

on bodies and norms  
on being and becoming  
on moving and growing and learning and not knowing  
on interpreting surroundings and challenging the *status quo*  
on how architecture can empower  
and on how there's always more than one (body)

–a master thesis







*“In fact, it is only through practice  
and critical reflection on practice that  
feminist art or architecture develops.”<sup>1</sup>*

# foreword

Over the past many months, this research has taken many different shapes. I like to think of these changes and alterations as an example of practice and critical reflection on that practice. I have practiced to develop a critical approach towards the architectural discipline, I have practiced thinking about the world in new, more inclusive ways and I have practiced documenting this all as I went on this graduation journey.

This document is a collection of all the explorations—and of reflections on these explorations. I'm still trying to make sense of it all. It feels odd to call this collection a final document, as my journey has not ended yet and I am not about to stop exploring and learning about the complex and intriguing world around me.

Nonetheless, I have learned the importance of concluding things, even if just for a little while, and it is time to conclude this part of my journey now.

Everybody seems to agree that graduating isn't easy, and the same counts for me. Because of this, I would like to express some words of gratitude to those who have managed to make this process a bit less strange and scary. First of all, to my mentors, who all let me go on this journey even though I hadn't the faintest idea of what was going to come out of it.

To, Alberto, for providing me with loads of amazing literature and feedback and—through your passion and knowledge on the topic—also for providing me with inspiring meetings and sharp conversations that were always a boost to my confidence and ambitions for this project.

To Roel and Hubert, for your unwavering enthusiasm, critical notes and helpful advice.

Furthermore to my friends, and especially to Yara and Catherine for all the cups of tea, words of comfort and inspiration and—even though this graduation thing is supposed to be an individual act—thank you for graduating with me every step of the way.

To you Joos and Soof for all the cozy evenings at home and for all the times in our time-machine.

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# introductory note

*DEFINITION: A metalogue is a conversation about some problematic subject. This conversation should be such that not only do the participants discuss the problem but the structure of the conversation as a whole is also relevant to the same subject. Only some of the conversations here presented achieve this double format.*

*Notably, the history of evolutionary theory is inevitably a metalogue between man and nature, in which the creation and interaction of ideas must necessarily exemplify evolutionary process. (Bateson, 2000, p. 12)*

This document is structured with the help of metalogues. The metalogues in this project are inspired by the metalogues from Gregory Bateson's book *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*. Bateson uses the metalogues as a method to explore certain topics or ideas. The metalogues in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* are between a daughter and a father, where the daughter could be seen as "uncorrupted by academic labelling and becomes father's excuse to approach profound issues outside their boundaries" (Bateson, 2000, p. ix).

As a daughter myself, attempting to develop a critical approach towards the (academic) discipline that I am graduating in, I found it a fitting method to develop my own metalogues to further explore the topics that I am working on. These metalogues are (partly) imagined conversations with my own father (Paul), and they helped me to situate the often rather abstract and complex findings from my research into more applicable and relatable definitions.

The metalogues in this research can be seen as a triptych. The prologue attempts to explore the ambitions and relevance of the research topic. The second metalogues attempts to discuss the first findings of the research and their implications. Finally, the epilogue can be seen as somewhat of a conclusion to the research and a discussion for further actions to be taken.



# prologue

---

P: “So you have started your graduation project. What is it that you will be working on the coming year?”

V: “I think that—most of all—I want to figure out how architecture can empower people... So that I will become a more attentive architect to the surroundings that I’ll be working in.”

P: “What do you mean by ‘empower people’? Architecture doesn’t really tell people what they can or cannot do, does it? Bricks can’t actually speak.”

V: “True, bricks can’t speak—but they do have a certain influence on lives. Imagine that right now, I would build a brick wall in the middle of this living room—all the way up to the ceiling—the wall would make it impossible for you to get to the TV and watch the news after dinner.”

P: “That wouldn’t be very nice of you, but luckily I can also watch the news on my laptop which happens to be next to me on the couch... Anyways, this is a rather negative influence that you are speaking of, but you wanted to focus more about empowerment. What are some ‘empowering influences’ of architecture?”

V: “Well—the roof of this house is rather empowering, for example. It lets us sleep in our beds without having to worry about whether or not it rains tonight. Also, the walls of this house protect us and our books and clothes and other valuable things. We could say that the architecture here is a mediator between us and our surroundings.”

P: “In that sense all houses are empowering, aren’t they?”

V: “It depends. If, due to some horrible accident you were to

lose both of your legs, not all aspects of this house would be very empowering to you anymore... It would take a lot more effort for you to reach your bed upstairs. Or, if you were to lose both of your hands and mom would close the door to the hallway, to keep the cold out, you would have to struggle to get to the bathroom because the doors would be a lot more difficult to open..."

P: "So is your project about figuring out how to make inclusive spaces for people who are not able-bodied?"

V: "Partly, yes. But it is about more than that. I also want to research the power-relations that manifest through architecture."

P: "What do you mean with power-relations?"

V: "Well—many parts of our surroundings—such as the stairs or the door I just mentioned—were created based on assumptions about the bodies that will be interacting with them.

The stairs assume that the bodies using it will have legs of a certain length, just as the door handle assumes that the bodies using it have certain body parts—hands—which are able to move in certain ways.

The designer of these parts therefore has a certain power which dictates which bodies are allowed to use the stairs or the door. Whenever Misty wants to go to her litterbox, she needs someone to open the door for her, as she can't reach—let alone use—the door handle properly. The door was not designed with her cat-body in mind."

P: "I see. But it is quite impossible to keep all bodies in mind when designing! There are simply too many bodies on our planet, which are all different from each other. Isn't it more

feasible and efficient to design for the average bodies?  
Most people do have hands and legs, right?”

V: “Yes, perhaps the majority of people have hands or legs...  
But I do not want to research efficiency or feasibility,  
especially not if this efficiency is not empowering to the  
bodies that have to deal with the architecture. I want to  
research how architecture can be an empowering practice,  
and designing for average bodies is not the way to go.”

P: “It isn’t? If you design for the average human being, then  
your designs will fit the bodies of most people, and they  
will only be un-fit for a small group of people.”

V: “I disagree. The average person does not and will never  
exist. By designing for the average human being, my  
designs will be un-fit for *all* bodies, albeit to a smaller or a  
larger extent.”

P: “Ah, maybe you’re right. Considering my own body, I can  
only confirm that I am definitely not average either. If  
it was, I would not need to bend down whenever I pass  
through a door opening. I have hit my head more times  
than I can remember... Thinking about it that way—would  
it be better to include variations in your designs? At least,  
you could make the door openings so that they can also  
accommodate very tall people.”

V: “I could do that... But that would mean that the doors also  
become very big—and heavy. That might be fine for you,  
but it might be problematic at the same time for shorter  
people who may not have the strength to push open the  
doors anymore...”

P: “Hm, I suppose... It seems like you’re ending up in a big

puzzle that is impossible to solve. I suppose you can never please everyone, people's wants and needs differ too much."

V: "They do... Also, simply 'enlarging' the definitions of which bodies I should keep in mind when designing does not actually change anything about my position of power as a designer or architect... I would still be the one who chooses which bodies are deserving of inclusion and which are not."

P: "But do you think it is possible to change that position at all? Isn't that power inherent to the designer?"

V: "Perhaps to a certain extent. But I do think there is potential for designers to adopt a different approach that is hopefully more about enabling than about defining..."

•

# position paper

## Architecture as Mediator Between Bodies and Their Surroundings

Architecture has the potential to mediate between bodies and their surroundings, or, as the architects Arakawa and Gins describe it: *architecture exists to be of service to the body* (Gins & Arakawa, 2002, p. xi). But what is *the body*, and how can architecture be *of service* to it?

To make sure that designs are able to provide this “*service*”, architects often try to define the bodies that they design for and figure out what it is that these bodies need from their surroundings. Subsequently, architectural designs are made based on these definitions.

In this paper I want to argue that there is something problematic about this act of defining “*the body*” in order to create architecture that is of service to it. In previous architectural publications, definitions of “*the body*” were often modelled after the able-bodied, white male, prioritizing their existence over the existence of many other types of bodies. These definitions created norms on what bodies should be like, and how they should engage with their surroundings.

I will argue that the problem goes further than questioning these narrow definitions, and that the underlying problem is the *act of defining bodies*, as this act assumes that bodies can be properly defined at all, but—perhaps more importantly—the defining of what it is that bodies are limits bodies in their change, growth and becoming of something else.

By taking a closer look at some architectural publications on standardisation, I want to discuss how these definitions can be problematic for the inclusivity of bodies in certain spaces and for the potential of bodies to grow, to learn and to change.

I will also take a look at some of the work of the architects Arakawa and Gins, whose main ambition it was to create architectures that help bodies reverse their destiny (and ultimately, avoid death). Through discussing the work of Arakawa and Gins, I want to show that it can be a productive approach to reject any knowledge whatsoever about what bodies *are*, and instead start thinking about what bodies can *do* in their surroundings, to create architectures that are true mediators between bodies and their surroundings.



## Standardisation as a Tool to Design for the Human Body

One of the ways in which the architectural practice defines what bodies are (and therefore one of the ways in which norms are created) is through standardisation. Standardisation aims to find similar elements in different situations, usually with the goal of normalising these situations. Normalising situations is done for various reasons, for example to allow for efficient (mass) production, or to protect certain qualities (i.e. levels of comfort, or levels of safety).

In the twentieth century, standardisation became more prevalent in the architectural profession. This development is understandable with regards to the existing capitalist society, in which standardising designs and standardising the design practice was a way to answer the question of how to efficiently build for the masses, with limited economic means available.

Various architectural books were published in the twentieth century, centred around standardisation. Such publications, like Le Corbusier's *Le Modulor* (1948) or Neufert's *Architects' Data* (1936) made standardised measurements readily available to many architecture students and practitioners. Especially Neufert's book is still widely used by architecture students and practitioners today—in the popular, Dutch store bol.com, the book is placed in the Top 1000 bestselling books, and can therefore be ordered without any delivery costs (“Architects’ Data - bol.com,” 2018).

## Standardised Measurements Feign Objectivity and Why This is Problematic

Standardisation of (human) bodies is problematic for the mediating potential of architecture, as it feigns objectivity and neutrality about these bodies.

The publications, such as Neufert's *Architects' Data* or Le Corbusier's *Le Modulor*, define what the average/normal body is, and how architects can make sure their architecture is of service to this average/normal body. These publications, especially *Architects' Data* is still widely accepted and widely used by architecture students and practitioners today. This means that the ideas within are shaping our built environment. Spaces in the built environment become charged with a dominating normal body, and as the normal body is necessarily an abstraction and is therefore not incarnated in any actual body (Moore, 2013, p. 62), the built environment will violate all bodies to a more or lesser extent.

The acceptance of these publications, and of the knowledge within these publications provides practitioners with safe design choices that they can hide behind when people should critique the inclusivity of their work. The publications make it easy for architects to simply adopt these measurements to make sure their designs are appropriate for the average person. It also frees practitioners from having to engage with and respond to real-world users and situations, as the publications are supposed to contain universal, objective knowledge (Gunawan, 2018, p. 22).

As said before, the words *normal* and *average* suggest neutrality, but these words are misleading. As feminist thinkers such as Donna Haraway have shown, neutrality (or objectivity, as Haraway calls it) is a myth. Objectivity does not simply exist “*out there*”, but is constructed by embodied individuals, who themselves are never neutral (Haraway, 1988). The same holds true for the “*normal body*” as defined in the publication of *Architects’ Data*.

It is these norms that emerge from the definitions that are made about the human body, that are problematic for the empowering potential of architecture. If we take a closer look at the contents of *Architects’ Data* for example, we see that it contains dozens of diagrams in which various situations of life are depicted. These diagrams ascribe norms to very detailed actions and situations, which charges these actions and situations with a dominating, normative body and/or behaviour. It disvalues behaviours and bodies which do not conform to the normative descriptions of the site, and through this, the built environment violates all bodies to a certain degree, as no bodies exist equal to the normative body that the diagrams in *Architects’ Data* depict.

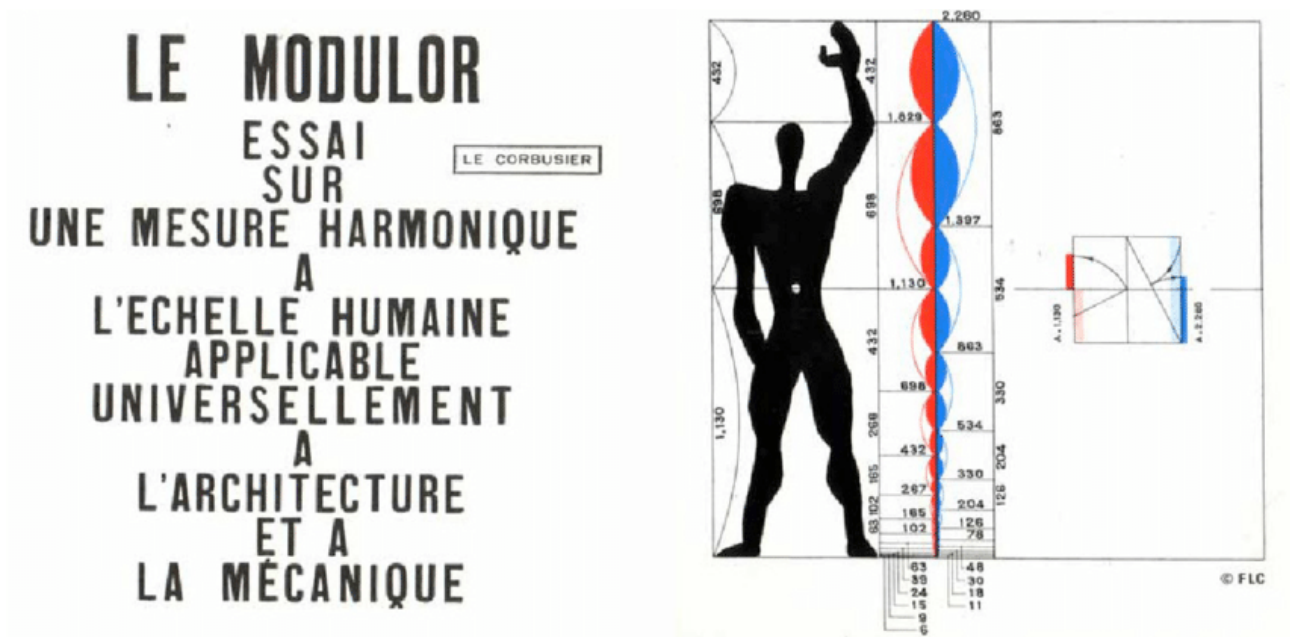


Fig 2. - *Le Modulor*

Retrieved from: Le Corbusier (1948) *Le Modulor : Essai sur une mesure harmonique à l'échelle humaine applicable universellement à l'architecture et à la mécanique*. Éditions de l'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui.

## Why Stretching the Norms is Not the Solution

The bodies that are represented as “normal” and “average” in Architects’ Data only represent very limited kinds of bodies. As explained before, the “average” and the “normal” is all too often modelled on the able-bodied, white adult male. However, the solution is not as simple as stretching the norms by including different bodies (women, children, people of colour, elderly, physically disabled people, mentally disabled people, homeless people, animals, plants, etc.) as the following example will make clear.

