervenes, imagines and reconfigures spatial experience.

Collaboration defines the group's working model. Ongoing dialogue – across disciplines, between researchers and students, and between drawing and the world – drives the evolution of ideas. Through conferences, workshops, exhibitions, and publications, the group activates platforms for exchange and collective reflection. Rather than advancing a fixed theory, this book offers multiple perspectives on how drawing operates as a spatial, conceptual and transformative act.

This publication stands as a moment of reflection and proposition. It shares what emerges from our collective inquiry so far, while remaining open to future questions, contexts, and challenges. Drawing continues to serve as a critical and imaginative tool – capable of navigating, revealing, and reshaping the complex territories of space and place.



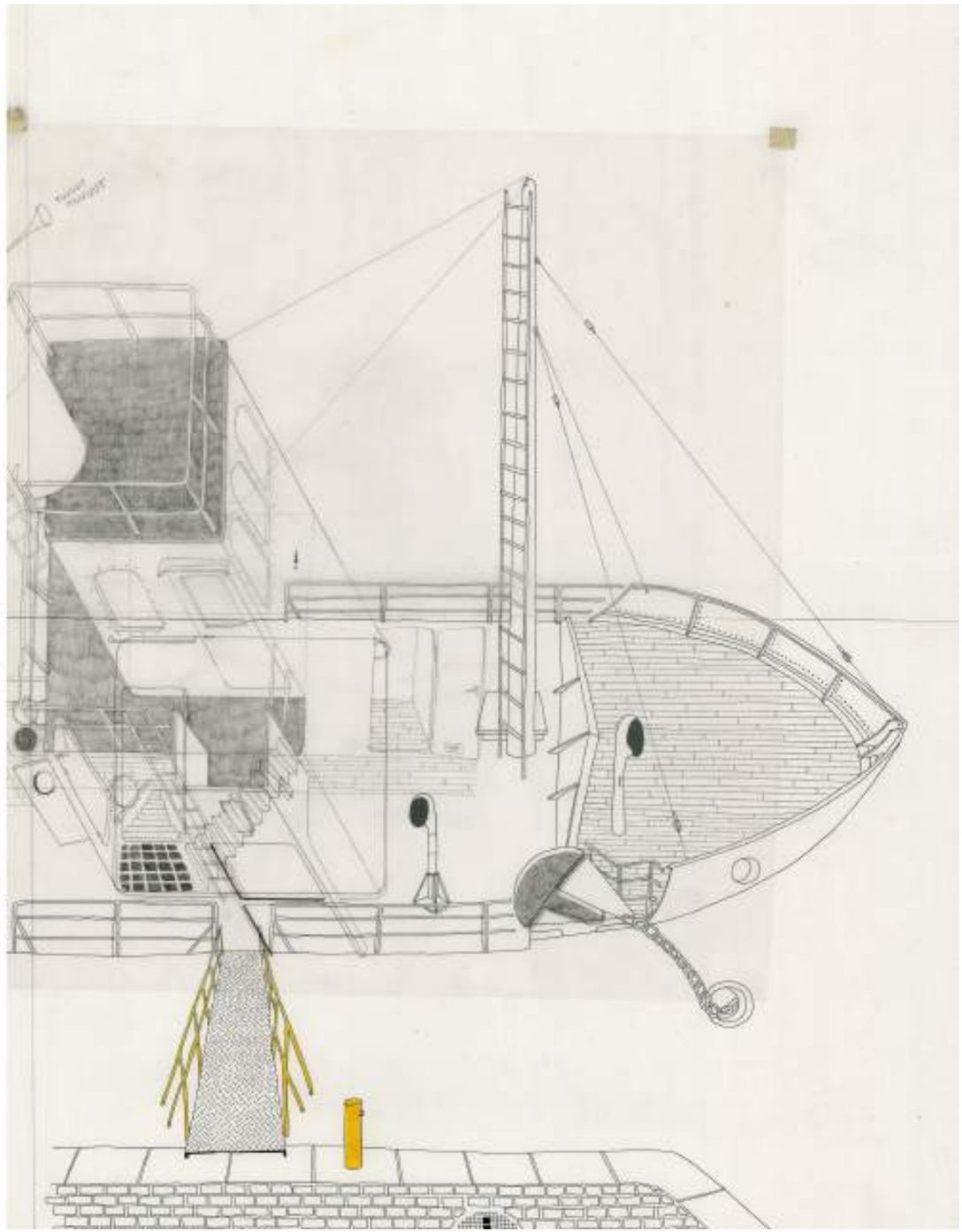


Fig. 2. Flore Lenaerts, *Boot deel*, Academic work for the Master Dissertation Studio *The Drawing and the Space*, 2022 (exhibition).

The Drawing and the Space: Themes, Practices, and Research Trajectories

Enrico Miglietta, Liselotte Vroman

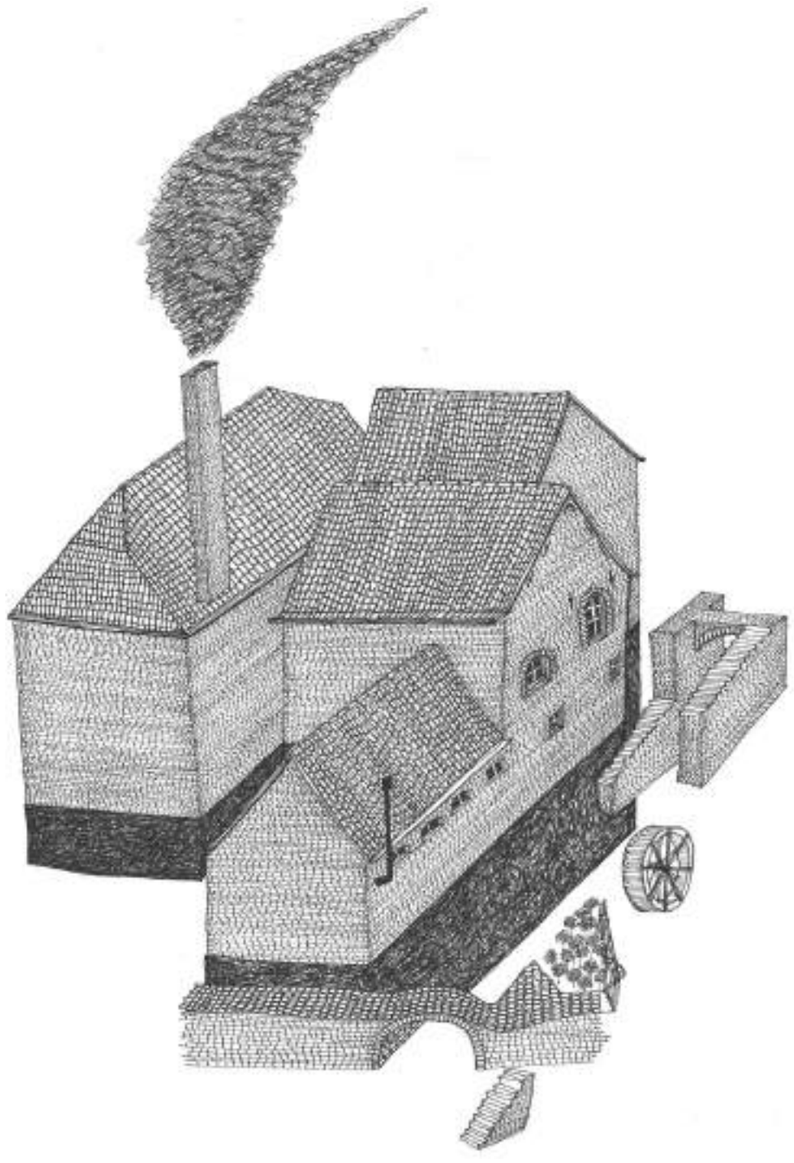


Fig. 3. Marie Porrez, *Molen*, Academic work for the Master Dissertation Studio *The Drawing and the Space*, 2022 (exhibition).

This book was born from a shared conviction: that drawing, beyond its representational functions, continues to offer a vital space for architectural research and reflection. It is not merely a means of illustrating finished ideas, but a field in which space is slowly discovered, questioned, and imagined. The Research Group *The Drawing and the Space* emerged from this belief, aiming to investigate drawing as a situated practice – one that operates in the interval between thought and construction, between the sensing subject and the material world, between what is visible and what is yet to emerge.

The contributions gathered here demonstrate how drawing can serve not only as a graphic medium, but as a form of spatial inquiry, a way of thinking that is at once tactile, temporal, reflective, and open. What ties these works together is an attention to drawing as a mode of attunement. In drawing, the body listens to material, to atmosphere, to site. It is a practice that favours resonance over control, intimacy over resolution.

This attunement extends into different perspectives: in some works, it reveals the iconographic density of landscape – the sedimented layers of culture, memory, and myth; in others, it addresses the presence of absence, and how voids, gaps, or erasures might become compositional forces. Elsewhere, drawing becomes a material act – being stitched, perforated, immersed, reworked – a process that leaves physical traces of time, gestures, and revisions.

Across these various perspectives, drawing operates as a threshold between architecture and nature, between human intention and spontaneous growth. It is a way of engaging with the world that remains provisional, receptive, and quietly radical. Each contribution suggests that architectural thinking does not always need to culminate in a built object. Instead, it can inhabit the page, the gesture, the diagram – offering new ways of approaching space, and of imagining how it might yet be lived.

Rather than proposing a unified position, this volume offers a constellation of practices, insights, and sensibilities. It seeks to add a voice – modest but grounded – to a broader cultural conversation on the role of drawing in architecture today. Not a conclusion, but a fragment: one more carefully drawn line in an evolving reflection on space, form, and the act of making.

The book is structured into four main chapters that echo the Research Group's plural and iterative approach.

Studios introduces the academic studios – *Studio Anatomy*, *The Double Look*, and *The Drawing and the Space* – which serve as pedagogical laboratories where drawing operates both as method and subject of inquiry. These studios form the backbone of the Group's educational and research framework. Though distinct in focus, each promotes a reflective, drawing-based approach to architectural design, foregrounding spatial experience, material investigation, and critical observation.

Studio Anatomy engages with architecture through the metaphor of anatomical dissection. Using the section as both method and metaphor, students explore the depth of space – from geological strata to constructive detail – by *cutting into* architecture's substance. Drawing becomes an act of resistance and revelation, offering insight through slowness and tactile understanding.

The Double Look, situated at the intersection between art and architecture, cultivates a dual gaze rooted in iterative observation. Emphasizing material making and embodied research, the studio invites students to reframe and rework fragmented contexts, particularly those along the Flemish *steenweg*. Drawing and sculpture intersect here to shape critical, site-specific investigations.

The Drawing and the Space Master Dissertation studio fosters personal exploration through research-by-drawing. Students begin from intimate fascinations and develop their own architectural language using methods such as chronological, empathic, and *x-ray* drawing. The studio emphasizes intangible spatial qualities – memory, silence, light – nurturing a slow, poetic mode of architectural inquiry.

Together, these studios offer a multifaceted understanding of drawing as a medium of spatial thinking. Drawing is not merely a representational tool but a way of seeing, questioning, and constructing space – across scales, disciplines, and sensibilities. The studios thus embody the ethos of *The Drawing and the Space* Research Group: a commitment to depth, care, and experimental pedagogy

Contributions brings together individual essays and visual works by members of the Research Group, forming a constellation of distinct yet interconnected gazes. These contributions explore how drawing can mediate space, time, and experience in both critical and imaginative ways. Rather than presenting a unified methodology, they share a commitment to drawing and making as active forms of inquiry – each revealing a unique way of engaging with space through the hand, the body, and the mind.

One approach to this is *figured drawing* – a conceptual and pedagogical method developed by Doug Allard. Rooted in figure-ground traditions and *Gestalt* principles, this method shifts the focus from representation to perception – foregrounding absence not as emptiness, but as an active spatial agent. Drawing in black and white, with deliberate

reduction, becomes a way to think through architecture by tracing the interdependence of presence and absence, built and unbuilt. Through work developed in the *BUILTNOTHING ADO* studio, the text presents drawing as a means of constructing relationships: between inside and outside, space and intention, material and immaterial. These *figures* are not fixed objects but open structures of meaning that evolve through the act of drawing itself. Rather than illustrating architecture, figured drawing performs it – making visible the invisible, and allowing absence to generate new forms of presence. It is a method of abstraction, clarity, and critical spatial inquiry.

Another line of inquiry comes through Eva Demuynck's exploration of *attunement*, particularly in the context of grief, as a means of fostering a deeper emotional and spatial sensitivity in architectural design. Drawing from expressive arts therapy, Demuynck highlights how non-verbal communication can facilitate intersubjective connections, particularly in the context of grief and memorial spaces. The essay presents a case study in which a bereaved client actively participates in the design of a personalized memorial, engaging in a process of *spatial attunement*. Through shared creative moments – sketching, modeling, and dialogue – the designer and client navigate loss and transformation, shaping a space that reflects personal healing. The project emphasizes the potential of lightweight, adaptable structures to embody emotional narratives while integrating sustainable and tactile materials. By bridging art therapy and architectural practice, Demuynck demonstrates how drawing can be a powerful tool for empathy, co-design, and the creation of spaces attuned to human experience.

In parallel with the previous, the act of drawing becomes introspective and therapeutic in the contribution of Moragh Diels, in which she examines how creative processes can contribute to mental health by materializing intangible personal experiences. It critiques the current architectural discourse for focusing primarily on technical aspects, arguing instead for a more humane and introspective approach. The essay situates drawing within broader discussions on mental health, referencing art therapy and psychological research to demonstrate how creative processes can facilitate self-understanding and emotional expression. Through an autobiographical case study, Diels investigates how drawing can materialize intangible memories and emotions, mapping the *invisible topography* of personal experiences. The process unfolds through a series of spatial translations – height differences, spatial proportions, and accessibility – where memories are given form. By engaging with drawing as an ongoing reflective act, the research highlights its capacity to bridge psychological and architectural realms, offering a means of communication and connection for both architects and, especially, non-experts.

Spatial experience, meanwhile, is interrogated by Riet Eeckhout through an inquiry into the drawn image as a site of architecture. Engaging with theoretical debates, the essay challenges traditional distinctions between built and drawn architecture, arguing that spatial experience can emerge through the act of drawing itself. Eeckhout builds on John Hejduk's notion that entry into architecture does not require physical immersion but an act of understanding and engagement. Through an iterative drawing process, employing oblique perspectives, movement, and relational readings, the author seeks to materialize implicit spatial knowledge beyond representational imperatives. The large-format drawings become sites of spatial inquiry, capturing change, performativity, and relational depth. By dissolving boundaries between observer and subject, drawing is framed as an autonomous architectural act – an evolving exploration of spatial presence beyond the built form.

From another angle, Enrico Miglietta explores the intimate and performative role of drawing in architectural design, particularly through the lens of details. The essay emphasizes drawing as a maieutic exercise – a process of inquiry where the act of drawing does not simply represent but generates and clarifies ideas. Miglietta's reflections suggest that architectural details are not only technical components but carriers of experiential and emotional weight, allowing the architect to interact with materiality and space. Through examples such as the drawing of a joint or fragment, he illustrates how the drawing process engages with tension, rhythm, and relationship between components, pushing the boundaries of traditional architectural representation. This approach fosters a deeper connection between the architect, the design, and the materials, where drawing becomes both a medium for understanding and an active part of the project's evolution. The essay invites us to see architectural design as a continuous dialogue between idea, form, and material, mediated through drawing.

The meanings of place – social, symbolic, and historical – are central to Marie Porrez's method of *iconographic drawing*. Rather than relying solely on conventional architectural drawings, this approach integrates experiential, narrative, and symbolic elements to reveal a site's immaterial aspects – its history, cultural practices, and social dynamics. Inspired by the landscape paintings of Pieter Bruegel the Elder, the essay examines how spatial, societal, and temporal depth can be captured in drawing. Through a case study of the Flemish village of Sint-Goriks-Oudenhove, Porrez applies this methodology to document both material structures and intangible cultural connections. By incorporating hand-drawn observations, annotations, and iterative reinterpretations, the research positions drawing as a tool not only for analysis but also for learning, communication, and design. The iconographic drawing process ultimately seeks to foster a more sensitive architectural practice, ensuring that new interventions engage meaningfully with the layered complexity of their contexts.

Ecological engagement becomes the point of departure in the contribution by Robin Schaeverbeke, Kristien Vanmerhaeghe, and Nele Stragier. Their concept of a *visual grammar* is enacted through sculptural 2.5D drawings: a hybrid medium between drawing, modelling, and construction, which captures ecological conditions in the city through layered and tactile compositions. Using the diptych as a conceptual device – juxtaposing observation and projection – students develop nine design propositions along a neglected urban line in Brussels.

Each explores how overlooked urban sites can become spaces of ecological care, revealing latent potentials for regeneration. Through methods of reuse, perforation, planting, and minimal intervention, the projects advocate for architecture as a medium of coexistence – sensitive, speculative, and materially grounded. Drawing, in this context, is not illustrative but constructive: a way to think ecologically through spatial gestures. The studio proposes a *grammar* for designing with and within nature – attentive, contextual, and open to transformation.

In a very different material language, Dimitri Vangrunderbeek's contribution emerges from a layered process. It reflects on an experimental artistic process that transforms architectural representations into layered, abstract compositions. Developed in dialogue with Thierry Lagrange and Hans Demeulenaere as part of the *On Abstraction* project, the series begins with photographs exploring architecture and the experience of scale. These images are projected onto canvas, traced in pencil, stitched, immersed in ink, layered with paraffin, and perforated – each step introducing new textures, transparencies, and spatial ambiguities. Through this material choreography, architectural forms gradually lose their literal outlines, becoming poetic, sculptural presences. The process embraces slowness, failure, and revision, allowing the works to evolve over time. Drawing, in its expanded form, becomes a tactile and temporal act of abstraction, translating architectural mass into visual rhythm and depth. Vangrunderbeek's practice reveals how architectural imagery can be reconfigured through stratification – of media, gesture, and meaning – until space itself emerges as an affective, elusive, and perceptually open figure.

A shift from sight to sound frames Esther Venrooij's contribution, which explores listening as a situated, embodied, and multimodal form of spatial engagement, challenging the dominance of vision in architectural and cultural practices. Drawing from acoustic ecology, psychoacoustics, and sound art, the essay introduces diverse *modes of listening* – including causal, semantic, acousmatic, and expanded approaches – each shaping our perception and understanding of space in distinct ways. Through references to John Cage, Tim Ingold, and Erich Fromm, Venrooij frames listening as an active, interpretive act that mobilizes attention, memory, and bodily presence. The text weaves poetic reflections, historical fragments, and examples of audio technologies to reconstruct listening as both intimate and political: a relational tool for attunement to place and time. In this perspective, listening is not passive reception but a method of inquiry. Drawing becomes its analogue – a way of sounding out space visually, temporally, and affectively. Both practices invite a slower, deeper engagement with the world and its spatial narratives.

The final contribution engages spatial experience not through the eye, but through the moving body. Liselotte Vroman investigates the relationship between drawing, movement, and spatial experience by introducing performative practices carried out by dancers and architecture students. Rather than adhering to conventional architectural representations, these drawings emerge as residues of bodily movement – capturing the energy and perspective of embodied spatial experience. Vroman reveals how two interrelated, yet distinct spaces arise in the act of drawing: one rendered through established architectural language, and another ephemeral, generated by the gestures of the moving body. Her approach introduces four conceptual *playing devices* that reframe how space, movement, and the body are perceived and engaged across both architectural and dance disciplines. Through this, Vroman positions drawing as an empathetic act that bridges material and immaterial spatial experience.

Annex: Doctoral Dissertations 2021-25 presents five doctoral research projects developed within the group between 2016 and 2025. Each of these projects investigates drawing as a slow, embodied act that does not merely represent space, but actively generates it.

Liselotte Vroman's *Make Room for Play* bridges architecture and dance: by staging a *playground* where designers alternate roles with choreographers, it rethinks spatial creation from the viewpoint of the moving body, dissolving disciplinary tools in iterative acts of action-reflection.

On the Fragility of Empathy by Louise de Brabander investigates hand drawing as *empathic musing*. Through walking, memo-drawing and fragment-based sketching, it shows how attentive line work can cultivate a felt understanding of places and assemble wholes by way of their parts.

Eva Beke's *Perspicio* revisits linear perspective to unlock Proto-Renaissance pictorial space; perspective is inverted from a geometric code into a *looking machine* that invites designers to dwell mentally in drawn worlds and return with refreshed perceptual habits.

Enrico Miglietta's *Re-reading Form through the Agency of the Joint* takes the architectural joint as an ordering principle: large-scale analytical drawings expose how material connections hold tacit knowledge, proposing a palimpsest-like design attitude grounded in archaeological curiosity and tectonic clarity.

Finally, *The Embodiment of Consolation* by Eva Demuynck explores co-drawing memorial spaces with bereaved participants, demonstrating how spatial metaphors on paper can support grief work and open a new interface between architecture and art therapy.

Across these diverse inquiries, several threads recur: drawing as an iterative laboratory for empathy and care; the fragment as a strategic lens on the whole; the body – whether grieving, moving, or measuring – as co-author of space; and an insistence on interdisciplinary crossings that destabilise habitual ways of seeing. Collectively, the research advocates for an architectural practice that is reflective, tactile, and profoundly human, where making lines is inseparable from making meaning.

Reflections, finally, gathers reflections by the founding members of the Research Group, along with two invited authors. These closing essays look back on the evolution of the Group's trajectory and open the way for future questions, contexts, and possibilities.

The essay by Jo Van Den Berghe and Thierry Lagrange draws together the threads running through the volume and reflects on the evolving trajectory of *The Drawing and the Space* Research Group. It reaffirms drawing as more than a tool for representation – positioning it as a medium of discovery, interpretation, and construction. Across the contributions, drawing emerges as a multifaceted practice that connects the tactile and the intellectual, the personal and the shared. The essay weaves together diverse methods developed within the group, such as empathic drawing, critical sequential drawing, and the representation of intangible topographies. These approaches make space perceptible through memory, emotion, and bodily experience – transforming abstract configurations into meaningful, situated realities. Crucially, the authors advocate for a *high trust environment* in which subjective research can unfold. The group's collective method, the *Concentric Circles of Observation*, exemplifies this ethos: a structured yet open form of peer review that nurtures dialogue and ensures personal explorations remain critically anchored.

In closing, the essay reflects on a significant conceptual shift within the group's work – from the notion of *space* to that of *place*. This transition signals a deeper understanding of architecture not as an abstract field of operations, but as a lived and meaningful condition. Through drawing, space acquires texture, memory, and presence – offering not only a way to *think* architecture, but to *dwell* in it.

Following these reflections, two invited voices extend the conversation, situating *The Drawing and the Space* within wider cultural, spatial, and philosophical horizons.

In *Spatial Heft in Flanders*, Michael McGarry reads the group's work as part of a larger reorientation of architectural thought from temporal to spatial consciousness. Drawing on Michel Foucault's notion of simultaneity and on the embodied epistemologies that followed the disintegration of modernist certainties, he locates in the Flemish context a fertile ground where space is both medium and subject of knowledge. The studios, he argues, cultivate a sensitivity to *spatial heft* – a density achieved through representation, section, metaphor, and empathy. Across drawings and models, the act of cutting, joining, or mapping becomes a form of thinking through resistance and depth. Echoing the layered materiality of the Ghent Altarpiece, McGarry perceives in these works a *dense space without voids*, animated by bodily presence and by trust among students and mentors. What emerges is not a theory of drawing but a culture of spatial awareness – attuned, reflective, and profoundly human.

In *Setting the (Drawing) Table for Design Research*, Penelope Haralambidou frames her reflection around the drawing table – at once a literal surface and a shared ground for research. Taking Eva Beke's *Bootleg* as point of departure, she traces the table's philosophical lineage – from Plato's ideal forms to Arendt's world-making, from Latour's mediating networks to Sara Ahmed's feminist reorientation of space – and proposes it as the matrix through which discourse and figure coalesce. Within *The Drawing and the Space*, the table is not a static support but an active site where bodies, lines, and words meet: the *locus* of the group's *concentric circles of observation*. Through close readings of several contributions, Haralambidou shows how drawing becomes an act of inhabiting, where intimacy, gravity, and dialogue intertwine. Her essay concludes by questioning the fate of this tactile terrain in the age of the digital screen, calling for a renewed understanding of the *deep table* that sustains the link between making, thinking, and imagining architecture.

Coming full circle, this book remains, by design, an open composition. The texts assembled here trace a dense constellation of gestures, ideas, and questions. They do not seek uniformity of method or outcome, but instead illuminate how drawing operates across a spectrum of intensities: from the slow accumulation of layers to the immediacy of an intuitive mark; from empathetic co-design to the abstraction of memory or scale. Drawing, as these pages show, is not a fixed language but a terrain of experimentation – always situated, always evolving.

As we move toward future developments – new studios, doctoral paths, collaborative projects – this publication serves as both a document and a proposition. It reflects the current state of a research trajectory in motion, while inviting others to enter, respond, and transform it.

In that sense, this book is not a final word, but a shared ground: a place where drawing continues to make space – for thought, for others, and for architecture as a deeply human and imaginative act.

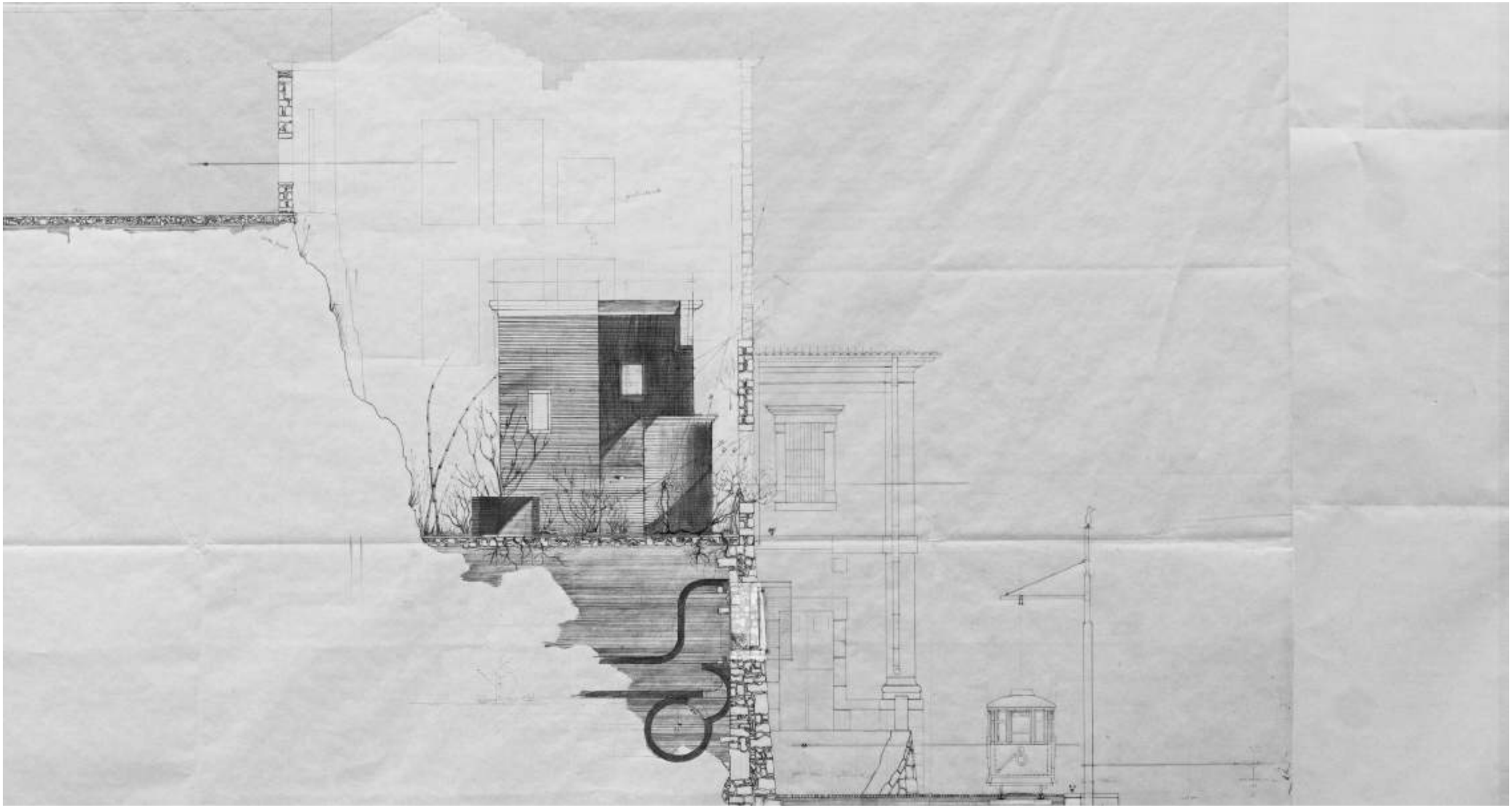


Fig. 4. Vincent Adeyemo, Academic work for the Master Dissertation Studio *The Drawing and the Space*, 2020.

Studios

Studio Anatomy
Jo Van Den Berghe

The Double Look
Thierry Lagrange, Dimitri Vangrunderbeek

The Drawing and the Space (Master Dissertation Studio)
Thierry Lagrange, Jo Van Den Berghe

Jo Van Den Berghe

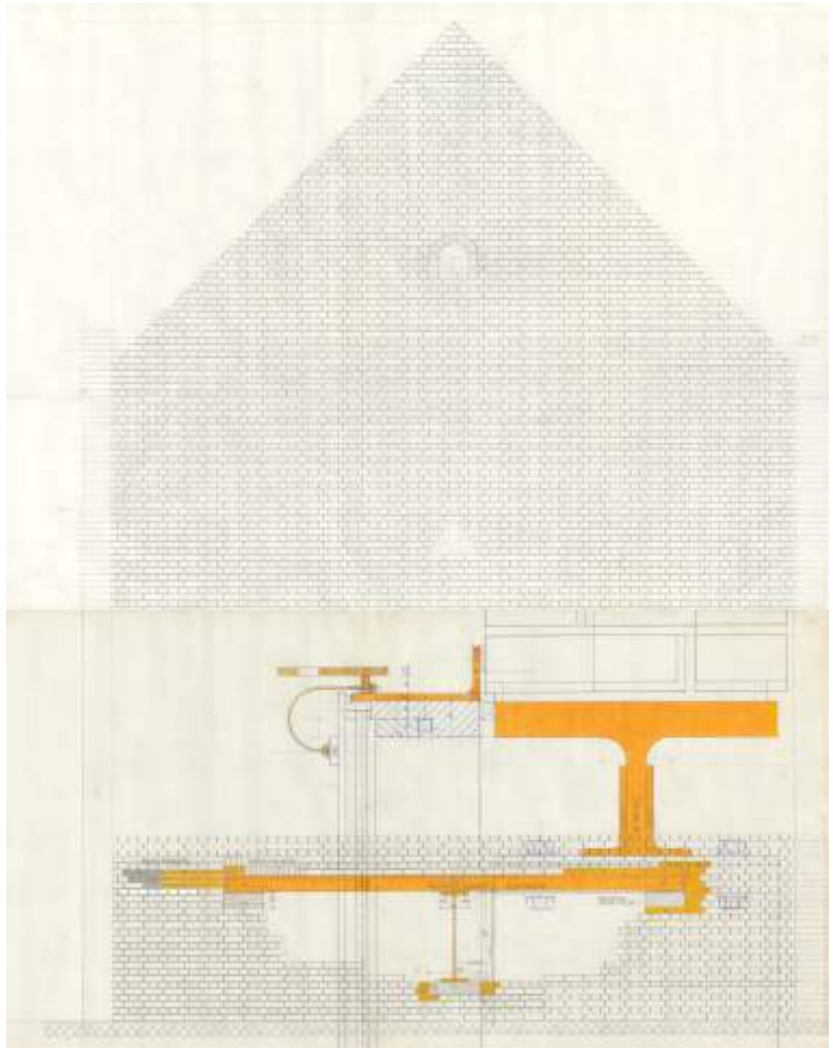


Fig. 1. Jo Van Den Berghe, *WoSho* (2013-ongoing). Graphite pencil 3H, blue ballpoint, Muji orange marker, gold marker, thin tracing paper 60gr/M2. Original size: 920 x 284 mm. Previously published at the *Works + Words* Biennale, Royal Academy Copenhagen, 2022.

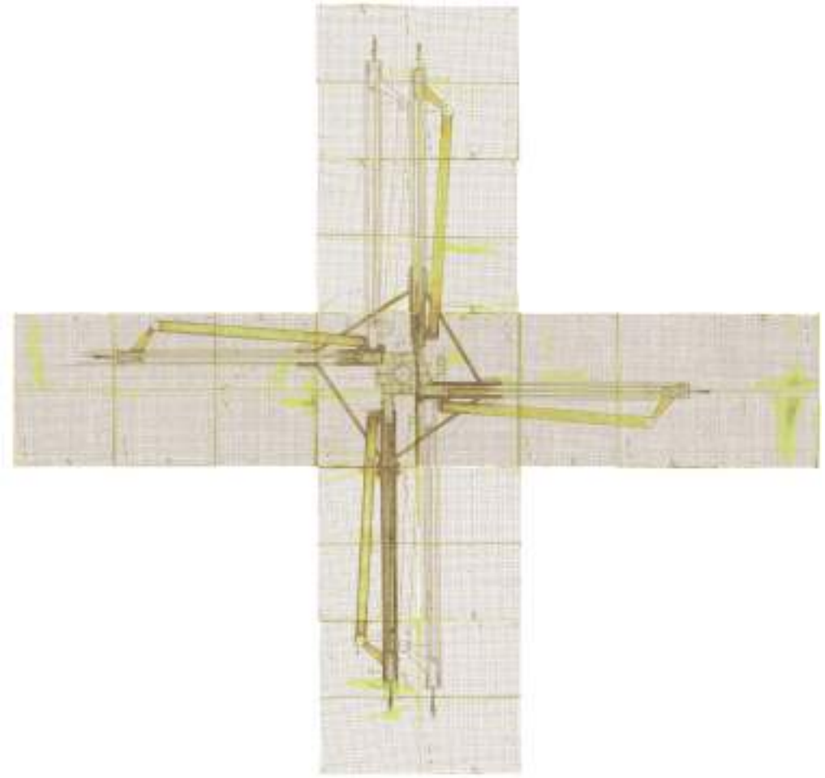


Fig. 2. Eliyah Caestecker, *Revolving door - Post Office, Ostend (architect Gaston Eysselinck 1947)*, Horizontal section scale 1:1. Graphite pencil, coloured pencils, 32 A4 pages of millimetered paper composed. *Studio Anatomy: [Window] Details*, Academic year 2025-2026.

Studio Anatomy traces socio-historical layers, starting from the topography (geology, the vertical section) and stretching as far as the full scale architectural (constructive) detail (the section, again), incorporating construction in the design-research process from the very beginning. Doing so, Studio Anatomy covers the full stretch from poetics to technics in architecture.

Critical sequential drawing (which includes scale modelling) and in-depth reflections on architecture's construction practice and on history of architecture and art, constitute the core of Studio Anatomy's research approach.

Studio Anatomy critically questions the too speedy nature at the surface of things we see (in architecture) – the superficiality of the world – by cutting into and under the skin of things (architecture). Alberto Pérez-Gòmez suggests that the section is of a foremost importance in the architect's work, as a prediction on the casting of shadows, pointing at the anatomic nature of the section that, applied by the architect, «break[s] the skin of things in order to show»[1], completing his argument with Merleau-Ponty, «how the things become things, how the world becomes a world»[2]. This cutting into substance is resistant, hence it slows down our acting and intensifies our thinking. *Slowing* instead of speeding. Because *slowing* permits one to perceive, absorb and embody longer, better, deeper. Depth is the first, not the third dimension in Studio Anatomy[3]. Through this act of cutting, which is a way of making with the thinking hand[4], the investigated subject (architecture) is being anatomised and better understood.

Main team:
Jo Van Den Berghe (2009-ongoing)
Mira Sanders (2009-2019)
Laurens Luyten (2009-2019)
Louise De Brabander (2019-2021)
Enrico Miglietta (2021-2022)

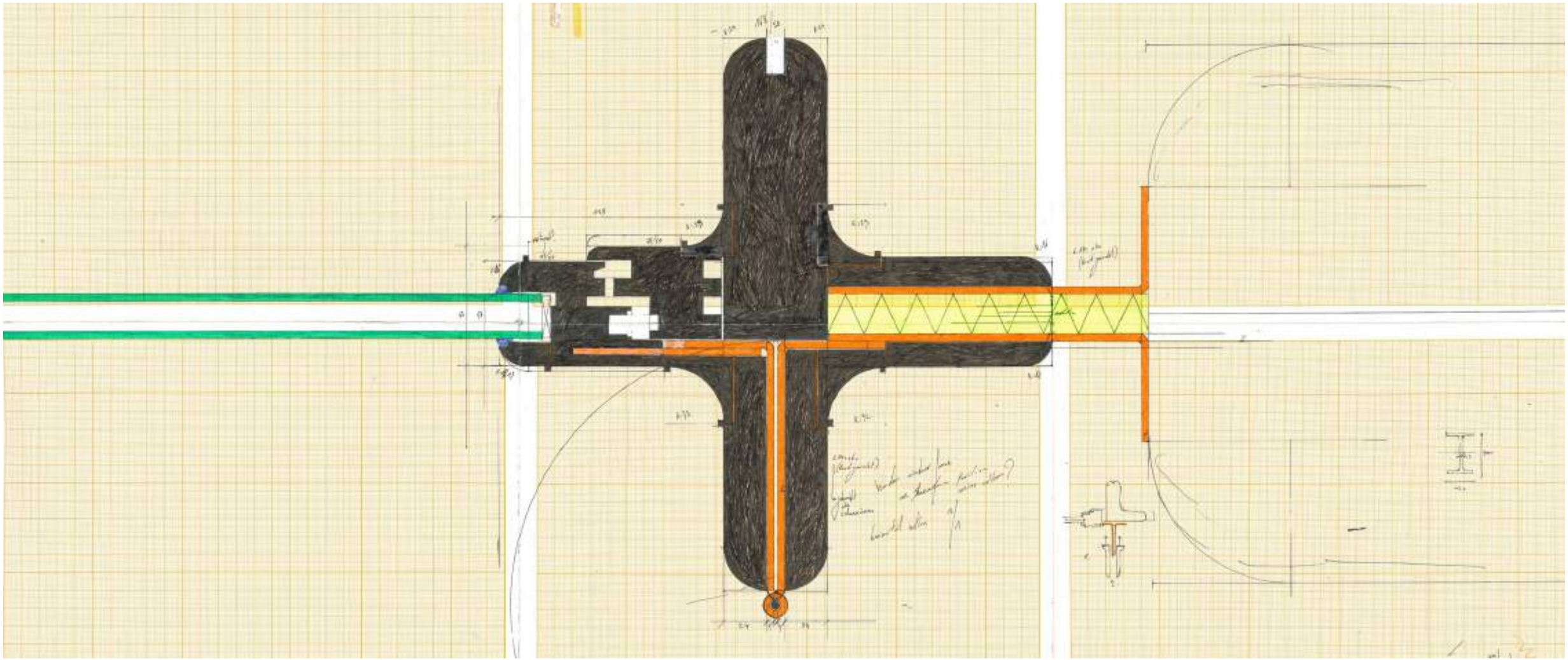


Fig. 3. Eliyah Caestecker, *The Room within the Window within the Room within the Window*. Markers and pencils on millimetered paper. *Studio Anatomy: [Window] Details*, Academic year 2025-2026.

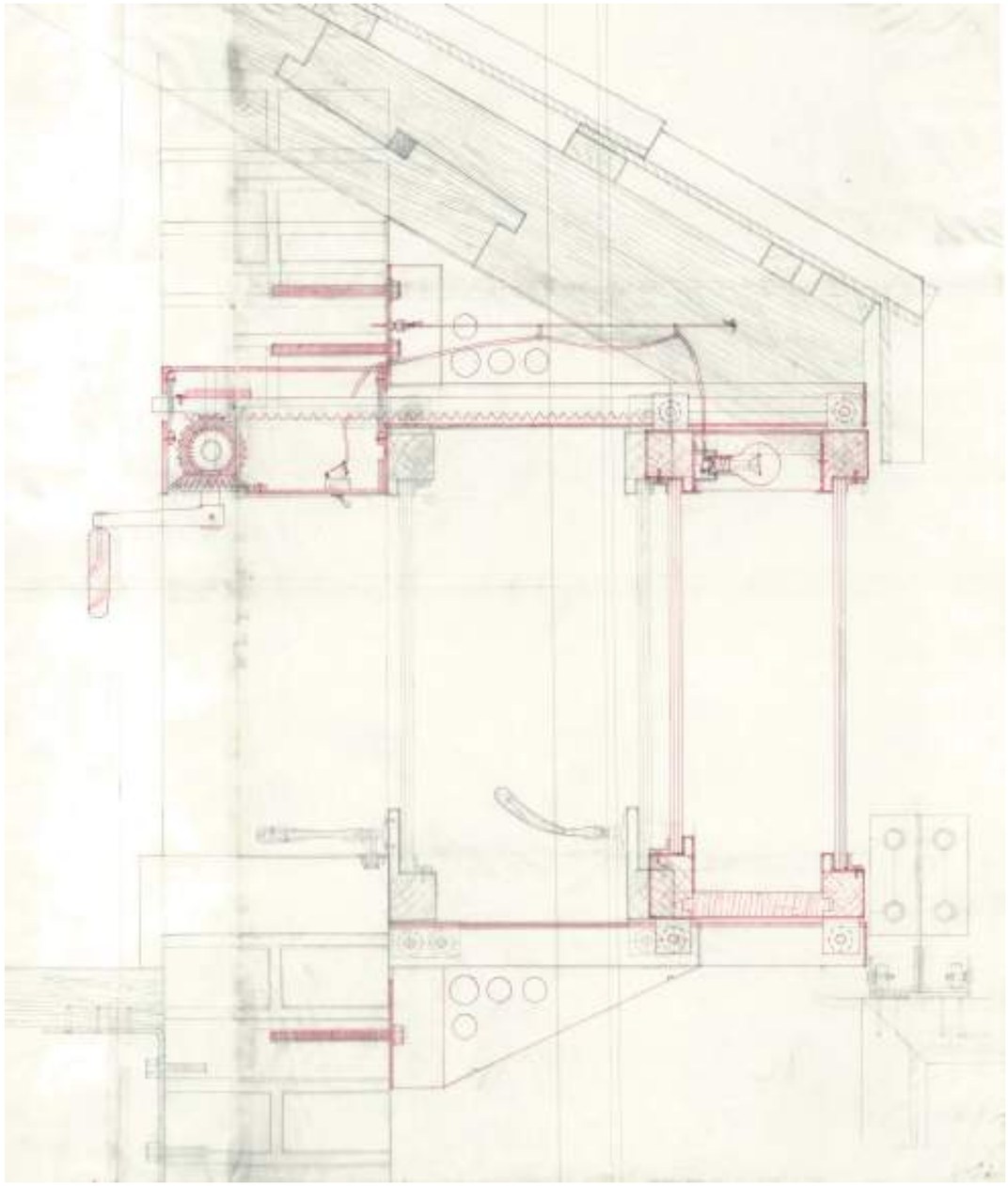


Fig. 4. Seppe Pylyser, *Window for a Watchmaker: drawing window detail*, scale 1:1. Tracing paper, pencil, thin red marker. *Studio Anatomy: [Window] Details*, Academic year 2024-2025.

Fig. 5. *The Architectural Detail*. Final exhibition and Jury. Discussion on the work of student Ronan Daniel O'Shea, Academic year 2021-2022.

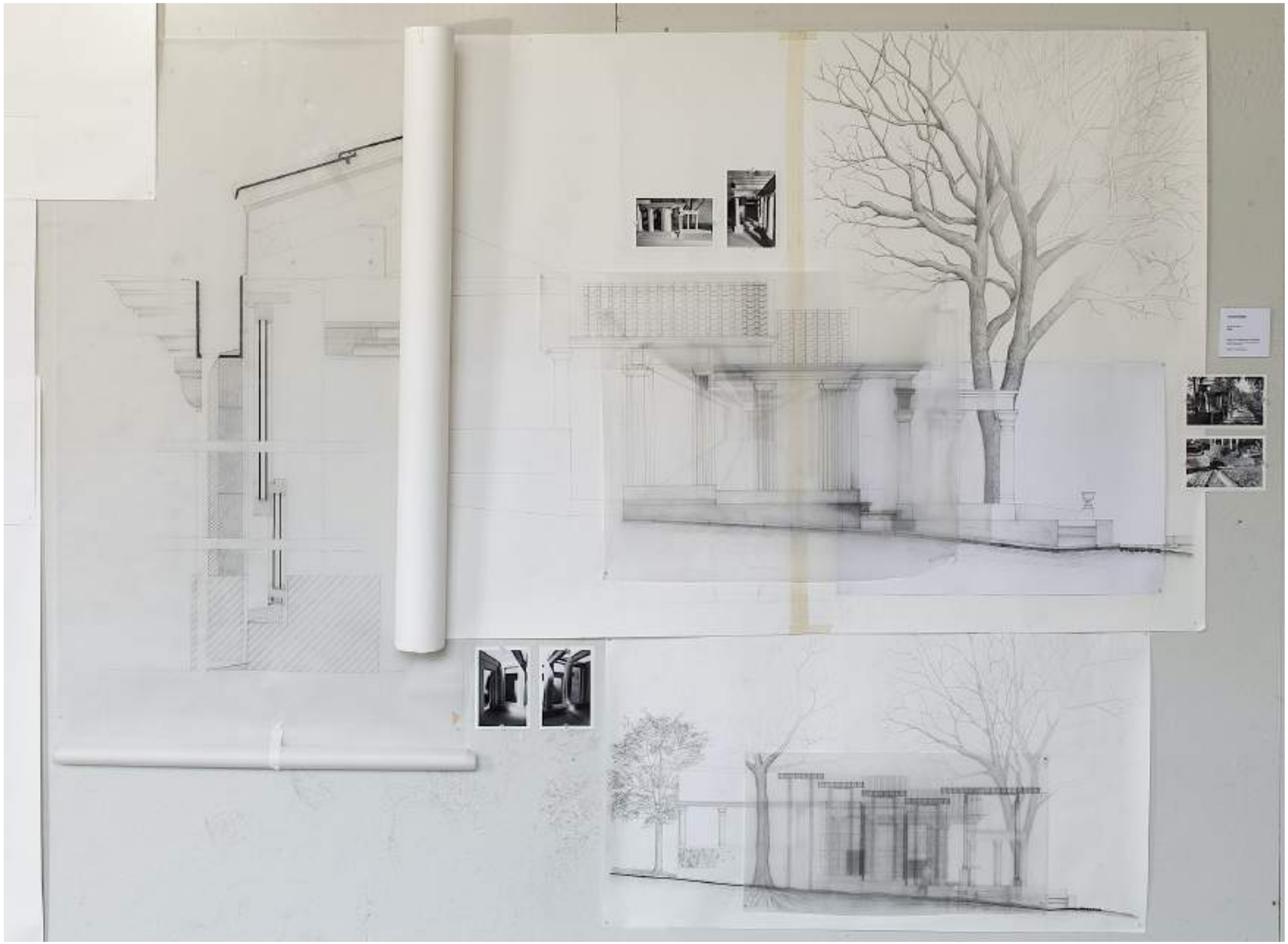


Fig. 6. Lina Chen, *Dieweg Graveyard, Ukkel, Brussels. Section and integrated central perspective,* scale 1:10. Layers of tracing paper, pencil. *The Architectural Detail: Technè = Poiesis? Prototypes of Looking and Seeing beyond Walls*, Academic year 2018-2019.

Fig. 7. *Studio Anatomy: EROS & THANATOS*, Exhibition of the work on the site of Abbey Villers-La-Ville (BE), Academic year 2013-2014.

Notes

1. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind”, in Id. *The Primacy of Perception*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston Illinois 1964, p. 181.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Jo Van Den Berghe, *Theatre of Operations, or: Construction Site as Architectural Design*, PhD Diss., RMIT University, 2012, SmallBook 2, pp. 71-74.
4. Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Thinking Hand. Existential and Embodied Wisdom in Architecture*, John Wiley & Sons, Chichester 2009.

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Pallasmaa Juhani, *The Thinking Hand. Existential and Embodied Wisdom in Architecture*, John Wiley & Sons, Chichester 2009.
Pérez-Gòmez Alberto, “The Space of Architecture: Meaning as Presence and Representation”, in *Questions of Perception: Phenomenology in Architecture*, ed. by S. Holl, J. Pallasmaa, A. Pérez-Gòmez, William Stout Publishers, San Francisco 2006.
Van Den Berghe Jo, *Theatre of Operations, or: Construction Site as Architectural Design*, PhD Diss., RMIT University 2012.

The Double Look

Thierry Lagrange, Dimitri Vangrunderbeek

Fig. 1. Dimitri Vangrunderbeek, *Cadrage*, Bergensesteenweg / Chaussée de Mons 2018. The opening image of the design studio *The Double Look* shows a typical Flemish arterial road and a frame that highlights a selected portion of it. It symbolizes the studio's intention: to look at the built reality and to look again from a particular perspective. The frictions, contrasts, and dialogues between these two ways of seeing led to creative insights.

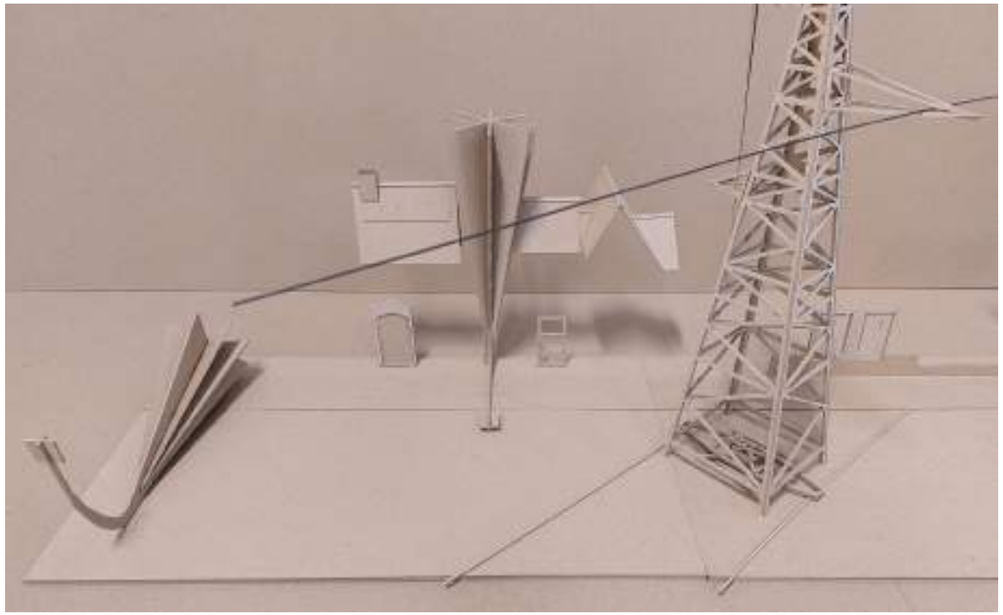

Fig. 2. Anneli Raman, Student work, Studio *The Double Look*, Ghent, AY 2022-2023.

The Double Look is a design studio operating at the intersection of architecture and art, established in 2015. It fosters a critical and experimental practice rooted in students' individual fascinations, with an emphasis on spatial design, context, and materiality. Central to its pedagogy is the method of *double looking*: an iterative process of re-examining contexts, ideas, and artefacts to provoke new insights. Through this reflective approach, students develop an acute awareness of how architects observe, interpret, and act within spatial and societal frameworks.

The studio is anchored in a phenomenological approach and is led by artist Dimitri Vangrunderbeek and architect Thierry Lagrange. Their combined expertise in sculpture and architectural detailing fosters an ongoing dialogue between disciplines, exemplifying a dual gaze that brings diverse modes of making and thinking into productive tension.

From 2015 to 2024, the studio focused on the *steenweg*, a typical Flemish arterial road marked by fragmented spatial conditions – juxtapositions of built forms, commercial typologies, residual landscapes, and infrastructural voids. Students selected fragments of the *steenweg* – from a few meters to one hundred meters in length – as the basis for site-specific investigations and interventions. The defined scale encouraged fine-grained engagement with context.

Since 2024, The Double Look has evolved into a master thesis studio with an open-ended structure. In the first semester, students define their thematic and conceptual focus; in the second, they develop a personal, materially grounded design project. The studio's outcomes remain diverse in form but consistently demonstrate craftsmanship, spatial sensitivity, and contextual awareness.

Throughout its evolution – from a design studio to an academic design office in 2019, and now a master thesis studio – *drawing, making, detailing,* and *experiencing space* have remained central.

The studio embraces contemporary issues while encouraging students to pursue their individual interests across architecture, art, and spatial practice. In 2025, Vangrunderbeek and Lagrange, in collaboration with the artist Hans Demeulenaere, published the book *Cut Down Build Up, On Abstraction*, the result of five years of research presented in the form of three dialogues between the authors, which culminated in a design-oriented and spatial production.

As a space of experimentation, The Double Look values *making and unmaking, seeing and re-seeing* as core acts. The practice of double looking fosters a multifocal perspective that deepens students' critical engagement with their work and its contexts. Though abstract in concept, this approach becomes deeply concrete through embodied acts of making space.

