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Histories
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Polyvalent Plasticity! Histories and Futures
was a course designed and taught by Zoë Ritts
at the Technical University of Munich in Spring 2023.

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Polyvalent Plasticity! Histories and Futures

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Introduction

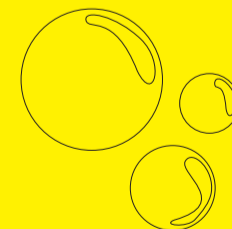
In the summer of 2018, two famous French architects addressed an overheated room of students in central Nantes. A honey-coloured image of a bubble projected onto the wall behind them. The bubble, made of concrete poured over an inflated polyester weather balloon, protruded like a tumor from the facade of a typical post-war apartment building, approximately ten storeys high and banded with ribbon windows. The bubble had one small opening on its spheroid surface and two spindly diagonal supports buttressing it against the white facade. Someone in the room coughed.

As the architects explained to the students, designs of plastic “cellules parasites,” parasite cells, were originally explored by Jean-Louis Chanéac in 1963 and sketched in his 1968 “Manifesto for Insurrectionary Architecture.” Chanéac proposed the use of such cells en masse as replicable anarcho-architectural solutions to the demand for housing and the oppressive monotony of modernist architecture. The cells would populate entire housing blocks, expanding individual units with autonomous, attachable rooms. The manifesto was read widely in a certain sect of the French-speaking architectural world, and in 1970 an architect named Marcel Lachat built a cell on the facade of his apartment in Geneva, dubbing it a “bulle pirate” – pirate bubble. It was an image of Lachat’s pirate bubble projected onto the classroom wall.

Lachat’s construction marked the second iteration of Chanéac’s utopian design, which itself drew from other experiments of the heady 1960s radical architecture scene. But it was Lachat’s Geneva translation in concrete that became the genesis for a third iteration, thirty years later, when it would be picked up again by other architects, those now standing at the front of the room.

A new image flicked onto the wall: another apartment tower, this one three times as tall, sitting just inside the Boulevard Périphérique border road in Paris. Its countless windows were squat, as if pressed by the weight of the “GSF” and “NETTOYAGE INDUSTRIEL” scaffold logos on the roof. One of the architects clicked again, presenting a final image: the building remade. The facade was now striped with bluish and dove-gray balconies of glass and thin steel. Light penetrated into each floor, revealing signs of life behind the balconies: colourful towels hung out to dry, silvery curtains drawn open, chairs, benches, leafy plants.

The initial architectural gesture of the “cellules parasites,” even before its translations, has now become synonymous with the work of the two architects at the front of the classroom. The bubbles inform their mantra to never demolish, always transform, with and for the needs of a building’s inhabitants.



The “bulle pirate” can be understood as plastic, even though it was technically a composite construction. In keeping with its etymological root in the Greek adjective *plastikos* (πλαστικός) and verb *plassein* (πλάθω), to mould, materials like concrete and marble are both plastic: they can be molded into any

shape. This plasticity is the function that earned contemporary synthetic polymers their name, the long chains of carbon atoms and additives producing a material that can be poured, cut, sculpted. In a more profound sense, the bubbles belong to a deep-time lineage of plastic and all that the material represents—culturally, ecologically, and politically, in 1968, 2018, and today.

In neuroscience, the concept of plasticity is defined as the brain's ability to be reshaped, irreversibly—a process of transformation and deformation that continues into adulthood. The philosopher Catherine Malabou has explored the concept extensively, and like others distinguishes plasticity from elasticity which supposes the possibility of return to original form. Plasticity is the ability to give and take form as the permanent change of carving out and entrenching neural pathways. According to Malabou's oeuvre of academic and published work, understanding neuroplasticity can open radical and emancipatory possibilities towards grounding an ethics for the Anthropocene. As the agents of our own neuroplastic change, Malabou argues, we can reconfigure new, individual and collective 'libidinal economies' that admit culpability and take immediate action against a worsening global climate crisis.

By thinking with plasticity and plastic, we can become the (literal) architects of a different future than the 1.5°C increase we have breached, and the catastrophic 2°C increase in global warming that we are on track to exceed during the 21st century. After all, plastic and its fossil fuel siblings—combustion particles, organic pollutants—are among the closest we've come to identifying the 'golden spike' in the geologic record which can prove the era of the Anthropocene, the era of planetary, human-made geologic change.

Plastic was a celebrated innovation of the consumer-crazed 20th century, developed into its present molecular form by Leo Baekeland in 1907. Ironically, it was promoted as an environmentalist's ally—a cheap material that could replace precious and finite natural resources like ivory, silk, and tortoiseshell. Since then it has become an abundance so everyday as to be banal, an environmental scourge and a micro-particulate presence in our bloodstreams.

Plastic's ubiquity is its invisibility, saturating our everyday lives. We see the world through computer screens layered with acrylonitrile butadiene styrene, and hear sound transmitted via acrylic polymer optical fiber cables wrapping around the globe. We insulate our homes and workplaces (in Germany at least) with extruded polystyrene panels laid behind polypropylene waterproofing membranes, and erect our buildings with an innumerable array of plastics from the poly-vinyl-chloride (PVC) flooring and wallpaper coating to the High-Density Polyethylene (HDPE) pipework that reach from the basement to the the Thermoplastic Polyolefin (TPO) weather resistant roofing sheets. A life-saving heart surgery might deploy an artificial valve in carbon coated plastic, while migrants crossing the Mediterranean risk their lives everyday in lethally-overcrowded inflatable polyurethane boats.

Plastic is a contradiction: it is born from dead fossil matter into a petroleum flame. It is "the outcome of the death of life." (1) From the deconstructed decay of ancient dead plants and animals, plastic is reconstructed anew, linked in molecular chains through the processes of polymerization and polycondensation. Plastic is translation, transformation, deformation; it is potential. As Barthes described it, plastic is "less a thing than the trace of movement." (2) That movement has contributed to the ecological collapse we face today, but it is movement—away from extraction and the vio-

lent processes of unbridled global capitalism—that can shift us towards a different future.

Polyvalent Plasticity! Histories and Futures, taught over eight weeks in Spring 2023 in the Department of Architecture at the Technische Universität München, explored the potentials and complexities of plastic. We discussed the utopian fantasies of 1968 and pneumatic dreams for radical escape. We considered global histories of production, consumption, waste, and value, and the 'slow violence' of ongoing neocolonialism and settler occupation. We talked about the planetary futures of finitude and extinguishment, as well as nonreproductive sex, toxic progeny, and kinship. We discussed design in the age of what Elisa Iturbe and others have dubbed "carbon modernity," (3) and the contradiction of designing with and through a material complicit with the extraction economy.

We tried to form, with plastic, a tentative sense of sober, optimistic futurity. What follows is a summary of our investigations as a class: an annotated bibliography (pp. 7) playful collages (pp. 23) and an inflatable (pp. 34) and charrette design proposals (pp. 39) for architecture in the age of the Anthropocene.

—ZR

- 1 Halland, "Being Plastic," 36
- 2 Barthes, "Plastic," 110
- 3 Elisa Iturbe, "Architecture and the Death of Carbon Modernity," 16

Annotated Bibliography

This bibliography is arranged by the order in which the texts were assigned.

Barthes, Roland. "Plastic"
in *Mythologies*,
transl. Annette Lavers,
(London: Paladin, 1972) AB, HZ, PR

AsB In his essay, Barthes describes the material plastic as a remnant of transformation and movement, to the extent that the initial product is so incidental that it becomes untraceable— "considering the original matter as an enigma." That infinite nature of plastic makes plastic valuable because its continuous processing gives a sense of man's power over nature, the origin of plastic. The quality of the material also lies in its democratizing nature. "The artifice aims at something common, not rare." But at the same time, Barthes argues that plastic as a material loses its value in itself because it can be anything. This is the birth of new form of capitalism initiated by plastic.

AnB Fulfilling the ultimate goal of alchemy, the transformation of natural matter, plastics incorporate the miracle of ubiquity, therefore remaining as an absolute concept more than actual matter. By now, the use of plastic has, like the idea of plastic itself, become prosaic. Artifice has become commodified. Unlike the rareness of natural materials, which embody luxury in their scarcity, plastic is plentiful and therefore usable. It is only through its determined function that plastic and objects of plastic hold value.

PR In the same way plastic can be viewed as nothing and everything at the same time, because of its possibility to be a substitute it still holds the value to be remolded.

JY Barthes describes an exhibition that showcases plastic's transformative power. The exhibit features an 'ideally-shaped' machine that effortlessly produces shiny and fluted dressing-room tiles from a heap of greenish crystals. At one end, there is raw, telluric matter, and at the other end, there is a finished human object. In between, there is nothing but transit. Barthes observes that plastic is less of an object and more of a trace of motion. It retains an air of wonder and can transform nature suddenly.

Davis, Heather. "Life & Death in the Anthropocene: A Short History of Plastic" in *The Routledge Companion to Critical Approaches to Contemporary Architecture*, eds. Swati Chattopadhyay and Jeremy White. (New York: Routledge, 2019) AsB, MS, SG, AnB, JP

AnB Davis is asking for a recalibration of the current, capital-driven technocratic form of world-inhabitation by the human species, most significantly by addressing past and current western ways of living. Opting for a change in outlook into a future shaped through pollution—by understanding the cyclical movement of life in general through the acceptance of death—the approach of an open end is made possible, which is not defined by the eventual death of humanity.

Davis' key statement, "we must learn to enter into an untenable world, instead of operating from the fantasy that it can be barricaded against," is recognizing the framework where plastics both operate and materialize this Endzeit soap opera. Plastic is, after all, in its ubiquitous nature encapsulating the ultimate fantasy of the passivity of nature in stark contrast to the genius of an emasculated modern subject.

JY The extensive use of plastic has also led to severe environmental consequences. Plastic waste is a major problem as it does not biodegrade and can persist in the environment for hundreds of years, causing harm to wildlife and ecosystems. In fact, plastic pollution has become one of the most pressing environmental issues of our time. Moreover, the production of plastic also contributes to climate change as it is derived from petrochemicals, which are a non-renewable resource. The extraction and processing of these materials require significant amounts of energy and emit greenhouse gasses.

AsB The text starts with an example where the use of plastic is anti-catastrophic: a water tank is completely covered with black plastic balls to avoid the formation of toxic bromate. This image bears similarities to contemporary art in terms of aesthetics: under the Anthropocene and, in particular, the presence of plastic, aesthetics change. Plastic is "the substrate of advanced capitalism."

The concept of "finitude" states that there is a clear, dramatic end. The finite conception of our existence sees it as individually a one-way trajectory from birth to growth to death. This link between human existence and the idea of a clear end is closely related to the idea of apocalypse. In the Anthropocene where that logic of finitude is, along with the idea of man as agent to bring the end, where the idea of techno-utopianism also arises: "Believing that whatever limits and tipping points the Earth system might throw up, human technology and ingenuity will transcend them." Plastic materialises that desire to control our environment. Unlike finitude, there is no dramatic end in the term "extinguishment" because it acknowledges circularity in life. "This civilisation may die, but within that death is the possibility for a reconfiguration with what may be left."

AnB Davis explains the concept of "extinguishment" as a mode of thinking based on a gradual transition into the

advancing geological age; a transformation is enabled by triggering a Westernized world into taking responsibility for the eventual traces of humanity and into taking accountability for the "slow violence" enacted through the fabrication and use of Plastics.

PV I felt a lot less hopeless thanks to the way extinguishment was described as opposed to finitude. It made this climate crisis less dramatic and more saveable. It's less about stopping the end of the human race (which is inevitable) but more about reconciling and repairing the damages we have so far caused.

SG It was interesting to see how "Life & Death in the Anthropocene" connected the pain point of human influence to another form of separation. As white males were often the believers of techno-utopianism, it is once again visible that the fight against the climate crisis goes hand in hand with the fight against racism, for feminism. As plastic works as a barrier, it is time to let go of separation and work together.

Malterre-Barthes, Charlotte.
"The Devil Is in the Details—Who Is It That the World Belongs To?", in *Non-Extractive Architecture: Designing without Depletion*, ed. Space Caviar (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2021).^{JT}

JT In her essay "The Devil is in the Details", Malterre-Barthes questions the role of architects and their responsibilities on the impacts of construction processes. She deconstructs the ideas we have of "sustainability," the "eco-friendly," or the "circular economy" by highlighting that they are unconscious of the whole process of construction, and are only labeling of the final product.

She also notes the manufacturing processes of architectural tools, such as computers, phones, softwares, modeling, printers, which, first and foremost, are made of extracted materials. Is it enough to be conscious? Can we alter something so anchored in our daily lives?

Halland, Ingrid. "Being Plastic" *Log*, Fall 2019, No. 47, *Overcoming Carbon Form* (Fall 2019), pp. 35-44 ^{AsB, PR}

AsB Halland's text begins by describing a dystopian work by Gaetano Pesce titled "The Period of the Great Contaminations" in which a subterranean crude oil reservoir irreversibly metamorphosed into polyurethane, along with a man trapped in it.

PR ["The Period of Great Contaminations]...brings up almost the future of humanity at this point. As if the world is symbolically going down the elevator and this is the final destination. Being surrounded and sealed in plastic until it covers us fully inside and out, almost resembling the end of the world at this point: the human's way to deal with their own created problem too late rather than worrying of the negative consequences it might bring. Cremated by humanity's own creation—plastic.

AsB Halland approaches plastic from a material science perspective before citing its socio-economic implications. A kind of plastic can be reheated and reshaped, thereby becoming a "symbol of the infinite progress of American late-capitalism, it represented a democratized mass culture and a destabilization of given material and social hierarchies."

Halland then approaches plastic as a concept, derived from the arts. Here she refers to Catherine Malabou who says that "things that are plastic preserve their shape, as does the marble in a statue: once given a configuration, it is unable to recover its initial form." Malabou, picking up Barthes's parallels with a new form of capitalism initiated by plastic, emphasizes that this logic has created a totalitarian and inescapable neoliberal system, dominated by managerial models that demand unending flexibility. Malabou proposes to challenge that toxic system by shaping human beings as plastic: via the irreversible negation of plastic. How to break the continuum of capitalist globalization: through redefining plasticity. By definitively saying no. "When all hope is lost, perhaps the only escape from our current paralysis is to brutally say "no" to the current condition by sealing the door and dwelling in a post-traumatic plastic ontology."

Bensaude Vincent, Bernadette. "Plastics, materials and dreams of dematerialization" in *Accumulation: The Material Politics of Plastic*, eds. J. Gabrys, G. Hawkins, M. Michael (London, Routledge, 2013) ^{SG, AnB}

SG As the title already gives away, Bensaude-Vincent digs deeper into how plastics shifted the relationship between humans and materials. Introducing the 'Plastic Age' as this material shaped the twentieth century civilization, the text states that materials do matter. The author first walks us through the timeline of plastic, from celluloid to composite material. This clearly shows the hunger of people of always wanting more, and in this case being superior to nature: letting go of natural features to increasingly obtain the perfect barrier between the object and its environment. The development of plastics was called the "democratization of material goods" by chemical companies, and advertised as such.

AnB Following the lineage of Stone Age to Iron Age to Plastic Age, Bensaude-Vincent traces the disengagement between nature and artifice. Placing the dawn of this new era at the center of the American way of life, the emergence of the new material-instrument [...] eventually stabilized the economy after World War I.

Bensaude-Vincent notes that from a historical point of view, the synthetic age has already made way for the next step in artifice: namely the emergence of nano-technology. Turning towards nature for inspiration, design at the smallest scale aims to end waste production by advancing towards the next step in production: molecular self-assembly. Living organisms, or 'soft machines' are re-designed and manufactured to perform technological tasks because of their inherent adaptivity, finally acknowledging nature's very own plasticity.

