

Underground Riddles

Falling in *Love* with the Riddles of Earth and Her Becomings

An E(thi)co-Aesthetic Set-Up towards Caring Architectures

Explore Lab 37
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'Oh ~~sad-emoji~~, that looks bad! How will 'we' fix-it?!'

The statement that our times are troubled should by no means come as a surprise anymore. In the light of the Digital Turn and Sixth Extinction, architects, and architecture students, seem to be drowning in the pressure of coping with all the complexities that they bring. Yet too many of us seem to be stuck in the transcendental anthropocentric approach of the modernist star-architects. But where does that bring us? I would argue that it only leaves us with more depressing architectures that fail to grasp and express the *underground riddles* of lived experience and subsequently, as I will come to argue alongside other scholars in this research, fail to *care* for the human and nonhuman (from organisms to objects) becomings of Earth. How can architects *fall in love* with thinking the unknown instead of hiding away from the chaos in rationalised habits?

Growing up as a female with a neurodivergent mind, I've often felt, and still often feel, quite alienated from society. However, by alienated, I do not mean the feeling of being outside of this world. On the contrary, I feel most at ease surrounded by nature with all her creatures and processes of life. Part of this can be situated in the fact that I grew up around a lot of farmland, river and forest landscapes, but also in my fascination with the richness and becoming of Nature's creations. The human has never been the superior species to me, just a *different one*, a very diverse, social and complex animal. In other words, by alienated I mean having trouble finding/making sense in/of the constructed social constellations and their egocentric values; trouble with getting across how I experience my world in great detail and so rich in relations. Why do I struggle? Well, it is not only because in general I have always had difficulty with linguistics and in particular verbalizing my lived experience. This often gets put aside as a dis-ability, a lacking in the ability to function 'well' in our society, putting me – and too many others that face similar or different forms of oppression – aside as 'less' human. Rather, I want to problematize in particular the fact that these experiences cannot be expressed in how the anthropocentric Western (literal white) men have shaped our linguistics and knowledge production, and the lack of lively expression in general. It baffles, and frustrates, me to see how current capitalist flows and their representational values are systematically rejecting any other modes of existence that differ from their transcendental rationalised concept of the human.

*Why must everything be the same?
Aren't you bored? Where is the expression in
contemporary architectures?
Of otherness? Of lived experience? Of
Earth and her living and non-living
creatures?*

*Please, let us burst out of our generalised,
representational aesthetic bubbles that are
rooted in objectified Western knowledge
and binary oppositions that neglect the
entangled relations. What if we, as architects,
try to grasp the underground riddles of
lived experience; the expression of Earthly
Becomings.*

A good three decades ago, Félix Guattari, a French psychoanalyst, activist and social philosopher, opened his essay *The Three Ecologies* (2000) by sharing his concerns on the techno-scientification of the Earth. He problematizes the affect of mass-media consumption, machinic labour and generalised modes of living caused by the capitalist flows and their ways of making sure that all sorts of otherness are kept out of our daily lives. Now keep in mind that when Guattari wrote this, it was not yet as intense as we know nowadays, however, that makes his thinking even more relevant. Guattari introduces his concept of *ecosophy*, which he explains to be the ethico-political articulation between the social, mental and environmental ecologies, actual and virtual. What draws me towards Guattari is his attention to the arts and aesthetic practices, as he argues them to reach before the signifying semiotics of our era that are trapped in linguistics and calculations. He therefore not only argues for new social practices but also new (ethico-)aesthetic practices. In his book *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-aesthetic Paradigm* he further elaborates on the ecological crisis and the need for a change in thought and practice to break with ego-centric ways of producing knowledge:

‘Thus the issue returns with insistence: **how do we change mentalities**, how do we reinvent social [and aesthetic] practices that would give back to humanity - if it ever had it - **a sense of responsibility**, not only for its own survival, but equally for the future of all life on the planet, for animal and vegetable species, likewise for incorporeal species such as music, the arts, cinema, the relation with time, love and compassion for others, the feeling of fusion at the heart of cosmos?’

