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Displacement, Other-ness and Multiplicity

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Displacement, Other-ness and Multiplicity

Introduction

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Based on research and creative projects that address issues of displacement of people, objects, identities and aesthetics, this research cluster explores strategies of crossing boundaries, cross-medium translations, transcultural exchanges, narratives and uncanny assemblies, hybridised aesthetics and reinterpretations of traditions in the understanding and production of new spaces and places. Context of critical interrogations and experimental projects range from Beirut, Buenos Aires, Mediterranean/Southern Europe, Southern US, Berlin and London, revealing often invisible or neglected realities of migration and segregation, as well as polemical situations of refugees and marginalised communities. Political conflicts that separate parts of a city, marginalised migrant cultures that seek hybridised manifestations, and strategies of juxtaposition between contemporary installations and existing traditional architecture to provoke uncanny relations, are investigated through subjective and immersive spatial experiences and as vehicles of new spatial strategies. These projects offer original contribution to knowledge in the intersection of politics, culture, art, architecture, sociology, ethnography, geography, aesthetics and philosophy.

Mohamad Hafeda, staff research profile

Mohamad Hafeda's research explores the use of art and architecture processes as urban research tools to negotiate sites of conflict and conditions of borders. His research is culminated in an authored book entitled 'Negotiating Conflict in Lebanon: Bordering Practices in a Divided Beirut' (I.B. Tauris, 2019). The book is a practice-led and site-specific research project that works with residents of Beirut to investigate the interplay between material and immaterial borders created across political and sectarian struggle, using interviews, documentations and media representations. It proposes a method of negotiating, one that considers how artistic research can itself be considered as a form of critical spatial practice and, in particular, a bordering practice; what the book terms, critical bordering practice. This enables the rethinking of border positions, including those between disciplines and between spatial conditions.

Currently Mohamad is working on a new practice-led research project entitled 'The Time While Waiting' that explores the temporal dimension of the bordering practices of displacement. The project focuses on the notions of time and waiting as borders and mechanisms controlling the space of displaced communities in the city of Wakefield. It works with a group of refugees through employing time-based media to produce a film and a new form of cartography. Part of Mohamad's research activities in the academic year 2018-19 included presenting a keynote lecture entitled 'Negotiating Conflict' at the Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon, Portugal, October 2018. The lecture inaugurated the conference 'An Alternative Future' and was followed by a one-day workshop that Mohamad conducted with five architect collectives selected from the Future Architecture Platform call for ideas. The collectives responded to the themes of the Gulbenkian Museum's exhibition 'Art and Architecture between Lisbon and Baghdad'.