Budvytytė, Goda and Viktorija Rybakova. *El Plástico, the Sun that lives inside the Rock*. (Berlin: Bom Dia Boa Tarde Boa Noite, 2022) ^{HZ, JP}

HZ The authors of "El Plástico, the Sun that lives inside the Rock" explore the history and impact of plastics on the environment and society, through a timeline ranging from Proto-plastics to post-plastics. They begin by analyzing proto-plastics, which were used by ancient civilizations for various purposes, including adorning tombs and creating objects of worship, noting that these proto-plastics were made from natural materials such as tree resins and animal horns. An interesting approach is used in describing metamorphic rocks, as carriers of history through their transformations, almost like humans.

Budvytytė and Rybakova then turn their attention to post-plastics, a form of "witch-craft" which they define as materials that seek to address the problems caused by traditional plastics. They note that post-plastics are often biodegradable or made from recycled materials, and they discuss several examples of post plastic products, such as biodegradable cutlery and 3D-printed shoes made from

recycled ocean plastic. Despite the promise of post-plastics, the authors caution that they are not a panacea for the problems caused by traditional plastics. They note that the production of post-plastics still have environmental costs, and that their widespread adoption will require significant changes in consumer behavior and industrial practices.

JP In the author's views, the first plastics (Proto-plastics) were substances such as clay, being very malleable but also hard when dried. They also argue metamorphic (volcanic) rock is a predecessor of plastic, calling into mind the similar process in which it is made. Through high pressures and temperatures, its atoms and molecules rearrange themselves to form another consistency. Whether miles beneath the earth's crust or in an industrial factory doesn't matter. If it is solid at the end it still holds the memory of once being liquid. They also explain other plastics, more natural plastics, like rubber from the elastica tree combined with alba juice discovered by the Mesoamericans around 1600 BC, or shellac as the first thermoplastic derived from insects, and the discovery of cellulose a natural polymer found in the cell walls of plants. These plastics were natural polymers from raw materials and not harmful to the environment. This shows the idea that plastic didn't always have a synthetic, artificial connotation. Only after people discovered that they could make plastics from petroleum, which produce substances with carcinogens and disrupt the cellular metabolism of living organisms, did the connotation of "plastic" change. This discovery of petroleum-based plastics exploited by capitalism took over, and are today the cause of so many environmental and ecological problems.

"Plastic and rock—in conversation with one another—are shocked by the comfort of each other's presence and the familiarity of the fiery affair that brought them into this world." So is plastic inherently destructive? Is it artificial or natural? This depends on the idea of nature, as it is only a human construct?

Friends of the Earth International,
"Plastic waste trade in crisis"
accessible at: <https://www.foei.org/plastic-waste-trade-in-crisis/>
and Guevarra, Stanley "The Face of Plastic" (18 Jul 2022) accessible
at <https://www.ateneo.edu/news/2022/07/18/face-plastic> ^{MS, PV}

MS Playing by human rules, not by the ones directed by plastic, could first and foremost mean just listening to each other and finding answers through a communicative process. This is the strategy proposed by Stanley Guevarra in "The Face of Plastic". He stresses the need to stop focusing on recycling as the answer to the "living-dead" plastic, because, judging from the examples of recycling plants in China and Global South, it quite obviously doesn't work and less than one percent of the global plastic waste ends up being effectively recycled. [...] Maybe a way of adaptation is through finding new terminology for this pre-human and, probably also, post-human substance?

PV Guevarra's text focuses on changing from a linear process thinking to a life cycle thinking, with plastics. I feel as though the author puts a lot of responsibility on the individuals. 'If not a change in personal lifestyle, the solution to plastic waste demands a change in society'. He expects the individuals to put pressure on communities and governments. While I agree this is necessary, I also feel a bit sceptical or lost when individuals are up against large corporations like coca cola or politicians that profit off the negative side of plastics.

The need for companies to always gain and grow makes it feel like whatever you do as an individual you can't win. Guevarra states how a plastic-free society can only be achieved by systemic changes from the micro to the macro level. He talks about an individual talking to communities and signing petitions. Yet to me this bottom-up approach isn't enough. When a government has their own agenda to create a profit (and with power comes money) it undermines these smaller incentives.

Malabou, Catherine “The Brain of History” pp. 175–180 in *Plasticity of the Planet*, ed. Magdalena Ziólkowska. (Milan: Mousse Publishing, 2020) ^{MS, JY, HZ, AnB}

MS The text draws a connection between the phenomenon of addiction and the environment. Knowing the adaptable nature of the human brain, Malabou builds her arguments on the theory of Daniel Lord Smail and argues that only new addictions will help counter the effects of climate change and to adapt to them, because the theory of addiction states that the brain maintains itself in its changing environment by becoming addicted to it.

JY The theory of addiction developed by Daniel Lord Smail focuses on the constant interaction between the brain and the environment. Smail argues that addiction is essentially based on alterations of brain-body states, and that the brain maintains itself in its changing environment by becoming addicted to it. This addiction is not limited to substances such as drugs or alcohol, but can also include behaviors such as gambling or shopping. Smail’s theory of addiction differs from traditional views of addiction, in that it emphasizes the role of adaptation and neuroplasticity in shaping addictive behavior.

According to Smail, adaptation is two-sided: it involves both adaptation to the external world and the brain’s adaptation to its own modifications. All important changes in deep history have produced new addictive processes and modulations of chemical bodily state. “The Brain of History” also discusses how understanding addiction as a transformation of the psyche can impact treatment approaches for addiction. By recognizing that addiction is not simply a matter of willpower or moral failing, but rather a complex interplay between biology, psychology, and environment, treatment providers can develop more effective interventions that address all aspects of this complex phenomenon.

HZ Malabou further examines how addictions can address climate issues, with a focus on technology as an extension of our brains. She suggests that addiction to ecological consciousness could be a powerful catalyst for action, shifting from indifference to reaction and embracing a cycle-based dynamic in our relationship with nature.

AnB “What is the relationship between plasticity and historicity in Hegelian dialectics?”

Malabou’s theory of plasticity is made up of four main lines of thought:

- A: the extension of Hegelian dialectics
- B: the accordance with the Freudian view of the psyche
- C: based on a neurological understanding of brain plasticity
- D: a vision of ecological plasticity

A+B: Plasticity designates the capacity to be educated and formed, as well as referring to the act of sculpting in art. Both the physical shaping and the formation of cultural intelligence allows the establishment of a two-part analogy to describe plasticity: To bestow form and the ability to receive form by being of something is conceived as a dual and reciprocal process, reminiscent of time. This duality is extended by the physical material condition of plasticity in distinction to the concept of flexibility,

based on total resistance to a formation process: one being limited, the latter, by default, unlimited. This concept is then transmitted onto the processual formation of identity.

C: As the central organ of the brain is capable of being shaped through external influences, and vice versa capable of (indirectly) bestowing form upon external environments, neural plasticity is positively connotated with creativity, suppleness, resourcefulness and the ability to evolve. Simultaneously, destructive forces can diminish affective abilities, ultimately leading to emotional inertia through separation between reason and an impulse to act.

In lulling a person into disregarding their own power to take action, political events actively disengage us from our capacities for affective subjectivity—that is, to react with empathy. By comparison, then, the current age of political violence effaces meaning, terminating in a globalized psychic pathology identical to post-traumatic stress disorder, categorized through the state of “affective barrenness.”

“Catherine Malabou in conversation with Ewa Majewska” pp.147–153 in *Plasticity of the Planet*, ed. Magdalena Ziólkowska. (Milan: Mousse Publishing, 2020) ^{HZ, AnB}

HZ In her interview with curator Eva Majewska, Catherine Malabou delves into the multiple theories surrounding plasticity. She begins by introducing Goethe’s concept of plasticity as openness. Then, she explains that according to Hegel, plasticity is a dual and reciprocal process that involves both the ability to form and the openness to be formed, contrasting with a more radical definition of plasticity as an explosion. Malabou then brings in Freud’s perspective on plasticity, which signals both a beginning and an end, representing the emergence of new forms and the destruction of older ones. She draws a parallel between this idea and the human condition, emphasizing how we are constantly changing while still carrying our history with us.

AnB The comparison between the psyche and the fabric of the city of Rome allows us to better comprehend the capacities at which our brain changes, yet keeps traces or layers that persist through time.

HZ Malabou explores how traumatic events can lead to a state of emotional detachment, akin to “sleep-walking,” as a coping mechanism to avoid further harm. She relates this detachment to politics, noting the rising resistance to experiencing emotions fully as a way to handle tragedies and protect oneself from attachment, disappointment, and destruction.

Dessauce, Marc. "On Pneumatic Apparitions" pp. 8–14 and Walter Chatham, "Foreword" pp. 4–6 in *The Inflatable Moment: Pneumatics and Protest in '68*, ed. Marc Dessauce (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999) ^{AnB, JY, JP}

AnB Bringing the symbolic qualities of pneumatic objects into focus, Marc Dessauce describes the revolutionary spirit of the 1968 period. Reintroducing the avant-garde in an attempt to fuse and cross-fertilize disciplines between art and life, pneumatics stood as a grotesquely deformed caricature of modernity, following the general social and architectural dissatisfaction (disenchantment) of the post-war period. The fall of ethical pretense and the credibility of the modern vision made way for feelings of disenchantment and platitude, calling for a spectacular and technocratic architecture. Strategies of inversion and inflation generated a seductive image that captured the conditioning of air, which gained popularity in light of hospital reforms and the rise of the comfort of climatized interiors.

In synthesizing archetypes of the grotto and the airship, pneumatic environments spectacularized and epitomized the notion of asylum, alternating between modes of enclosure "confinement and cure," "fusion and evasion," performing a new ephemeral existence.

JY The *Inflatable Moment* starts by exploring the use of inflatable structures as a tool for protesting in the late 1960s. These structures were utilized to challenge conventional architectural norms and establish temporary spaces for political activism. Inflatable structures were frequently employed in protests against war, consumerism, and environmental destruction. Additionally, they provided means of creating fresh opportunities for social interaction, where individuals could gather in temporary spaces to exchange ideas and share experiences. Inflatable structures challenged traditional notions of what architecture should be, and opened up new possibilities for architectural design. They also challenged traditional power structures within the architectural profession by creating new opportunities for non-architects to participate in architectural design.

JP In '68 there seemed to be similar political debates as those going on today. And there seemed to be similar calls to action. A time where people wanted to contest the status quo, and fight against rigid institutions with optimism, activism and protest. This optimism is what we need today again, I think.

Françoise Vergès, "Racial Capitalocene: Is the Anthropocene racial?" Verso Blog, 30 August 2017, accessed at <https://www.versobooks.com/en-gb/blogs/news/3376-racial-capitalocene> ^{JP, MS}

JP The term 'Anthropocene' can often be misused, or can hide important power-relations. It doesn't show the imbalance of polluters, and that history is important. In the words of Françoise Vergès: "The Anthropocene often ignores a deeper history, creating the illusion of an organic undifferentiated universal humanity. It's an easy story to tell because it does not challenge the naturalized inequalities, alienation, and violence inscribed in modernity's strategic relations of power and production." Vergès cites Cedric Robinson: "for the realization of theory we require new history."

We often think that we exist outside of nature, that the Anthropocene and its disastrous consequences are unstoppable forces. This is a way of thinking that accepts, rather than tries to fight against. And it is a way of thinking that denies responsibility, universalizing the actors of the Anthropocene, blaming the whole of humanity. It makes us forget that those profiting from the system are not the same as those dealing with its destructive consequences.

MS Vergès, herself growing up partly in the French colonial territories of Réunion and Algeria, examines the intersection of race, capitalism, imperialism, and gender in the perspective of the Anthropocene, global warming, and climate change. Through the text she highlights the concept of environmental racism. In a way it could be considered as an additional theory to Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence" mentioned in the text by Heather Davis. According to data about pollution and waste management, people in the global south are disproportionately affected by environmental degradation. The most interesting suggestion of the text is to write a history of the environment. A history in a modern way, that includes stories about colonialism and capitalism driven society, taking into account the Black radical theory of Cedric Robinson. The article suggests that by doing so, it would be possible to build stronger counterparts against greenwashing, capitalism and imperialism.

AnB Vergès' blog entry on the Anthropocene as practiced through a western lens argues in favor of a more accurate/representative terminology that recognizes global disparities between classes, sex and race. Highlighting the fact that within the United States alone, harmful land-use policies have always targeted PoC-communities at large, by actively cutting access to funding for environmental agencies and establishing hazardous waste facilities in host neighborhoods primarily populated by communities of color, she draws parallels to larger communities across the globe. The effect of a Westernized industry that sees the trifecta of "land, labor and lives" as constant and disposable capital further demonstrates a persisting globalized pattern of environmental racism in which environmental justice is never enforced upon states and corporations, because of unequal and structural distributions of power and racial capital directly linked to colonialism. Going back to the Promethean idea that nature can be tamed, exploited, disciplined and eventually prepped for tourism, nature and people of non-Western origin have been turned into objects of commerce.

Vergès questions both common outlooks on climate change, the first being an ideologically motivated pessimistic-apocalyptic strategy “blaming out-of-control forces rather than man-made structures of power,” and the second, optimistic and rooted in hyper-technological fantasies of progress.

Vergès resists the authoritarian management of Western societies by calling onto Isabelle Stengers’ “skepticism of the probable” in order to establish politics of the possible, by actively building “humanist counterpowers” which can be described as a mixture between forging awareness, decolonizing knowledge and openly exposing or addressing misconducts. The reader is left to question and actively resist the premise of capitalism—and therefore also the formal basis of the Capitalocene—and the ideal of ever-lasting economic growth through efficiency and optimization of labor, instead turning towards a more generalized idea of life-affirming practices.

AsB Green capitalism and the biotech industry present an optimistic discourse, offering seductive solutions. Building counterpowers to them means exposing the dangers of bio-engineering to human health, biodiversity, and the lives and wellbeing of minorities, indigenous communities, and poor laborers, the majority of whom are women. It also means developing a radical curriculum based on a decolonization of knowledge production and institutions and a denationalization of knowledge.

Beate Reimann, Sandra.
“Territories of Waste”
in *Territories of Waste:*
On the Return of the Repressed,
ed. Museum Tinguely (Basel: Museum
Tinguely, 2022) pp. 8–23 ^{PV}

PV This text sketches the background context and intentions of the exhibition of the same title at the Museum Tinguely in Basel in 2022. It looks at the growing awareness of waste created in society, and the artworks corresponding to a contemporary timespan. For example there, junk-art in the 1950’s and 1960s corresponded to the growing realization of the amount of waste humans were creating. A sentence that stood out to me in the introduction stated: “But a growing heap in one place always corresponds with a void somewhere else, and this void, too, can be understood as a manifestation of the excesses of civilization.” The authors talk about this void in the literal sense, like a hole in the earth caused by extraction. But it also refers to invisible parts of the creation of this “growing heap in one place”. They write: “This new perspective on residues as waste has also found expression in contemporary art; one might say that art even helped to establish it. Artists are inquiring into and rendering visible the hidden and repressed ecological, geological, and global conditions of our consumerism.” In the exhibition’s title, the ‘territories’ refer to the areas where waste manifests into art.

Can the feelings created by such artworks counter the indifference mentioned in Catherine Malabou’s text? Or do they enhance this indifference? As in, could such artworks be considered as shocks and blows, which then render us more numb to these images?

Robertson, Kirsty. “Plastiglomerate”
in *CSPA Quarterly*, No. 19,
Queer Ecologies (Winter 2017/18)
pp. 38–44 ^{JP, AnB}

JP About plastiglomerate, Kristy Roberson writes “It perpetuates a nature-culture divide and suppresses a more relational understanding of the world. Indigenous knowledges have space for the connection of all matter, while by contrast, settler knowledge requires the vibrant matter of a plastic stone to tell this story.” It seems we always need a sort of waking up call, to remind us of destruction and pollution. It speaks of the slow violence, which we are separated from, it happens out of our sight.