- Guattari, *Chaosmosis: an Ethico-aesthetic paradigm*, 1995, p.119-120

But then what does that mean for the architect? Even if Guattari was not an architect, he was concerned with the practice of architecture. He finds it the architect who finds herself at the heart of the social, mental and environmental ecologies and their ethico-political articulation. In his text *Architectural Enunciation*, he was rather clear on the need for a change in architectural mentalities:

‘It is henceforth impossible to take refuge behind art for art’s sake or pure science in good faith. Reinventing architecture can no longer signify the relaunching of a style, a school, a theory with hegemonic vocation, but **the recomposition of architectural enunciation**, and, in a sense, the trade of the architect under today’s conditions’

- Guattari, *Schizoanalytic Cartographies*, 2013 p.232

The architect’s goal should not be to be the artist of built forms, but Guattari argues her to be an artisan of sensible and relational lived experience; an artist able to take responsibility for the production of contemporary subjectivity and the capacity to compose the affects of spatialised enunciation.

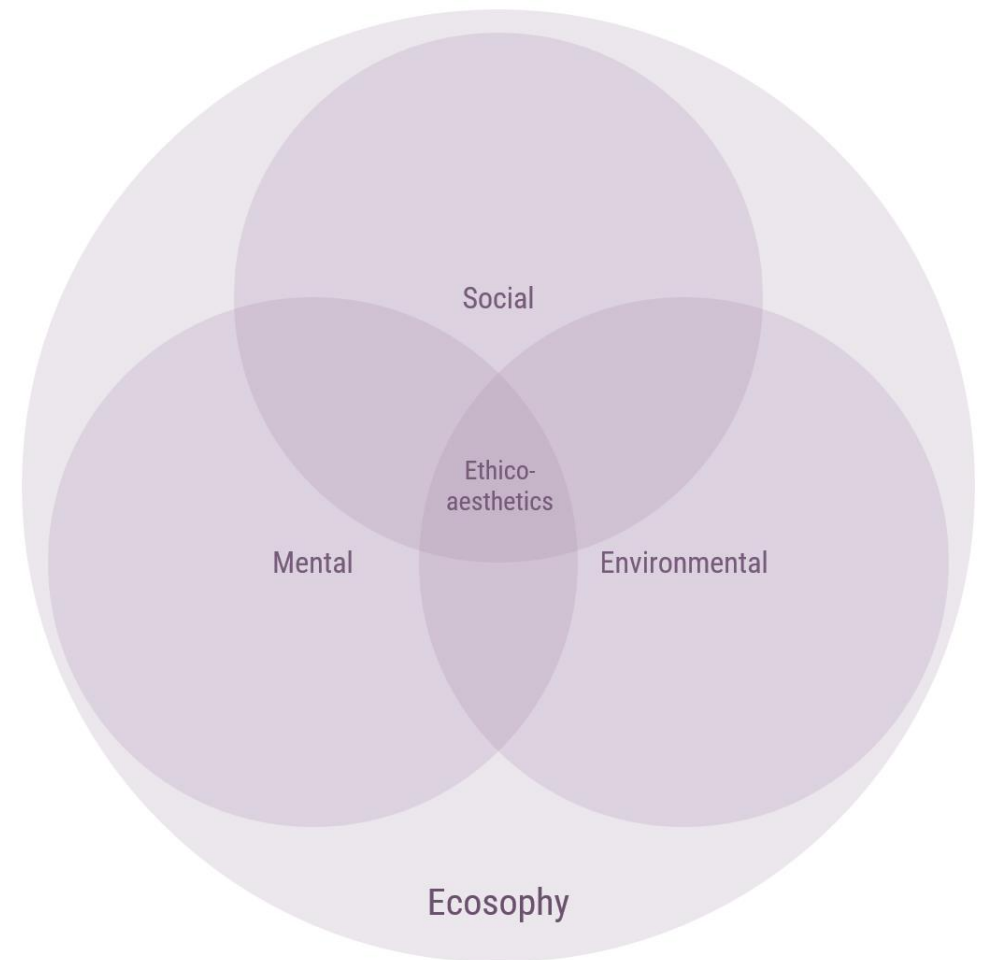


Figure 1.1 – Relationality diagram of Guattari’s ecosophical object, the three ecologies and their origin coming from a common ethico-aesthetic discipline.