Ultimately, The Double Look promotes a way of working grounded in iterative observation – a continual process of *looking and double looking* at contexts, interests, and outcomes. This method generates new understandings and cultivates the reflective seeing and making essential to architectural practice.

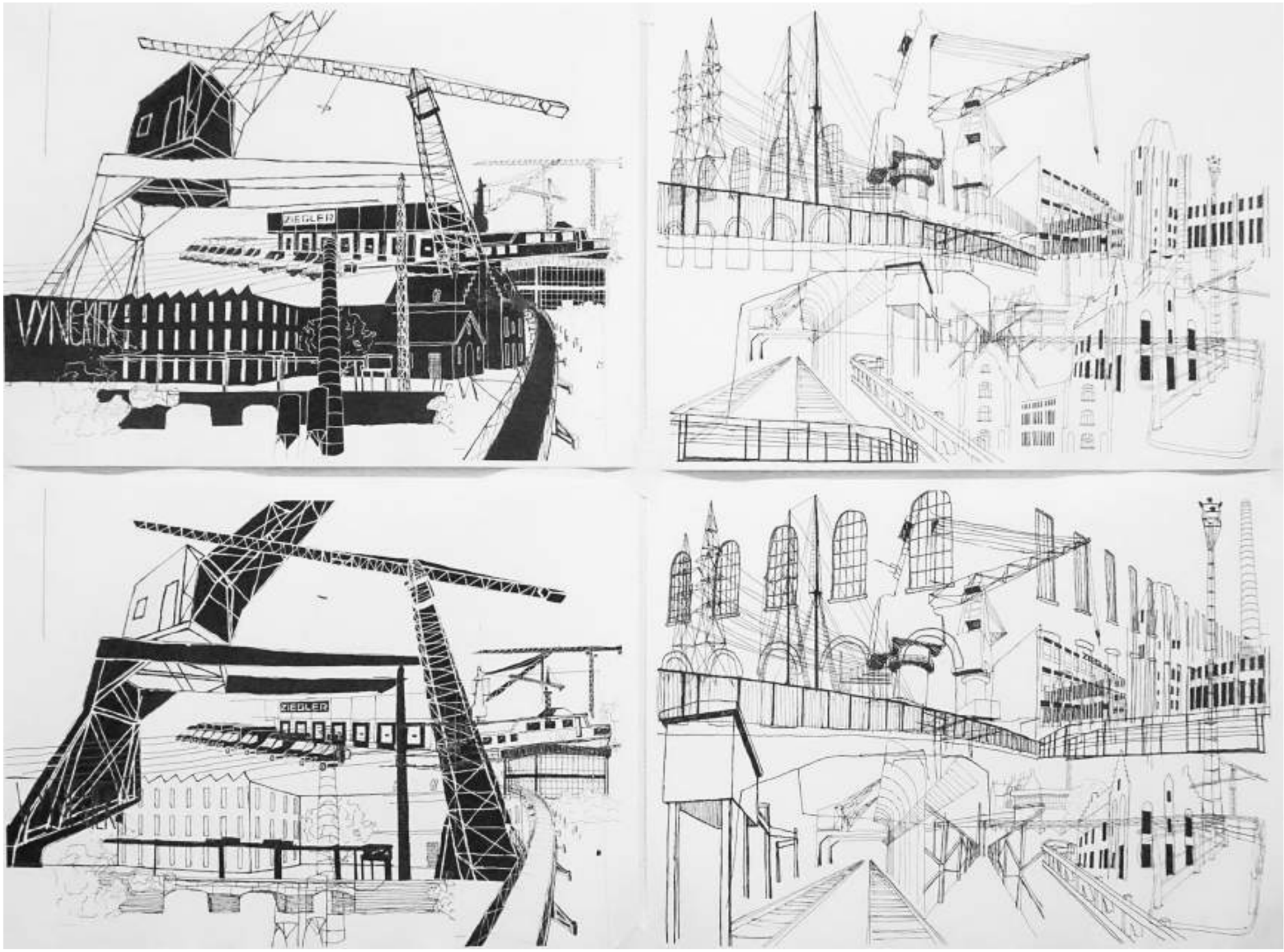

Fig. 3. Fons Galle, Student work, Studio *The Double Look*, Ghent, AY 2018-2019.

Fig. 5. Robbe Schelfhout, Student work, Studio *The Double Look*, Ghent, AY 2019-2020.

Fig. 4. Final Exhibition, Studio *The Double Look*, Ghent, AY 2018-2019.

Fig. 6. Kaat Van Extergem, Student work, Studio *The Double Look*, Ghent, AY 2021-2022.

Fig. 7. Lode De Smet-Van Damme, Student work, Studio *The Double Look*, Ghent, AY 2021-2022.

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Lagrange Thierry, Dimitri Vangrunderbeek, Hans Demeulenaere, Jolien Naeyaert (contr.), *Cut Down Build Up: On Abstraction*, MER, Ghent 2024.

The Drawing and the Space (Master Dissertation Studio)

Thierry Lagrange, Jo Van Den Berghe

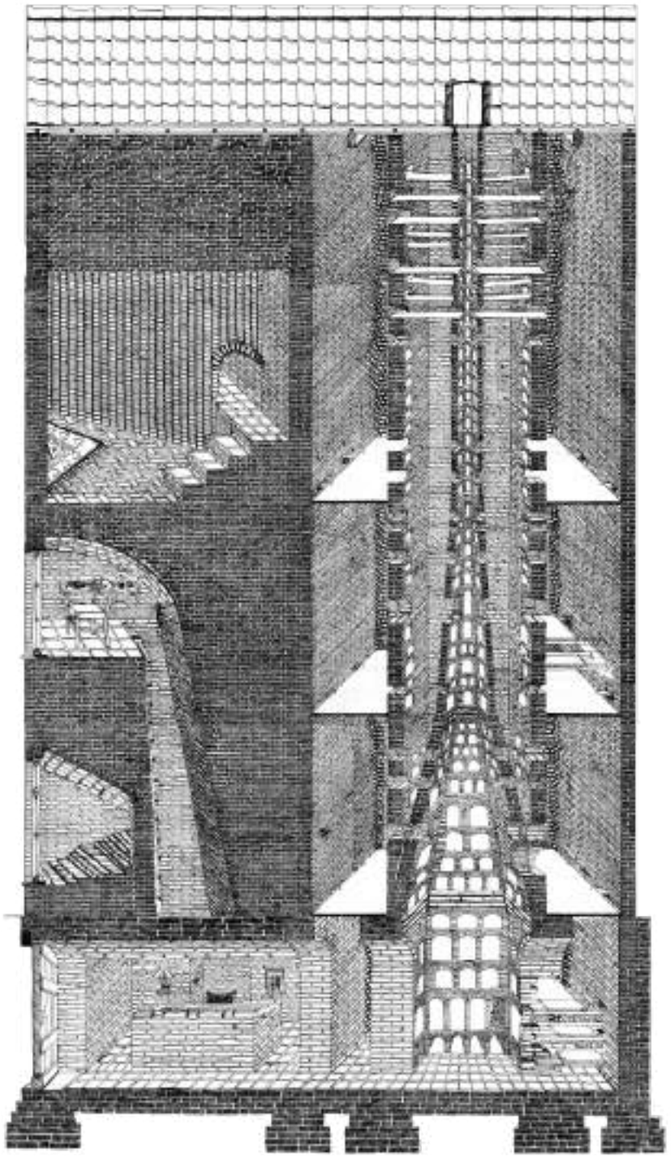

Fig. 1. Elise Verstraete, Academic work for the Master Dissertation Studio *The Drawing and the Space*, 2022 (excerpt from the exhibition *When Midnight Comes Around*, Ghent).

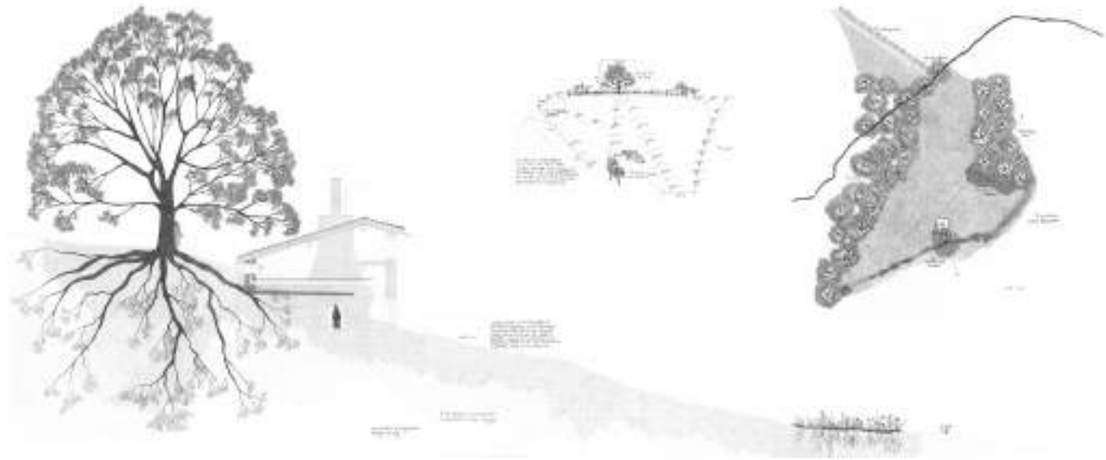

Fig. 2. Marie Porrez, Academic work for the Master Dissertation Studio *The Drawing and the Space*, 2022 (excerpt from the exhibition *When Midnight Comes Around*, Ghent).

Over the past seven years, the Master Dissertation Studio has evolved into a unique, high-trust academic environment that merges architectural research with personal exploration. Integrated within an academic research group, the studio has welcomed a bit more than a hundred students, each of whom has contributed to a collective inquiry into the intangible qualities of space through the mediums of drawing and scale modeling. The studio does not begin with a rigid programmatic brief. Rather, it invites students to explore their own deeply rooted fascinations – those inner compulsions, observations, and questions that shape their experience of space – and to cultivate these into mature architectural investigations.

Drawing is central to this process. Not merely a means of representation, drawing in this studio is an act of discovery. A variety of innovative drawing methods, developed within our research group, are offered as a flexible toolset. These include chronological drawing, X-ray drawing, critical sequential drawing, and empathic drawing, among others. Each method opens different ways of seeing, understanding, and engaging with space – beyond the physical and into the psychological, emotional, and atmospheric dimensions.

Students are encouraged to construct their research around the intangible properties of places: memory, light, silence, rhythm, presence, and absence. Through drawing and model-making, they test and refine their intuitions, slowly shaping a personal architectural language. These investigations are supported by an environment of trust and openness, where risk-taking and vulnerability are not only permitted but essential. The studio functions as a safe space – intellectually, emotionally, and creatively – where students' ideas can grow, and their horizons can expand.

To further this development, each year culminates in a jury exhibition, which brings together international experts from diverse architectural and artistic backgrounds. These jurors are not just evaluators but active participants in the discourse, offering critical insights that broaden the students' perspectives and sharpen their architectural thinking. Over the years, the studio has also reached beyond its local setting, presenting collective work in two significant international exhibitions: one at the Università degli Studi di Napoli "Federico II", and another at the Politecnico di Milano.

The studio's approach fosters the development of a mature architectural discourse rooted in individual experience and rigorous spatial investigation. It does not prescribe solutions but cultivates an enduring architectural attitude – one that values observation, care, and interpretation. Each student emerges with a project that is not only academically sound but deeply personal and resonant, reflecting a clear authorship and a thoughtful engagement with space. In this way, the master dissertation studio becomes more than an academic exercise. It becomes a rite of passage – a transition into a professional life equipped with critical tools, refined sensibilities, and a commitment to architecture as a cultural and existential act.

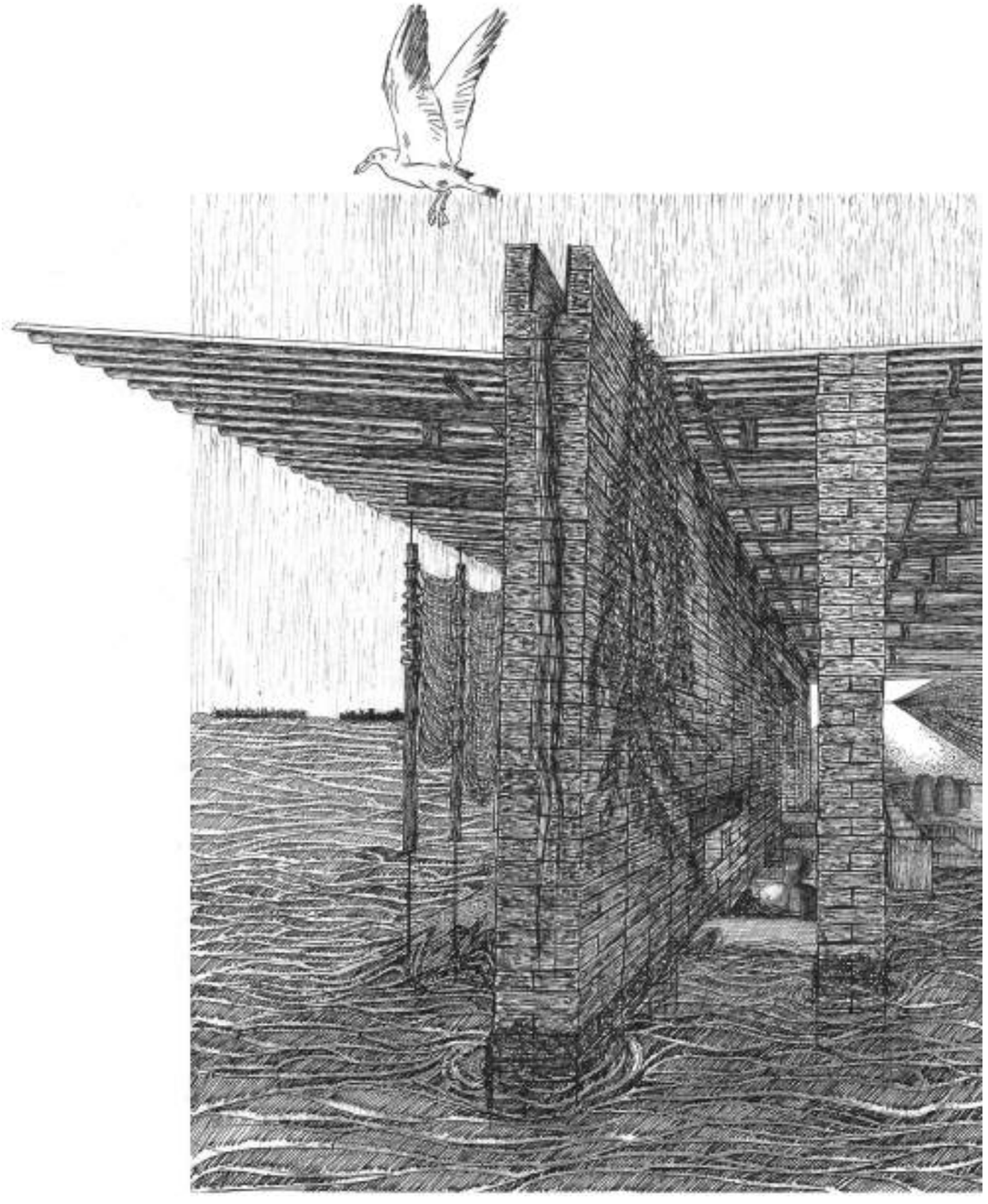

Fig. 3. Cassandra Van Peer, Academic work for the Master Dissertation Studio *The Drawing and the Space*, 2022 (excerpt from the exhibition *When Midnight Comes Around*, Ghent).

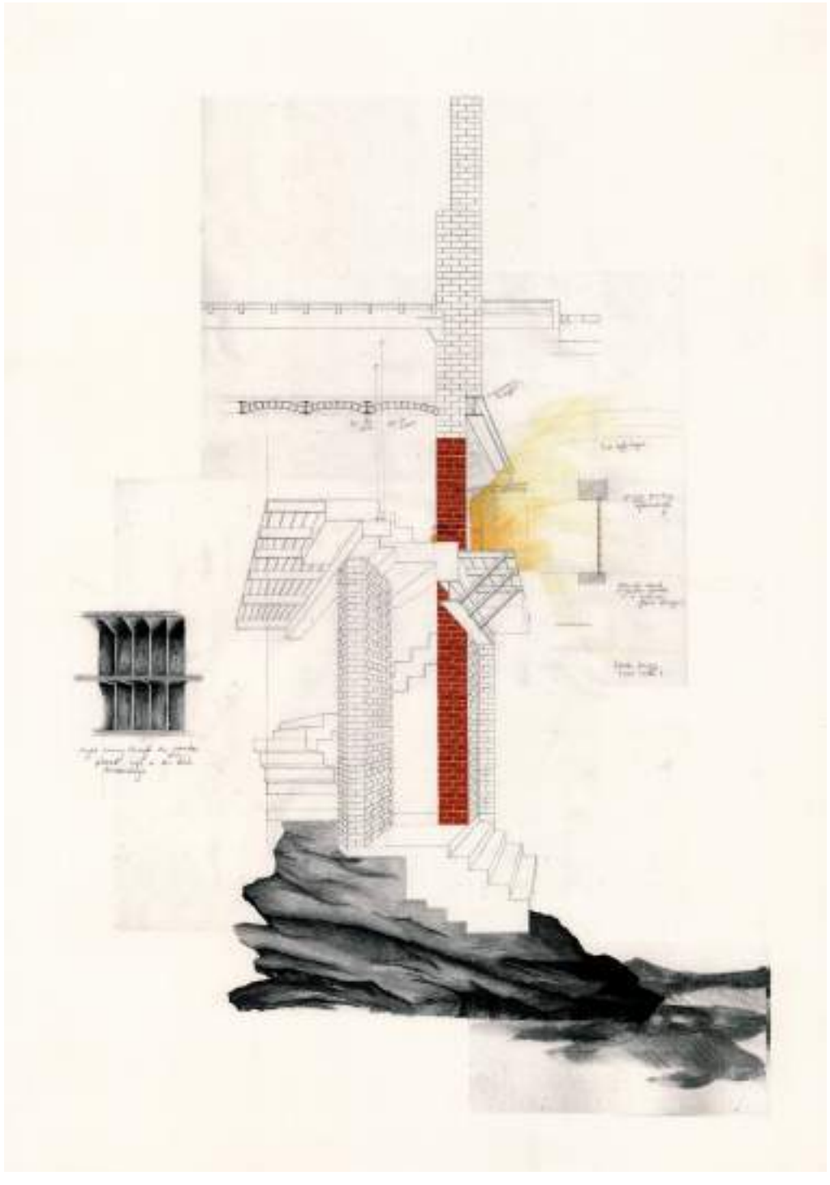

Fig. 4. Flore Lenaerts, Academic work for the Master Dissertation Studio *The Drawing and the Space*, 2022 (excerpt from the exhibition *When Midnight Comes Around*, Ghent).

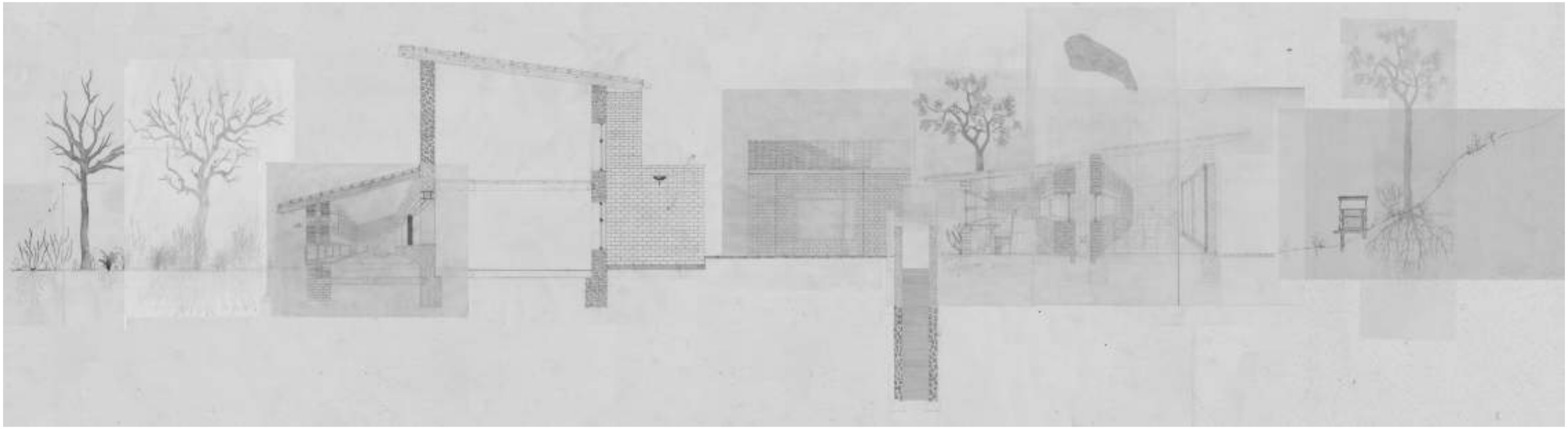

Fig. 5. Isra Cekaj, Academic work for the Master Dissertation Studio *The Drawing and the Space*, 2022 (excerpt from the exhibition *When Midnight Comes Around*, Ghent).

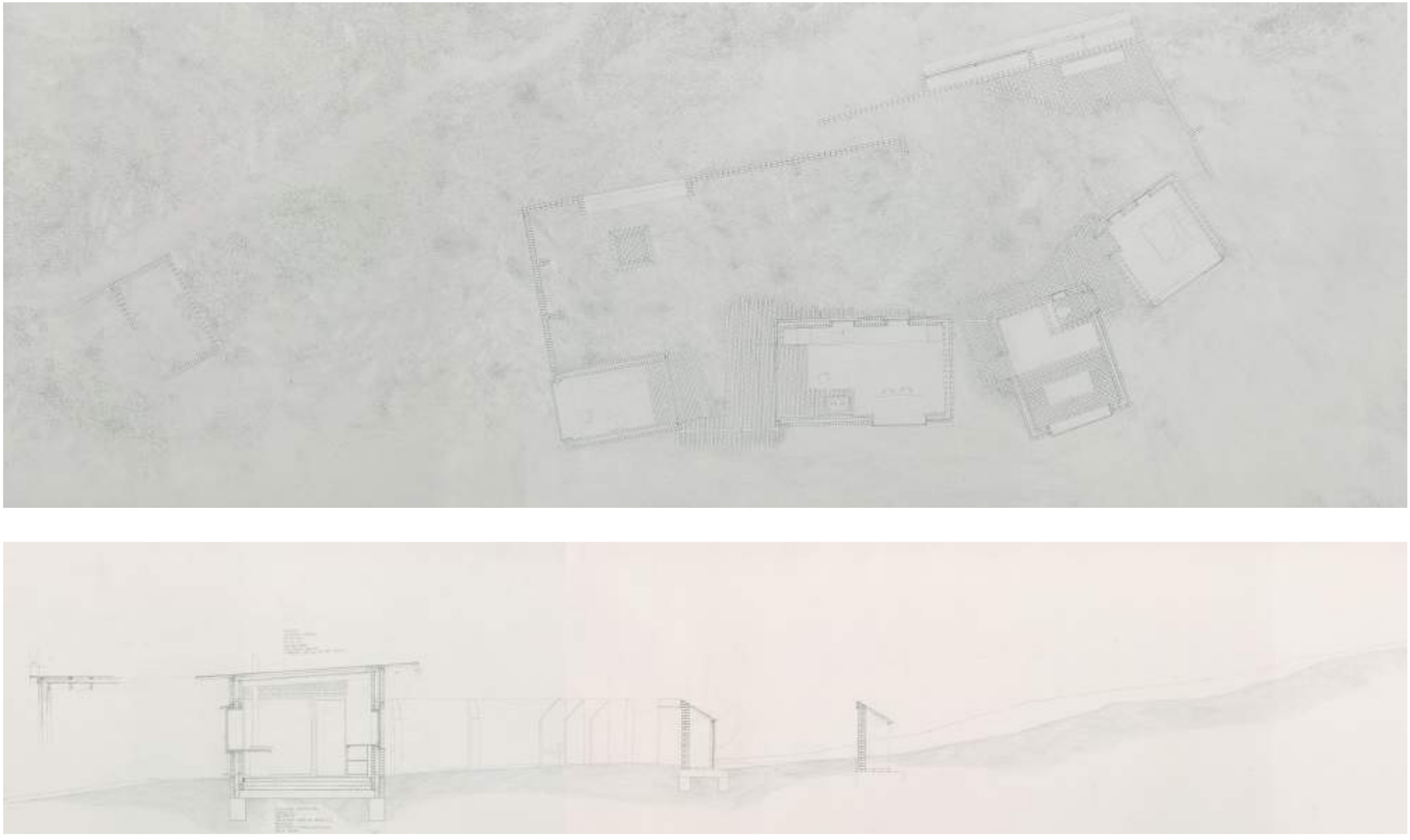

Fig. 6. Louise De Brabander, Academic work for the Master Dissertation Studio *The Drawing and the Space*, 2017.

Fig. 7. Marie Porrez, Academic work for the Master Dissertation Studio *The Drawing and the Space*, 2022 (excerpt from the exhibition *When Midnight Comes Around*, Ghent).

Fig. 8. Lina Chen, Academic work for the Master Dissertation Studio *The Drawing and the Space*, 2022 (excerpt from the exhibition *When Midnight Comes Around*, Ghent).

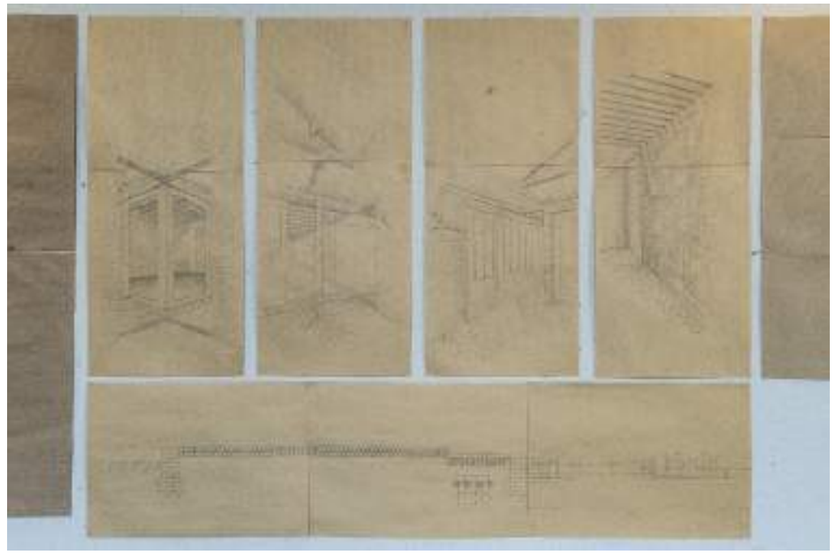

Fig. 9. Lotte Thierens, Academic work for the Master Dissertation Studio *The Drawing and the Space*, 2022 (excerpt from the exhibition *When Midnight Comes Around*, Ghent).

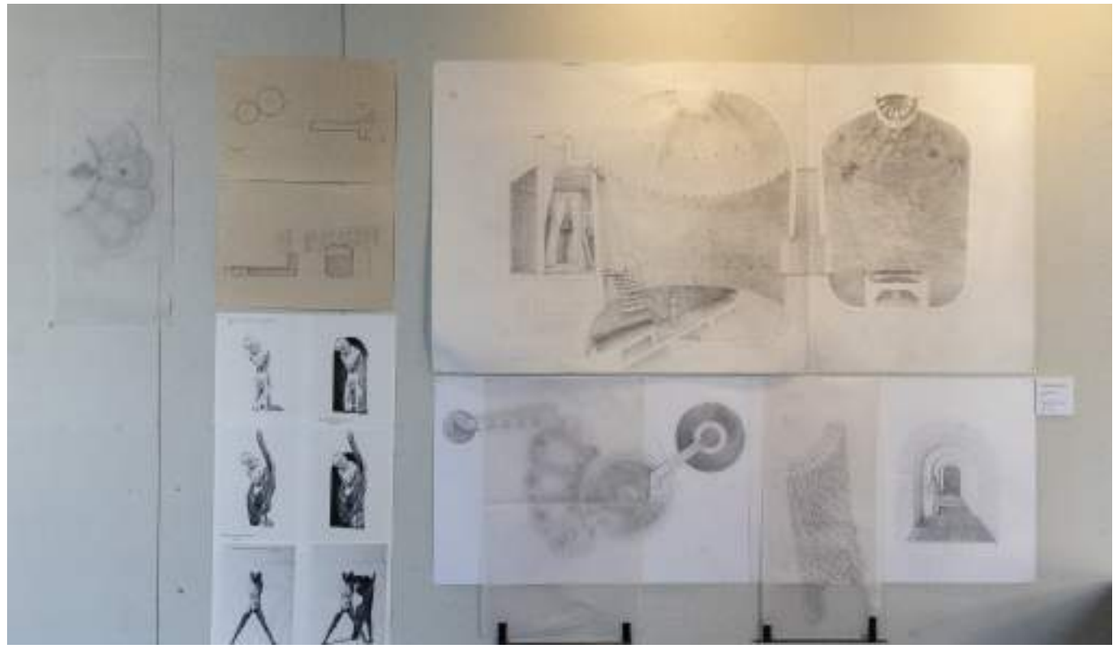

Fig. 10. Rémy Debbaut, Academic work for the Master Dissertation Studio *The Drawing and the Space*, 2022 (excerpt from the exhibition *When Midnight Comes Around*, Ghent).

Contributions

Go Figure(d). The Figured Drawing as Design Methodology
Doug Allard

Attunement through Drawing
Eva Demuynck

Materializing Intangible Topographies through Drawing Space. Drawing as a Tool for Connectedness
Moragh Diels

The Experiential Space in the Drawing Called Architecture
Riet Eeckhout

What's in a Detail? Drawing as Maieutic Exercise in Architectural Design
Enrico Miglietta

Iconographic Drawing. Learning from Landscape Painting
Marie Porrez

Towards a Grammar of Natural City Scenes. 9 Propositions
Robin Schaeverbeke, Kristien Vanmerhaeghe, Nele Stragier

On Scale, Experience and Layering
Dimitri Vangrunderbeek

You See I Write by Ear
Esther Venrooij

Arrays of Performative Drawing Practices.
Liselotte Vroman

Go Figure(d). The Figured Drawing as Design Methodology

Doug Allard

The image [Fig. 01] presents the black & white concept plan of the Melun-Sénart urban design competition entry drawn by Xaveer De Geyter whilst a collaborator at OMA[1] in 1987.
This complex design for a city of 5,000 hectares is most frequently represented by this simple, abstract, black and white drawing. The six black volumes which collide and interact with one another are in fact voids; *built-nothings*. They are a manifest encapsulation of what Rem Koolhaas had described as the art of «imagining nothingness»[2].

These voids, which are formed by a combination of existing landscape features and proposed unbuilt space, are intended to form the structure and blueprint for all proposed and future buildings within the city masterplan. The unbuilt absences (black) define the future built program (white). By inverting established drawing conventions, where black would represent solid and white indicates open, there is an explicit intent to acknowledge the un-builts as physical forms. These preeminent absences create physical boundaries to structure and shape the built program. Absence defines presence.

Introduction

This paper is both a description of, and reflection on, a wider research project investigating the role and representation of absence in architectural design methodology and as a driver for generating built space.

It draws upon work from the ongoing Doctorate Research Project entitled *Present Absence*, case studies generated through the *BUILTNOTHING ADO* (Academic Design Office)[3] and the design process, drawings and selected architectural works from Brussels architecture office XDGA[4] [*Fig.* 2]. The paper aims to establish a number of the characteristics and qualities which can be associated to absence in architectural design and methods of representing this absence within an architectural concept.

Design Drawing V Drawing Design

Multiple drawing conventions, styles, and methods of representing architectural design projects exist. Two-dimensional plans and cross sections, orthographic projections, and pictorial depth perspective drawings have been exponentially added to over the preceding decades by the introduction of Computer Aided Design applications, parametric software, and, most recently, artificial intelligence design tools.

Within architectural education this plethora of options to represent an architectural design can be both a blessing and a curse. The perceived reality of a computer-generated render, *fly-through* or simulation can be quickly realised with hyper realistic detail, however, this super-realism can masque fundamental flaws in the quality of the design presented. In its most extreme version, it can negate the design investigation process completely by presenting an underworked design proposal as a full and complete architectural work[5]. While architectural drawings can be created using a variety of graphic conventions and be represented in numerous styles, drawing can be seen as both:

Design *Drawing* (*noun*) – A representation of a design proposal, used to convey a design intent and/or the physical qualities of a design proposal.

Drawing Design *(verb)(noun)* – An architecture drawing situated as a reflective design process.

An investigation tool, utilised by the author, to explore and investigate design possibilities.

These two categories are not exclusive. A drawing can exist as both, particularly when it is created during and throughout a design process rather than at its culmination. However, the nature and conventions of what a drawing as design process can be is open to wider interpretation. This *drawing* invites interpretation and association. It represents possibilities and (yet to be fully formed) ideas. When applied to the research theme, the question arises: How can absence be investigated and represented through drawing?

A Reflective Concept

Frequently in the early development of an architectural project within XDGA and mirrored in the design methodology of the *BUILTNOTHING* studio, the designer will represent, through a simplified drawing or abstract model, a buildings *concept*. Christopher Peacocke defined a philosophical concept as «an idea or mental image which corresponds to some distinct entity or class of entities, or to the subjects' essential features»[6]. In the design sciences the architectural concept be similarly articulated as the fundamental idea that defines and explains the built design.

When represented in physical form (drawing or model) the concept can be utilised both as a reflective manifestation of a design intent and as a final encapsulation of the fundamental qualities and characteristics of a proposal. This encapsulation may incorporate multiple, simultaneous principles; spatial, tectonic, contextual, phenomenological. It can be posited that it sits both paramount of, and parallel to, normative architectural design domains such as program, form, precedent and structure[7].

When created retrospectively the concept drawing is a useful communication tool to explain in a simplified graphic the fundamental idea behind an architectural realisation. When created prospectively, at the onset of the design process, it can act as an encapsulation of the primary intent and as a visual aide-mémoire to ensure that a fundamental idea

Fig. 1. BUILT NOTHINGS. Figure plan, Melun Senart Urban Design Proposal, 1987, OMA (Office for Metropolitan Architecture), © OMA 1987.

Fig. 2. CONCEPT PLAN. Carrefour de l'Europe, Brussels, 1998, Competition Drawing, Monochromatic Concept Plan in Context, XDGA Architects.

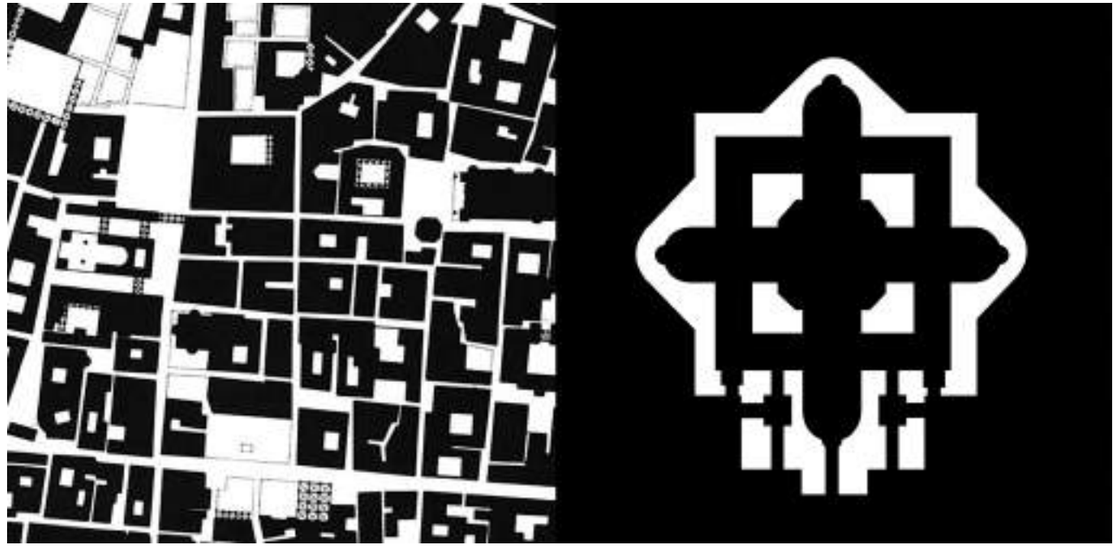

Fig. 3. FIGUREGROUND; left, image of Parma City Centre, from Collage City, 1984, Rowe and Koetter; right, figureground spatial interpretation, Saint Peters Cathedral, from Architecture as Space, 1948, Bruno Zevi.

Fig. 4, NOLLI PLAN. Nolli Map, Pianta Grande di Roma, 1748, Giambattista Nolli.

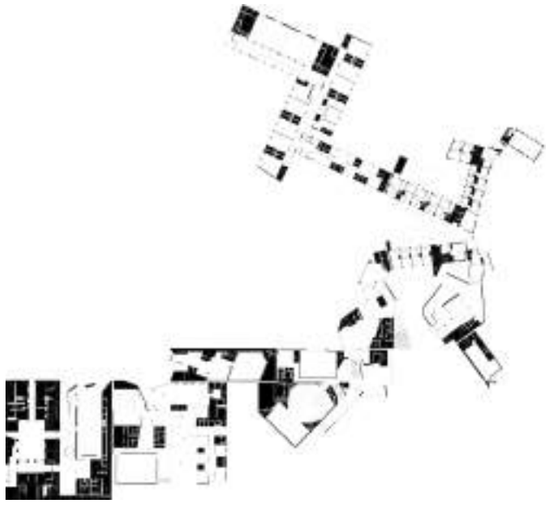

Fig. 5. INTERNAL NOLLI PLAN. Composite Nolli plan drawing, Central European University, Budapest, 2013, Sheila O'Donnell, image © O'Donnell + Tuomey Architects.

is retained through the complex processes of design development. This concept image becomes an active (process) rather than passive (representation) participant in the design process. It is subject to investigation, questioning, adaption, and revision.

This engages the concept image into a reflective dialogue. The designer utilises the image as a physical *tool* to maintain paramount qualities of the design whilst navigating the complex stages of a project's development and realisation.

A Perceptual Concept

Black V White: The Figureground and Nolli Plan

In architectural drawing practice the restricted use to black and white is commonplace.

These monochromatic conventions are derived not only through historical technical constraints (the availabilities and limitations of graphite, inks and printing practices) but also a deliberate focus towards representing a specific aspect such as built form, interior and exterior or public and private.

The Figure Drawing, also known as the Figureground, explicitly represents the difference between mass (black) and void (white). It is most frequently used in the field of urban design and town planning and was the primary focus of Collage City[8]. Whilst still highly relevant in the field of urban design and when representing an architectural project within a surrounding context, it is limited to the external form, and negates textural subtleties of inner organisation, categorisation, and border. Practitioners and architectural theorists such as Bruno Zevi have developed these drawing protocols to further represent specific qualities of spatial arrangement and sequence within a building's interior [Fig. 3]. Here, the monochromatic abstraction is transferred from the scale of the city to the scale of a building.

The Nolli plan [Fig. 4] similarly abstracts complex spatial arrangements into one of two different statuses. Its historical origins which represented public space (white) and private space (black) expanded the monochromatic concept out-with the confines of what is inside and what is outside a built boundary[9]. However, the increasing complexities of the public realm, ownership, accessibility and multi-level public buildings, can restrict the relevance of the Nolli plan as a tool for the design of architectural projects which do not follow strict public to private categorisation.

As with Zevi's development of the interior figureground drawing, there are prescient developments of the Nolli plan, which take forward a more nuanced definition of the public and private conventions. In their design for the Central European University Building in Budapest the architects O'Donnell and Tuomey represented the plans of the building both *unfolded* and with the inner spaces, rooms, corridors and voids in white or black dependent upon their collective accessibility [Fig. 5]. Thus, the principles of the Nolli plan are taken inside and through the multiple levels of a building plan. A representational tool previously used to map an urban condition is transferred within a building envelope and to the scale of individual rooms.

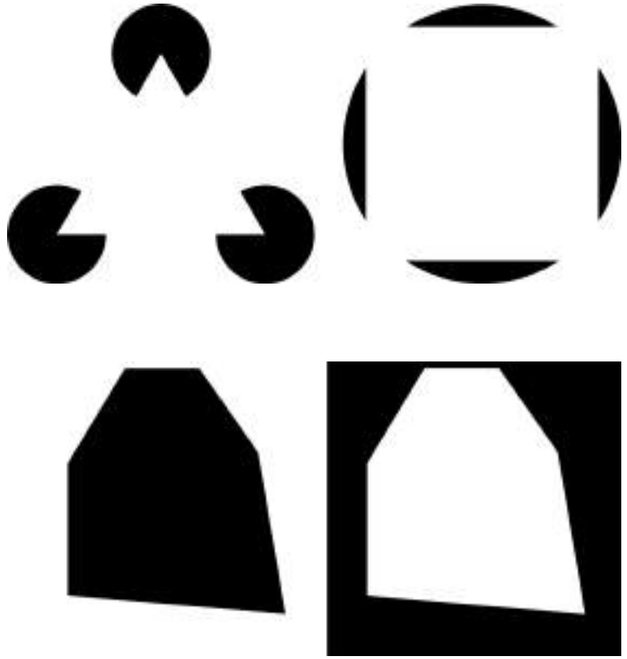

Fig. 6. FIGURES. *Closure*, Gestalt Principle n° 2, drawing by Author (left) & (right) Figured plan, Solo House, Matarraña, 2017, by OFFICE KGDVS, drawings by Author.

Fig. 7. FIGURED PLANS. *Extrovert*, n° 1, Diamond House, 2023 (left) and *Introvert*, n° 2, Diamond House, 2023 (right), Present-Absence Research Project, images by Author.

From Figure to Figured

The *figured drawing* is a construct. A name allocated within the doctorate research and within the methodology of the ADO to provide a uniquely identifiable nomenclature to a monochromatic drawing which explicitly represents presence and absence.

Exactly what a concept drawing is can be difficult to encapsulate or graphically represent. There exist no universally established rules and a buildings concept can be open to multiple contradicting foci and interpretations[10]. However, when one considers the figured drawing as a perceptual process, rather than purely an established set of objective graphic rules, the opportunity arises to establish a design methodology which can abstractly represent a spatial design concept.

The very restriction to black or white is, perhaps counter-intuitively, the freedom which allows the designer to focus on specific architectural issues or to graphically represent at an early stage a fundamental yet not fully formed concept for a building.

The monochromatic figure ground drawing is an established concept within the Gestalt[11] principles of perception [Fig. 6]. Elements are perceived as either figures (objects of focus) or ground (the rest of the perceptual field). When this relationship between black and white is clear the dialogue between the two is fundamental[12].

One cannot exist without the other and in many cases the opportunity for further interpretation is open. The drawing is reduced to the key elements required to convey the principle demonstrated. In both Gestalt principles *2-Closure* and *7-Figure/Ground* the viewer will seek solid stable items, perceptually complete a form, or seek to clarify the image into a recognisable pattern.

This cognitive process of abstracting and imbuing a simplified black and white image with additional form, meaning, complexity or character is here utilised in the methodology of investigating absence.

[Fig. 7] shows two Figured plan images extracted from the ongoing Doctoral Research Project. They represent abstracted concept variations for the design of a small weekend house located in an open landscape. The physical built area, shown here in black, is constant in both.

Extrovert, n° 1 is an object whose relationship with its context is open and direct. The white (absence) has no discernible effect on the generation of the black.

Introvert, n° 2 is a direct inversion. Here the absence (white) creates a courtyard and a generator of the subsequent built form. A fundamental characteristic of the courtyard typology is the interdependent dialogue between the present and the absent.

Within the context of this architectural investigation the intended character of each proposal, although limited to a simple form and monochromatic expression, can be attributed. Without detail or adornment, a phenomenological characteristic can be attributed and utilised as a primer for further resolution.

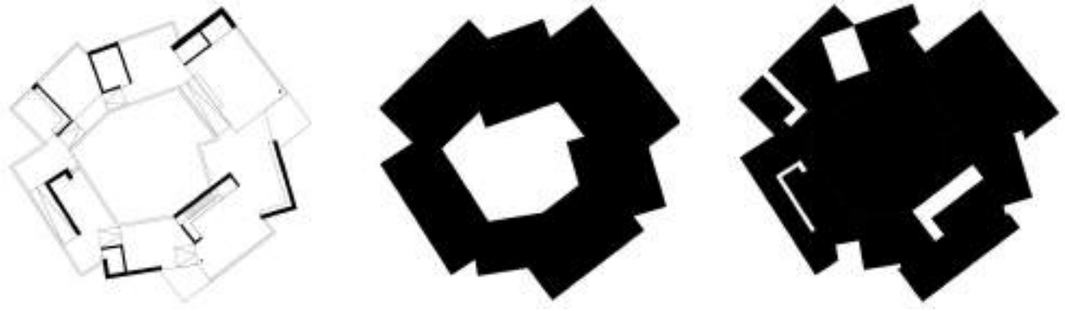

Fig. 8. IN/OUT. Left to Right: Detail Plan, Figureground, and Figured plan, Maggie's Centre, Glasgow, 2011, OMA Case Study Investigation drawings, Present Absence Research Project, 2022-2026, images by Author.

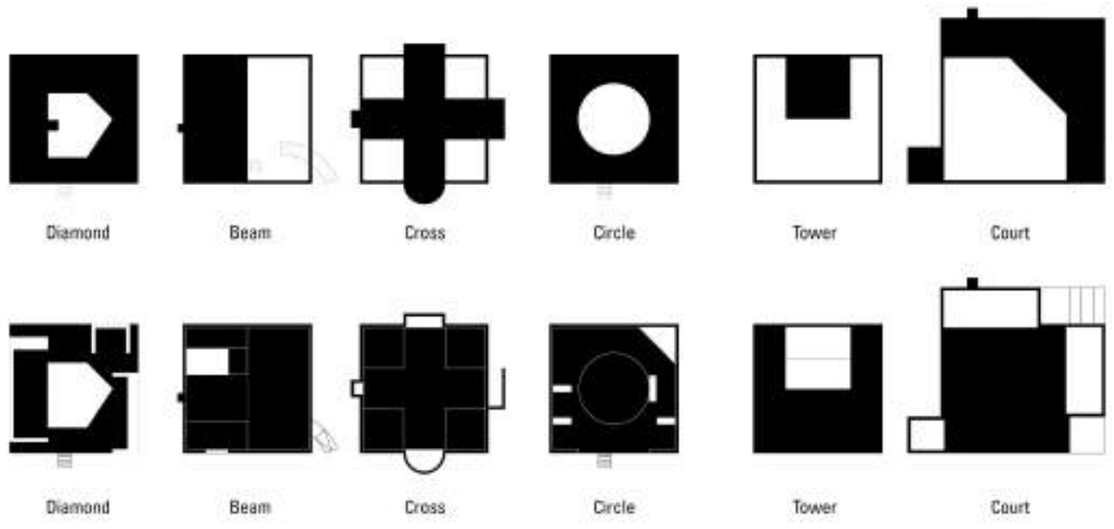

Fig. 9. BUILT & UNBUILT. Figuregrounds (top row) / Figured Plans (bottom row)
6 alternative design strategies for a courtyard weekend house, Present-Absence Research Project, 2022-2026, images by Author.

Absence V Presence

The definition of what can be considered absence in an architectural design process is manifold. The ADO methodology accommodates numerous interpretations and possibilities for what can be considered as *absent* and correspondingly what is considered *present*. When creating a figured concept drawing a fixed definition of absence is not required. However, what is required is a clear explanation of what the specific characteristic of absence is being represented in a particular drawing or model. This invites a design investigation which can simultaneously negotiate different aspects of spatial representation. A figured plan may represent absence as the physical omission of built space, whilst a further version may interpret absence as an omission of collective use, function, or status. This builds a *catalogue of absences*, each version investigating specific characteristics within a single design in its conceptual stage and through a similar abstracted medium. This typological classification of *absence* is reflected through the following dualisms:

IN/OUT
BUILT&UNBUILT
DESIGN INTENT v DESIGN PROGRAM
ARCHITECTURE + NOT ARCHITECTURE
PRESENCE via ABSENCE
A to B

These dualisms are employed as categories of investigation into the nature of absence. The investigated projects and their associated monochromatic drawings have been selected from a range of sources in which absence has been explored: Case Study Investigations from the *BUILTNOTHING* Masters Design Studio, Case Study and Design Driven Research from the *Present Absence* research project, and the architectural works of XDGA. Together, these sources provide a diverse but coherent foundation for examining absence across different contexts of practice and inquiry.

a) IN/OUT

The definition of absence need not rely on conventional rules for determining what is inside and what is outside a built envelope. A space situated outside a constructed volume may be considered either *present* or *absent* depending on its specific characteristics, rather than its physical boundary. This is illustrated in the case study investigation drawings [Fig. 8] of OMA's Maggie's Centre in Glasgow. The Detail Plan and Figureground follow the prescribed and objective rules of graphical representation. The Figure(d) Plan, however, represents the open internal courtyard as black (presence) without delineating the enclosing glass wall. The perceptual quality of this courtyard is that of an integral part of the open-plan configuration of space that surrounds it. In this way, the conventional distinction between inside and outside the building envelope is negated. This allocation of absence or presence is not universally applicable, for example, it would not necessarily be applied in the same way to other courtyard buildings. Instead, the allocation is determined by an informed understanding of the building's spatial qualities and tectonic realisation.

Within case study investigations, this approach can function as an analytical tool.

Within Design-Driven Research, it becomes a means of ascribing a specific quality that may be developed or adapted through subsequent stages of design.

b) BUILT & UNBUILT

Absence need not be restricted to a tectonic definition of what is *built* and what is *unbuilt*. This stands in contrast to the more objective categorisation of what lies *inside* or *outside* a building envelope. In legal and architectural terminology, a built space is understood as a construction that *encloses and defines constructed space*. However, in this research both built and unbuilt space may be conceptually understood as either *present* or *absent* dependent upon their conceptual approach to absence. Figure 9 illustrates six design investigations undertaken within the research project. Each proposal adopts a comparable external footprint, accommodates a similar program, and incorporates both built and unbuilt space. The Figureground drawings present an objective representation of these conditions. The Figured plans, by contrast, offer an alternative reading, in which spatial elements are categorised according to their specific characteristics and relationship to absence or presence within the overall composition. The genesis and subsequent categorisation of built and unbuilt, whether through tectonic composition (addition) or stereotomic removal (subtraction), can therefore lead to different spatial classifications when examined through the investigation of absence and presence.

c) DESIGN INTENT v DESIGN PROGRAM

The anticipated usage and/or function of a built space is not aways the most important driver in determining its architectural form, character, or expression. Highly specific functions will have multiple spatial and dimensional requirements, but this does not necessarily define the architectural intent. One can image a lecture theatre which is in concept, open, collective and/or part of a larger architectural promenade in contrast to one which is more enclosed, solitary, or insular. The dimensional, performative and spatial requirements for both may be identical, but the architectural intent is significantly different. The two building plans [Fig. 10a, 10b] are of buildings designed by XDGA. Both include auditoria which are similar in scale, use, and technical performance, but when considered as part of an investigation into absence, one may be considered *black* and the other *white*. Within this research investigation into absence the selection between black and white is focused on the design intent and not the programmatic use.

d) ARCHITECTURE + NOT ARCHITECTURE

The topic of absence does not exclude elements which are not considered architecture. As the profession of architecture becomes increasingly diversified into separate professions the requirement to holistically engage the design of public space, the public realm, and landscape is paramount. Absence does not restrict investigation into one specific field of study. Nor does it restrict architectural investigation into a particular style, genre, or typology. In their proposal for the CCN Competition in Brussels North District [Fig. 11]

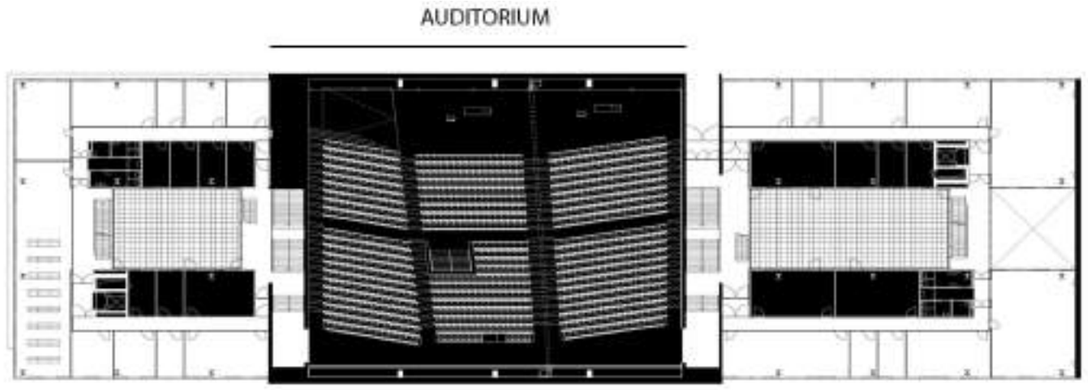

Fig. 10a. DESIGN INTENT v DESIGN PROGRAM. Auditorium UFO Forum, Gent (left) and Provinciehuis, Antwerp (right), XDGA Architects, drawings by Author.

