

objects between



home and street

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*Urban Architecture
Graduation Studio
Research Plan
05.11.2024*

*“Consider things, and you will have humans.
Consider humans, and you are by that very act interested in things.”*

Bruno Latour

When I walk the streets of a city, I find myself smiling as I pass a section of pavement thriving with potted plants. Almost without realising, I fill my camera roll with pictures of these arrangements. Often, this slice of street hosts one or more chairs or a small bench. Sometimes, two chairs facing the street are all there is. The informal, somewhat spontaneous care for public and collective spaces by appropriating them with objects is a theme that has increasingly fascinated me when observing and participating in urban life. From summer evening walks greeting the elderly who regularly sit at the edge of the streets in Italy, all the way to my flaneur attitude to cities I visit, I feel heart warmed by the life in the streets and intrigued by the objects that enable it.

10 months of life in Japan further fuelled this fascination as this informal culture of care permeated streets and public spaces which missed regulated urban furniture and urban décor, such as benches, sidewalks, and planters.

Most streets in Japanese cities do not have proper pavements on either side. The space is scarce, and the buildings – all slightly detached from each other for fire protection – give directly onto the asphalt. But Japanese people are masters in using narrow spaces efficiently, from ramen shops to the streetscape. Even the tiniest space between a façade and the street is filled with neatly arranged potted plants. Missing the space for a private garden, they gently spill onto the public space to create a small linear garden. Out of necessity and scarcity, new opportunities.

I am intrigued by undetermined spaces and their potential when daily users take over and perform acts of care, thus “making themselves at home” in public and collective spaces.

Not only do these urban objects infuse the space with domesticity, but they also show traces of people’s lives. “Things do not exist without being full of people. [...] Consider things, and you will have humans. Consider humans, and you are by that very act interested in things.” (Latour, 2000). The words of Bruno Latour beautifully capture this interconnection between humans and objects, which led me to an organic journey through literature, art, philosophy and ethnography.

The next chapter introduces a glimpse of the references I am pleasantly getting lost in, from Joyce, Heidegger and Beckett, to the representatives of “As Found”, passing through Surrealism, Dada and Pop Art.

Moreover, in the methodology section, I elaborate on my intention to continue this literary research while mapping and tracing my findings in an attempt to capture the richness of the references, as well as to filter them to carve my research path.

Simultaneously, I remain grounded in the physical realm of the public space and take agency not only to observe and document, but also to intervene and experiment. This paper introduces first attempts of college, as well as ideas for on-site interventions.

I intend to keep the research real and tied to its urban nature through visual anchors and on-site interventions while using levels of abstraction and literary research as inspiring forces to navigate a layered understanding.

research questions

Rather than by one focused question, my research is guided by a set of questions that tackle my fascination on its many facets.

How is the space between home and street appropriated by urban inhabitants?

How do objects tell stories of the people inhabiting urban spaces? How to see, unfold and represent the interwoven functionality and symbolism that characterize everyday objects?

What elements of the appropriation are characteristics of the objects abstracted from the space, and what are the contextual elements determining the appropriation?

What is the relevance of the placement of the objects? If the objects are abstracted from the space, what is their meaning? And what then is the meaning of the space?

What effect does the displacement of familiar objects in a familiar environment to an unfamiliar one have on the residents?

What reasons push urban residents to extend their domestic sphere onto the collective and public realm? What are the essential objects for appropriation? What are the extras?

Temporality is a notion intrinsically connected to the topic. Firstly, as a characteristic of appropriation. Secondly, it raises questions of transformation, wear, maintenance, and with it, responsibility. Who put objects there? Once they are there, who do they belong to? Who takes care of them?

Finally, taking care. Broader and more poetic than the practical term “maintenance”, taking care opens a world of interest focused on the relationship between things and humans, objects and caretakers, gardens and gardeners. If the appropriated spaces are seen as gardens, what makes them gardens? And where lies the line between a humanized space with informal care and a space containing relics?

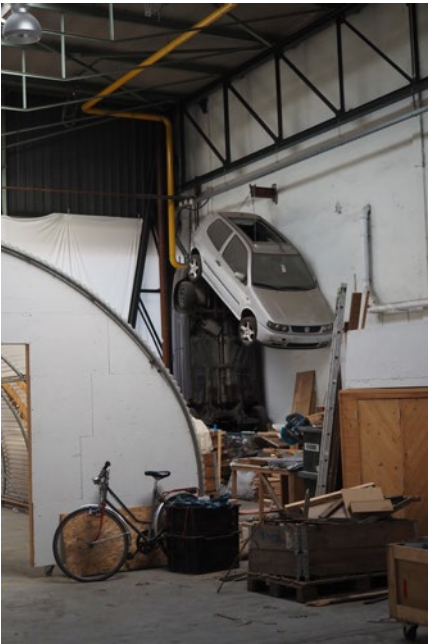
These are interconnected questions that I hope guide me to delve through the many paths this theme entails, to carve my own path among them.

the site

The site of Lageweg presents two diametrically different situations: a neighbourhood lacking almost any form of appropriation of the public space, and within it, an island of appropriation. The Blikfabriek is as overwhelming as it is inspiring. Here, it is not the architecture of the buildings that defines the space, but the collected objects and materials that accumulate and shift over time, creating a dynamic landscape. This landscape evolves, grows, and fosters interaction with the site (Material Garden group, 2024).