Henri Dreyfuss added to this narrative of standardisation with his book *Designing for People* (1955). In it, he personifies the standardised bodies, which he splits up in a standardised male body (Joe) and a standardised female body (Josephine). This addition of a standardised female body can be regarded as an attempt to include bodies that are often oppressed, especially considering that Neufert dedicates an entire chapter to defining the body proportions and space requirements of men in detail, before he continues with the chapter “*Man & his buildings*”, without saying a word about other bodies than the able-bodied male one. However, the addition of a standardised female body in Dreyfuss’ *Designing for People* does nothing to stop the creation of normative, dominating bodies in the situations that are discussed.

Dreyfuss writes in the beginning of the second chapter:

*“Joe enacts numerous roles. Within twenty-four hours he may determine the control positions of a linotype, be measured for an airplane chair, be squeezed into an armoured tank, or be driving a tractor; and we may prevail upon Josephine to do a day’s ironing, sit at a telephone switchboard, push a vacuum cleaner around the room, type a letter.” (Dreyfuss, 1955)*

This quote makes it clear that the creation of Joe and Josephine does little for emancipation and inclusivity, but mostly enforces a sexist division between different activities. From this we can see that stretching the norm to include more, different bodies will not solve the problem of creating dominating, normative bodies in different situations.

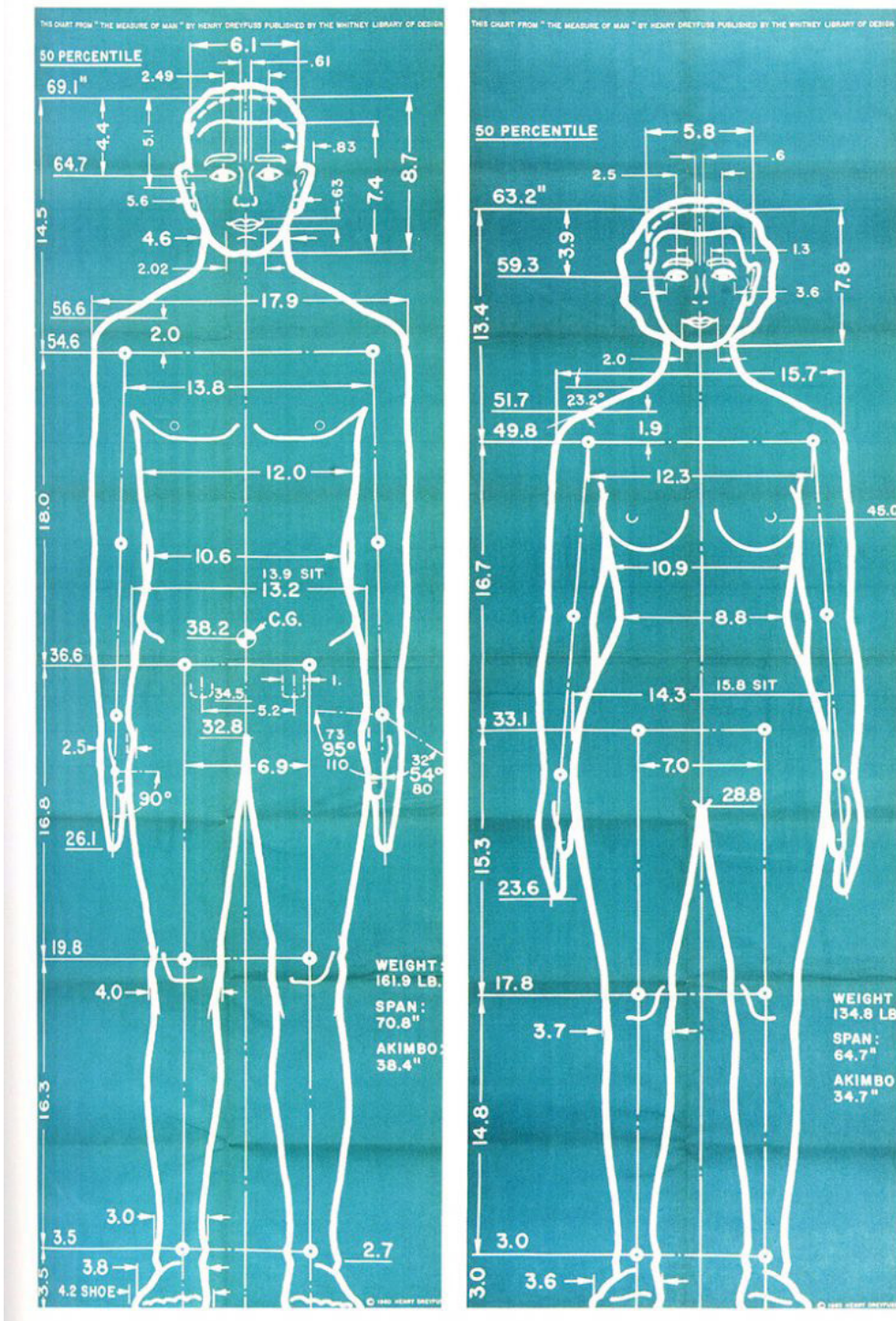
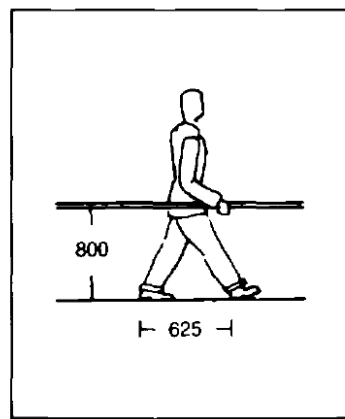


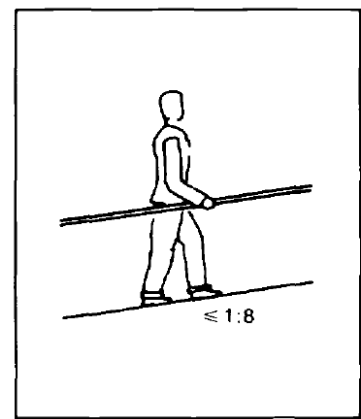
Fig 3. - Joe and Josephine in *The Measure of Man (Male and Female)*

Retrieved from: [https://images.collection.cooperhewitt.org/62955\\_3cde89d85e2cfc6e\\_b.jpg](https://images.collection.cooperhewitt.org/62955_3cde89d85e2cfc6e_b.jpg)

Even if the ambition is in fact to empower bodies that are different from the able-bodied, white, male norm (unlike stereotype-enforcing Dreyfuss), stretched norms are still limited in their mediating potential. Including different bodies in the definition simply means that more dominating, normative bodies are created. There is still little to no space for these bodies to learn, to grow and to change, as their existence has already been defined.



1 Normal pace of male adult on horizontal plane



2 On ramp pace reduced: desirable slope 10%–8%



3 Tread thumb: go

## Why the Act of Defining is the Actual Problem

The problem, therefore, is not the limited definitions that are made and the norms that emergence from them, but the problem lies with the *act of defining* bodies to begin with.

All definitions of bodies assume that bodies *are* a certain way, all definitions assume that it is possible to gain certain knowledge about bodies. These assumptions limit the possibilities for bodies to change, and for the surroundings to mediate.

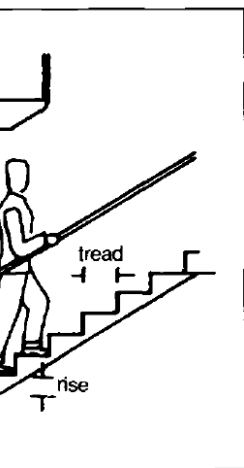
A closer look at some of the diagrams in Neufert's *Architects' Data* can reveal some of this assumed knowledge. In the diagrams on the right, we see a man walking on flat ground, on a slope and on different kinds of stairs. These diagrams assume a great number of things about how and which bodies are engaging with these surroundings.

The handrail, for example, can be seen as a walking aid, however, at the same time it assumes that the person walking up the stairs has hands (available) to hold on to that railing. The height of the handrail assumes that the bodies walking up the stairs have a certain height as well.

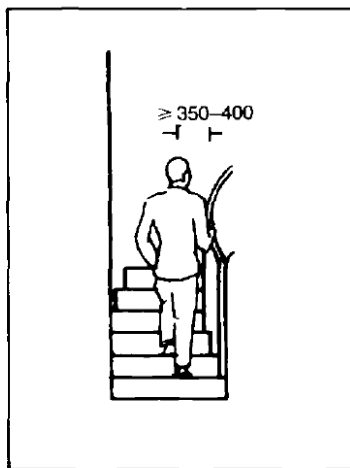
The stairs further assume that the desired manner of reaching the other floor is by moving one foot in front of the other, thereby creating risers that have the size of the average male foot. image: (Neufert, 1980, p. 14)

The diagrams on page 15 also come from *Architects' Data*, and show Leonardo da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man* (Neufert, 1980, p. 1) and Neufert's *Proportions of the human body* (Neufert, 1980, p. 9). By depicting bodies as free from any effects of their surroundings, simply as outlines corresponding to certain geometric shapes and mathematical functions, both Neufert and Da Vinci seem to suggest that there is such a thing as mere bodies.

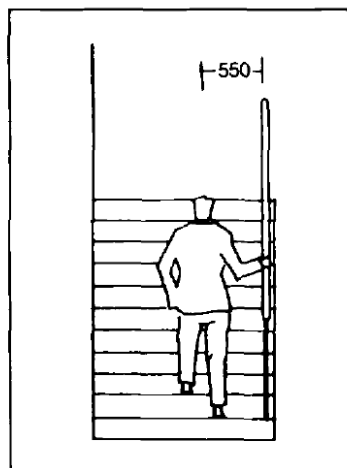
But bodies always are always situated. They always exist somewhere, and their existence implies that there are many different relations and interactions taking place which affect the body, or which the body produces, or both. As the British anthropologist Tim Ingold puts it: "*Simply to exist as sentient beings, people must already be situated in a certain environment and committed to the relationships this entails.*" (Ingold, 2000, p. 25) Therefore, mere bodies do not exist, and one could argue that this makes it impossible (and unnecessary) to think about what



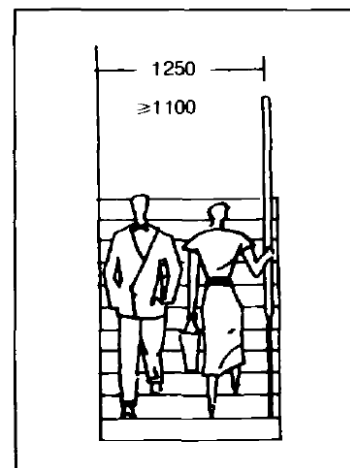
& rise proportion rule-of-  
ing + twice rise = 600



**4** If stairs narrow or curved  
distance of walk line from outer string  
450-400

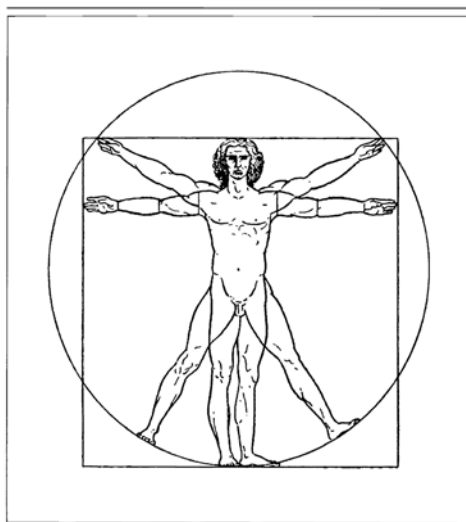


**5** If stairs wide & straight distance  
of walk line from handrail 550



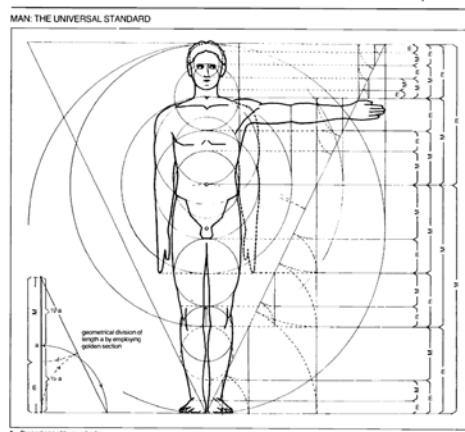
**6** W of stairs allowing 2 people to  
pass

The human scale in architecture



1. Leonardo da Vinci: rule of proportion

Proportions



1. Proportions of human body

Fig 4. - (above) *Walking Speeds and Flow Capacity*

Retrieved from Neufert, E. (1980). *Architects' Data - Second (International) English Edition*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Science, p.14.

Fig 5. - (below, left) *Leonardo da Vinci: rule of proportion*

Retrieved from Neufert, E. (1980). *Architects' Data - Second (International) English Edition*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Science, p.1.

Fig 6. - (below, right) *Proportions of the human body*

Retrieved from Neufert, E. (1980). *Architects' Data - Second (International) English Edition*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Science, p.9.

defines them.

All Neufert's diagrams, and all Dreyfuss descriptions are focussed on what bodies are, but bodies are not *a certain way*, or even *certain ways*. Bodies are contradictory modes of existence, sometimes they're such and other times they are so, but always they are related to their surroundings. Defining them in a singular, definitive way takes away the possibility for bodies to be more than one.

It is this assumed knowledge that will fundamentally be problematic for the inclusivity of designs that are based on this knowledge. This is because even if designers have the intention to make their designs inclusive, they still remain in a privileged position of power in which they have the ability to decide which bodies are deserving of tolerance and which are not (Lambert, 2018).

## How Norms Codify the Architectural Practice

As we have seen, the assumptions about characteristics of bodies creates norms about these bodies within the architectural practice and about the engagement of bodies with their surroundings. However, norms are present in various other dimensions of the architectural practice, and if we want to challenge them, it is worth reflection on this normative character of the discipline.

Digital technological advancements allow architects to create realistically looking representations of their future projects. Creating these images has become the norm in most architectural competitions. Similar to the act of defining bodies, these images are used to define what the end-product of the project should be like. Generally, the renders feature rays of sunshine, blue skies and young couples strolling around with their children. The streets and the buildings are clean, the trees are green, the people are happy.

These images are created mostly for marketing purposes, to make people enthusiastic about the coming project. The realistic feel of the images makes it believable that the picture shows exactly what the building project will deliver. Just as the feigned objectivity of the standardised diagrams is problematic, the feigned reality of the renders is just as problematic. The renders create a dominating, normative image of what the site should look like, and how the people in the site should engage with the site. The focus is mostly on what the building should be and what it should look like, instead of how it should mediate between bodies and their surroundings. Awan, Till and Schneider discuss this notion in their book *Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture*. They acknowledge that, within the architectural culture, aspects like aesthetics, form, style and technique are prioritized over more 'fluid' or 'volatile' aspects of architecture such as their occupation, their temporality and their relations to society and nature (Awan, Schneider, & Till, 2013, p. 27).



## How to Create Space for Becoming More than One Body

To create space for being more than one body (which is necessary if we want to create architectures that is a mediator) we need to accept that defining what bodies are is an unproductive approach.