Source: Author

The aim of this research is thus not to find a solution or ready-made approach to the architectural project that claims to solve our ecological crises. Rather a curiosity as to how we can do things *otherwise*; What questions are we to ask ourselves when working on a new project? How do we unravel collective desires? What thoughts are to be thought to feel and act otherwise? What if we replace the study of aesthetics with the practice of ethico-aesthetics in architecture? In other words, the aim is to quite literally grasp the underground riddles of the relationality between architecture and the lived experience. The main question for this research goes as follows:

What values can the architect adopt from ethico-aesthetic practices to act/have response-ability towards the human-non-human social, mental and environmental ecologies that she intervenes with and compose new modes of existence?

To take on this question, I will be introducing *underground riddles* not only as the title for this research but also as a concept through a critical and creative posthumanist/new materialistic lens. Doing this allows me to experiment with the domains of our lived experience that go unconscious, are oppressed and/or neglected in Western knowledge production. Underground takes on multiple meanings in this case; that of the experimenting with new ways of living/forms of art, but also sheds light on the life that is quite literally below the surface of the Earth. However, I would like to add here the kinds of matter/cosmic forces that exist among us but are either too slow, fast, micro or macro for our human perception, the unseen by the human eye. Nonetheless, they are in this world with us and affect us deeply. Riddles in this context should be understood as puzzles, brain-teasers, or, as I would like to phrase it in new materialistic terms, *diffractive questions* that help activate the architect not merely to be a critical observer, but, as Guattari would have it: to use her practice as an unraveller of collective desires, a mediator of lived experience. The concept of underground riddles will develop further throughout the research but for now, takes on the definition of *a type of question that aims at diffracting the lived experience and triggering thoughts that evoke new ways of living/forms of art in human-non-human relations*.

Underground; noun (people):
people in a society who are trying new and often shocking or illegal ways of living or forms of art

Underground; adjective, adverb (below earth):
below the surface of the earth; below ground

Riddle; noun (question):
*a type of question that describes something in a difficult and confusing way and has a clever or funny answer, often asked as a game;
something that is confusing, or a problem that is difficult to solve*

Riddle; verb (action):
to make a lot of holes in something

Figure 1.2 – Definitions of underground and riddle as given in the dictionary
Source: Cambridge Dictionary Online

Underground Riddle; noun (question):
a type of question that diffracts the unconsciousness and triggers thought for new ways of living/forms of art in human-non-human relations

Figure 1.3 – Working definition of underground riddles as concept
Source: Author

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Ways of Thinking-Reading-Writing-Making

Transdisciplinary framework:

Critical Posthumanities and New Materialism

The positioning of the architect through the work of Guattari, already introduces a schizoanalytic and ecosophical framework – where the planes of art, science and philosophy are transversed – that sets the ground for the research. However, as already hinted at in the introduction, the scope of this research will not stay within the realm of post-structuralist thinking. There has been an increasing amount of scholars over the past decade that have concerned themselves with the work of Guattari (and his work together with Gilles Deleuze). Curious about the potential values of Guattari's ecosophy and ethico-aesthetic practices in *our* current times, this research will take on a transdisciplinary framework of more recent scholars, ranging from architectural theorists to philosophers of science, who have also found value in Guattari's concepts and/or are concerned with the entangled relations of human-non-human life. In this research, the focus will thereby be on the concepts, methods and theories from the (feminist/queer) Critical Posthumanities/New Materialism. Within the set timeframe for this research, it is by no means possible or the goal to go through everything that is written in these fields. Therefore the scope of this research will be staying within a critical selection of leading scholars that are relational to either architecture and/or arts/ethico-aesthetics. This will mainly be publications by, but not entirely limited to, leading voices in these fields such as Rosi Braidotti, Iris van Tuinen and Rick Dolphijn, Donna Haraway Andrej Radman, Stavros Kousoulas and Hélène Frichot who have been actively, and still are, shaping these frameworks, see *also Bibliography*.