It is a continuously evolving “public arena” where agents take their stage and they perform acts of care to maintain its liveability.

This city-within-the-city, at the edge of the city, strikes me as an area with huge potential of “undetermined”, where strong acts of appropriation of the Blikfabriek could inspire a development that prioritizes voids to volumes and create “enabling fields for users outside of the buildings.” (Koolhaas, 1987).



*The halls of Blikfabriek thriving with objects
photo by author, 2024*



*apartment buildings in the neighbourhood
photo by author, 2024*

exploring the theme

Embracing the assumption of philosopher Heidegger that objects do not exist as isolated entities, but are instead embedded in a web of relationships and meanings, I embarked on a journey to (re)familiarise myself with the role of objects in literature, art, philosophy and urban ethnography in the 20th and 21st century.

Quickly after diving into literature research , the theme of object displacement became of interested, and led to many relevant references.

In Ulysses, James Joyce uses objects to express identity, especially in the chapter Ithaca, where protagonist Leopold Bloom's possessions reveal aspects of his character. J. Scholar (2018) extends this view, connecting Joyce's approach to Heidegger's ideas on object perception. Heidegger distinguishes between "ready-to-hand" objects, those with clear utility and integrated into our practical world, and "present-to-hand" objects, which we experience in a more abstract sense, removed from function. Joyce's depiction of objects as "present-to-hand" challenges readers to see them in a new light, often prompting a sense of unease when familiar objects lose their practical identity.

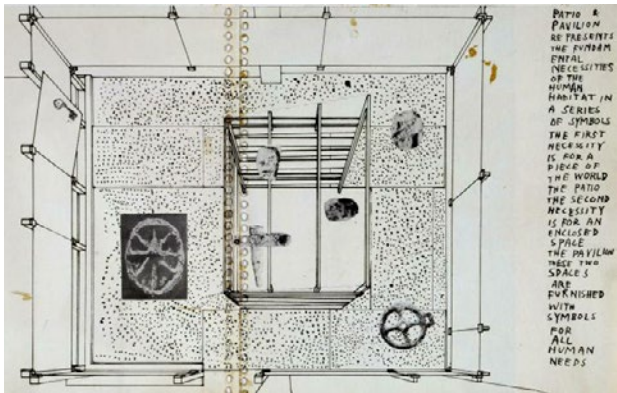
Samuel Beckett's Endgame similarly amplifies this awareness by placing familiar objects in unfamiliar roles or dysfunction. This dislocation heightens our attention to both objects and human relationships with them, often revealing latent interdependencies. Philosopher Bruno Latour also touches on this theme, emphasizing the interwoven connections between humans and things, while Steven Connor introduces the concept of "material imagination"—a perspective that values the potential for creativity and reinterpretation inherent in material objects.

Surrealist art embraces displacement to transform ordinary objects into powerful symbols, using methods like ready-mades(Duchamp), assemblage (Picasso, Ray), and appropriation (Duchamp, Hirst). Surrealism often strips objects of functionality, creating uncanny, evocative images that challenge perceptions. Eduardo Paolozzi's reassemblies and the Smithsons' "as found" philosophy both embody a similar ethos, focusing on the inherent energy in everyday objects. The Smithsons' work underscores the importance of seeing the ordinary with fresh eyes, enabling the mundane to inspire new, inventive possibilities.

Finally, Bruno Munari's Fantasia explores the reimagining of objects by encouraging creative experimentation with their color, shape, material, and purpose. Munari's work invites a reinterpretation of familiar items, revealing hidden qualities and new potential meanings. These perspectives highlight the transformative potential of displacement as a tool for uncovering the symbolic and relational layers within ordinary objects.



change of context to a painting by Giorgione
Source: B.Munari (1977), Fantasia



A.&P. Smithson (1956) Patio and Pavilion
Source: As Found (2001)



E. Paolozzi (1972) Bunk! Improved beans
Source: Google

in literature, art, philosophy
and urban ethnography

In the more contextual side of my research, I have encountered several key studies on the appropriation of objects and acts of care in public spaces. These works offer perspectives on how people navigate, redefine, and relate to urban environments through objects and informal interactions.