AnB In its purest, ready-made form that is shaped in situ through the agglutination of rock and molten plastic, the unique object-material of Plastiglomerate composites appear as an instantaneous artwork that “reifies the unfathomable, consolidating and attesting to difficult-to-substantiate material and social-political issues.” It is, simply put, all-encompassing in its banality, not only in relation to time (being seen as the culmination of all geological forces across the becoming of carbon-based life) but also space, in the combination of everything in its perpetual forming and unbecoming into a ubiquitous collage. Even going as far as being deified and politically instrumentalized for its affectual immediacy by artists and other parties alike, it remains as pure evidence of slow violence and the hierarchy between human and non-human, speaking of “the obduracy of colonialism and capitalism in its resistance to change.”

As Robertson concludes, “Perhaps, then, it is an anticolonial and a feminist action to refuse to see plastiglomerate as an ideal object or substance that can be discovered, extracted, gathered, and used to bolster careers in a capitalist system or to highlight the “newness” of an anthropogenic substance.”

It is also interesting to note that the author uses the medical term detritus when first approaching her conceptual perception of Plastiglomerate as a new material-phenomenon. Although the term also appears in Geohydrology to classify decaying organic matter in water bodies that consist of the remains of dead plants and animals, it is actually the medical term used to describe cellular waste products that occur primarily in wounds in which tissue dies (as in necroses or purulent wounds) that sets the tone for the thematic position of the essay.

Plastic’s initial replacement for organic matter, to safeguard wildlife, is seen as deeply cynical in light of the following and subsequent replacement of actual wildlife habitats by the production of plastics and industry, revealing the paradoxical nature of the material. This paradox is even highlighted in the way we only perceive the object made from plastic by refusing to see the manufacturing of the object itself. That is: by acknowledging the geological forging and processing of crude oil.

Stamatopoulou-Robbins, Sophia
(with videographer Ali al-Deek),
Waste Underground, 2017.
14:40 min, HD. Available online
at [https://www.e-flux.com/
journal/127/464874/film-and-the-toxic-
politics-of-waste-a-roundtable/](https://www.e-flux.com/journal/127/464874/film-and-the-toxic-politics-of-waste-a-roundtable/) ^{SG, JY, AsB}

SG Max Liboiron talks about land that Western countries assumed was theirs, to store their waste for example. As Sophia Stamatopoulou-Robbins and Ali al-Deek's film depicts, Israel couldn't get rid of the Indigenous people on their land, so they made them a prisoner on their own ground. They don't store their waste there, per se, but the indigenous Palestinians are unable to transport their trash anywhere other than Gaza strip—a luxury that only belongs to Western countries (though I'm not saying this is the solution). The Palestinians took care of their trash with a burn tactic before they engaged with the capitalist system. Before plastic single-use was an everyday thing, they had a self-sustaining waste and use circle. But can we 'prohibit' them from a capitalist vision?

JY The artists emphasize that waste is not just a technical problem to be solved with new technologies, but a deeply political issue involving power, inequality, and justice. By focusing on the social and political aspects of waste, filmmakers can raise awareness about how waste and pollution disproportionately affect marginalized communities and contribute to environmental injustice.

The roundtable also discusses how aesthetics can convey environmental issues. Participants argue that the visual and auditory elements of films can provide a sensory experience of living in a polluted environment. This experience can be a powerful tool for raising awareness and motivating environmental activism. They suggest that filmmakers can use techniques like slow motion, close-ups, and unconventional camera angles to depict the physicality of waste and pollution, evoking emotional responses from viewers.

AsB This video about recent management of waste via underground burial—landfilling—in Palestine depicts the infrastructure built by Palestinian authorities. Landfills are human-made craters dug deep in the ground, where compressed trash is collected. Linings and pipes along the bottom collect liquids to a point where the liquids evaporate under the sun. Landfills have a relation to time. Landfills are storage for the rejected matter of everyday life. That there is a storage of goods means there is a surplus of goods. These landfills are recent because the surplus of goods (trash) is recent. Before the 1980's, trash in Palestine was consumed (by eating or burning it), but afterwards the amount of synthetics in everyday goods increased, and their high toxicity couldn't allow them to be burned.

The trajectories of trash are often invisible, and this film is used to visualize this invisibility. In the video, the camera's focus rests on machinery, so in a way humans are made invisible. But if the filmmakers try to visualize the unseen, why don't they also visualize the people living in the neighborhood, suffering from the environmental impact of the landfills?

Liboiron, Max "Interview with
Ayana Young" and Liboiron,
Max. *Pollution Is Colonialism*
(Durham and London: Duke University
Press, 2021). pp 3–14 ^{EBP}

EBP In the book "Pollution is colonialism", Max Liboiron begins with a quote by Lloyd Stouffer from 1956: "It is time for the plastics industry to stop thinking about reuse packages and concentrate on single use. For the package used once and thrown away, like a tin can or a paper carton, represents not a one-shot market for a few thousand units, but an everyday recurring market measured by the millions of units." By stating so, Stouffer believed goods would be moved through the wider society—instead of only into consumer households—thus having greater impact in the economy, which was fragilized after the war period. Liboiron suggests the idea of disposability and mass production of plastic was first introduced then, more than half a century after plastics were invented. However, only a few years after the statement from Lloyd Stouffer, ornithologists already observed for the first time the presence of plastic inside an animal's stomach. It raised questions such as: how did plastics become such a ubiquitous pollutant?

According to this principle, Liboiron argues that global distribution of plastic and its uneven pollution is grounded on colonialism, as it is based on colonial land relations that presume access to Indigenous Lands. The author argues that colonialism is not a monolithic structure, but "a set of contemporary and evolving land relations that can be maintained by good intentions and even good deeds." An example would be recycling, which assumes access to land for the space required for recycling centers. "Without this infrastructural access to Indigenous Land, there is no disposability. [...] Land would provide a sink, a place to store waste. [...] This assumption is made easier when the land has already been cleared of Indigenous peoples via genocide."

In short, Liboiron argues that colonialism is, above all, about land. In cases where access is done for property or for settlement, the connection to colonialism might be clear. But to use land as a resource and to even intervene upon land with "ecological" goals in mind is also colonialism. As Liboiron concludes: "Environmentalism does not usually address colonialism and often reproduces it."

Collage Assignment

Students were asked to create two collages, and to articulate their work with a short statement. Included here are a selection from that prompt.

Assignment:

At this point in the class, we are introducing a site for future intervention. The site is Neuperlach, Munich, specifically the areas built between 1971–1972 along Gerhart-Hauptman-Ring and around Theodor-Hauß-Platz. This is a neighbourhood known to you as architecture students in Munich, and one which you can easily visit by public transit.

In your concept statement, articulate a precise interest in plastic/ity. What is a topic within this topic that interests you, conceptually and as a designer? Is it extraction, inflatable architectures, lightweight structures, pollution? Queer ecology, hypercomfort, waste?

Collage A: Sited Concept Collage
Combine new or found photos of the site with your own images or materials. The collage can represent any scale, urban or interior, and any perspective, including aerial and elevation. It does not have to be precise. The collage should represent an interest on themes of plastic and plasticity.

Collage B: Plastic Collage
Make a digital or analog copy of Collage A, and transform it in a way that is coherent with your position on plastic/ity. For example, if your interest is in accumulation, your Collage B could have many layers or materials overlaid. Or, if your interest is in extraction, your Collage B could be produced in a method that excavates, removes parts of, permanently alters the original image. Collage is understood broadly: the format is open. This includes analog and hand-cut work, photoshop collages, video or digital formats.

The result of this assignment will be two A3 landscape images.



Phoebe Verschuuren

What fascinates me about plastic is the different ways in which society turns a blind eye to this wicked problem—we can't live with it, but also can't live without it. Many of the 'solutions' are merely schemes to lull the population back to sleep, while on the other hand also causing damage to eco-systems. The great ocean clean-up is one such example: it cleans up the larger plastic in the ocean, but it also catches necessary algae and plankton. At the same time, it gives the impression that it is a solution, while not addressing the core problem: the source of the plastic being put out into the ocean (Podcast episode of 'For the Wild' refers to this). I think that our addictions to our comfortable way of living make it very hard for us to change.

I believe this awareness of being unaware is a way out of feeling responsible. We've heard the same story over and over but are never truly confronted with the consequences.

"How can we feel genuinely responsible for what we have done to the earth if this deed is the result of responsibility itself being in an addicted and addictive slumber? It seems impossible to produce a genuine awareness of addiction." — Catherine Malabou



Collage A:
A Fog over mass consumerism. We are unaware.



Collage B:
The process of uncovering and becoming aware. The smaller pictures become visible, yet these are (actively?) covered up again. Yet the fog can't keep up with the mess, the awareness will become not a privilege but forced upon us.



Mara Starka

It turns out, plastic was the simplest way also for me to preserve a memory. It corresponds to my very human ambition to achieve certain permanence, even though I don't usually think about it in such a general manner. Talking about memory, the actual goal of preserving is to leave a footprint. To make an event or a feeling important to me, permanent, immortal. It is an ability that is hard to promise. But plastic eases the process.

I am interested in the imitation that already Roland Barthes talked about. The concept of a memory container for my own personal use sounds pleasing and promising. Why not to imitate spring for my personal use and nostalgia?

Theodor-Heuss-Platz in Neuperlach is undoubtedly one of the few land-art-like examples in the city, that could almost be defined from the space. Human-made mega-structures have become the most visible evidence of early civilizations, so I want to argue that a decision to leave such a footprint on land is one with a permanence in mind. For me permanence is also connected with the concept of extinguishment. Could a chestnut blossom canopy be a form of answer or rather escapism to a world of never ending heyday?

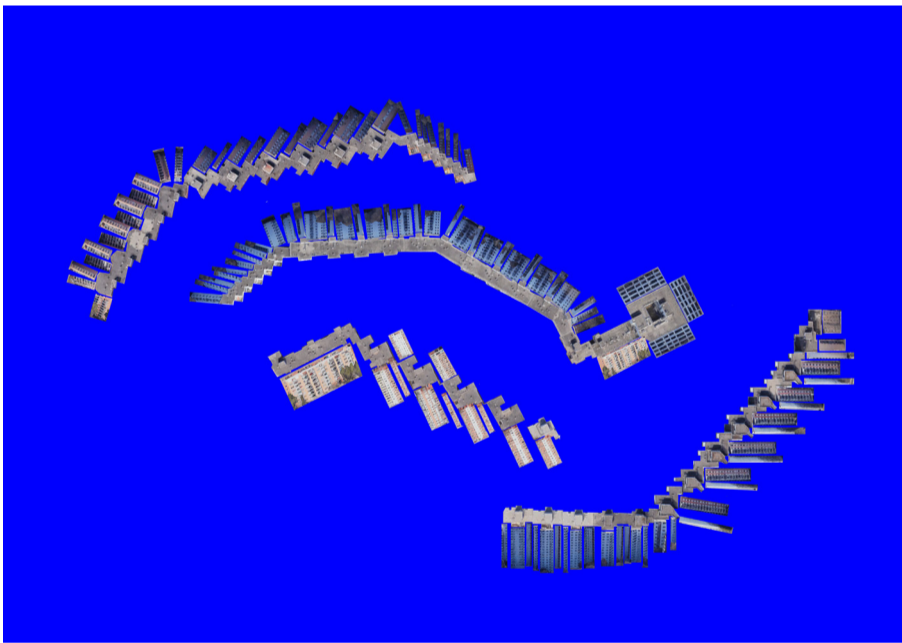
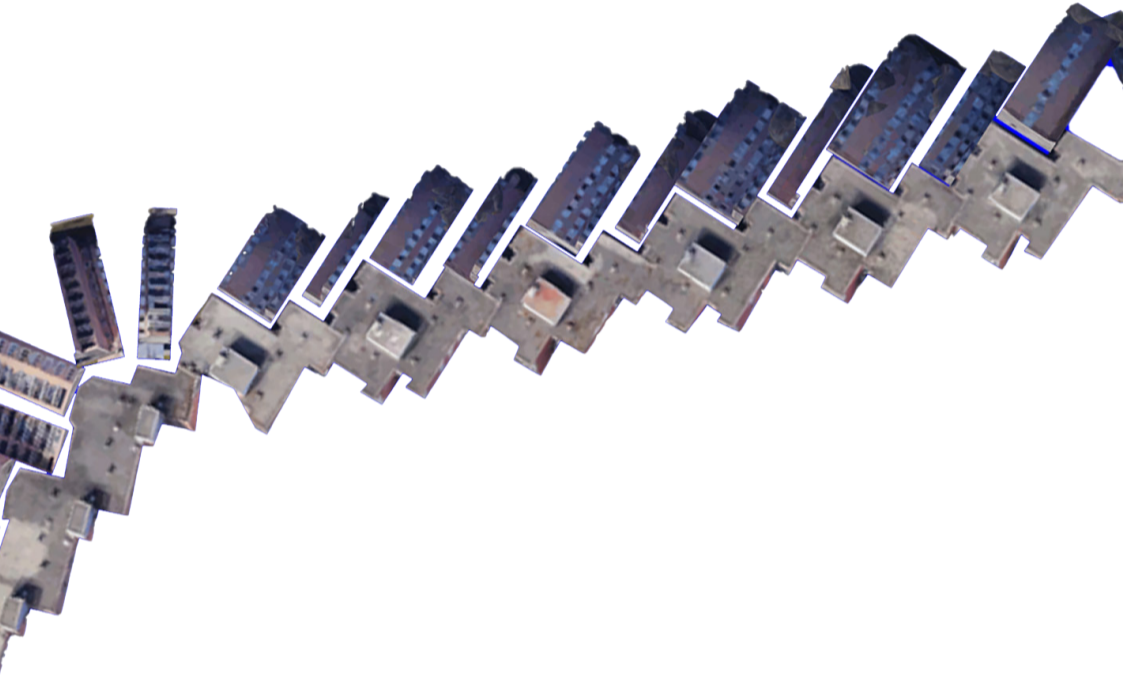
In all its universal egocentrism this urban structure still feels quite alive. And livable. A visit to the area coincides with period that has a special place in the structure of my personal life: I tend to associate the smell of blossoming chestnut trees with the time around my birthday, and I feel a nostalgic need to make these feelings permanent. Plastic is an extremely permanent material. Perfect and mostly used for preserving. I imagine a canopy layered over the Theodor-Heuss-Platz that is made out of chestnut blossom bio-plastics, which I made in my kitchen from flowers collected from one of thousands of chestnut growing there. The material preserves the smell of chestnut blossom for a never ending heyday.



Theresa Zöllner

“A economic, ecological, social and cultural order, caged in a fabric we call construction.” –Architecture as a political plastic

Our environment defines our position and our possibilities. We are wrapped in this (built) environment like in a fabric. Sometimes it seems silky, very light or sometimes rigid and even heavy. We try to shape it, to move around inside it. But the cloth does not fit perfectly.



Eduarda Barbosa Poubel Plastikblick – an Anthropocene’s Tale

In a dystopian future, the amount of microplastic present in water has surpassed H₂O molecules. It begins being assimilated by it, originating a new glomerate: plastifluid. The new plastifluid evaporates from the earth and finds shelter in the clouds. By rain or snow, the material descends from the sky and reencounters land, oceans, lakes and rivers. From the high-rises in Neuperlach, one has a free and magnificent blick to the Alps. Its summit, once covered in white, fluffy snow, slowly gives place to transparent, lightweight, plastifluids. Snowstorm after snowstorm, the plastifluid layer keeps on growing. With the constant rise of temperatures, the transparent mountain melts and loses itself from the summit.

It’s an avalanche. The rapidly speed makes the microplastics to separate from the water molecules and keeps on making its way to the city. Neuperlach gets rapidly flooded by microplastic. Plastic finds its way back home: the middle-class home.

“Look mama, that’s the doll we threw away last year. And another one. And another one. And another...”



Anthony Butcher

Numbness-hyper-detritus-wound fetish.