Methods:

1 - Assemblage of the Four Functional Domains

Instead of merely studying the concepts and theories of Guattari, with this research, I want to actively use his proposed methodology on how to approach the Assemblage of Enunciation. The first method introduced for this research can be found throughout his work but is most detailed in his book, *Schizoanalytic Cartographies*. Guattari introduces a diagrammatic approach, see *Figure 2.1*, to construct a meta-modelling of the four functional domains that together form the Assemblage of Enunciation. Aware of the fact that this is at the limits of more traditional forms of architectural research methods, such as a standard literature review, archival research, interviews and/or case studies, that is precisely the point

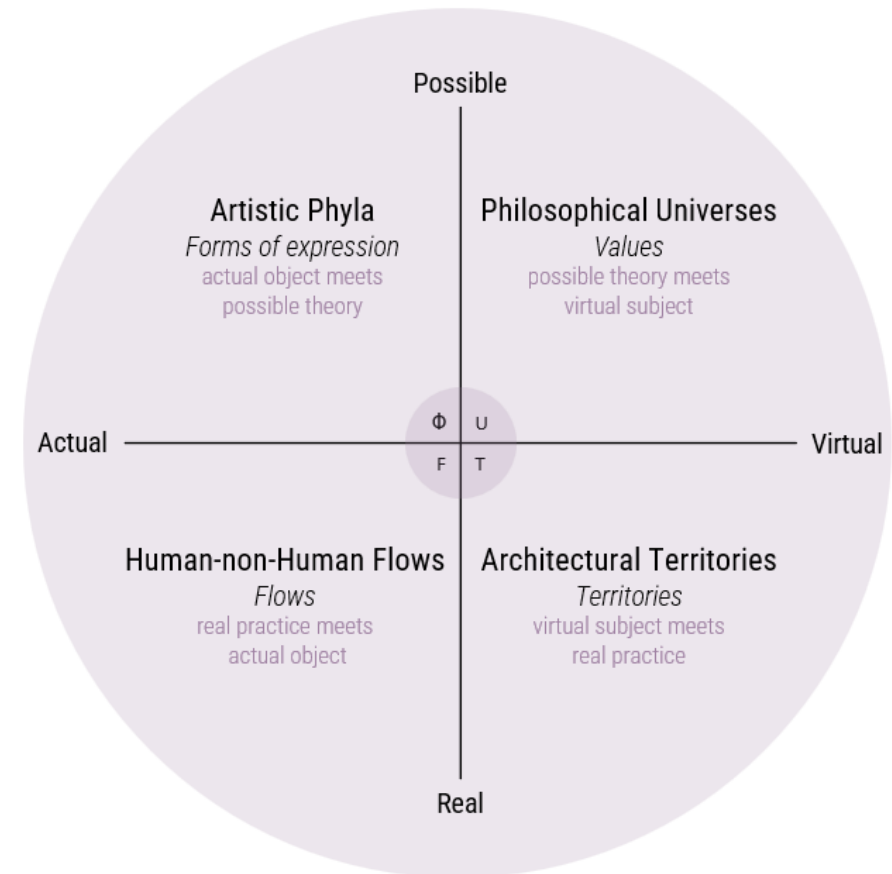


Figure 2.1 – Diagram of research domains following the *Assemblage of Enunciation* as proposed by Guattari (1989; 2000), combined with *Assemblage of Architectural Enunciation* by Radman and Kousoulas (2018)
Source: Author

of choosing this method and why Guattari set it up. It allows for all domains to be studied within their heterogeneous becoming, cancelling out the possibility of hierarchical oppositions and reduction of subjective knowledge.