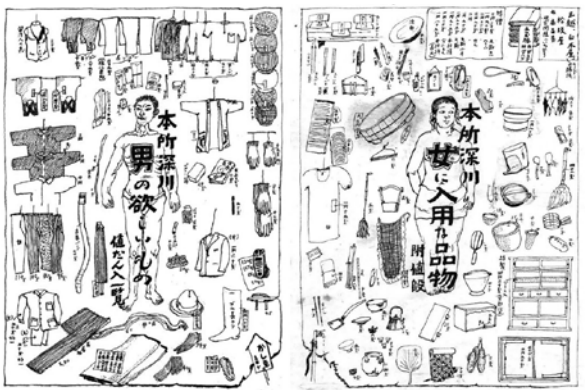
In a key book for the start of my research, Tokyo Totem by E. Gardner and C. Fruneaux (2015), the authors introduce the idea of "totems" as personal symbols in the dense urban landscape of Tokyo. These totems emerge from an imaginative effort to connect with the city's complex cultural fabric. Inspiring is also the work of K. Wajiro, whose Modernologio (2025) establishes "modernology," a practice of observing and documenting everyday urban life. Wajiro's approach captures the significance of mundane objects and practices within the broader urban context.

More specifically I addressed my research towards appropriation of urban space, searching how people repurpose areas for new uses in ways that foster a sense of belonging. Shaw and Hudson (2009), in The Qualities of Informal Space, explore how marginalized groups repurpose urban voids and derelict areas as counter-public spaces. These "informal spaces" provide opportunities for individuals to shape public space according to their own needs, revealing alternative logics of belonging and community.

Similarly, Oostrum (2021) examines the "public space arenas" of urban villages—informally produced public spaces where residents use and maintain the space without full ownership or formal regulation. These arenas foster liveability through self-regulation, supporting both "domestic" and "commercial" appropriations, especially where private space is limited. In this way, informal appropriations act as catalysts for public life, echoing Jan Gehl's (1987) concept of dynamic public spaces that grow from people's interactions with their environment.

Smith et al. (2023) further investigate how domestic objects, when placed in public spaces, disrupt traditional boundaries between private and public realms. This practice of "wandering domestic objects" unsettles common associations with home life, questioning the architectural divide between inside and outside. J.A. Lara-Hernandez et al. (2019) describe "temporary appropriation" as a way people reimagine public space for unintended uses, transforming these areas into "emergent assemblages" that shape the urban landscape.

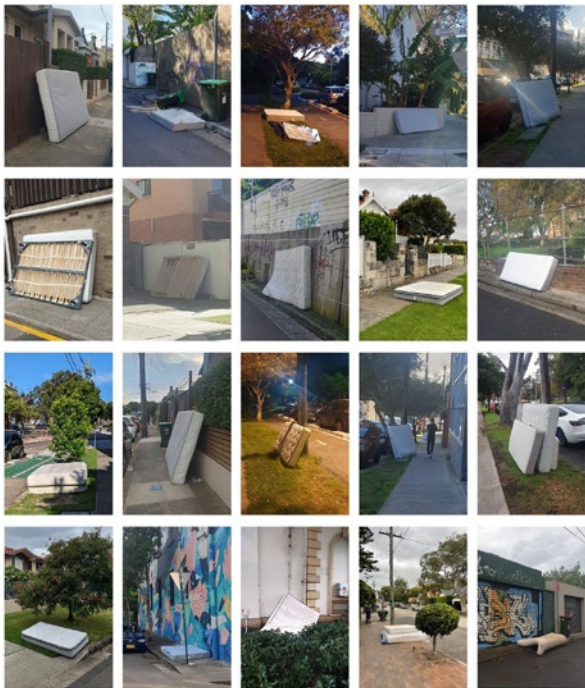
These rich resources are gradually provide material and critical views to create a path through my research questions.



K. Wajiro (2025), Modernologio

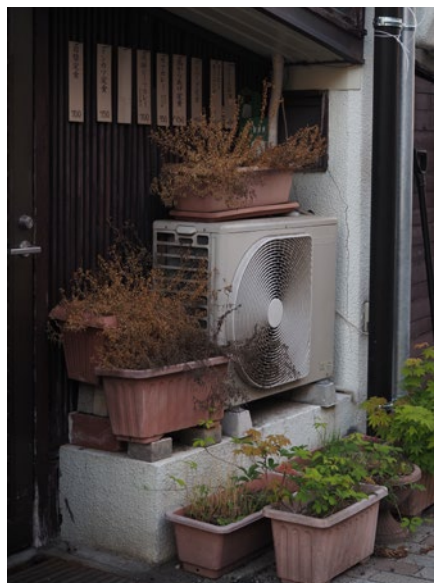


E. Gardner, C. Fruneaux (2015), Tokyo Totem, A guide to Tokyo



C. Smith et al. (2019-), Public Beds
Disposed mattresses in non-domestic space, as public encounters.

between home and street:



a garden.

If we take the garden as a metaphor of taking care of a place in the world, placing plants in the space between home and street is a generous act of care for the public space. Be it prompted by lack of private space or by an unconditional love for the street, the result is invariant. Streets become greener, without costly and invasive pavement works, and the boundary between public and private softens.