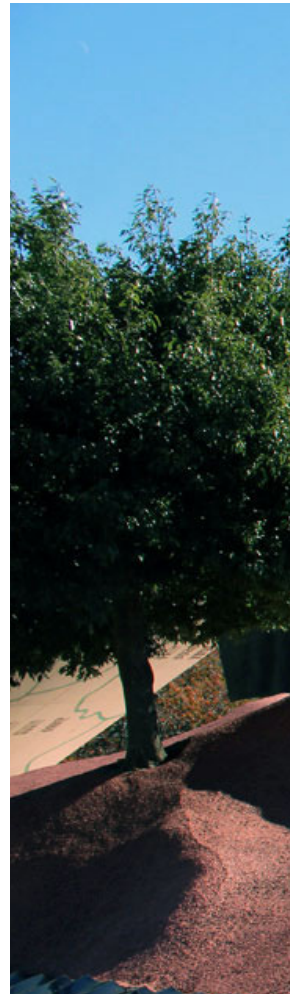
Arakawa and Gins' work is a great example of an approach to architecture which rejects all knowledge about bodies, to make sure their architecture is of service to bodies. The work of Arakawa and Gins is centred around a denial of mortality. Where mortality is generally taken as a given for every organism—a destiny, you could say—Arakawa and Gins set out to create architectures which allow organisms to reconfigure their own bodies and work towards escaping death and thereby reversing their destinies.

Arakawa and Gins describe the body as something that is required to “*fend off its own demise*”, in other words: a body is required to avoid death. Therefore, of an architecture that is of service to the body, the same is required: that it aids the body in avoiding death.

They then continue to wonder about bodies, and about what it is that “*we*” are. However, they acknowledge their own situatedness and therefore their limits in describing accurately what it is that *we* are. “*We cannot go beyond the world to find out what operates as it, because it is of our own making, it is us*” (Gins & Arakawa, 2002, p. xii). Arakawa and Gins decide not to concern themselves with defining the complexity and contingency of the world, instead they decide to focus on how to deal with contingency, to find value of the world *in the world*, through rearrangements of the world, *right here in the midst of things* (Gins & Arakawa, 2002, p. xiv).

Arakawa and Gins take this lack of knowing extremely serious, it is at the centre of their work: “*It must never be forgotten that we don't know what we are in the first place.*” The ambition of “*avoiding death*” may sound rather radical as an approach to life and as an approach to constructing architecture.

Therefore, Arakawa and Gins offer another, more toned-down explanation of their idea of reversible destiny: “*reversible destiny [...] as an open challenge to our species to reinvent itself and to desist from foreclosing on any possibility*” (Gins & Arakawa, 2002, p. xviii). In other words: a challenge for our bodies to constantly learn, change and grow in and with our surroundings, without refuting anything as *impossible*. The ambitions of Arakawa and Gins are perhaps best illustrated by taking a look at some of their built projects.



## Site of Reversible Destiny - Yoro Park - Japan (1995)

*“a created landscape containing a series of pavilions, undulating planes, shifting colours, and disorienting spaces that the artists presented to visitors as a place of purposeful experimentation.” (“Site of Reversible Destiny — YORO,” n.d.)*

The Site of Reversible Destiny is part of a larger public park in Yoro, Japan. Arakawa and Gins designed the site to create a place where visitors would be encouraged to reinvent themselves and the ways they interact with their surroundings. In the park, many architectural structures are placed with unusual elements, such as wavy planes and disorienting structures. Because the surroundings are full of unexpected elements, there is no ‘normal’ way to move through the park.

This absence of norms shifts the focus from what bodies *are* or *should be* to what bodies can *do*. The architects wished for the visitors to explore the site like children and discover the unlimited possibilities of their bodies (“Site of Reversible Destiny - YORO,” n.d.).

The architectural structures in Yoro Park do not assume any knowledge about bodies, but instead invite them to discover for themselves what they are able to do.



Fig 7. - (above, left) Devore, T. (n.d.) *Yoro Park*

Retrieved from: <https://thefunambulistdotnet.files.wordpress.com/2011/11/yoro-park-by-trane-devore.jpg>

Fig 8. - (above, middle) Lambert, L. (n.d.) *Yoro Park*

Retrieved from: <https://thefunambulistdotnet.files.wordpress.com/2014/11/yoro-park-02-photo-by-leopold-lambert.jpg>

Fig 9. - (above, right) Koichi (n.d.) *Yoro Park*

Retrieved from: <https://www.tofugu.com/travel/yoro-park/>

Fig 10. - (below) Lambert, L. (n.d.) *Elliptical Field – Site of Reversible Destiny Yoro by Arawaka and Madeline Gins*

Retrieved from: <https://thefunambulist.net/app/uploads/2014/11/Yoro-Park-05-Photo-by-Leopold-Lambert.jpg>



## Reversible Destiny Lofts MITAKA - In Memory of Helen Keller - Japan (2005)

*“The project [...] aims to challenge and stimulate the senses. Residents and guests who inhabit these spaces are given the possibility to discover the full potential of the body and experience challenging environments that may feel at different times more appropriate to a child or an elderly person. Helen Keller was a source of inspiration to Arakawa and Gins, and was described by them as someone able to practice ‘reversible destiny’ in her own life time. The lofts have been dedicated in her memory.”*



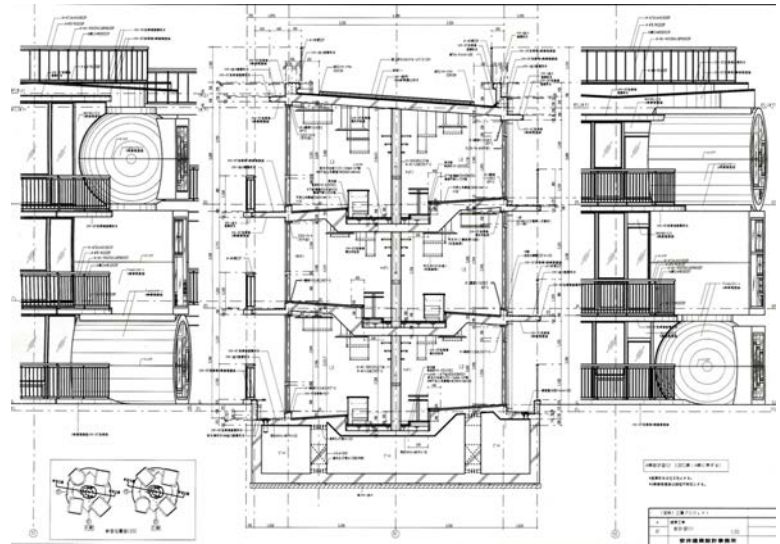


Fig 11. - (above, left) Lambert, L. (n.d.) *Mitaka Lofts*

Retrieved from: <https://thefunambulistdotnet.files.wordpress.com/2014/11/mitaka-lofts-08-photo-by-leopold-lambert.jpg>

Fig 12. - (above, middle) Unknown (n.d.) *Reversible Destiny Lofts MITAKA, interior, tube bathroom*

Retrieved from: <http://www.reversibledestiny.org/architecture/reversible-destiny-lofts-mitaka?view=slider#4>

Fig 13. - (above, right) Arakawa + Gins (n.d.) *MITAKA Lofts Drawing*

Retrieved from: <https://thefunambulistdotnet.files.wordpress.com/2014/11/mitaka-lofts-drawing-02-the-funambulist.jpg>

Fig 14. - (below) Unknown (n.d.) *Reversible Destiny Lofts MITAKA, interior, sphere room.*

Retrieved from: <http://www.reversibledestiny.org/architecture/reversible-destiny-lofts-mitaka?view=slider#3>

## Thinking of Bodies as Fields of Potentials, Constantly Becoming

To make sure we do not fall back into old habits of thinking about *mere bodies* instead of situated bodies, it is important that we attempt to let go of the subject-object division which has been introduced by the field of phenomenology. In this subject-object division the human body and space are seen as two separate entities (the human body being the subject, space being the object). This division ignores any forms of interdependency between bodies and their surroundings, and as Zuzana Kovar explains in her PhD thesis: “*it is because phenomenology concerns the body rather than bodies that it is a discussion of wholes rather than transitions and exchanges, unable to accommodate volatile processes*” (Kovar, 2014, p. 24).

*“If persons can never be extricated from surroundings, then what must be looked at is the extent to which they are bound to and influenced by them. In what respects and how variegatedly do physical surroundings invite bodily action? How far out into the environment does an organism that persons extend? To what extent do surroundings influence thoughts and actions?” (Gins & Arakawa, 2002, p. 40)*

Arakawa and Gins adopt their own terminology to keep away from the dualistic phenomenological approach. Instead of talking about space as a passive object, they refer to the *architectural surround*, with which they mean a set of features which exists only in relation to a body, making it therefore highly personal, but also perpetually shifting. They argue that bodily movements take place within the architectural surrounds, but these bodily movements are simultaneously formative of the architectural surrounds. This construct they call the *architectural body*, to emphasise the inseparability between bodies and surroundings.

Instead, to make sure that change can be accommodated in our conception of bodies, we can switch from thinking of ‘the human body’ as being an entity, to thinking about bodies as fields of potential, never in a moment of stasis or being, but always becoming (Kovar, 2014, p. 29).

A more productive notion, that does consider bodies’ complex relationships

with their surroundings it the notion of becoming. Frichot explains this notion as: *“Becoming is always based on an encounter whereby something happens between at least two things, which leaves both irrevocably transformed”* (Frichot, 2016, Chapter 3). So, where the notion of a human being seems to discuss a complete entity, the notion of a human becoming discusses the potentiality of bodies to change, to be affected and to produce affects.

- discuss *“Architecture is not a matter of objects, which are, or settings, which are outside of our selves, architecture is a way of framing our own existential experience, and consequently the characteristics of architecture also condition our experience of the world and of ourselves.”*

The notion that it is unproductive to define what bodies are, should not be a discouraging thought for the architectural practice. Thinking of bodies as fields of potential calls for situating bodies in their surroundings and thinking about what these bodies, and what architectural interventions in the surroundings can do.

The shift from a focus on definitions and wholes to a processual and relational mode of thought means a shift from end-products (buildings) to the process of building (Kovar, 2014, p. 30).

- Design in the midst of things  
- Work with the situation at hand, find tools to think about what could be done in a site, figure out how to deal with the problems that you’re facing right there, right now (Frichot, 2016)

# interlude

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P: “How is your research coming along? Have you figured out how to solve the impossible puzzle already?”

V: “I have not, but I have realised some things.”

P: “What kind of things?”

V: “Well—I have realized that it is unproductive to look at the matter as though it is a puzzle with a solution.”

P: “How so?”

V: “Empowerment—or inclusivity—in architecture is not one puzzle that can be solved at some point and then remain solved forever. Empowerment in architecture is more like an infinite number of puzzles, existing in all sorts of places and times, relating very much to who and what is going on in place.”

P: “Ah, so it is even more complex than we thought.”

V: “It is. However, I have also realised that I don’t need to figure some of these complex things out.”

P: “Like what things?”

V: “Like what bodies are, for example.”

P: “But wait— isn’t it exactly bodies that you want to empower through architecture? Don’t you need to know what they are, so that you are able to empower them?”

V: “It is bodies that I want to empower—true—but I don’t think I need to know what they are, to empower them. Actually, I think it is rather impossible for someone to know what bodies are, as bodies can be so different and



as they are constantly in a process of change and growth. Everyday our bodies are different, and there is no knowing how our bodies might change again tomorrow. As we talked about last time, it is impossible to keep all different bodies in mind when designing, but luckily we don't have to."

P: "I'm not following. How can you design for bodies while ignoring bodies?"

V: "Well—let's go back to our previous conversation. We mentioned that 'average bodies' don't exist. That is still true, but I want to go a little further than that. I will argue that, not only are there no average bodies, there is also no such thing as *mere bodies*."

P: "What do you mean with 'mere bodies'?"

V: "Mere bodies are bodies without surroundings. Like when you picture a body in your head. Or like Leonardo da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man*, that is a drawing of a mere body. In the world around us, there are no mere bodies. There are only *situated* bodies."

P: "Okay, fair enough, so you mean that all bodies are always in a surrounding—but why does this matter?"

V: "It matters a lot! If we acknowledge that our surroundings have an influence on our bodies, then that means that our bodies do not simply end at our skins. It means that your body—right now—extends to the clothes that you're wearing—for example—but your body also extends to the couch that you're sitting on and to the air that you are breathing in and out... We can't really ever determine where our bodies end and our surroundings begin,

because they are both so intertwined in all these relations and potentials. This notion makes it clear—I believe—that there is no use in defining what bodies are, no matter how many different bodies you would attempt to include in this definition.”

P: “Hm. This all sounds very complex, and—I must say— also rather depressing. If we’re never able to know anything about bodies, is it even possible then, to reach the initial goal you set for yourself at the beginning of your project?”

V: “I think so—yes—and I don’t think it is depressing at all! In fact, it is rather liberating not to have to find the “proper” definition of what it is that bodies are... Accepting that we—and everything around us—is constantly in flux and that there are endless relations to be formed with our surroundings is quite exciting. This shift in perspective could be very productive, and architecture could become about responding to what is already there and creating possibilities for new things—relations—potentials—to emerge...”

P: “Okay—it still sounds complex. Are there examples of projects that approach architecture in this way?”

V: “Well—in my research I have looked a lot at the work of architects Arakawa and Gins. Their ambition was to create architecture that could help to reverse the destinies of the bodies interacting with them.”

P: “Reverse their destinies? What do they mean with that?”

V: “Arakawa and Gins acknowledged the complexity of bodies and the situatedness of bodies in their surroundings. They believed that architecture is of service to the body, and to

achieve this servitude, architecture had to have the same goal as all bodies have, which in their opinion is to *not die*.”

P: “I suppose most of us have that goal—yes. How did their architectural design achieve this?”

V: “Many of the designs they created did not have any clear directions of how to move around in them. They created a park filled with many different objects and structures of which it wasn’t clear what to do with them. Everyone in the park has to physically explore their surroundings by using their own bodies, and because of all the differences between bodies, this means that everyone moves about differently as well. Their designs were not at all about producing comfort or making sure that people could move about with as little effort as possible—Arakawa and Gins really wanted the users to use and experiment with their bodies in their surroundings, so that their bodies could learn and grow and become something else through their relations with the architecture.”

P: “Okay—this sounds intriguing. How are you going to continue this graduation process now, with all this new knowledge you have?”

V: “I think that this approach to the world has some implications for how we intervene in places. I’m not too sure yet how to go about designing according to this approach yet—it is very difficult to reject the knowledge about bodies, like Arakawa and Gins did—but I think that I will be able to do some little (thought) experiments based on what I’ve found, to familiarize myself with this way of thinking.

P: “I think experiments are a good idea to practice what you’ve

found... I'm still having a hard time to figure out how your bodies-philosophy—if I may call it that—relates to the practice of architecture. What do you think you'll find out by doing these experiments?"

V: "I'm not too sure about what exactly I'll find, but this whole notion of situated bodies and the fact that bodies are not entities—even though we often think of them like that—does call for a critical look at our surroundings, to figure out how our bodies are extended in our surroundings and if there's anything we want to change about these relations. I suppose I'll find out some of my own body-surrounding extensions, and hopefully I'll find some tools for intervening without having to define and exclude."

P: "Are there interventions or actions you already know that are not about defining, but that are about these relations that you talk about?"

V: "Well—outside of architecture we are already doing this in countless different ways. We constantly affect our surroundings and our relations with our surroundings. For example, you and Mom affect the garden when taking care of the plants, cutting the grass, pruning the trees, etc. This taking care is an important notion. Architecture can also take care, when being attentive to the surroundings and responding to, or enabling relations."

P: "Do you have any examples of architecture which takes care?"