The four functional domains as proposed by Guattari will function as the main structure of this research as illustrated in *Figure 2.2*. The research will thus consist of four parts (domains) that each have a different theme (universe) while all are connected through their relationality towards architecture and the lived experience.

Even if there is no linear hierarchy to be found in this method, one does need to make a beginning somewhere, which I will do from the middle, the cut-out: the virtually real Architectural Territories. To give some familiarity, I will follow the diagram clockwise, however, I want to emphasize that it could just as well be done the other way around, in fact, it should work both ways. An illustration of the (sub)questions that will lead the focus of each domain can be found in the writing below:

Part I – How are we to position ourselves as architects in these crisis times? What position can/should the architect take? How do we adopt a more humble and caring approach towards our project?

Part II – Who *and* what do we talk about when we say ‘we’? What is the posthuman? With whom do we share our environment and how do they affect us? What about the matter around us that we do not immediately see?

Part III – How to approach posthuman art/aesthetics? What are the values of artistic research to diffract an environment? Where in the work of architects/how can the use of art/artistic research be of value?

Part IV – In what ways can we actively *make meaningful* sense? How do we think-with living and non-living beings that cannot communicate?

II – Critical and Creative Assemblages

Whereas the first method structures the research to a great extent, we need a second method to compose the content of the four domains. Writing in this research will not merely be a structuring of reviewed literature. Rather, following the framework set by Rosi Braidotti, the writing of essays is approached as an assemblage:

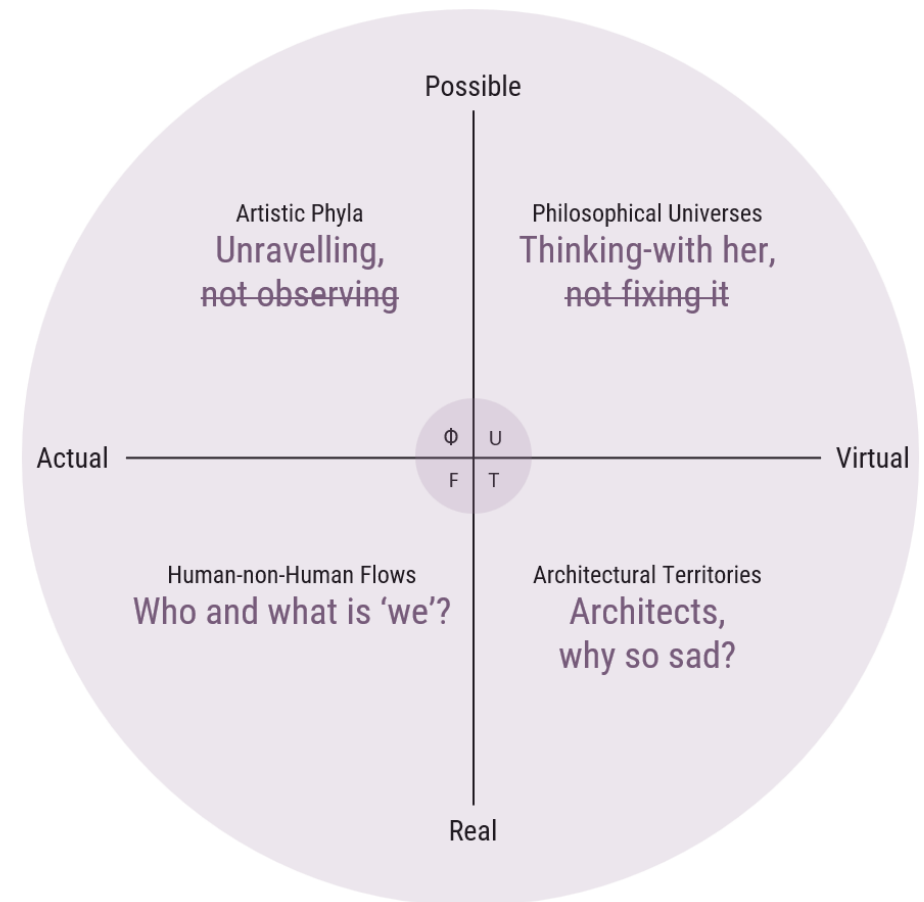


Figure 2.2 – Diagram of research domains with titles, following the *Assemblage of Enunciation* by Guattari, combined with *Assemblage of Architectural Enunciation* by Radman and Kousoulas (2018) as illustrated in Figure 2.1