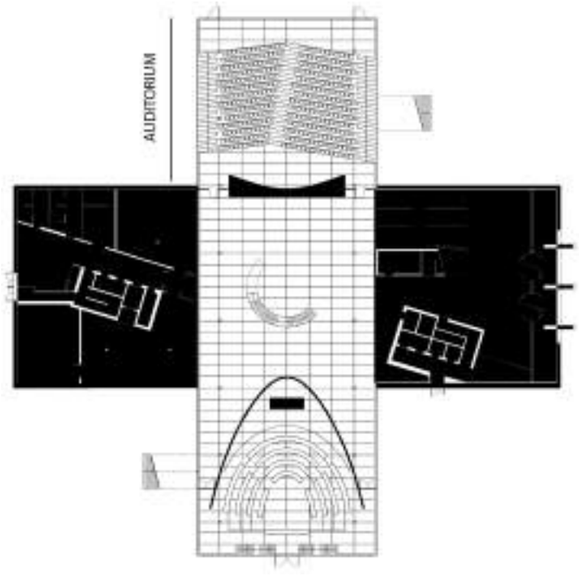

Fig. 10b. DESIGN INTENT v DESIGN PROGRAM. Auditorium UFO Forum, Gent (left) and Provinciehuis, Antwerp (right), XDGA Architects, drawings by Author.

XDGA expanded the investigation of absences outside the competition site perimeters. Here, elements of building, public space, canals, railway lines, parks, churches and building interiors are classified into black or white based on an analysis of their spatial contribution in the urban conglomeration. Black or white is determined through an entity's presence or absence within the urban tabula plena, and not by its use, scale, or classification by form or structure.

e) PRESENCE via ABSENCE

Architecture is defined as a «tectonic art»[13] one which utilises built form, construction and materiality to bring together tectonic elements into a built ensemble. The design methodology of the ADO requires a similar attention to the phenomena of absence within this ensemble. Absence is not merely a void, but a phenomenon that can be understood as a constructive force in architecture. Just as tectonics generate form and structure, absence can act as a generator of space and meaning. To consider absence, and to attempt to represent it, requires the designer to engage deeply with its presence within the design process. In this way, absence does not remain a passive byproduct of form-making, but becomes an active condition that informs and shapes the architectural presence itself

f) A to B

In architectural representation the concept drawing is used at the start of the graphical explanation of the project to help explain the primary aspects and characteristics of the design. These drawings can be invaluable in translating a complex process and proposal into a simplified image which can organise and structure further detailed articulation. In the study of absence, the figured drawing is created at the early conceptual design development of the project. It is used to define a conceptual strategy of absence which can be further refined and elaborated over the subsequent design development stages.

The Absent Plan

The Figured plan is the primary orthographic drawing used in the *BUILTNOTHING* Studio. This monochromatic, two-dimensional drawing is used both in Case Study analysis of existing buildings and as a design tool in the development and representation of the students own architectural projects. The analytical drawings produced as part of a Case Study investigation of a Japanese children's centre designed by Sou Fujimoto Architects [Fig. 13] shows the potential radical divergence between a figureground plan (*massiv void*) and a figured plan (*absence v presence*). The figureground follows an established set of rules whilst the figured plan requires a personal interpretation of absence and a deeper understanding of the projects spatial concept.

The Absent Section

The published isographic drawings of the architectural work of Aires Mateus Architects are exclusively in monochrome [Fig. 14] It is not always instantly discernible if the drawing presented is a plan or section as the decision of which element is filled in by solid black is not based on function or construction logic. When one examines the drawings, and then connects them to the built reality, it becomes apparent that the use of black and white represents a spatial concept, simultaneously horizontal and vertical. The white represents a volumetric sequence of interlocked space. The black represents a *poché* of void, construction or mass which defines and encapsulates the white. The architects themselves have identified in the drawings and in their work a pursuit of: «drawing absences and voids…to smooth out functional boundaries, to suggest archetypal details without being redundant»[14].

The Absent Model

In addition to orthographic plans and sections, absence is also investigated, represented, and developed through the making of physical models. These models are abstracted into a single material and exected in monochrome. They extend the orthographic Figure(d) investigation into three-dimensional and volumetric space. Figure 15 illustrate an absence investigation of Alvar Aalto's Town Hall in Säynätsalo, carried out within the ADO case study program. The abstract model inverts what is built and what is non-built in the realised project. The elevated central courtyard: an open outdoor space that organises and structures the surrounding plan becomes, in the model, the most prominent solid form. In this translation, the *absent* element is not only acknowledged but represented as the dominant and formative presence. The physical model adds a further dimension to this research: it makes absence tangible, allowing it to be apprehended not only visually but spatially and (through material choice and surface) haptically. Its materiality emphasises the weight, scale, and volumetric presence of what is otherwise invisible. Unlike drawings, which remain bound to a surface, the model permits the viewer movement around and through the representation, offering shifting perspectives and new spatial readings.

An Absent Blueprint

The research into Absence and the work of the *BUILTNOTHING ADO* will not culminate in an architectural manifesto.

Architectural design education is complex, necessitating the combination of subjective phenomenological qualities with objective, performative requirements.

A design methodology requiring a specific focus on the role of absence does not preclude the sequential or indeed simultaneous inclusion of other subjective or objective design criteria.

However, when introducing absence as an architectural concept, the enticing opportunity arises to consider:

1) a borderless design investigation, one that can simultaneously be attributed to urban design, architecture, and landscape design.
2) an investigation of built and unbuilt space at the same time and, therefore, a necessity to consider issues of public, collective and private space
3) the possibility to investigate phenomenological qualities of drawn space by considering spatial quality and relationships rather than functional use
4) an architectural design methodology that avoids discussion of style, genre, or individual taste.
5) the use of a concept drawing, as aide memoire, and as a statement of intent to facilitate the further development of a more detailed architectural project.
6) a method of case study investigation which allows buildings of different program, scale, and style to be considered and researched under a universal theme

The *Present Absence* research project establishes one potential methodological framework to investigate and develop the theme of absence in architectural design. Fundamental in this investigation is the requirement to establish an informed interpretation of the characteristic of absence and its phenomenological role in architectural space.

One must make *absence present*.

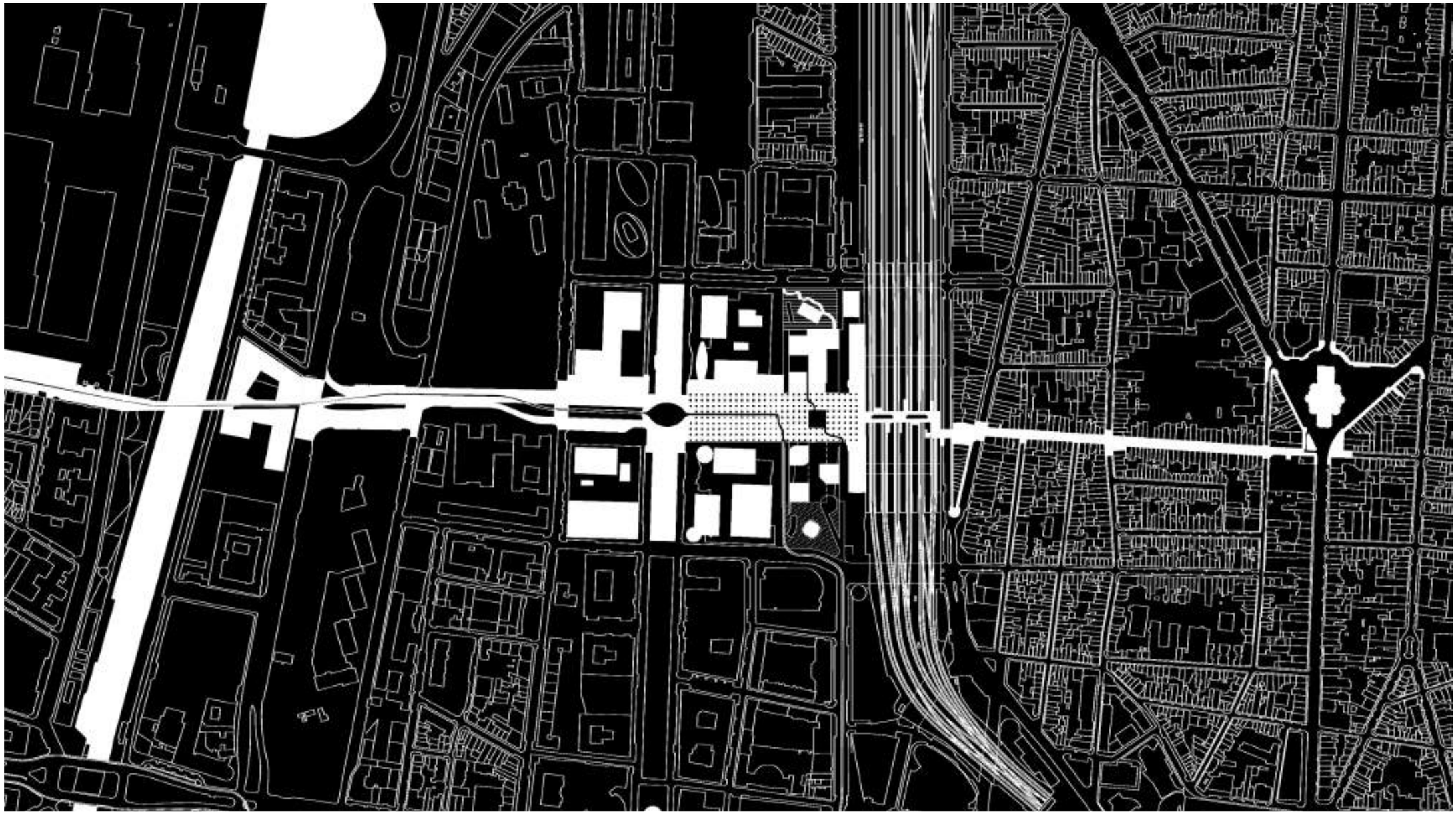

Fig. 11. ARCHITECTURE + NOT ARCHITECTURE. Inverted Figured plan, CCN Building and Environs, Architecture Competition, Brussels, 2019, XDGA Architects, drawing by XDGA.

Fig. 12. A to B. Early Concept Diagram (left) and final Figured plan (right), Palermo Government Offices Competition, 2021, XDGA Architects, images by Author.

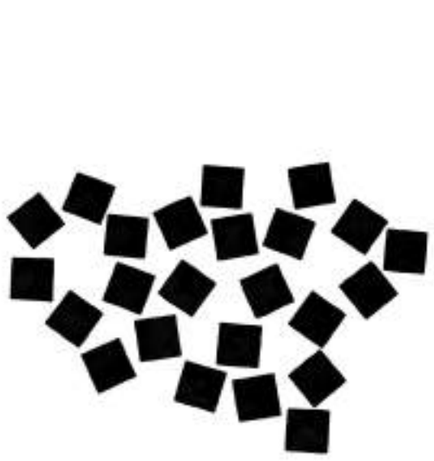

Fig. 13. THE ABSENT PLAN. Figureground (left) and Figured plan (right), Children's Center, Hokkaido, 2006, Sou Fujimoto Architects, Master Studio Case Study drawings by Issa Driesen & Daan Vanbrabant, BUILTNOTHING I, 2022

Fig. 15. THE ABSTRACT MODEL. Townhall Säynätsalo, 1952 by Alvar Aalto Architect, Abstract Figured Model (left) and Figureground plan (right) Masters Studio Case Study drawing and abstract model by Luka Kranendonk & Yinan Qin, BUILTNOTHING II, 2023.

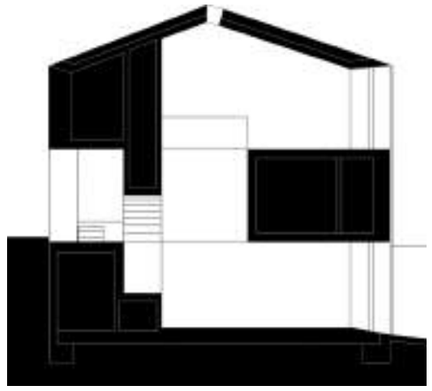

Fig. 14. THE ABSENT SECTION. Section, House in Alcobaça, 2013, Aires Mateus Architects, Drawing © Aires Mateus Architects, redrawn by author

Notes

1. OMA – the Office for Metropolitan Architecture founded in 1975 by Rem Koolhaas.
2. David Peleman, *The Illusion of Reality: Ville Nouvelle Melun-Sénart (1987)*, in «OASE Journal for Architecture», n° 94, 2015, p. 92.
3. Masters Design Unit at the KU Leuven Faculty of Architecture, Sint Lucas Brussels Campus, utilising *Absence* as a Design Driver. www.builtnothing.space
4. www.xdga.be
5. Joanna Kołata, Piotr Zierke, *The Decline of Architects: Can a Computer Design Fine Architecture without Human Input?*, in «Buildings», n° 11, vol. 8, 2021, p. 338.
6. Christopher Peacocke, *A Study of Concepts. Representation and Mind*, The MIT Press, Cambridge (MA) 1992.
7. Donald A. Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*, Basic Books. New York 1983, pp. 95-98.
8. Colin Rowe, Fred Koetter, *Collage City*, The MIT Press, Cambridge (MA) 1983.
9. Ian Verstegen, (ed.), *Giambattista Nolli and Rome: Mapping the City before and after the Pianta Grande*, Studium Urbis, Rome 2013.
10. James Tait, *The Architecture Concept Book*, Thames & Hudson, London 2018.
11. The *Gestalt Principles of Perception* describe and categorise how humans recognize patterns and simplify complex images when perceiving objects. The initial seven principles, now sometimes expanded to twelve, were first created by psychologists Max Wertheimer, Kurt Koffka, and Wolfgang Kohler.
12. Jonas Malinauskas, *Evolution of Gestalt Principles in Contemporary Graphic Design*, Review paper, 2018.
13. Kenneth Frampton, *Studies in Tectonic Culture. The Poetics of Construction in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Architecture*, The MIT Press, Cambridge (MA) 1995.
14. Excerpt from an interview with Manuel and Francisco Aires Matues from the *Fuori Salone*, September 2021

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Frampton Kenneth, *Studies in Tectonic Culture. The Poetics of Construction in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Architecture*, The MIT Press, Cambridge (MA) 1995.
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Peacocke Christopher, *A Study of Concepts. Representation and Mind*, The MIT Press, Cambridge (MA) 1992.
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Verstegen Ian, (ed.), *Giambattista Nolli and Rome: Mapping the City before and after the Pianta Grande*, Studium Urbis, Rome 2013.

Eva Demuynck

attune (v.)

1 to bring into harmony
2 to make aware or responsive[1]

In the aftermath of challenging life events, such as the loss of a loved one, we may struggle to make sense of what has happened and to put our experience into words. In these moments of need, expressive art therapists are able to bypass verbalization by providing their clients with artistic media through which they can reconnect with their innermost feelings. This creative process not only facilitates a deep connectedness – or synchronization - between the client and the material they are working with but also fosters deeply shared moments of intersubjective connectivity or shared intimacy between the client and therapist, also known as «therapeutic attunement»[2].

By drawing parallels between the artistic activity used within these therapeutic settings and throughout codesign processes[3], architect Eva Demuynck strives to bring (visual) art therapy and architectural design closer together. With her PhD project[4], she therefore investigated how actively involving bereaved clients in the design of personalized memorial spaces can help promote their mental wellbeing.

This visual essay provides a condensed report on a singular case study, through a careful selection and juxtaposition of drawings and artefacts created by the author and one of her research participants. Each of the images is paired with a description of a moment they shared, ultimately forming a series of moments demonstrating how the use of non-verbal modes of communication during the pre-design phase can help unlock invaluable tacit knowledge about prospective spatial users. Please note that these moments are not necessarily presented in chronological order but are arranged so that the reader can perceive the dialogue between the visual material made before and during the design phase.

Shared Moment 1
I meet M. for a cup of coffee on a rainy Friday morning. We discuss how to venture into the unknown now that the series of workshops she participated in has come to an end. She shares with me her thoughts and insecurities, but also her curiosity about our continued collaboration. After considering where she might want to create a memorial space, she tells me about a former ash tree in her garden. With great sadness, she explains to me how it was cut down a couple of years ago and that she has felt drawn to its remains ever since. On the way home, I let my mind wander. I think about how its crown and roots used to live peacefully side by side, but without the crown, the roots are now slowly dying, as evidenced by the mushrooms on the remaining bark. I imagine the tree trunk acting as a painful reminder of their separation, like a scar evoking the absence of the original ash tree. However, most of the remaining roots remain invisible, as they are hiding underground. I discover parallels with the pain M. experienced after losing one of her eyes and having lost her twin sibling before she was born, as well as with the loneliness she felt afterward because she was unable to fully share these experiences with others. Therefore, the idea arose to design a window to look at what remains of the tree in a more conscious way and thus make M.'s experiences more visible [Fig. 1, 2, 3].

Shared Moment 2
During the workshop series, M. tells the group about her previous experience with aqua touch therapy, and about how it helped her relive past trauma and feel reconnected to life. She describes feeling comforted by the sensation of being carried by the water, like a warm embrace. An intimate moment that made her feel reborn [Fig. 4].

Shared Moment 3
When asked to explore the shape of consolation, M. closes her eyes as she slowly hollows out the inside of a small piece of clay in the palm of her hand. Throughout the process, she wets her hand several times, making the surface as smooth as possible, because she intends it to be a space you can lie down in [Fig. 5].

Shared Moment 4
While making a viewing box to house both her loss experience and source of consolation, M. creates a long tunnel through a succession of arches. She places a ball of thread at the very end to mark the transition to *the other side*. Unsure of what the height of the space is supposed to be, I suggest M. to make use of the scale figures provided. After testing out the smallest one, we share a moment of silence. She touches her heart and tells me how this makes everything so much more tangible. Together, we glue the figure in place, clearly facing the end of the tunnel [Fig. 6].

Shared Moment 5
A couple of weeks after our coffee meeting, I meet up with M. to take her through the memorial space I designed for her. In our imaginations, we pass the entrance door that leads to a small waiting area. A window with a built-in bench frames the view of the tree. The time it takes to run the bath in the heart of the room creates a moment of tranquillity to

Fig. 1. The remnants of the former ash tree in M.'s garden. Photograph by M. (2023).

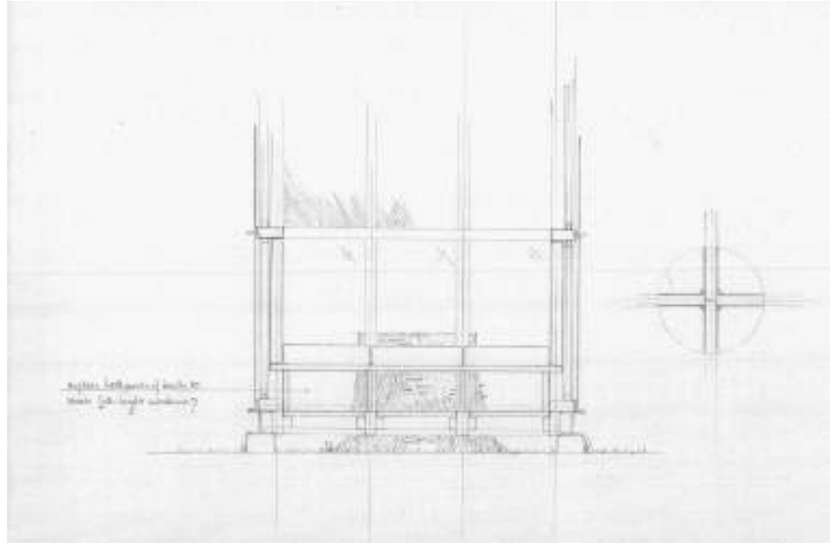


Fig. 2. Cross section of the design of M.'s memorial space with the window overlooking the former ash tree. Pencil on A2 paper. Drawing by Eva Demuynck (2023).

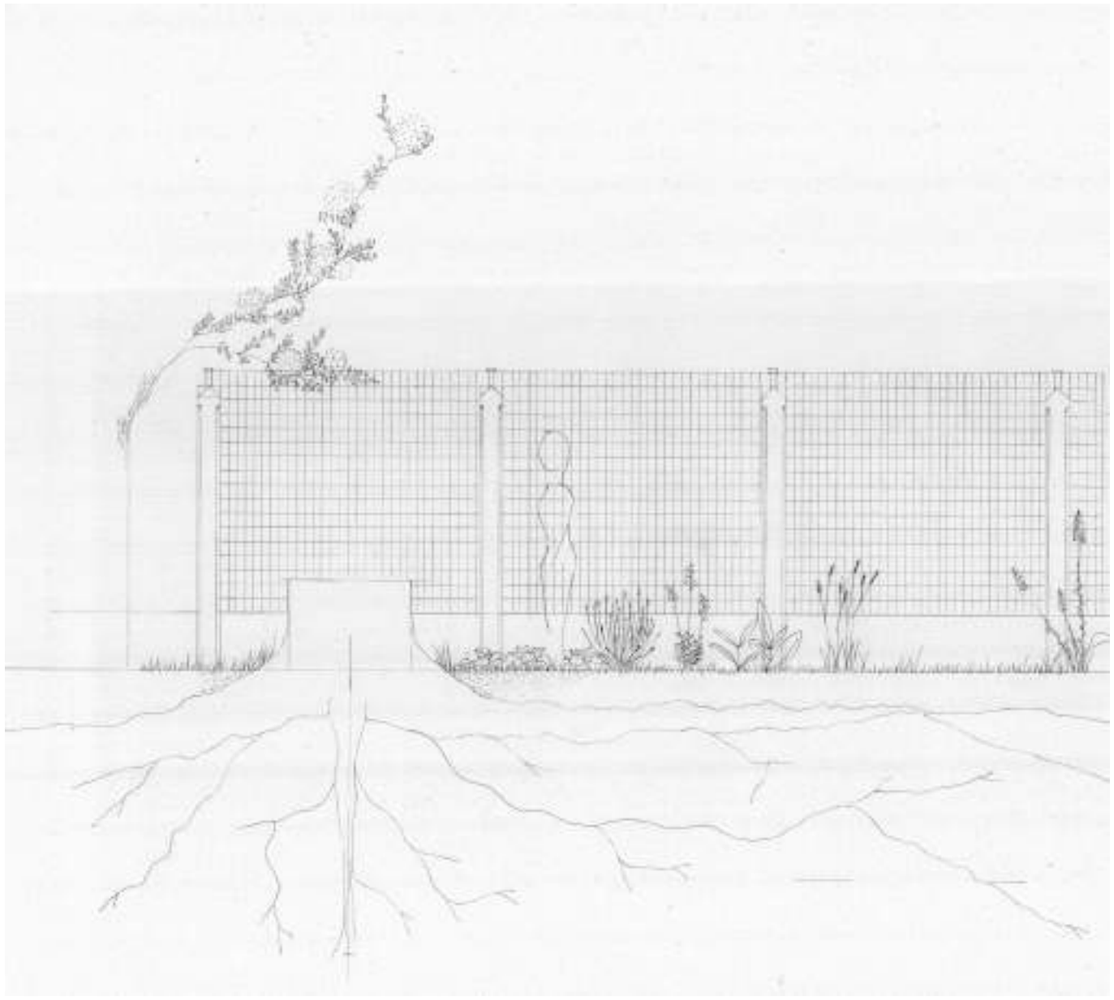
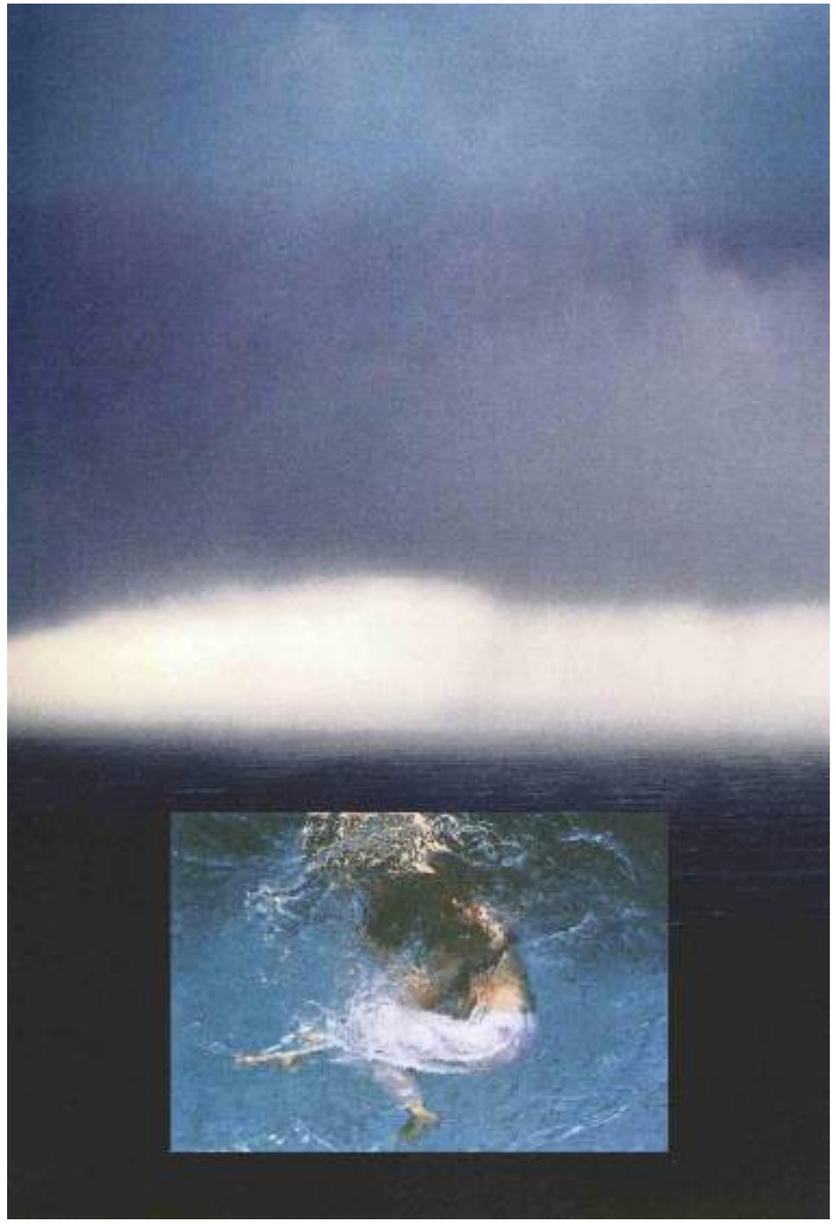


Fig. 3. Longitudinal section of M.'s garden showing both the visible and invisible parts of the former ash tree. Pencil on A2 paper.
Drawing by Eva Demuynck (2023).



* Fig. 4. Recollections of an experience with aqua touch therapy. Photocollage by M. (2023). Original images by Richard Billingham (background) and Sigrid Von Lintig (foreground).

Fig. 5. The shape of consolation: a place to lie down in. Clay model by M., photographed by Eva Demuynck (2023).

Fig. 6. A tunnel to the other side. Cardboard viewing box by M., photographed by Eva Demuynck (2023).

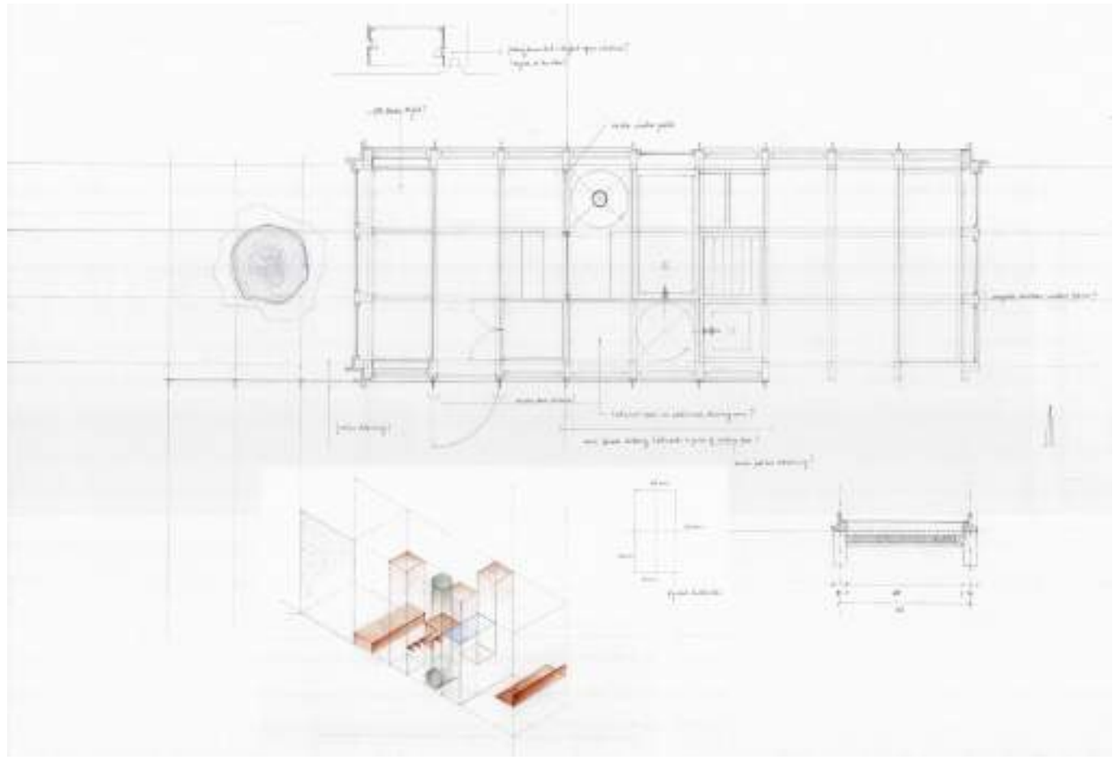


Fig. 7. Floor plan, isometric drawing and construction detail for the design of M.'s memorial space. As seen from left to right: the room for waiting, the room for bathing and the room for painting. Pencil on A2 paper. Drawings by Eva Demuynck (2023).

reflect on past experiences. The sensory experience of being in the water then draws the attention back to the present, while a skylight establishes a connection with the clouds above - a visual reminder of the transience of life. Feeling reborn, a small atelier illuminated by high-placed windows on the north façade sets the scene for painting and writing, for transforming past painful experiences into something new and beautiful. Pulling down the writing desk reveals a window facing the east symbolizing renewal and sets in motion a gear system that pulls up the bench in the west-facing waiting area. This two-way dialogue between past and future deliberately directs the gaze towards one or the other. The south-facing side of the room ultimately operates as a large sliding door, opening the atelier towards the outside world. A roof overhang prevents excessive sunlight from entering the interior.

Since the garden belongs to a rental property, the design is conceived as a lightweight temporary structure built on top of two steel beams supported by concrete blocks placed in the lawn. The resulting height difference creates a clear threshold between the outside and inside. Inspired by how the use of tatami in Japanese teahouses references the size of the human body, a modular system is created by cutting a standard-sized plywood panel into quarters. These in turn are placed between wooden supports. All other elements – the bath, storage for logs, clothing, soap, towels, art supplies, and personal treasures, are designed to fit these measurements. The ash veneer creates a warm yellow ambiance inside, contrasting the black steel sheets used to finish the design's protective shell. Low-tech solutions like a tank to reuse the rainwater collected on the roof and a wood stove to heat the water and the interior space ensure its independence from the main house. The ratio between the length and the width of the space ultimately creates the necessary depth to embody a journey from loss to transformation. Standing in the longitudinal direction gives meaning to looking backward or forwards, while reposing in the transverse direction emphasizes moments of standing still. The use of sliding doors and moving elements offers agency to the visitor to take a deliberate position towards the past, present or future [Fig. 7, 8].

Shared Moment 6

During our discussion of the initial design proposal, M. confirms that she feels like her story has been heard. However, she quickly suggests some corrections. Based on the qualities of the site, she proposes to change some of the views of the garden.

On a practical note, she asks if a handrail could be added to make it easier to get in and out of the bathtub. She also expresses doubts about the design's current position, as it blocks the view of the tree as currently seen from her kitchen window. More importantly, our conversation reveals that the financial feasibility of the project is important to her to realize the memorial space [Fig. 9, 10].

Shared Moment 7

When asked to draw a surrounding for a personally meaningful object, M. experiments with folding the page she's drawing on. She decides the drawing of her crystal with healing properties should be on the inside, safe and secure, invisible from the outside. The 2D drawing thus becomes a 3D object in the shape of a tear, standing proudly on its own [Fig. 11].

Shared Moment 8

The next time we meet, M. indicates that upon further reflection she would prefer to create something small that could be placed upon the tree. She shows me a sketch of a spiral shaped object, describing how its base needs to be strong to connect to the earth while it gradually dematerialises towards the sky, to embody her spiritual connection to the cosmos. She describes how the design should move her. Before us – or rather between us – lies a large empty sheet of paper. What to draw now? [Fig. 12]

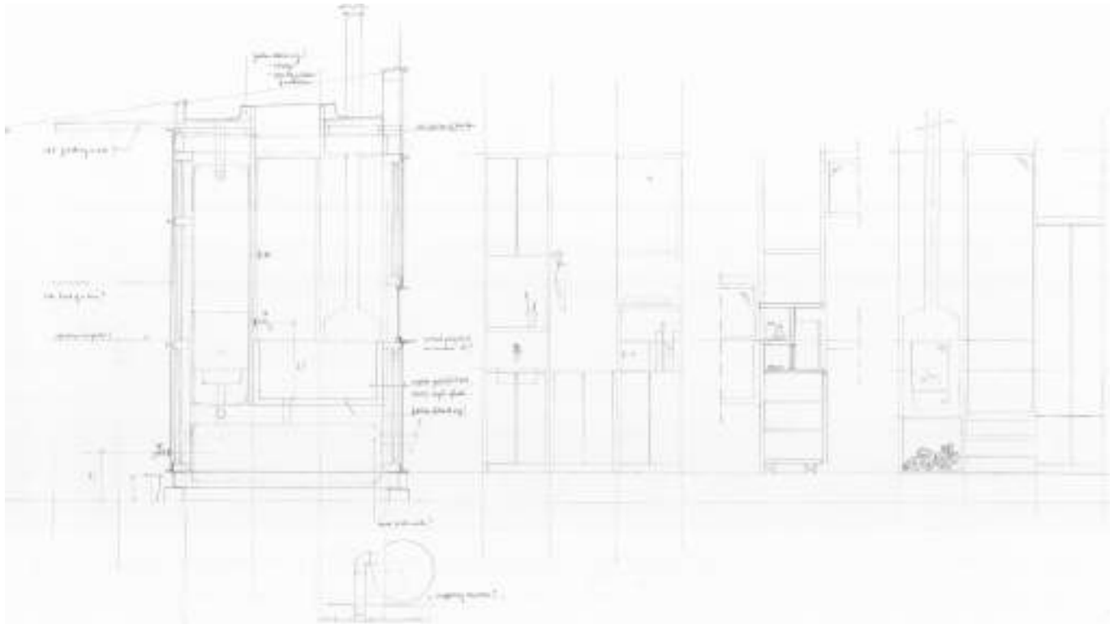


Fig. 8. Cross section and furniture elevations for the design of M.'s memorial space with the system for rainwater collection on the left, the storage for bathing supplies in the centre, and a hidden compartment for personal treasures on the right. Pencil on A2 paper. Drawings by Eva Demuynck (2023).

Fig. 9. Discussing the initial design proposal. Photograph by Eva Demuynck (2023).

«Close your eyes», M. says. «What does this make you *feel*? What do you see?»
«A mirroring surface», I reply.
«A mirror?»
«Yes, lying horizontal on the tree, drawing the clouds above towards us»
«Can you draw it?»
Thus, line by line, word for word, a flat mirror becomes a hollow space, a treasure box for a healing crystal, a skylight for a tree - the healing gesture we were looking for all along.

Closing Thoughts

The series of shared moments presented throughout this essay demonstrates how the making of visual artefacts became essential in the communication between M. and the author. By observing and questioning how M. engaged with the various artistic materials provided during the pre-design phase the author was able to gradually learn more about M.'s lived experience.

Making her own drawings then allowed her to formulate a reply beyond the spoken word, through various design proposals. Hence, much like in art therapeutic settings, making artefacts established a third point between architect and client, an interactive place where a trialogue could take place. Even though the resulting designs remain unbuilt, M. reported that participating in the research helped her come to terms with her various loss experiences. As such, the findings point out the potential therapeutic value of involving clients creatively in the pre-design phase. By revealing that not only our physical encounter with our built environment can disclose important insights about ourselves[5], the findings also make us re-evaluate the importance of paper architecture. Rather than designing for the purpose of constructing, the design process can equally serve to create imaginary *transitional spaces* capable of helping mourners move through their mourning process[6]. Unlike constructing buildings, capturing these spaces in «never-ending drawings»[7], leaves them open to future revisions, thus complementing how mourning nowadays is approached as an open-ended process in the west[8].

In addition, the way in which M. made use of the available media during the pre-design phase invites architects to widen their understanding of what can be understood as architectural drawing when collaborating with clients who don't share a background in architecture, e.g. seeing how the simple act of folding a sheet of paper can be read as a model rather than *just* a drawing [Fig. 11].

From the author's own experience, we also learned that to tune into M.'s emotional needs she had to allow herself to feel moved by everything she had seen and heard during their various encounters (see Shared Moment 8). It was operating from the right *feelset* that ultimately allowed her to create a design capable of moving M as well[9]. Also interesting to note is that, when we look more closely at the designed painting atelier and treasure box, we don't find a memorial space or object in the traditional sense. On the one hand, this observation raises compelling questions about what can be considered memorial architecture in a contemporary context.

On the other, it demonstrates the potential of using architectural design as a memorial practice, one that involves actively engaging with places that are intimately intertwined with lost objects[10], even if only imaginatively, instead of merely mapping such places[11]. As such, the findings align with existing bereavement literature which notes how many contemporary memorial practices of the bereaved involve attempts at continuing or even transforming bonds with who or what they had to say goodbye to[12]. It is in facilitating such potentially transformative encounters between clients and those places that are personally meaningful to them that architects can take up a supporting role. And, as the case study presented in this essay has shown, it is engaging in various ways of drawing, already in the pre-design phase, that can unlock the *interpersonal attunement* that benefits such emotional placemaking practices[13]. In other words, designers might rely on drawing to help them develop a heightened sensitivity and responsiveness to their client's inner worlds which in turn might enable them to create spaces in harmony with and tailored to their emotional needs.

Acknowledgements

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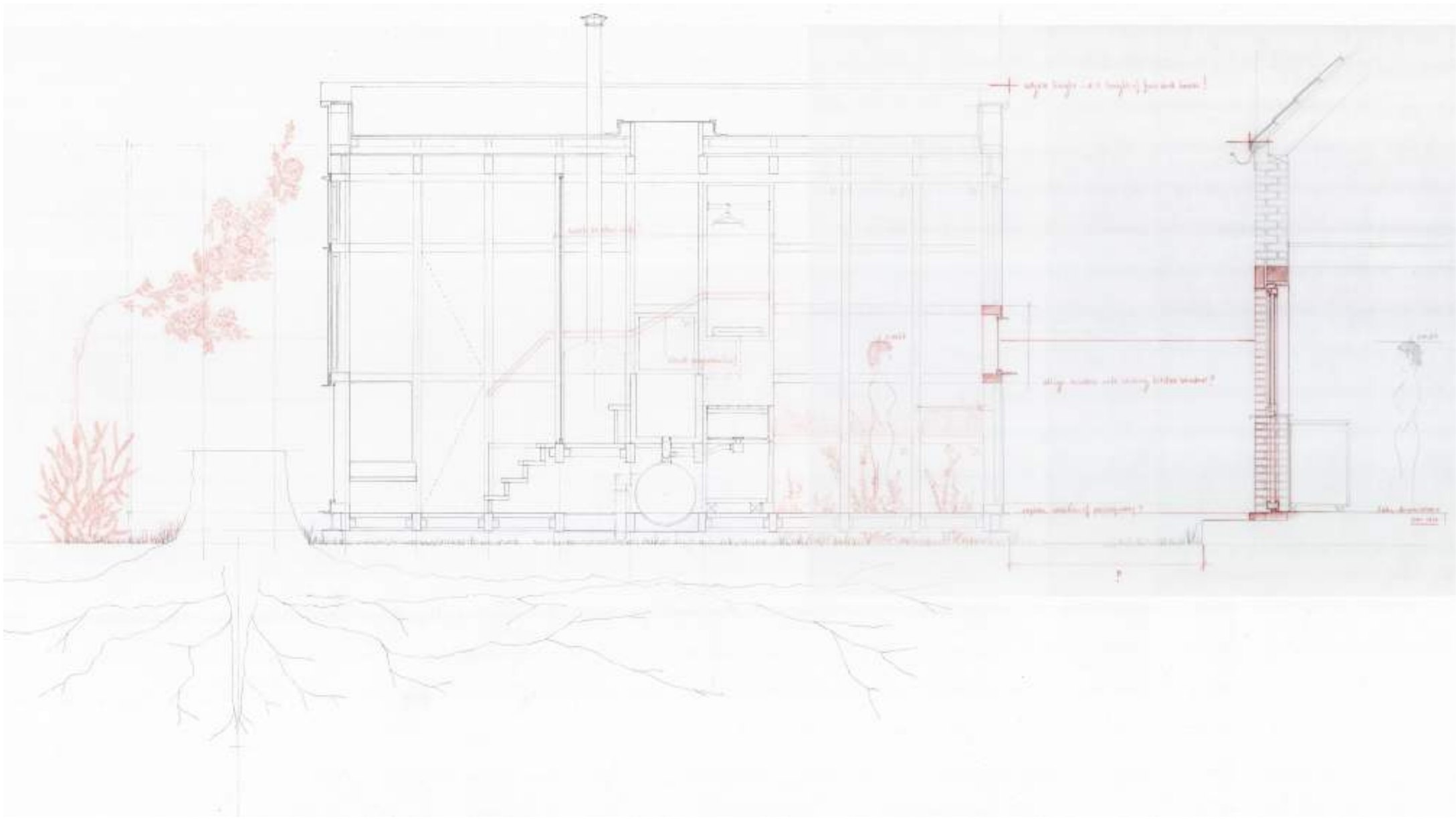

Fig. 10. Longitudinal section indicating some remarks on the initial design of M.'s memorial space (see shared moment 6). Pencil on A2 paper and red pencil on tracing paper.
Drawing by Eva Demuynck (2023).

Fig. 11. Tear-shaped shelter for M.'s healing crystal. Drawing by M., photographed by Eva Demuynck (2023).

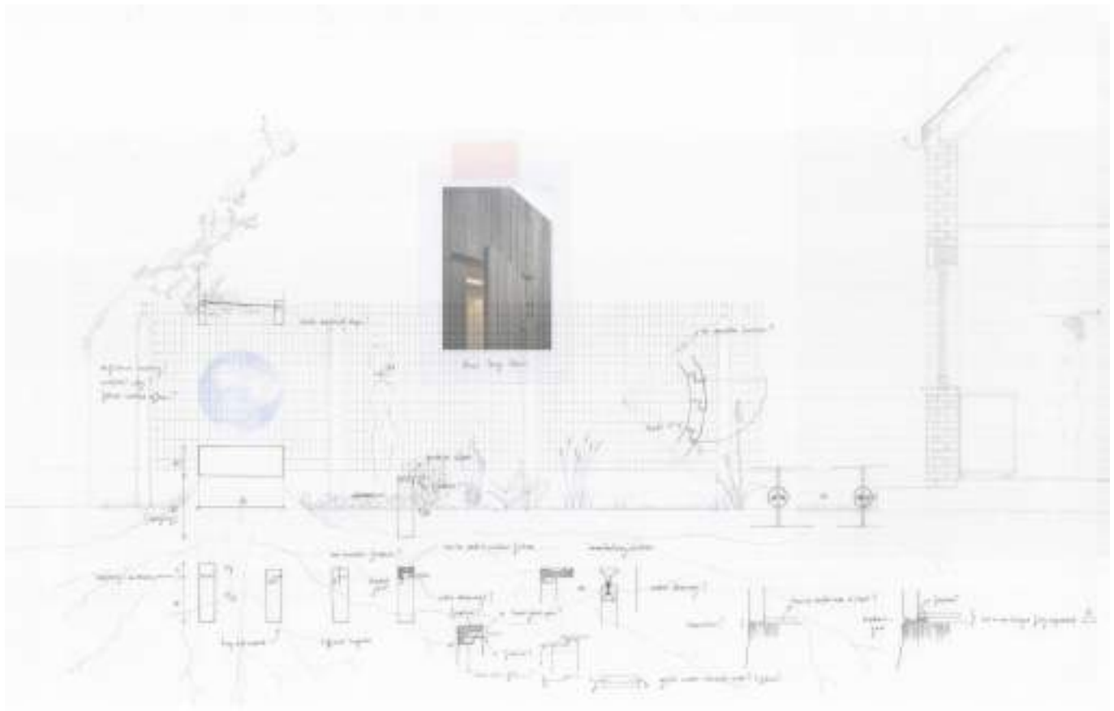

Fig. 12. Construction details for M.'s memorial object, including different iterations for the fixation of the mirror and other technical considerations. (Coloured) pencil on A2 paper and pen on tracing paper. Drawing by Eva Demuynck (2023).

Notes

1. Definition according to Merriam-Webster. Consulted via www.merriam-webster.com.
2. Mitchell S. Kossak, *Therapeutic Attunement: A Transpersonal View of Expressive Arts Therapy,* in «The Arts in Psychotherapy», n° 36, 2009, pp. 13-8.
3. See for example Elizabeth B. N. Sanders, Pieter Jan Stappers, *Convivial Toolbox: Generative Research for the Front End of Design*, BIS Publishers, Amsterdam 2020.
4. The project was entitled *The Embodiment of Consolation: unlocking the interaction between mourning, drawing and space*. It was conducted by the author at the KU Leuven Faculty of Architecture in Ghent (BE) between 2020-2024.
5. Lucy Huskinson, "Using Architecture to Think Ourselves into Being: Buildings as Storehouses of Unconscious Thought", in Lucy Huskinson, *Architecture and the Mimetic Self: A Psychoanalytic Study of How Buildings Make and Break our Lives*, Routledge, Abingdon & New York 2018, pp. 134-72.
6. In her PhD dissertation the author redefined the concept of *transitional spaces*, originally coined by psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott to describe the space between a child's inner and outer world, as «imaginary places capable of bringing about real psychological change, places that are made visible and tangible only through drawing». For further reading, see: Eva Demuynck, *The Embodiment of Consolation: unlocking the interaction between mourning, drawing and place(-making)*, PhD diss., KU Leuven, 2025, p. 302.
7. Term coined by the author in *Ibid.*, p. 297.
8. See for example Leonie Kellaher, et al., "Wandering Lines and Cul-de-Sacs: Trajectories of Ashes in the United Kingdom", in Jenny Hockey, et al., *The Matter of Death: Space Place and Materiality*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2010, pp. 133-47.
9. Term coined by the author in Eva Demuynk, *The Embodiment of Consolation*, *op. cit.*, p 275; as a counterweight to *mindset*, its better-known counterpart.
10. Annika Jonsson, Tony Walter, *Continuing Bonds and Place*, in «Death Studies», n° 7, 2017, pp. 406-15.
11. Avril Maddrel, *Mapping Grief. A Conceptual Framework for Understanding the Spatial Dimensions of Bereavement, Mourning and Remembrance*, in «Social & Cultural Geography», n° 2, 2016, pp. 166-88.
12. See for example: Dennis Klass, et al., *Continuing Bonds: New Understandings of Grief*. Taylor & Francis, Abingdon & New York 2014; and Brenda Mathijssen, *Transforming Bonds: Ritualising Post-Mortem Relationships in the Netherlands*, in «Mortality», n° 3, 2018, pp. 215-30.
13. Term coined by the author. For further reading, see: Eva Demuynk, *The Embodiment of Consolation*, *op. cit.*, p. 277.

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* Original images included in this collage: *Storm at sea* by Richard Billingham (2002), from the series *Landscapes*, lightjet print mounted on aluminium, 111 x 130.5 cm and *Ute II* by Sigrid Von Lintig (2018), from the series *Schwimmer*, painting, 60 x 85 cm. Respectively collected from Hope Kingsley, Christopher Riopelle, *Seduced by Art: Photography Past and Present*, The National Gallery, London 2012, pp. 162-163 and Kunstenfestival Watou, Kunstenfestival Watou 2018: *Over het verlangen en de troost*, vzw kunst & stichting ijsberg vzw, Schore 2018, p. 53.

Materializing Intangible Topographies through Drawing Space. Drawing as a Tool for Connectedness

Moragh Diels

The general lack of connectedness today shows a negative impact on society, leading to major challenges like loneliness and suicide[1]. Some studies indicate that nearly half of the Belgian population reports feelings of loneliness, while other studies indicate it as a risk factor for death comparable to smoking and even bigger than obesity or lack of exercise[2]. As existing research seems insufficient, more research into new ways to increase connectedness is urgently needed.

Meanwhile the discipline of architecture entails unique tools for fostering connection between people, but this side of architecture remains underexposed in academic research.

After analysing various studies on connectedness and architecture, its discipline-specific instruments present themselves as the discipline of choice to tackle this problem. This text argues for the connecting potential of a more humane side of architecture, beyond the existing merely technical research.

Existing Academic Research

Most research about fostering connectedness through design conveys (1) societal studies on the (semi-)public environment, including the exploration of a possible remedy in the public domain, (like designing of public areas with a focus on social interaction, in the work domain (like co-working) and in the common dwelling environment (like co-housing)[3]. These societal approaches are a well-trodden path.

Another approach in research on connectedness focuses on the (2) historically grown digitalisation. People are more connected than ever, yet studies indicate a direct correlation between the use of social media and social disconnection[4]. The (3) psychological approaches focus on therapy research and design research.

Psychological approaches on connectedness through design mainly consider geographical influences (e.g. proximity to nature)[5]. Literature about the psychological influence of space in the domestic space mainly consider changing properties of the place[6].

Today, architects are still defined and perceived as primarily technical and administrative professionals, whereas my experience has taught me that architects spend at least as much time acting as social mediators between the demands of clients, regulators and contractors as they do on purely designing.[7] The discrepancy between the practice and theory surrounding the architectural profession does not contribute to bridging this academic gap. Cambridge Dictionary: «a person whose job is to design new buildings and make certain that they are built correctly»[8].

Existing research on connectedness in architecture deals mainly with physical properties of the built environment, while the architectural discipline encompasses much more than simply looking at or making practical use of the physically built environment. The personal memories that are intrinsically – often unconsciously – connected to physical properties of buildings is missing from current academic research, a major gap since many studies indirectly point to the great therapeutic potential. Further evidence of the therapeutic potential of the discipline of architecture is revealed in the following case study.

Reflections on a Case Study

I have experienced the connecting potential of drawing architecture in a successful auto-biograpahical approach during my master dissertation, about the last weeks of my father's life. This approach proved to propel the conversation with experts from other disciplines (art-therapy and psychology) I was in contact with, as well as with my friends and family. Subsequently my further research on this case was published in an academic journal[9].

The process and meaning of materializing intangible topographies – described as *memorie* below – is explained in more detail by means of four excerpts of the architectural drawing:

1. A Realisation in Hindsight Materialized Into a View on a Hidden Space

The memory:
Only after *missing the phone call* did I realise I will never *know what my father wanted to tell me*

Materialization of the memory in the drawing:
Only after *passing by the space* did I realise I will never *be able to enter the space*
[Fig. 1A, 1B]

The Drawing Process

Mapping the invisible topography of one's intimate being provided a central tool for self-understanding and exploration, stimulating remembrance and verbalisation by turning unconscious experiences into explicit awareness[10]. In addition to the physical topography (physical context: built environment, our body, etc.) that is easily observable by the public, people also have a mental topography (mind) that is easy to hide and not freely accessible (only if you consciously choose to verbalise it). By verbalising this intangible topography, you can connect with others. The invisible topography is this case study entailed my experience of specific memories of the last weeks of my fathers life within his home – my childhood house. The drawing process consisted of first writing down everything I remembered of a specific memory, than exploring unconscious material by reflecting on the spatial context of – and how I felt during a specific memory.

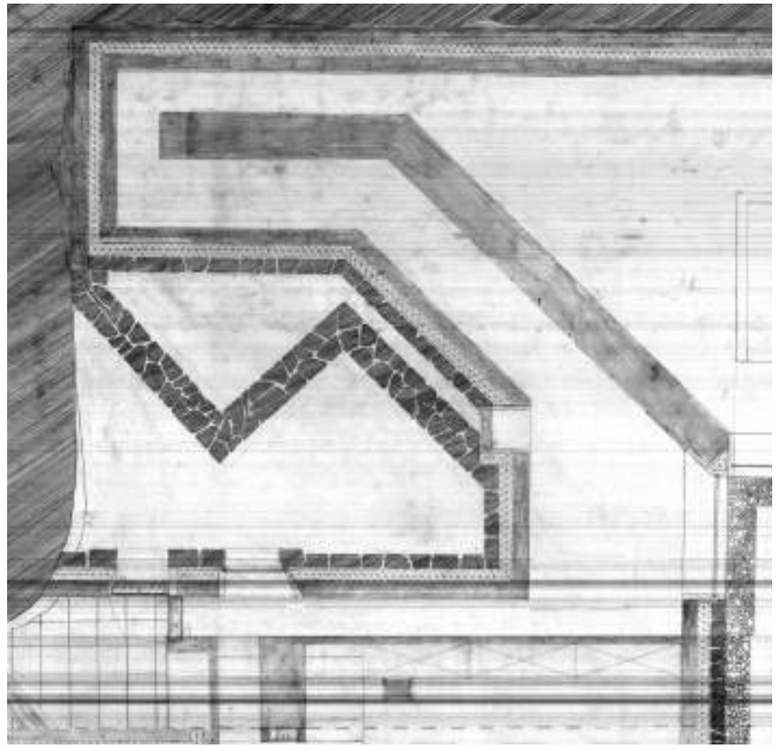

Fig. 1A. Moragh Diels, *Plan of space representing the missed phone-call*, Kessel, 2019.