Placing plants and forgetting about them, though, is not enough. Like any in any garden, they need to be maintained.

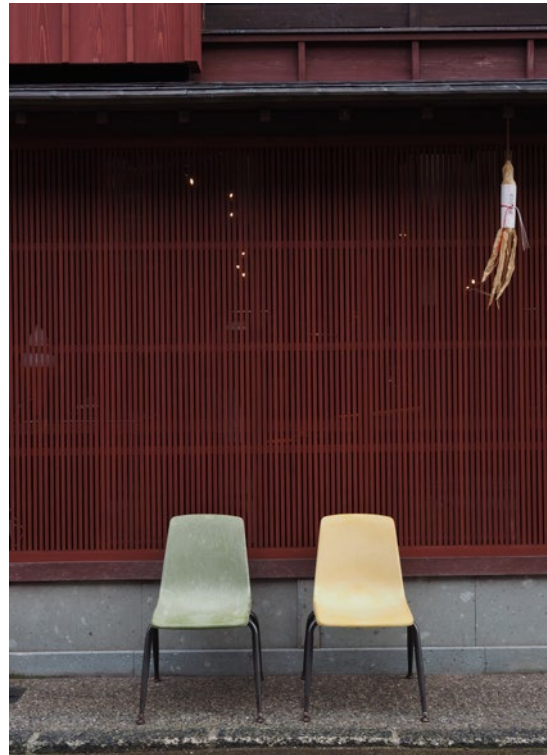
"The issue of time is relevant, because in a garden, you always have to cultivate what you do. It's not that you can just make it and leave it. In fact, its qualities appear if you have the time to really work with them. There's also hopelessness to it: you're never going to win. But this is also why people love gardening, because it's almost relaxing to know that you will never win."

M. Rein-Cano, Interview for CCA

As a humbling activity, the approach of gardening towards urban space offers a new perspective on the relationships between people and objects, less imposing, more collaborative.

photos by author (2024)

between home and street:



photos by author (2024)

a place to sit.

Placing a chair on the street is possibly the simplest act of appropriation. Yet, it works effectively as a “catalyst for public life” (Gehl, 1987). With this simple act, inhabitants turn the street in their living room, sharing it with neighbours and passersby, humans and non-humans.

While opening curtains shows a wish to connect home to the street instead of closing off from it, bringing a place to sit into the street reveals the agency to inhabit public space, making oneself at home by appropriating it.

The street offers the chance to sit, rest and observe on our own, or we may be joined by others, in silence or in conversation. All that is needed is a chair.

Be it a worn-out plastic chair or an expensive designer chair, its function does not change. How will the different chairs affect the environment they are placed in? How do different people react to them?

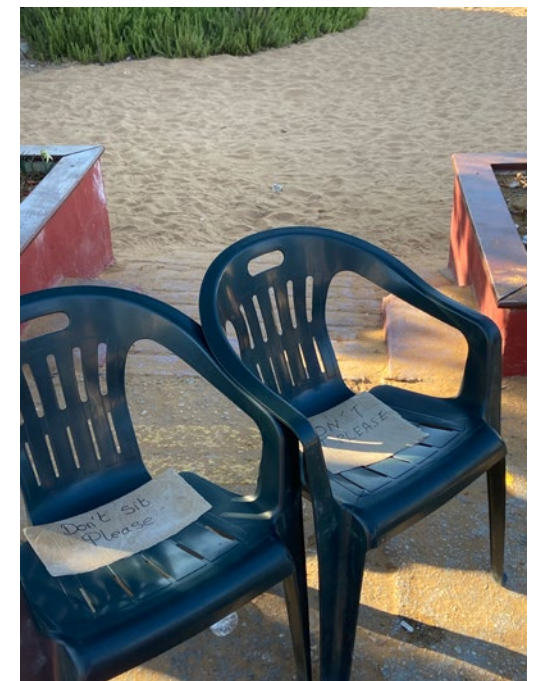
So clearly ready-to-hand objects - functional and familiar - chairs can become present-to-hand, if it is not possible to sit on them. Either because of damage or prohibition, these present-to-hand chairs are relics in public space, causing bewilderment.

Inspired by this, I started a few experiments abstracting a plastic yellow chair - iconic in the Blikfabriek - from its environment and assembling it with similar plastic chairs spotted on the street in Japan.



photos by author (2024)

...or not.





*chairs in front of machiya (town house)
Kanazawa, Japan
photo by author, 2024*



*forest without chair
image by author, 2024*



*chairs around table in Blikfabriek's courtyard
Antwerp, Belgium
photo by author, 2024*



*chair, abstracted
image by author, 2024*



*chair by the forest, behind Blikfabriek
Antwerp, Belgium
photo by author, 2024*



*chairs meet up
collage by author, 2024*

street gardens:

Plants and chairs appear to be the most common objects of domestic appropriation of urban space. Humble and available, they stand for informal care of public space and for sought interaction.