Source: Author

'[...], I hope the readers will take my over-crowded article as an attempt to compose a missing community of posthuman scholars: **the essay as an assemblage**. To sum up: a cartography is a **theoretically-based and politically-informed account of the present that aims at tracking the production of knowledge and subjectivity** and to expose power both as entrapment (potestas) and as empowerment (potentia).'

- Braidotti, 'A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities', 2019, p. 33

The methodology proposed in the critical posthumanism/new materialism frameworks, that of critical *and* creative writing, allows me to add a layer of a-signifying expression to signifying semiotics. Academic essays, however, already ask for a certain length, hierarchy and conclusion. With the method of concept mapping and my tendency to dive into details, the domains will be not just four essays, but multiple thought pieces; academic/critical written pieces with a max. of 1500 words. This method allows me to not jump into close-ended conclusions or reduction of knowledge, but to find the *underground riddles* of each domain.

Creative writing allows to create of a more phenomenological grounded *bridging* between the four domains (see Figure 2.4). The creative writing will thus assist me in evoking/expressing thoughts, memories and emotions throughout the research. Likely to the short thought-pieces, I will be making use of creative writing practices that are short in length, but powerful in affect; expressive poetry and micro (non) fiction stories that have a particular focus on narrative and descriptive writing.



Figure 2.3 – Overview diagram of characteristics thought-piece
Source: Author

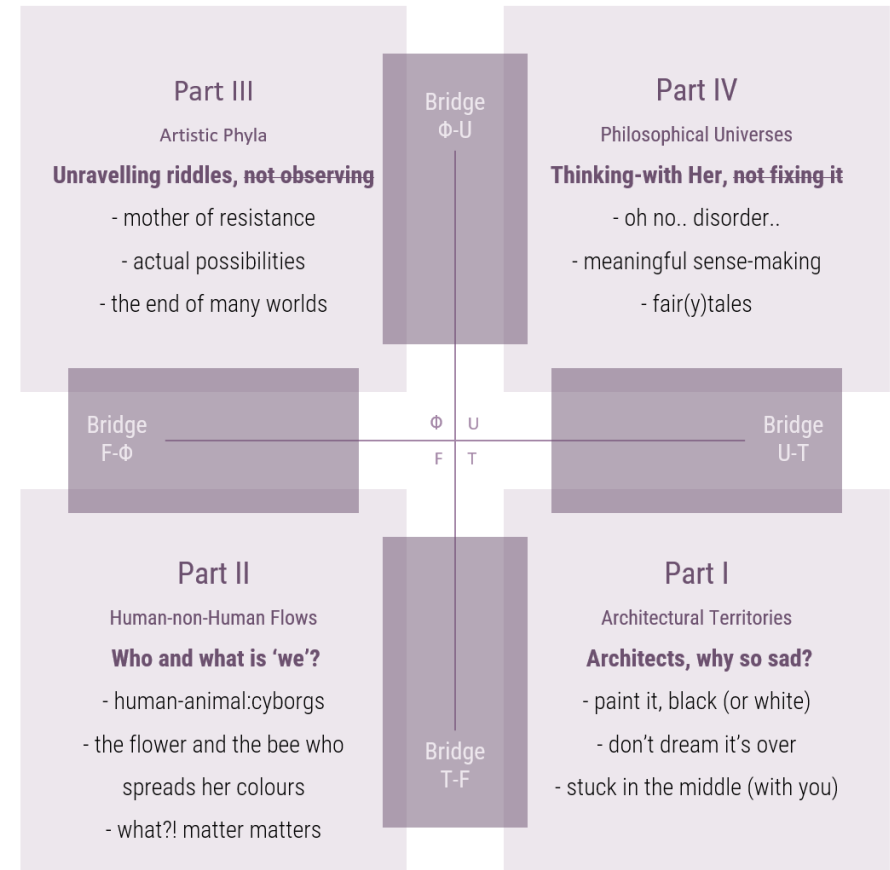


Figure 2.4 – Diagram of research domains with titles of thought-pieces and visualisation of the bridges that will be formed by creative writing
Source: Author

3

Reflection on plan, end product and design proposal

Over the past weeks, I've been given the chance in Explore Lab 37 to turn my fascinations (and frustrations, if you like) into a research plan for my graduation project within the Faculty of Architecture at TU Delft. As my introduction shows, the research is not necessarily rooted in architectural argumentation but also comes from a psychoanalytic (or schizoanalytic) and social-political point of view. Coming from my personal life's observations and experiences. Whereas I do not only hope, or believe, that this research will be of value for the architectural discourse, but it will also be of value for me to actively find my own (architectural) voice, and maybe for other voices to come. To say the least, the making of this research plan has been an academic and emotional journey