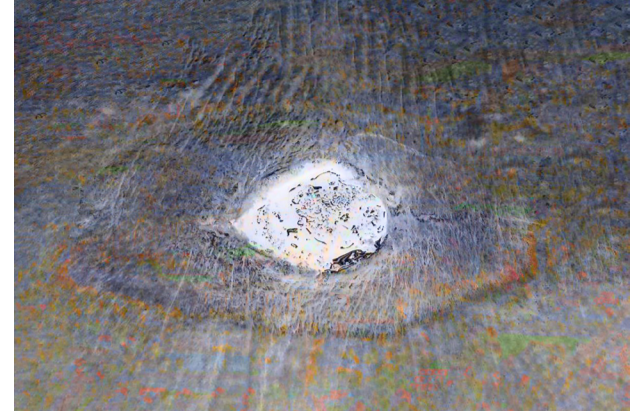
Oh Lorde!

Where are we going, if all is fluff and transpo-opaque? Let's be real, the only step forward is the step of our feet. And yes, some coffee smears our gears. I conform in the same way! I have this wound on my finger that never goes away, it leaks fluid when there's stress applied. The same wound bothers my eye-lids. They burn when my skin flakes.

I think it's hereditary, just like our cave! And yes, there's chemtrails over this culture club. They're beautiful to see, criss-crossing the sky, especially on Tuesdays, when there's just another homicide in the park.

Plastic happens in the brain. It disconnects, disrupts, disorganizes and organizes. It establishes decay. It infests our wounds, and yet it helps cleanse our bodily environment. Voids appear out of this plastic tissue, too, so does numbness, death upon arrival.

And what does it entail? Hyper-sensitivity, Wellness culture, acceptance, aversion, separation, bleached hair & cigarettes, or just sitting. Or staying; resting. It's not so much captivity that is at play, it is precisely the opposite – self-enforced isolation, the most blissful escape. And how delightful that we all can engage in this conversation.



Jef Potargent Collage of found objects.

I am an ant, collecting pieces of trash from the street. Neuperlach is my biotope, I am picking up pieces that fall to the ground, taking them back to my nest. Though I am not a real ant, I am only a pretender, an artificial human ant, mimicking its behavior, an imitation of nature's trash collectors.

Though what does artificiality mean? 'Made or produced by human beings rather than occurring naturally, especially as a copy of something natural.' A copy, an imitation. Artificial as the opposite of natural. Culture versus nature. But an ant doesn't discern between the two, it simply picks up pieces that don't belong, a plastic bag in a tree or a leaf on the pavement. It believes in the cyclical nature of processes, the never-ending cycle of transformation of all matter, cut from the same cloth that is earth.

So why can't humans have a place in that? Does picking up an object, appropriating it, mean transforming it in some way? Is it still the same object as before or is it a copy that now bears your name? Do these objects gain artificiality from the moment I touch them? Does artificial matter imitate nature, or does nature imitate artificial matter? Who copies who? Or can we simply accept that things copy each other, natural or human-made, organic or inorganic. A cyclical process of imitation.



Collage Assignment

As the bridge from theory to design, the class spent one Saturday morning designing an inflatable structure. The assignment was informed by the paraSITE project by Michael Rakowitz and the inflatable experiments of the '68 period as discussed in Marc Dessauce's "The Inflatable Moment: Pneumatics and Protest in '68"

Iraqi-American artist Michael Rakowitz began building simple inflatable structures for unhoused people in the late 1990s in cities like Boston and New York. Using storebought garbage bags and plastic materials, the paraSITES can be attached to the heating and air-conditioning vents (HVAC) on the external envelopes of large buildings.

Assignment: using the DIY instructions given to you, design and construct your own collective paraSITE. You have 4 hours and the following materials:

Materials:

- 60 bags 30L camomile-scented garbage bags
- 60 bags 60L unscented recycling bags (with drawstring)
- 50 bags 25L transparent garbage bags
- 9 rolls of duct tape
- 1 electric fan
- 3 pairs of scissors
- Vellum sketch paper
- Markers
- 1 package strawberries
- 1 roll cinnamon loaf
- A few bananas



48-hour Charrette Assignment

As the final assignment in the class, students were asked to make a permanent intervention on an existing building (one surrounding the site of the Collage Assignment). This was an attempt to incorporate critique and theory into an informed and real-world design proposal.

Assignment:

Develop the concept you explored in your collage by translating it into an architectural intervention on a residential building in Neuperlach. This intervention should embody your conceptual focus in plastic / plasticity, expressed through a real, pragmatic spatial proposal. For example, it could be an intervention addressing waste, extraction, or sustainable modes of collective dwelling.

It will be integrated into one of the five* existing buildings at Neuperlach for which we have floorplans:

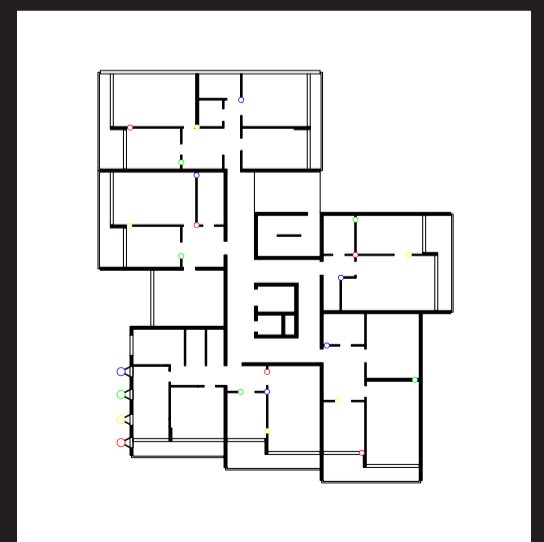
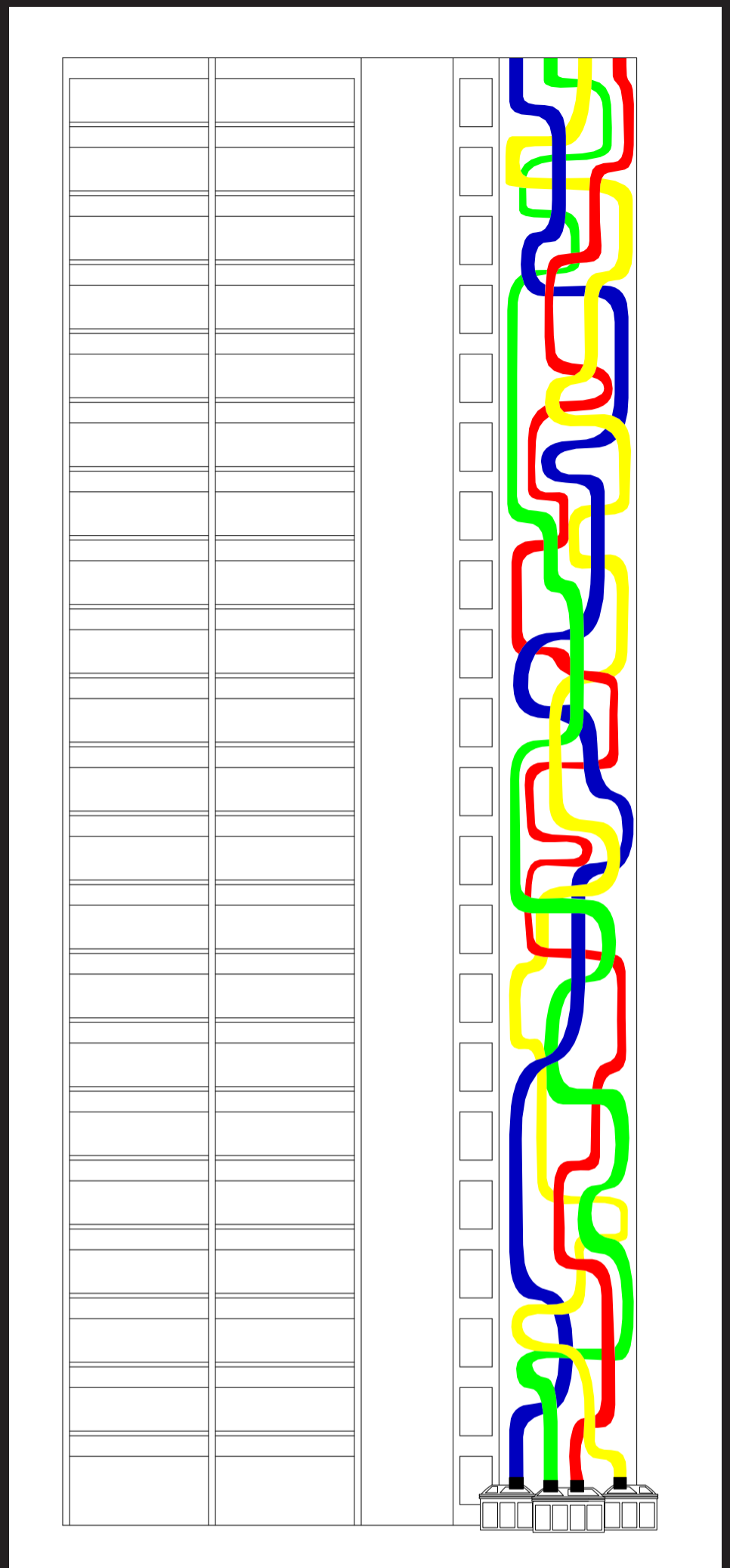
- 1 Gerhart-Hauptmann-Ring 7
- 2 Gerhart-Hauptmann-Ring 9
- 3 Bert-Brecht-Allee 13
- 4 Gerhart-Hauptmann-Ring 11
- 5 Gerhart-Hauptmann-Ring 24

Deliverables will be adapted per project, depending on the scale of your intervention. In all cases, you should produce a finished drawing set, and represent the intervention at two scales—one representing it in a larger context, and another showing its more intimate use or function. We will operate between 1:200 and 1:10 scale.

Begin by working with analog sketches, diagrams, concept models, and quick, messy collages. Consider: how could this intervention respond to observations about the site? Or observations made in your own living environment? How can your design respond to a question you have been exploring around plastic, plasticity, or any of the related themes?

Justine Thévoz Exposed

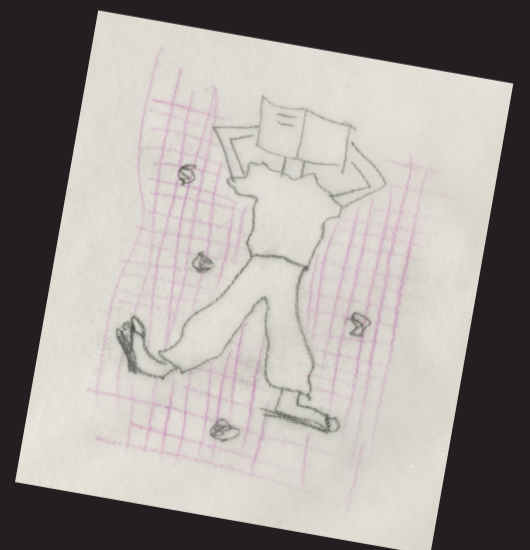
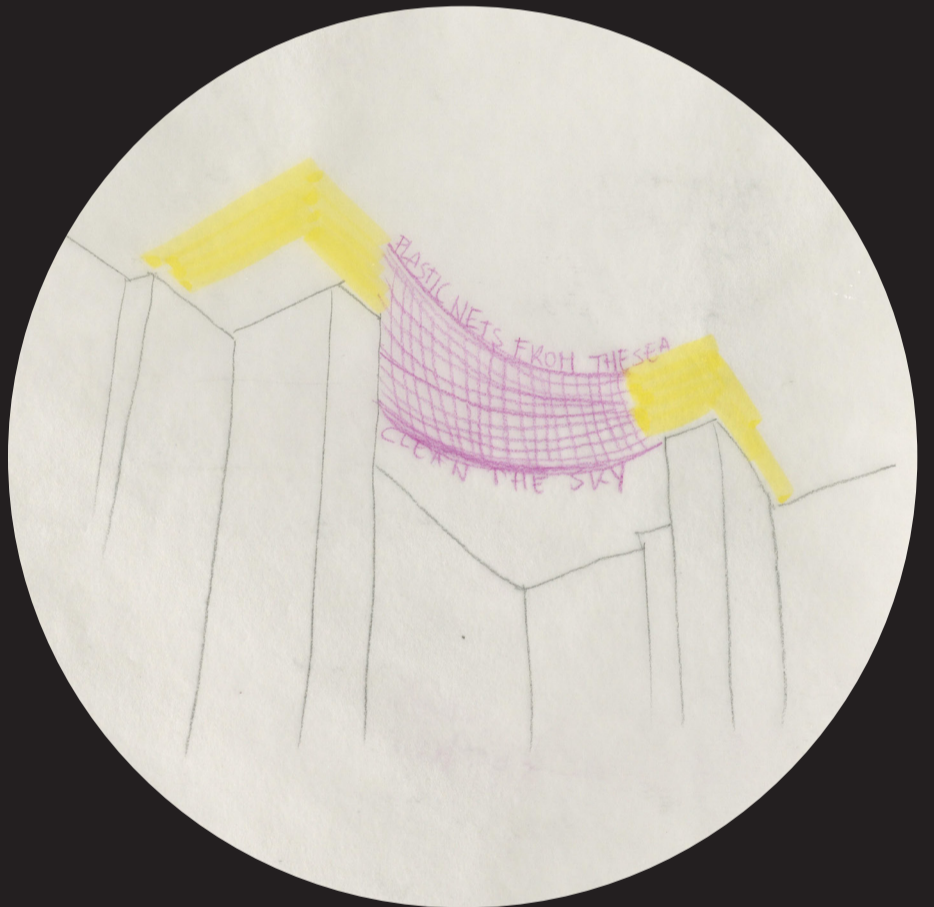
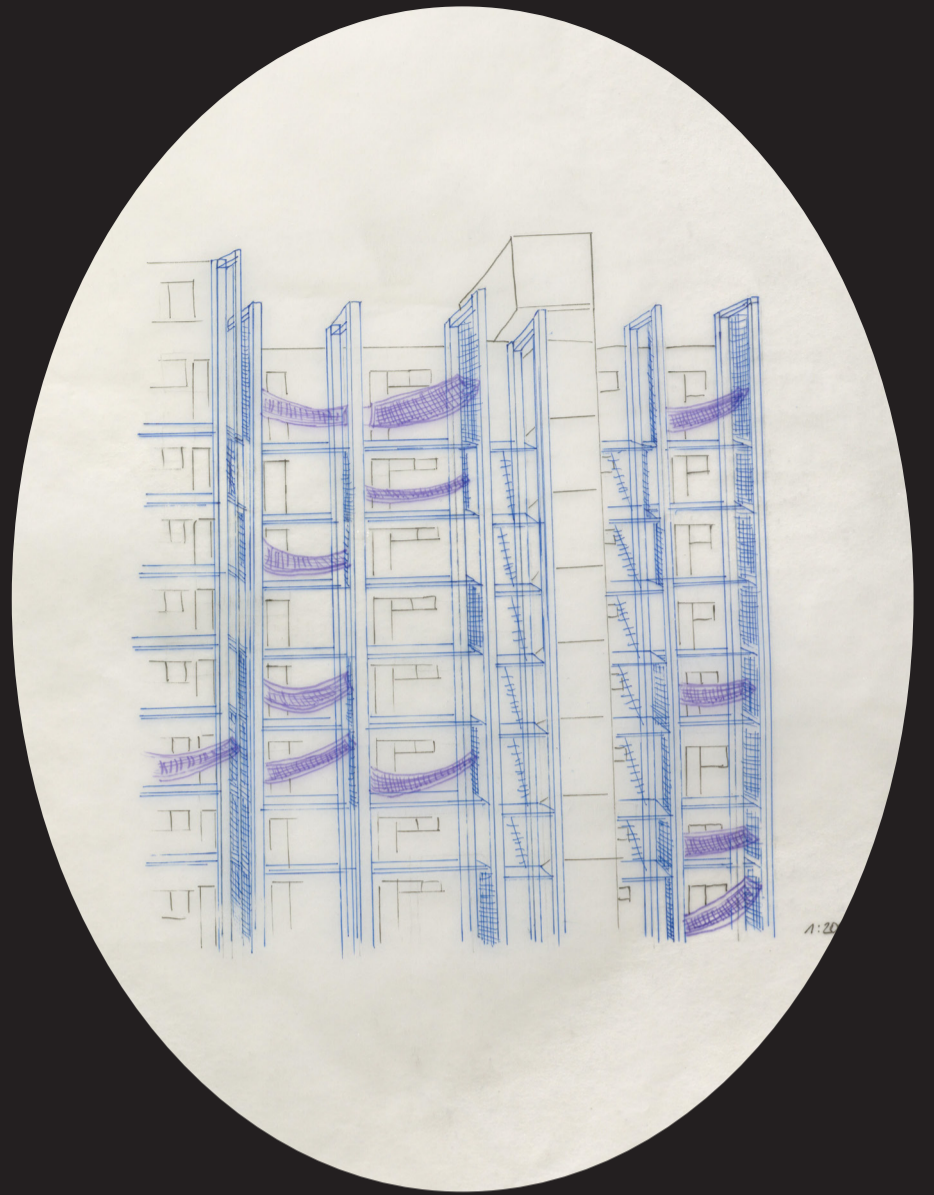
A world of plastic
Plastic is over-present, over-used.
At a point where we don't notice it anymore
Unaware of its impact, its consequences.
On every level
From creation to destruction
We simply don't consider how, where it comes from
And ignore how and where it ends up
So anchored in our daily life, we don't realize what it represents
It envelops everything surrounding us
Plastic represents the plasticity of our world
The power of creating
The plasticity of plastic is indescribable



Sharon Galle “Net-toyer”

Plastic is consumed on an ongoing basis, but the waste is fading into oblivion. Oversea landfills compress it, sprinkle it with a layer of earth and let the environmental dangerous gasses flow into the earth. Far away from the public gaze, all land has been colonized. The global waste cycle is busting at its seams. The living world continues on its own plastic belts. The material has almost no identity of its own, but can be the shadow of its predecessor. As a parasite, it takes over the imprint of what it sticks to, enlarging its footprint. It is everywhere, it is glued to us. Gigantic fishing nets are floating along on the waves of the ocean. Left there to end the lives of even more marine animals, they could serve a greater purpose. When they are removed from the ocean, they can be recycled and their strength can be enforced.