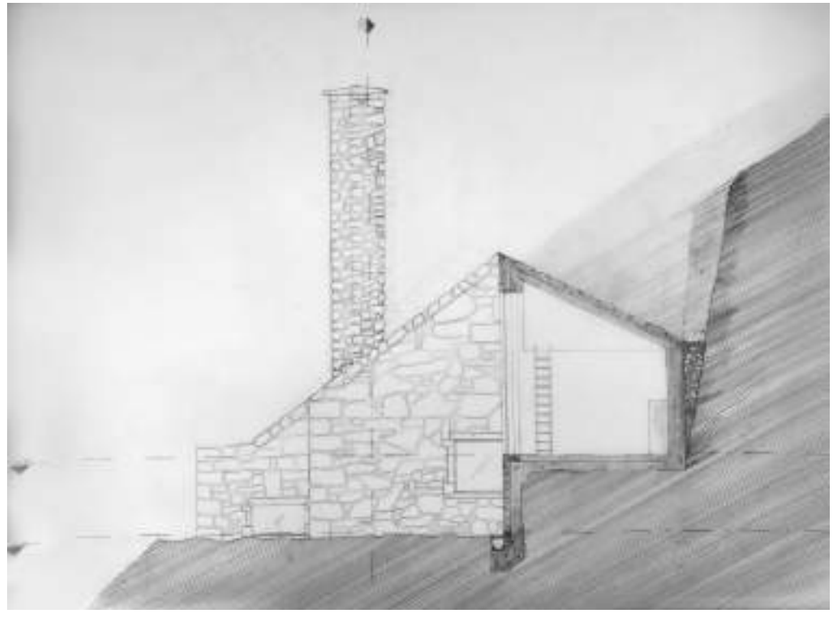

Fig. 1B. Moragh Diels, *Section of space representing the missed phone-call*, Kessel, 2019.

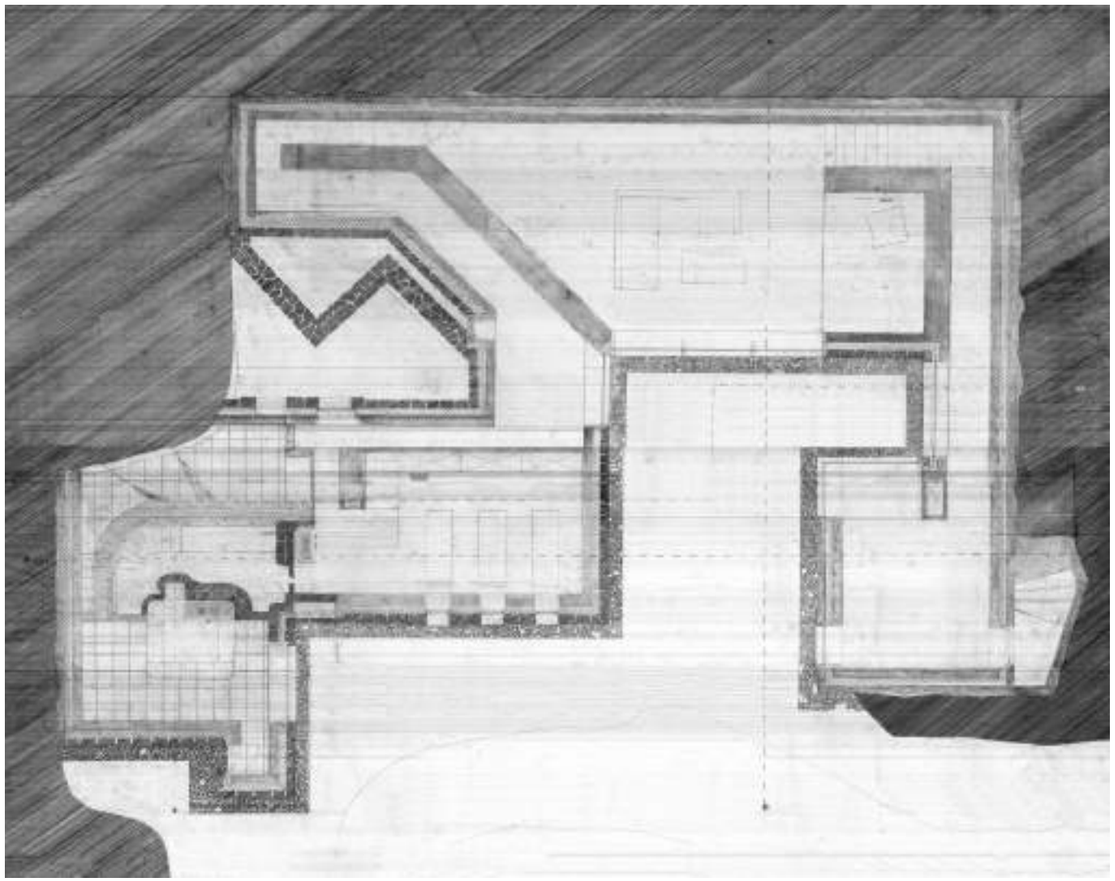

Fig. 2A. Moragh Diels, *Plan of space representing the overview,* Kessel, 2019.

Subsequently drawing a space, where this feeling is recalled when I walked through, now triggered by the physical properties of the drawn space. The cyclical drawing process of first sketching this space in plan, then refining it in section to create a space that more closely matched the feeling I had during that memory, ensured efficient, constant refinement of the design[11]. In this case study, during the materialisation of the intangible, new perspectives emerged. The drawn space was a medium for re-entering memories in a more accessible way, for cyclically redrawing and therefore changing perspective.

When mentally walking through the excerpt of drawn space *The missed phone call* I experienced the same naivety as when I actually missed the phone call in my memory. The drawn space reflects a sloped corridor, a room and a window with a nice view – distracting attention from the seemingly unimportant door behind the corner, that provides access to this room. The way in which a physical slope determines the speed of your walking pace influences the transience with which you experience the space, causing you to pay less attention to striking details in this space. This fleetingness symbolises specific events that seemed unimportant when they occurred, but in retrospect turned out to be part of a larger whole, resulting in a feeling of *I could have seen this coming*. *There were signs on the wall* is also a physical translation of an intangible experience.

Only after passing by the space, after exiting the building and climbing a inevitable mountain – the room becomes visible from the outside, in a new perspective. When returning to this room it's not accessible anymore – resembling the inaccessible content of the missed phone-call – the doorframe is actually blocking the door instead of supporting. This drawn space resembled the memory of missing the seemingly unimportant phone-call and realising only days later that I will never know what my dad wanted to tell me right before he ended his life. Through exploring the multisensory similarities between the built space and remembrance during drawing architecture, the drawing process in this case study was a tool to verbalise memories I had difficulties talking about directly. Even to myself.

2. Connecting Memories Materialized Into an Overview of Spaces

The memory:
Only during *mourning* did I have an overview of the connections between *memories*

Materialization of the memory in the drawing:
Only during *climbing a mountain* did I have an overview of the connections between *spaces*
[Fig. 2A, 2B]

The Connecting Potential of Drawing Architecture

The architectural drawing played a crucial role in facilitating verbalisation to myself and others, in order to handle personal vulnerabilities. This research focused on the working drawing – as central research tool of the architect and therefore no less important than the built environment – as an ongoing process.[12] Multiple authors in the field of psychology state that the house and its rooms are a recurring form of representation for one's own body and psychological functioning[13]. The image of the house seems to become the topography of our intimate «being»[14].

When mentally walking through the excerpt of drawn space *The overview* I saw the sequence and shapes of rooms I just walked through in a new perspective, representing the new perspective on memories I had gained during mourning and having an overview of them by recalling and connecting them. For example, my father had bought a new boiler just before he died. At the time, it seemed like an unremarkable choice, but after his death it became clear that with this purchase he had already been anticipating his death. The physically challenging climb of the mountain in the drawn space represents the actual challenging mental mourning.

Thanks to this tangible drawing, I was able to repeatedly access previously difficult-to-reach intangible memories, in order to start an internal dialogue to process the memories, connecting with myself.

Creative expression has been described as a therapeutic medium that acts as an extension of our body, with the potential to connect people[15]. The therapeutic potential of drawing is explored further within Art Therapy: a discipline that ties together creative expression and psychotherapy to include non-verbal creative media (e.g. visual arts, dance, etc.) in general. Clinical Psychologist and professor Danielle Knafo emphasizes how both creative expression and psychotherapy rely on a creative process which «utilizes the unconscious in a quest for transformation and healing»[16]. One of the main axioms of art therapy states that during a creative process the created drawing can be a foundation for self-understanding[17]. I gained new perspectives and insights on my own memories through drawing spaces. The architectural drawing is closely related to creative and artistic expression in many ways.

3. Impressions Materialized Into Proportions of Spaces

The memory:
I *wanted to* feel warmth and connectedness *with my dad*

Materialization of the memory in the drawing:
I *can* feel warmth *from the stove* and lay close *to the urn*
[Fig. 3A, 3B]

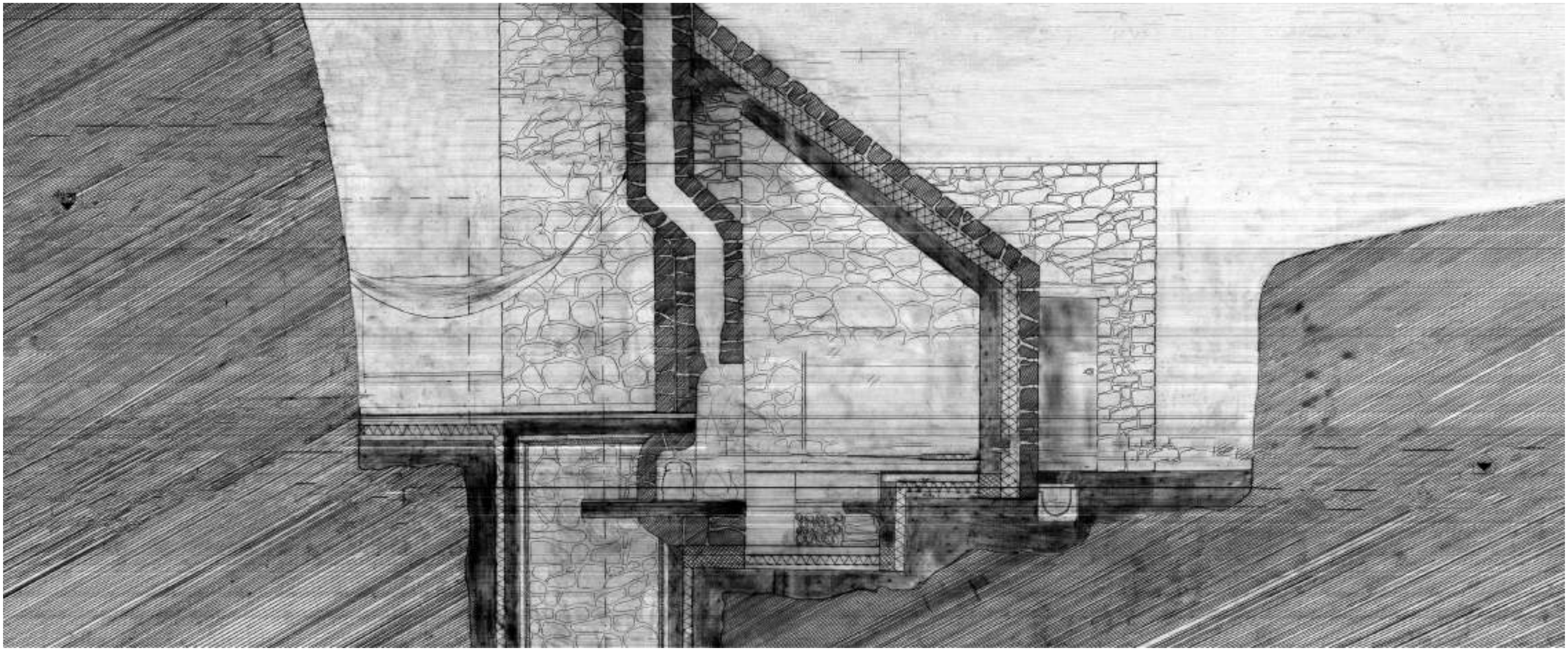

Fig. 2B. Moragh Diels, *Section of space representing the overview,*
Kessel, 2019.

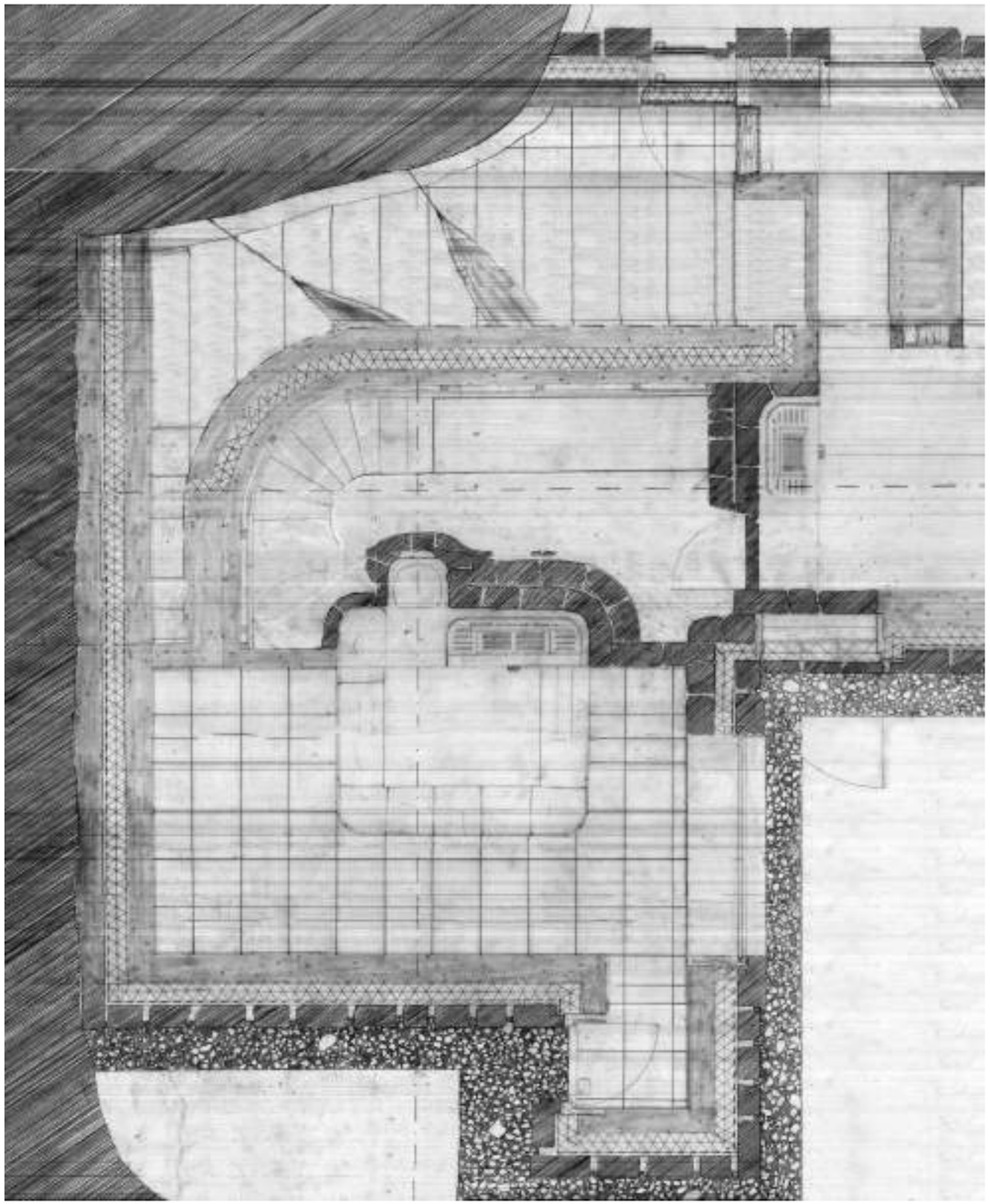

Fig. 3A. Moragh Diels, *Plan of space representing Connectedness to the urn,* Kessel, 2019.

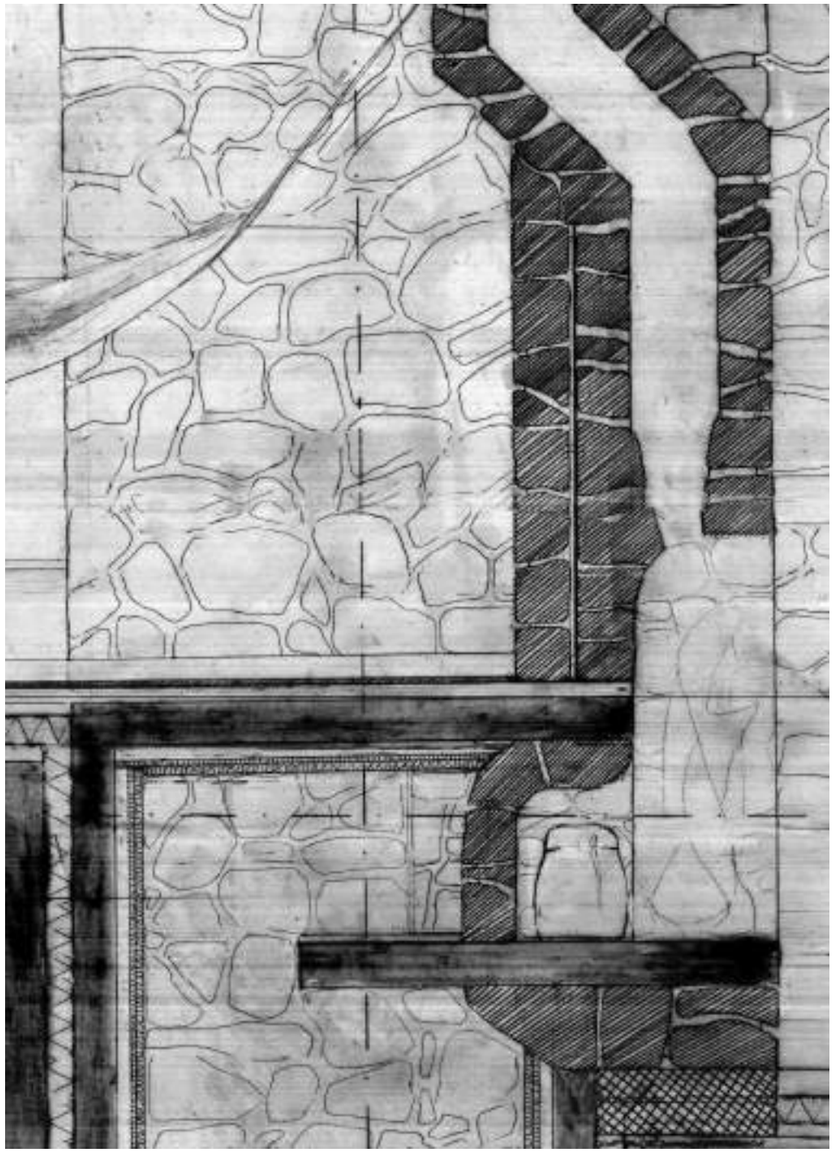

Fig. 3B. Moragh Diels, *Section of space representing Connectedness to the urn,* Kessel, 2019.

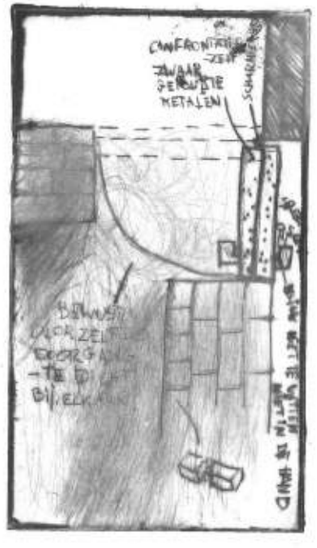

Fig. 4A. Moragh Diels, *Plan of space representing Accessibility to the urn,* Kessel, 2019.

Fig. 4B. Moragh Diels, *Detail of entrance to space representing Accessibility to the urn,* Kessel, 2019.

The Connecting Potential of the Architectural Drawing

An architectural drawing is a compilation of the carefully considered assimilation of personal experiences of spaces into a new space. Arguably, most architectural drawings are at least partly autobiographical. This type of autobiographical drawing has great potential as a tangible object that, when published, can stimulate conversation and improve connectedness with others.

Successive levels of verbalisation increased my sense of connectedness. First verbalisation with myself (reflection on memories), then verbalisation with friends and family (drawing together), then verbalisation with strangers (presentation master's dissertation). After the internal dialogue while cyclically refining the sequence of drawn space, I asked my friends and family to help finish the drawing[18].

As they started following my instructions, they asked me what they were drawing. This is where verbalisation to others started, I opened up about the drawing and first indirectly about the memories, but quickly I was elaborating on all the details. They felt that they could finally contribute to my grieving process, and I felt supported.

This boundary drawing, a drawing that facilitates verbalisation between visitors, provided they have a common interest, bridges our intangible topographies when drawn up in the universally readable language of conventional architectural representations.

4. Social Relations Materialized Into Accessibility of Spaces

The memory:
My mother and aunt didn't want to be in the same room but both wanted to be close to the urn

Materialization of the memory in the drawing:
My mother and aunt *have to actively decide every time again if they* want to be in the same room close to *the urn, using one door with 2 locks for 2 entrances*
[Fig. 4A, 4B]

The Therapeutic Potential of the Discipline of Architecture

The World Health Organization in Europe identifies «… a major role for the arts in the prevention of ill health, promotion of health, and management and treatment of illness across the lifespan», while the «Sustainable Development Goal 3 of the UN is to «ensure healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages»[19].

In addition to the findings from academic research, the case study also shows that the discipline of architecture has great therapeutic potential. Analysing memories through drawing, then making them explicit in a design and later verbalising them to others provided a tool to handle those memories, allowing me to reflect on and process them, and helping me reconnect with my brothers and friends. This case study leads to a number of conclusions about the therapeutic potential of architecture. Memories can easily be translated into the physical characteristics of a space. For example: there is a decreasing level of abstraction in the translation of the experience of an event into the materialisation of the memory of this event in a design. This makes the concretised memory more comprehensive to talk about.

The Built Environment

Not only creating and communicating the architectural drawing, but also consciously experiencing the built environment has great therapeutic potential. Since everyone has come into contact with it, the built environment has the potential to be deployed as a universal tool that can be drawn, read and understood. The idea that our bodily experience of the built environment interacts with our inner mental space is supported in many disciplines. Current research into the influence of architecture on emotions and behaviour shows that one's-built environment has a significant impact on the self[20].

Dwelling satisfaction for example has a big influence on the emotional health[21]. Bringing together ideas from psychotherapists and architectural theory demonstrates how buildings shape us as much as we design them; while entering a space, the conscious and embodied experience triggers related unconscious material. Research on *attention* suggests that non-architects experience a building less consciously than architects, whereas the interaction between research in art-therapy and research in architecture points to the therapeutic potential of consciously experiencing space[22]. Huskinson therefore advocates to cultivate the multisensory potential of the field of architecture by means of a more evocative architecture, claiming that «the power of architecture (built and drawn) lies not in its capacity to represent the unconscious, but to evoke it», which potentially allows non-architects to experience this embodied experience more consciously[23].

The interaction between our built environment and mental health clearly indicates that the field of architecture – currently far from being at the service of society – can influence the inner mental space. However, this does not currently present itself as easily accessible for a non-expert and even for an expert (architects and therapists) audience.

Architecture as a field of investigation should initiate more humane dialogues next to its mere technical discourse, arguing there is a need to articulate more precisely the philosophical implications of architectural design and research[24].

In today's world of regulations and innovative techniques and materials, which architects are expected to be knowledgeable about, should the profession of architect be split into different types of architects, just as it was a few centuries ago when the profession of architect-builder was split into architect and builder?

Should this include an architect who is more at the service of people, using his expertise for mental well-being; an architect of intangible topographies?

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The Experiential Space in the Drawing Called Architecture

Riet Eeckhout

Drawing Architecture concerns the domain within the discipline of architecture where the primary output is a drawing. This term *Drawing Architecture* not only delineates how and where architecture is conceived, explored, and assessed, but also underscores how a drawing can embody architectural characteristics and even manifest itself as architecture.

The architectural drawing is historically understood as a representational instrument, used to visualize architectural proposals and guide construction. In the context presented here, however, drawing is approached as a means of producing experiential space in the drawing without being a representation of a world outside of the drawing. Moreover, rather than depicting what is imagined, the drawn surface becomes a speculative working environment – an active field in which spatial relationships can be tested, discovered, and continually adjusted as they come into being. This article elaborates on the ways in which architecture can be articulated as a sensation in the drawing.

In analogy with how one understands the spatiality of a building by the experience of walking in and around it, in the drawing too, we understand and savour spatiality by experiencing it. In the built environment, one enters the edifice to be immersed in the tangible and intangible complexity of built space, taking time to explore and sense its spatiality. The incremental process of understanding space through the encounter of detail and spatial change, gradually discloses the building's spatial identity. Its spatial consistencies are sensed and revealed. The edifice's intrinsic virtues need to be directly experienced, bringing forth the entrancing pleasure of architecture.

Entering the built environment is fundamentally different from entering the shallow depth of a drawing; a different type of entry takes place; a different experience of architecture takes place. This difference was the subject of a disagreement between John Hejduk and Peter Eisenman in the early 1990s. For Eisenman, architecture can only be assessed by entering the build construct; for him, the built condition and the experience of a physical interior are prerequisites for assessing something as architecture. By contrast, Hejduk argued that many things can express or embody architecture, not only physically constructed environments. This disagreement emerged in an interview by David Shapiro with Hejduk at Cooper Union, when Hejduk expressed discontent over Eisenman's statement that Hejduk's pavilions at the 1992 Berlin exhibition «are not architecture because you cannot get into them»[1]. To which Hejduk responds: «*You* can't get in them. In other words, he was not in the position to get into them. You can only get into something if you understand or are willing to»[2]. In this interview, their disagreement becomes productive. Although Hejduk disagrees with Eisenman's insistence on physical entry, he concurs that verifying architecture requires entry – but not necessarily a physical one. Hejduk describes an entry based on understanding, or the willingness to understand.

Entering and occupying a painting or drawing, Hejduk suggests, is «a flight of no substance, collapsing space in its wake»[3]. As one observes the drawing or painting, one surrenders the mind to the experience of the artefact. This flight of no substance is experiential in nature; it allows for a transfer of implicit knowledge about the object – knowledge that cannot be fully conveyed in words alone. This experiential transfer of knowledge occurs when drawing becomes an act of surrender, when the distance between the drafter and the subject-matter diminishes. When drawing, I am interested in what this immersive act brings to the surface in the drawing. As a drafter, I seek to enter and occupy the drawing to experience the sensation of space as I construct it. I want to be moved when I draw, engaging closely with the drawing's subject-matter beyond representational imperatives.

Spatiality as Such: Seeking Close Encounter With the Implicit

When considering architecture *in* the drawing, one encounters interesting disciplinary consequences. We know how to examine and evaluate architecture as a built edifice and how to regard spatial qualities in drawings when they refer to an external reality outside of the drawing. But how do we consider spatiality *as such* within the drawing – drawn architecture that does not serve a prospective built environment? This question opens an inquiry into what it means to draw architecture and asks what conditions within the drawing enable the expression and reading of architectural space.

A fundamental disciplinary consequence concerns the locus of architectural expression. Despite the central role of drawing in the production, understanding, and communication of built architecture, *Drawing Architecture* implies a shift in the locus of architectural expression from an artefact outside the drawing to the drawing itself, serving the drawing with the autonomy and agency necessary to perform. What is to be understood in the drawing must be sensed and experienced *within* the drawing – it is the experiential space in the drawing called architecture. The sensing of space beyond representational imperatives is characterized by direct, instantaneous, and relational qualities. Privileging relational properties in the perception of space redirects the gaze from the form *of* things towards the form *between* things. Architecture is considered here as a relational discipline – moving away from object-directed observation in favour of relational readings, where one element gives rise to another.

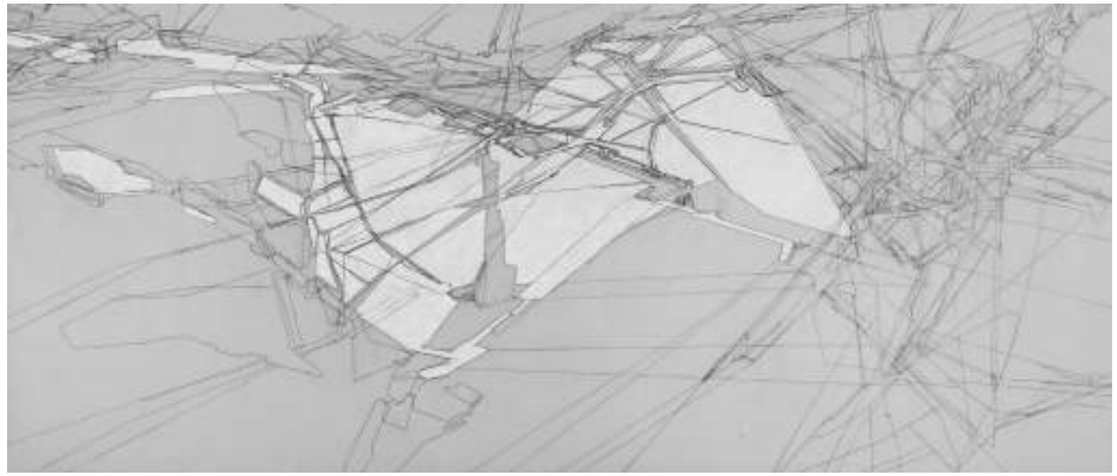

Fig. 1. Riet Eeckhout, *Drawing Out Gehry II*, Detail 1. Graphite pencil, white wax pencil on polyester film. 90 cm x 450 cm, 2018.

When experiencing spatial affect, the mind moves away from categorical thinking and cognitive construction – away from representational thought, from the indirect, from language in reference to constructions outside itself. This experience of spatiality is characterized by a kind of entering, a close encounter with actuality.

It is this experiential space that relates to the *figural* aspects of what is observed. This exploration is supported by Deleuze's distinction between the figurative and the figural[4]: the *figurative* is narrative and illustrative, it represents an object. But no matter how deeply we describe an object, we never fully exhaust what it is. There is something about objects when they enter into language, in a way that cannot be fully explicated; in other words, something always remains implicit[5]. It is these implicit aspects of the observed that are of interest, persisting, underlying and extending beyond their representational shell. The figural is concerned with this implicitness.

When drawing, I seek to trace and materialise aspects of the implicit.

Place in Its Momentary Status

These drawn inquiries – in process and result – are characterised by both an observational and speculative intent. The drawing surface, positioned between mind and subject-matter, serves as a receptive medium for the development of speculative ideas based on observations of the real. Here, the drawings materialise the search for architectural space, constructed through the careful reading and understanding of visual information. A dynamic interplay between observational and speculative intentions in observing, filtering, and retaining visual information is instrumental in determining how spatial information is brought to the surface in the drawing.

Drawing processes are tailored in each drawing project to enable a close encounter of subject-matter to observe consistency in their spatial-relational information. I project film fragments and photographic representations onto the drawing board to carefully observe, extract, and trace spatial-relational aspects onto mylar.

Seated at the pixel-end of the enlarged image, one becomes alienated from what it is one is looking at. In the beaming light of the projector, objects and figures dissolve into contours and tonal differences, instilling a sense of distance from assigned meanings and preconceived ideas. Seated when drawing on the vertical drawing board at close distance, at arm's length from the work, one perceives spatial relations and a kind of line and surface impetus or intent. Tone-based image morphology invites engagement with an incarnated material presence that is cut loose from cultural meaning or cognitive framing.

This drawing set-up – the drawing board with the projection of film fragments and stills – aims to bypass representation. It allows one to look beneath and beyond the apparent

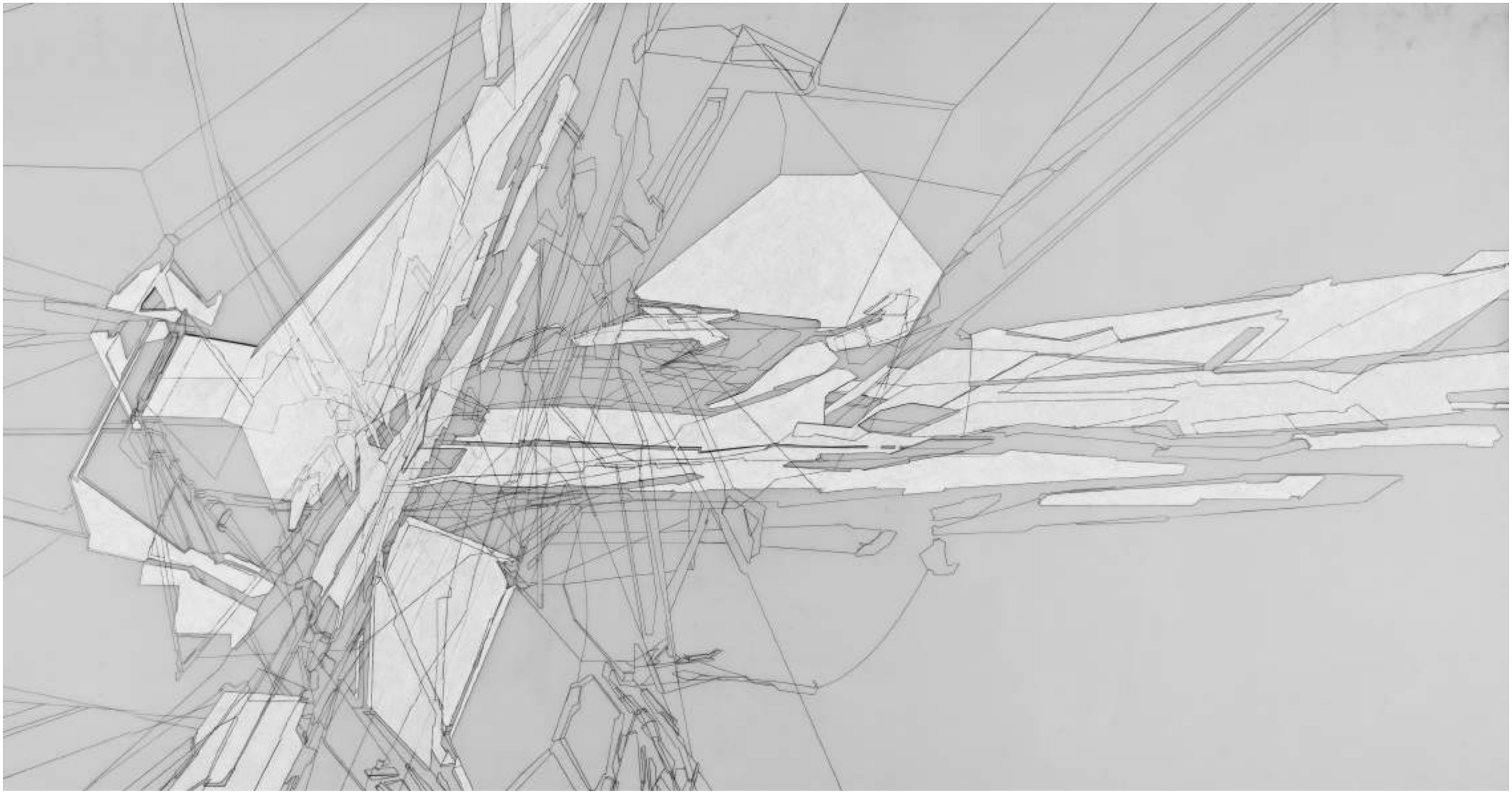

Fig. 2. Riet Eeckhout, *Drawing Out Gehry II*, Detail 2. Graphite pencil, white wax pencil on polyester film. 90 cm x 450 cm, 2018.

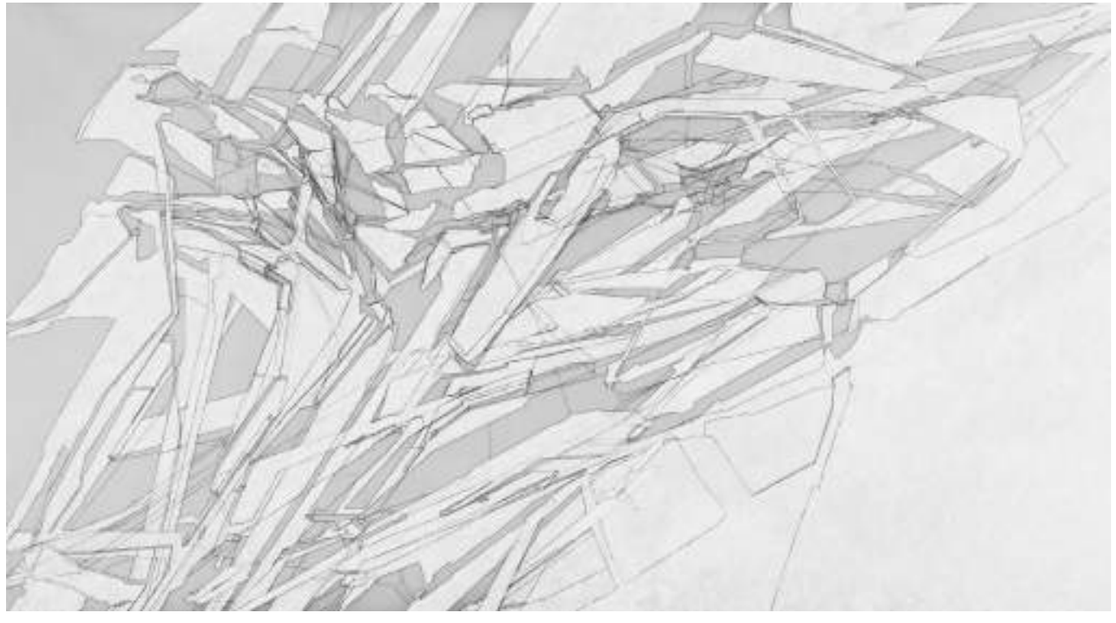

Fig. 3. Riet Eeckhout, *Drawing Out Gehry VII*. Graphite pencil, white wax pencil on polyester film.
90cm x 170cm, 2021.

presentation of a thing or situation, exploring other more latent agencies and substrata of the subject-matter, probing the relational significance in material presence.

Drawing by extracting spatial-relational environments from subject-matter footage is an act of mediation that oscillates between an observational and a speculative interpretation. With every line drawn, subject properties and conditions incrementally ground themselves into the drawing surface, giving rise to a dynamically changing spatial environment, until the drawing comes to a halt in an autonomous state. A momentary aspect of spatial performativity is materialised and with that, an underlying spatial consistency reveals itself. Resulting in the drawing as an arrested spatial disposition, sited and grounded, a *figured ground*, a place in its momentary state.

The search for the experiential space in the drawing is a search for spatial presence beyond the representational capacity of space in a drawing, conditioned by notions such as movement and difference, and the oblique performance.

Movement and Difference

Situational events as project sites with articulated change, such as a plane crash (rapid change) or a landscape in formation (slow change), reveal the logic of how form takes shape or deforms over time. The interest lies in what the drawing can extract from these situations as sites – namely, the space these phenomena occupy and unfold over time – place in its momentary status. The space taken in by the situation forms a figural manifestation of the situation in the drawing.

Here, the term *place* is characterised by multiplicity: the simultaneity of the changing performance and a disposition beyond any fixed meaning or morphology. The use of film frames and stills as source material for drawing enables a regard beyond the singular point of view. Through film, we can see performativity, change, and difference. It is not movement as such that is of interest here, but rather its consequences: the exchange of forces over time and the impact on morphology revealed by the relentless change of spatial disposition as a situation unfolds.

Time moves on and change is inevitable – there is no such thing as a frozen moment or a static environment. Change might be minute and barely noticeable, or it might be incidental, dramatic, and clearly articulated. Situations with a pronounced time-related change and impact serve as fruitful sites for drawing when observing the spatial structure locked into that change.

When change or difference finds its way into the drawing's morphology, it directs attention to the idea that form and change can be studied simultaneously without being in opposition.

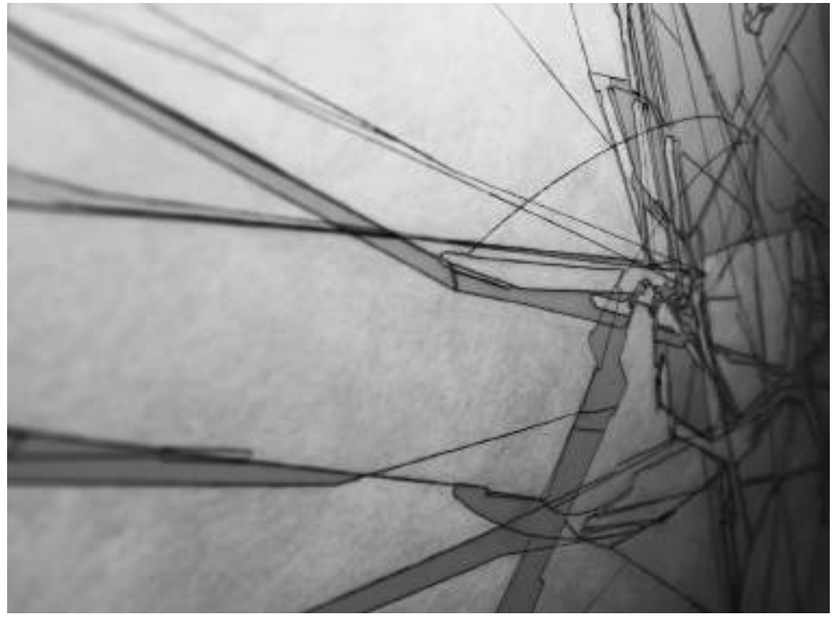

Fig. 4. Riet Eeckhout, oblique photograph of *Drawing Out Gehry II*, 2018.

The Oblique Performance

The search for the experiential space in the drawing is structured by an iterative drawing process. This process makes use of photographed oblique points of view to tease out spatial performativity within the drawing.

Photographing the drawing at acute angles facilitates entry points into the work and allows one to look at spatial information in different iterated proportions establishing intensities in the drawing. This results in the foregrounding of particular spatial formations in the drawing, while other visual information slides into the background. Aspects of perspective and foreshortening enter the drawing now. Incorporating oblique iterations of the drawing back into the drawing is a way of exploring and immediately folding the subject-matter's iterated capacities back into the work.

The transfiguration in the drawing that occurs from one point of view to another, directs the search of the experiential properties. This approach is somewhat akin to the iterative manner in which the Cubists painted in the early 20th century – a representation of the world drawn closer to experiential values.

Operating through repetition and iteration, this process filters and releases spatial information in the drawing, turning it into an expanding notational field distancing itself from the assumed performativity of representation and from the pictorial material it was born from. Instead, in critical surrender to the drawing process, a form of augmentation is deployed to allow the drawing hand to cultivate an awareness implicit to the complexity of what is observed.

While each drawing is deeply rooted in the observation of a particular situation, once the projector is turned off and the drawing is finished, it has cut ties with its figurative narrative. Now the drawing is able to perform independently; beyond the representational values it was born from.

The drawings, in their figural nature, do not delineate an inside or an outside, and there are no exact borders of where the entirety begins or ends. There is a need for the drawings to be large, on a vertically placed drawing board, standing in front of them as I make them in search of spatial experience, the sensation of urgency arises – an urgency of instant involvement with the subject in view. By immersing myself, sitting up close to the drawing board unable to see the edges of the drawing, I prevent the drawing from becoming an object treasured in hand. It allows the subject matter spatial intent to unravel in the drawing, to become tangible, capable of being sensed, experienced, and touched.

The drawing's postures, oblique and never fully frontal revealed, the configuration pulls you in and continues off page. The drawings are an extract, a sample, every time the final draft of the immersion called architecture.

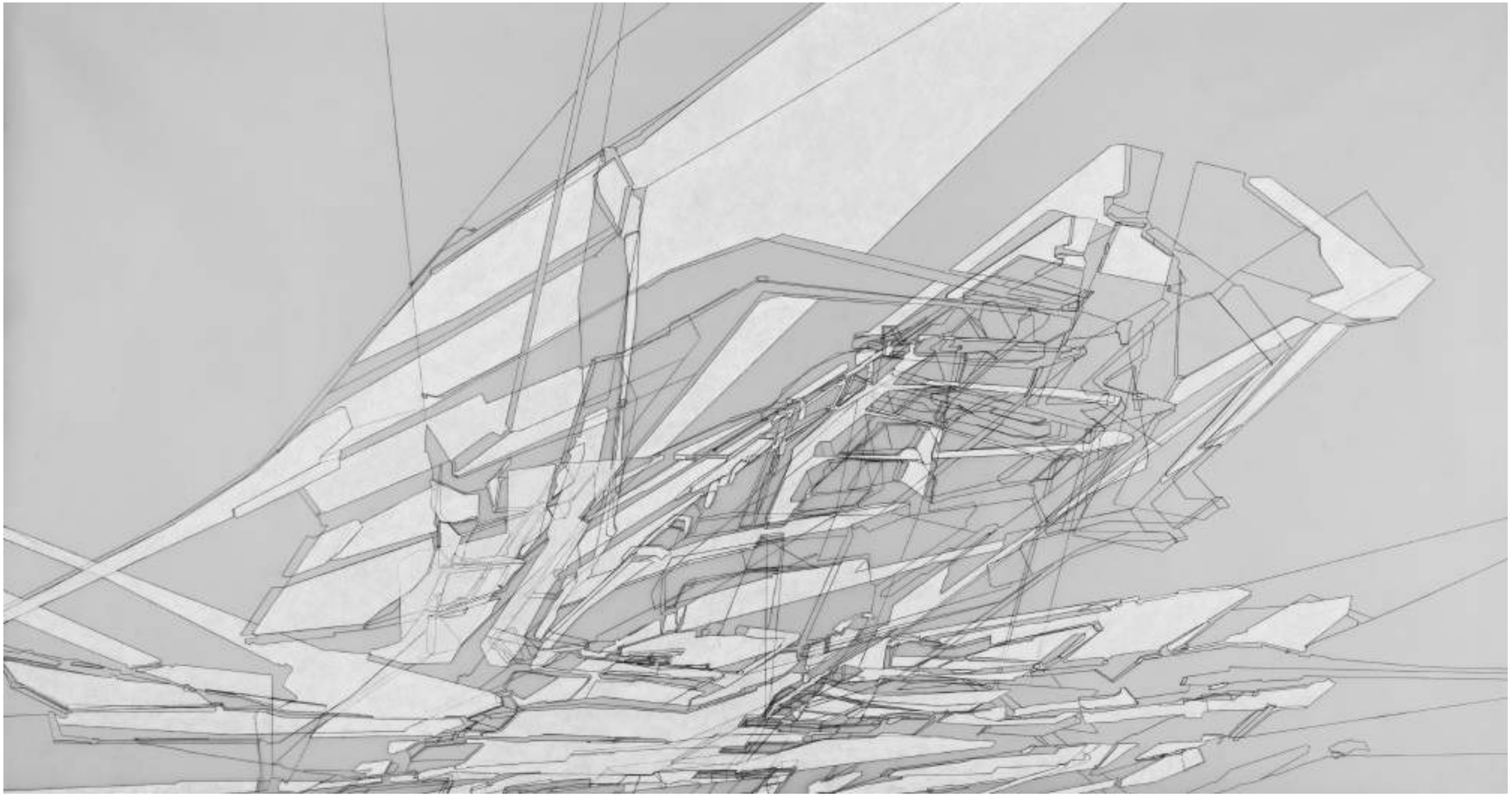

Fig. 5. Riet Eeckhout, *Drawing Out Gehry III*. Graphite pencil, white wax pencil on polyester film.
90 cm x 170 cm, 2019.

Notes

1. Michael Blackwood, *John Hejduk: Builder of Worlds*, (United States of America 1992).
2. *Ibid.*
3. John Hejduk, *Education of an Architect: Evening in Llano*, Rizzoli, New York 1988, p. 340.
4. Gilles Deleuze and Francis Bacon, *The Logic of Sensation*, trans. by D. W. Smith, Continuum, London 2003, p. 125.
5. Shores Corry, *Figural Studies: Lyotard's Distinction between the Figural and the Figurative*, in «Pirates & Revolutionaries», 04/2010, http://piratesandrevolutionaries.blogspot.com/2010/04/figural-studies-lyotards-distinction.html

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What's in a Detail? Drawing as a Maieutic Exercise in Architectural Design

Enrico Miglietta

To draw a detail at a scale of 1:1 is to approach construction from within the drawing itself – to trace, through the gesture, the tension between idea and matter, and to inhabit that narrow space where architecture begins to take shape yet remains unresolved. The sheet of paper becomes a field of action, a site of physical and mental proximity, where what is drawn ceases to be representation and becomes search for relation. It is in this closeness, intimacy, that drawing begins to convey – almost to embody – the weight of things[1].

This text emerges from a practice-based research context that explores drawing as a generative and epistemic tool in architecture. Rather than illustrating completed ideas, the drawings presented here act as investigative tools, ways of thinking through form, material, and relation. They belong to a design exercise conducted by the author, which takes its point of departure from a structural detail by Sigurd Lewerentz – used here as a cultural reference and trigger of reflection – but then develops autonomously as an independent exploration. In this sense, the drawings are not illustrations of a precedent but investigative tools within a broader research-by-design process, where architectural form is tested, varied, and re-imagined through drawing. Moving across the scales of the detail, the joint, and the fragment, the essay reflects on how drawing, especially at full scale, can operate as a *maieutic exercise*: an open, iterative, and embodied form of projectual knowledge.

Drawing Weight: The Detail as Mediator of Experience

Ghent, Sint-Niklaasstraat 27, room 2.15. In front of me, pinned to the wall, lies a drawing that re-interrogates the relationship between the two INP 550 profiles that compose the twin pillar supporting the beams and roof system of St Peter's Church in Klippan[2]. On my drafting table, I sketch a variation of these two steel sections, coupling them differently than in Lewerentz's original design [Fig. 1]. Everything begins with a minimal shift: increasing the distance between the metal webs from 70 to 110mm. A minimal movement, yet sufficient to open a breach in the project. I decide to indulge in a drawing that is overtly compositional, a *divertissement*, but one that questions the very relationship between the two elements. From there, a broader reflection begins. The question is not merely structural – how resistance or stability is altered – but perceptual: what happens when the gap between the beams widens? What happens to the light, the sense of breath, the verticality of that twin column? It feels as though, in their separation, the two sections gain new tension, and that the void between them begins to weigh as much as the steel itself.

In this sense, the detail becomes a mediator of experience: not merely a technical node, but a sensitive, «fertile trigger»[3], capable of activating an embodied understanding of the construction[4]. More than representing, the drawing relates.

Tilting the drawing table vertically, then, suddenly aligns the drawing gesture with the direction of the forces, with gravity itself. The pencil stroke, sometimes sharp and hard, sometimes soft and diffuse, registers invisible but perceived tensions. Graphite engraves the surface, layering parallel lines to express pressure, deformation, the heat that once forged the steel. Red pencil is introduced as a vector of tension: not a symbol, but a temperature, a material memory, an energetic trace.

This is not a neutral act. The profile is not drawn as data to be recorded, but as a body to be questioned. The drawing takes a position; it listens, attentively, to the form and to the force it contains. It responds, not passively, but through gesture and resistance, shaping what it receives. Hatching thickens, overlaps, blurs. A kneaded eraser is used to mute certain lines, but never fully erase them, as if the material resists forgetting. It is both an analytical and an affective exercise, where every gesture becomes a declaration of closeness[5].

At some point, around the two beams, other figures begin to emerge. As if the drawing, once opened to drifting, produces its own geography: fragments of structures, allusions to a submerged urban landscape, stretched lines, suspended profiles. These apparitions do not follow any predetermined order: they arise through association, almost through resonance. It is as though the detail begins to generate a space – not so much a context as an atmosphere, a possibility.

Here, the drawing does not represent; it «constructs»[6]. And it does so beginning with the body: with the weight felt in the hand as a line is drawn, with the strain of dense hatching, with the deliberate choice of pencil, paper, gesture. The drawing does not merely convey the idea of weight; it begins to make it tangible. It allows one to momentarily inhabit the *interiority* of a material, to sense its tensions, its reactions, its ambiguities. The graphite line is not simply descriptive, but performative: it records not only form, but resistance, memory, sedimentation[7].

Only in this immersive act design decisions begin to emerge. They are not preconceived but arise from the act itself. It is the drawing that suggests whether the pillar should divide or unite, whether the space between the beams should remain void or become built.

The detail truly becomes a mediator – between mind and hand, force and form, experience and intention. To draw weight is to listen to what the drawing returns, and to allow that response to guide the project.