In addition, Mohamad was invited to participate and present a paper at 'Bordering On' symposium at the School of Architecture, Louisiana State University, USA, February 2019; and to take part in the 'Border Studies Network Gathering', DePauw University, USA, September 2018. His film 'Sewing Borders' (2017) was selected in 2018 for the International Film Festival Rotterdam, Holland, and Queer Lisboa International Film Festival, Portugal; and was part of the 'Living Room: UIT' exhibition at ISCP, New York, USA, 2019.
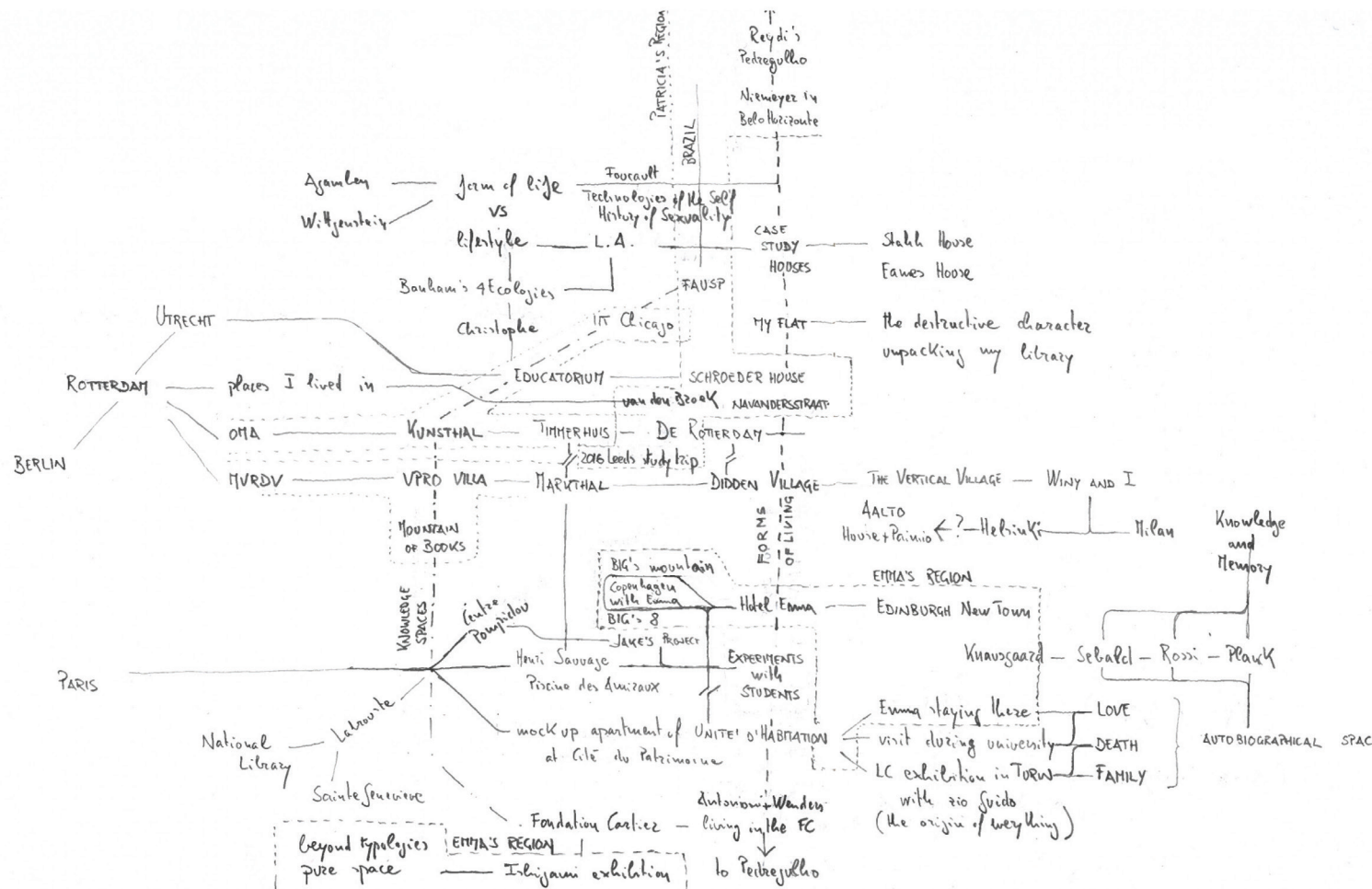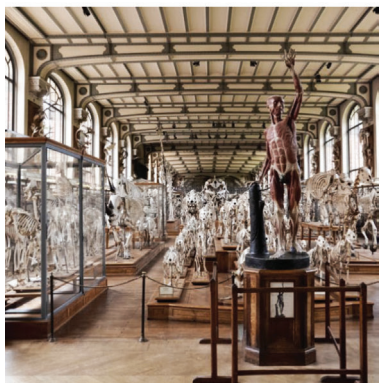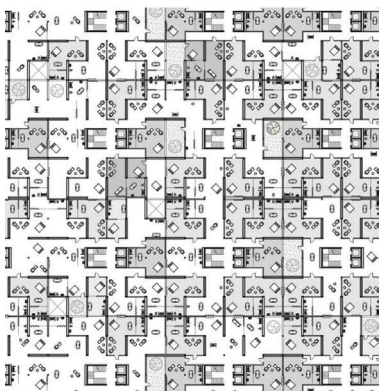

Mohamad Hafeda, Still from Sewing Borders, 2018

Mohamad Hafeda, The Twin Sisters are 'About to' Swap Houses, gallery installation at Cities Methodologies exhibition, UCL, London, 2012

Architecture, Knowledge, Work: a User's Manual. Index/
map, of explorations of life through architecture

MVRDV, Didden Village, Rotterdam, 2006

Bulat Gafurov, Hotel Paris MArch Studio, ESALA 2011

Museum of Natural History, Gallery of Paleontology, Paris

George Epolito, staff research profile

George's research explores the intersection of politics and culture with an emphasis on the innovative, often hybridised, aesthetics produced by people who have been displaced into the margins of societies. He previously focused on the plight of marginalised cultures, their situation within the realm of the everyday, and their potential for informing new design strategies for the built environment having investigated this potential in African-American culture, Puerto Rican culture, and Italian immigrant culture – both in the Rió de la Plata Basin of Latin America and the Deep South of the United States. George more recently branched out to view the Italian influence in their colonies in North and East Africa. George's research interests traverse Architecture and the Everyday; Social and Spatial Marginalisation in the Americas, immigrant/ethnic enclaves, Italian Presence in Art and Architecture of the Rió de la Plata Basin, migration/displacement of cultural capital/transculturation, Tropical Modernism in Latin America; Intersection of avant-garde strategies and historic structures, non-place/residual space/places that have lost their meaning over time/urban ruins/artefacts; architectural theory and architectural pedagogy.

Architecture Knowledge Work, A User's Manual
Giorgio Ponzo, PhD project

The research looks for definitions of 'knowledge' and 'work' and their relation to life through the account of the author's experience — both as architect (in training, as student, at work, as designer and scholar) and as ordinary man — of a series of architectural works (realized buildings, projects, books, exhibitions, citiescapes, etc.). Using the methodology of an autobiographical narrative, the research aims to challenge the conventional disciplinary boundaries of architectural knowledge construction, looking at architectural history and theory through the lens of life experience, and at cities, buildings, and building typologies as fixed backgrounds for everyday activities.