Plastic nets, with the same characteristics as their material, create an almost invisible space. As humans already left their mark on a huge part of the earth, it is time to not consume any more space. The solution are temporary places, hardly closed, which can be adapted to any one's wishes. A traveling underground, a space to claim without ever taking it. In a world where people don't know their neighbour anymore, this is a place to connect again. With others, but also with themselves, the earth and all its inhabitants, while cleaning the area they take. The plastic nets work as a great air filter, a translucent layer and a second skin for the building. A lightweight structure where the nets can be connected to, creates a playful atmosphere and refurbished look for the building. The total structure shelters the building from radiating sunlight, in an ever-warming climate cooling its core. A renovation without a materials pit. Hereby imposing a question on hierarchy: people on the top floor do have the best view, but as the waste is falling from above, they take on even more trash. As the landfills become landfulls, it is time to have a take upon the sky in the most eco-responsible way.



Theresa Zöllner

Plastic walls: the fabric of our built environment

“The individual demands and the emotions aroused by personally experienced situations or atmospheres differ too much to be able to represent a serial product.” —Carina Sacher in her essay *the Ordinary Luxury* (1).

CONTEXT

The twelve-story building on Gerhart-Hauptmann-Ring 24 resembles its neighbors in its massive construction with small openings that reveal little about the lives of its inhabitants. The four apartments on each floor are limited to two to three rooms per unit.

“A dwelling should give the same facilities as a villa. The idea of luxury is therefore redefined in terms of generosity, freedom of use and pleasure. Inhabiting is neither norms, nor rules, nor the minimum; it is about a maximum of pleasure, comfort and freedom on every floor.”(2)

SPATIAL PROPOSAL

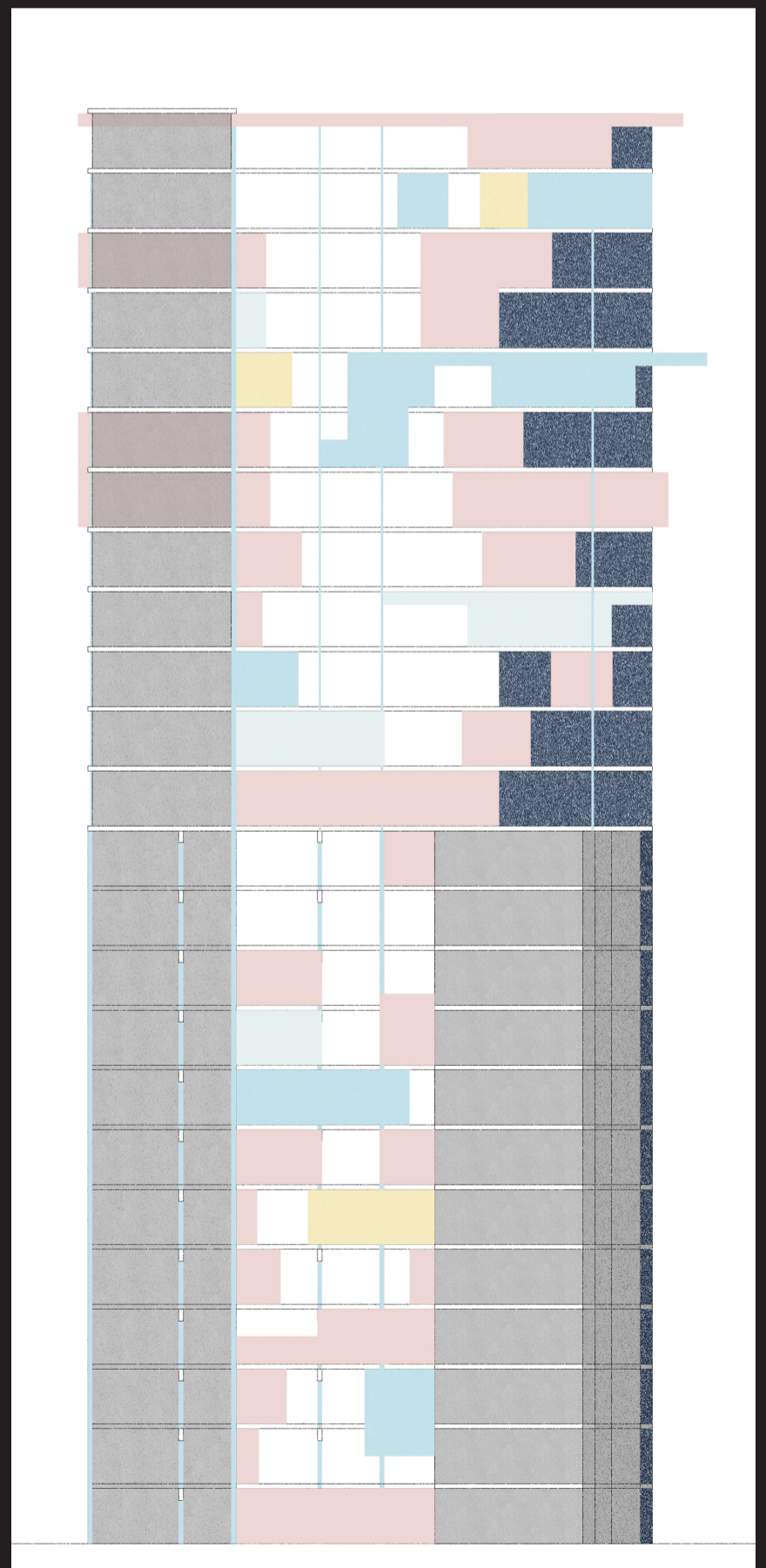
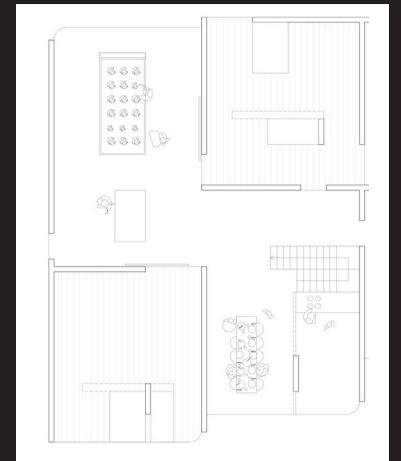
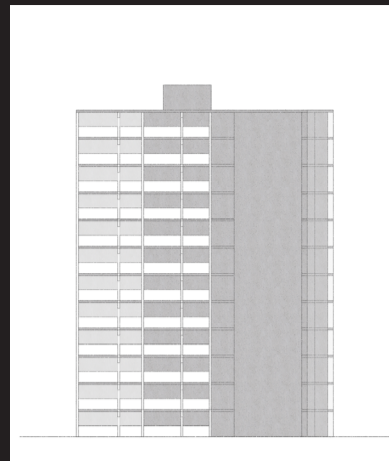
The structure is compact, could not contain more apartments in itself, seems to say no to even the slightest demand for flexibility. But why is that? This decision should not be answered by the building, but by the residents themselves: they should decide what happens in and around their apartment. Squeezing as much housing as possible into a skin that is just too tight is being questioned. Therefore one half of the lower units is being stacked on top. The result are free and interactive spaces aiming to give inhabitants options for participation and also the sharing of resources.

FUTURE

As the fabric of the building is a very loose one, it fits perfectly and allows people to move freely. As it continues to gain personal value residents feel more and more connected to it and invest in repairing it and patching small “holes.”

(1) Lacaton, Anne, and Vassal, Jean-Philippe, (2020). *Qualities of Inhabiting* (Studio Anne Lacaton). ETH Zurich D-ARCH.

(2) Anne Lacaton and Jean-Philippe Vassal in *Inhabiting: Freedom, pleasure and luxury for everyone 2*.



Astrid Berlangé

This work compares mass housing complexes to plastic.

Neuperlach is a mass housing complex built after world war ii to reduce the housing shortage in munich. Today, it is subject to the process of gentrification: wealthy new residents are attracted to the neighbourhood, accompanied by the expulsion of former residents from the district.¹

In this sense, neuperlach has been colonised by the big-earners.

By analogy with mass housing complexes, plastic began as a product for the general public, large in number and therefore affordable. That mass production and consumption turned the panacea that was plastic into a danger.² The waste mountain increases and waste is dumped far away from houses and streets. Waste is exported elsewhere. Living and working conditions at the waste disposal site are abysmal due to the stench, dust, water pollution, litter and gore (toxic) combustion fumes.³ Thus, the residents of waste processing site are faced with a fait accompli, their destiny is shaped by the waste exporters. In this way, those waste processing areas have been colonised.

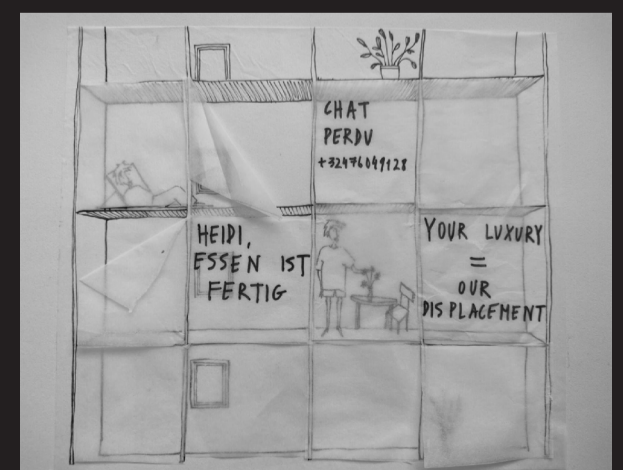
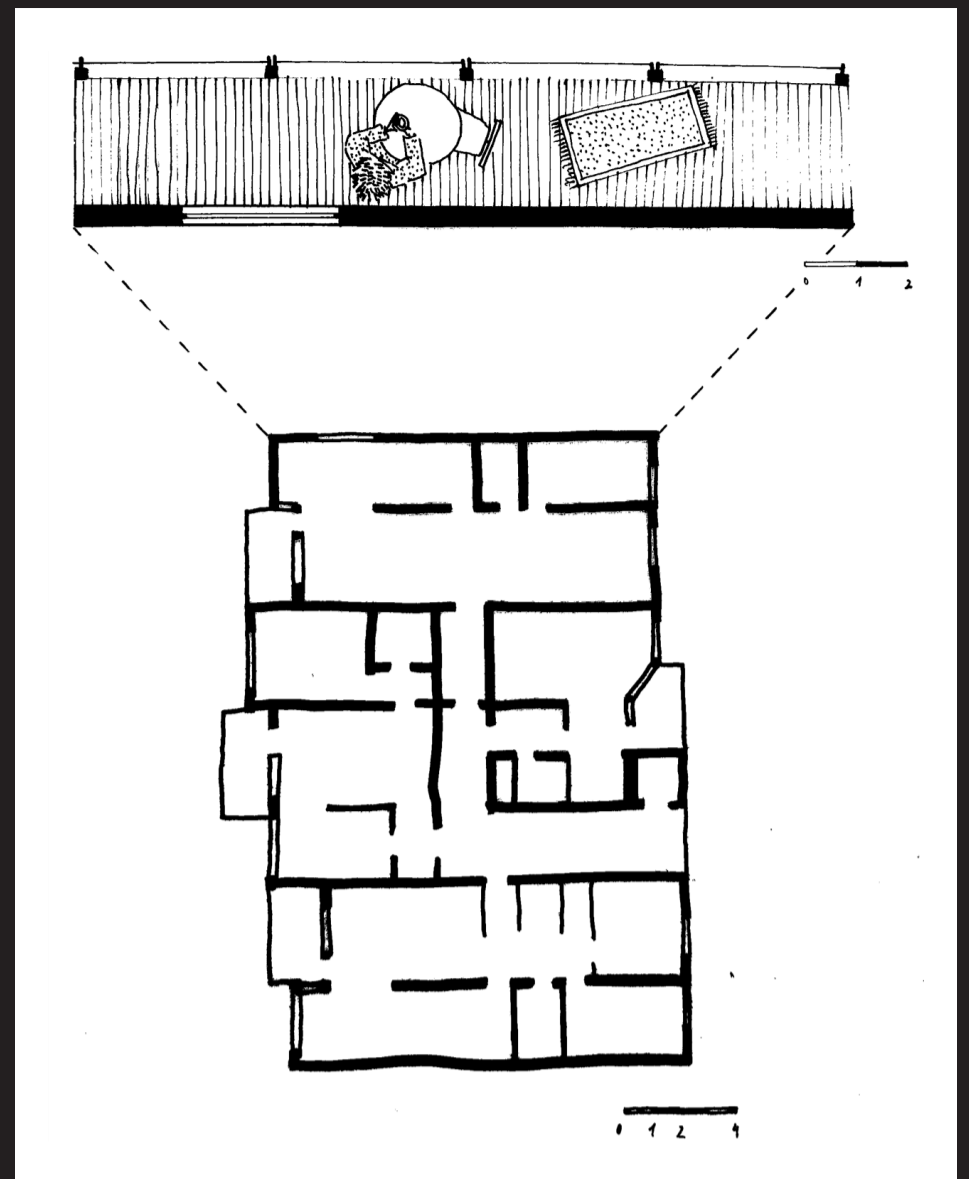
The intervention shows this colonialism and the mark of absence of former residents. The plastic slabs covering the building refer to taking possession of other people's property without them having a say. Instead of being a mark of oppression and absence of voice, the plastic slabs are used to give a voice to the residents by functioning as information screens. In this way the utopian view of the late 60's is represented in the intervention: the appeal to define architecture as a social practice.⁴ Residents use the plastic slabs as a medium to share their thoughts, to communicate news, to be heard and seen.