V: "Oh, I've found so many over the past months—it's incredible—some that really inspired me were projects which managed to inhabit sites which appeared to be inhabitable at first. The architects there really thought

about how to care for these surroundings, and create interventions which allowed for new engagements with the surroundings to emerge. There was a project where someone created a secret studio, hidden away underneath a large concrete bridge. Another project brought a space underneath a flyover back to life, by building a temporary open-air cinema there.”

P: “These sound like interesting interventions. Do you already have some ideas about interventions of your own?”

V: “Not quite... I want to practice a bit at first. I want to find ways to explore my own surroundings and figure out how to take care there. I want to look for some normative structures which exist because of those assumptions about bodies that we talked about earlier. Then, I want to look for ways to disrupt these structures and create interventions that enable potentials of the surroundings.”

•

# thinking sites

## On Thinking Sites as Concept-Tools

To situate this research in my own surroundings, and in my own body, I set out to perform a few 'experiments', to learn through doing, and to think through the things that I am doing. I set out to perform architectural procedures, "*launching an inquiry-on-the-go into my own constituent factors*" (Gins and Arakawa, 2002, p. 73).

I dedicated time to explore my own surroundings, to sculpt my own architectural body in different ways, and to carefully intervene in my surroundings and find out what information these interventions could bring (about normative situations, about new potential relations, etc.). Because, in the words of Tim Ingold: *ways of acting in the environment are also ways of perceiving it* (Ingold, 2000, p. 9).

However, in your direct surroundings these normative structures can sometimes be difficult to find, as habits and everyday life tend to make even oppressive situations appear normal (Frichot, 2016, p. 8). These experiments were therefore also a way of figuring out the *status quo* in different situations, and discovering certain structures of my own everyday life.

After having performed a few experiments, which I have given the name of *Moments of Exploration*, I tried to figure out how to learn from these procedures and interventions. I had gained knowledge through performing these explorations, but I wanted to find a way in which these explorations could inspire further action not only for myself, but also for others.

In her book *How to Make Yourself a Feminist Design Power Tool*, H el ene Frichot encourages her audience "*to think and do architecture in ways that challenges a dogmatic status quo*". In the introduction to the book she stresses the importance of tools, which include material as well as immaterial tools, such as think-tools or concept-tools. "*Relevant tools, the tools for thinking, address and actualise the 'power of the situation', and it could turn out that these tools are not very respectable, exactly in that they challenge the norm. Rather than simply allowing us to recognise what we already know; the tool helps us think in relation to a pressing matter of concern.*" (Frichot, 2016, p. 16)

In this research, these concept-tools, or tools for thinking have been given the name of *Thinking Sites*. These *Thinking Sites* do not simply offer a solution



*Moments of Exploration*

case studies

*“becoming a modest witness”*

to specific situations, nor do they describe a state of affairs. However, they do challenge to “do something, to make a difference, to make a change.” (Frichot, 2016, p. 116)

The list of *Thinking Sites* I have collected grew gradually, through the *Moments of Exploration*, and the list is growing still, and will perhaps (hopefully) always do so.

In some *Moments of Exploration*, multiple *Thinking Sites* were explored and, on some occasions, one *Thinking Site* was applied to multiple *Moments of Exploration*. Sometimes, from this re-application even more *Thinking Sites* emerged. The process was an irregular and unpredictable one, but productive nonetheless.

On their own, these *Thinking Sites* do not do much. They need to be put to use by someone, in actual sites and situations. In this research therefore, the *Thinking Sites* will be discussed by looking at the *Moments of Exploration* from which they arose, but also by discussing some case studies in which they have been applied.

This chapter could be read from beginning to end, but other ways of reading it are also encouraged, as the *Thinking Sites* remain tools to be put to use and are not prescriptive instructions. The contents of the *Thinking Sites* often overlap and are inseparably intertwined—there is also always more than one *Thinking Site*...

In this chapter the *Thinking Sites* are written out as a record of my own investigations over the past months, to figure out a way of thinking about architecture in a productive and non-normative way.

To give the collection of *Thinkings Sites*, *Moments of Exploration* and the case studies some structure, a colour code has been used. The text is structured in chapters on each *Thinking Site*. Within these chapters, pink boxes represent *Moments of Exploration*, green boxes represent case studies and yellow boxes represent moments in the site which has been chosen for the ‘final design’. These moments have been titled “becoming a modest witness”, after one of the steps of Frichot’s *How to Become a Feminist Power Tool*, as I tried to place myself in the chosen surroundings to learn about the things that were taking place there.







**thinking site #1:**  
discover repetition/  
transformation potential

# thinking site #1: discover repetition/ transformation potential

This (first) *Thinking Site* emerged from the first *Moment of Exploration*, in which I set out on a walk around my neighbourhood, dictated by a domestic object that I took with me on the walk (a spatula).

Bringing an object that is usually part of a specific surrounding (in this case my kitchen) into a completely different surrounding, triggered me to imagine what this particular object could do in this 'new' place (see *Moment of Exploration #1*).

This thought then triggered me to imagine what a dozen of these objects could do in my surroundings. Could I imagine a new building material? Could I imagine new interactions with the site?

I realised that I was thinking about a certain relationship between the object in my hands and the site that I was standing in, namely the "repetition/transformation potential" of this object in this site. I documented some thoughts about what potentials could be enabled with multiple spatulas, which are depicted in the *Moment of Exploration*.

Repetition and transformation are actions that can lead to new potentials, but it isn't only objects and materials whose repetition leads to new potentials, the same counts for thoughts or actions. This *Thinking Site* encourages the exploration of the ways in which the repetition or transformation of something can be used or looked at as an affordance. Like how the placement of one single brick next to another can eventually lead to a wall and how the placement of one step after another can lead to a long walk, or can eventually form a path.

## *moment of exploration #1: taking a domestic object for a walk*

While I was pondering which normative structures to disrupt first, my research mentor introduces me to the idea of “*taking an object for a walk*” as way to encounter surroundings *otherwise*<sup>24</sup>. Letting a domestic object dictate my actions in public space turned out to be a productive way of analysing the object in a entirely new way, but also of experiencing my surroundings in a new

One morning, I decided to set out for a walk with a wooden spatula. In its usual surroundings (my kitchen) the object often serves as an extension of my hand, allowing me to scrape, stir, spread, transport and even cut some things.

Before I started my walk, I tried to map the physical dimensions and qualities of the object. One side of the spatula has a slightly pointed end, with a circular hole in it. The other side has four elongated holes, of which the outer two are a bit shorter than the middle ones. The wood is the pretty much the same thickness, but it becomes a bit shorter towards the end with the four holes. I’m not able to find a ruler, so instead I measure the spatula with my phone. Its’ length is twice the length of my phone, and the wide end is roughly the same width as my phone.

After this mapping, I take the spatula and walk out of the door. As soon as I close the door behind me, I start to actively search for affordances in my surroundings that this spatula can in some way respond to. To use the words of Arakawa and Gins:

## moment of exploration #1: taking a domestic object for a walk

I'm looking for *landing sites* for the spatula and I am *apportioning the spatula out* into the world (Gins & Arakawa, 2002, p. 6).

On the staircase towards the main front door of my building, I can't find many landing sites. I realize I'm looking for hooks or for spaces with the same width as my spatula (twice my phone), so that I can wedge it in between.

The building where I live is situated along the river the Schie, and there is a little strip of park right next to it. I decide to walk through there. I find a three-stemmed tree, and it seems like the perfect landing site for my spatula. If only I had more spatulas... Then I would be able to make a little platform in the middle of these three stems, perhaps even expanding beyond the stems. I stop trying to find landing sites for the spatula, and let it direct the movements of my walk instead.

Even though the spatula isn't Y-shaped, it still reminds me of a dowsing rod, as I'm holding it in my hands and urge it to direct my movements in the surroundings. I try to place the end of the spatula between my thumb and index finger, parallel to the ground, to try to get it to point in different directions. The wood of the spatula is a bit too



## *moment of exploration #1: taking a domestic object for a walk*

rough unfortunately, so it doesn't turn much.

I continue to think about other ways in which the spatula can tell me what to do, and can allow me to engage with my surroundings in a different manner. My mind keeps going back to the holes of the spatula: one on one side, four on the other. A ratio of 1:4. I let this ratio direct me for a while: taking one step forward and then turning around in that spot to four sides



(looking to the right, then backwards, to the left, and forward again).

This procedure slows my walk down immensely, but it does provide me with a lot of different perspectives of my surroundings. It also turns the walk into somewhat of a performance. There aren't many people passing by, but I can see a few of them looking at me curiously. After a while I take

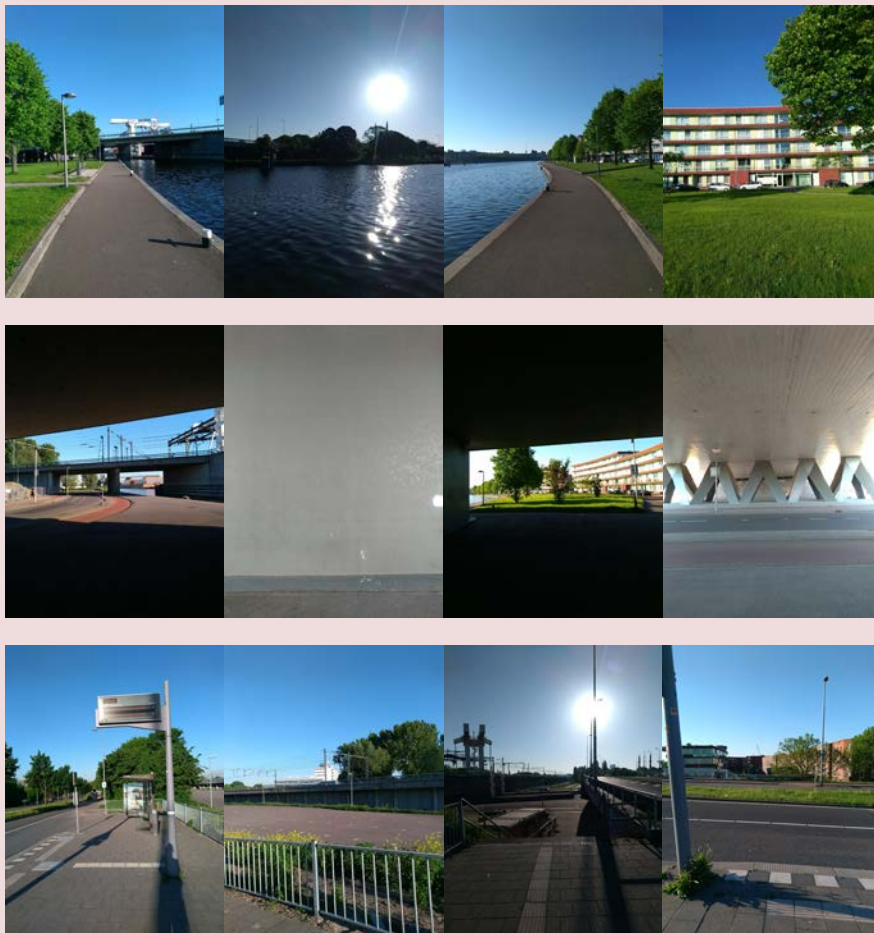
## *moment of exploration #1: taking a domestic object for a walk*

a few more steps before turning to four sides again, not only because I am a little embarrassed about what people might think of me, but also because the views to the four different sides are quite similar after just one step.

I take a photo of every side that I look at, as a way to document the places where I'm standing still, and the surroundings that can be perceived from there. Later on I make a collage of the photos so that the four pictures actually frame the place where I took the photos.

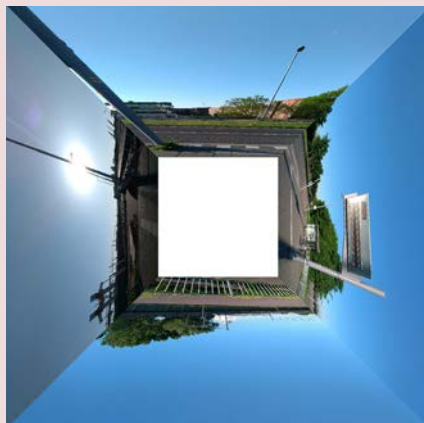
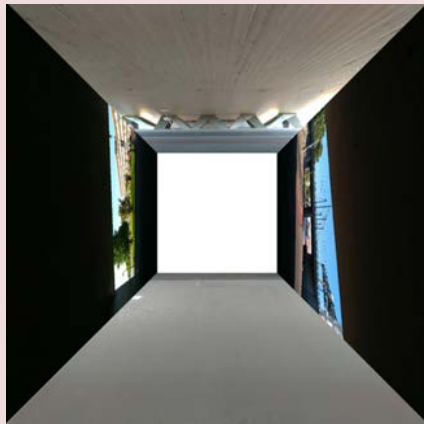
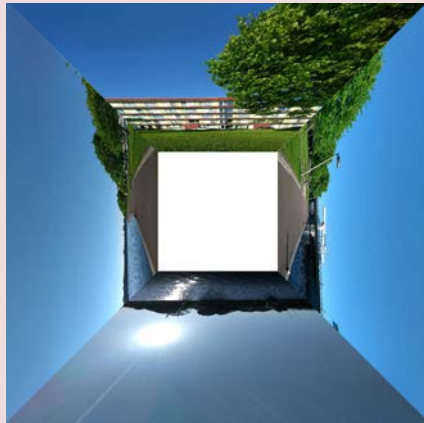
I still wonder about what having multiple spatulas would afford, and when I get home from my walk, I make some sketches of different potential spatula-constructions.

