Sensing Domesticity From Mine to Mine

// Design Narrative Book





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Explore Lab 2021-2022

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TABLE OF CONTENT

- 7 Prologue // The House and the Mine
- 11 Chapter 1 // Toxic Forest
- 29 Chapter 2 // Baquedano Oasis
- 45 Chapter 3 // London Mine
- 59 Epilogue // The Miner's House

67 BEHIND THE SCENES: SITE SNAPSHOTS

- 68 Copper Landscapes
- 72 The House and the Mine
- 76 Toxic Soil and the Tailing Dam
- 78 Water Scarcity and Copper Distribution
- 80 London, Copper and Capital

83 PLAN MATERIAL: ELABORATION ON DIFFERENT SCALES

- 84 Chapter 1 // Toxic Forest
- 104 Chapter 2 // Baquedano Oasis
- 120 Chapter 3 // London Mine
- 132 The Miner's House

155 GIZMOS OF THE CHAPTERS' ARCHITECTURAL AGENTS

167 NOTES ON NARRATION AS DESIGN METHOD

A VISUAL NOVEL

From Mine to Mine

PROLOGUE

The House and the Mine

PROLOGUE

The House and the Mine

From Mine to Mine is a research and design project that confronts the concept of the house and the domestic with its emerging context of data transmission and resource extraction. In the middle of the Atacama desert in Chile, the house of the miner is confronted with the physical outgrowth of our global data industry: Copper, the material underlying any kind of digital connection, is extracted in the world's biggest open-pit mine, while the mining industry is destructing and contaminating a whole territory.

Thinking towards a time of copper depletion, From Mine to Mine, envisions in three chapters transitions for these copper landscapes - turning them from destructive into productive ones while giving agency to the house of the miner itself. From there, the miner of the future enters remotely through screens the three chapters - "The Toxic Forest", "The Baquedano Oasis" and "The London Mine" - all mines in their on right, that materially and programmatically feed into the house. This way, the house becomes both consumer and constructor of a context in trans-ition, a context that is being "mined" trans-territorially, trans-temporally and transdisciplinarily.

CHAPTER I

Toxic Forest

TOXIC FOREST

The First Mine



We are in the interior of the miner's home. The miner is about to position themselves in the work station to start the first shift connecting them to the *Toxic Forest*.



A green hyper sensed and monitored monoculture of 800 000 eucalyptus trees fill an acidic dam in the Atacama Desert. The thirsty forest drinks litres of poisonous water from the copper industry, infused with acids and copper particles.



Stretching out its roots tentacular, it fights for every drop. 165 million litres of toxic water per day, 475 litres per second.



The tree absorbs it into its body, the toxic particles settle in the molecular structures of the wood. It lives, keeping the soil alive, cleansing it, remediating it. A technology acting as a pump to greenwash a vice from the copper industry. Evergreen and toxic.



When it has drunk, the tree transpires. It retains the poison and sweats the water. Toxic water in, clean water out. The forest cools down. The moisture in the air is no longer retained, fog rises.



"Water recycling-plants" frame hectare after hectare. Their textile panels are perched on tree trunks. Opening and closing, they regulate heat corridors and thermal differences in the forest. The panels catch the water. They drain it in. The recycled water is pumped back to the mine.



We fly over the monoculture, selectively grown, planted and fertilised by drones. Remotely navigated from the Miners' home, they scan the landscape, create its digital twin. They capture what can be captured optically. Their quartz eyes are calibrated by perfect spheres. White volumetric targets form a new pattern within the grid of trees.



Next to the trees, metallic trunks stretch vertically towards the sky. Sensing Piles keep not only the eyes of the drones but also the artificial climate in balance. Their screw foundations anchor themselves punctually between the roots in the ground. Like leaves, sensors in plastic bodies frame the trunk.



Connected to the mine's water system, the piles generate toxic rainfall. Drop by drop, they adjust the humidity. The temperature falls. Young trees find shelter under the roof that is spanned. The architecture imitates a mother forest that provides shade.



The structure of the drone tower houses the forest's seeds and fertiliser. The loaded tanks, ascend the steel scaffolding beyond the treetops, from where their cargo finds its way back to the ground.



Drones, which together with desert birds inhabit the clay wall of the tower, fly out to feed the forest, shift by shift. Seeds and fertiliser are fired into defined locations, making use of pneumatic firing devices.



Once the copper deposits in the Atacama Desert are exhausted in 2060, no more toxic water will flow from the treatment plant to the forest. The thirst of the trees can no longer be quenched. The red eucalyptus wood is cleared. It becomes a valuable resource. The industry has found a new market.