This intervention follows the idea of the winning design for centre pompidou.⁵

'The main facade was depicted as a grid of screens, images, rolling news and messages: almost a proto-internet. There were epic images of vietnam, banks of missiles, student protests and an message reading: "caroline go to canvas city im mediately your friend linda has been busted." It was the perfect cocktail for a cultural megastructure in the post-'68 age: politics, pop festivals, pot and protest.' (Heathcote 2021)

The design tries to resonate what is happening in neuperlach and munich today: the demand of young artists for affordable studios, the search for affordable housing in general and an end to the disappearance of social housing.

- 1 "Uber neuperlach," neueperlach.org, last consulted june first 2023.
- 2 Roland Barthes, plastic (paris : les lettres nouvelles, 1957).
- 3 Sophia Stamatopoulou-Robbins (with videographer ali al-deek), waste underground, 2017.
- 4 Marc Dessauce, the inflatable moment: pneumatics and protest in '68, (new york: princeton architectural press, 1999).
- 5 Thomas de Monchaux, "the original shock of the pompidou center," the new yorker (2022).



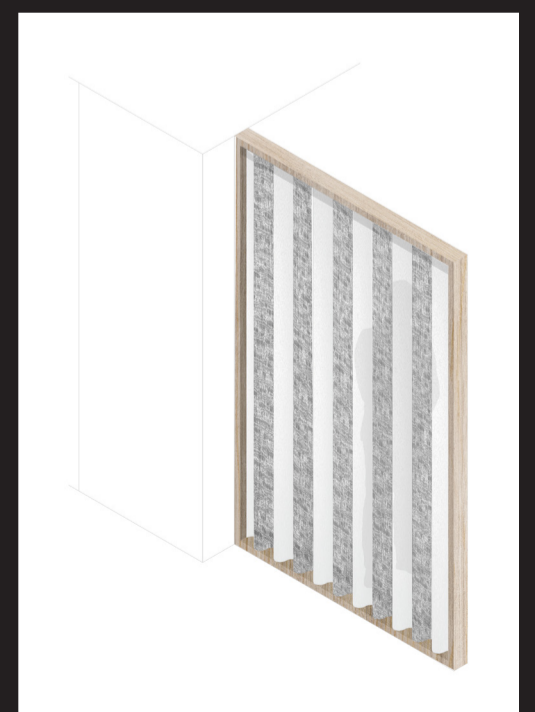
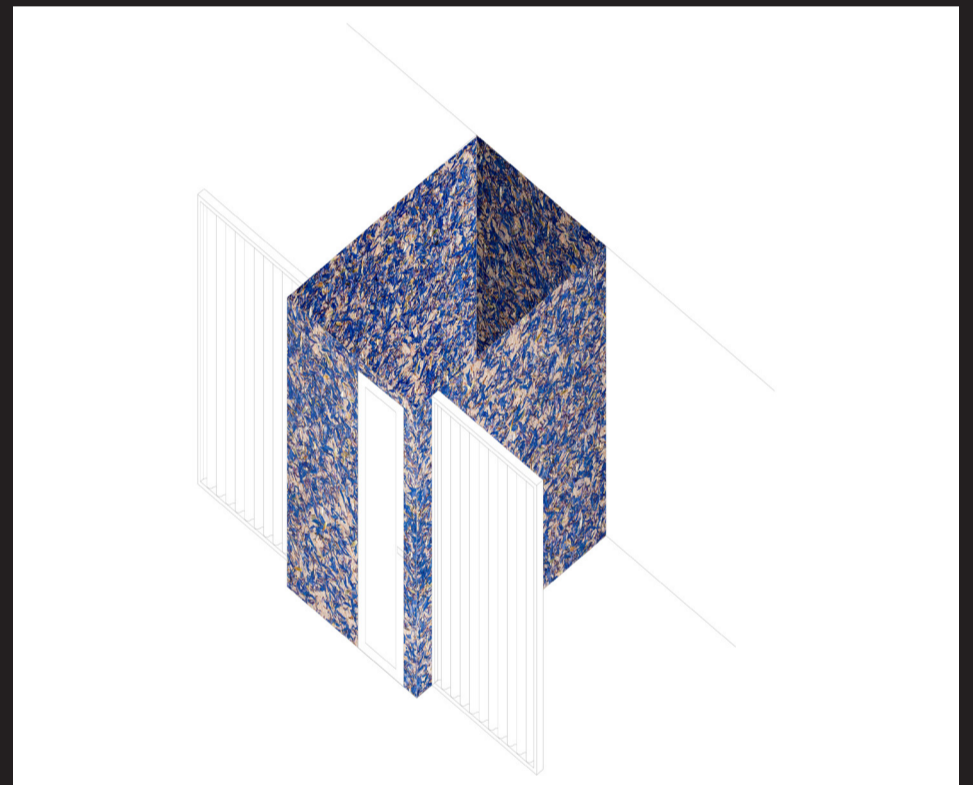


Hiba Znaidi “Threads of time”

Plasticity encompasses the inherent capacity for development across various aspects, impacting individuals and communities. It involves embracing experiences, perspectives, and insights, enabling growth and transformation within the evolving realities of life through natural and artificial processes. Aphorisms like “the only constant in life is change” and “the truth is the whole” capture a vision that applies to plasticity. The reality, as a constant flux, influences ideas, individuals, institutions, and materials, emphasizing their interconnectedness. Hegel suggests that truth is found in a comprehensive understanding of the whole, rather than isolated fragments. This underscores the importance of considering the historical processes that shape the current reality of materials.

Building upon this philosophy, the intervention “Threads in Time” translates these concepts into physical space. It takes place in an apartment located at Gerhart-Hauptmann-Ring 7. The project begins by preserving the existing load-bearing walls and units and adding rigid brick walls to create permanent bathrooms. Modular walls are introduced to divide the space as needed.

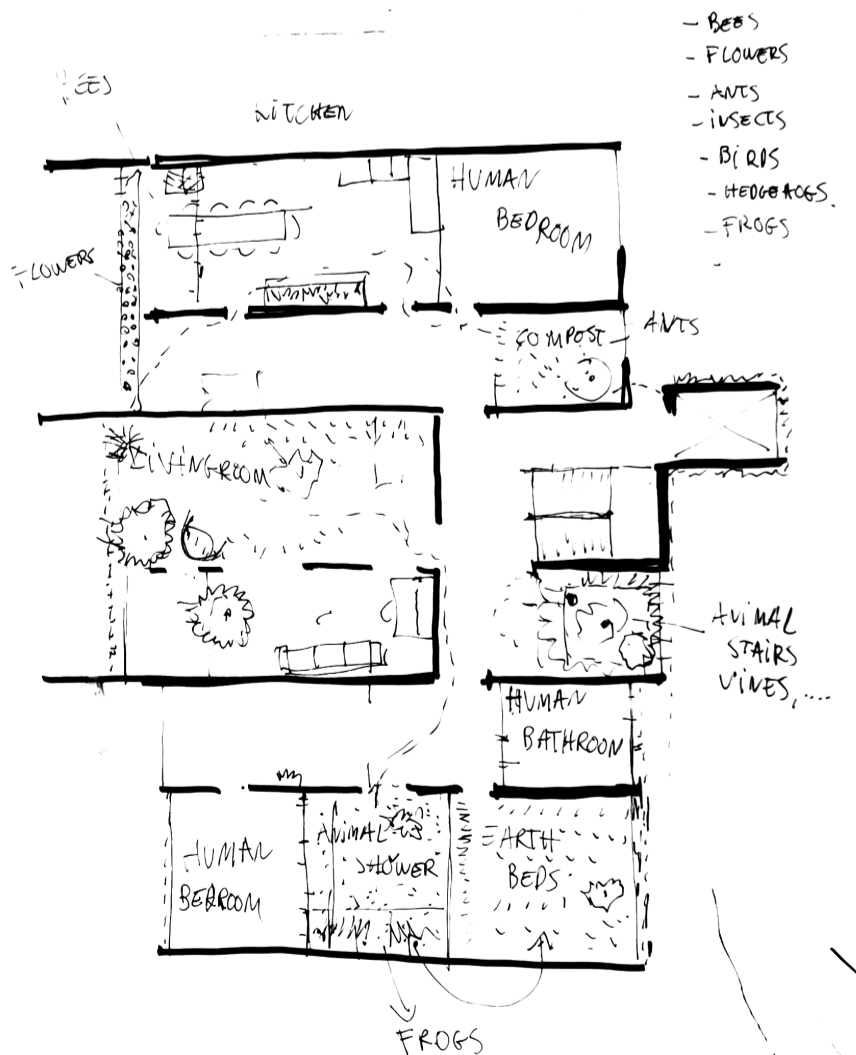
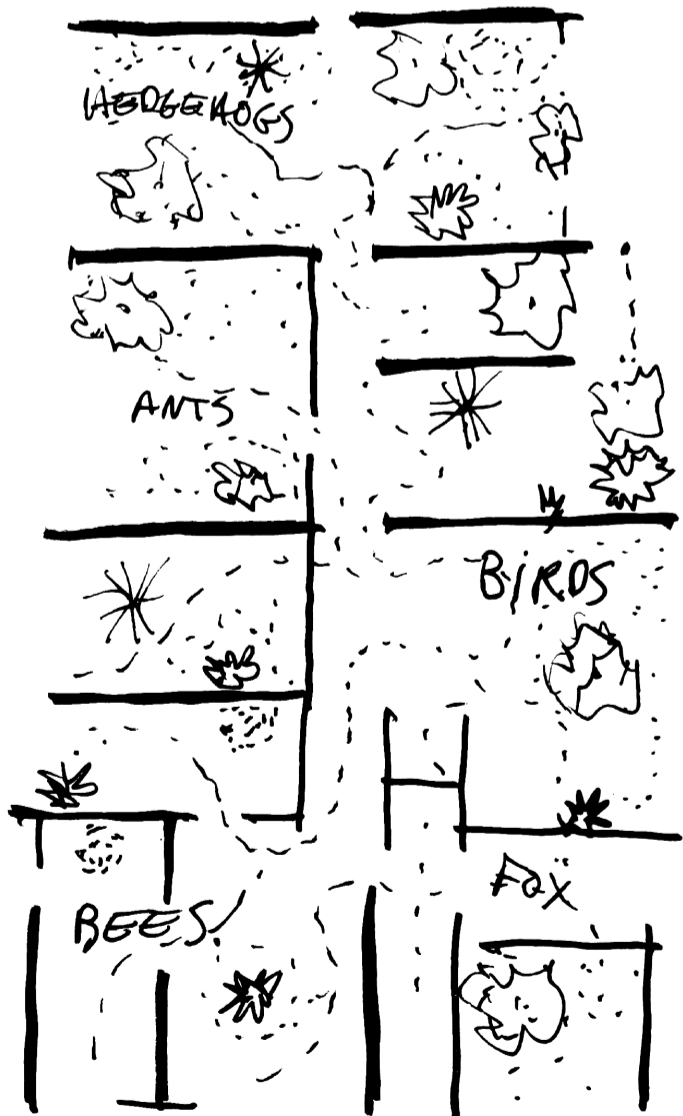
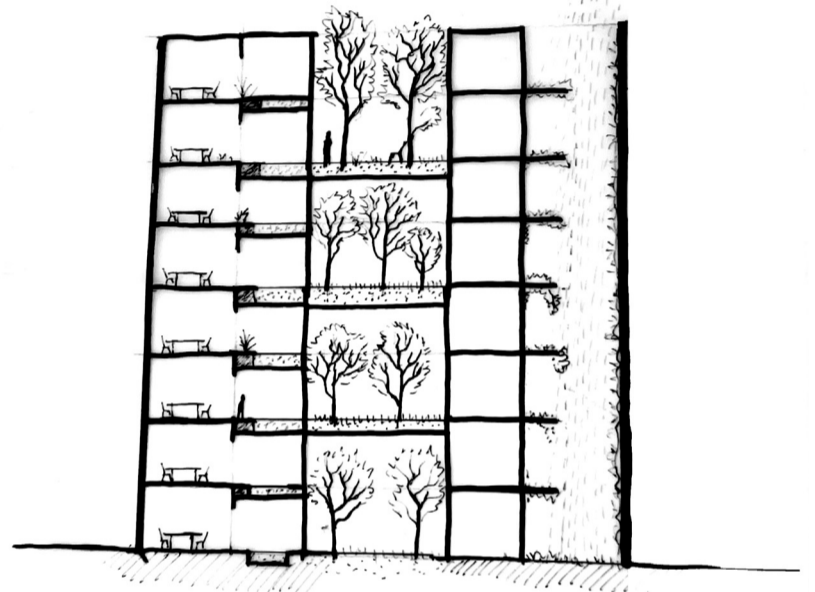
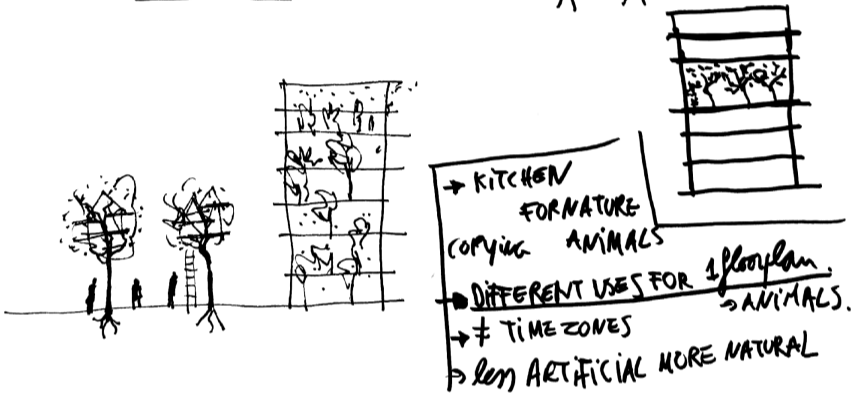
Each module blends timeless and delicate materials to bear witness to the passage of time: a wooden frame, translucent fabric, and enduring plexiglass. As inhabitants write their stories within these modules, they also undergo transformation. The project incorporates three timelines: movable walls for daily flexibility, adaptable fabric for seasonal changes, and the addition of modules over time, creating a captivating contrast between aging elements and pristine ones, with plexiglass symbolizing timeless endurance. Drawing inspiration from the notion that “the only constant is change,” “Threads in Time” embraces change within the physical space and in our lives. The project symbolizes the dynamic nature of existence, the evolution of ideas, and the preservation of memories within architectural elements. It serves as a visual representation of the philosophy of plasticity, encouraging an appreciation for the transformative power of change and how we, in turn, shape the spaces we inhabit.



Jef Potargent "Artificiality ↔ Nature"

- ARTIFICIALITY ↔ NATURE
- MATERIALS, FOUND OBJECTS, TRASH.
- COPY, IMITATION → BLURRING THE LINE
- APPROPRIATION → different forms space. → MEMORY OF MATERIALS.
- TOUCHED BY HUMANS → NATURE FREE
- CONTROL
- UNCONTROLLED SPACE. → FREE TO APPROPRIATE
- ONE CYCLE OF TRANSFORMATION / IMITATION - GREEN HOUSE
- NATURE IMITATING ARTIFICIALITY → HUMANS / ARCHITECTURE - TREEHOUSE / NEST
- ARCHITECTURE IMITATING NATURE → PLASTIC NATURE / GARDEN.
- PUTTING A TREE IN YOUR HOUSE.