*moment of exploration #1: taking a domestic object for a walk*



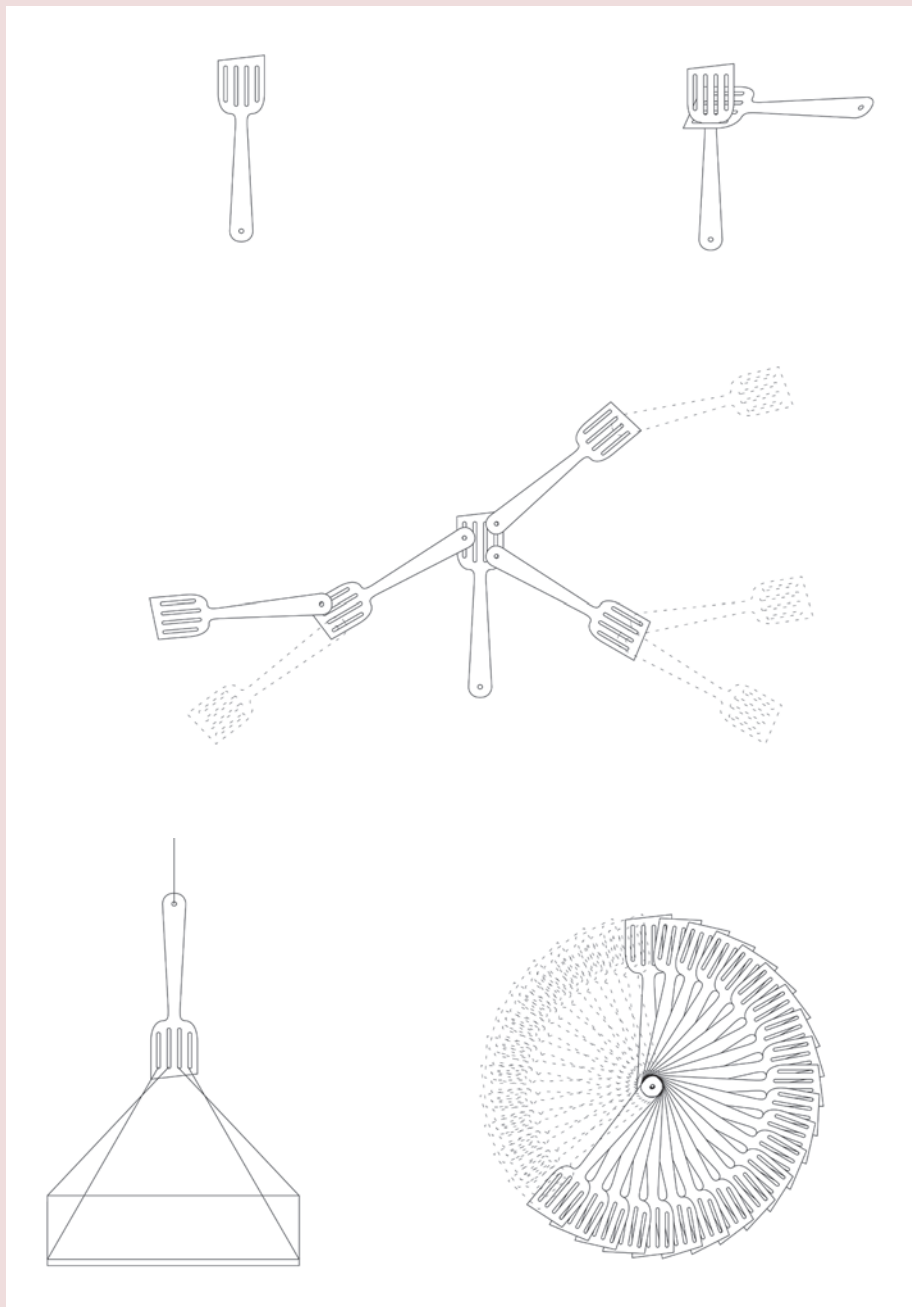
photos: Veerle Alkemade

*moment of exploration #1: taking a domestic object for a walk*





*moment of exploration #1: taking a domestic object for a walk*







**thinking site #2:**  
discover structural-  
element potential

## thinking site #2: discover structural- element potential

This next *Thinking Site* developed during the first *Moment of Exploration* as well. During my walk, I was placing the spatula into the surroundings all sorts of different figurations. In this way, I found a tree with three stems and was able to wedge the spatula in between two of these stems, creating a little platform within the tree. This platform could potentially be used to place something on, or to hang something from.

The potential of a thing to serve as a structural element formed another way of thinking about the possible relations that could be formed in the site (and thereby focussing on what the thing could *do*, instead of attempting to figure out what the thing was).

By placing the spatula in between the stems of the tree, I was provided with information on this relationship and on some further potentials. One edge of the spatula has quite a pointy end, which meant that the spatula wobbled a bit when wedged in the tree. I thought about what would happen if I could saw off a part of the edge, to make it curve the other way around. Perhaps it would increase its *Structural Element Potential* in this site. Another possibility would be to carve out a little hole in the tree, so that the spatula could be put into this hole, but of course, there are many other considerations against this intervention (namely the health of the tree).

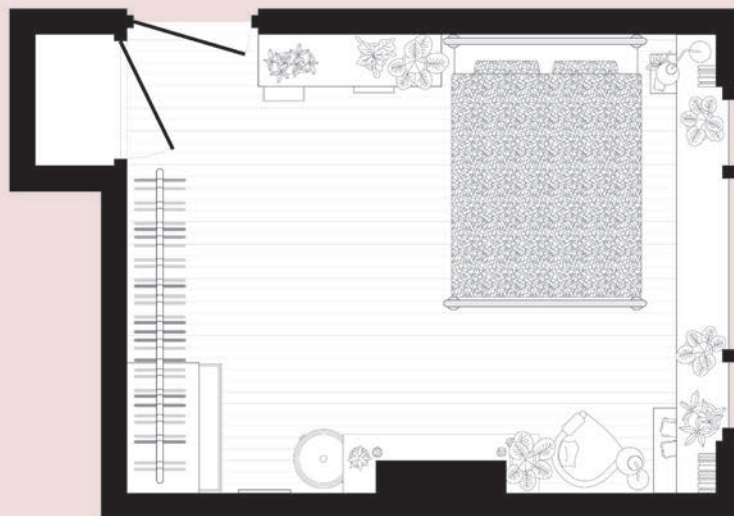
Interacting with my domestic object and the tree also led me to think about the *Structural Element Potential* of this tree in relation to other materials. Would it be possible to build a little tree house among its branches? The stems of the tree weren't all that big, I doubt they would be able to support my weight, but perhaps the tree house could be a lovely hiding place for some of the local birds.

I applied this *Thinking Site* again during the second *Moment of Exploration*, in my own bedroom. As I had challenged myself to intervene right then and there, using only the things that were already present in my house, I had to figure out if any of the objects I owned could serve as a structural element for the creation of a table.

## *moment of exploration #2: a sunday evening in my bedroom*

My bedroom is quite a comfortable room, about 16 square meters, with a nice broad windowsill, plenty of morning sun and a cosy (electric) fireplace. However, there is something missing from this space, which doesn't always bother me, but sometimes proves problematic. This is the fact that my room is missing a table to work, write or draw on.

Before I go further, I'll give some more context of the situation.



First of all, the house I live in is a rental house, which means I'm not the actual owner of the space. Secondly, I live in a house with three bedrooms and a living room, together with two house mates who both have partners that occasionally stay over. Next to this, there are two young cats in the house who are great at destroying whatever object they encounter. Finally, my budget could be considered as a "student budget",

## *moment of exploration #2: a sunday evening in my bedroom*

meaning that I don't have the means to buy any table I like. I do actually own a table, but at this moment it is used as our dinner table in the living room.

A normative response to this situation, considering the tight budget, could be to simply move my table back into my room, which as you can see here, technically fits. I would have to do some rearranging of furniture, as this place is not ideal for reaching other things in my room, but I suppose it is a possibility.

I wasn't quite happy with this solution. First of all, the table is quite heavy, so I wouldn't be able to move it into my room on my own. Next to that, whenever I do desire a surface to write or draw on in my bedroom, it usually means that my

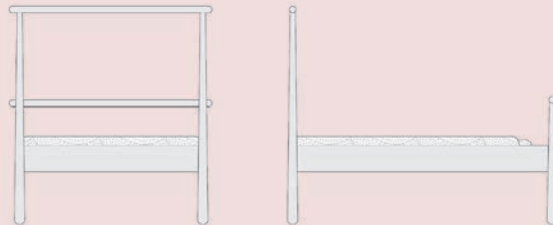


## *moment of exploration #2: a sunday evening in my bedroom*

room mates are hanging out in the living room, and that is likely to mean that the table is occupied as well. I don't want to intervene with that.

When thinking about options to create a writing surface in my room, I tried to view the furniture and things I own not as objects, but as affordances, to figure out if there were any possibilities for interventions at this moment in time.

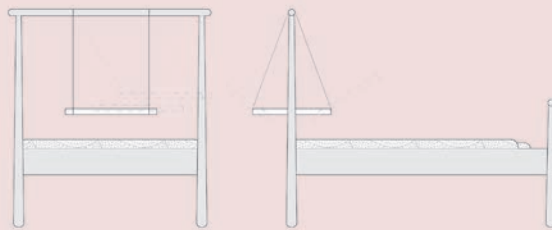
The first thing I thought about was how my bed, a sturdy birch-wood IKEA bed, can be seen as an affordance because of the wooden bars it has at both ends. They could be used to hang or place something on, and I set out to find something



that I could hang on it. I found a wooden board (which technically belongs to my roommate) and I found some spare thread. These were the tools available at that point in time to me.

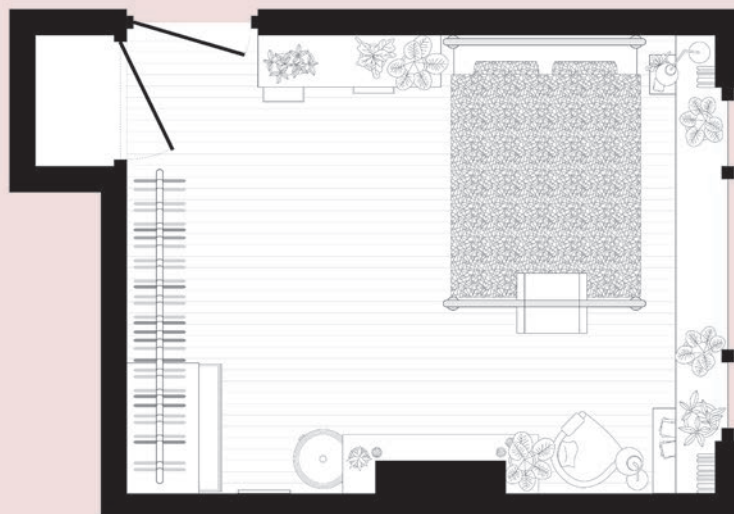
The first intervention I created was quite a simplistic one, I tied two ropes around the board and hung them on the high wooden bar. I had to adjust it a few times to figure out which

*moment of exploration #2: a sunday evening in my bedroom*



height was a nice height to work on when sitting on my bed.

This intervention provided me with a new situation to assess. Did this situation appropriately mediate between me and my surroundings? Not quite. The wooden board was great to put my laptop on, but it was quite annoying to have the board swing around when trying to write or draw on it. Especially straight lines were a real challenge...





*moment of exploration #2: a sunday evening in my bedroom*



photos: Veerle Alkemade

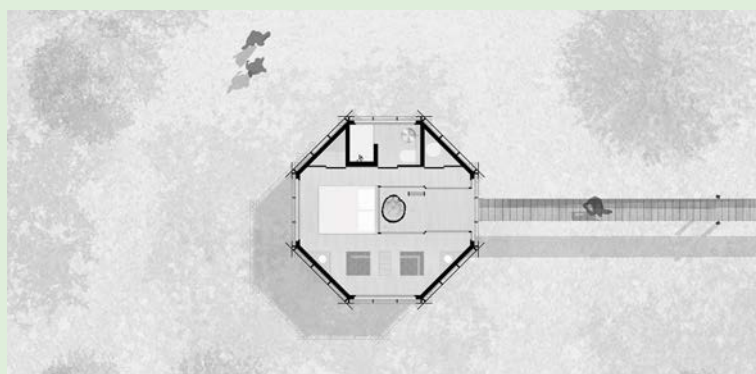
case study: *ORIGIN tree house (Atelier LAVIT)*

In a French forest, not far from Paris, Atelier LAVIT has constructed a tree house which shows much resemblance to a birds' nest. Using the *Structural Element Potential* of the stem of the tree (and of the wooden beams), a small wooden cabin has been built in which two people are able to spend the night.



photo: Marco Lavit Nicora

case study: *ORIGIN tree house (Atelier LAVIT)*



drawings: Marco Lavit Nicora

***case study: Secret Studio, Valencia, Spain (Fernando Abellanas)***

Beneath a bridge in Valencia hangs this tiny workspace, created by the self-taught designer Fernando Abellanas. The chair and table of the workspace are attached to the big concrete column and can be reached by moving the floor along the beams of the bridge.

*“These are locations that due to their architecture, location or size have become useless. People hardly notice when walking by.”*



photos: Jose Manuel Pedrajas

*case study: Secret Studio, Valencia, Spain (Fernando Abellanas)*





**thinking site #3:**  
make non-intrusive  
connections

# thinking site #3: make non-intrusive connections

Making or constructing something often entails making connections between certain materials or elements. These connections can be made with certain goals in mind: nailing planks together can create a beam which is able to bear more weight than the planks were able to before the connection.

Sometimes however, the connections can be harmful to the materials, and their potential can become limited. A plank with many nails hammered into it, is altered in a way that makes it more difficult to reuse it than a plank without any nails would be.

If we consider architecture and our architectural bodies as some things that are continuously in flux, it then follows that the connections that we make when we are making or constructing something do not have a static character either. These connections are part of the process of architecture, and they too can end.

I started wondering about this temporality, and how extreme temporality can limit the options of connections that can be made. If you want to construct something for only a few days, or perhaps for only an evening or an afternoon, you might not want to harm the materials by making intrusive connections. It would be more valuable to create non-intrusive connections, which do not harm the materials (too much) in their construction.

This notion arose from *Moment of Exploration #2*, which took place on a Sunday evening in my own home. On this particular Sunday evening, I set out to intervene in my current surroundings (my own room), to see what information it would give me about the normative structures of my house and the architectural bodies that I usually form in this place. But, equally important, I wanted to discover the potential of intervening right then and *only* then. I did not want to plan an intervention which would take weeks to complete, for which I would need specific power tools and a space to build.

The *Moment of Exploration* is described in the *Discovering Structural Potential* chapter, but that was not the only way I was thinking about the site, that Sunday Evening. I was also in search of *Making Non-Intrusive Connections*, prompted by the fact that I wanted to intervene right away, with the limited amount of resources to intervene with (the majority of them not technically owned by me).





## becoming a modest witness: pancakes on the picnic table

Every Thursday afternoon (at least during the summer) a number of women gather around one of the picnic tables in the park 1943. One of the women arrives with a shopping cart full of plates, cutlery, mugs and a large pile of ingredients. Next to the picnic table stands a cart on wheels, festively



photo: Veerle Alkemade

## *becoming a modest witness: pancakes on the picnic table*

decorated with drawings. On both sides of the cart a beach umbrella is attached, to shelter the people standing near the cart from the sun (which is surprisingly warm on this September afternoon).

The cart has been transformed into an outdoor kitchen. There are two cooking pits, pans are hanging on a rack above the cart and there is a trash bag attached to the side.

Today we are baking pancakes. Every week the women think of a new dish to make together, often with ingredients that they have gathered from the market that day.

Everyone is allowed to join the cooking and the eating. The event is organised by the Zelfregiehuis, who receive some funding from the municipality to organise events like these.

Catherine and I approach the group, a little uneasy about how to join the gathering. I am a little nervous. Are we really allowed to join? I do live in the neighbourhood, but it feels a little awkward still.

After a bit of uneasiness, we manage to get to know the people there, and conversations develop. It doesn't take long before Catherine is baking pancakes with some of the children who pass by on their way home from school.

At one point an elderly lady walks by, pushing a walking aid in

*becoming a modest witness: pancakes on the picnic table*



front of her. She is intrigued by the gathering, but—similar to Catherine and me a while ago—she is unsure about joining. “Come, come!” Evie says to the woman, “we have pancakes and coffee or tea!” Evie is a regular here, she joins nearly every week. She is sitting on a chair that she brought from the Zelfregiehuis, crocheting while she makes conversation.

The elderly woman agrees to join, but she declines the tea—if

photo: Veerle Alkemade

## *becoming a modest witness: pancakes on the picnic table*

she drinks any she'll have to go to the bathroom soon, she tells us. She turns her walking aid around, so that she can use it as a chair—the picnic table requires too much strength and flexibility for her to be able to sit on it.

From this position she isn't able to reach any of the items on the table on her own, but she doesn't mind asking people to hand her things. She tells us that she's 95 years old, and that she has lived in neighbourhood a very long time.

The woman stays for the rest of the afternoon. After a while she tells us that her daughter will probably be worried about her now. "She usually calls me in the afternoon, but now I won't be home to pick up the phone." She doesn't seem to mind very much, but instead chuckles excitedly at the thought of being able to tell her daughter about her little escapade of this afternoon.