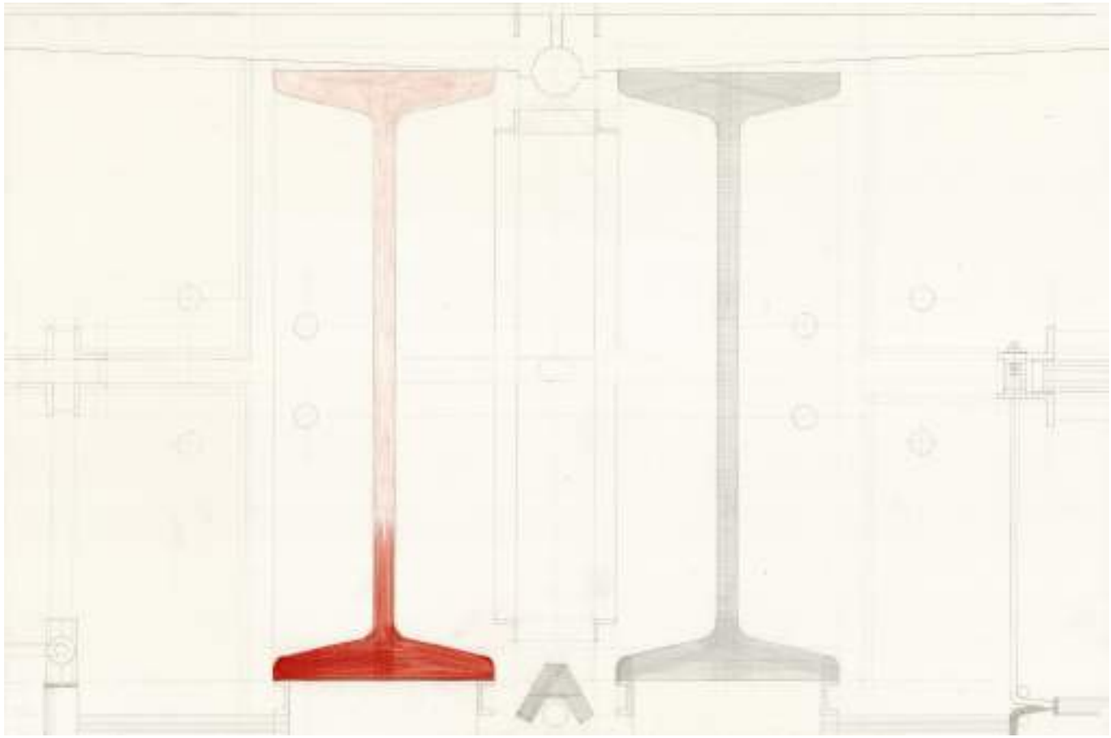

Fig. 1. *Relations between two IPN beams and the space around them*, pencil on paper, 1000x660mm, scale 1:1. Design and drawing by Enrico Miglietta, 2024.

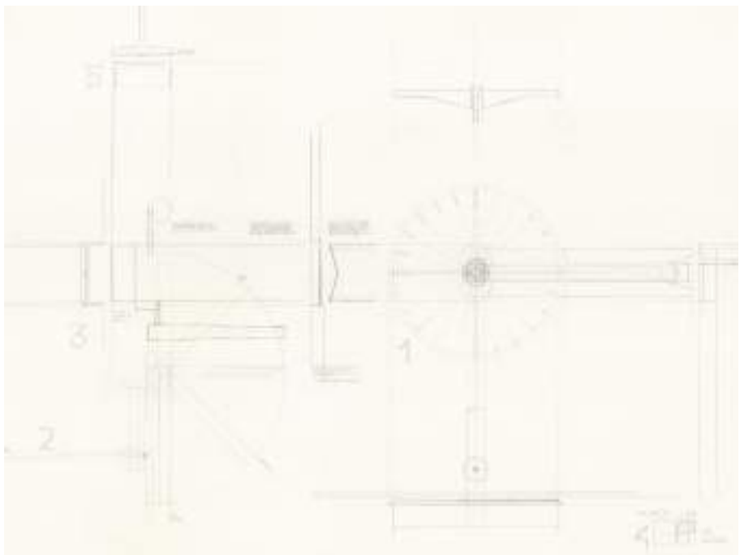

Fig. 2. *Study for a door and its pivoting mechanism*, pencil on paper, 1000x760mm, scale 1:1-1:10. Design and drawing by Enrico Miglietta, 2024.

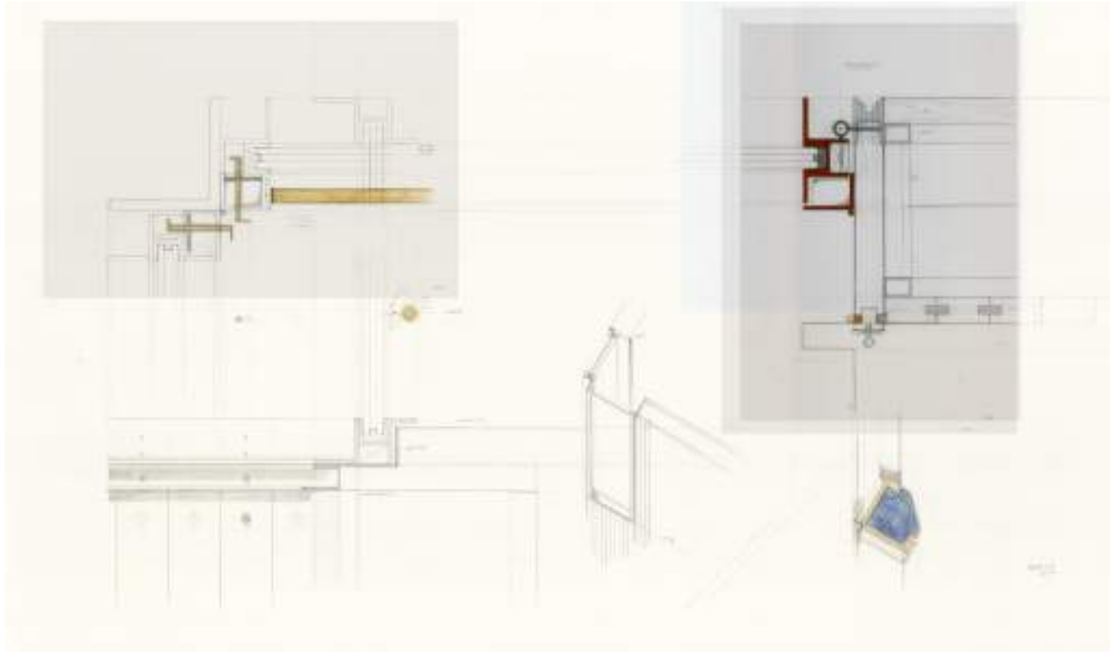

Fig. 3. *Study for a bedroom window*, pencil on multilayered paper, 1500x880mm, scale 1:1. Design and drawing by Enrico Miglietta, 2024.

Drawing a Joint

To draw a joint means engaging with the project at one of its most delicate, dense and intense moments. It should be approached with care. The joint is the point where something significant happens. It is not simply a matter of technically connecting different parts – materials, components, directions – but of accepting that a decision, a relationship, a tension is concentrated in that very place[8]. The joint is where form becomes charged with intention, where one can articulate a «critical practice»[9].

In the drawing of the pivoting door [Fig. 2], a small world is set in motion. «The door handle is the handshake of the building»[10], wrote Juhani Pallasmaa. The pivoting movement of the leaf, its rotation around a vertical axis, activates a complex system of connections: floor, ceiling, frame, space. The threshold is not merely a passage between inside and outside – it can be seen, in itself, as a small *architecture*, capable of articulating ulterior relations. Drawn at full-scale and at 1:10, the detail approaches the margins of things, seeking to hold each component together without losing their individual tension or character. The drawing searches for rhythm: I have come to realise that many of my drawings instinctively follow a base-7 structure. The traces thicken where materials change direction, where they meet or break. There is something choreographic in this kind of drawing. The sheet is inhabited like a performative space: lines are traced, then one steps back, observes, and returns to adjust an opening, an overlap, a possible interference between parts. Drawing a joint is not about describing an assembly – it is about entering its rhythm, understanding its measure, defining a system of proportions. Knowing where to yield, where to resist, where to push for alignment. To draw a handle is also to think about how this will relate to the entire building.

In the drawing of the bedroom window [Fig. 3], this logic becomes even more complex. The node between wood and metal, between gaze and touch, between closure and opening, is translated into a layered, tense, intimate assembly. It is not just a window frame being drawn, but the relationship between the body and space, between a gesture (opening, pushing, gripping) and a material (steel, brass, linoleum, glass) that responds. The colours that define the various components (red, ochre, blue) are not decorative but suggest potential uses or gestures: what can be held, what can be moved, what can be leaned on to write or study, what weight can be perceived, what temperature can be felt through the material.

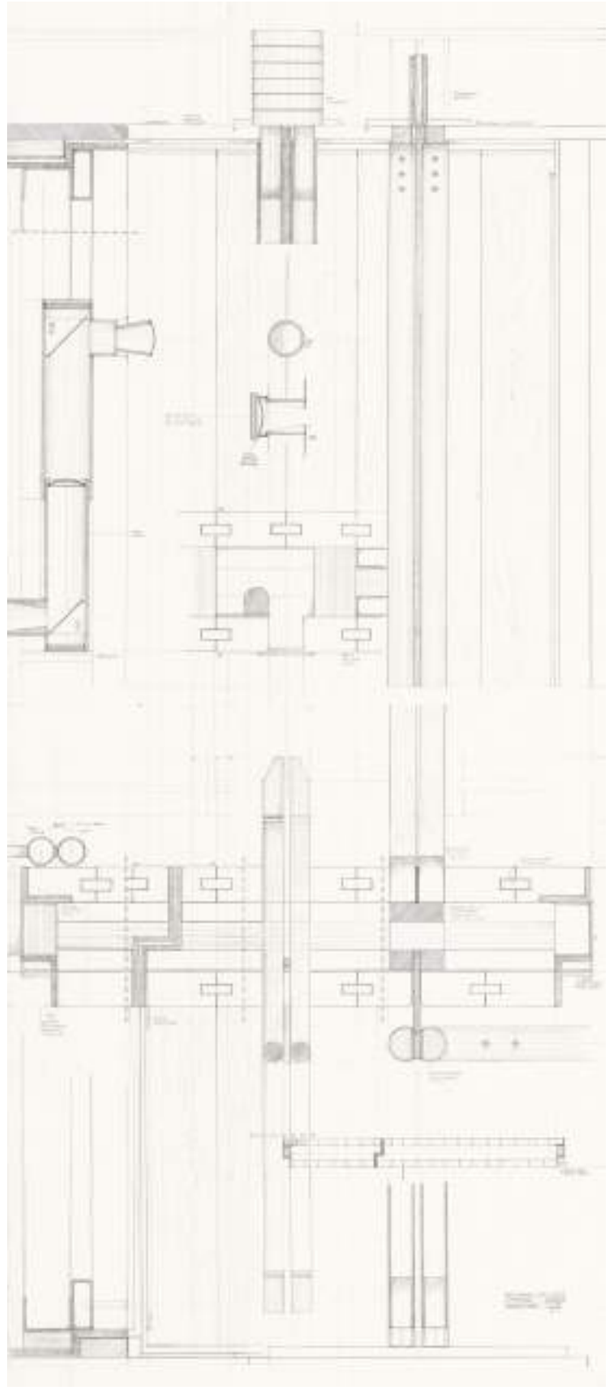

Fig. 4. *Study for an entrance door*, pencil on paper, 600x1500mm, scale 1:1-1:5. Design and drawing by Enrico Miglietta, 2024.

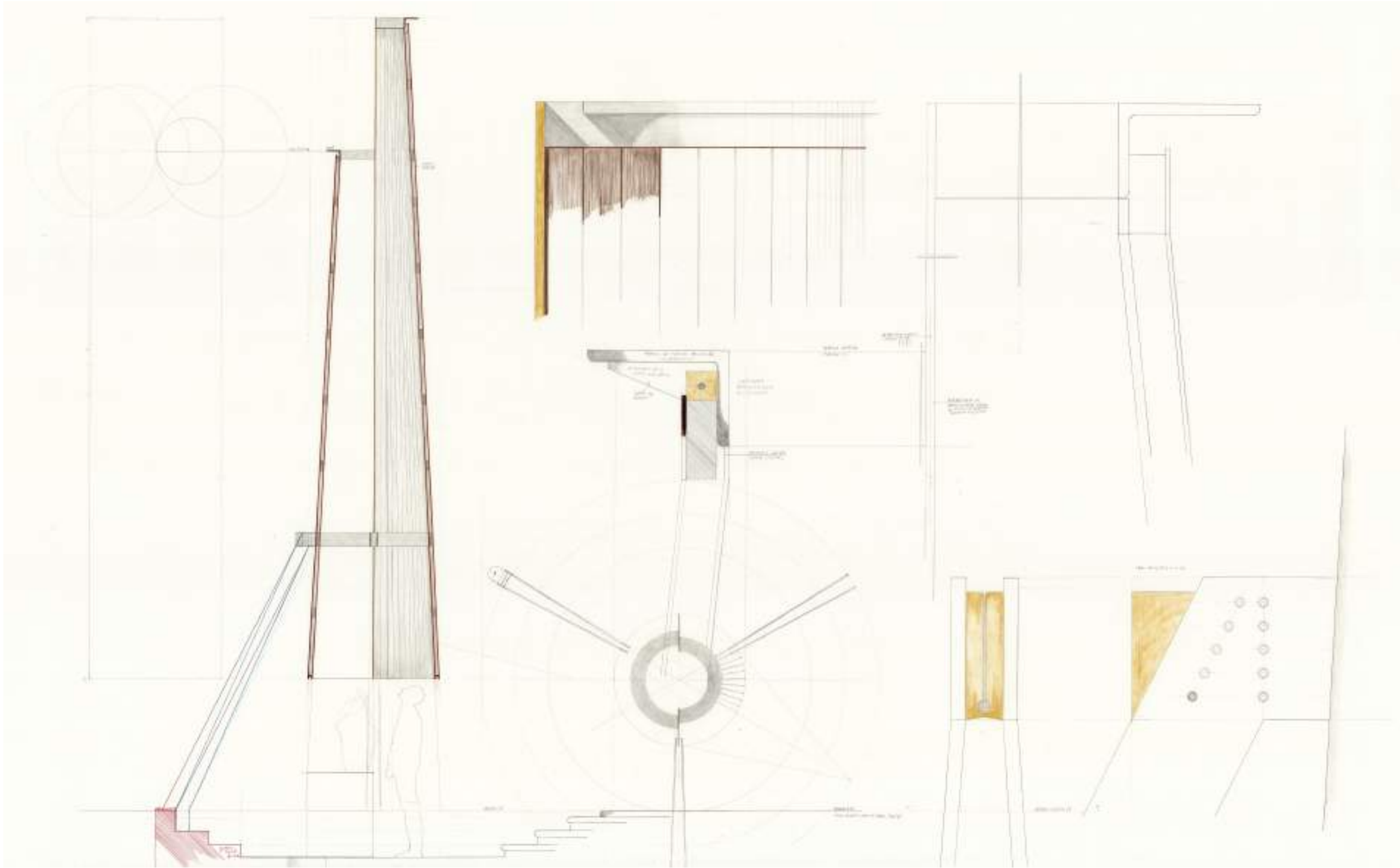

Fig. 5. *Study for an outdoor place of reflection*, pencil on paper, 1500x930mm, scale 1:1-1:10. Design and drawing by Enrico Miglietta, 2024.

The drawing unfolds through iterations, overlays on tracing paper, rotational tests performed by physically moving the sheets. Each part drawn puts the previous one into question. The joint is never a synthesis; it is a zone of negotiation. Each stroke carries with it a question about function, but also about experience. What does it mean to open this window? What difference does it make whether it opens inward or outward? Where does the shadow fall? Where does the hand rest?

In the drawing of the entrance door [Fig. 4], the research on the threshold becomes even more autonomous, yet always connected to the previous design choices. The door panel is no longer just a closing element, but an active body, held in tension between floor and ceiling. The frame detaches from the wall, remains visible, holds and releases. The door becomes a device: it takes a position in space, it allows one to see through it, it orients and designs the space.

This drawing already anticipates a transition: this threshold ceases to be *only* a joint and begins to assert itself as a *fragment*. The rotation of the door, its anchoring system, its autonomous presence suggests a construction that, though born of a specific function, goes beyond that function to become architecture. It becomes a reflection on the relationship between parts, on their distance, on the possibility of being together without dissolving one another.

In drawing an architectural joint, one has to listen to how materials speak to one another. They do not always get along – sometimes they ignore each other, sometimes they attract. Sometimes, they live within a form of «respectful distance»[11]. The task of drawing is to give space to these dialogues without closing them down. Dialogues that may resonate throughout the entire process, from the particular to the whole: not to dictate how things must go, but to discover how they might hold together.

Drawing a Fragment

A fragment is never simply an autonomous part, severed from the whole. It is, rather, a condensation: a form that contains within itself a *possible totality*. In architectural drawing, the fragment becomes a moment of concentration – not to isolate, but to reveal; not to reduce, but to intensify. It is a singular configuration that, through its density, grants access to the deeper structures of a project. Not a synthesis, but a vector of forces: formal, tectonic, experiential.

But how does one draw a fragment? And how can one tell that a fragment is being drawn?

The design for a *Place of Reflection* [Fig. 5] attempts to answer these questions through drawing itself. The project emerges as a possible alternative or further development within the broader design of a refuge-studio[12], of which the surrounding drawings (those that precede and follow this one) form a contiguous part. A truncated conical volume, lifted from the ground and opening to the sky: at once a shelter and a lookout, a space of stillness and projection. The fragment here is not discovered – it is purposefully constructed as a device to question the whole from within, to reorient its internal logic through a singular yet relational form. It is the result of a precise analytical operation, a critical incision that extracts from the whole a part endowed with expressive autonomy. Not the *ruin* of a synthesis, but a deliberate architectural gesture.

The drawing begins with a generative section at a scale of 1:10, expands in detail, and opens into plan. A structure in Cor-Ten steel and wood, held together by punctual joints in brass that are both technical and expressive. The fragment contains the idea of a whole – not by reproduction, but by analogy. Through proportion, tectonic articulation, and symbolic charge, it offers itself as a complete thought. It presents itself as a possible alternative to its parallel project, which – by reasoning through the same elements, the same metric, and the same materials – constructs a new singularity [Fig. 6].

In this sense, the fragment is not what remains, it is what *insists*. It resists being reduced to mere function or image. It retains the traces of a design subjectivity, what Giorgio Agamben calls a «signature»[13], a mark that opens a passage into the work, not only as construction, but as meaning. When successful, the fragment makes the author's gaze present: situated, embodied, intentional. In the drawing, this presence is felt. The fragment cannot exist independently of a *gesture*. It is the result of an intentional act by the author – who selects it, marks it, distinguishes it – and of a gaze that recognises, layers, interprets it. The fragment, in this sense, is an interface between author and observer. It is not merely a meaningful part of the work: it is a threshold of sense, activating a process of reading, condensation, and attribution. It is in this gesture, in the very act of drawing the fragment, that the singular acquires a universal charge, opening up to a multiplicity of dimensions: geometric, pragmatic, semiotic. A moment of «dense blending»[14], that emerges through the relation.

Again, as Vittorio Gregotti has noted[15], the fragment stands as a figure in opposition to the totalising logic of synthesis, not due to lack, but thanks to its capacity to articulate connections beyond itself: connections of measure, construction, and reference. This drawing does not aim to «conclude» the project, but to intensify its open structure. It gathers the forces that traverse the whole yet reassembles them in a self-sufficient form.

The fragment, then, is not an accident. It is a project. Its construction is not spontaneous, but the result of a strategy

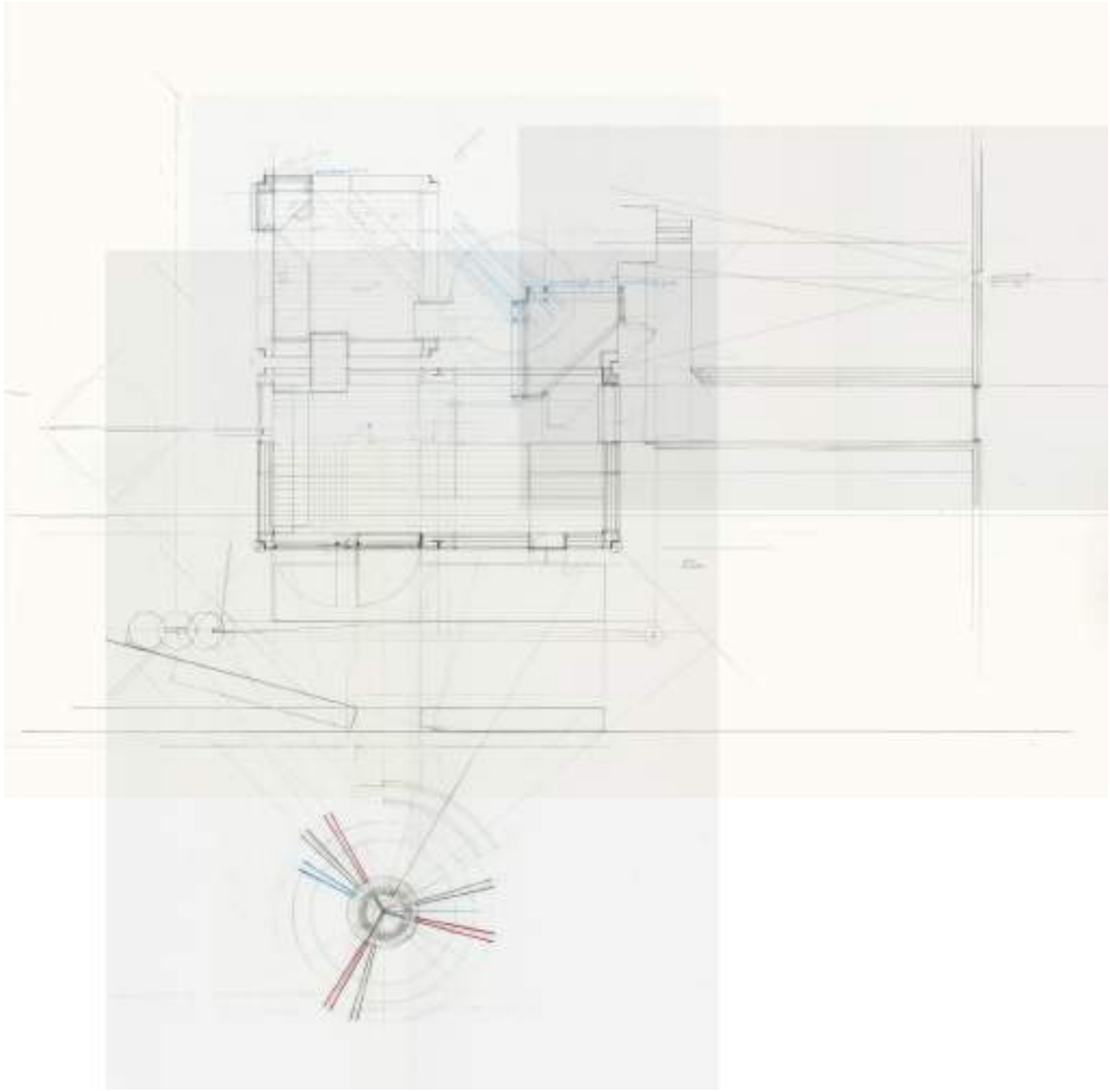

Fig. 6. *Pensatoio / Study for the plan in a 'fragmented context'*, pencil on multilayered paper, 1065x1070mm, scale 1:20. Design and drawing by Enrico Miglietta, 2024.

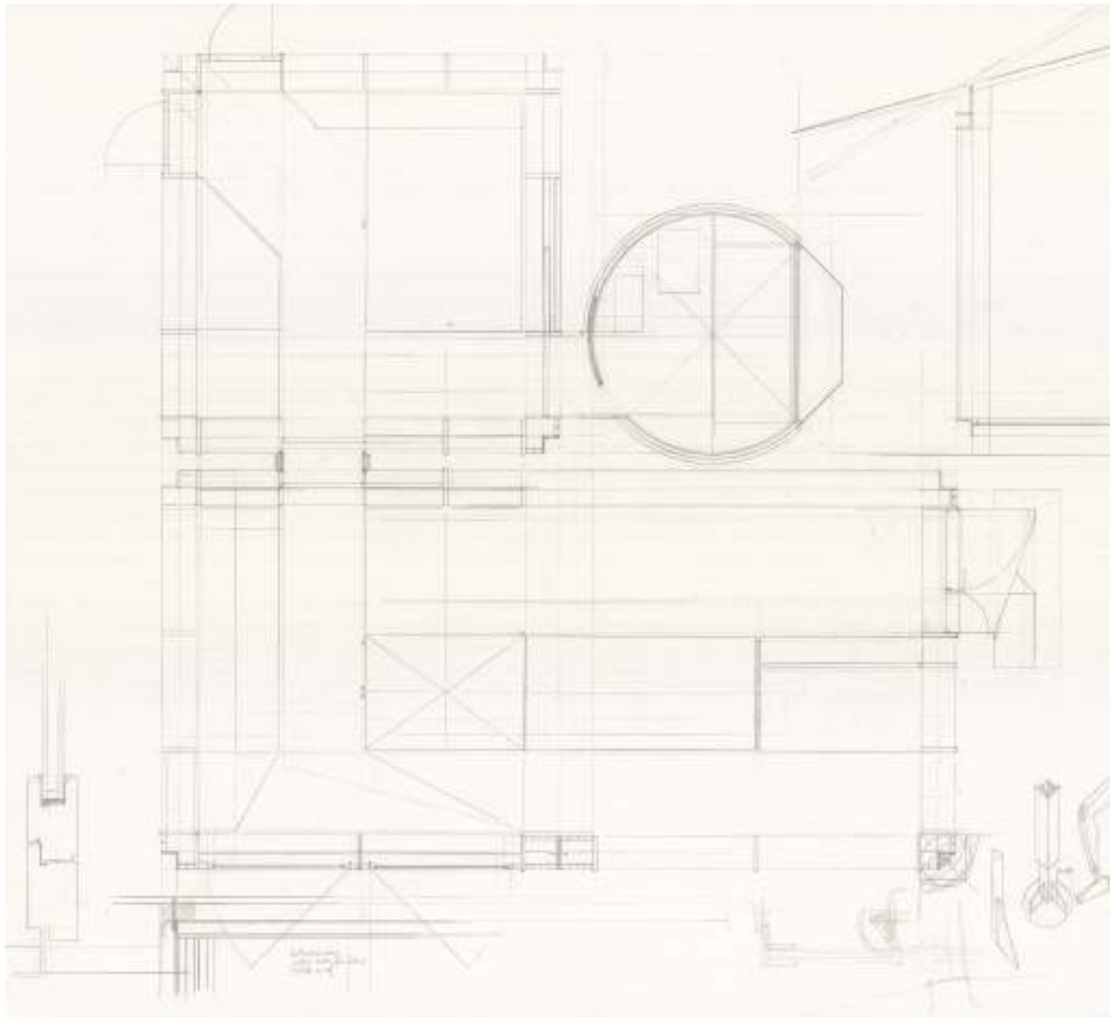

Fig. 7. *Pensatoio / First draft for a plan*, pencil on multilayered paper, 1000x900mm, scale 1:10. Design and drawing by Enrico Miglietta, 2024.

of *self-involvement*, where design decisions are filtered through personal experience, embodied practice, and continuous negotiation with matter. The drawing of a fragment becomes a gesture of offering: it gives the observer a way to read the work anew, in a different cultural framework (one defined by the culture of the observer) as a living structure: mathematical, technical, and symbolic at once.

In this drawing, the fragment is not an element that anticipates a totality, but one that suspends it. It suggests a whole that is not yet, and perhaps may never be fully reached, but one that becomes active through the density of the fragment. As Dalibor Vesely[16] suggests, the distance between architecture and its meanings cannot be directly bridged; it must be mediated. And the fragment becomes precisely that medium.

Drawing as Maieutic Exercise

Drawing is never merely a means to represent an idea – it is a way to approach it, to understand it, to allow it to emerge. From the outset, if one truly engages with what is being drawn, drawing becomes a space of inquiry, of reflection, of discovery. Drawing is no longer a tool that follows an already formed thought, but becomes the *locus* where thought is constructed, layered, corrected, questioned[17]. As Robin Evans observed, drawing is not a transparent act: it transforms and mediates. The «projective cast» of architecture emerges not through linear instruction, but through analogical projection and temporal layering[18].

The drawing becomes a *palimpsest*, not merely as a surface layered with attempts and corrections, but as an open structure in constant negotiation. To draw becomes a way of inhabiting the project while discovering it. In this sense, drawing acts as a true maieutic exercise: it does not simply show – it questions, provokes, generates. It does not serve to display a knowledge already acquired, but to bring it forth, to draw it out through gesture and attentive listening.

In the plan drawing [Fig. 7], this process becomes highly visible. Nothing is final: intersecting lines, marginal annotations, partial corrections, overlapping additions. It is not a drawing that presents itself as a synthesis, but as a territory in evolution. A topography of uncertainty, of operational doubt, and also of trust in proceeding by approximations. To draw, here, means to ask questions – operational, material, poetic. Every line traced is a proposal, a hypothesis made visible, a form of thinking-in-practice. Every correction, change in direction, is an attempt to engage with what the project is trying to become. In this sense, drawing unfolds as a discursive practice: not merely registering decisions once taken but generating them in the very act of making. Each mark becomes simultaneously a record of what has been attempted and a prompt for what might still come, keeping the project in a state of open negotiation. Drawing poses questions, and it does so through the body: through the pressure of the hand, the rhythm of the hatching, the choice of viewpoint. As in classical maieutic, knowledge is not univocally transmitted, but emerges in the form of intuition, of discovery.

Drawing is not just a spatial act, it is also *temporal*, shaped by repetition, hesitation, and return. It is not linear, but circular, stratified. It is made of pauses, of returns, of stillness. One draws to move forward, but also to go back. To revisit something that, when first traced, was not yet fully understood. The time of drawing does not coincide with the time of the project – it includes it, stretches it, complicates it.

The layered section traced in [Fig. 8] represents the culmination of this process, but not its end. It is a drawing that contains everything thought and construed before: the structure (drawn «from the bottom up»[19], as Louis Kahn teaches), the thresholds, the joints, the openings, the variations, the devices of light and use. It is both an archaeological and prospective drawing: it looks back to consolidate what has been, and forward to imagine what is still possible.

Yet the project does not close within this section. Just when everything seems ready to be gathered into a synthesis, an oak tree appears. Not as ornament, but as a gesture of opening. A slow, patient mark, taking days to complete – branch after branch, stroke after stroke. The drawing of the tree does not add information to the project: it reveals its character. It is a self-portrait, an expansion, a gesture of care. It is also a sign that drawing, when practiced as a form of reflection, is not only a way to design space, but also a way to design oneself. The tree is a self-portrait of an epigone – someone formed through the presence of others, growing through relation and alterity.

There is, in all of this, an ethics of drawing, one that binds precision to care, mastery to attention, and thought to action. An ethics not of control, but of proximity. A drawing never arises alone: it carries with it questions, layers, and references. Every mark is a relation. Every sheet is a palimpsest. Every drawing is, at its core, a space one enters in order to understand how to be in the world through design.

And perhaps this is what the design of the detail, of the joint, of the *particular*, in its essence, teaches us. That it is not necessary to conclude, but to continue asking. That architectural design is a way of being *with* things, not *over* them. That one can draw in order to build – but also in order to resist, to remember, to remain.

Fig. 8. *Pensatoio / Cross-section*, pencil on paper, 1000x700mm, scale 1:10. Design and drawing Enrico Miglietta, 2024.

Notes

1. The *weight of things* is to be understood here in both its physical and semantic dimensions, as suggested in Peter Zumthor's *Thinking Architecture*, where he speaks of architecture as *made of materials*: «I believe [materials] can assume a poetic quality in the context of an architectural object, although only if the architect is able to generate a meaningful situation for them», see Peter Zumthor, *Thinking Architecture*, Birkhäuser, Basel 1999, pp. 10-11.
2. Sigurd Lewerentz, 1962-66. The Church was one of the objects of investigation, through drawing, of my doctoral research, see Enrico Miglietta, *Re-reading Form through the Agency of the Joint. The Archaeological Attitude of Design Driven Research*, PhD diss., Politecnico di Milano – KU Leuven, 2024, pp. 161-201.
3. Marco Frascari, "The Tell-the-Tale Detail", in *VIA 7: The Building of Architecture. Architectural Journal of the Graduate School of Fine Arts*, ed. by P. Behrens, A. Fisher, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia 1984, p. 33.
4. Jo Van Den Berghe, *Critical Sequential Drawing. A Drawing Method to Close the Gap Between the Poetic Image and its Material Presence*, in «Stoà», n° 2, 2021, p. 174.
5. Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Thinking Hand. Existential and Embodied Wisdom in Architecture*, Wiley, Chichester 2009.
6. Marco Frascari, *op. cit.*, p. 23.
7. In this sense, the act of drawing aligns with what Tim Ingold describes as a process of «correspondence»: a line that does not illustrate, but travels, sensing and responding, mapping a trajectory rather than a shape, see Tim Ingold, *Making. Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, Routledge, London 2013, pp. 125-141.
8. To quote one of the best-known sources on the subject, already in his *Der Stil* Gottfried Semper spoke of tectonics as the «art of conjunction», see Gottfried Semper, *Der Stil in den Technischen und Tektonischen Künsten, oder Praktische* Ästhetik, Verlag für Kunst und Wissenschaft, Frankfurt 1861, 1863.
9. Kenneth Frampton, *Tettonica e Architettura. Poetica della Forma Architettonica nel XIX e XX Secolo*, Skira, Milano 2005, p. 45.
10. Pallasmaa, *op. cit.*, p. 62.
11. In particular, the theme emerged in the analysis developed in my doctoral research on the work of Juliaan Lampens, see Miglietta, *op. cit.*, pp. 223-279.
12. This also forms part of the author's doctoral research, in particular in the one dedicated to research by design – chapter 4. II - *Becoming the Author: the Epigenesis of a Pensatoio*, see Miglietta, *op. cit.*, pp. 333-96.
13. Giorgio Agamben, *Signatura Rerum. Sul metodo*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino 2008.
14. Giovanni Maddalena, *The Philosophy of Gesture. Completing Pragmatists' Incomplete Revolution*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal 2015, pp. 119-133.
15. Vittorio Gregotti, *Diciassette Lettere sull'Architettura*, Laterza, Bari 2000, pp. 176-177.
16. Dalibor Vesely, *Come il Corpo si Manifesta in Architettura / The Architectonics of Embodiment*, in «Casabella», n° 856, 2015, p. 20.
17. This understanding of drawing as a *maieutic exercise* is also indebted to the reflections of Guido Morpurgo, who writes: «To draw is an exercise in memory and projective thinking, but also in signic renewal, because it is through drawing that, whenever a design theme is approached, a fragment of the tectonic substance of the discipline is reorganised», see Guido Morpurgo, *Strategie del Dettaglio. Ragioni Critiche del Disegno di Architettura*, in «La Rivista di Engramma», n° 207, 2023, pp. 24 (translation from the original Italian by EM).
18. Robin Evans, *The Projective Cast. Architecture and Its Three Geometries*, The MIT Press, Cambridge (MA) 1995.
19. «I draw a building from the bottom up, because that's the way it is constructed. You begin with the way that the weights can be distributed on the land, and then you build up. If you do that, then you draw like an architect», Louis I. Kahn, in conversation with Richard Wermischner, 1971.

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Iconographic Drawing. Learning from Landscape Painting

Marie Porrez

Introduction into «Iconographic Drawing»

Intervening as architects in existing landscapes is challenging. How can we understand a place fully before building into it? To act with reasoned consideration, we study the physical, material context and try to get a grasp of the historic layers and meanings connected to it. One can study a context through written sources, reflections and findings, but within the architectural discipline the act of drawing is ultimately used as a method to understand, research, display and construct[1].

Today, the drawing methods we use in the process are rather classic and two-dimensional: implantation plans, sections, elevations. For analyzing the many physical, material aspects of a place, this might be sufficient. But to study and understand more *immaterial* aspects of a place is much more challenging. How can the drawing reveal aspects such as local characteristics and knowledge, inherent values and meanings of a place? These are aspects that cannot be neglected when building in existing contexts[2]. This idea does not come from a preserving and nostalgic perspective, but rather from an intention to learn from it and allow future interventions to be integrated in a sustainable way.

When one succeeds in making these aspects part of the drawing, one develops an *iconographic drawing* method: using images – *from the Greek word* εικών *(eikōn): image* – to *describe* – γράφειν *(graphein): to write or to draw* – different layers of meaning.

So, in order to develop *iconographic drawing*, one can move these *more classic* drawing tools into a more experiential, narrative direction. Strategies on how to accomplish this don't need to be developed from scratch, for historically this is something that has been practiced in (landscape) painting for many centuries.

Many useful references emerge. Based on the specific focus on local characteristics and inherent meanings of a place, the works of Pieter Bruegel the Elder (c. 1525-1530 – 9 Sept 1569) proved highly valuable for further studying. [Fig. 1, 2]

Learning from Bruegel: A Literary Study

Pieter Bruegel the Elder (ca. 1525/1530-1569) is one of the most important Flemish masters of the northern renaissance whose work has become part of the collective memory[3]. His work proves to be an adequate subject of study to better comprehend how iconography can be integrated in paintings and drawings. It teaches us something about the different layers of meaning, historical references, societal symbols, etc. that can be distilled from his images.

In multiple ways, *depth* can be found in his oeuvre. First, Bruegel depicts landscapes determined by man and where man sets the scale[4], leading to (I) *societal depth* in his paintings. Human presence and human activity are incorporated in a narrative way, as a kind of storytelling[5]. And he succeeds in capturing the different facets of life throughout different periods of the year in every detail[6]. This makes it hard to see the landscape without the people in it, they are part of it and determine each other. In doing so, he displays life in the beauty of its triviality and so, everydayness becomes timeless[7].

Secondly, Bruegel's awareness of (II) *spatial depth*[8] teaches how to understand the different layers of a landscape[9] – foreground, middle ground, background. And, by using different viewpoints in one image, he multiplies the amount of information that can be extracted from it.

And third, Bruegel has the ability to reveal (III) *time-depth* in an image. On the one hand his paintings incorporate cyclic time by depicting the different seasons. One can see the time pass but also begin again. On the other hand, he displays linear time through a pictorial, narrative image from which can be deduced what has happened before and leaves traces of what will happen after[10].

These different *depths* – societal, spatial and time – provide a large amount of information about a particular landscape, a certain zeitgeist, local customs and so on. So, when developing an *iconographic drawing* method, his work is highly valuable to learn how these depths and layers of meaning can be incorporated into a drawing strategy.

To comprehend the spatiality of these different layers of depth, one can look at Bruegel series of paintings *The Twelve Months (1565)*. It consists of six panels, five of which have been preserved: *Haymaking* (representing June-July), *The Harvesters* (August-September), *The Return of the Herd* (October-November), *Hunters in the Snow* (December-January) and *The Gloomy Day* (February-March)[11]. To learn from Bruegel's eye, two paintings were looked at in specific: *The Harvesters* and *Hunters in the Snow*[12]. [Fig. 3]

The series of *The Twelve months* displays in an iconographical manner different periods and seasons of the year and the human (inter)actions related to them. In these landscape paintings, one can see man close to his natural environment and his intimate connection to it. They show how man relies on the nourishment from the landscape one lives in and therefore, the typical human activities related to it.

By taking a closer look at these paintings, different elements that seem related to *spatial depth, time-depth* or *societal depth* can be distilled.

In the painting *The Harvesters* [Fig. 3], Bruegel leads the viewer's eye through the people in the foreground down into the valley and finally to the background by the sea. This illustrates *spatial depth* through which he manages to incorporate

Fig. 1. (Painting) Bruegel the Elder, P. (1566). The Census at Bethlehem [Painting]. Koninklijke musea voor Schone Kunsten van België, Brussels, Belgium.

a large amount of information into the painting. For example, the farmers are seen during a break of their late-summer activity of the hay harvest. This shows certain social interactions, cultural habits or customs: looking at the food they are eating or the process of the work they are doing. All these are indications of *societal depth* in the painting and display immaterial elements that say something about a local characteristic or values carried by a particular society.

Similar information can be deduced from the painting *Hunters in the snow* [Fig. 4]. Here, Bruegel shows a group of hunters and their dogs returning to their village with only one catch brought from their hunting trip. In the meantime, on the left side, people are preparing a fire for food.

And leading our viewpoint down into the village, Bruegel displays people skating and playing on the ice, while the cold feels evident everywhere. In this matter, he portrays the winter activities and circumstances of a small, Flemish village of his time.

Interesting is to note his virtuous ability to capture the light of the sky throughout the different periods of the year. Both in the intensity of the colors and in the formation of the clouds as well as the impact of the sun's position according to the seasons is thus felt in his paintings[13]. Therefore, this can certainly be seen as a rather immaterial aspect linked to a landscape and the cyclicality of time.

So, learning from these references shows how landscape paintings are able to communicate the complexity of immaterial elements and aspects of a place. Many different layers of meaning emerge. The amount of information that can be derived from them is highly insightful.

This is and remains, of course, an initial search. This literary study attempts to give first indications of how an iconographic way of working can be of use and importance when trying to better understand a place. So, a further decipherment of Bruegel's compositional, (pre)iconographic and iconological techniques can only teach us more in this respect. [Fig. 4]

Fig. 2. (Drawing) Porrez, M. (2021).

Fig. 3. (Painting) Bruegel the Elder, P. (1565). The Harvesters [Painting]. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, New York, USA.

Learning From a Village and Its Landscape: A Drawing Study

The insights generated from Bruegel's landscape paintings were applied to an initial drawing study of the village *Sint-Goriks-Oudenhove*, a village of a few hundred inhabitants in East Flanders, Belgium. The drawing sought to become a first reading of the village, an attempt to capture its village character. In this initial research stage, the drawing consists of first, intuitive impressions that were compiled into a sketchbook. This includes a combination of both observations from passersby and local residents, as well as personal experiences or elements that are considered remarkable or important.

By adopting Bruegel's way of looking onto a study of a Flemish village and landscape, an attempt is made to distill several layers of meaning. In doing so, reference is made to the three levels of *depths* already highlighted in the study of Bruegel's landscape paintings: *spatial depth, time-depth* and *societal depth*.

Since the experience of depth is a key element in one's perception and spatial experience of a place and is crucial when one researches (im)material elements in an existing context. To elaborate, *spatial depth* can be understood as a discipline-specific study subject within architecture[14]. *Time-depth* is considered as the (im)material traces left behind in (built) landscapes through the ages[15] and *societal depth* implies collective memories through traces of societal evolutions and networks through time[16].

Spatial Depth

These first, drawn impressions include material elements, such as the prominent presence of the church, a clear landmark in the village and its surrounding landscape [Fig. 5, center]. As for most Flemish villages, the position of the church determines its composition or built structure. It forms the center and has an expanding, organically built pattern around it.

Fig. 4. (Painting) Bruegel the Elder, P. (1565). Hunters in the snow [Painting]. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria.

Just outside this small village core, the influence of the typical ribbon development becomes evident. From this core several streets expand and cut through the landscape. Seen from the road, this leads to rows of contiguous houses that hide the view of the landscape behind them. But inserted between the buildings, one finds small in-between paths. Walking along these, the mishmash of backyards, garden gates and additions becomes visible (Fig.5: top left). This provides first insights on the spatial structure of the village and the way in which it occupies its landscape.

Societal Depth

Further, the drawing consists of *immaterial elements* that are as much part of the village's character as the material ones. For a better understanding of what is understood under *immaterial*, reference is made to immaterial heritage. This domain includes elements that are not strictly speaking tangible, visible aspects of an environment or landscape. This includes (cultural) customs, practices, music, rituals... elements that are embedded in the minds and hands of people.

An example is the pronunciation of the village's name (Sint-Goriks-Oudenhove) commonly referred to by its inhabitants as *Sente Guerens* [Fig. 5, bottom right]. Another example is the importance attached to the local café *De Zondige Zeven (The Sinful Seven)* [Fig. 5, right]. Through various testimonies of both villagers and passers-by, it becomes clear that place attachment is connected to this café. This forms an indication for the emotional significance of this place[17].

Time-Depth

When referring to time-depth, this is reflected in both material as well as immaterial elements.

This can be illustrated through an old brick wall standing in the village center [Fig. 5, left center]. For years this wall has defined the image in the village center as a ruin, with the fallen part recently being rebuilt. This was accomplished by a group of local residents who have advocated for this for years. Again, this constitutes an example of place attachment connected to the material built.

Another example can be found in the brick wall of the church [Fig. 5, top right], through which the layers of history become visible. The combination of different colors and shapes of brick are a testimony to this, some parts remained, others were rebuilt. As such, the bricks become a material carrier of different events in and around the church through the centuries.

Reflections on Iconographic Drawing

Initially, the act of drawing is used to map, analyze and better understand the existing village and its surrounding landscape. Later-on the drawings evolve and lead to visual, iconographic translations of elements that are characteristic to this village. In doing so, drawing by hand is used strategically for that it brings one, as a researcher, closer and in haptic contact with what is studied[18]. The value of the drawing lies in its guiding force for the thinking and research process. Through the slowness and precision of the drawing, certain elements come

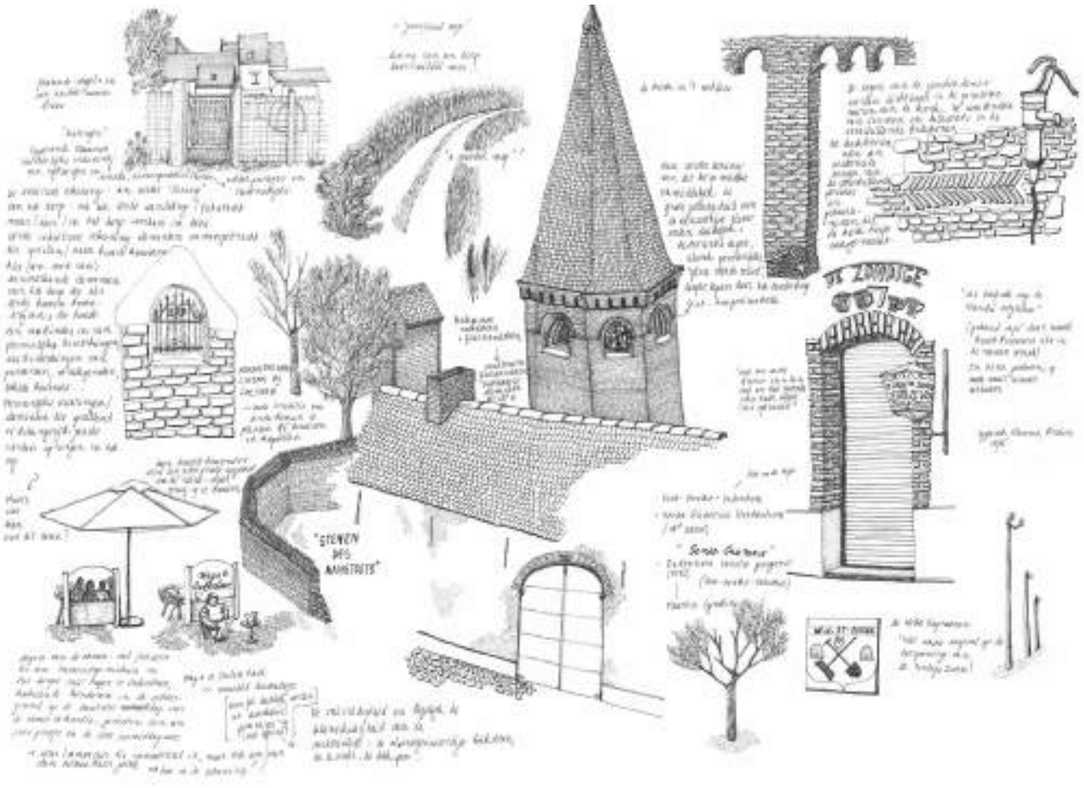

Fig. 5. (Drawing) Porrez, M. (2024).

to the surface; so that, while drawing, one thinks about each individual part and difficulties are exposed. In the drawing space emerges and becomes tangible[19].

Detailed drawings prove to be the ultimate instrument to research and to comprehend. Combining these with written reflections while drawing, helps in the process of defining and understanding[20]. These two methods of drawing and writing come close together in the *annotated drawing*. Here, the drawing influences the writing, and the writing then again influences the drawing. This enables annotated drawings to capture, retrace and memorize what is studied[21]. This method proves to be very fertile for the process.

It starts with making annotated drawings from (im) material aspects that seem related to inherent meanings of a place. These drawings can then again be interpreted and translated into new drawings. Repeating and reinterpreting this process leads to an initial form for an *iconographic drawing method*.

Later-on, in practice and while designing, these several drawn investigations can interact with each other. So that, with the future in mind, they form a foundational study from which new (built) interventions can learn a lot and new ideas evolve. Bringing these different layers of depth into a drawing provides a lot of information on the specific living conditions in a certain environment. But it has to be noted that the drawings do not incorporate each and every possible aspect. It highlights certain elements. So as a draftsman and drawing researcher, one has to be aware of the perspective that one applies. Does one choose to approach the research of a landscape from an inhabitant's point of view, or a visitor's one, a historical or contemporary one? Therefore, these initial drawings are explorations of possible viewpoints and approaches. What is more important, is the implementation of the drawing as a researching, a communicating and a learning tool. And therefore, the use of an iconographic drawing method can lead to a deeper understanding of one's environment before making new interventions. Moreover, this method can lay a basis for more considerate, sustainable interventions: interacting with an existing context, translating certain values and characteristics of a place and bringing them together with present and future needs and ideas. [Fig. 5]

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Towards a Grammar of Natural City Scenes. 9 Propositions

Robin Schaeverbeke, Kristien Vanmerhaeghe, Nele Stragier

In language, grammar refers to the structural rules that govern meaning – the way words are arranged to make sense. In our studio, *Towards a Grammar of Natural City Scenes*, we translated this idea into a visual-spatial language. Our grammar is composed of drawings, models, and constructions that uncover and reimagine fragments of urban nature: sites, views, incidents, ecosystems, and in-between spaces often overlooked in the contemporary city.

To create a shared space for visual inquiry and expression, we introduced the diptych – historically, a hinged panel used for devotional paintings – as both a conceptual and material medium for thinking through urban nature. In our studio, the diptych functions as an extended drawing surface: one panel explores the analytical or documentary aspect of the site, the other speculates on possible ecological futures. The diptych format supports a narrative tension between observation and projection, between what is and what could be. In that sense, the diptych, as a thinking tool, reinforces a dual perspective: one part analytical, the other speculative. Together, the two panels invite viewers to enter into a dialogue between reality and imagination, between diagnosis and proposition.

Gradually, the diptych transformed into a 2.5D sculptural drawing method. Surpassing its historical reference, the 2.5D drawing environment enabled students to translate complex ecological conditions into spatial gestures – neither fully representational nor entirely abstract but hovering in a productive in-between. Rather than an artefact or object, we began interpreting the 2.5D sculptural drawing as a hybrid (visual) research method that merges drawing, modelling, and installation. As a drawing method, it allows for a spatial representation that is neither flat nor fully volumetric but appears suspended between two and three dimensions. As a research method, it provides a tactile and investigative way to engage with natural systems in the city, beyond conventional orthographic or cartographic tools.

The 2.5D sculptural drawing is a regenerative method that reveals the slow accumulation of data and knowledge into a grounded proposition. In the 2.5D drawing, thinking becomes designing, speculation becomes construction, and imagination is expressed in the space between drawing and modelling. This approach proposes a broader framework for how we might design with nature in mind: slowly, attentively, and with care. It offers a visual grammar that does not impose order but reveals possibilities – a quiet architecture of coexistence, crafted through drawing, building, modelling, and imagination.

The following nine projects, developed along an arbitrary line through Brussels, reflect diverse encounters with urban ecologies. They form nine propositions – fragments of a larger, emerging grammar – through which we explore how cities might nurture and be nurtured by the natural scenes within them. The featured propositions demonstrate the richness of urban nature – not in its grand gestures, but in its subtle, spontaneous, and often hidden presences. Collectively, they show that contemporary cities already host countless opportunities for regeneration – if only we start to see them, and work with them.

Transition between Spaces
Yunus Agdag reimagines an abandoned warehouse as a public garden where nature, architecture, and education meet. Vertical gardens of site-specific climbing plants reclaim the building inside and out, while a green *promenade* guides visitors through the production of organic food by the local community. The space, part greenhouse and part park, connects surrounding residential areas and invites seasonal transformation. As façades grow wild and workshops activate the site, the project becomes a living system – always in flux, always drawing a new line between human care and natural growth [Fig. 1].

Sempervirens
Iman Demol transforms an obsolete concrete building into a living vertical forest. Four monumental Sequoia Sempervirens pierce through the emptied structure, defining a new kind of ecosystem that blurs the lines between architecture and nature, public and private. Each floor responds to a different part of the tree – from roots to crown – turning the building into a multisensory landscape. Through botanical growth and poetic inquiry into boundaries, limits, and invisible lines, the project imagines a space of learning, rest, and collective redefinition. The Redwood becomes both a literal and symbolic force, always green, always growing [Fig. 2].

Nature-Vation
Duvitri Rajapakse transforms the KU Leuven Architecture Faculty building in Brussels into a prototype for integrating natural ecosystems within the dense urban fabric. Drawing inspiration from Sri Lankan tropical modernism and the

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

legacy of Geoffrey Bawa, the project proposes a seamless blend of built and natural environments. Through carefully placed interventions – modeled in diptychs and triptychs – the existing structure is transformed from within: vegetation climbs through façades, light and air permeate interior spaces, and the building evolves into a living, breathing organism. Both didactic and poetic, Nature-Vation reimagines the faculty not only as a site of architectural education but as an urban forest in the making – an example for future cities to grow within [Fig. 3].