Architecture gives us the possibility to live in someone else's work, in someone else's understanding and definition of life and its activities. In the relationship with this constructed nature, we write our own understanding of life: in the space written by another subject, we strive to define our own position against a material artefact that frames our life. The relationship between architecture and (auto)biography questions both the ways in which we construct architectural knowledge and the categories we use to define the work of architecture. Architectural knowledge emerges as a collection of fragments, memories, pieces of knowledge often belonging to different disciplines (literature, photography, cognitive sciences, philosophy, etc.) that the autobiographical account aims at connecting, making sense of an otherwise scattered disciplinary compartmentalization, through life experience.

Architectural Appropriations in Contemporary Sculpture: The Uncanny Effect of Cross-Medium Migrations
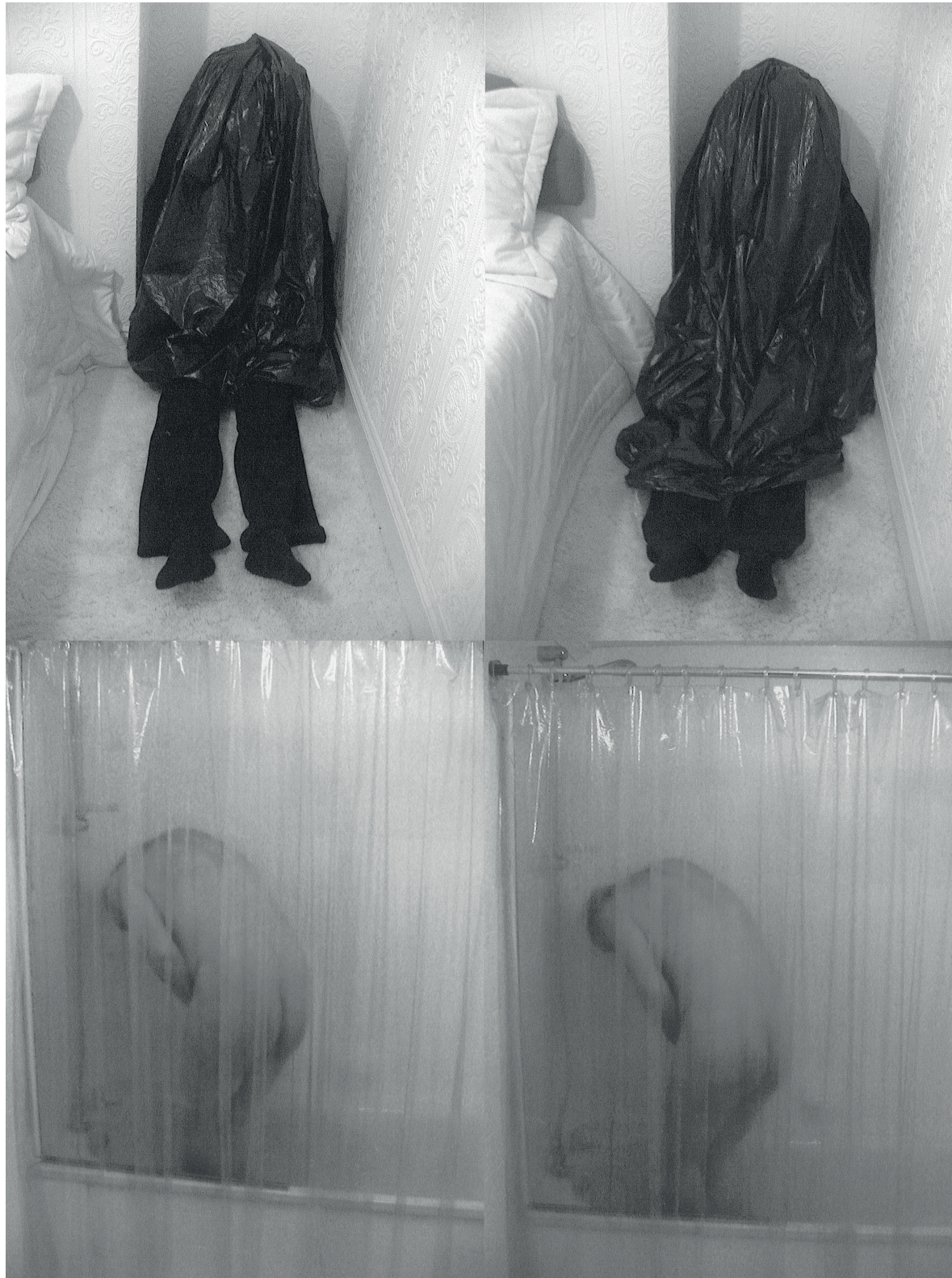Kirstie Gregory, PhD project

This project looks at the way contemporary sculptors repurpose the forms and attendant associations of architecture, why and how they do this and to what effect. It focuses on sculptors who have returned to this way of working repeatedly in their practice, adopting and adapting the medium-specificities of architecture for their own purposes. The research will focus on Mike Kelley, Mark Manders, Gregor Schneider and Rachel Whiteread among others. Using a psychoanalytical methodological approach, and examples of gothic or 'uncanny' literature, Kirstie examines the echoes of narratives which reinforce the viewer's psychic and sensory experience.