### *moment of exploration #3: the picnic table in the park*

The pancake afternoon was a wonderful introduction to the site, and the relations that the people form with the site.

One (normative) thing that stood out to me in the surroundings that I had placed myself in that afternoon was the picnic table, and how exclusive it seemed to be in its use. It was clear that the table was designed with certain (able) bodies in mind, disregarding any others who wish to gather in the park.

I decided to go back to the table, to explore the affordances of this picnic table. I brought a small script with me, to guide me in thinking about how to intervene in the site, but also to urge me to act. I learned in my previous *Moments of Exploration* how vulnerable you become when trying to challenge the status quo, especially if the surroundings you are in isn't the comfortable site of your bedroom.

Script for the intervention of today:

1. Bring (household) object with me
2. Walk around the site for about 10 minutes.
3. Talk with at least one person
4. Choose two thinking sites to explore.
5. Act.
6. Reflect.

*moment of exploration #3: the picnic table in the park*

In my bag:

- camera (phone)
- notebook + pencil case
- thread
- door handle



photo: Veerle Alkemade

### *moment of exploration #3: the picnic table in the park*

I arrived at the site after a walk through a part of the neighbourhood that I hadn't visited before. After that, I decided to go back to the picnic table that we ate pancakes at two weeks ago.

The picnic tables are semi-permanent structures within the public space of the park. There are three of them in a row, in the middle of the park. All three are identical, sturdy tables, made from metal and wood. They seem to be designed to resist harsh weather and harsh behaviour.

However, the tables are clearly designed for able people only. Even though the sides of the table are quite open, the table is very long, so the middle part of the bench still requires people to lift their legs up very high.

During the pancake-lunch, the 95-year old woman who passed by was only able to sit on her walking aid, meaning that she was too far away from the table to be able to reach anything that was standing on it.

The site got me thinking about possible interventions that would allow for more uses of the table.

I had brought some thread with me, as many of the ladies that were at the event two weeks ago do a lot of knitting and crocheting. Their activities made me wonder if there were



### *moment of exploration #3: the picnic table in the park*

ways to use thread to intervene in the site.

I also had a door handle with me, as I wanted to bring an ‘alien’ object to this situation—inspired by my first Moment of Exploration, taking a domestic object for a walk—as I hoped that it would help me to look and explore the site in different ways.

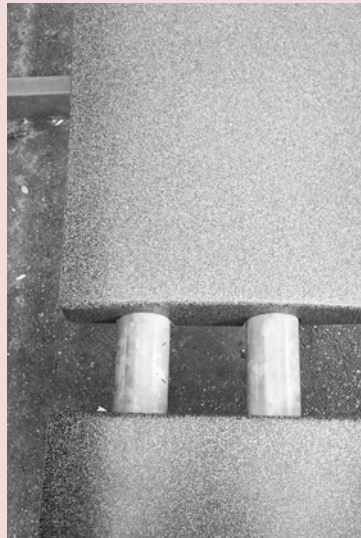
I used the tools to map the affordances of the table. The thread made it easy to measure dimensions, and I discovered that the width of the table is just a bit less than the length of the benches for instance.

The door handle mostly looked like a hook in this situation. I could hook it into one of the holes in the middle of the table to be able to create a force pulling away from the table.



photos: Veerle Alkemade

*moment of exploration #3: the picnic table in the park*



photos: Veerle Alkemade

*moment of exploration #3: the picnic table in the park*

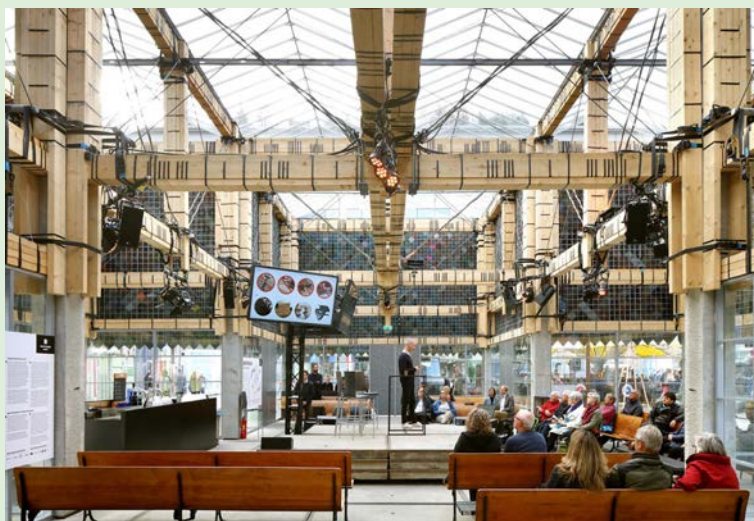


## *case study: people's pavilion (Overtreders W + bureau SLA + ARUP)*

The People's Pavilion by Overtreders W, bureau SLA and ARUP was built for the Dutch Design Week in Eindhoven in 2017.

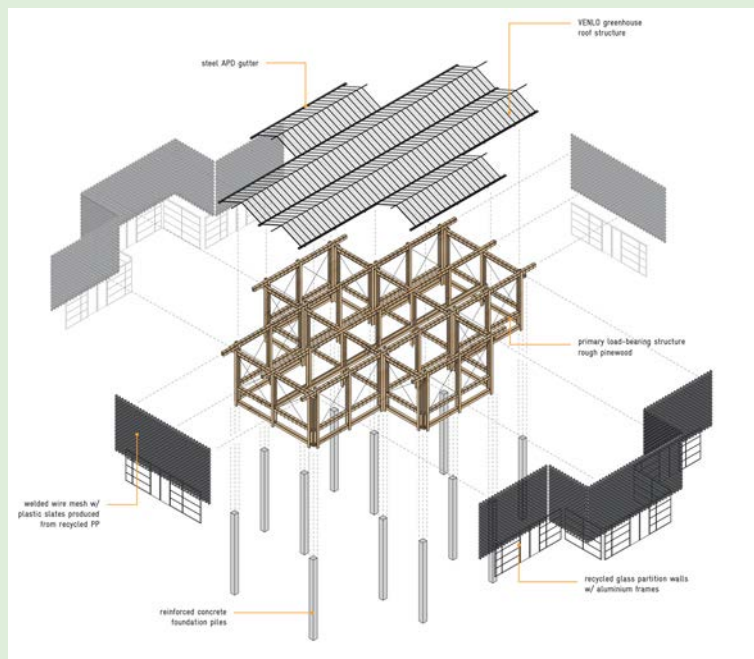
The pavilion, which was made from borrowed materials, was assembled in such a way that complete disassembly was possible without any harm to the materials that were used.

The pavilion aimed to promote sustainable and circular design with their building approach. Especially fascinating is the inventive use of ropes and straps as connecting-elements.



photos: Filip Dujardin, drawing: Overtreders W + Bureau SLA

*case study: people's pavilion (Overtreders W + SLA)*



## case study: folly for a flyover (Assemble)

Another project which focusses on making non-intrusive connections was the Folly for a Flyover, created by Assemble. With the project, Assemble wanted to re-imagine the norms of a specific site, namely the area underneath a flyover, situated next to the water.

This piece of land is dominated by the structure of the flyover, and its use is generally limited. The folly was meant as a temporary structure, to host events such as movie screenings and a café.

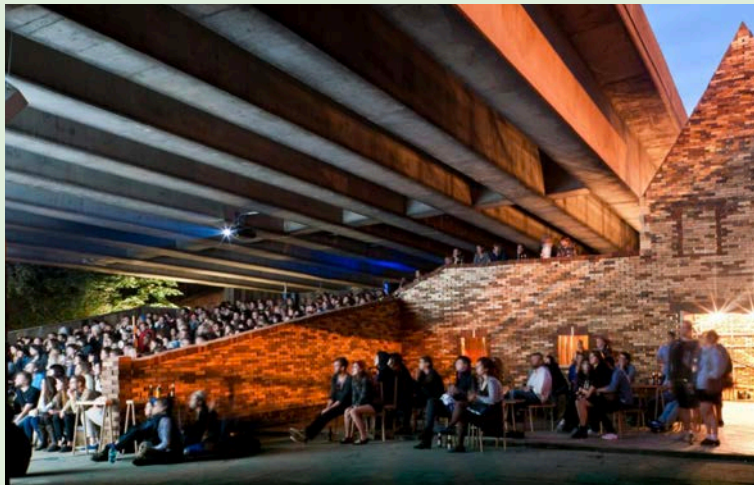
The main aim of the project was not to build something, but to get the people of the neighbourhood engaged, and build something together. To collectively reimagine the potential of the site.

This aim gave direction to the construction of the structure, which was designed as a 'giant construction kit'. This approach allowed volunteers of various skill/commitment to get involved with the project. Wooden blocks, resembling bricks, with two holes in them, were woven with ropes into a wall.

The project was disassembled after a while, the blocks were returned to the project that they had been made for: the play area of a new school. The folly had achieved awareness through its construction and use, and the London Legacy Development Corporation decide to invest in permanent infrastructure for the site (which was designed by muf).

photos: Assemble

*case study: folly for a flyover (Assemble)*







**thinking site #4:**  
emerge from/  
merge into

## thinking site #4: emerge from/ merge into

This *Thinking Site* arose from a desire to start interventions not from a clean slate, or a *tabula rasa*, but to let interventions emerge from the things that are already happening in a site. Or to let an intervention merge into the current happenings of a site and focus on a sort of co-habitation between ‘the old’ and ‘the new’.

This *Thinking Site* was sparked by a trip last summer to the city of New York, where my boyfriend and I walked across the High Line, a former railroad that has since been redeveloped into a lush green park.

What struck me was how beautifully the new additions to the site were weaved together with the rest of the site that was already present before the redevelopment. The concrete pavement tiles were carefully placed next to the old railroad tracks, allowing the pedestrians to actually walk on the old tracks. The pavement tiles have pointed ends, which leave spaces open between the tiles, allowing plants to emerge from the tiles, while the tiles at the same time merge into the foliage.

Thinking through the notion of emergence, and leaving the possibility of emergence open, allows a site to be in flux, to become something else eventually.

Emergence and merging also relate to the notion of knotting as the fundamental principle of coherence, as elaborated by the anthropologist Tim Ingold in a thinkpiece on the website of the Architectural Review (Ingold, 2013).

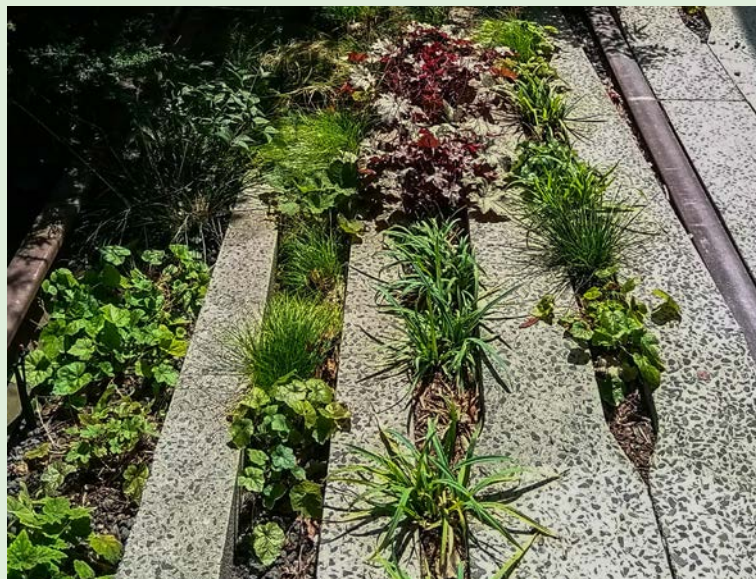
“But in their weaving, they only continued where nature had herself left off.”



***case study: the high line, New York, USA (Diller Scofidio  
+ Renfro & Piet Oudolf)***

The High Line in New York City is a public park on a former rail line through New York. Interesting about the design of the park is the integration of the old elements of the site, and the space left open for new elements to emerge.

The tiles are shaped and placed in such a way that the old rail tracks still have a place in the park. Furthermore, the shape of the tiles makes it appear as if the tiles merge into the plants, and the plants emerge out of the tiles—or the other way around.



photos: Veerle Alkemade

*case study: the high line, New York, USA (Diller Scofidio  
+ Renfro & Piet Oudolf)*



### *case study: Baltic Street Adventure Playground, Glasgow (Assemble)*

The Baltic Street Adventure Playground by Assemble is quite an unusual playground. At first glance, it appears as if nothing is going on in the site at all, there is mostly mud and some random objects scattered around in the mud.

However, the playground is constantly evolving in response to the actions of the children. The playground intends to support the children in self-organizing. There are boots that can be borrowed and materials that can be used—with supervision, to stimulate the immediate relations between the children and their surroundings.



photos: Assemble

*case study: Baltic Street Adventure Playground,  
Glasgow (Assemble)*



*case study: Het Grid, Beuningen, Netherlands (ATM Model Art)*

Down The Rabbit Hole is a three-day festival in the Netherlands. The terrain is divided into two distinct areas: the camp site and the actual festival terrain.

These two areas have their own regulations, and this requires a separation between the two. A regular fence was not desired, because of the dream-like theme of the festival, so this artwork was made.

Large tree stems form a grid, between which nets have been placed. These nets do not simply divide the two areas, but also enable the division by creating opportunities for new engagements with the structure. It is possible to walk over the entrance in between the nets, and on the camp side of the 'fence' it is possible to lounge in the nets.



photos: Antal Bos, Thijs Trompert, Sven de Lang, Mojo Concerts



*case study: Het Grid, Beuningen, Netherlands (ATM Model Art)*





**thinking site #5:**  
think affordances,  
not objects

# thinking site #5: think affordances not objects

What is the difference between materials and objects? Are objects simply materials in a different formation? What makes an object an object? These questions won't be resolved in this research, but the notion that objects have a specific function or intend, whereas materials just are is interesting with regards to the context of this project.

One could argue that objects with their defined use or purpose, are similar to normative ways of designing, and that, through their specific purposes, objects are excluding other possibilities. Materials fit more with a notion of architecture of becoming. Materials hold a promise, a potential of what they could become. They invite explorations of what they can do.

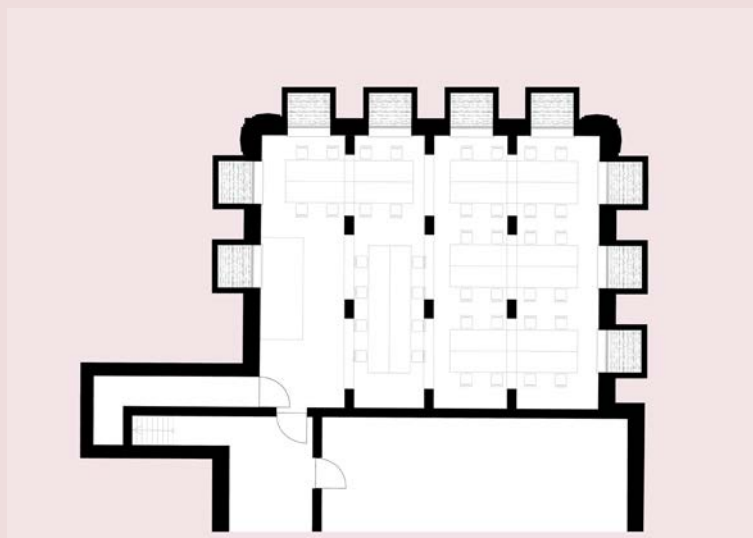
In situations it can be helpful to look at the potential of materials, and think through their potential, instead of thinking of them as finite objects, or through their desired uses only.