Reconsidering Conservation

Jannes Moons reimagines Brussels' monumental 19th-century Justice Palace – not as a relic to be preserved, but as a living structure to be transformed. Confronting the building's controversial legacy – its colossal scale, the erasure of an entire neighborhood, and its seemingly endless renovation – Moons proposes a radical reinterpretation of conservation. Through strategic subtraction and reuse, architectural elements are dismantled and reassembled to create new spatial experiences within the existing shell. Perforations guide rainwater through the structure, allowing it to infiltrate and animate the building across all levels. The Palace becomes porous, seasonal, and sensorial – a civic shelter where the elements are not excluded but embraced. This approach, rooted in the philosophy of *adding value by removing*, reveals the unseen by carving into the monumental. In doing so, Jannes transforms a symbol of authority into a dynamic urban landscape – an invitation to rethink permanence, memory, and the role of architecture in time [Fig. 4].

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

The Acupuncture

«Have you ever noticed how nature's various attributes always seem to fill the empty holes with life and with that how little a living organism sometimes needs to exist?» Nika Khalus draws inspiration from the quiet resilience of spontaneous urban nature – grasses between pavement cracks, moss on walls, trees that take root uninvited. Rather than erasing these subtle presences, Khalus proposes a design philosophy that embraces them: small, precise architectural interventions that allow buildings to host biodiversity. Like the practice of acupuncture, these gestures are minimal yet transformative. They do not demand large-scale renovation or dramatic change. Instead, they work with what exists–piercing, opening, and guiding the built environment toward ecological healing. Some interventions are designed for integration during construction; others retrofit existing structures that cannot be heavily altered. In both cases, the result is a city that breathes with life in unexpected places. Nika's work challenges us to see value in the overlooked, and to imagine architecture not as a barrier to nature, but as its quiet collaborator [Fig. 5].

Fig. 6

Break Up the Street

Pia Vandeputte confronts the ecological consequences of soil sealing in contemporary cities – where asphalt and concrete suffocate the ground, severing its vital functions. Her project focuses on overlooked, residual urban spaces, reclaiming them as sites for ecological repair. By introducing folds into the urban fabric, Vandeputte increases the surface area of exposed soil, allowing it to breathe, absorb, and regenerate. Massive mounds of earth, stabilized by timber frameworks, are inserted into the cityscape of Brussels. These sculptural interventions not only restore hydrological cycles and biodiversity but also connect subterranean ecosystems across the urban terrain. Rather than treating soil as an inert surface to be paved over, Pia treats it as a living infrastructure. Her work proposes a radical reversal of urban sealing – transforming the city into a porous, fertile ground for sustainable futures. In her proposition big mountains of soil, which are held in place by wooden structures, are placed in Brussels to create new ecosystems which are connected underground. Through her project Pia aims to reverse the effects of completely sealing the Earth's surface to give way for a sustainable ecosystem [Fig. 6].

Fig. 7

Open-Stelling

In Open-Stelling, Pieter Metten breathes new life into the long-abandoned Église du Gesù in Brussels, transforming it from a sealed monument into an open framework for collective exploration. The title – combining the Dutch words for *opening* and *scaffolding* – captures the essence of the intervention: a careful unmaking that invites light, life, and people back into the sacred void.

By removing sections of the roof and vaults, Pieter allows daylight to flood the cavernous interior, while breaches in the floor welcome vegetation to reclaim the space. A timber scaffolding, inspired by medieval construction techniques, supports the altered structure and doubles as a vertical promenade – encouraging visitors to ascend, interact, and inhabit the church in new ways. Neither museum nor ruin, the space is left without a fixed function – open to appropriation, imagination, and spontaneous use. Open-Stelling proposes a new kind of sacredness: one rooted not in preservation, but in participation, transformation, and the quiet power of letting go [Fig. 7].

Fig. 8

Ecocine Art Nouveau
Tia Khalis envisions a new architectural epoch – one where building practices no longer extract from nature but evolve in symbiosis with it. Observing the ecological cost of decades of material innovation, Khalis asks: can we construct without destruction? Can architecture become a medium for ecological reconnection? Drawing from Dr. Joanna Boehnert's Ecocene framework – an emerging paradigm that reorients human design within ecological systems – Tia proposes a new era of *slow architecture*. Inspired by the spirit of Art Nouveau, which once resisted the rise of industrial mass production. Ecocene Art Nouveau celebrates organic materials, artisanal craftsmanship, and the patient rhythms of natural growth. Her project explores how buildings can incorporate living systems from the ground up – embedding ecological awareness into every layer of construction. The result is a vision of architecture not as a static object, but as a living process: one that nurtures biodiversity, honors material cycles, and reconnects us to the Earth. Through this lens, Tia calls for a return to the handmade, the local, and the regenerative – a poetic and political act of resistance against the speed and scale of industrialized construction. Ecocene Art Nouveau is not just a style, but a stance: a call to build with care, and to let nature grow with us [Fig. 8].

Fig. 9

Natural City Scenarios
Tristan Borromeo's proposition is a sequence of interventions along six neglected plots next to the railway between Schaarbeek and Laken. Tristan reclaims the and transforms them into a kilometre-long linear park. Each site is given a distinct identity, shaped by its historical, natural, architectural, urban, and social characteristics – yet together they form a continuous ecological and civic landscape. Tristan's interventions are modest, site-specific, and primarily constructed from reclaimed materials. Rather than imposing new forms, he works with what is already there – respecting existing ecosystems and allowing them to evolve. Polluted soils are given space to remediate naturally, while subtle design moves facilitate the return of biodiversity and community engagement. At the heart of the project is a new ecoduct and pedestrian bridge, built atop the remnants of a former railway crossing. This gesture reconnects fragmented ecosystems and neighborhoods across the Brussels canal, stitching together urban and natural fabrics. *Natural City Scenarios* is a quiet act of urban healing – an invitation to see value in the overlooked, and to build with care, continuity, and ecological awareness [Fig. 9].

Conclusion
The studio *Towards a Grammar of Natural City Scenes* reveals a transformative approach to architectural education and practice – one that repositions design as a medium of ecological dialogue rather than domination. The 2.5D sculptural drawing method developed in *Towards a Grammar of Natural City Scenes* foregrounds the drawing not merely as a representational tool, but as a spatial and conceptual medium capable of engaging with ecological complexity. These drawings – hovering between two and three dimensions – allow for a tactile, layered articulation of urban nature, where gestures of folding, piercing, reclaiming, and growing become visual propositions. Their strength lies in their ambiguity: neither diagram nor model, they invite interpretation, speculation, and dialogue. Yet, this very ambiguity also marks their limitation. While the drawings reveal latent ecological potentials and foster spatial sensitivity, they remain interpretive rather than empirical, suggestive rather than systemic. They do not quantify impact, nor do they resolve infrastructural or policy challenges. Instead, they operate as a grammar of possibility – valuable for reframing perception and initiating discourse, but requiring translation and integration into broader ecological and sustainability frameworks to effect lasting change. In this sense, the method offers a powerful lens, but not a complete map. In that sense consider the studio's grammar not as a universal language, but a local dialect – fragile, partial, and evolving. Its strength lies not in its scale, but in its capacity to provoke reflection and reframe the way we see, draw, and care for the city.

On Scale, Experience, and Layering

Dimitri Vangrunderbeek

This contribution describes the creative and artistic process behind a series of textile artworks and reflects on their abstract qualities.

It outlines how architectural representations are transformed into abstract, poetic forms through an intensive and experimental process. The presented series of canvases emerged through trial and error, exploring a range of media and techniques.

The starting point was a photographic series on architecture and the experience of scale, developed in dialogue with fellow artist Hans Demeulenaere as part of the On Abstraction book project[1].

The motivation for these works lies, on the one hand, in the fact that for this book project, I did not want to use only photographs that merely illustrate architectural experiences. Within that photographic series, I saw an opportunity to raise questions about layering and process in relation to the static architectural image.

On the other hand, the idea also originated from a text by Tim Ingold that I was reading at the time, in which he discusses thinking through making[2]. I was fascinated by this idea and saw the potential for a concrete creative project based on the principle of introducing thought into the momentum of making and with one eye on *the horizon* of where one wants to head for.

Through a succession of different actions, I tried to create layered images in which the original architectural image gradually began to distort and fade into abstract entities. The buildings then came to resemble poetic and expressive sculptural objects. Despite the canvases exuding a certain *heaviness*, I wanted the works to convey a sense of lightness within these architectural entities.

I started by projecting some photographs onto different canvases and drawing over the projected images with a pencil. What remained was a schematic outline of the photographic image. I then superimposed several of these pencil lines with thick stitched lines. Through these accentuated lines, I created a graphic yet spatial interplay of lines. This also enabled me to translate the architectural image into its essence of form and volume.

In the next phase, the canvases were repeatedly immersed in water-based ink baths. More than once during this process, new colours and shades emerged through the overlapping of pigments, and in the same way, a deep black tone could be achieved.

The traces of layering produced unexpected landscape-like connotations, which I found intriguing.

I smeared melted paraffin onto the fabrics to apply a positive–negative principle with the inks.

To my surprise, the paraffin-impregnated cotton became slightly transparent. This inspired me to sew coloured pieces of fabric onto the back of the canvas – introducing a new aspect of layering. Occasionally, I made perforations in the cotton to establish a relationship with the coloured fabric behind it, or I filled the gaps with other pieces in different shades.

The thick stitched lines, which in some way still refer to an architectural scale, form a link between scale and layering. These lines act as a spatial and graphic skeleton that can engage with the technique in various ways. The layering, consisting of transparencies, colour additions, tonal variations, and ink contrasts, lends the reading of scale a sense of lightness and something almost surreal.

The textile works are full of traces of decisions made in the momentum of creation itself: during the repeated partial immersions in ink baths, the batik processes, the stitching, the cutting, and the addition of coloured surfaces. Several canvases were developed simultaneously, allowing the creative process to enter a state of flow.

Intermediate drying, the emergence of discolourations, reflection on the results, and techniques tested or accidentally discovered in one canvas were applied in others. The tactility of the various end results stems from this flow of successive and intersecting actions.

Throughout the project, I observed a formal language developing – one that holds potential for three-dimensional translation as well.

Alongside this, a desire emerged to work on a larger scale. Could such an expansion introduce a new kind of architectural scale experience, and how might that feel?

Fig. 1. *Between Buttresses*; cotton textile, pencil, dye ink, paraffin; 520 X 630mm. Photo: David Mailänder, 2022-2023.

Fig. 2. *Base for a Space*; cotton textile, pencil, dye ink, paraffin; 520 X 630mm. Photo: David Mailänder, 2022-2023.

Fig. 3. *Transparent Column Base*; cotton textile, pencil, dye ink, paraffin; 520 X 630mm. Photo: David Mailänder, 2022-2023.

Fig. 4. *Column Base*; cotton textile, pencil, dye ink, paraffin; 520 X 630mm. Photo: David Mailänder, 2022-2023.

Fig. 5. *Looking into the Base*; cotton textile, pencil, dye ink, paraffin; 520 X 630mm. Photo: David Mailänder, 2022-2023.

Fig. 6. *Double Column*; cotton textile, pencil, dye ink, paraffin; 520 X 630mm. Photo: David Mailänder, 2022-2023.

Fig. 7. *Burgher of Calais*; cotton textile, pencil, dye ink, paraffin; 520 X 630mm. Photo: David Mailänder, 2022-2023.

Fig. 8. *Civilian*; cotton textile, pencil, dye ink, paraffin; 520 X 630mm. Photo: David Mailänder, 2022-2023.

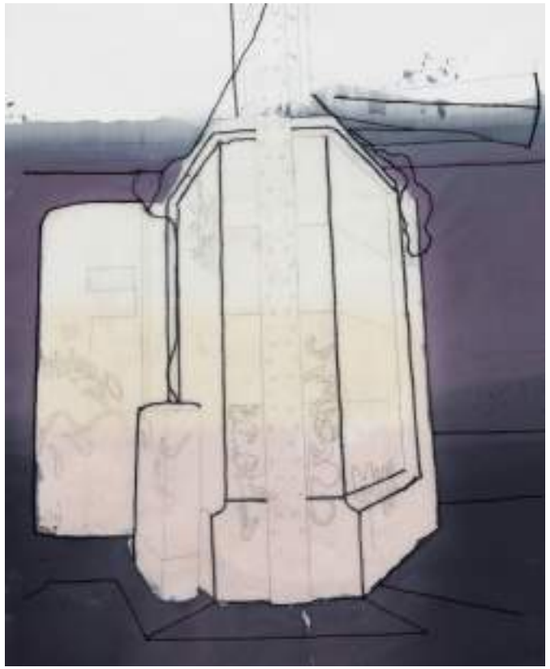

Fig. 9. *Midi Station*; cotton textile, pencil, dye ink, paraffin; 520 X 630mm. Photo: David Mailänder, 2022-2023.
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Fig. 10. *What Comes Out of It*; cotton textile, pencil, dye ink, paraffin; 520 X 630mm. Photo: David Mailänder, 2022-2023.
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Fig. 11. *Vilvoorde Viaduct*; cotton textile, pencil, dye ink, paraffin; 520 X 630mm. Photo: David Mailänder, 2022-2023. © Dimitri Vangrunderbeek.

Notes

1. These dialogues form the basis for the publication: Thierry Lagrange, Dimitri Vangrunderbeek, Hans Demeulenaere, Jolien Naeyaert, *Cut Down Build Up: On Abstraction*, MER, Ghent 2024.
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You See I Write by Ear

Esther Venrooij

Fig. 1. *Radio* (2023)
by Esther Venrooij, drawing.

A cassette clicks. The radio hums. I'm ten years old, finger poised on the record button, waiting for the perfect song to arrive. Not to own it, but to hold it for a moment. Listening was anticipation, a tactile act. Back then, sound felt alive. Imperfect, full of chance. You could hear the room it came from, the stumble of a DJ, the fuzz of distant signals. To listen was to wait. Recording was never clean; it was shaped by static and timing. Today, sound is everywhere, but it's harder to hear. Sound surrounds us, yet the act of listening has become thin, often secondary to the screen. But listening, when practiced deliberately, opens something else: a space of attention, of relation. It allows the unnoticed to emerge: the rustle of leaves beyond the traffic, the low pulse of infrastructure, the quiet hum of a building settling into its own weight. It draws us toward texture, toward the grain of things.

In my teaching and composing practice listening has become a central method. Not just a way of receiving, but a way of reaching out. Tuning into environments, materials and silences. I am not listening for answers but for presence. Sometimes I use a tool: a field recorder a contact mic. Sometimes I just sit still. Before analysis, before critique, there's the act of noticing. Letting sound in and letting it shape how we move, how we think, how we are with the world.

«It is not necessary that you go out of your house. Remain by your table and listen. Do not even listen, only wait. Do not even wait, be completely still and alone. The world will offer itself to you to be unmasked; it cannot do otherwise; in ecstasy it will write before you»[1].

Modes of listening are the ways we orient ourselves to sound. They are shaped by intention, focus, context, and the tools we bring with us. Listening is not neutral; it changes depending on what we are looking for, what we hope to hear, or even how we prepare ourselves to receive sound. Each mode emphasises certain aspects of sound while others recede into the background. We might tune in analytically, dissecting a sound's structure, its pitch, rhythm, and timbre. Or we might listen emotionally, feeling how a sound resonates within us. Sometimes, we listen spatially, attuned to how sound moves through air, meets walls, or fills a room. Other times, listening is intuitive, a quiet openness to what might unfold.

These modes are not fixed. They overlap, shift, and evolve as we listen. A field recording might begin as an act of technical listening, zooming in on specific details with a microphone, but unfold into something embodied, where vibrations are felt through the feet or chest. A conversation in a crowded café might invite contextual listening: picking out the fragments of meaning between words, or reflective listening, noticing the pauses, the silence, and the unsaid. To engage with modes of listening is to realize that sound is not just something we hear. It is something we shape, something that shapes us. The following pages outline a selection of listening modes and practices, each offering ways to shift perception, extend awareness, and experiment, inviting the reader to sense with the body, to diagnose with the ear, or even to trace the echoes of what is no longer there.

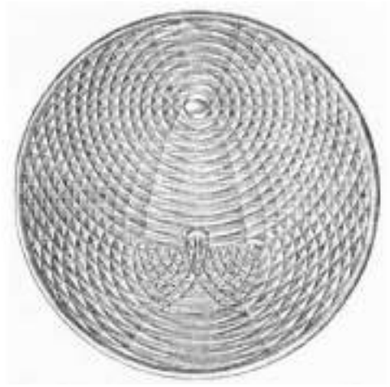

Fig. 2. Sketch of standing waves produced in a circular vessel when mercury drops in constantly, by Heinrich and Wilhelm Weber.

Fig. 3. *Oramics Machine* with a neume cutting block, operated by Daphne Oram.

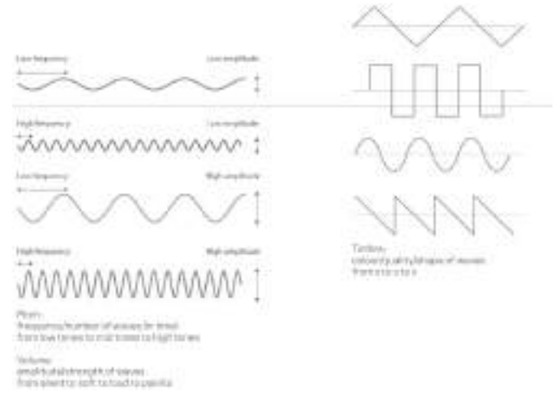

Fig. 4. Pitch corresponds to temporal frequency (Hz), determining perceived tone height; Amplitude reflects sound pressure level, perceived as loudness;Timbre is defined by waveform shape and harmonic content, differentiating sound quality independent of pitch and loudness.

Object Listening
Separating the sound from its source
Reflective discovery of sound
with a focus on the qualities of sound itself
Sounds are extracted, mined, and precipitated from their environment
Listeners often go outside to collect data, and extract sounds
The microphone is a lens, a zoom
breaking the general flow of sonic information
Turning a sound into an object
to analyse and be objective

Object listening requires a shift in attention: an opening of the ears and, figuratively or literally, a closing of the eyes. In this way, the sound is no longer a signal or a symbol. It becomes an object of experience. Something to perceive in its own right. This mode of listening doesn't demand a concert hall or a specially composed piece of music. It can happen anywhere, with everyday sounds that often fade into the background of life: the irregular hum of a fridge, the staccato clicks of typing, the percussive rhythm of footsteps on pavement. Under object listening, these sounds become alive with qualities we might not notice otherwise: the timbre of a keystroke, the whisper of air against walls, the resonant echo of a closing door. Practicing object listening is both a stripping away and a deepening. By removing distractions, visual cues, habitual associations, or the urge to categorize, we allow ourselves to focus entirely on the sound in front of us. It's a way of being present with the sound, attending to its subtleties with sensitivity. We listen not to what it represents, but to how it exists.

Fig. 5. *Silenzio*, supplement to the Italian dictionary (1963) by Bruno Munari, book.

Fig. 6. Having lost his sight to retinal cancer as a baby, Daniel Kish rides his bike by using echolocation.

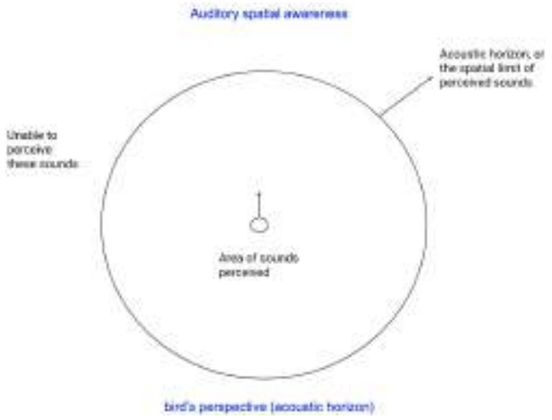

Fig. 7. Auditory spatial awareness: the listener's perception of sounds is shaped by the surrounding space, extending outward to an acoustic horizon that defines the limit of audibility.

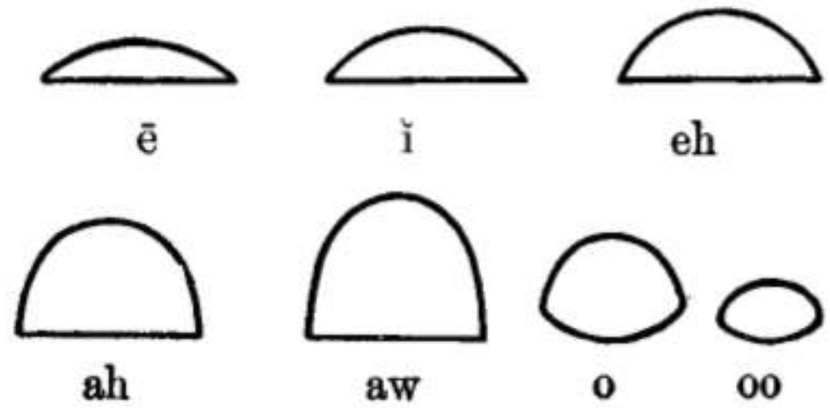

Fig. 8. *The Child-Voice in Singing* (1895) by Francis Howard, illustration.

Fig. 9. *On the Process of Becoming Silent and listening* (2022) by Esther Venrooij, audiovisual installation.

Semantic Listening
Listening from a distance or from within the auditory event.
Sounds are out there
and are part of the world.
Sounds offer themselves, entwined with the observer
and are welcomed by attentive ears.
Sounds are documented in reports or recorded.
The observer receives sonic information and the given sonic is interpreted
focussing on certain sounds and listening to what they are saying
with the possibility to classify, categorize or list the sounds.

I am walking across the courtyard of Zawiya Boutchichiya, drawn by the rhythmic pulse of the hadra. Inside the main chamber, Sufi voices rise in a spiral of dhikr – *la ilaha illa Allah*. The chant isn't sung; it's breathed, a collective exhalation. I feel the exhilaration. This repetition carves a path – *la ilaha, la ilaha* – until the words dissolve into pure cadence.

A call to prayer isn't just pitch and rhythm; it's a compass needle swinging toward Mecca. A film's ominous drone isn't frequency. It's foreshadowing. We swim in an ocean of sonic signifiers, each wave whispering, *This means something*. Semantic listening, as described by Pierre Schaeffer, involves perceiving sounds not only through their immediate sonic qualities but also by interpreting the meanings, associations, and symbols that they evoke. This mode of listening is attuned to the cultural, social, and historical contexts that shape how sounds are understood and experienced. When we engage in semantic listening, we move beyond the surface of sound to uncover the messages, emotions, or atmospheres that it conveys. Sounds are seen as carriers of meaning.

This form of listening demands that we decode the signifying role of sound. A language's speech patterns or the meaning behind a sound effect in a film, such as the ringing of a bell or the creaking door. They all rely on shared cultural knowledge. Understanding these sounds requires an awareness of the codes and contexts in which they exist. Just as Morse code conveys messages through dots and dashes, sounds function as signifiers that stand for something due to socio-cultural conditioning and learned associations. In semantic listening some meanings may be intuitive; others may demand expert knowledge or a familiarity with specific cultural practices. By embracing this interpretive listening practice, we engage with the full potential of sound to communicate beyond the sensory.

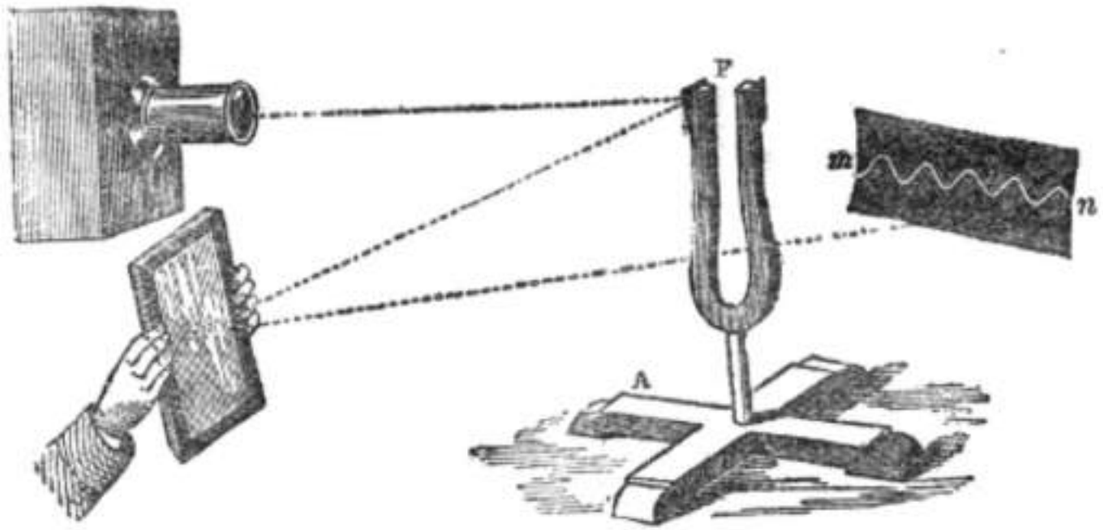

Fig. 10. *Sound — A Course in Eight Lectures Delivered at the Royal Institution of Great Britain* (1867) by John Tyndall, illustration.

Causal Listening
Source-oriented listening
Describing a sound by its source
Everyday listening
to identify sounds by instinct
Connecting sound to an image
Understanding the materiality of the source
It is possible that the cause stays hidden
to decode the soundscape

A door creaks. Before thought, the body tenses. Someone's there. This is causal listening in its rawest form: sound as a compass needle swinging toward source, threat, meaning. We are hunters still, ears pricked for the snap of twigs, the rustle in tall grass. William Gaver called it *everyday listening*: not an art, but an instinct. The dog's bark is a sentinel; footsteps sketch proximity on pavement; shattering glass fractures the mundane into shards of alarm. We navigate the world by these sonic breadcrumbs, stitching cause to effect like cartographers mapping unseen terrain.

Michel Chion framed this as audio-vision: sound and image braided into a single lifeline. In film, the creaking door isn't just a noise; it's a character entering frame, a plot pivoting. The audience, unwitting detectives, match pitch to action: a vase tips, a gun cocks, a breath hitches. Causal listening thrives on this pact between ear and eye, a dance of verification. Yet Chion knew the game was rigged. When Jacques Tati's *Playtime* traps us in a waiting room of squeaking foam chairs[2], the joke is on our need to name. That rubbery squelch isn't merely texture. It's a critique of modernity's absurdities, a sound gag that mocks our compulsion to pin noise to object.

Chion argues that causal listening is deeply ingrained in our perception due to its practical and survival-related functions. It allows us to interpret and understand the world by associating sounds with their visual sources or causes. For example, hearing a loud crash while watching a film may lead us to attribute the sound to a character knocking over a vase on the screen. It can influence our interpretation, emotional response, and overall understanding of a scene or narrative. Filmmakers often employ specific sound design techniques to guide and shape causal listening, creating audiovisual coherence and engaging viewer-listener in the unfolding story. In contrast to causal listening, semantic listening, which Chion also discusses, involves interpreting sound beyond its direct cause or source. It focuses on the symbolic or associative meanings of sounds, allowing for more abstract and subjective interpretations.

Fig. 11, 12, 13, 14. *Escape Plan* (USA-2013) by Mikael Håfström with actor Sylvester Stallone.

Fig. 15. An acoustic mirror at Abbot's Cliff, Dover, Kent, UK.

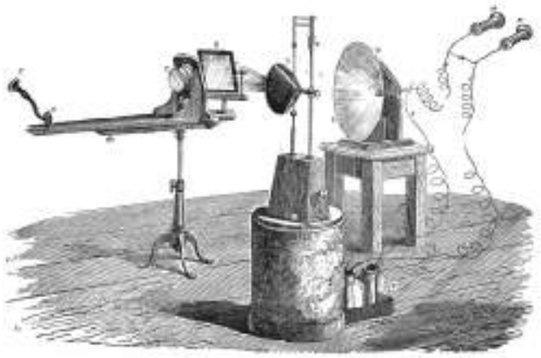

Fig. 16. *Drawing of the Photophone* (1880) by Alexander Graham Bell and Charles Sumner Tainter, illustration.

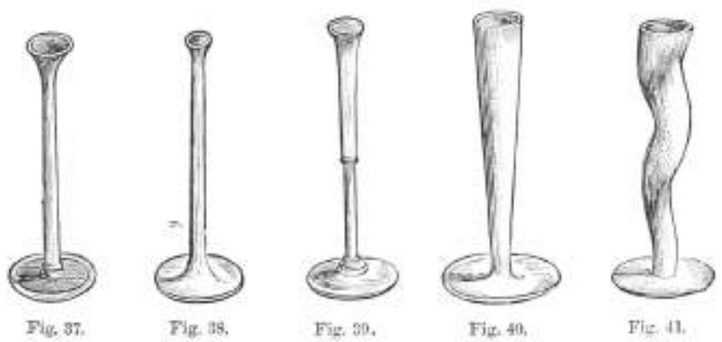

Fig. 17. *Clinical Lectures on the Principles and Practices of Medicine* (1874) Early stethoscopes, illustration.

Fig. 18. *American Psycho* (2000) by Mary Harron, with Christian Bale as Patrick Bateman, film.

Fig. 19. Bartók while transcribing from the phonograph, ca 1918.

Fig. 20. *Special Projects: Sound Chair* (1979) by Bernhard Leitner, installation view of his work in P.S.1.

Expanded Listening
Outwards
widening one's perception
including the relationships between sounds, their sources, and the broader systems
Embracing the interconnectedness of all things
Extending beyond the physical realm
A heightened attentiveness to the umwelt
Opening ourselves to the universe

Expanded listening is about widening one's perception to include the relationships between sounds, their sources, and the broader systems in which they exist, whether natural, urban, or technological. This mode of listening engages not only the body but also the mind, fostering a deeper awareness of how sound connects individuals to their environments and to each other. Expanded listening opens us up to its larger relational significance.

Expanded listening encourages us to perceive the interconnectedness between sounds, their sources, and the systems in which they exist. This mindset aligns closely with the ideas of composer and philosopher John Cage, who challenged conventional ways of hearing and understanding sound. In his book *Silence: Lectures and Writings*, Cage discusses his ideas about listening and sound. He encourages listeners to be more aware of the richness of the sonic environment around them.

Cage suggests that if we are open to it, there is beauty in all sounds, not just those traditionally labelled as *musical*. He believed that all sounds are music, and that we should not make a distinction between *musical* sounds and *non-musical* sounds, as all sounds have the potential to convey meaning and emotion.

He argued that our tendency to categorize sounds as either musical or non-musical is a result of cultural conditioning, and that we need to break free from these limitations, in order to fully appreciate the richness of the sonic world. In his writing, lectures and interviews Cage tells about the importance of active listening. He believed that listening is not a passive act, but rather a creative process that requires us to engage with sounds on their own terms. He argued that we should not approach sounds with preconceived notions or expectations but instead allow ourselves to be surprised and challenged by them.

This kind of listening aligns with the principles of acoustic ecology, which advocates for a more intentional relationship with our sonic surroundings. Acoustic ecologists emphasize that sound is not background noise but a source of information, emotion, and connection. By tuning in.

Listening not just with the ears but with the full body. We can rediscover the richness of our auditory environments. In this way, embodied listening becomes a means of reestablishing dialogue with the world around us, revealing the delicate beauty of natural soundscapes while also drawing attention to their fragility in the face of noise pollution and human activity.

This mode of listening is resonating also in the practice of American composer Pauline Oliveros, who pioneered the concept of *Deep Listening*. For Oliveros, Deep Listening was a meditative and immersive practice that invited listeners to engage with sound in a holistic way, attending to both the external soundscape and their internal responses to it.

his approach encourages a heightened awareness of all auditory experiences, from the most subtle sounds to the overwhelming. Pauline Oliveros's Deep Listening invites us to engage with sound as a fully immersive and intentional practice, where listening becomes an expansive act of awareness. Embracing not just what we hear but how we hear it, and how it connects us to our surroundings.

This approach naturally extends to her concept of the *sonosphere*, which expands the boundaries of listening even further.

The sonosphere encompasses not only the immediate and audible sounds but also the vast continuum of vibrations, frequencies, and resonances that exist beyond human perception.

It reimagines listening as an act of tuning into the interconnectedness of all sounds – those present, remembered, or imagined, those felt as much as heard, and even those that lie beyond the limits of our physical senses.

Fig. 21, 22, 23. *Shawshank Redemption* (1995) by Frank Darabont, with actor Tim Robbins, film.

Musical Listening
Engaging with the world
finding music in the everyday
To find patterns and rhythms
and wonder in the ordinary
Everyday sounds are elements of a composition
Dissolving the boundaries between music and the soundscape
Heightened awareness
Everything is intentional
Being creative and perceptive

To engage in musical listening is to attune ourselves to the world as if it were already a composition, a moment-to-moment unfolding of sound that carries its own coherence. This mode of listening is akin to finding faces in clouds or stories in the patterns of tea leaves, a process of active interpretation and creative perception. Through this mode of listening, we allow otherwise functional or incidental sounds, such as the hiss of steam escaping from a kettle, the tapping of fingers on a keyboard, or the faint ticking of a distant clock – to take on a musical quality. This mode of listening invites us to hear the ordinary as extraordinary, to shift from passive hearing into an active engagement where sound reveals itself as form, texture, and rhythm.

This listening process involves shifting from a functional mode of hearing (identifying and categorizing sounds) to an aesthetic mode (experiencing sounds as elements of a composition). It's about finding patterns, rhythms, and relationships within the seemingly random sounds of the environment. It's about perceiving the world as a complex, multi-layered composition, where different sounds interact.

I'm kneeling on the floor of a parking garage, ear pressed to a pipe. Somewhere in its cast-iron veins, I hear a morse code – *shhhk-shhk* - a message from an active agent somewhere in this building.

Pierre Schaeffer called it reduced listening, stripping sound from source until a door's creak becomes a cello's cry. But I prefer critical paranoia, a term stolen from Dalí's surrealist playbook: the delusion that every clang, drip, and sigh is composed. In one of my classes I have assigned my students to sit in a laundromat. First, they hear chaos: dryers tumbling, coins clattering. Then, the shift: What if this is intentional? Suddenly, the tumbling syncs with a car passing by; the thunk of a washing machine morphs into a bassline.

Listening, for me, began as a small act of waiting: a finger on the record button, hoping for the right song to arrive. It has since unfolded into a wider practice of noticing: how sound leans into space, how meaning slips between tone and texture, how silence carries its own quiet logic. Writing about listening is, in a way, an attempt to keep that anticipation alive, to stay tuned, even when nothing much seems to happen.

In my upcoming publication M*odes, Practices and Exercises in Listening*, I try to trace how sound and space shape one another: how a room listens back, how a wall responds, how architecture can hum. To the ways the ear orients, interprets, and occasionally misbehaves. The modes described in this essay here – object, semantic, causal, expanded, musical – are not fixed categories, but temporary lenses, moments of focus. They shift as quickly as our attention does.

Sometimes listening is analytical, sometimes devotional, and sometimes just confused.

Fig. 24. *Listening to Schumann* (1883) by Fernand Khnopff, painting.

Fig. 25. *Tableau Physique* (1807) by Alexander von Humboldt (naturalist and explorer), diagram (fragment) that depicts Chimborazo and Cotopaxi, two volcanoes of the Andes, illustration.

Notes

1. Franz Kafka, *The Zürau Aphorisms*,Vintage Digital, London 2006, p. 111.
2. Jacques Tati, prod. by B Maurice, *Playtime*, (France-Italy, 1968).

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Arrays of Performative Drawing Practices

Liselotte Vroman

Prologue

The act of architectural drawing is traditionally seen as a translation of an imagined space into a visual language of plans, sections, and elevations. Yet, drawing is not merely a representational practice – it is a spatial and corporeal experience in itself. At the moment an architect begins to draw, a dual phenomenon occurs: one space unfolds on the paper, and another emerges through the bodily gestures of the drawer.

This ephemeral space – temporary, intuitive, and shaped by the movement of the body – is created alongside the drawing on paper, but the two do not coincide. In this moment of drawing, an intimate relation occurs between the body of the architect and the spatial concept. This relation is not purely rational; it is empathic. The body becomes a medium, and the act of drawing becomes a dialogue between embodied memory and spatial imagination.

This essay presents a series of explorative performative drawing practices by dancers and architects in training that originated in observing their moving bodies or those of others in different kinds of spaces. These were developed to gain a better understanding of the concept of *embodied spatial experience*. These practices challenge normative drawing conventions by favouring gesture, movement, and perception over conventional architectural representation.

In doing so, this array of performative drawing practices is not a representation of spaces according to any known architectural conventions but is a series of residues of movements in spaces and/or observations of movements. Some are searching for a more universal language in articulating space, the body and how both interact through movement. Nevertheless, without aspiring to a universal understanding, each of these drawings communicates a certain energy generated by moving bodies as well as a particular perspective on the phenomenon of embodied spatial experience emerging from moving bodies.

Designing and Scoring

In architectural creative processes, drawing fulfils a double function: communicating ideas as well as organising thoughts. In essence, the architectural drawing gives expression to an idea that originated in the architect's mind and allows it to be further formed in and through that drawing. Architectural drawings allow architects to make conceptual ideas of non-tangible spaces, which emerge from the designer's imagination, explicit so that they can be communicated and discussed.

Therefore, architectural drawing is considered to be «an essential tool for architectural thought»[1]. Often, the human body is not even directly depicted or primarily assigned a very functional role, such as a scale bar for capturing measurements, which only implicitly refers to the body itself [2]. To summarise, the act of drawing in the discipline of architecture has a mediating role between the idea and the final building, through which it provides insights, on the one hand, and communicates to third parties, on the other. However, this dichotomy regarding the role of drawing since digitalisation is no longer self-evident[3].

The drawing, in its role as a tool for thinking and understanding, has undergone a profound evolution ever since. Instead, design and construction are reconfigured more often within the same document using drawing software in which the design is in continuous transformation and several layers can easily be hidden or displayed.

Scoring' is a conjugation of the verb *to score* and, according to the Oxford English Dictionary (*score, v.* n.d.)[4], has the following meaning to music: «To compose or arrange for [orchestral] performance» or «To write down in a score», where *score* refers to «[a] written or printed piece of concerted music, in which all the vocal and instrumental parts are noted on a series of staves one under the other».

The latter meaning of the verb is also used in dance, where *score* refers to a written/drawn piece of movement. Understanding and describing *drawing* or the score in the discipline of dance seems less straightforward than in the discipline of architecture, as both the creative processes and the drawings have a less direct character.

As explained above, choreography in its etymological meaning refers to the writing or drawing of dance. In dance, movement operates as a form of spatial thinking, allowing the choreographer to investigate and shape space through embodied action, intuition, and temporal flow, embracing the fleeting and the unstable as central to the creative process. Within this context, scoring functions not as a fixed representation, but as an open-ended framework – a set of cues, traces, or instructions that guide, inspire, or document movement without prescribing it rigidly. When these two worlds intersect, the act of drawing becomes less about representation, more about temporal traces. Thus, performative drawing is not merely an outcome – it is a method, a process, and a performative act in its own right.

The performative drawing practices presented in this essay blur the boundaries between drawing and scoring. The presented practices are residues – traces – of bodies moving through or responding to space. Rather than attempting to *depict* space in traditional terms, these drawings *record* embodied experiences. They serve as scores that document kinetic relationships between bodies and spaces.

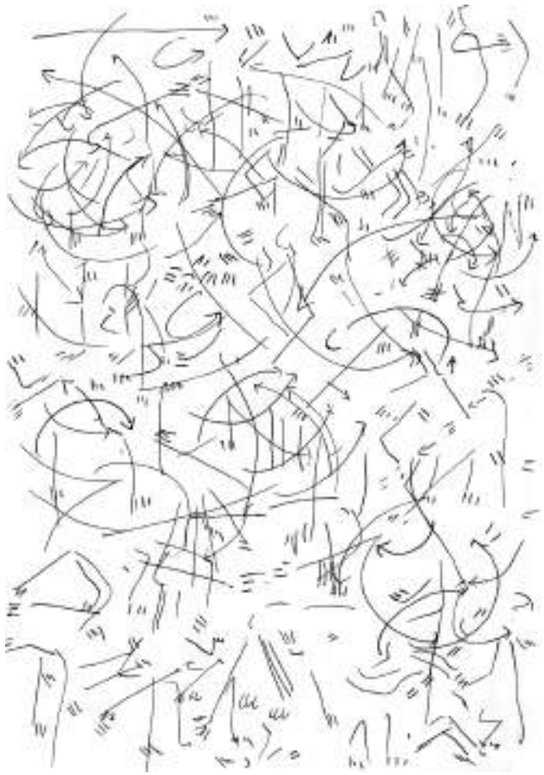

Fig. 1. Explorative Notation of performers' movements, drawing courtesy of Paola Bartoletti, 148 x 210mm, 2018.

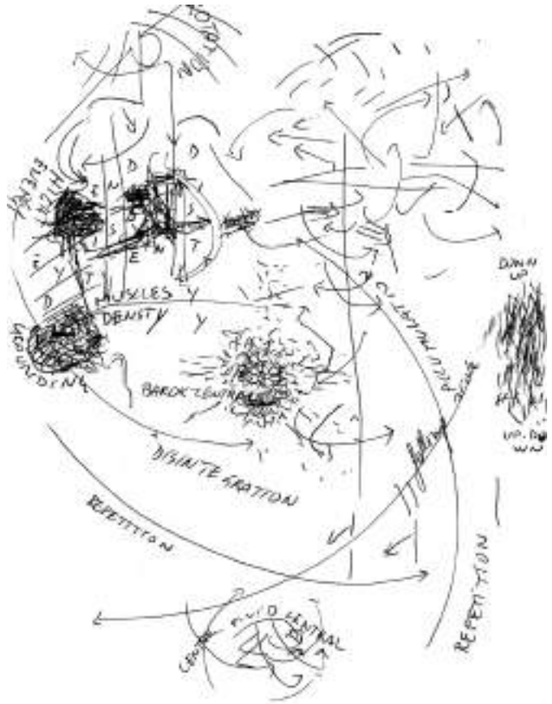

Fig. 2. Explorative Notation of performers' movements, drawing courtesy of Paola Bartoletti, 148 x 210mm, 2018.

Roles within the Process of Drawing.

The Observer: Gaze and Discipline

The perception of movement and space is always shaped by the disciplinary lens through which we view it. In architecture, movement is often reduced to *circulation*: functional, linear, and purpose-driven. In dance, however, movement generates space; the dancer's body produces spatial volumes, rhythms, and relationships with the environment. To observe movement in this context is to do more than simply watch – it is to feel with and through the body. The observer is invited to attune themselves to the rhythms, gestures, and spatial dynamics of what unfolds before them. Rather than translating movement into fixed architectural symbols, the observer responds through drawing: using gesture, pressure, speed, and rhythm to record an impression of movement and space.

This shift from visual to embodied observation challenges the conventional architectural gaze. The observer is not *outside* the experience but is implicated in it – affected by what they witness and expressing that affect through their drawing. Each mark becomes a trace not of what was *seen*, but of what was *felt* through the act of observing. In this sense, the drawing becomes a form of participation: the observer's body responds to the movement it perceives, and this response leaves a spatial residue on the page.

The presented drawing practices highlight how disciplinary habits shape perception. Where architecture may prioritise clarity, legibility, and fixed spatial order, performative drawing reveals multiplicity, ambiguity, and fluid relationality. The observer's drawings resist codification. Instead, they express a situated point of view – an embodied, temporal, and responsive engagement with space in motion.

This transformation of the observer's role is particularly relevant in learning contexts. It draws attention to the limitations of traditional architectural drawing in conveying the full richness of embodied spatial experience. By foregrounding the body of the observer – not just as a witness but as a sensing, drawing subject – these practices broaden our understanding of how space can be known, expressed, and communicated.

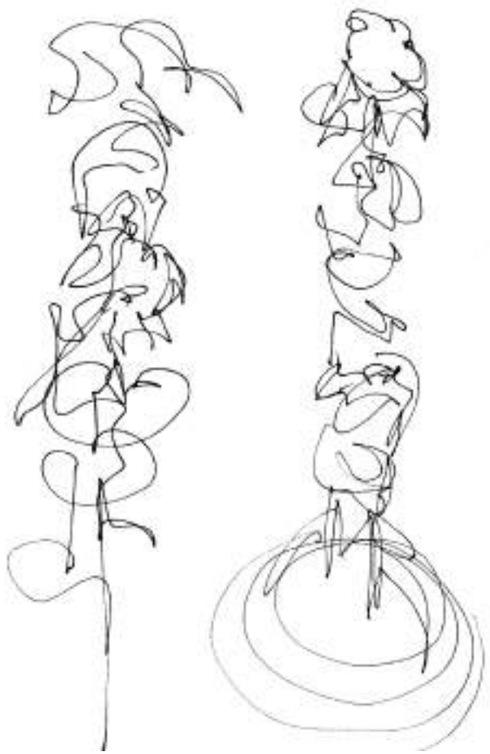

Fig.3. Explorative Notation of performers' movements, drawing courtesy of Paola Bartoletti, 148 x 210mm, 2018.

Fig. 4. Explorative Notation of performers' movements, drawing courtesy of Paola Bartoletti, 148 x 210mm, 2018.

Observers were invited to step into the role of participants, engaging not only in looking but in *doing*, allowing their bodies to respond to the observed movement through gesture-based drawing. These practices generated a multiplicity of spatial impressions, reinforcing the idea that embodied space is never singular or fixed, but always plural and relational.

The Participant

To draw as a participant means to collapse the distance between the one who draws and the subject of the drawing. Here, the body is no longer a neutral instrument for producing measured lines; it is an active, perceptual medium that generates spatial knowledge through movement.

Drawing becomes not an act of representation, but one of immersion. As participants, drawers use their full bodily presence – gesture, balance, rhythm, orientation – to create marks that emerge from within the experience of space. Rather than drawing *about* movement, they draw *through* movement. These are not controlled, rational images produced from a stable point of view, but energetic residues of spatial engagement.

For architects accustomed to precision and abstraction, this approach disrupts familiar habits. Letting go of conventional tools, participants reconnect with the intuitive foundations of spatial thinking.

Their drawings are not plans or sections but perceptual translations of internal motion, relational dynamics, and embodied attention. The participant does not stand outside space, observing and recording it; they *inhabit* it. The resulting drawings reflect not a fixed view but a lived one – one that values temporal flow, bodily presence, and experiential immediacy. In doing so, performative drawing opens up an expanded vocabulary of architectural expression – one rooted in the intelligence of the moving body.

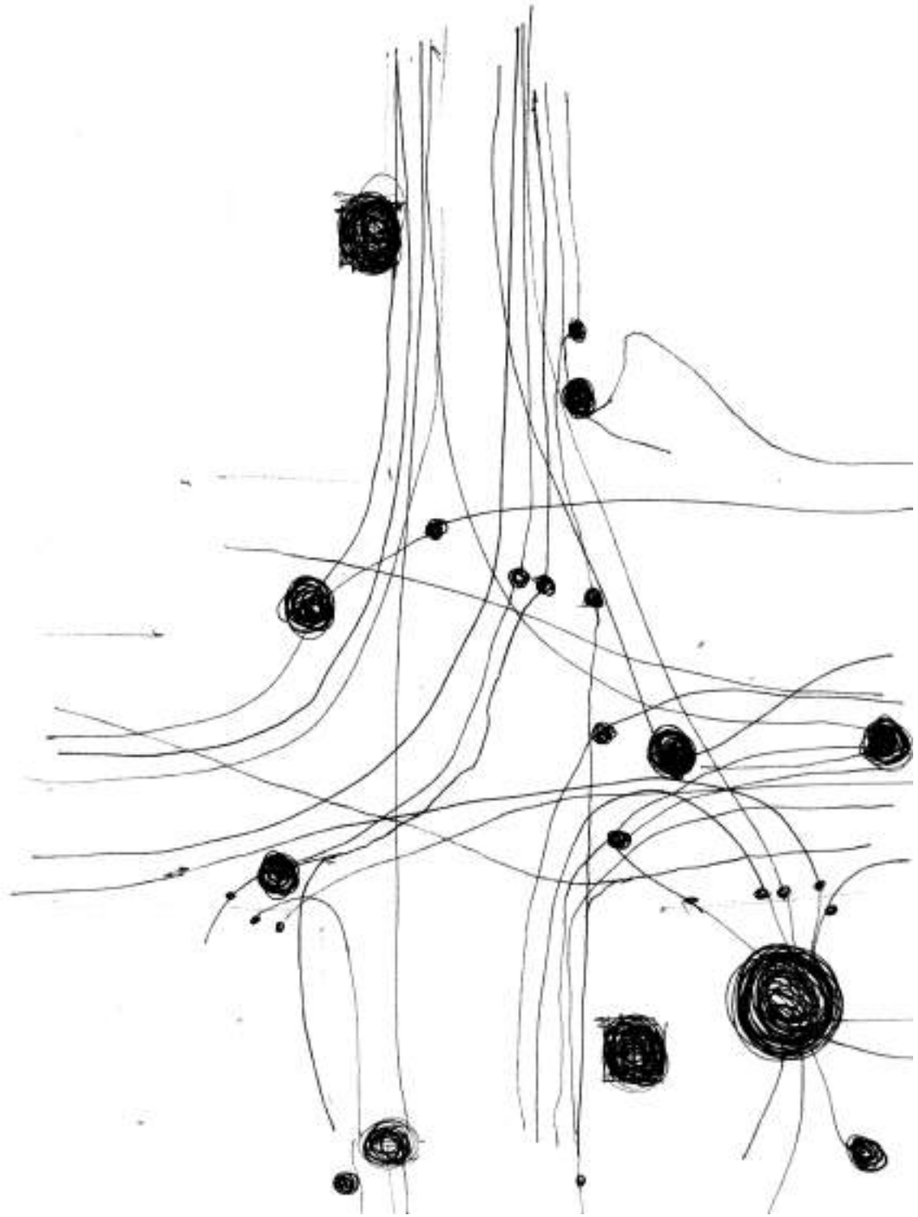

Fig. 5. Explorative Notation of movements of passersby in the city, drawing courtesy of Aleksandra Sliwa, 148 x 210mm, 2019.

Fig. 6. Explorative Notation of movements of passersby in the city, drawing courtesy of Cemre Oguz, 148 x 210mm, 2019.

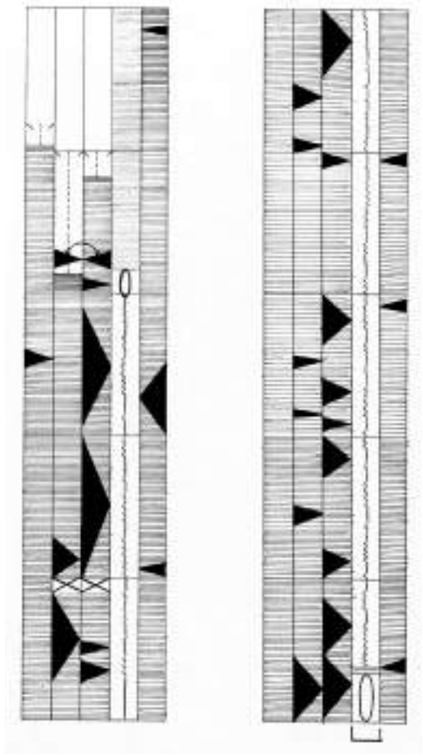

Fig. 7. Explorative Notation of movements of passersby in the city, drawing courtesy of Manon Persoone and Emma De Leeuw, 148 x 210mm, 2019.

Toward a Plural Spatial Cognition

The performative drawings presented in this essay do not aim to represent space in the conventional architectural sense. Instead, they express spatial experience – the dynamic interplay between body, movement, and environment. By foregrounding embodied engagement, these practices question the visual dominance and disciplinary boundaries of traditional architectural drawing.

Although conventional architectural drawings are informed by embodied experience, they often fail to reflect or convey that experience explicitly.

The body in motion remains a silent presence: implicitly understood yet rarely made visible. Similarly, in dance, no single system of movement notation can capture the full spatial and experiential dimensions of performance. Space influences dance profoundly, yet it is often underrepresented or abstracted in notation systems.

This reveals a broader issue: discipline-specific drawing practices tend to offer narrow perspectives on complex spatial realities. In educational contexts, especially, this restriction can limit how students perceive, experience, and design space. But rather than striving to expand architectural drawing methods or to systematise movement notation, the goal should be different.

These performative drawing practices suggest another possibility: not to create a universal language, but to acknowledge multiplicity, to open space for other ways of drawing. Ways that prioritise bodily knowledge, perceptual awareness, and temporality. Ways that draw from within space, rather than at a distance.

Ultimately, this research invites a shift in how we think about drawing in spatial disciplines. It calls for an understanding of drawing not just as a tool for representation, but as a generative, performative, and embodied act–one that reflects the lived, moving experience of space itself.