Kirstie is currently Research Programme Assistant at the Henry Moore Institute, Leeds and completed a Masters by Research on the work of Romanian/British sculptor Paul Neagu and worked as a curatorial assistant on the exhibition 'Paul Neagu: Palpable Sculpture' (2015) there. She is an interviewer for the British Museum's National Life Stories oral history project for which she is currently interviewing sculptor Phyllida Barlow. She is Assistant Editor of the Subject/Object: New Studies in Sculpture series of publications. Her writing has been published in Paul Neagu: Palpable Sculpture, Sculptor's Papers from the Henry Moore Institute Archive, Artist's Lives, Sculpture Journal, Careers in Art History, Glamourie, and in An Introduction to the Principles of Symmetrical Intimacy Volume 1.

A Woman's World
Anna Pepe, research project and photography exhibition

A Woman's World is a journey across photographic genres, including documentary, portrait, architecture and fine art, which explores women, places, cultures and habitats around the world. Findings from this ongoing research project were curated in a photography exhibition hosted by Leeds Beckett University's 'Women and the Built Environment' research cluster in the School of Built Environment and Engineering and supported by Leeds Beckett University's Gender Forum and Equality & Diversity Team. The exhibition included 36 photos spanning 8 years and 9 countries in 3 continents, and was centred around 4 themes: contrast, intended as both chiaroscuro and contradistinction, i.e. the effect of contrasted light and shadow and, at the same time, the effect of contrasting different realities, qualities and aspects of lifestyles, cultures and habitats of women around the world; extraordinary ordinary, an oxymoron that juxtaposes two seemingly contradictory terms and offers an alternative viewpoint on what we may easily disregard as 'normal' or unworthy of our attention, for example ordinary circumstances, like waiting at a bus stop, routine events, like going to the market, habitual gestures, like touching one's face, and other ordinary scenes from women's everyday life that somehow possess remarkable, unusual or outstanding qualities; genius loci, i.e. 'sense of place', the prevailing character or atmosphere of places, particularly those inhabited by women around the world; imaginaria, i.e. places of imagination, an exploration of the imaginative depiction of women through the artistic media of sculpture, street art and graffiti.

Gregor Schneider, 'Die Familie Schneider', 2004, detail

Play and Social Housing in Britain: An examination of the play element in post war social housing and its relevance to social housing today and the future
Jeneill Codner, MArch thesis

The modern age saw a dramatic shift in social housing design. Architects during this time designed the structures rationally and pragmatically as a response to the conditions generated by the world wars. Although successful on many accounts, the housing designs were a cause of concern for its inability to become meaningful spaces for its inhabitants. In an attempt to remediate its effects, the notion of play was considered with an expectation of creating a more receptive form of social housing.

This dissertation will consider a play abstract as developed in Johan Huizinga's 1949 book Homo Ludens- wherein a system of 'rules' will be used to guide the study. It will critically analyse the attempts of several game changers to provide a link between their ideologies and the shift seen in modern architectural culture. Primarily focusing on the major organisations such as the Team X, the Smithsons and the interchange between them as well the polemical positions of Constant Nieuwenhuys, it is expected that the evolution of social housing may be understood through the lenses of play within the design process. Shifting scales from urban [the city] to the architectural [social housing], the dissertation will examine play as a means of progressing out of the state of rationalism and will challenge the common understandings of the phenomenon, defending its potential in social housing from past to foreseeable future.

Anthropology of a Towerblock: Excitement, Demonization and New Directions
Aleksandra Szwedo, MArch thesis

Since 1980s council housing architecture has been under significant pressure. The righ-to-buy scheme, although allowing the tenants to own their home, caused the loss of tens of thousands of council homes that were not being replaced. This, together with cuts in local government funding, led to an increasing shortage of council housing. Poorly maintained estates were slowly declining and loosing their property value. Today, valuable land housing many modernist estates, is being sold to private developers for regeneration. The perception of council tenants as groups of lesser value to the area often provides an excuse for the sale transaction.