The wood finds its way from the mine to the miner's home.



Above the red eucalyptus tiled floor, we find the wooden panels that frame the view to the outside, a land made accessible again.

CHAPTER II

Baquedano Oasis



After years of depleting the water supplies of the Atacama Desert, its copper territory has reached to the Pacific Ocean.



The sea is the last sensible source to be extracted. The industry is under pressure.



Sea water is pumped into land.



It follows the routes of copper cathodes that cross the country along rails from the mines to the ocean. Copper out - sea water in.



A gigantic dome sits in the landscape. Every day, it converts 80 000L of seawater into fresh water, making use of the desert's most abundant energy source: the sun.



120 mirrors tilt towards it. Constantly adapting to the angle of incidence, they reflect sun rays onto the central structure of the dome. It becomes a beaming energy ball.


Inside the dome, the temperature rises. At far more than 100°C Celsius, the water begins to evaporate rapidly. In the middle of the driest non-polar desert on earth, dense rainfall separates water from salt.



While fresh water is pumped out, the industry's focus shifts to what is left behind: Brine, a compact mixture of salt and other rich minerals from the oceans.

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Compressed into a block, Lithium, calcium, gold, magnesium, potassium, {...} convert into a sellable product both container and content at the same time.



"One Block, endless possibilities", they say. Salt becomes the new promise of water.



Brine blocks travel down old copper routes. Along the rails, they build up into salt structures.



As a walkable platform, their architecture forms both storage and station. It mediates different states of material and flows of people, different speeds of becoming. Train and truck run parallel. Pick up, drop off. The moving factory operates at its centre.



Do you remember the dry years, when the copper drank away the water? The brine industry has taken over, making water an abundant bi-product. Around its tanks and pipes, water encounters the fertile desert soil. Nature conquers the land that has been taken from it.



After the shift, the miner turns around to find both fresh water and salt block reunited: Once separated, they together construct the miner's interior.

CHAPTER III

London Mine



As the earth's copper reserves are exhausted, the city has become the new site of extraction. London, formerly the copper's virtual site of trade and economic transaction, is attracting new attention:



With almost 50% of all copper being implemented in buildings, its lush skyline represents a rich material deposit. It is waiting to be mined to quench the thirst for copper.



Once the Chilean miner physically dug out raw copper ore from depths of openpit mines, now they remotely gather the Copper guts of London's interiors.



Copper piping, roofing, cladding, and wiring - 130 tons of copper daily pile up in front of the London Metal Exchange Market, confronting it head-on. While the Market is mining capital, the London Mine has started mining the financial district.



It exposes what is taken from the most intimate spheres to the public, promoting both value and transparency of the process. Its skeleton structure is host to all different states of scrap. Steadily, the machinery cuts and compresses the incoming material.



Standardised bales become the new currency: A new product to be sold on the London Metal Exchange market.



456 bales per day, 19 bales per hour, travel along the building's ceiling towards their designated place of display.



Lift per lift, the cargo is pulled up into the vertical -



where like a billboard, the architecture advertises its content.



The gleam of the copper bodies pervades the façade. A new star on the skyline depicts what has been taken from it. Trucks greedily wait for the new goods. London Copper Cargo is ready to be loaded.



Implemented in the building's antenna the materiality of London's copper connects back to the miner's house.



The Miner's House



Walking through the house the miner finds an assembled articulation of the three chapters and their mines.



A section through the house is a section through the mines, that is, a section through the context they have created and the materials they yield.



Water, mined in the Baquedano Oasis fills the miner's bathtub. The miner consumes what they have constructed.



Step by step, the "toxic" wood guides them to the earth it has cleared.



{...courtyard breeze...}



{...antenna sounds....}

BEHIND THE SCENES

The Copper Landscapes' Site Snapshots

COPPER LANDSCAPES

While copper changes not only from one state of being into another - from raw material to capital; through ore, smelted commodity, stock market exchange value, assembled material and waste - it also travels, destructs and constructs various geographic locations - from copper extraction sites in Chile to its virtual site of economic transaction, the London Metal Exchange Market. Every change in state creates new architectural agencies and forms of living.

Site Snapshots give brief outlines of the sites from which the stories evolved and describe their momentary challenges.

The "Design Research Book" provides a deeper analysis of the sites and the problems they encounter.