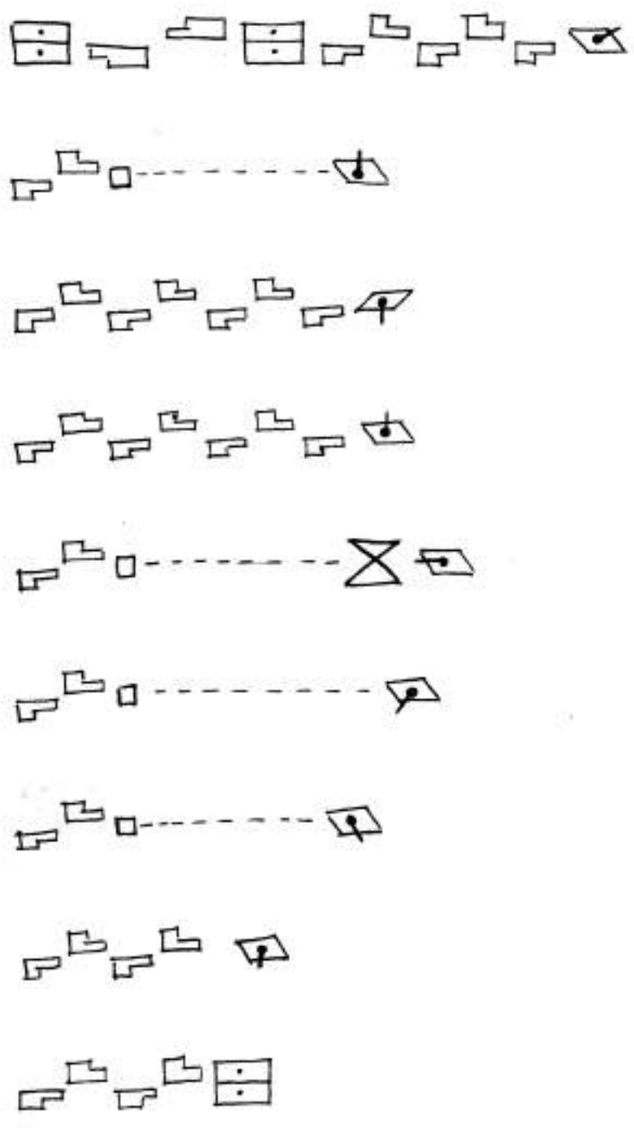

Fig. 8. Explorative Notation of movements of passersby in the city, drawing courtesy of Rebecca Ocadiz Vargas, Polyanna Galvo Gondim and Esma Sena Balci, 148 x 210mm, 2019.

Notes

Pallasmaa Juhani, *The Thinking Hand: Existential and Embodied Wisdom in Architecture, Wiley*, Chichester 2009.
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1. David Ross Scheer, *The Death of Drawing: Architecture in the Age of Simulation*, Routledge, London 2014, p. 3.
2.Ibid.
3. Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Thinking Hand: Existential and Embodied Wisdom in Architecture*, Wiley, Chichester 2009.
4. OED Online, *score*, v., Oxford University Press, accessed June 7, 2021.

Annex. Doctoral dissertations 2021-25

Eva Demuynck
KU Leuven, 2024

Enrico Miglietta
Politecnico di Milano-KU Leuven, 2024

Eva Beke
KU Leuven, 2022

Louise De Brabander
KU Leuven, 2022

Liselotte Vroman
KU Leuven, 2021

Eva Demuynck

KU Leuven, 2024

The Embodiment of Consolation.
Unlocking the Interaction between Mourning, Drawing and Place(making)

When dealing with life-altering events, such as the loss of a loved one, we may struggle to put our experiences into words. In these moments of need, art therapists bypass verbalisation by providing their clients with artistic media that allow them to reconnect with their innermost selves. This study explored a new domain in the field of architecture by investigating whether the creative process underlying architectural design can be used to improve the mental well-being of someone in mourning as well.

This involved observing how research participants both with and without a background in architecture used their spatial imagination and various media for spatial representation to (co-) create a place in memory of a personal loss. This showed that the associated (co-)design approaches developed within the research supported the participants in developing a language of spatial metaphors which they then used to assign meaning to and materialise their intangible experiences of loss, both in the memorial places they imagined and in their drawn representations. In this embodied form, it subsequently became possible for the participants to share their grief with others and to gain access to social support.

In other words, the research revealed that architectural design through drawing can simultaneously be used as a practice for placemaking and (self-)care, resulting in the creation of a personally meaningful place which may exist only on paper and in the imagination of the designer (and the client) while literally and figuratively providing space for and transforming along with the mourning process that follows the initial moment of farewell. In doing so, the research corresponds with the memorial practices of the bereaved as these are observed in the West today and re-evaluates the power of paper architecture and of the design process as a generator of knowledge. Finally, the research uncovered a new interdisciplinary field between architecture and art therapy, specifically within the context of bereavement care. As such, the findings will be of interest to researchers, educators and practitioners in both fields, as well as to all who experienced loss themselves.

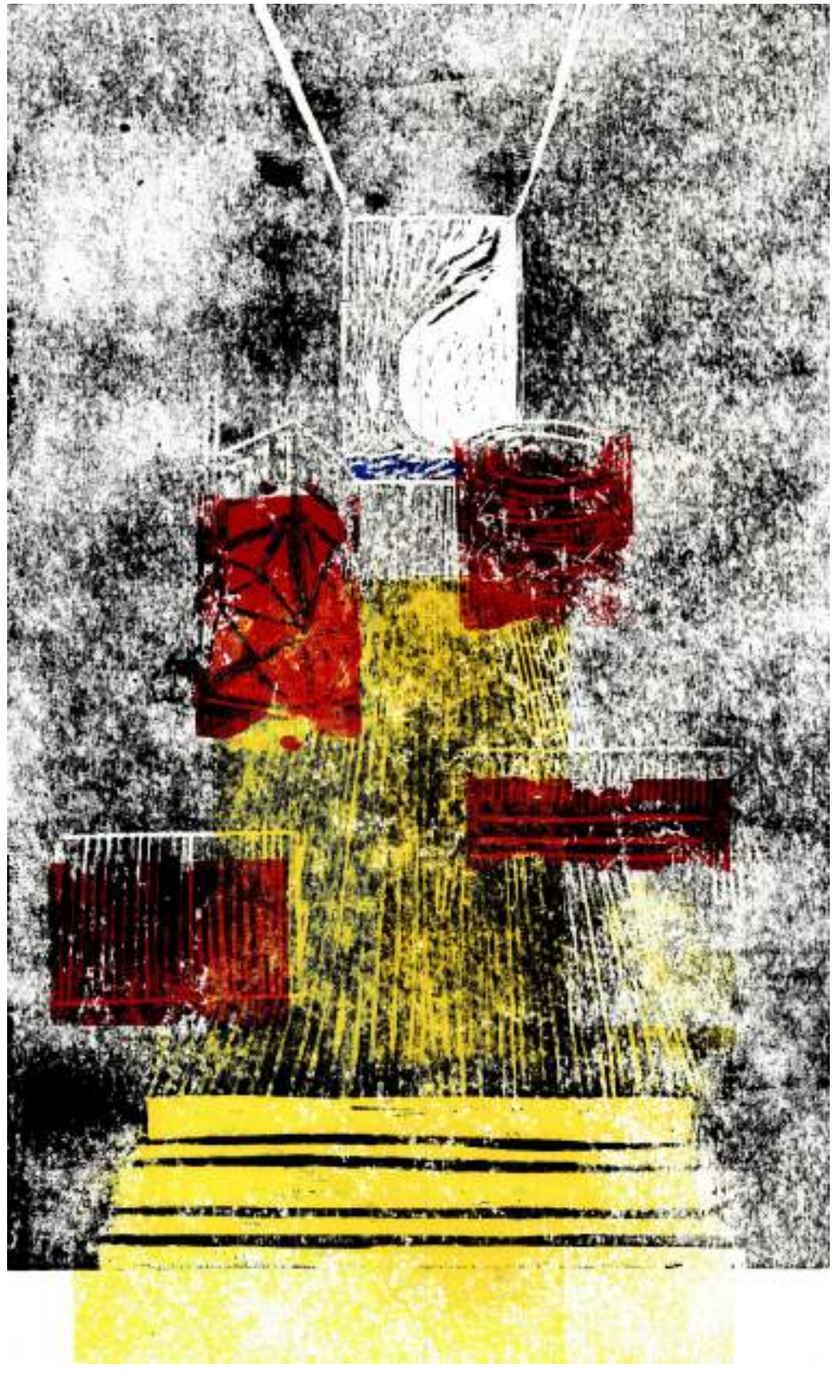

Fig. 1. *Engraved*: Perspective drawing of a hallway connecting various experiences of loss, resulting from a highly personal process of material experimentation with the medium of linocut. For example, the printing process came to symbolize how some losses can cut deeper than others even if they look the same on the surface. Lino print on A1 format by one of the students who participated in design studio An() other Goodbye and who prefers to remain anonymous (2022).

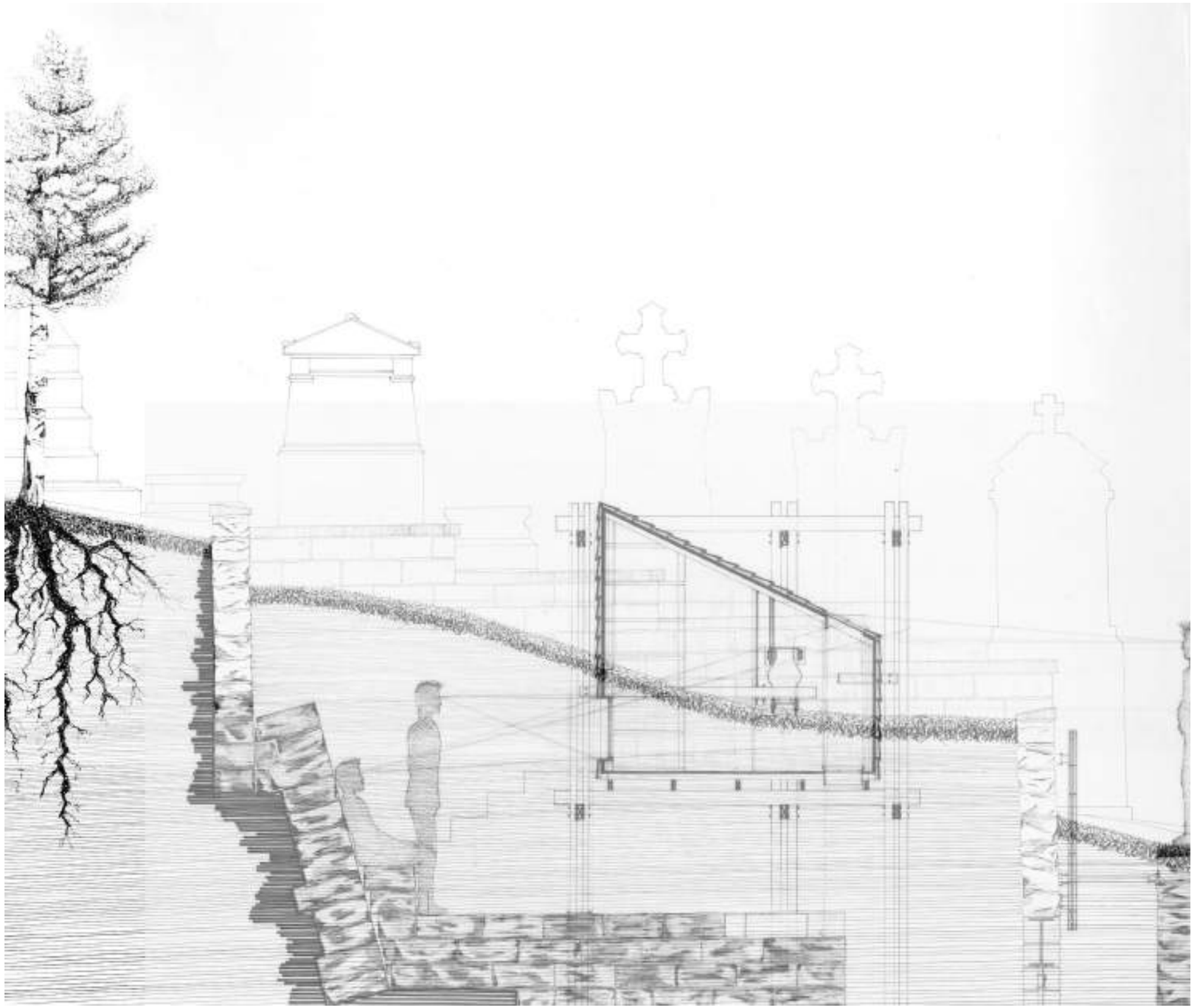

Fig. 2. *Em()braced*: Section through a grave designed for the brother of a friend. A wooden structure made up of columns and beams - respectively symbolizing the deceased's siblings and parents – stands around, reaches towards and lovingly embraces the urn. Drawing on (tracing) paper by Miguel Vervacke, one of the students who participated in design studio An()other Goodbye (2022).

Enrico Miglietta

Politecnico di Milano-KU Leuven, 2024

Re-reading Form through the Agency of the Joint.
The Archaeological Attitude of Design Driven Research

Can the study of the material's identity, the detail, and the binding — reciprocal dependence between things be observed as a point of onset, rather than of arrival, for architectural analysis and design?

Can the systematic questioning of relations of secondness, material and formal joints between elements, parts and fragments of a work become its structuring artifice, the red thread that orients its technical and expressive consistency, its tendency towards a whole?

What strategies make it possible to adhere to principles of coherence and necessity, balance between parts, in projects that adopt fragmentation as a design principle, programmatically renouncing abstract schematisms in favour of empirical research processes?

In a circular trajectory, typical of the flow of *time* that characterises artistic practices, this research starts from a reconnaissance on design to then proceed through it, be guided by it, find coincidence between researcher and author, thus situate his work within a tradition. Starting from the interpretative re-reading of works by architects of the so-called *other* modernity, by formulating a rigorous method of critical investigation, this thesis rediscovers in their realisations a form of tacit knowledge, a way of interpreting the potential of each material and design, by successive stratifications, by fragments, an idea of unity.

First through participant observation, then by design actions, through variation and the project of the new, this exploration formulates an excavation within an open strand of the architectural discipline, providing the reader with a field of findings as the result of a philosophical archaeology, a regression made to look forward, an act of passionate criticism. On these grounds, the research develops the proposal of a palimpsest for a design practice, as an attitude rather than a method, an open matrix on which it is possible to operate continuous rewritings, identifying a profound link between peculiar design strategies and drawing tools, and revealing their deep intertwining, their reciprocal agency.

Moving from the design of a material-based economy, and of a particular type of tectonic readability, the research tests the potential of the architectural joint as ordering principle, the possibility of incorporating intentions into each fragment, and offering, as a gesture, their knowability to the dweller. Through the design of a *pensatoio*, a *place for reflection* within the research and, at the same time, a fragment of the interiority of the researcher, it demonstrates how certain ways of making architecture, certain design-thinking strategies, are always closely intertwined with ways of working through drawing, with the relations we establish between its scale and our body.

In a passionate and partisan form, the research uses subjectivity as a key to access a more profound level of awareness, reconstructing then, through exemplification, the site of a problematic discourse. It does so to offer a new, manifold contribution of knowledge to the field of architectural research, suggesting possible transformations — from within. It does so to offer architecture students, researchers and practitioners, the passionate reader, the tools to build their own research attitude, their own reflective practice, intimate but never self-referential, rooted in iterative processes of study, exercise, observation and review.

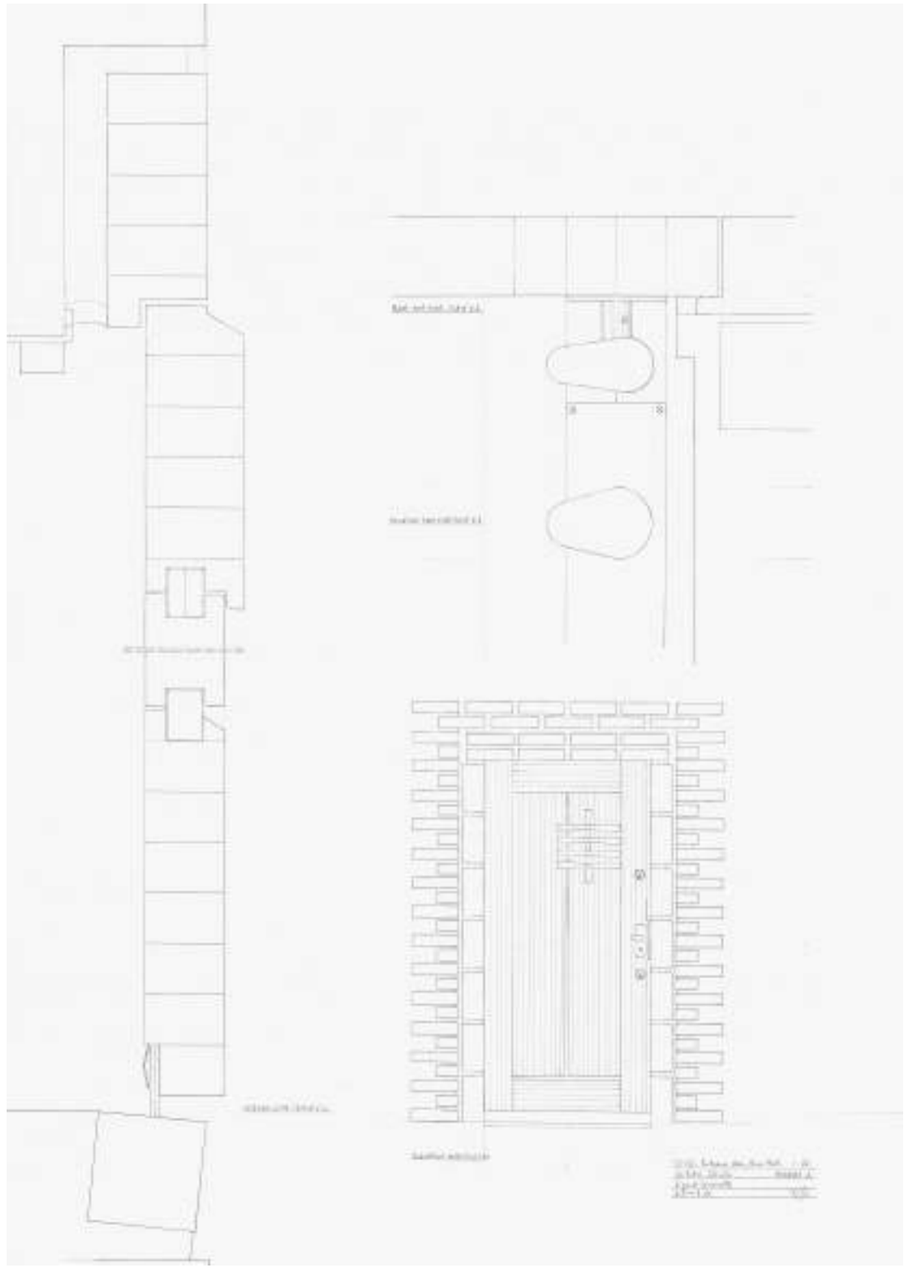

Fig. 1. Sigurd Lewerentz, *Church of St. Peter* (Klippan, 1962-66). Entry door assembly structure and knob. Pencil on paper, 700x500 mm, scale 1:1. Drawing by Enrico Miglietta.

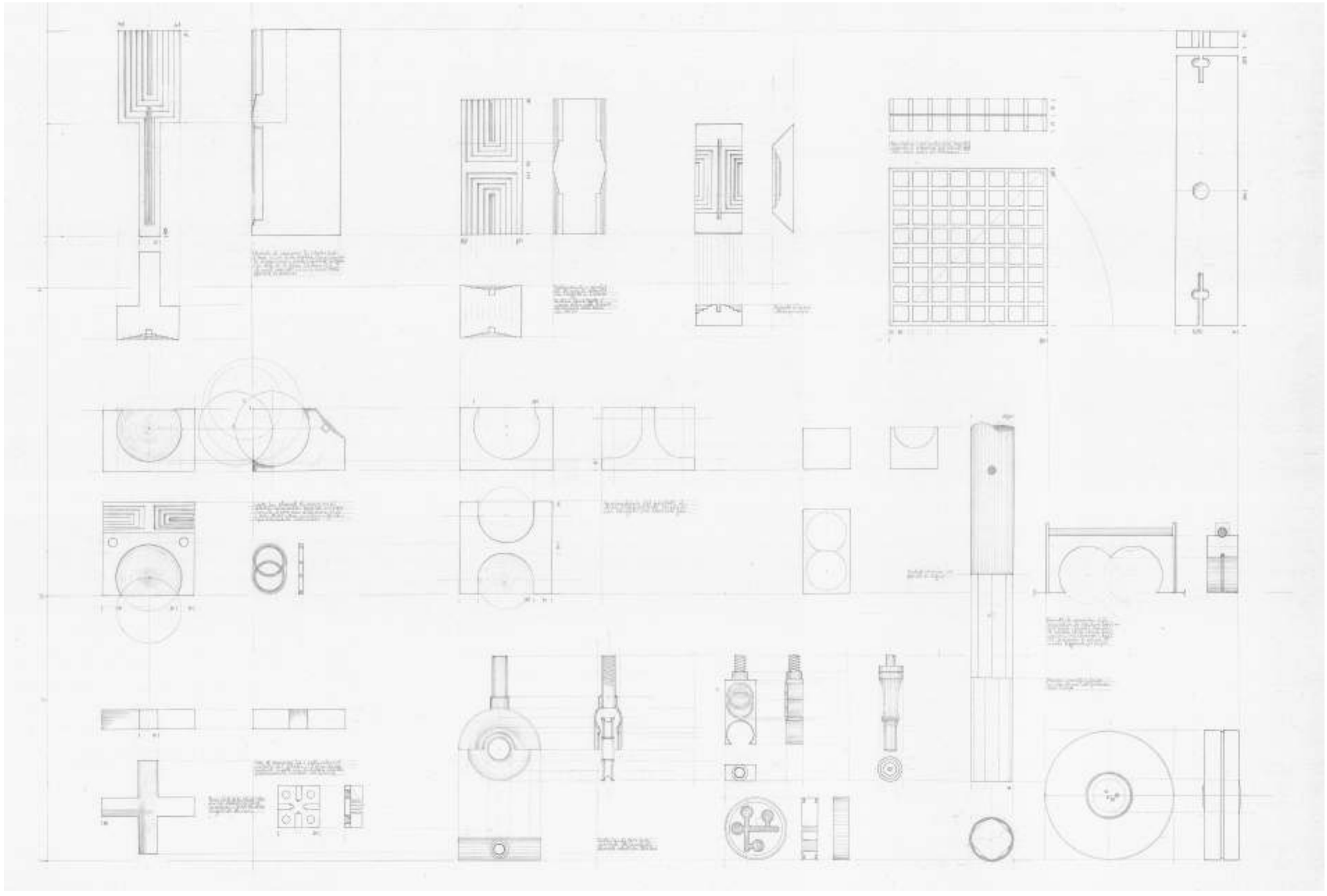

Fig. 2. Carlo Scarpa, *Brion Cemetery* (Altivole, 1968-78). Abacus of joining elements materialised as autonomous entities. Pencil on paper, 1285x875mm, scale 1:1. Drawing by Enrico Miglietta.

Eva Beke

KU Leuven, 2022

Perspicio.
To Look At, Through and Beyond the Picture Plane

This Research by Drawing uses linear perspective in the reconstruction of Proto-Renaissance (hence pre-perspectival) painted space, in such a manner that the act of drawing becomes a re-observation of as well as a dwelling in the unlocked imaginary world that exists behind the canvas. Drawing (by hand) and reading drawings is harnessed as a way of exploring other works and, thereupon, the idea of space and how we look at it. By reading Proto-Renaissance pictorial space through the lens of linear perspective – a projection method it shares no common ground with – it is possible to reveal and access the Proto-Renaissance spatiality in a new way and have it serve as a looking machine (to question conventions we too often still perceive to be true). Linear perspective is principally known as a method for systematically projecting a spatial representation onto a two-dimensional surface, and has dominated (architectural) representation and spatial understanding since its conception in the Renaissance. Upon closer examination, however, it proves to be more multifaceted than a mere geometrical tool for composing two-dimensional imagery. This research instrumentalises the inversion of perspective so that it becomes not simply a means of disclosing space but a crowbar for opening up our way of looking. More than just for its geometrical potential, this research is invested in perspective as a device for unlocking a space and, consequently, opening up our gaze. In other words, perspective itself is not the object of investigation, but the tool to observe perception. Perspective is deployed because of its theatricalising character – for the construction hinges on the central element or picture plane, which, like a fourth wall, has the ability to present the spectator a world of different space and time. In the first place, the picture plane is a barrier between Here and There, a two-dimensional plane that contains the composition, determines the position of the onlooker and directs their gaze. Secondly, it is a threshold that can be crossed, a doorway opening up to an imaginary space. Moving through the different positions in relation to the picture plane – looking at, through and beyond its surface – we zoom in on and examine how we look at the image, at the spatial construction and finally at our own looking, respectively. By gradually expanding our space of exploration in regards to the picture plane, we also aim to broaden our understanding of how we look at it, with a particular focus on specific points of view and the framing of moments. This research draws on two paintings that present themselves with pre-perspectival pictorial language: The *Birth of the Virgin* (1303-1305) by Giotto di Bondone and *The Head of Saint John the Baptist Brought before Herod* (1455-1460) by Giovanni di Paolo. These two cases, and the spaces they display, are construed through the performance of analogue perspective drawing experiments within self-reflective cycles, where thinking turns into drawing and drawing into thinking. With case 3 the bridge is built between mental and physical experience by the presentation of a diptych of existing spaces: a built Here and There in the guise of a chapel comprising two adjoining rooms. This chapel is a stepping stone for the reader in two respects. On the one hand, it is an intermediate step before accepting the invitation to mentally dwell in a diptych of drawn spaces. On the other hand, it is a materialized suggestion (a built metaphor) of how the way of looking investigated in and presented by this research could be incorporated into architectural practice. This thesis is an account, in words and drawings, of the author's personal experience while drawing/in the drawing, in which the spatialities that are generated by perspective are imaginatively accessed and function as looking machines. This research perpetuates, firstly, the role of drawing as a way of observing, entering and mentally exploring. In addition, it also identifies the potential of perspective drawing as a scenographic device in particular whereby the central picture plane is transformed into and instrumentalised as place. This plane-as-place, paradoxical and subjective in nature, is recognised as an important mental space to dwell in and return from with a new pair of eyes. The research also exposes the significance of Proto-Renaissance imagery as a *distorted* fictional playground. To reconcile *correct* linear perspective with pre-perspectival pictorial language brings about friction that is propulsive. The confrontation between expectation (dictated by the analytic, because metrical Here) and experience (inherent in the ambiguous, because atmospheric There), provokes linear perspective as a cultural given (not to say prevailing paradigm) and questions its impact on our architectural reading and understanding of space.

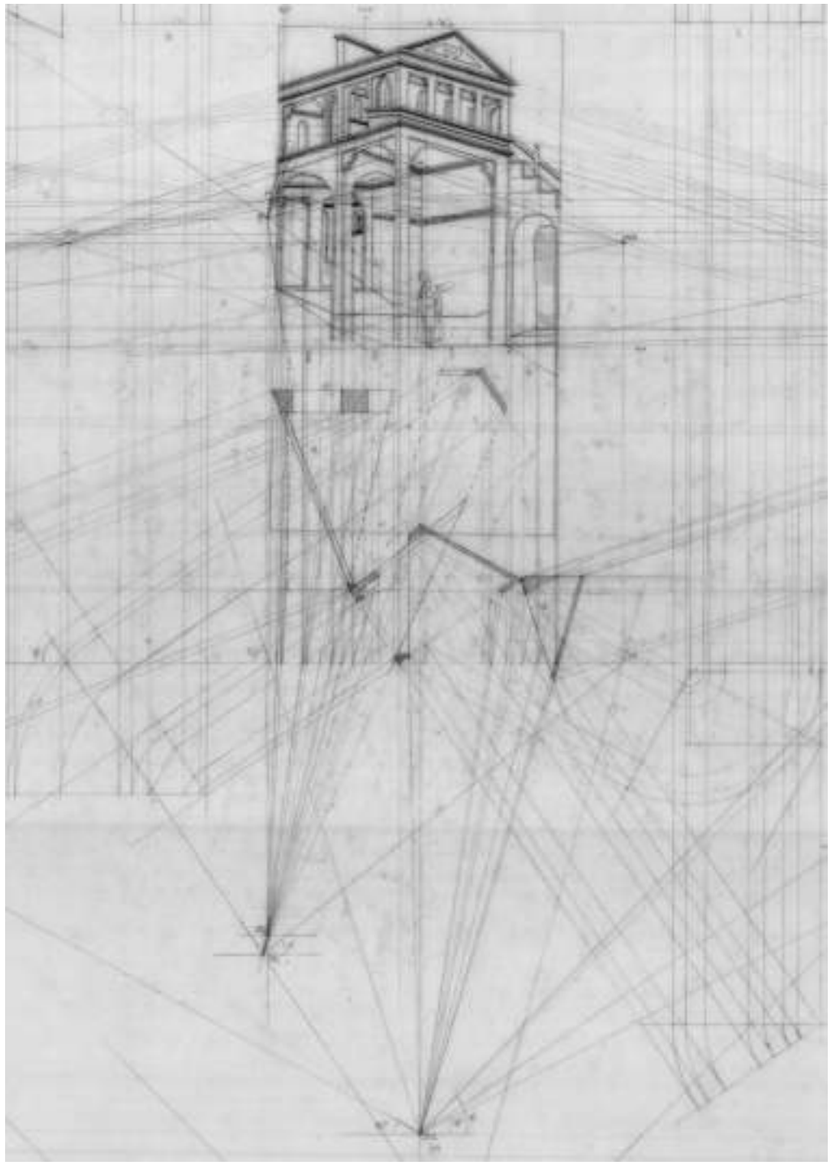

Fig. 1. Fragment of *case 2 drawing 1*, based on the painting of Giovanni di Paolo, *The Head of Saint John the Baptist Brought before Herod*, 1455/60, Art Institute of Chicago. Through linear perspective, the floorplan is reconstructed as a uniting of four atmospherical moments. Eva Beke, *case 2 drawing 1*, Ghent, 2019.

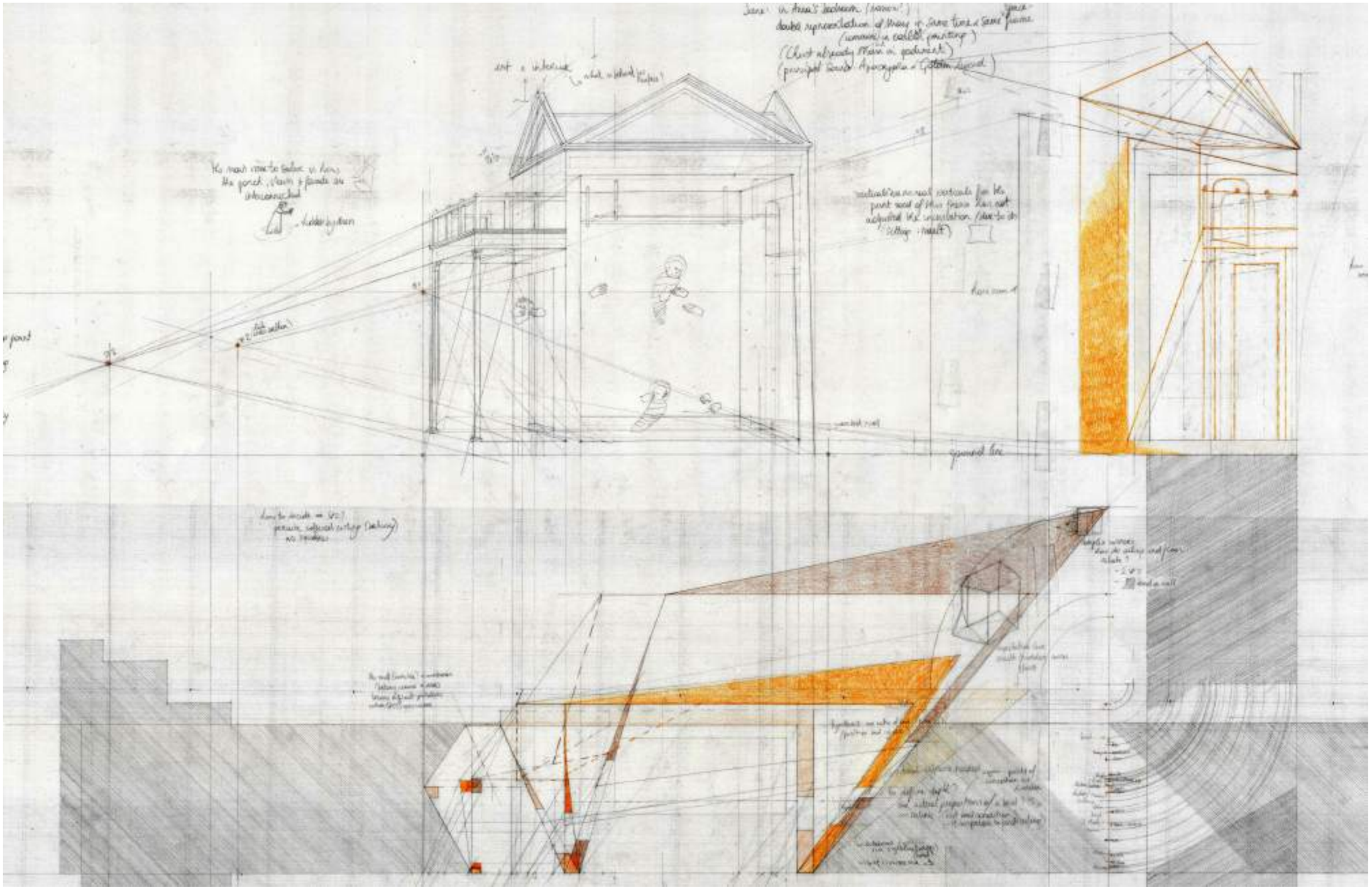

Fig. 2. Fragment of *case 1 drawing 1*, based on the fresco of Giotto di Bondone, *The Birth of the Virgin*, 1303-1305, Scrovegni Chapel, Padua. Through linear perspective, horizontal and vertical sections are derived from the representation. Eva Beke, *case 1 drawing 1, Ghent*, 2019.

Louise De Brabander

KU Leuven, 2022

On the Fragility of Empathy.
Drawing as Empathic Musing

Interpersonal empathy is the empathy mostly referred to when the term is used in contemporary situations. In the field of architecture, an architect's empathy is, or should be, aimed at the future user of a space, as well as the landscape this place will become part of. The meticulous observation of these places and empathising with them is indispensable to any architectural design process, as the experience of them comes before any spatial intervention is even imagined. Hence, this research is concerned with empathy towards places rather than people.

Empathy is one of the most human and bodily of capacities, and it is predicated on awareness, which in turn must be predicated on acute observation. However, it is not always brought into use or harnessed – one can show a lack of empathy with someone or something. Empathy also depends on the willingness of the observer to activate it. In some cases, one empathises naturally, without much effort, but empathy can and needs to be worked on intellectually if one is to ever empathically understand the place that is being observed.

This research, through drawing, examines the role of (architectural) drawing, and particularly drawing by hand, as a transformative tool to engage human empathy in observing and reconstructing architectural place. It has done so through iterative, experimental and immersive processes of (analogue) drawing. Every drawing process was preceded and fuelled by *walking* actions and was interspersed with various *writing* actions as tools of verbalisation that made both the critical assessment of the drawing and walking actions and their outcomes (the drawings) explicit.

Through the drawing actions and reflecting on those processes and their outcomes, as well as through experiments within an educational context, the research has affirmed that drawing, an example of empathic musing, can become a transformative tool in engaging human empathy. However, drawing does not mean empathising by default; hence, the research has further examined how and in what way drawing can engage human empathy. It has identified *Memo Drawing* and *Critical Iterative Drawing* (CID) as ways of drawing that hold empathy-engaging qualities. Subsequently, it has brought the *Fragment-Instrument* to the fore as a tool, whereby the (architectural) *whole* is holistically assembled via its fragments, not from beholding and capturing it from an overarching, holistic stance; hence, inverting habitual ways of observing. It states that through observing the *whole* via its fragments, a physical empathic understanding can consciously be developed.

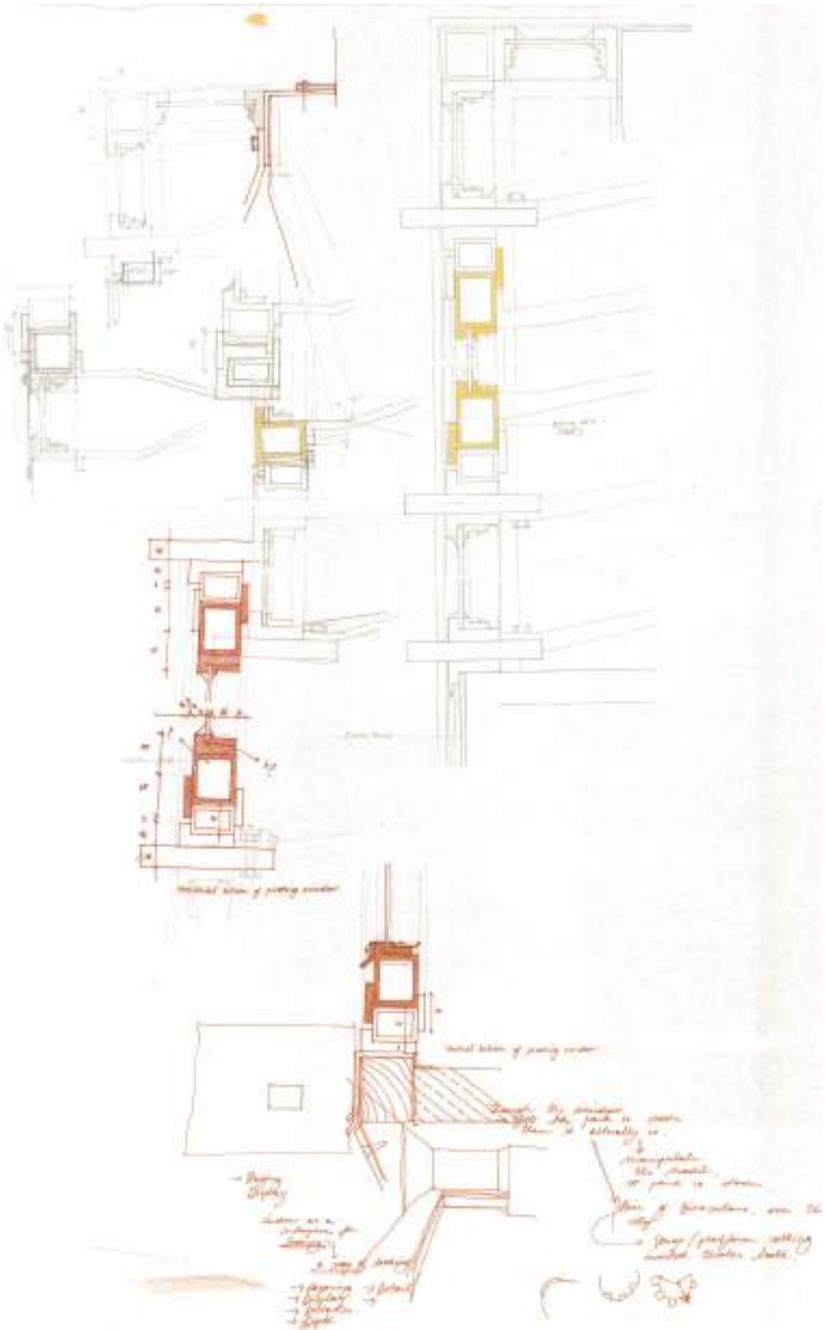

Fig. 1 Louise De Brabander, *Revision Drawing of the Windowframes* of a *Corner Window at De Grote Post in Ostend*, Ghent, 2020.

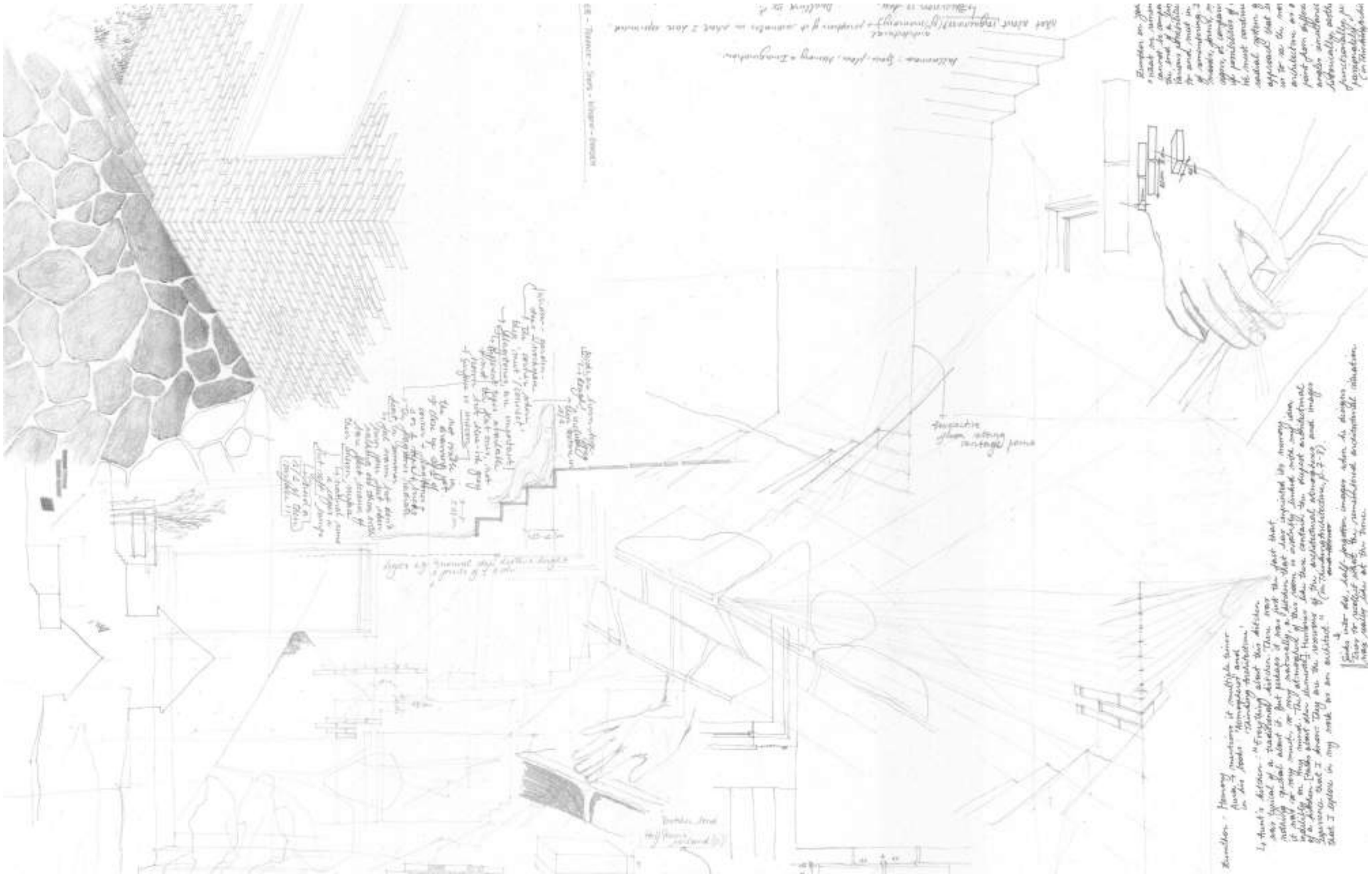

Fig. 2 Louise De Brabander,
Drawing the Flagstone Terrace of My Grandfather's House, Ghent, 2020.

Make Room for Play.
Questioning the Role of the Moving Body between Thinking and Making

This interdisciplinary research examines how architecture and dance can enhance their mutual understanding of the embodied spatial experience to open up new perspectives on the creation processes in both disciplines. In the discipline of architecture, the visual experience dominates the tools as well as the thinking processes and the human body is mainly assigned a functional role, while the embodied spatial experience arises from the body in motion. As such, the architectural design tools offer minimal possibilities to fully understand the phenomenon of embodied spatial experience.

Like architecture, the dance discipline is also a creative *design practice*. Both design practices share three main components: body, movement and space. However, unlike architecture, in the latter discipline space is created with the body in motion, and space is, in that case, a temporary, non-materialised and constantly evolving. Hence, the relationship between the components, which links both disciplines in the process of creation, is fundamentally different. This epistemological distinction is approached from three angles in this research: literature, education and established practices. The last two are in the context of the research, respectively named as *plays* and *talks* and accommodated in an imaginary constructed *playground*. Within this playground, active experimentation takes place through the application of design tools and methods derived from one of the involved disciplines. This allows for a deeper understanding of the epistemology underlying these tools and methods. At the heart of this research is a methodology based on the Lewinian Learning Cycle – an iterative process in which action and reflection allow for generating new insights.

In short, this research examines what preconceptions are embedded in both disciplines regarding the relationship between body, movement and space as a result of using discipline-specific strategies and tools, in particular, how they determine *learning* to understand and approach *embodied spatial experience* within an educational context. The ultimate goal is to provide both architects and choreographers with a broader and more conscious approach to the phenomenon within their respective creative processes.

Ultimately, through the creation of the playground, this research offers an imaginary space for sharing and accommodating this interdisciplinary knowledge and allows one to think and act beyond discipline-bound design tools and associated preconceptions. As such, the playground is not only a space for experimentation but also a learning environment stripped of its disciplinary boundaries, in which two learning principles, *reallocating the gaze* and *alternating the role*, prevail. The playbook, as an outcome of the playground, invites to actively expand the discourse and framework for thinking about the relationship between body, movement and space. By doing so, the research also implicitly opens up the debate on breaking down the disciplinary barriers that have been created throughout history.

Fig. 1. Liselotte Vroman, *Atmosphere image of the expo Make Room for Play* as part of the PhD Defence on July 7, 2021, Ghent.

Fig. 2. Liselotte Vroman, Overview of a selection of photos of sketchbooks – illustrating the fieldwork – grouped according to appearance, to obtain insight into the ways of *looking* throughout the varying outcomes of the different *plays*, Ghent, 2020.

Reflections

Space Making becoming Place Making:
Drawing Research in the Research Group the Drawing and the Space
Thierry Lagrange, Jo Van Den Berghe

Spatial Heft in Flanders
Michael McGarry

Setting the (Drawing) Table for Design Research
Penelope Haralambidou

Space Making becoming Place Making. Drawing Research in the Research Group the Drawing and the Space

Thierry Lagrange, Jo Van Den Berghe

Introduction and Brief Historical Overview

Drawing is one of the most prominent activities of a designer, who draws with different media ranging from the pencil to the computer mouse. The act of drawing is a multi-layered, multi-sensorial activity with a significant impact on creativity, creative output, thinking and knowledge production. It is above all an act with a long history related to humanity, hence to many disciplines that adopt the map, the symbol, the sketch, the plan, the section, the detail, ..., all related to discipline-specific acts of drawing. All this includes direct and vivid connections, back and forth, between the outcome and the first sketch.

What is the meaning and agency of space? This question seems to return time and again in the course of human history, and it asks for a precise and well-focused approach. History proves that we can rethink and redesign space in such a way that it opens new avenues to innovation and reflection. We can see spatiality in such a way that it instigates debates on political and social topics. There are numerous strategies to be investigated here, ranging from the transformation of immaterial and mental aspects in tangible space to looking at old masters who focused on how space is related to mental aspects such as thinking, reflecting and understanding the world.

Drawing and space share a common history, and all along these historical lines – that reach as far as today – strong dependencies between the drawing and the space exist, which appear to make them inseparable, both in the conception and in the observation and understanding of space. In designing, looked at from a historical perspective, space is often that which drives designers to drawing, whereas drawing is often that which leads to new spaces. Innovative ways of drawing have led to innovative concepts of space. The urge for the latter has often instigated the quest for the former.

This co-existence of both entities – the drawing and the space – requires intense collaborations that lead to crosspollinations, and for this reason, we founded the research group *The Drawing and the Space* in 2017. We believe that bringing together the research topics of drawing and space may change our views on this research landscape and further expand it.

These ambitions are developing and coming forth from methodological approaches we began to explore during the previous decades, when our institution, Sint Lucas School of Architecture, now KU Leuven Faculty of Architecture, took the initiative of organising the international conference *The Unthinkable Doctorate* in 2005. It was mainly due to the unwavering efforts of the late Prof. Johan Verbeke and the international network that he gathered that an epistemological shift that opened new perspectives on knowledge production. This evolution was mainly based on an emerging tradition that was also under development in Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian academic environments and institutions[1].

Scholars of this international network have been brought together in an exceptional tutorial team under the initiative of Prof. Johan Verbeke. This team has developed the program of *Research Training Sessions* (RTS)[2] through which a design-driven research culture could develop and thrive in a vibrant international context. It coincided with the transformational period of academization of schools of architecture within the aspirations of the Bologna agreement. We have been fortunate to participate in these innovative dynamics.

In 2017, we could obtain sufficient research funding through which we could canalise our expertise into new PhD projects that could be brought together in our research group, *The Drawing and the Space*. Louise De Brabander, Eva Beke and Liselotte Vroman, who graduated in our master thesis studio, have been the first master students who continued their research on a PhD level under our supervision.

Since the research topics investigated are deeply personal and often characterised by subjective qualities, the research group needed to develop three components that together constitute the necessary research conditions. These three components are:

A high-trust environment;

The concentric circles of observations;

The agency of drawing.

In the following paragraphs, we will unfold these three components.

High Trust Environment

The thematic framework of the research group revolves around the notions of drawing and space. Within this framework, we would like to emphasise the importance of a high-trust

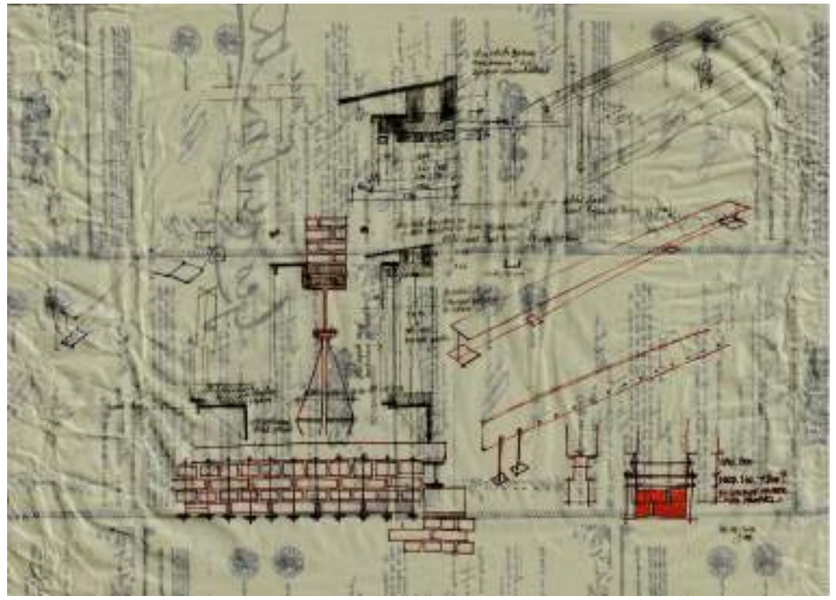

Fig. 1. Jo Van Den Berghe, *WoSho*, Fountain pen, thin black marker, graphite pencil, red pencil, *as found* thin paper (wrapping paper from Lagavulin single malt whisky), original size: 440 x 290 mm, 2013-ongoing.

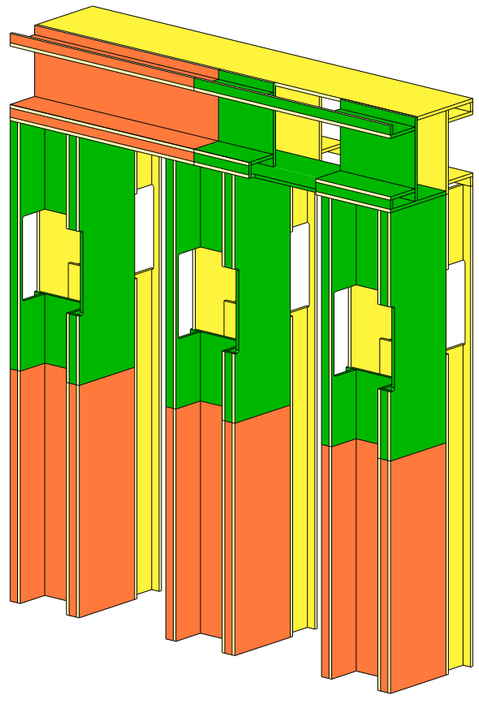

Fig. 2. Thierry Lagrange, *HD400, beams*, digital drawing, 2024.

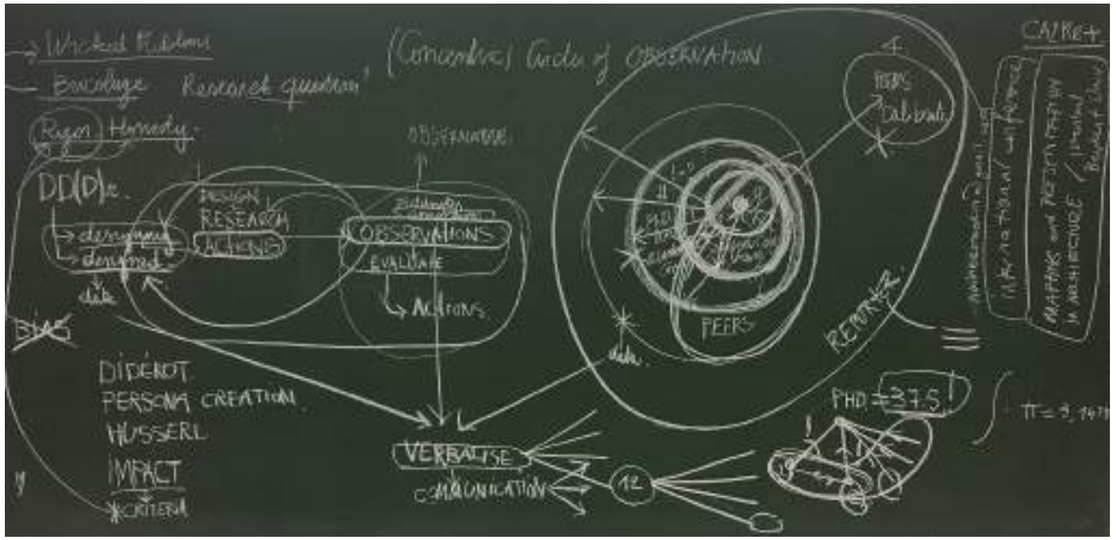

Fig. 3. Jo Van Den Berghe, *Concentric Circles of Observation*, Image from the CA²RE+ Workshop Ghent, 2019.