to find a framework and methodologies that fit both my problem statement and my personality *and* stay within the requirements of the Graduation Plan of the Architecture department. This brings me to the fact that the proposed research plan currently has 'no respect' for the maximum amount of 9000 words and thereby also might not be realistic to be completed before the P2. The structure/methods can stay unchanged, but the amount of thought-pieces will most likely be reduced to a total of four, one for each domain/part. *See also Table of Contents - Research Paper and Research diagram.*

Throughout the research plan it has been addressed multiple times that the research is an attempt to break with the traditional representational values within architectural practice and thinking, the end product will therefore also take on a rather experimental style. The conclusion will not be a closed-ended answer to my research question, but a redefined/reworked explanation of the concept of *underground riddles* and the values that this concept brings along in each domain. The replacement of the conclusion, or binder as I have named it, will be Part X (I+II+III+IV), which allows me to bring together the underground riddles of each domain, without having to reduce their singularities and heterogeneity into a generalised finalised outcome. As this is a very theoretical and conceptual research, I will be adding a glossary at the end to create an overview of the used concepts.

The (becoming) values of this research are not bound to a location, nor a specific function, nor do they make any assumption on spatial qualities/forms/typologies. Rather, they aim at creating a sense of responsibility *and* the ability to respond (response-ability) towards different scales of the design process. But then how can this research be translated into a design proposal? The underground riddles could be applied anywhere, however, over the coming weeks, I

will be working on my proposal to create a project that demonstrates the ecological crisis as illustrated in the introduction and allows me to create a response that highlights the research focus. In other words, this means it will be in a location that I argue needs care, to have troubled socio-techno-environmental relations and a design that responds to the collective desires, aiming at thinking-with and recomposing the ecologies of that environment (without ego and with care). *An architecture that explores new modes of existence, new ways of living with one and another; human and non-human, living and non-living. Creatures among creatures.*

Table of Contents - Research Paper

Abstract

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'Oh ~~*sad emoji*~~, that ~~looks~~ bad! How will 'we' ~~fix it~~?!'