SITE SNAPSHOT I

Prologue and Epilogue: The House and the Mine

In the middle of the Atacama Desert, just next to the world's biggest open-pit copper mine Chuquicamata, the miner's house is eaten up. It is subject to its employer - to the consequences of the extractivist actions of a globally operating copper industry. Each blasting takes away habitat, each copper refining poisons fresh water, but also consumes the last reserves of the driest non-polar desert. Meanwhile, the extracted copper feeds into our communication infrastructures: one of the most conductive metals allows our global data society to run and its demand is increasing. The landscape's destruction is also what keeps it economically alive, constructing capitalist dependencies controlled by the world's financial centers: London, headquarter of the Metal Exchange Market regulates copper prices and allows the movement of copper products between extraction and implementation. But the red gold of the desert is diminishing: while the demand is rising and the landscape is being destroyed, the underlying material is threatened by total depletion. How can we design a transition for this territory that embraces its global implications while reinforcing the agency of the miner's house itself?

City of Chuquimata © Ignacio Acosta







2km

Calama and Chuquimata copper mine, Atacama Desert, Chile

FROM MINE TO MINE

SITE SNAPSHOT II

Chapter 1: Toxic Soil and Tailing Dams

Situated close to the Chuquimata mine, one finds huge ponds forming a tailing dam - a structure where almost 170 Million L of acidic water from the copper production is pumped every day. There, it is stored until the acidic particles sink to the soil and the remaining water can be pumped back to the mine.

Over the last decade, the increasing activity of the mine lead to an increasing size of the dam, which contaminates not only the soil on site but also threatens to pollute the groundwater and the nearby river Loa that brings water to the whole region of Antofagasta.

Thinking towards copper depletion, the first chapter *Toxic Forest* makes this dump site of the copper industry accessible again, by cleaning and remediating the soil while speculating on new economic values that can be gained from this transition.

>> see Design Research Book p.8



Tailing Dam Structure, Atacama Desert, Chile

SITE SNAPSHOT III

Chapter 2: Water Scarcity and Copper Distribution

In the driest non-polar desert in the world, the mining industry consumes the last water resources. The water of the rivers, as well as the groundwater reserves, have drastically decreased in the last decades, which has significantly weakened another important economic sector for the region: Agriculture.

Along the rails on which the finished copper cathodes are shipped from the mines to the coast stretches a parched and thirsty territory.

The second chapter *Bauedano Oasis* connects the flow of copper with the flow of water, by designing a water infrastructure along the rails. The process of desalination and the different states of seawater it encounters, meet different states of copper. As a transition design, the chapter also tells of a future in which brine, the bi-product of desalination, replaces copper as a saleable product while the extracted freshwater abundantly drenches the landscape. >> see Design Research Book p.62



Baquedano Railway Station, FCAB railway, Atacama Desert, Chile

FROM MINE TO MINE

SITE SNAPSHOT IIII

Chapter 3: London, Copper and Capital

Finsbury square forms a large public plaza in the financial district of London, directly facing the London Metal Exchange Market. This location is the global base for the trading of copper.

Today, this site has already a direct virtual connection with the site of copper extraction in Chile. In the last couple of years, strikes at the Chuquicamata mine have seen a drastic fluctuation in the copper prices on the other side of the world at the London Metal Exchange.

London is where copper is turned into capital, the one and only source of the miner's income. However, while the metal is set to become even more in demand, geological deposits in Chuquicamata face depletion by 2060.

The third chapter turns the city itself into a site of copper extraction: Mining the buildings, the *London Mine* can keep up with an increasing demand for copper while turning the existing economic and material dependencies of two continents around.

>> see Design Numbers Book p.116



Finsbury Square, London Metal Exchange Market, Atacama Desert, Chile

FROM MINE TO MINE

PLAN MATERIAL

Plan Elaboration on Different Scales

THE TOXIC FOREST

Plan Material Chapter I



Exploded Axo

1 hectare of the toxic forest



Site Overview

forest hectare and water distribution







Site Plan

forest hectare and different phases





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#### **Drone Tower**

floorplans alone and in context Toxic Forest

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#### **Drone Tower**

elevation front • elevation back Toxic Forest





#### **Drone Tower**

section Toxic Forest

0 2 5 10



### Zoom-In

plans and section Toxic Forest





Drone tower with seed tank and drones



Sensing pile with attached protective fabric creating an artificial climate for baby trees.



Irrigation pipes running through the forest and providing the sensing piles with water.