By bringing out something as simple as plants in pots and a place to sit, we can create a garden that reappropriates everyone's space.



*the essentials of a street garden
collage by author, 2024*

plants in pots and a place to sit

The installation “Fence Parasite” implemented by Smith and Olsson functions as “an ‘architectural breach’ whereby a table and accompanying stools are located on a front property fence and can be folded out and used to occupy the adjacent domestic garden and public footpath areas simultaneously.” (Smith, 2023).



*Fence Parasite, Cathy Smith and Rowan Olsson (2014+).
Source: Cathy Smith (2014)*



*“street gardens” in Leiden (left)
and Blikfabriek (right)
photos by author, 2024*

The concept of a street garden is simple but opens a world of possibilities. A new connection forms in my mind to the Linear Garden, a landscape design project completed by my sister Lucia Angelini that resonates with the idea of a street garden. Her proposal implements a linear garden in the existing infrastructure, “following roads, adapting to pavements, recovering space, bending the void as a resource. The green space becomes a backdrop for movement, a garden for everyone that speaks to the urban space, that does not hide but asks to be shared and experienced.” (Angelini, 2021).

Placing domestic objects and actions into urban settings shifts their usual associations with the home, unsettles the boundaries between the inside-outside and, by extension, private-public space.

between home and street:

The appropriation of the public space its not limited to domesticity. Commercial appropriation is such an ancient, widespread practice, still thriving today across diametrically different urban fabrics and cultures.

In line with the informal, spontaneous acts of appropriation, flea markets and vegetable markets run by neighbours mainly spark my interest. Along with markets, pavements witness the heartening act of give-and-take. Free objects left on the street turn someone's trash in someone else's treasure.

Temporary by definition, the market as an instance of informal appropriation can silently leave the urban scene or leave traces. Commercial activities often spill out onto the street appropriating it, and the daily routine of installing and dismantling the market may leave traces, urban derelicts after closing time.



vegetable market by neighbours, Yoyogi, Tokyo | photo by author, 2024



Free objects on pavement, Hatagaya, Tokyo



remains of a closed market, Nagasaki | photo by author, 2024



Mini crafts at resident's front door, Ebisugawa, Kyoto

a market.

Flea markets in Antwerp are thriving examples of temporary appropriation as a catalyser for the community. The pleasant encounter of the flea market in the Zurenborg district resonates with me as I felt a uniquely connected and energetic atmosphere in the streets, full of domestic objects in transition from waste to treasure.

The flea markets organised by Blikfabriek are the only events that the residents of the neighbourhood enthusiastically adhere to. Taking place in the street adjacent to the Blikfabriek, the flea market physically connects the two otherwise rather separate worlds.



flea market by neighbours, Zurenborg, Antwerp
photo by author, 2024



flea market in the adjacent street to Blikfabriek
source: Facebook page of Blikfabriek, 2024

poster of flea market at Blikfabriek
source: Instagram of Blikfabriek, 2024



methodology

To address the questions of this research I intend to implement three main methods: literature research (and its mapping), experimental imagery (object transformations and collages), and site-specific interventions. Together, I believe these methods can enable a layered exploration of objects, spaces, and their references, blending theoretical grounding with creative engagement.

Method 1:

The literature research forms the basis of the methodology, incorporating perspectives from Bruno Munari’s *Fantasia* as well as Heidegger’s concept of present-to-hand objects and Joyce’s *Ithaca*. This phase frames objects not only as functional items but as sources of abstract and evolving meaning, grounding the research in both visual and theoretical contexts. As I am already experiencing the getting lost in the richness a variety of references, I appoint mapping of this literature as an auxiliary method to trace my paths and gradually filter references.

Method 2:

The experimental imagery method involves transforming everyday objects by manipulating scale, color, and context. Inspired by Munari, this process abstracts the objects’ appearance and purpose to reveal latent meanings, allowing for creative reinterpretation and encouraging viewers to see beyond the familiar. Site interventions actively test insights from both literature and experimental imagery. I will begin by rearranging objects in public spaces as a performative act of appropriation and documenting the reactions of people. Next, I plan a street garden installation—either created from scratch or by repurposing existing items—to observe community engagement with this temporary setup and explore urban ethnography.

Method 3:

These site-based actions align with the intentions my groupmates and I have to set a ground of our masterplan, aiming to rethink the roles of public and private objects in shared spaces. Drawing on the idea of a flea market as temporary appropriation, I want to curate objects to engage the community at Blikfabriek, inviting them to take or use items, and revealing each object’s communicative power through communal exchange. A workshop with AA School in Tokyo, where I transformed a car into a mobile “pocket park” inspired by Kon Wajiro’s “Archeology of Present Times,” further inspired this approach. Collecting donated items and sparking local interactions, the moving installation we made emphasised the potential of interventions to create social connections This is a perspective I bring into this research as I explore the meanings people attach to objects in public spaces.



rear car transformed into a moving installation to connect neighbours (Tokyo, 2023)
photo by author , 2023

mapping research?