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- II Assemblage of the Four Functional Domains
- III Critical and Creative Writing
- IV Research diagram

Results

Assemblage of the Four Functional Domains

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Bridge
- Part II** Human-non-Human Flows Who *and* what is 'we'?
Bridge
- Part III** Artistic Phyla Unravelling riddles, ~~not observing~~
Bridge
- Part IV** Philosophical Universes Thinking-with *her*, ~~not fixing it~~
Bridge (with part I)

+

Binder

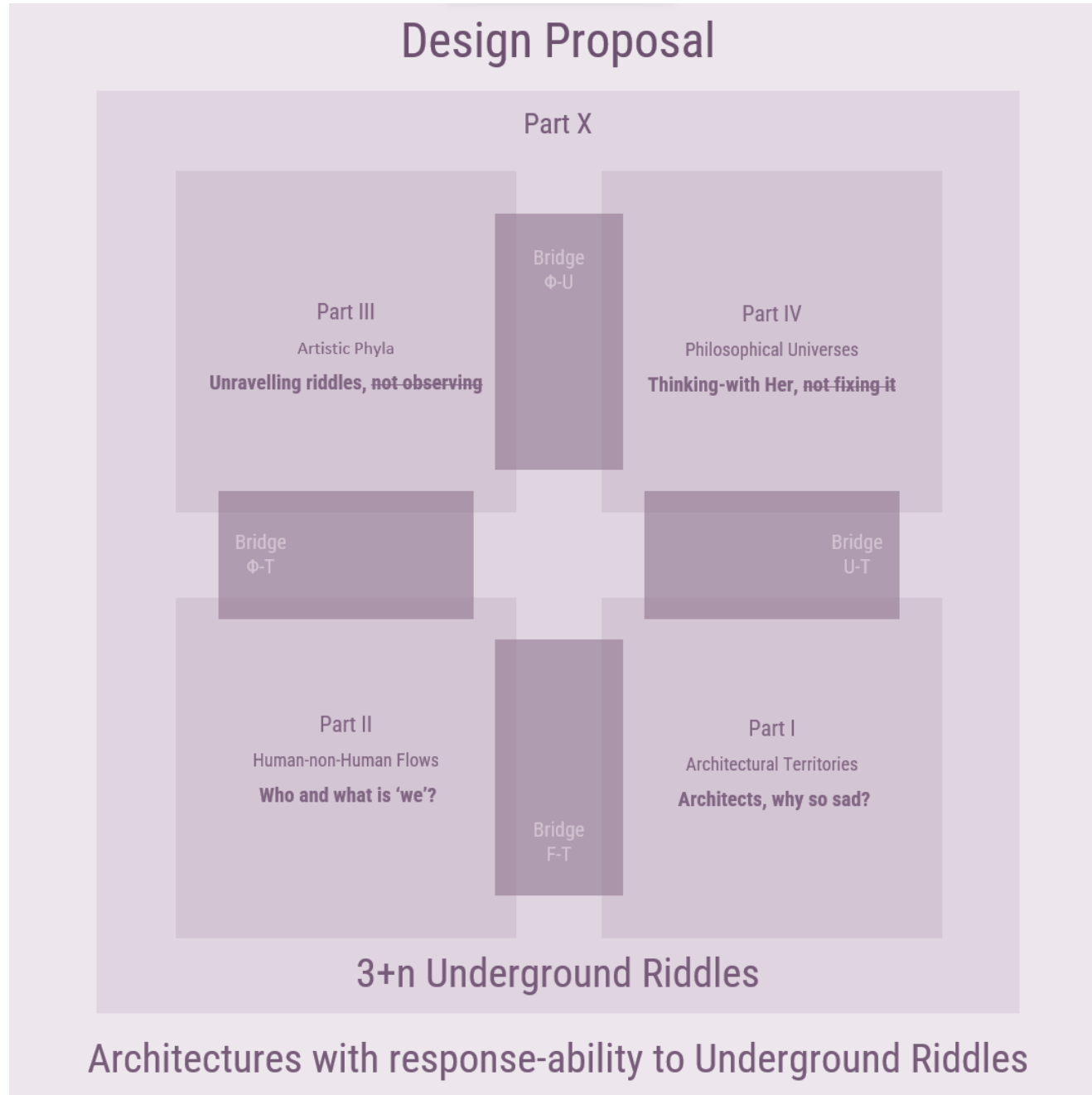
Part X 3+n Underground Riddles for Caring Architectures

Glossary

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Research diagram

Note: To be read inside-out
Source: Author



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