This thesis introduces the life in Towerblock in the City. Both are fictional places based on a number of case studies creating a set for a semi-fictional story which allows the reader to understand the relationship between architecture and anthropology. The thesis gives voice to the devalued groups portraying them as regular people trapped in the cycle of authority decision making and deprived of their own input.
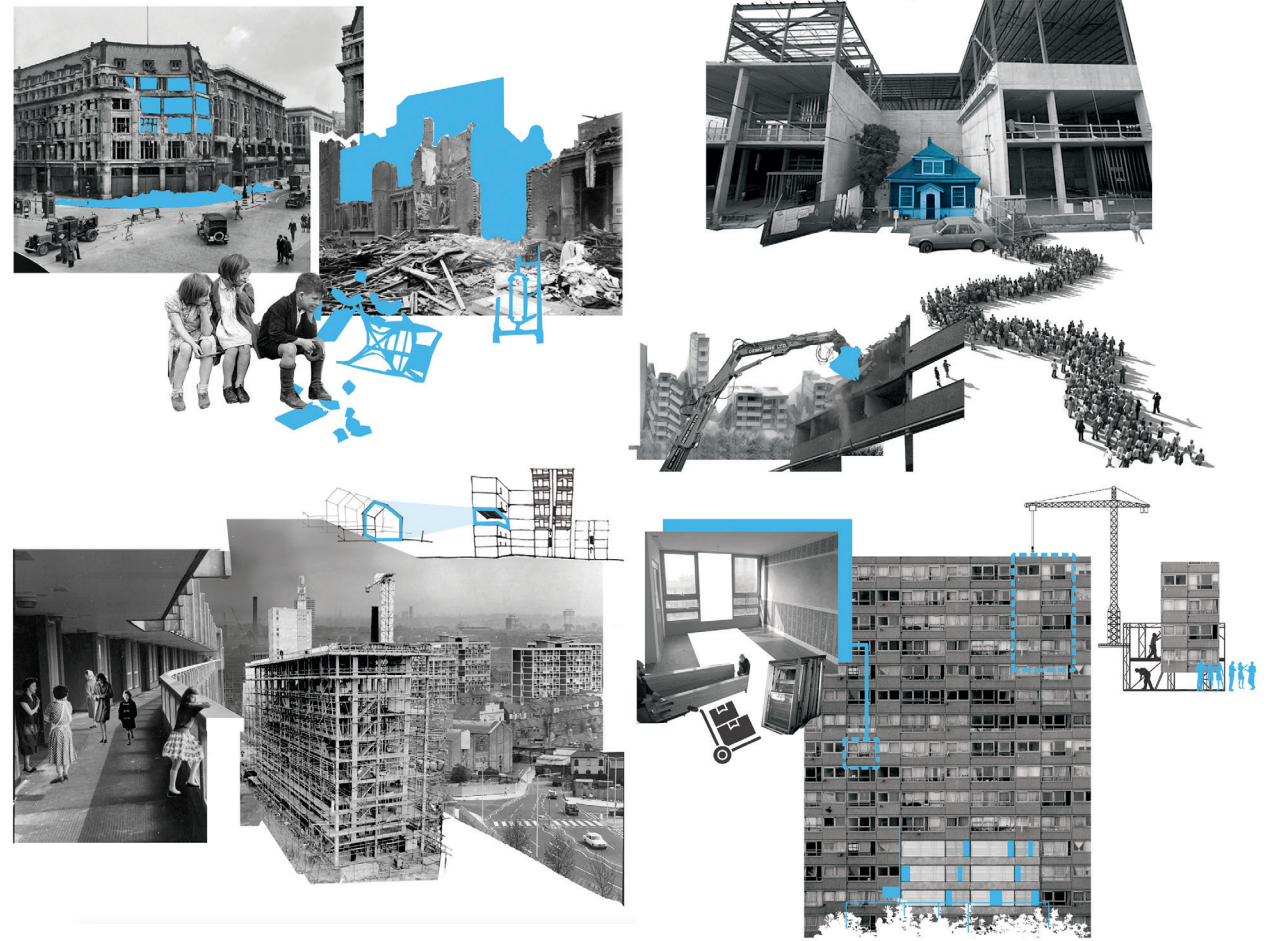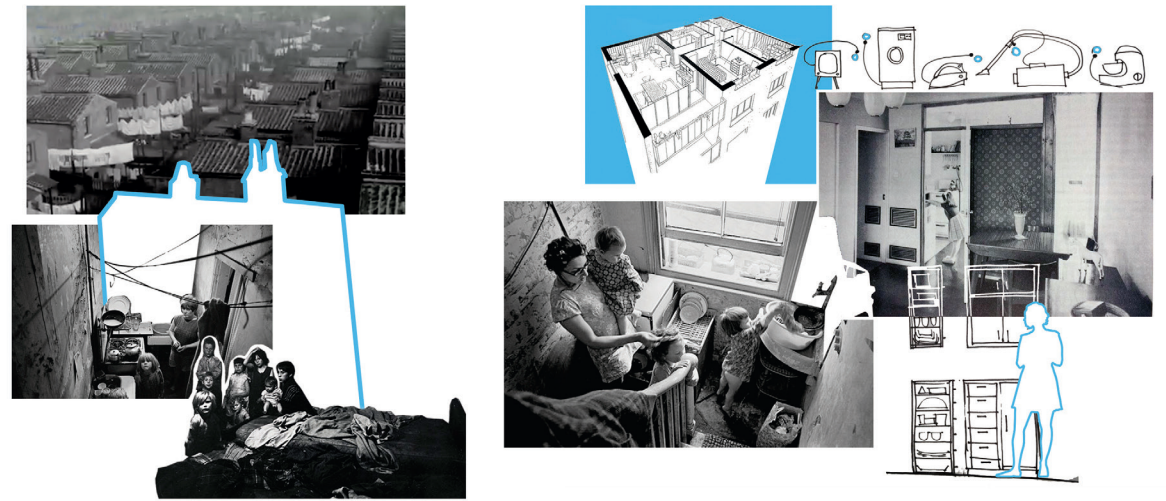
Architecture and the Escape: Dissecting the infrastructure of entertainment, performance and leisure
Hanzla Asghar, MArch thesis