### Detail

the fogcatcher: a water recycling plant, fabric panels on eucalyptus tree



## THE BAQUEDANO OASIS

Plan Material Chapter II



### Site Plan

station, railway, and water ditribution Baquedano Oasis



FROM MINE TO MINE


ground level Baquedano Oasis





first floor Baquedano Oasis





fragment of first floor Baquedano Oasis





### Zoom-In

plans and section Baquedano Oasis





Platform of salt blocks, moving facorty, pedestrian bridge with distributing crane



Platform of salt blocks, evaporation pond with brine processing, and geodesic dome in the back



Geodesic dome seperates brine from (sea)water

## Detail

moving factory: operating crane moving salt blocks



# THE LONDON MINE

Plan Material Chapter III



groundfloor and first floor London Mine









## Section

longitudinal and cross section London Mine







#### Elevation

west and east elevation London Mine



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## Zoom-In

plan copper balepick up London Mine





## Detail

antenna on London Mine, from copper scrap to communication technology



## THE MINER'S HOUSE

Plan Material Prologue and Epilogue



## Site Plan

groundfloor in surrounding The Miner's House



















## Section

longitudinal and cross section The Miner's House








## Section

longitudinal and cross section The Miner's House











## Zoom-In

section and plans The Miner's House





Server structure with miner's workstation, server as serving element for the surrounding floorplan



Domestic Landscape, various possibilities of inhabitation



Server structure, server as serving element for the surrounding floorplan

## **Facade Fragment**

horizontal and vertical facade fragment The Miner's House



2 foldable door, double glazed window 10cm, thermo curtain 3 tension cable 3cm 4 eucalyptus floor10x10x30cm, OSB 3cm, beam and enclosed air circulation, anti insect mat

# Detail

server with fog catcher (Toxic Forest), saltblocks (Baquedano Oasis) and copper network (London Mine)



## Detail







Architectural Agents af All Chapters

water - 200l/day height up to 40m Ø ~40-100 cm



#### Agent Fogcatcher

transpiration per tree: up to 30 % of consumed water height: 20m



8,5x4x40m fertilizer, seed, battery rechgarge



#### 1*1*1m

	kg/m3
Chloride	38.324
Sodium	21.358
Magnesium	2.554
Sulfate	5.360
Calcium	0,8192
Potassium	0,7906
Carbon	0,0552
Bromide	0,1326
Boron	0,0088
Strontium	0,0158
Fluoride	0,0026
Lithium	0,24



water - 80.000 l/day brine - 95.000 l/day Ø 74m



kw/h*m2 - 2500 > 3389 2*3*0.1m 120 Heliostats / Evaporation Dome



processing salt blocks 30*17*10m

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16*16*1m



potable water - 20 000L  $\emptyset$  12m



#### Ø 2m 2,44 GHz Parabole Antenna



# NOTES

On Narration as Design Method

# **ON NARRATION**

as Design Method

### Stories as Transitions

Over the course of the last year, we have developed our designs in storyboards. Image by image, the mines expanded, the stories spun on, new architectural characters were introduced, some excluded again. Every scene that was fed helped us to think further, to ask new questions or to answer open ones. Thinking in stories was what enabled us to weave the enormous research that went into this project and that our sites demanded - not into one solution to one specific problem, but into a transition design that develops directions ("from-to") for a possible future across different scales, times, and disciplines within chapters. A future built on the present and the complexities of a vast copper territory.

## Visualisation as Spatialization

The visualisation of the chapters is their spatialization. The architect as narrator links and mediates the different scales, materials, times and disciplines into an experiential product that visually addresses space. In this way, the (economic, ecological and material) questions encountered in the research become spatially conceivable and the answers that unfold all the more holistic. Nevertheless, the visualization also holds the possibility of confronting different views and expressing critique towards the world we create: The protester in the chapter of the Toxic Forest sees a weakness in the linking of economic and ecological action. (see p. 25) The Baquedano Oasis' advertising slogan makes a dazzling promise that the scene clearly fails to deliver. (see p. 40)

## Architecture as Condition

The architectural agents occurring within the chapters give conditions for the development of a "story". Their appearance is reduced to the expression of their agency:

The formal exaggeration of the water tank's overflow pipe points towards a future of water abundance (p. 164)

The fog catcher, whose panels on pruned trees collect their transpiration and lead it back into the water system, gives new conditions to the tree to act as a pump. (p. 157)

The high volume of the mine in London points toward the future state of copper scrap as a transportable commodity: Its zig-zag shape optimally accommodates the trucks on the ground floor for pick up. (p. 129) A Section through the House as a Section through the Chapters

The chapters do not occur consecutively, but temporally overlap each other and form an important point of intersection: The miner's house. A section through the house is a section through the mines, that is, a section through the context they have created and the materials they yield. (see p. 152) The new mines and their stories find a momentary articulation in the house, made their own by its inhabitants: From Mine to "mine".



Timeline of Chapters