→ ARCHITECTS erect structures
in their IMAGINATION FIRST

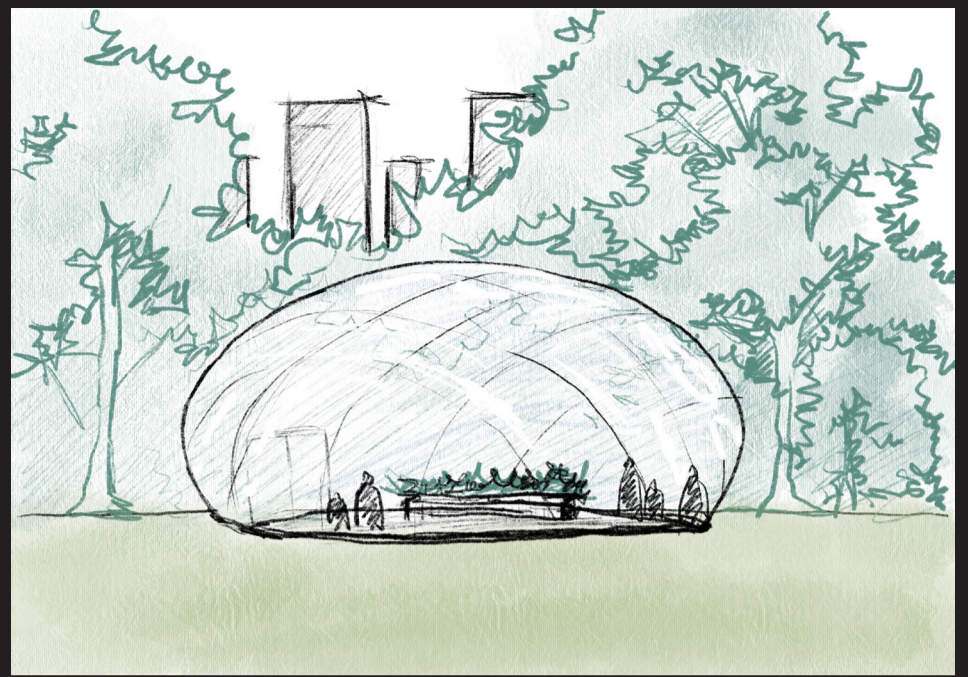


Jingming Yu “Newborn Cell” in Theodor-Heuss-Platz

I aim to create a series of spatial experiences that enhance people’s encounters with urban spaces. From the enclosed spaces of residential buildings to the semi-open inflatable architecture and eventually to the fully open outdoor green spaces, each experience offers a unique perspective. “Newborn Cell” represents a temporary and artistic inflatable architecture that provides a safe and social environment for people to gather, interact, and find solace.

“Newborn Cell” represents a temporary and artistic inflatable architecture that creates safe and social environments for people to gather, interact, and find comfort. It acts as a haven where individuals can freely express themselves, fostering a sense of belonging and community. By prioritizing simplicity over extreme aesthetics, “Newborn Cell” aims to enhance the urban public space, offering a sanctuary that promotes relaxation and ease in people’s daily lives. Visually, this inflatable architecture resembles the metaphorical “newborn cell” that bring life and vitality to urban spaces. It captures the essence of growth, adaptability, and transformation. However, its significance extends far beyond its visual appeal. With its ability to activate the city instantly and effortlessly, “Newborn Cell” has the power to inspire and invigorate both individuals and communities.

In conclusion, “Newborn Cell” is more than just a physical structure; it is an immersive experience that transcends traditional notions of architecture. Through its innovative design, it creates a series of spatial encounters that engage, inspire, and connect people with the urban environment. By embracing simplicity and prioritizing the enhancement of urban public spaces, “Newborn Cell” aims to create a lasting impact, enriching the lives of individuals and fostering a sense of harmony and vitality within the city.



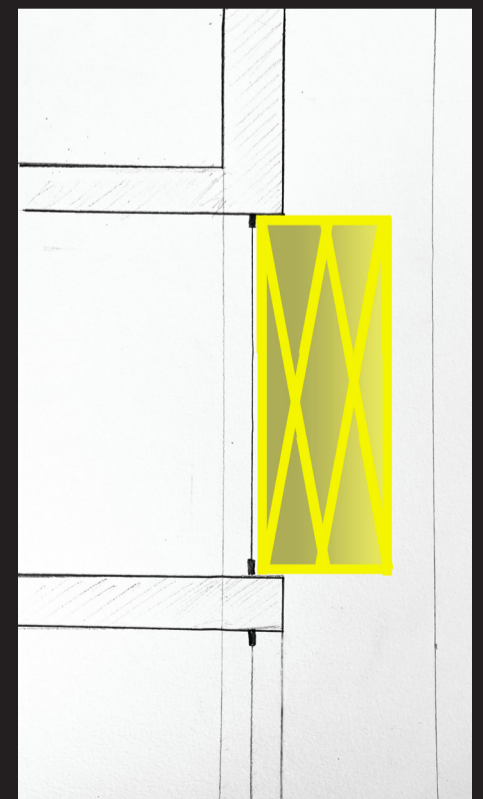
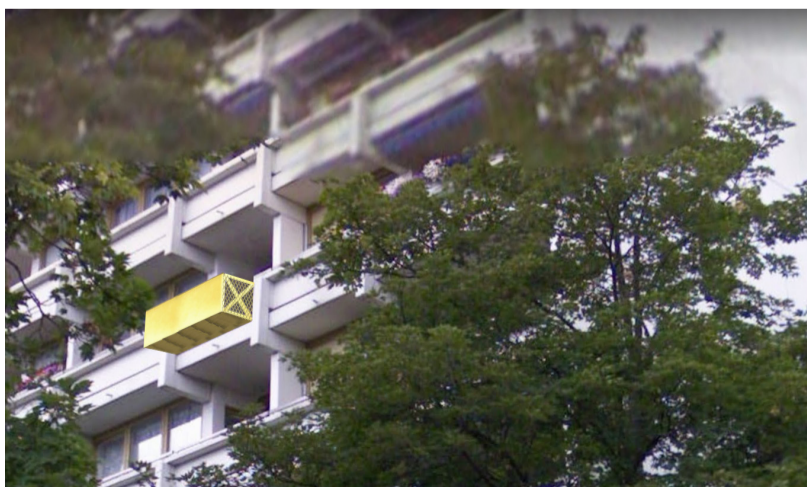
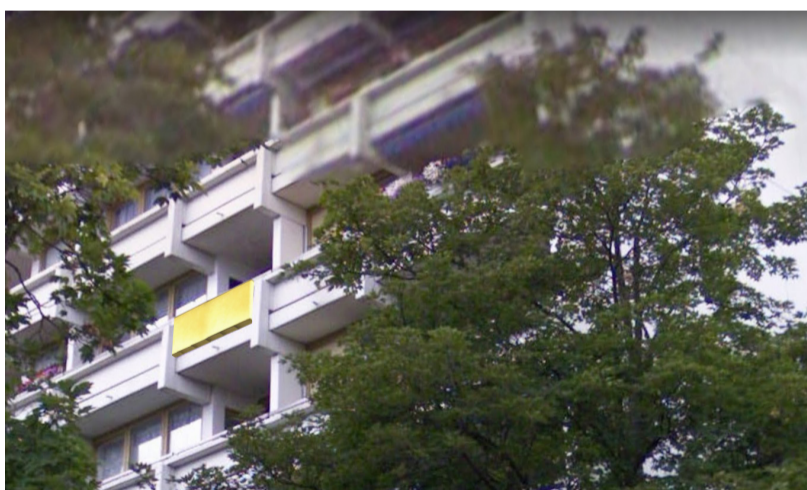
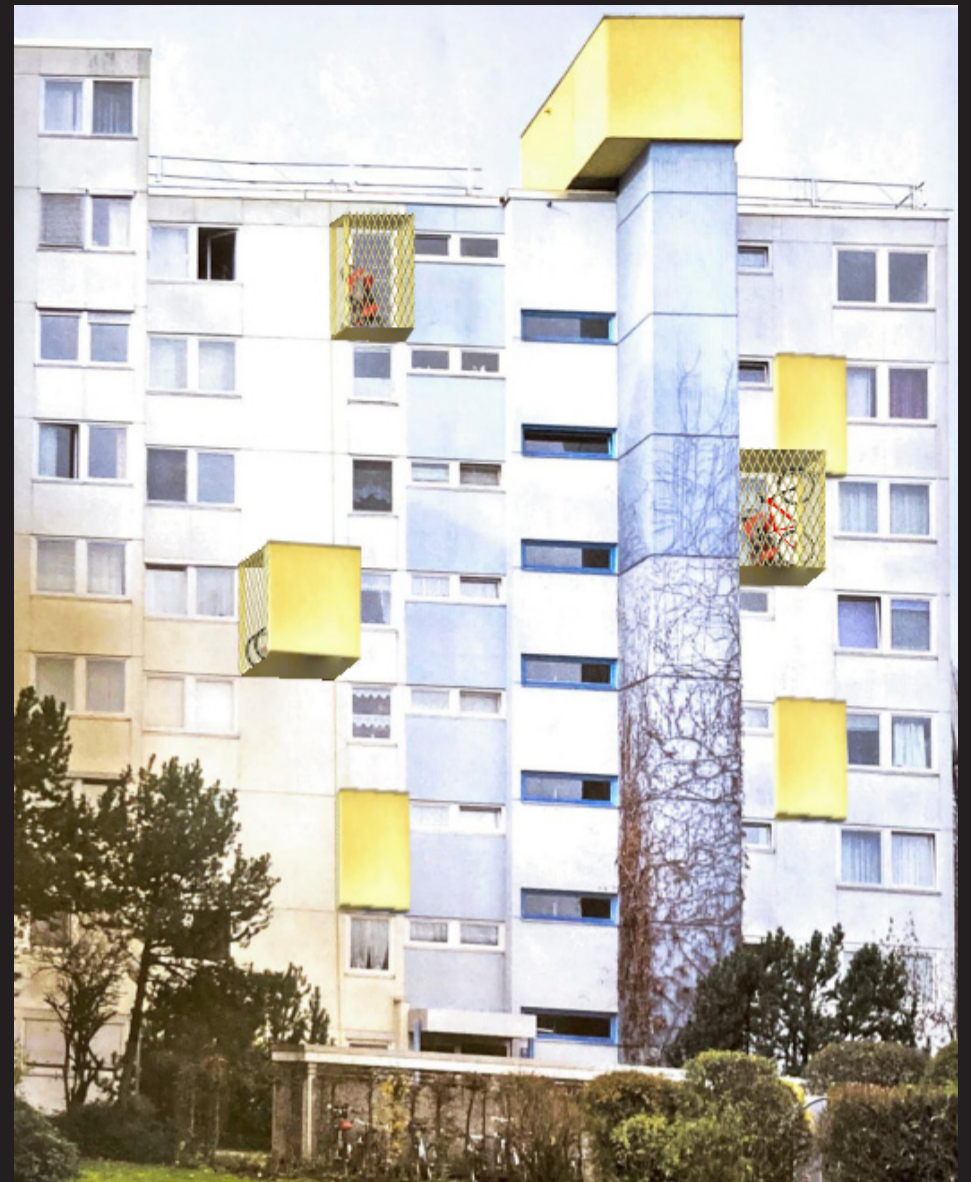
Patricija Ratniece “Value”

What is the value of our surroundings? How much does a beautiful view cost, how much does a square meter cost in your apartment?

When is the value of places decided on and measured? As this value means whether something can stay or go, for example one mountain is left as it is, because of its value for a nice hike or a beautiful green area to look at from an apartment block. At the same time, some other mountain, maybe a bit more out of town, is torn down because of its valuable natural resources—to build more apartment complexes to look at the other mountain. For one of them value is visual, and for another it is the stone it is made of. They might be totally identical, but one has inflated value made from people’s perception.

The value for things in our world seems to be born from people’s perceptions of things in their aesthetic or material function. Value is something quite inconsistent and interchanging. The most associated thing to value is money. Money is made out of these natural resources and it is not nature which earns it, nature just loses. Exploitation of nature is nothing new, people have done this for ages. Just now the money tag on it has made it clearer.

Coming back to the idea of the cost of square meter: the project idea is born. Not to build this next apartment block to make room for more of your stuff, maybe you would like to keep the same space, but to add a space for your stuff. Most apartment buildings have similar façade system of being made out of panels. In the building in Neuperlach Bert-Brecht-Allee 13 this is the case, the façade is made out of mostly square or rectangle panelling. The addition-intervention is made to fit in to the place of the panel to create a room for your stuff which is extendable and retractable depending on how much space you need. The project plays with the idea of adding a square meter to your place whenever you wish.



Anthony Butcher “Leiden//Erdulden (polyvalent pathological)”

The site of one vacated autopsy.

A body is lying on the operation table with pierced skin, surgically removed muscles, exposed organs and vessels — a building with structure, insulation and HVAC.

A closer examination reveals the wounds inflicted upon the existing. Bedded in sheets of glass and steel, stripped from its untouchable rigidity, the specimen simultaneously appears ravaged and pathologically wounded. With its physical limitations laid bare, it is the building's visible deconstruction and starting decomposition that makes inhabitation palpable and the organism experienceable.

A look into its many internal wounds reveals a prior attempt to retrofit the mid-life patient through the preventive removal of two layers of dry-walling and deteriorated insulation alongside the building's lungs and durable core: freed from asbestos, the vents atop the corridors become visible, an airflow audible. The uncovering of pipework leading from wet-cells to kitchens enables the repair of dysfunctional gearing long smeared with grime and organic matter. In shedding its final, purely optical layer, the bathroom becomes spacious, adaptable and operable for reasons of maintenance.

Along the spine, bones of concrete are removed for reasons of quality-management. Holes between the units alongside the facades and the enclosing circulatory spaces light the central axis of a corridor. Another surface wound presents the conditions of the interior to the public sphere.

Through the introduction of prosthetic screening devices of communing, the wounds located alongside sanitary facilities become active sites of healing that through their fresh-water based transport of human waste mirror western attitudes on a perceivable micro-scale. It has become clear: our preceding imaginary operation is doomed to fail. Unsuccessful to revive its glory, architecture, our flatlined body, has since turned into a cadaver. Its processualized state of (de)construction now merely manifests stages of collective mourning, lamenting at a shared funeral.

Yet, the death of our beloved presentable corpse instead prepares the soil for a new type of life: Stripped down to skin, veins and bones, the now perceivable functioning of architecture becomes both facilitator and catalyst for a new pathological type of social interaction. Through the opening of both the literal and the figurative wound, an encounter built on tolerance and endurance, Leiden und Erdulden, is made possible. Initiated at the most intimate space, the private domicile, new relations between inhabitants and their residual environment celebrate the overcoming of wound culture in spaces of sanitation, instead opting for regenerative practices of care.