## *moment of exploration #4: daydreaming in the basement*

Every semester each studio in the Faculty of Architecture gets a studio space assigned, in which the students can work on their projects and meet with their tutors. This spring semester, our studio got assigned to work in a space in the basement, which according to the faculty is considered a "study space".

However, many of the students choose to work in other spaces in the building, and avoid spending time in the cold and dark basement. For me, it made the basement into an interesting site to think about the affordances that are there, or perhaps that are not there or simply unavailable.

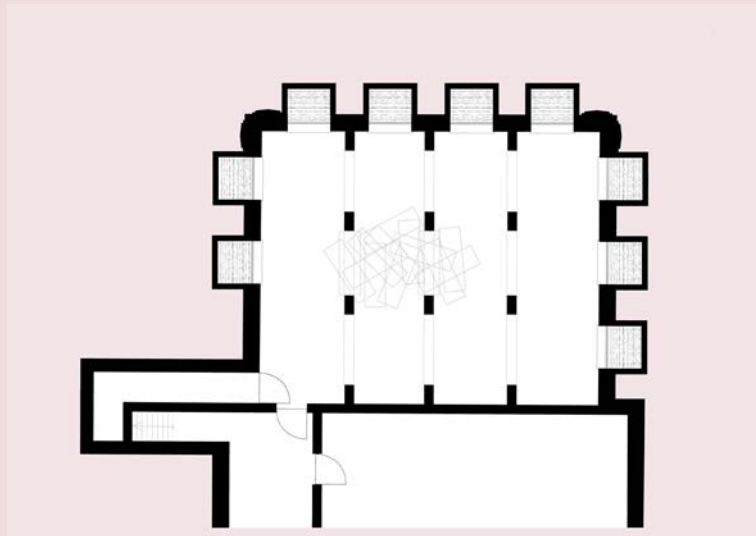
What first struck me is the normativity of the space because of the interior arrangement. The large tables and expensive chairs are most definitely not the perfect fit for the space, but they were probably placed there because those are simply the tables owned by the faculty.



The room is filled with social norms, the expensive furniture is to be used in the way it is designed and in that way only.

I wondered what would change if we could stop seeing the tables as tables and the chairs as chairs, and simply looked at their materiality. Would different relations be able to be formed?

*moment of exploration #3: daydreaming in the basement*



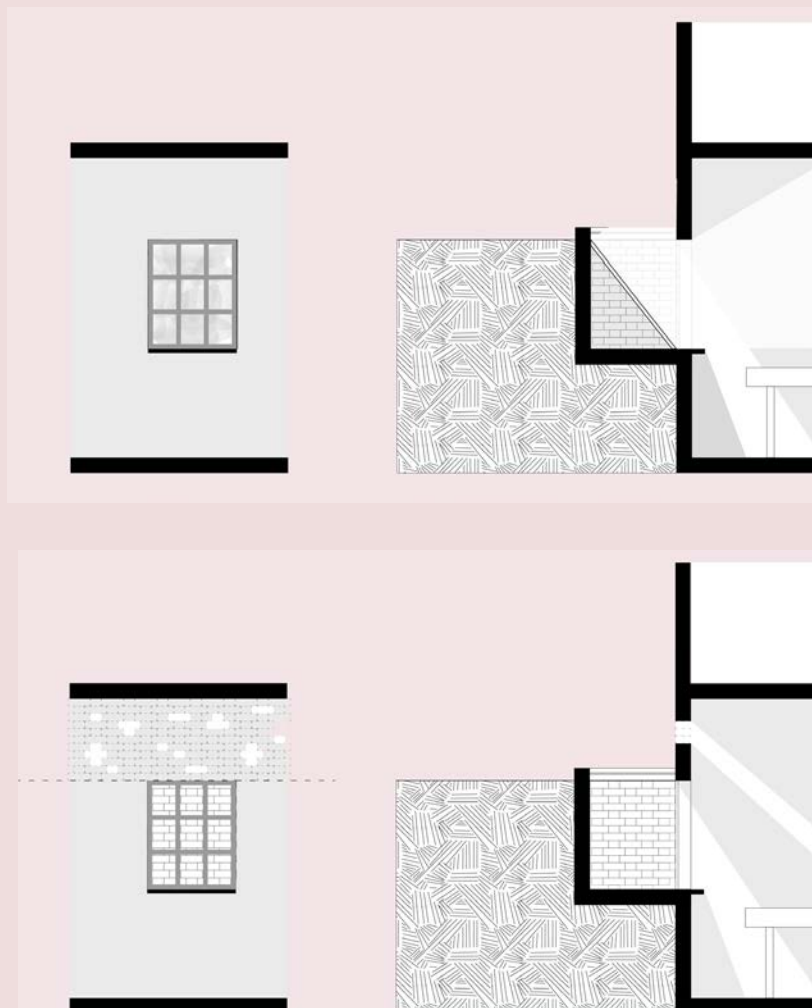
Besides the interior, the fact that the basement is partly dug into the ground also has affects on the affordances of the site. About two-third of the height of the room is located beneath the ground level. Niches are created along three sides of the space, to let in daylight.



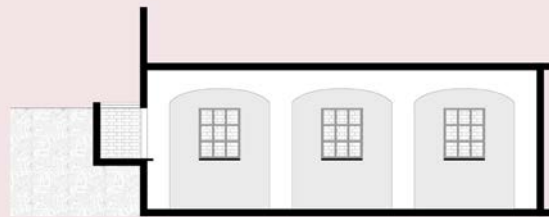
The fact that the space is partly located beneath the ground level, implies that it is sheltered from the light by the earth that surrounds the space. The architecture of the walls of the basement creates boundaries that the daylight cannot perforate. This perforation or lack thereof was one of the thinking-sites

### *moment of exploration #3: daydreaming in the basement*

I adopted for my exploration. Could I think of possible interventions to create more perforations, or to use the existing perforations in a different way?

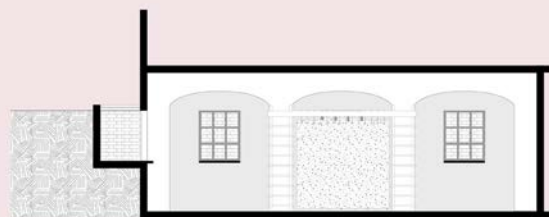
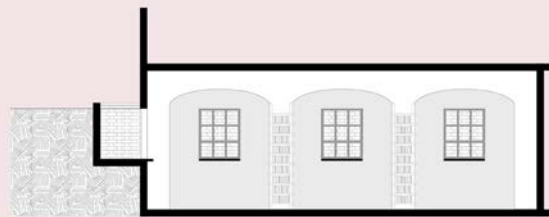


*moment of exploration #3: daydreaming in the basement*





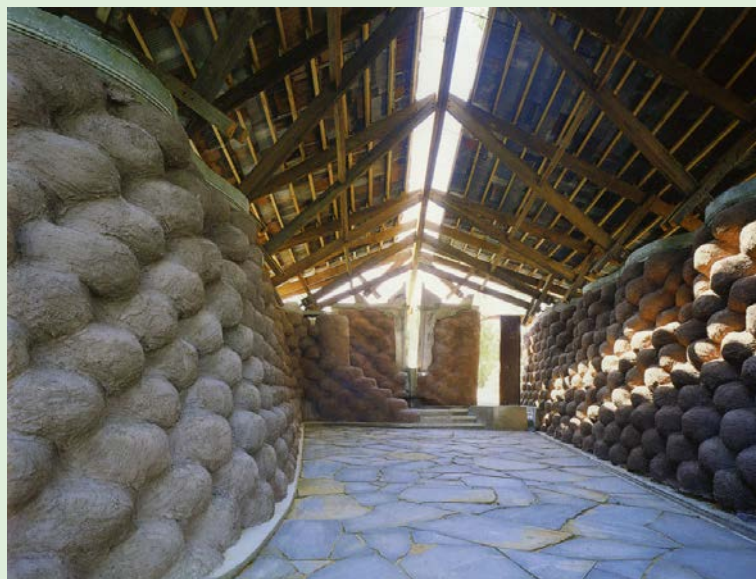
*moment of exploration #3: daydreaming in the basement*



case study: *Yancy Tire Chapel, Sawyerville, USA (RURAL Studio)*

The walls of the Yancy Tire Chapel are made from car tires, covered with stucco and filled with dirt for reinforcements.

The project re-imagines the purpose of the objects that are used, which in this case are the car tires. By thinking of the tires not as objects (with a pre-defined purpose), but as affordances which have potentials, the designers managed to use the tires in a new way.



photos: Timothy Hursley

*case study: Yancy Tire Chapel, Sawyerville, USA (RURAL Studio)*



*case study: Wikado Playground, Rotterdam (Superuse Studios)*

Similar to the approach of the Yancy Tire Chapel, the Wikado Playground designed by Superuse Studios re-imagines the potential of wind turbines. The playground is made of various parts of recycled wind turbines.

Parts of the wind turbines are turned into tables, tunnels, and simply foreign objects for the children to interact with.



photos: Denis Guzzo

*case study: Wikado Playground, Rotterdam (Superuse Studios)*





**thinking site #6:**  
explore floor-  
ceiling relations

# thinking site #6: explore floor- ceiling relations

One meeting, my research mentor and me agreed to meet in the espresso bar of the faculty to discuss the progress of my project. We mainly discussed the contents of my upcoming presentation moment, and we discussed the question of how architecture, instead of prescribing (a certain) action, could prompt otherwise, how architecture could prompt not one but many.

We discussed possible cues and keys of the space that we were in. What interventions could be done here in the espresso bar, right here and right now? The tables could perhaps 'prompt otherwise' if we turned them upside down, or used them in a different way than they are commonly used. We could weave a fabric in between the steel wires that support the table tops, thereby creating an enclosed space underneath the table, where one could store or hide some small objects.

The architecture of the espresso bar is also full of potential. The ceiling of the space is quite high, there is about five meters between the floor and the ceiling. The relation between the floor and the ceiling offers potentials for interventions as well. The height would make it possible to have the tables hanging from the ceiling, that could then be pulled up or down whenever one wanted.

This relation between the floor and the ceiling became the next Thinking Site in my growing collection.





*case study: coat rack, Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam (Wieki Somers)*

This coat rack, which is located in the entrance hall of the Boijmans van Beuningen museum in Rotterdam, is centred around the relation between the floor and the ceiling. Users can use a rope to let down one of the hangers on which they can hang their coat. After they have put their coats on the hangers, they can then pull on the rope again to lift the hanger back up, storing their coats in the air.



photo: David Simmer





**thinking site #7:**  
explore boundaries/  
openings of (day)light

# thinking site #7: explore boundaries/ openings of (day)light

This Thinking Site was triggered by the studio space that we were using in the spring semester. Every semester, each studio in the Faculty of Architecture gets a studio space assigned to them, in which the students can work on their projects and meetings (with tutors) can be held. This spring semester, our studio got assigned to work in a room in the basement.

However, not everyone was happy with this assignment. Many of the students chose to work in other spaces in the building, and avoid spending time in the cold and dark basement. The basement is a rectangular space, divided by columns that attach together to form arches. Only about two-third of the height of the room is located beneath the ground level. Niches are created along all three sides of the spaces, to let in a bit of daylight.

The fact that the space is partly located beneath the ground level, implies that it is sheltered from the light by the earth that surrounds the space. The architecture of the walls of the basement create boundaries that the daylight cannot perforate. These boundaries (and openings) of daylight became another Thinking Site, and prompted another Moment of Exploration in the basement. Could I think of possible interventions to create more perforations, or to use the existing perforations in a different way, to create a basement with more daylight?

I decided to look at the basement not as “a space”, but specifically focus on the daylight-relations that were present, or that could emerge from interventions in the site. Currently, there was some light coming in through the windows, but it wasn't much, and it did not reach far into the room.

This led me to wonder about how mirrors could change the daylight-relation of the basement by changing the direction of the light beams.



## case study: solar bottle (“botella solar”) - Alfredo Mosar

In areas where power outages are common, it is very important to use daylight as a lights source in settlements. Alfredo Mosar developed an intervention in which a water bottle is filled with water, and placed through the roof. The water makes the light reflect in a way that it can illuminate an indoor space rather well.

Instead of figuring out how “normative” openings of daylight (i.e. regular windows) could be used in this site, the whole notion of boundaries/openings of daylight are explored. Perhaps *Explore Potentials of Daylight* could be a sub-thinking site here, as this intervention makes use of the potential of light to reflect in a different way, depending on the substance which the light beams encounter.





case study: solar bottle ("botella solar") - Alfredo Mosar



photos: Gabriela Romeiro/ Believe.Earth



**thinking site #8:**  
disturb normative  
settings

# thinking site #8: disturb normative settings

In the introduction to this chapter, I quoted professor H el ene Frichot who writes extensively about feminism and architecture “becoming a feminist architectural practitioner means searching for ways to unsettle the status quo and to question normative structures.”

These normative structures (and specifically, ways to disturb them) also became a Thinking Site in my research. Disturbing a situation can provide information on the normative structures that are present in surroundings, and these disturbances can also prompt people to act or engage otherwise.

I decided to turn my P2 presentation into a Moment of Exploration, in which I would disturb the normative settings of a presentation, by altering and rearranging the objects in the room of my presentation.

The goal was to make the people who came to watch my presentation, aware of the relations between their bodies and the surroundings. By not supplying the audience with objects that have any normative descriptions attached to them (such as the chairs and tables that usually stand in the room), everyone had to explore on their own how to relate to the structures and how to get comfortable to be able to enjoy the presentation.

## moment of exploration #5: P2

I wanted to use the opportunity of my P2 presentation to create another Moment of Exploration. The space of a presentation is generally also quite a normative space. There is a table in front of the beamer, and there are chairs which face the beamer for the audience.

I wanted to challenge my audience to explore the affordances of the site in order to find a comfortable place to listen to my presentation. With a friend, we moved all the chairs out of the room, and pushed all the tables to the sides. In the middle of the room we placed various objects, which could be used to sit on, or to write on.

However, as I wanted everyone to interact with the affordances of the space, we made sure that the site wasn't entirely finished when everyone arrived. We placed objects in such a way that the slightest touch would cause them to fall apart (all objects were sturdy, so there was no chance of anything actually breaking).



The experiment was inspired by a workshop called *Dancing the Virtual*, created by SenseLab, a "Laboratory for Thought in Motion" in Montréal, set up by the Canadian philosophers Erin Manning and Brian Massumi.

photos: Veerle Alkemade

## moment of exploration #4: P2

The SenseLab focusses on the intersection between philosophy, art and activism, and the workshop *Dancing the Virtual* was a three-day workshop that focussed on what constitutes a "movement of thought".

I was inspired by the way in which the organisers tried to create an environment for their participants in which it was clear that usual social norms were not applicable to the workshop and to the space where the workshop was held.

In their book *"Thought in the Act"*, Manning and Massumi describe the workshop, and about the way they contested normative space they said:

*"Participants were individually greeted and ushered past the threshold, where a space awaited that contained none of the expected accoutrements—no tables at the front for a presenter, no chairs in rows for an audience, no podium, no stage. Instead, a number of "affordances" presented themselves that did not take an immediately recognisable form, so that they had to be arrived at through exploration."*



photo: Senselab

## moment of exploration #4: P2

I tried to make sure I also managed to individually greet and usher my audience past the 'threshold', to make sure that they felt welcome in the space of my presentation.