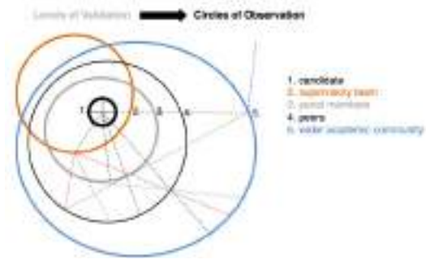

Fig. 4. Jo Van Den Berghe, *Scheme of Concentric Circles of Observation*, 2019.

Fig. 5. *CA²RE+ Workshop*, Ghent 2019.

environment[3] as the core of our supervisory approaches, in which every PhD researcher has sufficient mental space to work from their own expertise alongside their skills and fascinations. It is our supervisory responsibility to identify this expertise and fascinations and to create an appropriate research environment in which they can thrive.

Within this high-trust environment, it is important for us to remain open-minded regarding the adoption and application of a wide array of drawing methods at our disposal, both coming from our own expertise and the expertise on which the PhD researchers are selected.

By doing so, the PhD researchers can not only apply but also further develop and expand drawing as a knowledge production. This permits us to benefit from an empirical research environment, liberated from prescriptive methodologies. Herewith, and based on our empirical observations, we can transgress existing boundaries and conventions and, by doing so, discover new knowledge that otherwise would remain hidden. This is where we identify our position in academia.

We consider a high-trust environment as a safe space, both physically and mentally. Physically, we built a well-equipped and comfortable research lab, whereas mentally, we are fostering a culture in which the PhD students and members of the research group know they can expose their research methods and findings.

As such, our researchers constantly adjust and refine their research methods for the sake of the robustness of the ongoing research process. Methods are at the service of the research process and not the other way round.

Concentric Circles of Observation

Despite the potential of this high-trust environment, there is also the risk of impoverishment of the level of critical observation and reflection. For this reason, and since this high-trust environment is constantly operating within intersubjectivities, we have developed the method of Concentric Circles of Observation (Figure 01, 02) for securing the robustness of the peer review process.

This method consists of a set of concentric circles of observation, which represent everyone involved in the peer review processes in design-driven research. As such, the method is a social construction that strengthens the robustness of design-driven research by offering situated ways of interaction between stakeholders, by making layers of intersubjectivity reliable through enough iterations of calibration. The iterations are continued until saturation and confirmation occur.

The aim of this method is to offer grips to every circle of observation involved in the peer review processes in design driven research. The method permits to identify all the layers at work in such a peer review process and to give them a name according to their role in each of the layers. This permits each stakeholder to situate themselves in the layered system of observations and subsequently, by doing so, to come to a more situated position of observation, reflection and action. This improves the critical calibration of the high-trust environment.

In the heart of this set of concentric circles sits the PhD researcher who activates the method by consciously and explicitly observing their research actions. The PhD researcher is expected to calibrate themselves by critically evaluating these self-observations yet improve their next round of research actions based on the critical observations of the previous round of research actions. This is where the method starts.

From the next circle, the supervisory team not only observes the research actions of the PhD researcher in the first circle but also the quality of the PhD researcher's self-observations and how these self-observations affect the quality of their next round of research actions and consequent self-observations[4].

These supervisory observations are put in cyclical iterations until saturation occurs by observing that no further improvement of observation and action is coming forth from additional iterations.

In orbit around these first two circles, a third circle of observation is activated in the form of panel members at presentation moments like doctoral seminars and conferences. These panel members both observe and calibrate the observations of the supervisory team and the PhD researcher.

Subsequently, the circle of peers can observe the observations of the previous circles and evaluate whether the ongoing process and its intermediary output is viable and acceptable for the disciplinary field (e.g. presentations, publications...).

Finally, in the outer orbit, the wider academic community observes and eventually comments on the observations of the previously mentioned circles. Other PhD researchers from within the research group and beyond have a specific status in that they are encouraged to migrate between these circles of observation according to the specificity of the peer review moment, ranging from the daily research activities amongst PhD researchers in the research labs to more formal peer review moments as organised in research seminars and conferences.

All the previously described circles eventually help to ground the academic viability of the research.

Since we started to develop this structured and layered method of peer review, we have been in the possibility to further apply and refine its potential in the high trust environment of our research group *The Drawing and the Space*, our Master thesis studios and in the way we are mentoring and supervising ongoing PhDs in the framework of the CA2RE community (FN) and beyond. It is not our intention to provide hard proof with this description because this would require more formal evaluations of its agency. Rather, this description demonstrates how the Concentric Circles of Observation is developing through its continuous application and refinement in various research environments.

It is important to mention that the chronology with which the system of these circles is consulted is not unidirectional and independent from the hierarchy of its stakeholders. The high-trust environment permits breaking through formal hierarchies[5].

As a further explanation, we will now describe three different research situations of how this method of Concentric Circles of Observation works in a concrete PhD context.

CA²RE+ (VN) Workshop

On the occasion of the CA²RE+ conference at KU Leuven Faculty of Architecture in October 2019, we were invited to organise a PhD workshop. The CA²RE+ workshop started with a lecture in which the method of Concentric Circles of Observation was explained. Subsequently, a roleplay with approximately 25 participants was set up, in which the theoretical insights of the lecture were added with an introduction of Theory U by C.O. Scharmer[6]. Then, the participants were instructed to reorganise the classroom by putting the chairs in the form of the circles of observation.

The organisers invited all participants to play a role during two sessions (as PhD researcher, supervisor, panel member, etc.). This play led to a series of vivid discussions illustrating a myriad of cross-connections shown in the scheme of Concentric Circles of Observation.

The participants played the game twice, so that everybody could experience more than one role, switching roles and obtaining new insights. Due to the high-trust environment, the threshold was very low, so that all participants, ranging from PhD researchers to supervisors to panel members of PhD presentations, could learn. An atmosphere of empathy and openness was created, referring to Theory U.

At the Drawing Table

In our research lab, we have a series of drawing tables around which we have created several supervisory situations in which we have meticulously applied the method of Concentric Circles of Observation for two ongoing PhDs (Louise De Brabander and Eva Beke). In two consecutive sessions, the first PhD researcher occupied her place at her drawing table and was invited to formulate her observations regarding the ongoing drawing process, the first circle of observation. In a second circle, the supervisor and co-supervisor were observing the formulated observations and drawings of the PhD researcher. In a third circle of observation, two assessors of the PhD were invited to formulate their observations of the two previous circles of observation (i.e. the PhD researcher and her supervisors). In the meantime, the second PhD researcher was also present in the room and was invited to observe all the ongoing Concentric Circles of Observation and to formulate her findings by taking positions in the various circles of observation that were applied in this session.

In the next round, the second PhD researcher occupied her place at her drawing table to take her position in the centre of the Concentric Circles of Observation and to take all the participants through the same process of Concentric Circles of Observation.

Since all this took place in a high-trust environment, we could invite the PhD researchers to take positions of observations of the circles involved and to switch from one circle of observation to another circle of observation. Additionally, and from our supervisory responsibilities, we have also switched positions from one circle of observation to another circle of observation.

Through these dynamics, we could better understand the agency of empathy and openness, hence refine and improve the mechanisms at work in the system of Concentric Circles of Observation in processes of design-driven research.

PoliMi PhD Workshop

In 2022, we were contacted by Politecnico di Milano for a PhD workshop in the framework of the doctoral program[7]. We took the occasion of this nine-day PhD workshop (30.01.23-06.02.23) to further develop and refine the Concentric Circles of Observation. Coming from different institutions worldwide, ten PhD researchers enrolled in this workshop; hence, both culturally and academically, they came from very different academic paradigms, often apart from design driven research. However, Politecnico di Milano has facilitated the opportunity to create a high-trust environment in which methods could be shared, and new perspectives could be opened for the participating PhD researchers.

We started this workshop by building and curating an exhibition with research drawings from ongoing PhDs and Master thesis studios that we are running within our research group, *The Drawing and the Space*. Building this exhibition has been done together with the PhD researchers who participated in the PhD workshop. This exhibition has been the immersive setting for two introductory lectures at the end of the first day of the workshop[8].

The next day, we set up a drawing room in this exhibition. Each PhD researcher could use a drawing table. The workshop revolved around our request to the PhD researcher to draw out their research in a series of drawings. These drawings ranged from elaborated mind maps to specific kinds of drawings through which the PhD researcher could grasp and communicate the essence of their own research. In this setting, we created Concentric Circles of Observation like the Concentric Circles of Observation situation as described above. As such the whole setting and the adoption of the Concentric Circles of Observation have permitted us to have an intensive week of research by drawing. The whole situation permitted us to refer back and forth between the ongoing research at the drawing tables and the research drawings that were exposed in our immediate proximity to the exhibition setting.

The Concentric Circles of Observation started as a conventional setting with a tutorial team, consisting of ourselves as two senior researchers and one of our own PhD researchers (dr. Enrico Miglietta) as an assistant tutor. Then we started to change the positions by breaking through habitual supervisor-PhD researcher hierarchies based on the potential of the high-trust environment. As such, we applied a comparable method as described above.

Again, this inspired some PhD researchers to change positions in the set of Concentric Circles of Observation to observe from different perspectives. By including one of our own PhD researchers as a tutor at this workshop, we have been able to add a different and very specific perspective. On the one hand, he was still a later stage PhD researcher under our supervision, hence very familiar with the agency of drawing in research and on the other hand, already aware of the potential of the use of Concentric Circles of Observation in his own PhD. We could refine the Concentric Circles of Observation by engaging one of our own PhD researchers as an intermediary between the participants of the workshop and ourselves who took the posture as their supervisors in the context of this PhD workshop.

As we were approaching the end of the PhD workshop, we invited the participants to build an exhibition within the setting of the already existing exhibition. In their exhibition, we have invited the participating PhD researchers to present their work. We have invited all the other participating PhD researchers to act as an additional Concentric Circle of Observation from where we have asked them to observe and provide feedback loops into the work of the PhD researcher under observation. We have done so for every participating PhD researcher.

To conclude the PhD workshop, we have organised a plenary session in the setting of the exhibition as a final and summarising moment. By now, one of the participants (Michela Caserini) in this PhD workshop has requested us to become additional supervisors in the supervisory team of her PhD.

From Space to Place, Through the Agency of the Drawing

The Sint Lucas School of Architecture was founded in 1862 in Ghent as an institution focusing on education in the Arts and Architecture. Unlike other European architecture schools that typically originated from engineering faculties, Sint Lucas developed from an arts background, emphasising craftsmanship in its educational approach. This connection to the arts, particularly drawing, painting, and sculpture, distinguished Sint Lucas from other institutions.

From its inception, the educational program at Sint Lucas centred around craftsmanship, heavily influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement in Great Britain and the Neo-Gothic ideas of Viollet-le-Duc. The school adopted principles from John Ruskin, who advocated for honest architecture, celebrating the craftsman and the materials they worked with. Drawing, seen as a crucial craft, became a cornerstone of the Sint Lucas method. The curriculum combined observational drawing, which teaches students to see and depict the natural world, with compositional drawing, which fosters imagination and creativity. This dual approach aimed to nurture students' ability to dream and create precise images of their visions.

The Sint Lucas School of Architecture has continuously adjusted its position within the architectural education landscape. A significant development influencing Sint Lucas's position has been the Bologna Process (1999), which promoted the academization of many European art schools. Sint Lucas, like other architecture schools originating from the arts, embraced research as a crucial component of this process. This led the school to explore its unique identity and develop appropriate research strategies that aligned with its origins and focus on design rather than traditional academic research paradigms. Through these dynamics, design-driven research has been developed as an innovative research paradigm.

The making of the drawing affects the maker of the drawing. In the past years, we have systematically applied drawing as an investigation tool and the act of drawing as an investigation method, both in master's thesis projects and design-driven research PhDs by drawing. We will further elaborate on the PhD projects below.

Fig. 6. The absence-presence of Eva's father in the living room of her childhood home, experience that instigated her doctoral research. Photograph by Eva Demuynck, 2017. From *The embodiment of consolation: unlocking the interaction between mourning, drawing and place(making)*, PhD diss., KU Leuven, 2024.

With the research group *The Drawing and the Space,* we both reconnect with these historical origins of Sint-Lucas School of Architecture, and we contribute to the further development of design-driven research. *The Drawing and the Space* further develops innovative ways of drawing that permit us to discover and produce new spatialities.

The drawing is the subject of fundamental research. Crucial are a set of methods that have been developed with the aim of amplifying the agency of drawing as a research method: *Chronological Drawing* and *X-Ray-Drawing*[9], *Critical Sequential Drawing*[10], *Empathical Drawing*, *Drawing as Boundary Object*[11] and *Polyscenic Perspective Drawing*[12].

The aforementioned intertwining of the act of drawing and the notion of space, crucial for the discipline of architecture, is intensely investigated in the research group and is leading to innovative ways of seeing, understanding and creating space. These different drawing methods appear to have, as a common denominator, their capacity to make tangible and intangible properties of space explicit, communicable and discussable. As conversation pieces, these drawings operate as epistemic artefacts.

Consequently, this research is opening new avenues to understanding both the role and the creation of space. Through the identification and a more precise situating of tangible and intangible properties of spaces, layers of meaning of a space are becoming more recognisable, made explicit and applicable in design-driven research contexts. These identifications are changing more abstract, distant understandings of *a space* into a more concrete, immersed experience of *a place*. Through these research findings, it is becoming clear to us that the noun changes from space to place. For this reason, we have decided to change the name of the research group, *The Drawing and the Space*, into The Drawing and the Place. This is not merely a semantic discussion, but a fundamental one based on the research and its discoveries within the research group[13].

The knowledge creation in the making of a drawing is closely related to the high trust environment as described above, which includes the permission and acceptance of deeply rooted subjective matters that are brought to the surface through processes of slow drawing and that are made explicit and transferable through meticulous verbalization of the mental process that is going on in and through the moment of drawing[14].

The following research projects demonstrate the growing importance of the notion of place in our research group.

Fig. 7. Moragh Diels, *Drawing a Boundary Object Together*, Photographs by Moragh Diels, 2019. From *The Drawing as a Boundary Object: Interacting with Vulnerabilities through the Process of Drawing Space*, research article, 2021.

Demuynck Eva (PhD): *The embodiment of consolation: unlocking the interaction between mourning, drawing and place(-making)*[15]. This research explores how architectural drawing can create meaningful places for mourning, addressing the growing shift from public to private memorial practices. It examines how drawing architecture can bridge the gap between the built environment and the personal, everyday landscapes where grief is often experienced. Inspired by the researcher's therapeutic redrawing versions of her childhood home after her father's passing away, this research investigates how drawing can generate placemaking and, by doing so, helps individuals in making sense of personal loss.

Through the design studio *An()other Goodbye* and research seminars, participants – both architects and laypeople – were invited to draw their personal memorial places which highlighted the therapeutic potential of placemaking through crafting personal narratives of loss. These processes enable the participants to deconstruct the symbolist nature of memorial places into understandable and adaptable notions that become design components applicable in new creative engagements. The research advocates for integrating co-design between the bereaved and the architect in memorial architecture to tailor personal places to clients' emotional needs, forming a transdisciplinary *architectural practice of mourning* that redefines the role of a personal place in the grieving process.

Diels Moragh (paper). *The Drawing as a Boundary Object: Interacting with Vulnerabilities through the Process of Drawing Space*[16]. This article explores the concept of drawing as a boundary object, focusing on its connection to place and its role in processing grief. Using an auto-ethnographical approach, the research investigates how the act of drawing an imagined mnemonic house – based on memories of her father's final days – becomes a therapeutic medium.

Key to this process is the relationship between memory and domestic spaces, where analysing childhood home memories informs and is informed by the act of drawing (Step 1). The large-scale hand drawing fosters collaboration between the author and the family (Step 2) and invites for public reflection (Step 3), creating a place for introspection and communication across personal and collective vulnerabilities. By translating emotion into placemaking, the drawing activates new understandings of place and shared human experiences of loss.

De Brabander Louise (PhD). *On the Fragility of Empathy: Drawing as Empathic Musing*[17]. This research explores how hand-drawing serves as a transformative tool for fostering empathy in the observation and reconstruction of architectural

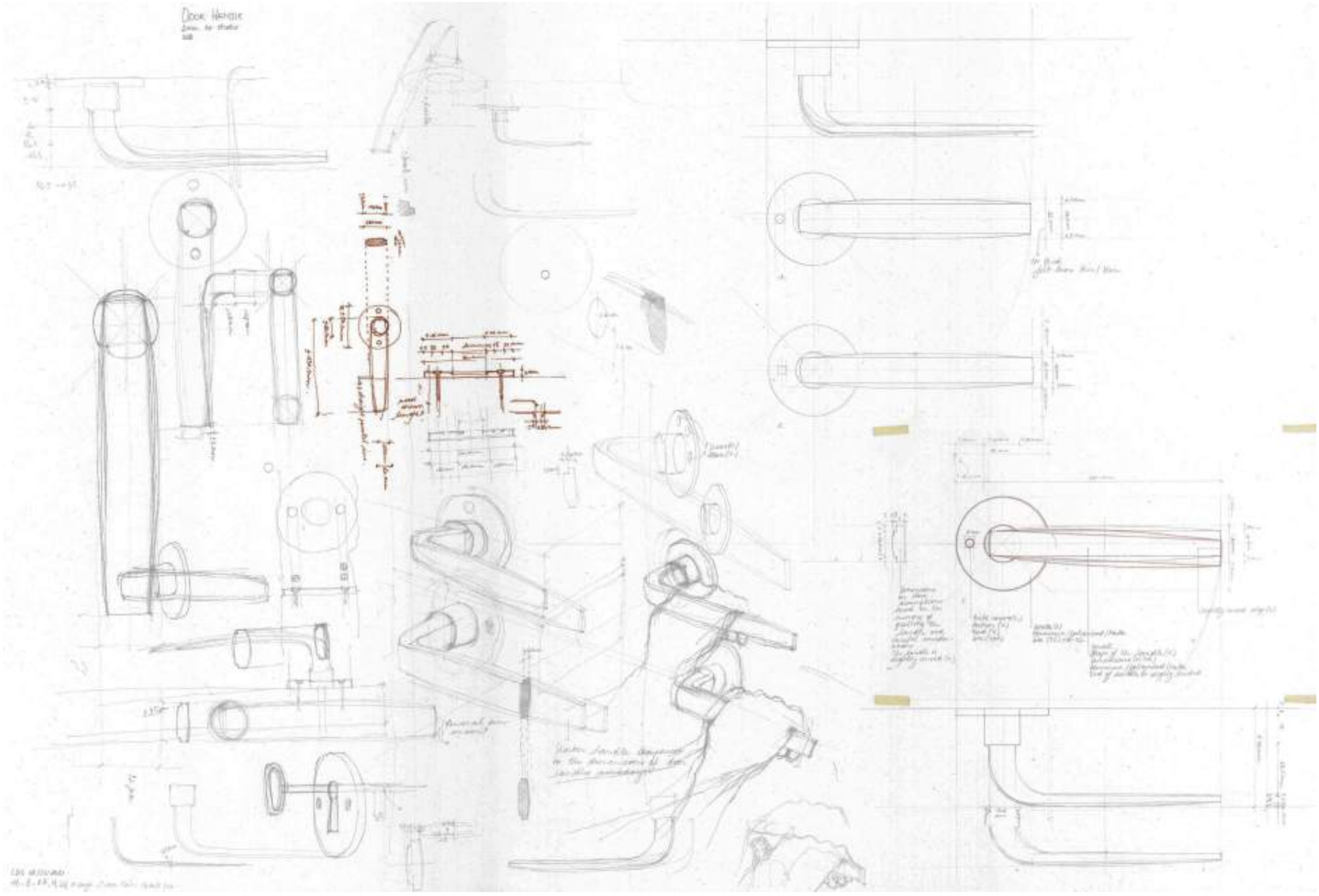

Fig. 8. Louise De Brabander, Image from *On the Fragility of Empathy: Drawing as Empathic Musing*, PhD diss., KU Leuven, 2022.

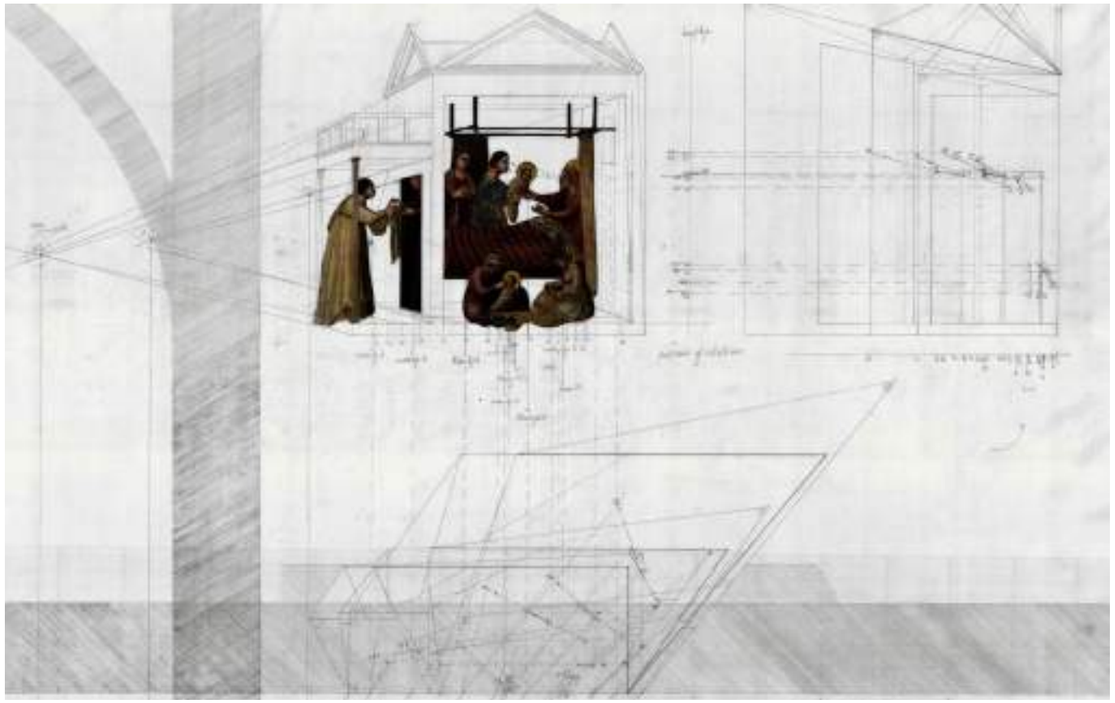

Fig. 9. Eva Beke, Image from *Perspicio: To Look At, Through and Beyond the Picture Plane*, PhD diss., KU Leuven, 2022.

places. Adopting a phenomenological approach, it investigates how drawing cultivates the ability to 'feel into' places, a concept rooted in 19th-century philosophy and architectural phenomenology. Central to this process is the architect's capacity to empathize not only with future users but also with the place, emphasizing acute observation as a prerequisite for meaningful spatial intervention.

The methodology combines walking and writing with iterative hand-drawing processes, such as Memo Drawing and Critical Iterative Drawing, to develop empathic insights. The *Fragment-Instrument* is introduced as a method for understanding places by assembling holistic perceptions through their fragmented parts, challenging traditional observational methods. Through these experimental and reflective drawing methods, this drawing research demonstrates how drawing deepens awareness and generates knowledge by enhancing the empathic relationship between observer and place.

Beke Eva (PhD). *Perspicio: To Look At, Through and Beyond the Picture Plane*[18]. This research delves into the role of hand-drawn linear perspective as a tool for engaging with and reinterpreting the spatiality of Proto-Renaissance pictorial works, emphasizing the notion of place. By reconstructing painted spaces like Giotto's *The Birth of the Virgin* and Giovanni di Paolo's *The Head of Saint John the Baptist Brought before Herod*, the study reveals how pre-perspectival imagery opens a dialogue between *Here* and *There*. The central picture plane is transformed into a paradoxical place – a barrier and a threshold – inviting viewers to observe, dwell in, and mentally explore the depicted spaces.

Through iterative drawing experiments and reflective cycles, the research treats perspective as more than geometry; it becomes a lens for questioning how we experience place. By confronting the friction between metric *correctness* and atmospheric ambiguity, this work reframes perspective drawing as a scenographic device, enabling architects to reconceive place as an imaginative, layered, and subjective mental space.

Concluding Observations

Based on the research described above and particularly through the doctoral research cases we gradually come to a more precise identification of our position in the domain of design-driven research.

Through concrete formulations regarding the agency of drawing in design-driven research we are developing a domain-specific discourse that appears to become accepted and broadly applied in the international community of design-driven research.

This becomes clear through a manyfold academic publications (conference papers, proceedings, papers, posters, exhibitions, lectures ...) and through the international interest coming regarding the research in our research group.

The discourse developed permits us to lift subjective matters that are coming to the surface through individual processes of drawing to an intersubjective level of understanding. Key in this process is the consequent application of the Concentric Circles of Observation, which is the necessary tool to keep the transition from the subjective to the intersubjective within the boundaries of academic rigour.

For a better understanding of the agency and instrumentalization of subjectivities in design-driven research, we refer to the distinction between the self and the other as described by Ranulph Glanville[19] and to the principles of transcendental intersubjectivity of Edmund Husserl[20].

In the process of drawing subjectivities, we develop immediate and simultaneous verbalisations as memo-writing through which direct connections between what is drawn and language are established. This has three intertwining consequences.

Firstly, this language lifts the subjectivities of the drawing process to a level of communicability and transferability. Despite the observation that drawings clearly communicate information and tacit knowledge as a drawing, we have developed this method of immediate verbalisation as a tool to check whether this tacit knowledge that the self collects by experiencing the drawing resonates with the tacit knowledge that the *other* collects by experiencing the drawing[21].

By doing so, the tacit knowledge detected by experiencing the drawing is translated into language, hence becomes more tangible and transferable. Language, as a tool for expressing thoughts, is deeply intertwined with subjective experiences shaped by physical embodiment through the act of drawing[22].

Secondly, the subjectivity at stake in the process of drawing a space inevitably loads this space with many layers of meaning through which this space becomes deeply personal, hence a place. Observing that this transition occurs in the research done in the research group it becomes clear that *place* is becoming a central research topic.

Finally, intertwining the deeply personal nature of the places investigated and surfaced through the ongoing drawing processes with immediate verbalisations as described above, makes the embodied experience and the layers of meaning of these personal places discussable, yet shareable.

Notes

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Spatial Heft in Flanders

Michael McGarry

Michael McGarry

This publication offers an insight into the work of an atypical grouping of scholars and practitioners who have been creatively curating space in multiple senses of the word - cultural, intellectual, imagined, and attitudinal. Their shared endeavour is about architecture, but only if we distil that definition to mean those conditions of material and spatial resonance. The wider spatial context is set by Michel Foucault:

«The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein»[1].

The reasons are numerous – time-based notions of Enlightenment progress were unseated by the terrible reality of two world wars followed by mass displacement, decolonisation, globalisation, climate crisis – all conceptually rooted in space. The promised certainty explicit in modernism was replaced by an ambivalence, which in turn triggered collective and individual disorientation, a sense of unstable uprootedness, the condition of being lost, yet another spatial analogy.

Paralleling this cultural shift, has been the refound acceptance of the indivisibility of mind and body, that core knowledge is embodied, and that human experience has always been predicated on the position of the body in space, and thereby the body's position relative to other entities[2].

From metaphysical existentialism we have moved to the primacy of experience and an acceptance of the limitations of language-based knowledge, particularly English. Poststructuralism has unsettled previously stable narratives, even the very premise of the narrative[3]. Advances in neurology have given insight to creativity as thought process, and where knowledge resides (some indeed is in the fingertips)[4]. There is a sense we have never been better placed to understand the totality, the completeness (Foucault's *simultaneity*) of our existence.

The last but critical contextual aspect for this grouping must be the location of this work in Flanders, in Ghent, with its extraordinary visual culture and indeed the coincidence of the wonderful altarpiece by the brothers van Eyck. Art (especially visual) is predicated on spatiality – Panofsky[5], White, Arnheim[6], Greenberg, Stella[7], Deleuze[8] and a host of others have wrestled with the fabulous paradox that the nature of space might be best revealed and challenged through media where its characterising aspect (the third dimension) is not to hand.

This is the cultural and intellectual context of the remarkable pedagogical and artistic endeavour encapsulated in these three studios (*Studio Anatomy*, *The Double Look*, and *The Drawing and the Space*) with their interweaving archipelagos - the underpinning ethos being the insistence on the centrality of space to the understanding of existence, and an acknowledgment of the limitations of Enlightenment thought and rationality.

Recurring themes and fascinations are evident, primary among which must be representation – representation as the constitution of new knowledge as distinct from mimesis; and representation as being uniquely generative as a consequence of its reflexivity.

Particular conditions around representation apply in the discipline of architecture given that we act vicariously, *allographically* rather than *autographically* to use the American philosopher Nelson Goodman's terms[9]. This relative remoteness to the actuality of building provokes the second paradox – spatial practitioners might be most spatiality eloquent in their anticipation of the built rather than in its actual realisation. Forster writing of Schinkel:

«He incorporated his ideas not only in brick and mortar, but also in lines on paper, composing them in images and words. While thus representing rhetorically what was destined to be constructed materially, he allowed the engagement to break and the discourse to split again into one of objects and words. For this reason, he was forever looking for the right word and the proper shape in a quest for Entwürfe, for the preeminent condition in which he expected his architecture to take shape»[10].

These two paradoxes of displacement (one through media, one through agency) have profound consequences for the architect's planar representations, how spatiality (depth) is interrogated within the strictures of the sheet or screen. The point precedes optics, and engages our very ability to conceptualise space.

In this body of work the *section* is foundational, and is taken in its etymological sense as active cutting, as slice of revelation. The lineage from anatomical demonstration is obvious (Leonardo to Harvey to Hurst); the origin of the English word *autopsy* being the Greek verb *to see*. The resistance afforded by the skin to the scalpel is paralleled by that of the paper to the marking action of the drawing instrument. Vertical sections mimic the columnar stance of the drawer and the anisotropic nature of earthly space (skewed as it is by gravity): but the same surgical ruthlessness is applied here to horizontal sections - the plans bear the markings of the scythe's blade, *poché* renders the ground as solid with space extracted: Van Den Berghe, Diels, Demuynck. Even Eeckhout's orbital scenes read as slices of space, extracted momentary episodes, with her figures obliquely compressed in one axis. Shallow space dominates in the studios, the depth of field always limited, even the model-making succumbs, foreshortened as it is in one axis: Schaeverbeke, Vanmerhaeghe, Stragier.

These are widely acknowledged constructs in academia but the emphasis here is quite distinct: in the space between anticipating architecture through representation, and imagining it as physical and present, there resides the core thrust of this body of work. This creative gap is critical and is where the work goes beyond Frascari's framework[11], his being ultimately predicated on the anticipated constructed assemblage rather than as an imagined presence. Eeckhout's essay elaborates on the similar Eisenman/Hejduk discourse, but the body of work represented here avoids the intellectual binary, the work has its own trajectory and momentum validated as it is by its actual and tangibly imagined affects.

Second thematic concern of this constellation is that of metaphor, sometimes enunciated, more often inferred. The necessity for metaphor lies in the search for meaning: Hannah Arendt writing her introduction to Walter Benjamin wonderfully referred to metaphor «as the means by which the oneness of the world is poetically brought about»[12]. Crucially, metaphor is reflexive, the source is reimagined on foot of its latest dependency. As a device of associative thought and a source of creativity, metaphor generates new knowledge beyond the strictures of conventional European prose and rationality[13].

Metaphor abounds in the work - the narrative as journey, figure and ground, the anthropomorphic association of the articulated joint, the gesture, the embodied presence within both the drawing and its production, the fragment, the constructed mental space, and the implicit presumption of the solid/occupied as being the pre-existent condition: Van Den Berghe, Lagrange, Miglietta, Allard…

Turner, Eliasson, Twombly, Bacon debunked Enlightenment notions of void (Latin, *vocitus* meaning *empty*): Francis Bacon's prepainted canvases begin as potent surfaces of buried depth, awaiting incision and overlay, anything but blank, anything but empty; the hatched poché of the drawings within these studios convey a similar reading of occupied space where extraction is the conceptual spatial generator, the metaphorical clearing in the forest. *Raumplan* prevails (we are indeed in northern Europe), entities never slide frictionless but are anchored by their curtilages, Bruegel-like, a mapped and controlled landscape with figural entities related to each other in space (*raum* might be more accurate)[14]. The equivalent spatial density is in Venrooij's work, sound and silence alternating as figure and ground, silence as resonant presence, never nothing.

Time is a third theme, but more *kairos* than *chronos*, more Bergson than Newton. The appeal of Bruegel is the sense of a moment captured, a moment within a continuum, the huntsmen returning, the sweep of the scythe - chronological time collapsed, Breugel as a sixteenth century Cartier-Bresson: Porrez. Breughel frequently included bird traps in his scenes, an arrangement of timber boards precariously propped to drop on an unsuspecting bird, typically only photography has such imminence. *Kairos* is present across this group, nostalgia eluded; immediacy is ever-present in Vroman's vivid drawn choreographies, Sanders' intimate penworkings and their moment of contact: Eeckhout's cordite marks on Mylar of flattened lattices in space, the momentary immediacy in the juxtapositions within Lagrange and Vangrunderbeek's assemblies, and the interest in the performative architecture artefact/mechanism.

Fourth shared concern is around narratives; these are either narratives of methodologies or narratives of individual production, the latter being essential individual tropes, the former a reconciliation of the body of work to academically recognised epistemologies. By trope is meant the personal necessity of the narratives to their author, as distinct from and independent of their meaning to others. The methodologies are innovative, empirical, and implicitly loose in their application, guard rails so to speak.

Finally we have empathy – a problematic term in English that comes with risks of sentiment and self. Surprisingly recent in its conceptualisation within European culture, hitherto most usefully articulated in the weight-bearing lexicon of German Romanticism – *Einfühlung, Erlebnis, Erfahrung Empfindung, Anschauung, Ortsversetzung*… More recently the Irish writer Colum McCabe defined empathy «a way to inhabit an otherness beyond ourselves»[15] – this definition captures the vital displacement and guides that empathy is not limited to interpersonal kinship. Diels' penetrating drawings eclipse their personal origin, Vangrunderbeek's oscillations between determinacy and indeterminacy are predicated on a binary otherness as are Miglietta's drawn depictions as to how one element is offered to another – all profoundly relational.

Empathy is the genesis in the work around architecture and grief (Demuynck, Diels), but empathy permeates this entire pedagogical and research project, a project of relationships, spatial, artefactual, formal, compositional, and most consequentially human relationships, without which the degree of evident trust between students and academics would not have been possible.

Panofsky devotes 41 dense pages to the Ghent Altarpiece in his contentiously titled two volumes on early renaissance painting[16]. Simply put, the altarpiece deviates

Fig. 1 Jan van Eyck, Hubert van Eyck, *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb (Ghent Altarpiece)*, Detail of the exterior-closed view. Sint-Baafskathedraal, Ghent (BE), 1426-32.

from multiple orthodoxies of its time – there are unexpected allegorical conjunctions, the respective fraternal inputs are unclear, sensuality and formality sit cheek by jowl, and there are unsettling juxtapositions of scales. It's a syncretic wonder, unsynthesised, episodic, kairological, imminent, spatially dense and without voids, held together in every sense by its imperfect folding timber frame. As with Francis Bacon the painted surface is but one spatial layer beneath which are multiple. The two protagonists of the Annunciation on the altarpiece's exterior panels occupy opposing edges causing a charged space to be subtended laterally across the four panels (two of which contain only space); that space is then compressed vertically between floor and ceiling, with the third axis (at right angle to the picture plane) providing only restricted release. That space would (of itself) have such substance and presence is a marvel. An equivalent sensibility underpins the work of this extraordinary group - the pre-eminence of dense space.

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Setting the (Drawing) Table for Design Research

Penelope Haralambidou

A perspective drawing on tracing paper, filmed with a camera positioned directly above it, lies on a white drawing table. Two female hands holding a brown cardboard tube enter the frame, stretch across the table, grasp the edge of the paper, and, with gentle touches, begin to roll the drawing towards the invisible body on the left. The sheet of paper is part of a continuous scroll of meticulously drawn plans, sections, and elevations in pencil, neatly attached to one another with tape. With repeated gestures reminiscent of my grandmother's rolling out phyllo pastry on a kitchen table, the hands here unfold the nonverbal narrative of drawing research across the surface.

Entitled *Bootleg*, this video piece by Dr Eva Beke, which uses the drawing table as a stage to narrate her excavation of perspectival depth, was one of my first encounters with the work produced at *The Drawing and the Space* research group[1]. Created and performed on a drawing table for Beke's Master's project, the work served as the seed for her doctoral thesis, for which I was invited to act as an external examiner in 2022. Using this encounter as a springboard, my reflection on this volume's collection of essays will be positioned around the architectural *drawing table*, or *drafting board*, drawing out its symbolic and material significance as an underlying matrix connecting all the group's works.

The word *table* derives from the Latin *tabula*, meaning *tablet*, *board*, or *plank*, which also refers to a mathematical chart. This etymology points to the interconnected early histories of the table, inscription, and architectural drawing, dating back to clay tablets used for writing, drawing and mathematical calculation. In *Changing Plans: From footprints as Indexes of Construction to Horizontal Section*', Paul Emmons proposes that one of the oldest surviving images of an architectural plan is found on a 2200 BC, Mesopotamian stone sculpture depicting a tablet on the lap of an architect-king[2].

Not often analysed in depth in architecture, the object of the table is a recurring metaphor in philosophy, where it becomes a stage on which questions of reality, meaning, and relation are played out. In Plato's theory of ideal forms, the carpenter's table is only an imitation of the perfect, eternal form of «tableness»[3]; Hannah Arendt uses it as a metaphor for the world, a common, stable object that both connects and separates people who gather around it[4]; Bruno Latour reanimates the table, mixing its meanings of a chart and physical object, as a mediator, an active participant in networks of humans and materials[5]; and in Edmund Husserl's phenomenology it serves as a metaphor for the object of perception as it appears to consciousness[6]. Using Husserl's table as a starting point, Sara Ahmed's feminist take challenges the white male philosopher's writing table with the embodied collective experience of the kitchen/dinner table[7]. Her table functions like a micro-architecture, a space of orientation that structures relations between bodies and objects. For Ahmed, the table organises space and relation – how we sit, face, reach, and orient ourselves – and becomes a way to think about how worlds are made through habits and histories.

In all the work presented in this collection of essays, the figure of the drawing table becomes a constant, if not veiled, metaphor for a specific type of architectural drawing that roots the drawing body in the depicted architectural form, attuning it to the moment of discovery of yet unknown, or unnamed, architectural dimensions. This essay will focus on the table's role as both a facilitator of individual drawing practices and a setting for design research discourse.

Admittedly, this interest in the table and its connection with architectural drawing has been a constant source of fascination and a stage for many of my own design research projects. From the early design of a large composite table displaying drawings and images composing *Athens-Scape* the exhibition about the forthcoming Athens Olympics in Florence Hall at the RIBA, 2003; to the central table display of all my hand-drawn *thinking drawings* for my Blossoming of Perspective exhibition, 2007[8]; the drawing/film/table adaptation of Alain Rennais' film Last Year at Marienbad in Déjà vu, 2009[9]; and finally a second three-table adaptation this time of a text by proto-feminist medieval author Christine de Pizan in my installation for the City of Ladies exhibition, 2020, my reflections on drawing are framed by tables[10].

During my close reading of the material collected in this book, I could not fail to notice how the role of the table as a metaphor for human connection and the exchange of ideas, highlighted in the philosophers' writing and conference table, is perhaps even more relevant for the type of table on which we draw. The drawing table becomes the essential foundation of the highly valued and shared embodied act of drawing, which is often described in the book as inhabiting, an *occupation* of the object of the drawing itself.

In their concluding reflection *Space Making becoming Place Making: Drawing Research in the Research Group the Drawing and the Space* Thierry Lagrange and Jo Van Den Berghe unpack their doctoral supervisory method as a process that takes place *At the Drawing Table*:

«In our research lab we have a series of drawing tables around which we have created several supervisory situations in which we have meticulously applied the method of Concentric Circles of Observation»[11].

The object of the drawing table becomes the epicentre of the shifting concentric-circle choreography of discourse among the candidate, supervisory team, panel members, peers, and the wider academic community in the production of architectural research.

It is the locus where design research work is imagined, produced, displayed, communicated, reimagined and evaluated[12]. In their shared investigation into the relationship between drawing and space, the research group brought together by Van Den Berghe and Lagrange gathers around the table to explore drawing «not merely as a representational tool, but as an agent – a method of inquiry that generates new knowledge and reveals intangible properties of place»[13].

Beyond serving as a shared research method and a communication platform, many contributing authors use their close encounters with their drawing tables to disclose their personal, often intimate, experiences of the situated act of drawing.

Esther Venrooij, in her analysis of her method in *You See I Write by Ear. Modes of Listening* positions the attentive listening by a table:

«It is not necessary that you go out of your house. Remain by your table and listen. Do not even listen, only wait. Do not even wait, be completely still and alone. The world will offer itself to you to be unmasked; it cannot do otherwise, in ecstasy it will write before you»[14].

In *What's in a Detail? Drawing as Maieutic Exercise in Architectural Design*, Enrico Miglietta describes the sheet of paper on the drawing table as a *field of action* where intimacy turns representation into a search for relation and when the drawing begins to almost embody the *weight of things*:

«More than representing, the drawing relates. Tilting the drawing table vertically, then, suddenly aligns the drawing gesture with the direction of the forces, with gravity itself. The pencil stroke, sometimes sharp and hard, sometimes soft and diffuse, registers invisible but perceived tensions»[15].

The term *maieutic* relates to the Socratic mode of inquiry, which, through dialogue, aims to bring latent ideas into clear consciousness, but the ancient Greek term is also etymologically connected to the work of a midwife delivering a baby. The drawn details and joints on the tabular plane become fragments from which the unborn body of the building can emerge.

Riet Eeckhout, *The Search for the Experiential Space in the Drawing Called Architecture* also describes a desire «to enter and occupy the drawing as a drafter… beyond representational imperatives»[16]. For Eeckhout the drawing surface supported by the tilted vertically drawing board is a materialised picture plane *positioned between mind and subject-matter*.

«Being immersed, sitting up close to the drawing board, unable to see the edges of the drawing, prevents the drawing from becoming an object, treasured in hand. It allows the subject matter in its spatial intent to become tangible, capable of being sensed, experienced, and touched»[17].

So, the surface of the table holding the drawing is not just a flat plane, but a portal through which the body of the depicted architecture can be conceived, delivered and inhabited. It serves as the ground, a scaled abstraction of our connection to the earth, or the theoretical plane intersecting our visual field, on which the amorphous realm of the imagination is given shape through a process of excavation.

During my single visit to Ghent, on the occasion of Beke's viva, I had the pleasure of discussing the complexities of design research around dinner tables and coffee tables with my generous hosts and editors of this volume, Van Den Berghe and Lagrange. We touched upon the different modes of thinking in architectural research through lines, words, and numbers. Pertinent to this discussion is the work of Jean-François Lyotard, who examines the complex relationship between *discourse*, what he sees as the realm of language, logic, and structured representation, and *figure*, the realm of visuality, sensation, and affect[18]. Lyotard also uses the term matrix to name the generative field or condition that gives rise to both discourse and figure, but which is itself neither purely linguistic nor purely visual. In yet another philosopher's use of the table as a metaphor, he describes it as the plane of *signification*, where meaning is produced within the *system of language* in contrast to the realm of *designation* and figural space. However, Lyotard does not simply oppose discourse and figure; instead, he shows their interdependence. Discourse always contains traces of the figural – it depends on sensory and libidinal energies for its force – while the figural can only appear through some form of discursive framing.

The Drawing and the Space research group's table also merges the figural with discourse. It facilitates the direct skin-on-skin connection between the drawn line, the body and the imaginary space it conjures. Setting the drawing table brings together the group of researchers and students around the drawing-in-the-making to oversee, lean, decipher, point, touch, and perhaps most importantly, attempt to articulate and translate lines into words, the figural into discourse. It is the location where discourse and figure coalesce, overlap and shift positions, in concentric circles of observation re-engaging with a matricial depth of meaning.

Every act of drawing on a membrane by hand requires a supporting surface, a plank, a board, or a table. So, how has the advent of digital design and the slow disappearance of the table from the drawing act transformed our relationship with, and orientation towards, the drawing table? Perhaps it is this gradual replacement of the table with the digital screen that gives rise to the need to assert and define its overlooked

Fig. 1. *Around the table*, CA²RE+ GHENT Erasmus+ project event, 2-7 October 2019.

significance. Digital design and drawing have eliminated the physicality of the drawing surface – the paper, the film, graphite and ink, smudges, and compass pin pricks – but have also begun releasing form from the shackles of the *veiled matrix* of the static Cartesian grid[19]. A question I see growing within the group is the need to define another deep *table* realm within the digital, able to sustain the link between discourse and the figural, and to explore alternative methods of delineating space. Can this new territory define «not only the way we design and build architecture but also the structure of our thinking and intellectual space?»[20]

As one of her examiners, I was fortunate enough to attend Beke's public doctoral defence, which took place in a haunting private chamber next to the altar of an abandoned Discalced Carmelite monastery in Ghent.

Her verbal exposition was accompanied by a digital projection of intricate drawings and exquisite models, filmed on the drawing table, now displayed vertically on the back wall partition.

In a magical moment during her presentation, and as the perfect coda to her outstanding research, Beke opened the hinged partition that hid the lattice barrier to the altar. This theatrical material re-enactment of the desire to occupy the drawing transported us, the audience, from the unfolded plane of the drawing table, through to the inaccessible altar, Lyotard's matrix and the deep space of the imagination.

Fig. 2. Penelope Haralambidou, *City of Ladies*, 2020. Repositioning the artefacts on the tables. Photograph by John Cruwys.

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Editors

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Contributors

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He has worked in architectural practice in Belgium, the Netherlands and the UK, was a senior lecturer in Environmental Design (UK) and Studio Director at Rice University (USA) Paris Program.

Eva Demuynck is a Belgian-based architect with a professional interest in making the intangible dimension of space tangible through the design of architectural details. In 2020, she joined KU Leuven Faculty of Architecture after being awarded a PhD Fellowship by the Research Foundation – Flanders (FWO). With her research project *The Embodiment of Consolation*, she explored how to help improve the mental well-being of bereaved individuals by including them in the design of personalized memorial spaces. Since 2025 she works as a partner at ÉVARISTE Architectuur and continues to support initiatives at the intersection of Architecture and Art Therapy.

Moragh Diels is an architect who advocates uncovering the healing potential of architecture. Her master's thesis *De laatste weken* (2019), developed within the course *The Drawing and the Space*, explored autobiographical drawing in architecture and evolved into a successful paper, after which she joined the related research group. She completed her first-year internship in Switzerland at the research-based office Herzog & de Meuron, followed by internships at Noémie Van Heuverswyn and B2AI, where she engaged with property developers and fire station projects. Currently, she works as a renovation coach at ROTSvzw in Ghent, assisting vulnerable homeowners through projects such as *GentKnaptOp* – which inspired the recent Flemish subsidy *Noodkoopfonds* – and Energiecentrale. In 2022, she co-founded *Mosterd* with architect-scenographer Astrid Kempeneers, a practice dedicated to the intelligent implementation of sustainable renovation measures.

Riet Eeckhout is an architect and associate professor at KU Leuven Faculty of Architecture. Her research in Drawing Architecture investigates the critical and generative potential of drawings beyond mere representation within architectural practice and education. She exhibits, lectures, and publishes on drawing as a mode of architectural research. Her drawings have been exhibited internationally, including at the Venice Biennale; La Galerie d'Architecture, Paris; Museum of Architectural Drawing, Tchoban Foundation, Berlin; the Architekturmuseum der TU Berlin; the Design Centre UQAM, Montreal; Art Omi: Architecture and Gallery A83 in New York.

Marie Porrez obtained her master's degree in Architecture in 2021 at KU Leuven Faculty of Architecture. After graduating, she started working as an architect in Belgium at ALT architectuur (www.alt-architectuur.be), where she continues to work today. Simultaneously, she maintains her own projects as a freelance practitioner-architect.
She graduated with her master's thesis: *Interiorities, Embeddedness and the Dwelling*. Upon which, as a researching architect, she continues to explore the immaterial aspects of places in a landscape – such as local characteristics, knowledge, inherent values and meanings – and the significance of immersive drawing techniques in exploring these.

Robin Schaeverbeke (www.ontwerpendleren.be) is an architect, senior lecturer and researcher at KU Leuven Faculty of Architecture, Belgium. He holds a PhD in Architecture from the KU Leuven. His research centres around practice-based epistemologies of tools, techniques and formulas for architectural imagination in action, teaching and learning. Currently, he directs the educational master program, exploring ways architects and interior architects can add value to schools and various learning environments. Investigating future challenges from a design-based point of view is at the heart of the program.

Nele Stragier works on projects under her own name and is a member of the architectural Collective Générale. Her approach is grounded in the belief of the added value of interaction. For each project, dialogue with the client and user is central, as is the interaction within the spatial composition and the integration of the built structure into its environment. She is deeply concerned with nature and climate, inclusion, and human well-being. She brings needs and dreams together in sustainable, timeless architecture. As a guest professor at KU Leuven Faculty of Architecture, Belgium, she teaches architecture design to bachelor's and master's students, engaging with socially relevant themes.

Dimitri Vangrunderbeek is a visual artist whose practice is grounded in sculpture and installation art. Central to his artistic practice is the formulation of sculptural methodologies to create poetic objects, installations and images with strong visual interaction. With his artworks he investigates aspects of human scale, proportion, geometry, form and structure, starting from everyday objects and materials. Vangrunderbeek holds a master's degree from the Royal College of Art, London and a PhD from RMIT University, Melbourne. He teaches at KU Leuven Faculty of Architecture. Further information about his work is available at www.dimitrivangrunderbeek.org.

Kristien Vanmerhaeghe is a partner at the architecture firm Burobill, based in Brussels. Burobill's work is often situated within complex urban contexts. The firm embraces adventurous architecture in which dialogue, nature and inclusion are central, aiming to contribute to a social and fair society through participatory design processes. In addition, she is a senior lecturer at KU Leuven Faculty of Architecture, Belgium. She teaches various design studios for both master's and bachelor's students, focusing on Brussels with particular attention to mixed-use urban sites connected to its neighbourhood. She has a passion for drawing. In the Elective Course Tinkerlab, she explores the boundary between architecture and graphic arts.

Esther Venrooij is a professor, artist, and composer whose work explores the interplay between sound, movement, and space. Her practice spans composed music, improvised electronica, video, and site-specific installations. With a PhD from KU Leuven on audio topography, she now holds a ZAP-mandate there and supervises doctoral research on spatial experiences. At LUCA School of Arts, she teaches and leads seminars such as *Audio Topography* and *Too Body to Fail*. Her research investigates the immaterial dimensions of space and includes projects *You See I Write by Ear* and *Sounding Things Out*.

Eva Beke graduated with a master's degree in architecture from KU Leuven Faculty of Architecture (2017). She received her PhD in 2022 for Perspicio: To Look At, Through and Beyond the Picture Plane, supervised by prof. dr. Jo Van Den Berghe and prof. dr. Thierry Lagrange. Her research by drawing inverts linear perspective to reconstruct and inhabit Proto-Renaissance pictorial spaces, exploring perspective as a tool for observation, spatial imagination, and the way we look at space. She recently completed a postgraduate programme in Cultural Heritage and is pursuing professional activities within the field of cultural education.

Louise De Brabander graduated with a master's degree in architecture from KU Leuven Faculty of Architecture (2017). Following her master's dissertation, she pursued a PhD titled *On the Fragility of Empathy: Drawing as Empathic Musing*. Her research, conducted through drawing, explored the role of architectural drawing, particularly drawing by hand, as a transformative tool for engaging human empathy in the observation and reconstruction of architectural place. Since completing her PhD in 2022, she has been working in an architectural practice.

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Penelope Haralambidou is Professor of Architecture and Spatial Culture at The Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL. She initiated, developed and is the Co-director of the Cinematic and Videogame Architecture MArch programme, the first of its kind in the UK. She was formerly Director of Communications and the PhD Programmes Coordinator and has supervised over 25 doctoral design research and history & theory theses. In her teaching, she employs innovative research-based methodology that uses digital film and immersive environments to rethink architectural design through the dimension of time. Her design-led, interdisciplinary research combines architectural drawing, model-making, and time-based media as investigative tools to analyse ideas across architecture, visual representation, the politics of vision, art, cinema, and medieval studies. She is the author of the monograph *Marcel Duchamp and the Architecture of Desire* (Routledge, 2013). She has exhibited her design work internationally, and her solo show City of Ladies was hosted by DomoBaal Gallery in 2020.

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