These last pages show the work-in-progress attempts to map my literature research, to gain overview, connect themes and filter references. I intend to find more dynamic ways of mapping to register the traces of my evolving research.

Finally, I experimented with a collage to test appropriation with current elements of the research into one of the empty halls on site.

objects

displacement

habitat

appropriation

as found

assemblage

acts of care

ORDINARY OBJECTS

Joyce (1920), *Ulysses*

- + focus on last chapter: Ithaca
- + Seeing Bloom's indentity (protagonist) in his things. Understanding human identity by reading potential of objects

Heidegger (1927), *Being and time*

- + objects "ready-to-hand" (Zuhandenheit) or "present-to-hand" (Vorhandenheit)
- + **ready-to-hand**: object with utility, prompting interconnectedness with the world
- + **present-to-hand**: object abstracted of functions, prompting a different perspective
- + our relationship with objects is rooted in our practical engagement with them

S. Beckett (1957), *Endgame*

- + by putting familiar objects to strange users or to malfunction, Beckett enhances awareness of objects and of humans relating to each other through those objects.

FOUND OBJECTS (CUBISM, SURREALISM, DADA, POP ART)

Readymade

art made from manufactured objects
M. Duchamp, D. Hirst

Assemblage

art made by assembling disparate elements, often everyday objects
P. Picasso, M. Ray, K. Schwitters, J. Tinguely, M. Merz, S. Lucas, D. Hirst

Appropriation

trasforming pre-existing objects into artworks with little transformation of the original
M. Duchamp, D. Hirst

Uncanny

a strange and anxious feeling created by familiar objects in unfamiliar contexts
S. Dalì, M. Ray, R. Magritte, A. Breton

N. Ramiller (2017), *Inventorying "Ithaca": Things, Identity, and Character in James Joyce's Ulysses*

- + interdependence of humans and things (B. Latour)
- + concept of material imagination (S. Connor)

J. Scholar (2018), *Joyce, Heidegger and the Material World of Ulysses: "Ithaca" as Inventory*

- + analysis of present-to-hand objects in Ithaca and Heidegger interpretation
- + the distourbance we experience when we suddenly experience ready-to-hand objects as present-to-hand

B. Munari (1977), *Fantasia*

- + reinterpretation of ordinary objects
- + creative perception: looking beyond conventional uses of objects and exploring their potential for artistic expression
- + engaging with objects to discover their hidden qualities and meanings
- + experimenting with objects: changing color, dimension, material, function, place

'AS FOUND' MOVEMENT

E. Paolozzi

- + focus on the potency of the content by reusing popular objects.
- + reassembly of objects opens a world of neverending possibilities and reflects a true state

A.& P. Smithson

- + "As found is a small affair; it's about being careful." (Smithson)
- + "as found" was a new seeing of the ordinary, an openness as to how prosaic "things" could re-energize our inventive activity."
- + Exhibition "patio and pavilion represent the fundamental necessities of the human habitat, in a series of symbols. the first necessity is for a piece of the world, the patio. The second necessity is for an enclosed space, the pavilion. these two spaces are **furnished with symbols for all human needs.**"

B. Latour (2000) *"The Berlin Key or How to Do Words with Things"*

- + "things do not exist without being full of people"

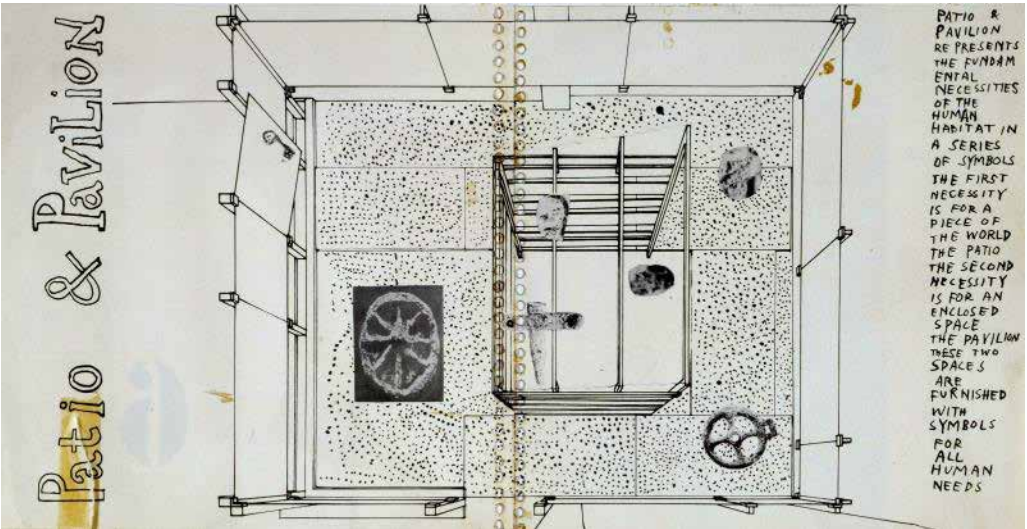
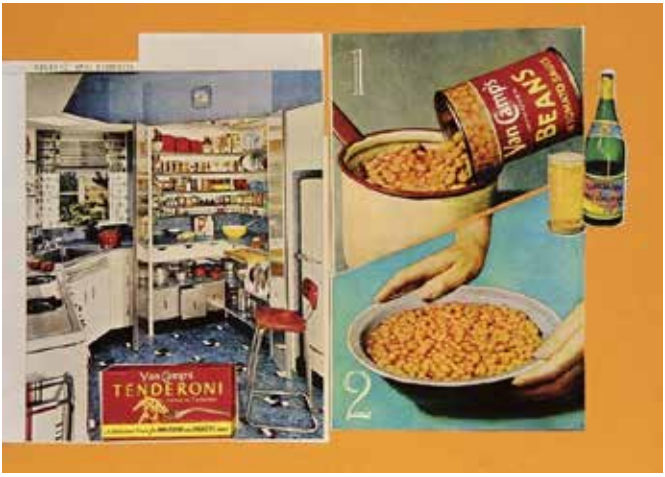
S. Connor (2014) *Beckett, Modernism and the Material Imagination*