Architecture and escape have always had an intimate relationship, their infrastructures are intertwined, they rely on one another to exist and carry out the various actions of the people who escape within them. What do these infrastructures look like and what are the architectural tools that realise them?

There have been various infrastructures of escape within history, whether that be the British seaside resort towns or the American. There are numerous historic infrastructures that highlight the need to escape from the worsening conditions of the everyday metropolis and the everyday pressures of contributing to an economic society. Within this context of escape the masses would flock to these locations on the periphery to indulge in entertainment, leisure, performance, abnormality and nature. Society as a whole has had the ever increasing need to escape, today it's through holidays, virtual environments and portable devices with an ever-expanding stream of content. Although, there are various groups on the periphery of society that have a different relationship to the escape, their displacement whether geographically or out of the family has forced them to create these exciting and dynamic infrastructures of escape where architecture has the chance to flourish.

How can these tools of architecture be identified and understood? What infrastructure of escape, entertainment and leisure are prevalent within society of today and what will their significance be in the future? The way in which we escape has drastically changed within the last decade, from the communal to the private and from the physical to the virtual. An investigation into the current dilemmas and conditions of escape within society will be investigated to formulate a toolkit for a new and interesting typology of escape.
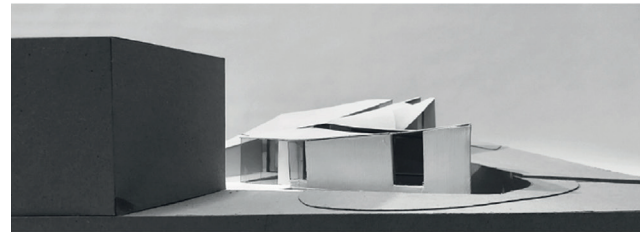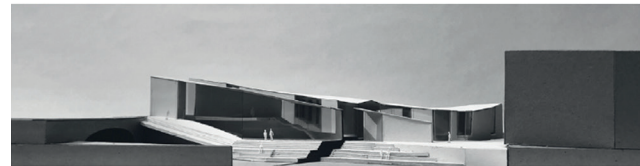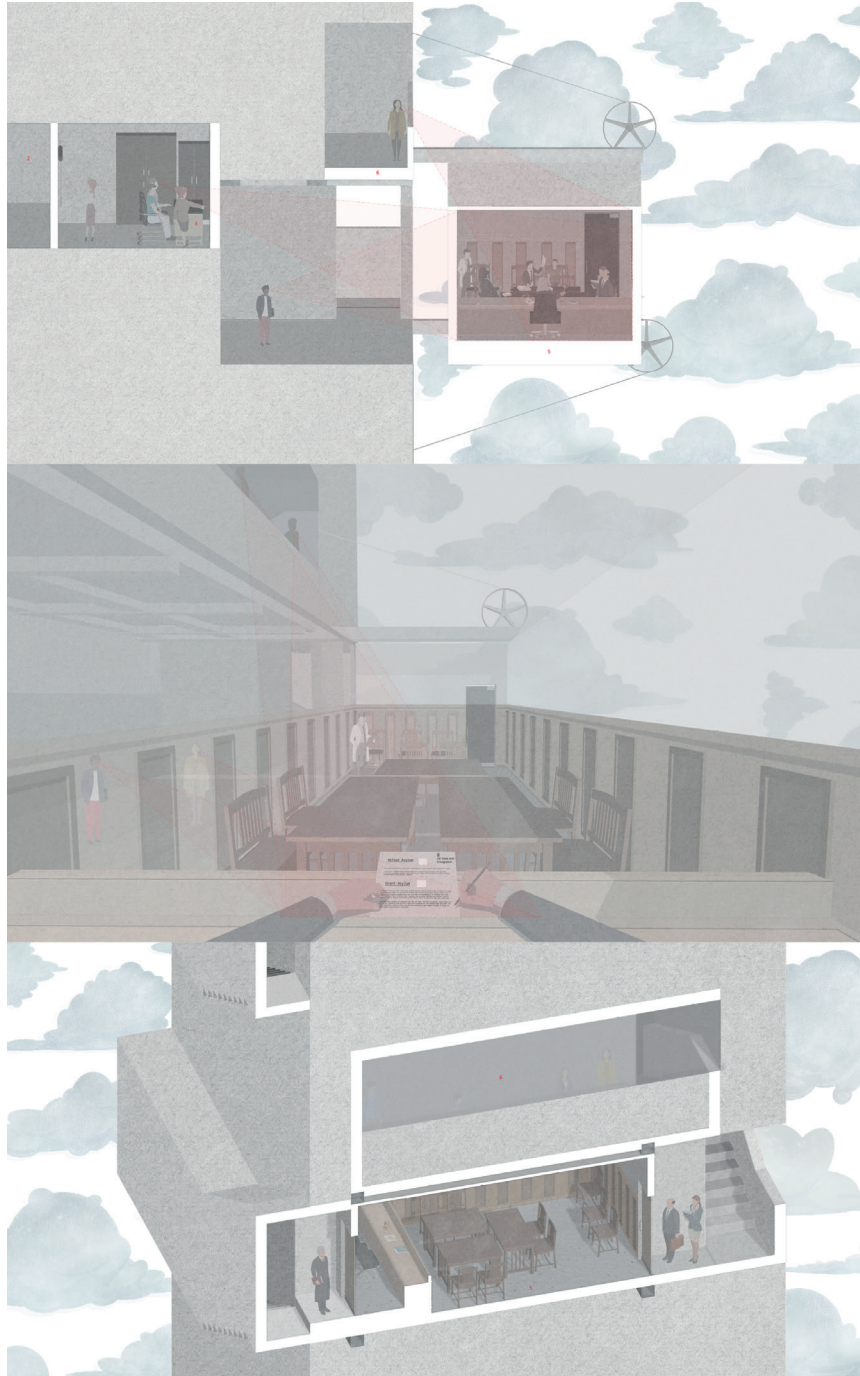