However, the objects in the room for my presentation still caused a lot of confusion and insecurity with the audience. Most of the people did not feel entitled to move any of the furniture, some people were too scared to sit on anything so they brought in chairs themselves.



photos: Veerle Alkemade

## *moment of exploration #6: Body x Borders, ARCAM*

"The Wall" is a project by Mariana Fernandez, created during her graduation year at the Rietveld Academy. In this project, Maria explores the implications of the border wall between Mexico and the United States as proposed by president Trump.

Part of her project is to walk part of the length of the border wall with a group of people in a public setting. During the Body x Borders event at the Architectuurcentrum in Amsterdam, we walked 2171 meters (a mere 0,07% of the total length of the wall).

Maria had drawn a line with chalk around the Architectuurcentrum and by walking together on this line, we were not only becoming aware of the insane dimensions of this horrifying plan, we were also disturbing the normative settings of the street we were walking on. At times, when crossing the street, we would block passages for cyclists or cars, and they would have to wait for us to pass.

This disturbance resulted in some annoyed looks, but also in interesting conversations with people who wondered why we were walking in this line in complete silence.



photos: Mariana Fernandez Mora & Festival WhyNot



*moment of exploration #5: Body x Borders, ARCAM*



case study: Cineroleum, London, UK (Assemble)

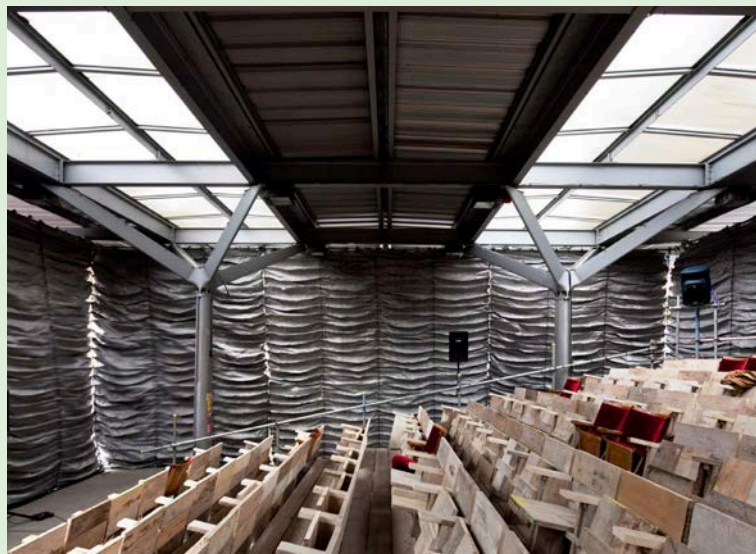
The Cineroleum, designed by Assemble, disturbs the usual, normative settings of a gas station by turning it into a temporary cinema.

The cinema, which was constructed with the help of many volunteers (much like the *Folly for a Flyover*). Its disturbance of the site altered the usual engagements of people with the site.



photos: Assemble

case study: Cineroleum, London, UK (Assemble)



*case study: Unexpected Fountain Occupation (UFO),  
Warsaw, Poland (EXYZT)*

The Unexpected Fountain Occupation, much like the previous case study, temporarily disturbed the normative settings of a fountain.

Fountains are generally inaccessible to anyone, but through this intervention, people were allowed to experience the site in a new way.



photos: Mattia Paco Rizzi

*case study: Unexpected Fountain Occupation (UFO),  
Warsaw, Poland (EXYZT)*



## case study: Der ESSEntisch, Essen, Germany (ConstructLab)

This intervention aimed to disturb the normative settings of a square, and re-imagining the potentials of engaging with the site.

The intervention was constructed collectively on the site, with the aid of a manual designed by ConstructLab.

Disturbing normative settings therefore became a collective act, through construction.



photos: ConstructLab

*case study: Der ESSENTisch, Essen, Germany  
(ConstructLab)*







**thinking site #9:**  
approach the limit/  
enable constraints

## thinking site #9: approach the limit/ enable constraints

Related to the Thinking Site of emergence is the thinking site of approaching the limits. While certain elements in a site (such as walls, ceilings, floors, etc.) can be seen as limiting elements, these 'limits' can also be looked at as sites of emergences.

For example, the walls around a room can be seen as limits, as they make movement in some directions no longer possible. However, these limits or constraints can also enable other uses: objects can be hung on a wall, stairs can be created along a wall, etc.



*case study: (Re)mettons Vittone en place, Saint-Étienne, France (ConstructLab)*

Walls, fences and trees can all be seen as obstacles. However, with the interventions at a school in Saint-Étienne, ConstructLab did an amazing job in using the potentials of these apparent constraint.

The fences were used to place little platforms and frames on, and a little bridge/climbing was could be formed around the tree.



photos: ConstructLab

*case study: (Re)mettons Vittone en place, Saint-Étienne, France (ConstrucLab)*





**thinking site #10:**  
discover material  
becomings/ solid  
fluidity

# thinking site #10: material becomings/ solid fluidity

Dust gathers. Materials weather. What appears solid slowly morphs into something else. This Thinking Site emerged from a reading of Zuzana Kovar *Productive Leakages: Architecture in Abject(ion)*. In this text, dust is discussed as “a register of time, a sign of material change [...] a “marker of history”” (Kovar, 2014, p. 52). It is also discussed how dust could be regarded less as a product and more as a process—dust is always in the process of gathering. This led me to think about how materials can also be thought of as processes, becoming faded or eroded over time. So, even though materials are solid, these processes of fading and eroding and becoming are more fluid and volatile, hence the ‘*Solid Fluidity*.’”

After emergence, I found this *Thinking Site* difficult to apply during one of my *Moments of Exploration*, perhaps because the aspect of time is so important in this *Thinking Site*, and most of my explorations were relatively short, time-wise.





*case study: Ice Pavilion, Klyazminskoye Reservoir, Russia (Alexander Brodsky)*

In 2003, Alexander Brodsky designed this temporary pavilion on the middle of a frozen lake in the Klyazminskoye Reservoir.

The pavilion was barely more than a few steel perforated frames, attached together with the help of some wooden beams.

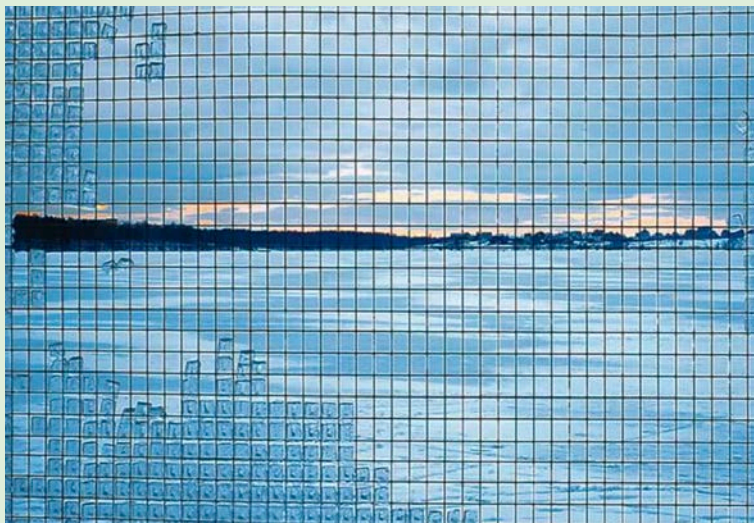
Over time, water (from snow and wind) would gather in the perforation and immediately freeze because of the cold temperature of the steel (and the air).

The ice would turn the frames into solid walls, able to shelter the people inside from the icy winds.

Temperatures in the pavilion were still very cold, but slightly more pleasant than the temperature outside of the pavilion. The potential of water (a fluid) to turn into ice (a solid) is used here as a construction method.



*case study: Ice Pavilion, Klyazminskoye Reservoir,  
Russia (Alexander Brodsky)*



# epilogue

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P: “And, have you been exploring your surroundings? What have you been doing?”

V: “I have been exploring my surroundings a lot! I started with a walk around my neighbourhood, accompanied by a spatula. That was actually quite an eye-opening exploration.

P: “Wait—did you say accompanied by a spatula?”

V: “Yes. This was an idea from my research mentor. You see, these normative structures that I was talking about last time—well—often they are quite invisible. We can get so familiar with some of our surroundings that it can become difficult to look at them in new ways. So, instead of walking out my door like I normally do, I brought an object with me that would be quite an alien apparatus in these surroundings, helping me to look at the site differently.”

P: “Aha—and did the spatula help to learn new things?”

V: “It did. Firstly, I learned that people find it very odd to see someone taking a walk with a spatula—I received some weird looks from people who were passing by.”

P: “I can imagine.”

V: “Next to that, the spatula-walk was also a moment in which I was actively thinking about my surroundings and how to—carefully—intervene in them. I thought about the potentials of my little spatula in these surroundings, but also, I thought of the potentials of my own body with the spatula in the site, and of the potentials of the site with other bodies, and I thought of many more things.”

P: “OK—that sounds like a nice walk, but I can’t help but fail to understand how this walk is contributing to your project?”

V: “Well—the walk was a great exercise in potential-discovery. The spatula became an apparatus through which I was able to think through doing. It allowed me to let go of some normative descriptions of the site which I usually use: “river”, “waterside”, “tree”, etc. These descriptions are all words defining what something is—and, similar to the discussion we had about defining what bodies are—these definitions are—by definition—limiting. During my spatula-walk, I tried to think otherwise, not in terms of definitions, but in terms of relations and potentials. I continued—during further explorations—to gather these terms of relations and potentials, and I decided to call them *Thinking Sites*.”

P: “*Thinking Sites*?”

V: “Yes... I like to think—ha-ha—of them as tools that can help to discover ways of forming relations with a site—ways of intervening—without the need for formulating definitions about what is there or what should be there. For example, the first *Thinking Site* that I formulated was “*Discover Repetition/Transformation Potential*”. This was sparked by the walk which I just told you about, as I started imagining configurations of the spatula. For example, the spatula that I had with me had one hole on one side, and four holes on the other side. Let’s imagine that you have a single hook on a wall, then the spatula could be hung onto this hook (with the one-hole-side), and the four holes on the bottom could become site for four new hooks to be attached... In that sense, the spatula has some potential of transforming an “input” of one (hook),

into an “output” of four (hooks).

P: “OK... How many *Thinking Sites* did you find?”

V: “I have written down ten of them, but I suppose there are endless ways of thinking about potentials of a site, so the list of *Thinking Sites* could be growing forever.”

P: “So why these ten?”

V: “These ten were the *Thinking Sites* that emerged through my explorations. After writing the ten of them down I realized that of these ten, there were a few that I found very useful and productive—and there were others that I wasn’t sure why I had written them down in the first place.”

P: “Why didn’t you just get rid of the ones that weren’t useful then?”

V: “Well—the fact that I wrote them down means that at some point I must’ve thought they could be a helpful intervention tool, and—just because I can’t find any use for them right now, does not mean that I won’t find any use for them ever. One of the ones that I’m not sure what to do with at the moment I called *Discover Material Becomings/ Solid Fluidity*.”

P: “What do you mean by that?”

V: “Well, those phrases were sparked by a text I was reading at the time. At some point in the text—which was *Productive Leakages: Architecture in Abject(ion)* by the Australian architect and researcher, Zuzana Kovar—the author discusses the notion of *hygienism* in architecture and

the—often undesired—existence of dust and dirt. Kovar mentioned that dust is like “*a register of time, a sign of material change [...] a “marker of history”*” (Kovar, 2014, p. 52). It is also discussed how dust could be regarded less as a product and more as a process—dust is always in the process of gathering. This led me to think about how materials can also be thought of as processes, becoming faded or eroded over time. So, even though materials are solid, these processes of fading and eroding and becoming are more fluid and volatile, hence the ‘*Solid Fluidity.*”

P: “I see. So this one focusses a lot on relations with time?”

V: “Yes, you could put it that way. But yeah—I haven’t managed to apply this particular *Thinking Site* yet during any of my experiments—but I am still very intrigued by this a way of thinking about the potentials of materials and allowing them to become something different as well—so I’m keeping it in my collection anyway.

P: “I see. What was one of the more productive *Thinking Sites*?”

V: “One that I’ve come to like very much is called *Make Non-Intrusive Connections*. It is an interesting one to think about, it involves ways of assembling and constructing things.”

P: “When is a connection “non-intrusive”?”

V: “With ‘non-intrusive’ I mean connections that do not harm the materials or things that are being connected. An example is binding papers together with a clip instead of with a stapler, or bricks that click together—like *LEGO*—as opposed to using mortar.”

P: “Right, so these are connections that can be disassembled.

Why is this so interesting to you?”

V: “Well, the ways we are able to affect our surroundings is partly dictated by the tools we have at our disposal. Most architecture projects—especially really big ones—often require the use of highly specialized power tools—that most people don’t have.

This makes it difficult for people to contribute to the affecting of the surroundings, through architecture. I think that discovering ways of making ‘non-intrusive connections’ in sites can help to make it possible for people to affect their surroundings more easily, even if there are certain restricting regulations.”

P: “I see. So those connections would make ‘doing architecture’ more accessible to more people.”

V: “Exactly. Often it is pretty difficult to take care of and with architectural surroundings, as they appear so static, and as so many tools are needed. Being able to make some non-intrusive connections in architectural surroundings could mean that ‘doing architecture’ can become a shared activity of taking care of the surroundings, which I think would be quite empowering to the people who interact with these surroundings.”

P: “So after all these experiments, what is the next step that you’ll take in this process of graduating?”

V: “The next step is to propose some design interventions, based on what I have research these past months. To do this, I have chosen a site close to where I live—where I’ve already done a few small experiments [see *Thinking Sites* chapter].”



P: “What interventions are you going to propose for the site?”

V: “I’m not too sure yet, but I think the exercise here is twofold. On the one hand this next part is a learning process for myself. I want to become more adept in applying the *Thinking Sites* that I have formulated so far—and potentially discover some more of them as I go—and show the possibilities for architects of acting otherwise. Next to this, I want to propose architectural interventions which question the normative structures that I have been criticizing during this research. It would be very exciting if these interventions would also make the people interacting with them aware of some of the normative structures of our surroundings.”

P: “Do you mean to make them aware of their extended selves into the surroundings?”

V: “Yes, I would like to make people aware of their own potentials in and with their surroundings. It would be amazing if the interventions would inspire people to think about possible relations that they could form, possible ways of affecting and possible ways of taking care. This means that I will not only propose a thing, but I also want to propose ways of affecting that thing and leave space open for other ways of affecting.”

P: “What could that look like in your site?”

V: “Well—I like how some of the architecture of Arakawa and Gins doesn’t dictate how to use or engage with it. The structures are so random and varied and abstract that engagements with them are highly personal—they depend on the potentials of your body. However, the designs of Arakawa and Gins are very static

in their appearance. The park that I have mentioned was designed in a certain way, and it is intended to stay that way. In the site that I have chosen—partly a very public park—this could mean that at some points, new norms would develop on how to engage with the site properly. Therefore, I would like to propose some elements that invite unique engagements, but I also want to make sure that the site will be a site of becoming as well. It would be great if the interventions would allow temporary structures to appear and change and develop and vanish and become again...”

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