"an imagination that performs the traditional duty of taking us beyond the merely given but does so in ways that seem designed to keep us on terms with its materiality, even as that materiality is something still to be imagined."



P. Serafini & L. Angelini (2003-), *La voce delle cose*

- + exploring the artistic and theatrical potential of everyday objects
- + prompt a fresh, more attentive and different gaze on objects that surround us
- + connect objects with memories and imagination tha they spark



URBAN ETHNOGRAPHY

E. Gardner, C. Fruneaux (2015), *Tokyo Totem, A guide to Tokyo*

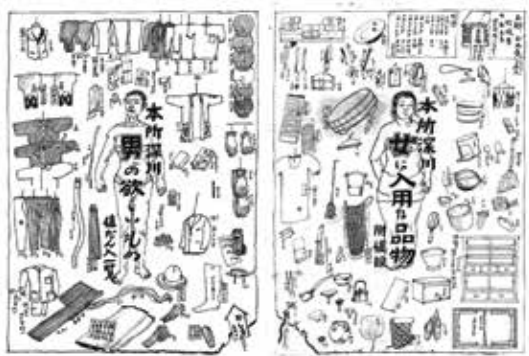
- + guide to find your own totems in a seemingly overwhelming city. The totems signify the “effort of your imagination to reach out into the world and connect to it”.
- + navigating the labyrinthic tokyo culture through its urban objects



K. Wajiro (2025), *Modernologio*

J. Traganou, K. Izumi (2014), *Design and Disaster: Kon Wajiro's Modernologio*

- + urban ethnography
- + modernology: the science of everyday observations



APPROPRIATION
of public space with objects

P. Shaw, J. Hudston (2009), *The qualities of informal space: (re)appropriation within the informal, interstitial spaces of the city.*

- + urban voids and derelict areas of the city as counter public spaces appropriated by marginal groups
- + informal spaces offering a sense of belonging
- + tactics of appropriation to reveal an alternative logic of public space

M. Oostrum (2021), *Appropriating public space: transformations of public life and loose parts in urban villages*

- + “public space arenas”: enacting performative codes in public spaces
- + self-regulatory functioning of public space arena is critical to their liveability
- + informally produced public space in which neither the authority nor its residents claim full ownership and the related costs of its upkeep.
- + appropriation as a catalyst of public life (Gehl, 1987)
- + domestic appropriation and commercial appropriation
- + domestic appropriation from lack of private space

ACTS OF CARE



photo by author, 2024

- + garden as a metaphor of taking care of a place in the world.
- + the essentials of a garden between house and street: plants and a seat
- + taking the “garden approach” offers a new perspective on relationships between people and objects

L. Angelini (2021), *Linear Garden*

- + project for a garden that reappropriates everyone's space.
- + “following roads, adapting to pavements, recovering space, binding the void as a resource. The green space becomes a backdrop for movement, a garden for everyone that speaks to the urban space, that does not hide but asks to be shared and experienced.”