Aleksandra Szwedo, collages of a semi-fictional story across thirteen storeys, Anthropology of a Towerblock

Jamil Dossa, The Court Of Divine Justice. An Appeals Court For Asylum Seekers

Callum Suttle, River Aire Visitor Centre

Joe Clark, Waterfront Gallery

At the intersection between art and architecture, private and public, permanent and temporary, the BA1 Design Studio investigated the notion of architecture as extension of the existing context in the public realm. Intended as design experiments in the urban context, the different projects realised through the year, respond to different sites, programmes and scales. Through a series of design exercises and a critical evaluation of current practices of public space, the Design Studio introduced students to the design process as a creative and experimental approach to architectural design. Using drawing, photography, collage and scale models, they generate small-scale hypothetical proposals for public interventions that introduce new activities in Leeds city centre and explore context, inhabitation, space, form and materials. The semester culminates in the design of a medium-sized building with a public programme that responds to the cultural and social conditions of Leeds' urban context.

Love Lane: Imagining the City of Sanctuary, second and third year undergraduate design studio
Leader: Mohamad Hafeda

The design studio explores the relationship between displacement and architecture in the city of Wakefield. It focuses on the dichotomy of architecture as a tool of inclusion and exclusion, a shelter and a prison, a room that gathers or a wall that separates. The studio partners with civil society and art organisations active in the city to build local relationships with asylum seekers, refugees and the wider community. The premise is to imagine the possibility of city spaces that are inclusive and responsive to the challenges of our times characterised by the displacement of people and the differentiation between citizens (locals) and noncitizens (refugees) and the effect these inequalities have on people's temporal experiences. The design studio engaged in a one-day workshop between the students and a group of asylum seekers and refugees at the spaces of the Art House. The workshop was supported by the Wakefield City of Sanctuary who introduced the studio to the workshop's participants. The workshop explored the experiences and spatial practices of asylum seekers in Wakefield's public spaces in relation to time and their legal status. Using discussions, drawings and maps the students mapped out the network of spaces and institutions available to the asylum seekers and produced analytical drawings on the displaced experience that formed the City Dictionary of Displacement.

I am rushing to the central station to return Emma her bottle of water. I forgot to give it back to her when we parted, and it remained in my bag, I have just realized, and now she texted me. Her train will leave soon, but I can make it, walking fast. And, in the end, as I am now used to thinking every time we say "see you soon", this might be the last time I see her.
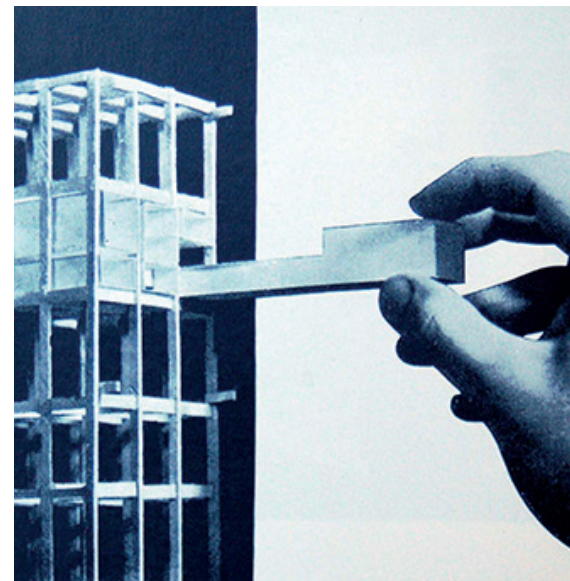
We spent the morning in a cold cafe talking about Jaap, sitting too close to the entrance, from where Copenhagen's winter could too easily come in. And I felt the cold coming from Emma too. I saw it coming yesterday already. At some point, on the way back to the hotel, I became a stranger.