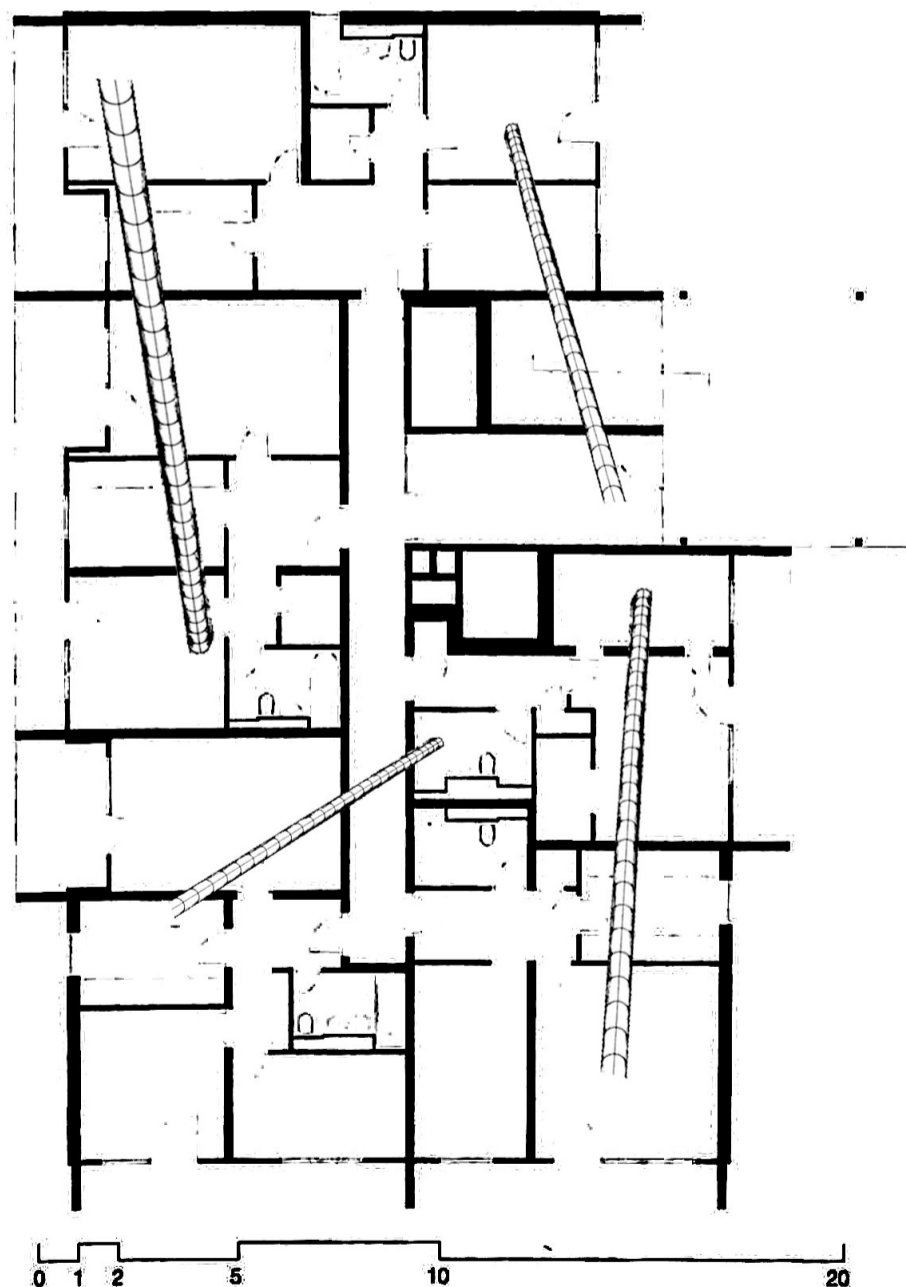
Pathology

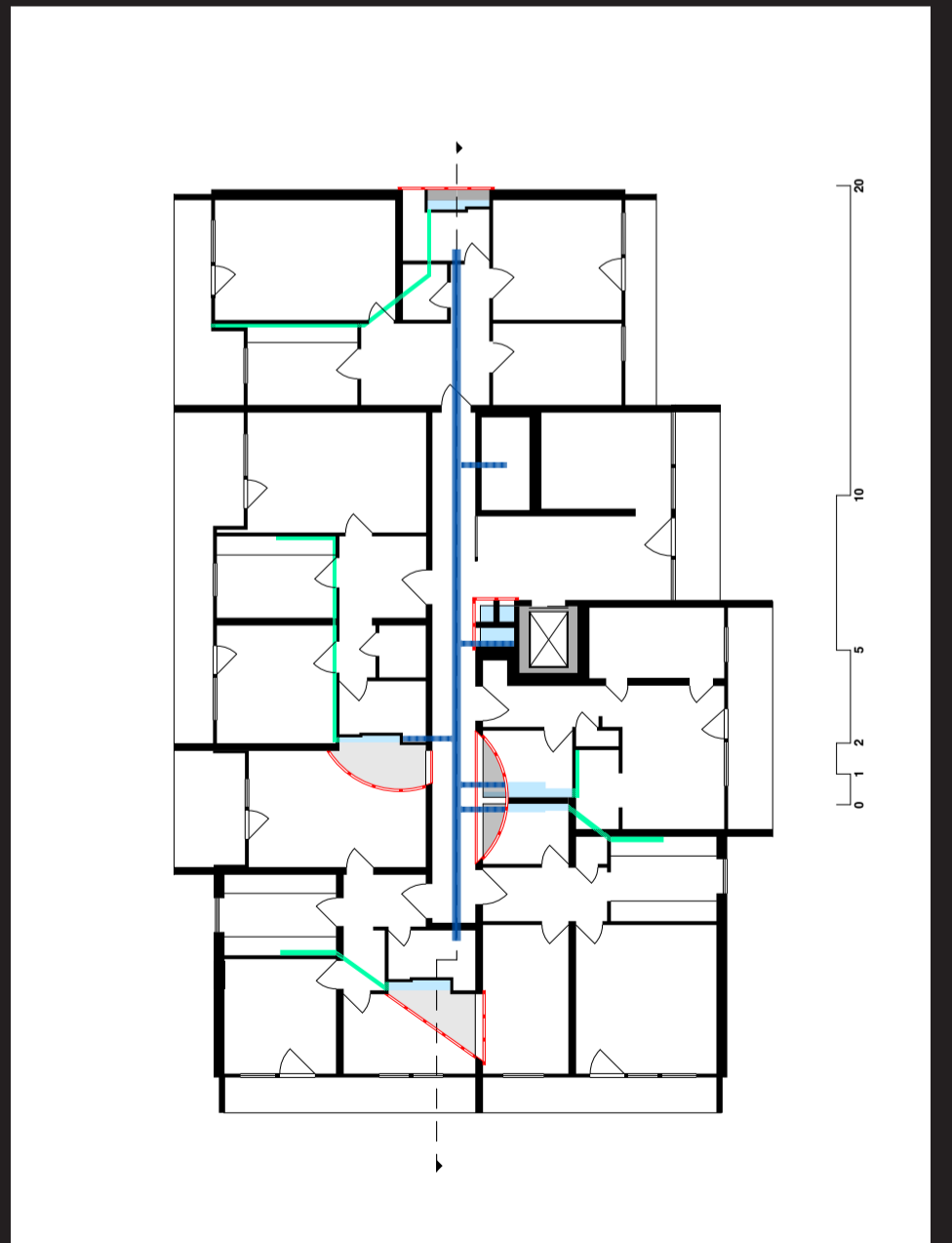
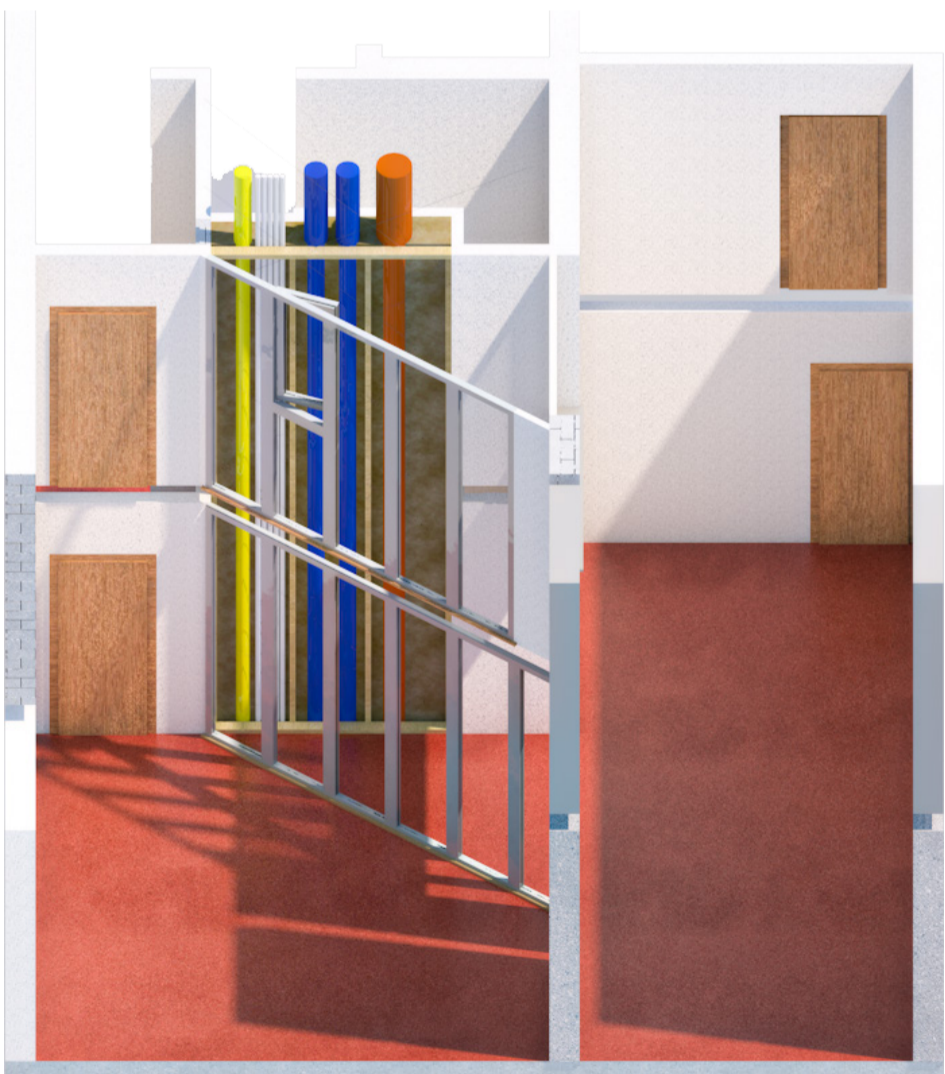
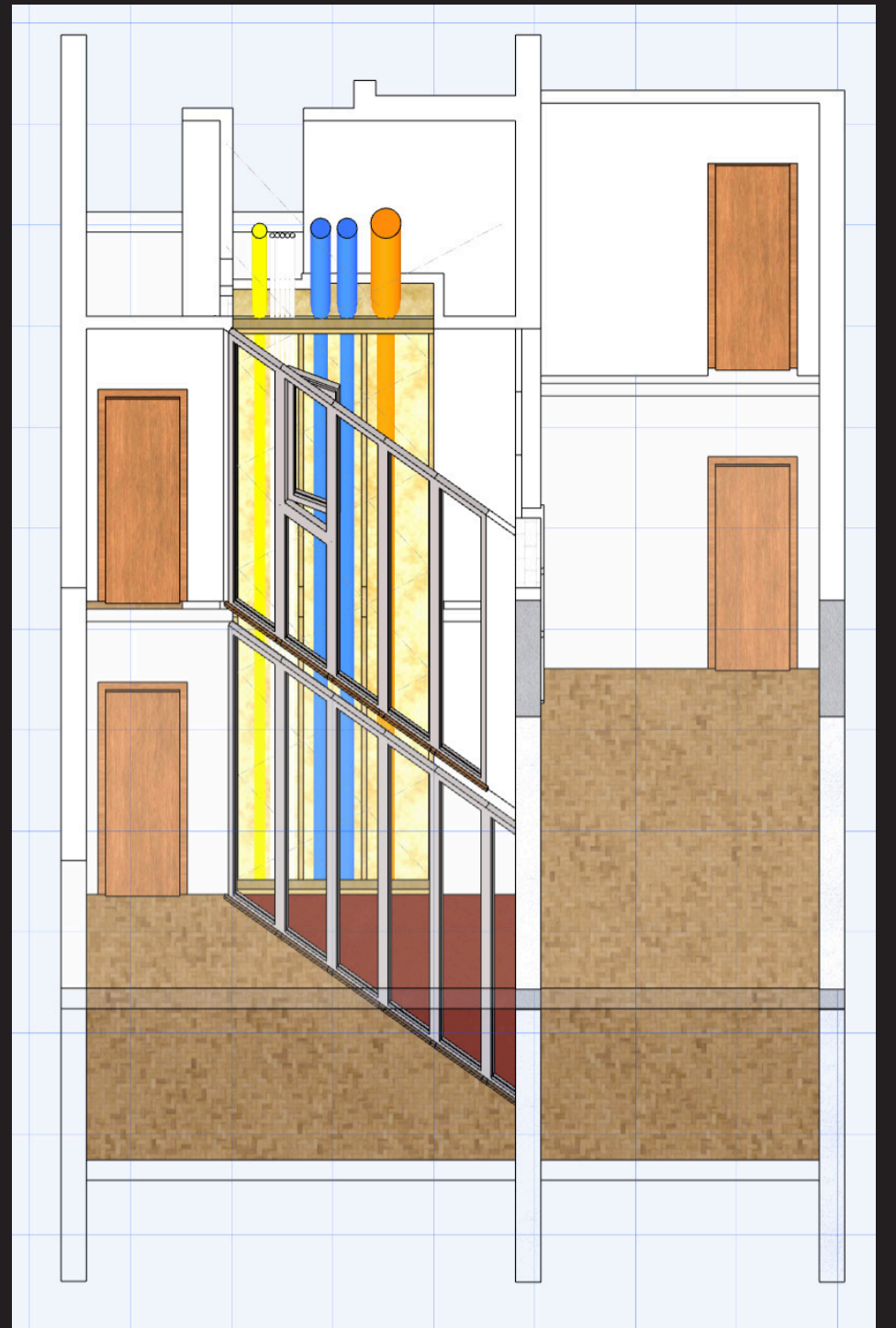
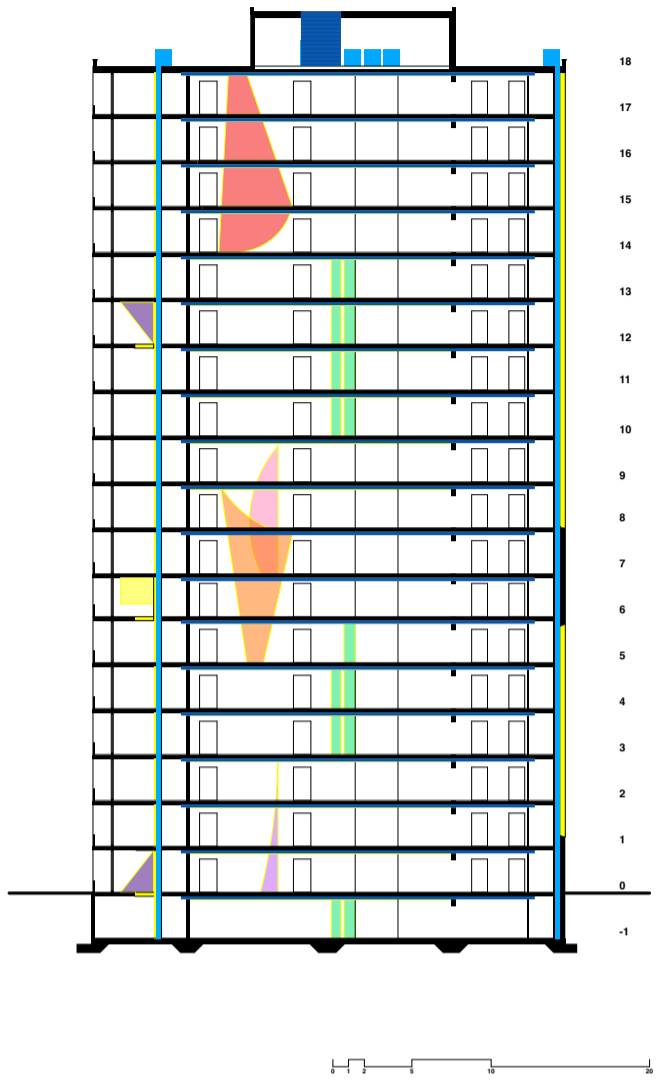
Not merely a collective spectacle, addictive processes of passive violence have become the site of desire in the public space. The gathering of the public around scenes of violence—the spectacle of an ever-approaching apocalypse and the fetishization of points of extraction and accumulation—have all but realized wound culture, a public fascination with torn and opened bodies, a collective gathering around shock, trauma, and the pathological wound.

Plastic happens in the brain. It disconnects, disrupts, disorganizes and organizes. It establishes decay and through the infestation of wounds cleanses our bodily environment.

Ultimately, it is at the area of the wound that change is introduced at a micro-biotic level. Detritus appears as a byproduct of processual transformations of regrowth. By comparison, the opening of the metaphorical wound, then, appears as social catalyst in initiating change. Through direct engagement of wound culture, the comparison between extraction and (slow) violence is made possible, effectively rendering the effects of plastics on the body.

No longer understood as a mere enclosing barrier, plastic reengages with us as the once intended chemical device that now manages to penetrate our skin, seeping into our bodies and altering them. What makes us differentiate our bodily surface from our planetary boundary? And how does trauma affect the piercing of our physical boundaries?





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Since hair isn't preserved in fossils,
We can't rule out the possibility that
Dinosaurs looked like this.