UA students (2024) *Material Garden of Gift and Waste*

- + “although a garden can be captured in a single moment, it is never a static environment”

C. Smith et al. (2023), *Disrupting the architectural line: wandering domestic objects in public spaces.*

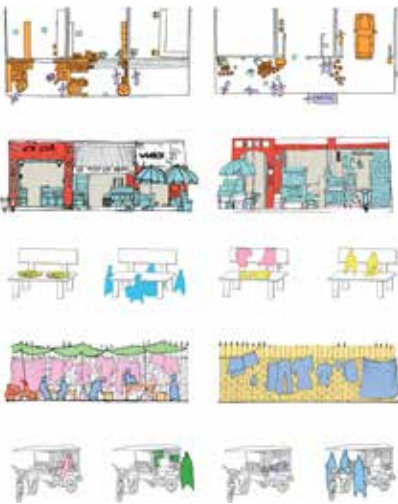
“placing of domestic objects and actions in public or non-residential urban settings, thereby unsettling their usual associations with the home and thus the boundaries between the inside-outside and, by extension, private-public space”

J.A. Lara-Hernandez et al (2019), *Temporary Appropriation of Public Space As an Emergence Assemblage for the Future Urban Landscape*

- + temporary appropriation: “temporary act in which people use public spaces to carry out individual or collective activities other than the purpose for which space was originally designed for”



C. Smith et al. (2014-), *Fence Parasite*
a table and stools to occupy the adjacent domestic garden and public footpath simultaneously.



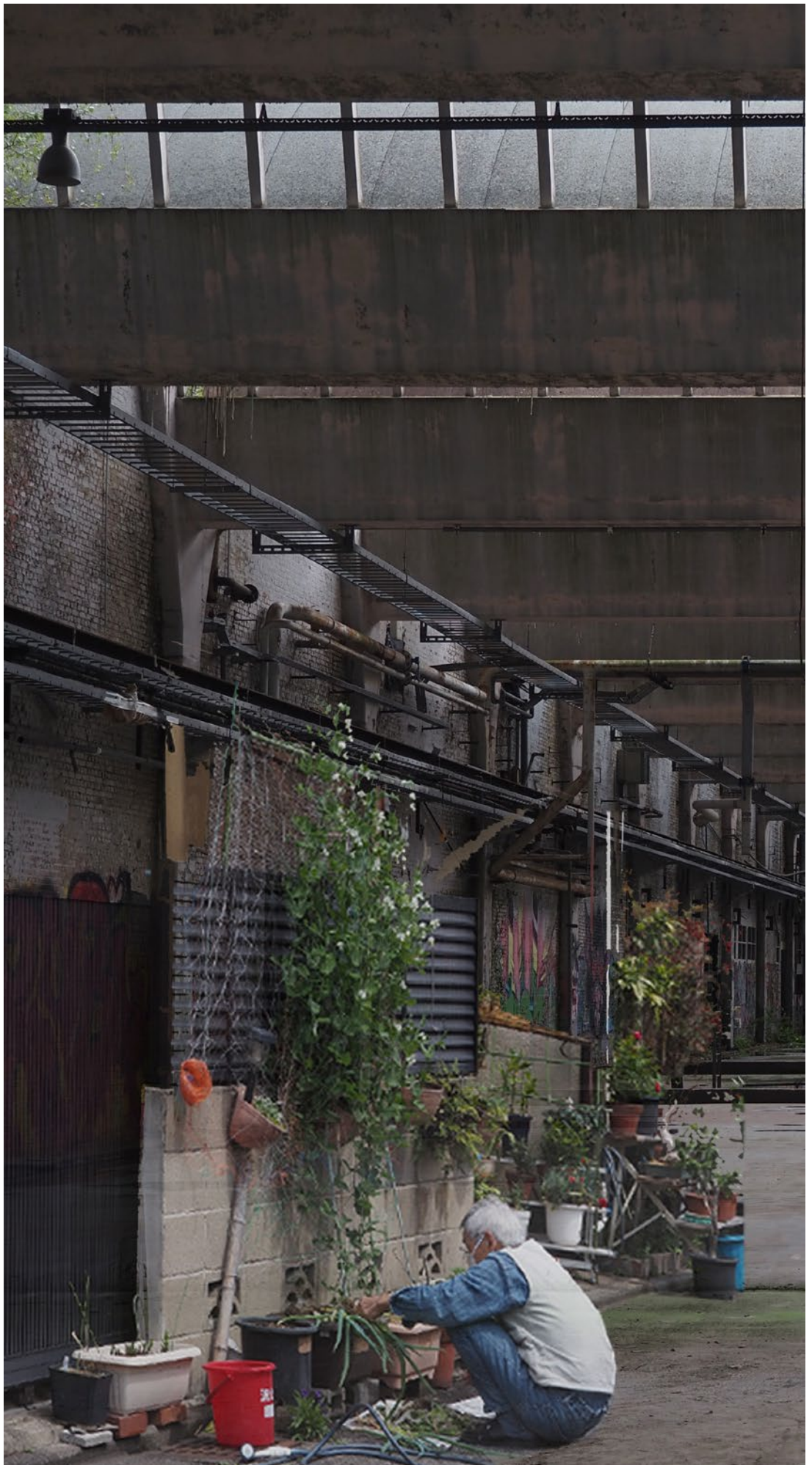
C. Smith et al. (2015-), *Streetlife*
Threshold diagrams by students



C. Smith et al. (2019-), *Public Beds*
Disposed mattresses in non-domestic space, as public encounters.







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