Earlier that day we cycled to the southern edge of the city to visit a couple of buildings designed by BIG, "the mountain" and "8 House". Then the day grew colder.

The 8 House is definitely an impressive piece of architecture. The blasphemous thought of comparing it to the Unité d'Habitation in Marseille slowly creeps in. Thinking of comparing Bijarke Ingels, 'Highflyer of Skylines', [1] and Le Corbusier, 'The Man with a Hundred Faces', [2] would be an even more dangerous thought. The 8 House will not probably last as long as the Unité has done so far, and, most likely, it will not become part of UNESCO World Heritage: among other changes, in the last sixty years, housing has increasingly became a disposable commodity.

If the Unité is a reference for the construction of a more or less independent community, the 8 House accommodates a great number of users in a shared environment maintaining their individuality. In Marseille, the communal services are distributed halfway through the height of the building, and belong almost exclusively to its inhabitants. In Copenhagen, shops and shared facilities are distributed on the ground floor, easily accessible to the neighbourhood. Unité's rue interieure and the amenities located on the roof terrace have become one object in Copenhagen, a path in the figure of 8, that unfolds from the ground floor to the roof of the building. Here, there is no need to design collective leisure spaces, the path itself is the amenity: you could walk (run, and cycle) in a loop climbing up and down the building, continuously changing your relationship with the surrounding landscape, looking at it from above or diving into it. In Marseille, the landscape remains unavoidably remote, behind the taller than normal, about one and a half meter, parapet whose solidity prevents you from seeing the immediate surroundings, a periphery without qualities, while allowing you to see, the mountains and the sea at a distance.

In Marseille, the different types of dwellings are made invisible in the uniformity of the facade. The dwellings and their inhabitants — various types of "standard" families — differ from one another mostly just in terms of size. Housing is a matter of quantity. In Copenhagen, not only are there three different kinds of apartments (terraced houses, flats, and duplex) but each dwelling has a unique relationship with the surrounding landscape, as a result of the different height of the access to the apartments along the circulation loop. (The building must have been a nightmare to build because of the frequent discontinuities in the floor slabs). The inhabitants are (or, at least, they can think they are) all different, unique.

Rem Koolhaas, "Highflyer of Skylines" in Time Magazine,
21 April 2016

Jean Louis Cohen, "The Man with a Hundred Faces", in Le Corbusier, Le Grand. New York: Phaidon, 2008

[1] Rem Koolhaas, "Highflyer of Skylines" in Time Magazine (21 April 2016)

[2] Jean Louis Cohen, "The Man with a Hundred Faces", in Le Corbusier, Le Grand (New York: Phaidon, 2008)

A similar strategy, spatially simpler but with a comparable outcome, was used by Alvar Aalto in the design of the students' dormitories at the MIT campus: the S-shape of the plan gives each window a different view towards the surrounding landscape, as if one was trying to tell the students that they are not just one in hundreds of identical figures. If I were smart enough to read Deleuze maybe this could be about difference and repetition, the friction between the universal and individuation. Collectivity and individuality struggle to find a practicable compromise, in mass-housing architecture, especially far away from a nordic context.

I would like to live here, said Emma. But she said the same about the Unité which she visited shortly after we first met. Knowing that she would have visited Marseille, I suggested her to stay in the Hotel Le Corbusier at the Unité.

Or from Dutch structuralism. Even OMA, since they re-started to design and build housing in Europe had to compromise with a "tradition" they initially declared foreign to their design interests. Rather than relying on the manipulation of programs, circulation, and structure, the Timmerhuis was probably the first OMA's in which an assemblage of individual cells constructs a collective forms. There is a model of the Timmerhuis that looks like a cloud of voxels, apartments and offices, floating above the ground, the space for the public program. Here, almost literally, the individual units make the building. It is not a coincidence, I believe, that this project (and successive housing projects, such as the Norra Tornen in Stockholm) was led by Reinier de Graaf, rather than Koolhaas himself, more truthful, deliberately or subconsciously is up for debate, to Hertzberger and van Eyck's heritage.

I left Brussels on a (grey) Monday morning. I stepped off the train in Rotterdam and left my bag in a locker and went for a walk. There were no ghosts in town for now, it was safe. I wanted to see the Markthal and the Timmerhuis on my own, before going there with the students. They both had been completed after we (Patricia and I) left. Outside the Jumbo, once Super De Boer, supermarket on Botlersloot Giuseppe recognized me. Che ci fai qui, paisà? I did not say much, it would have been a too long story. I shook his hand, he patted my shoulder.

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