

SURREALIZING

THE

MEMORY

HOUSE

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Surrealizing the Memory House

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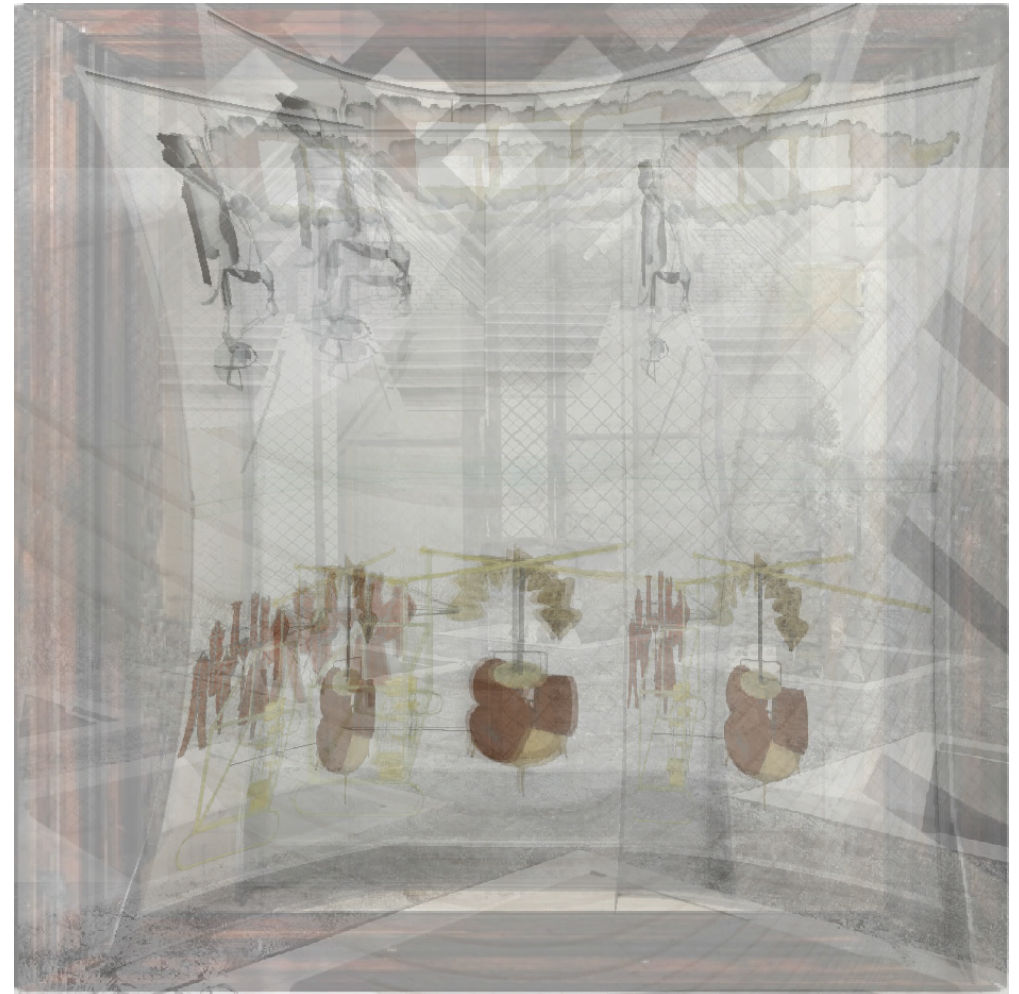
April 2016

the house itself was an object of memory, not of a particular individual for a once-inhabited dwelling, but of a collective population for a never-experienced space: the house has become an **instrument of generalized nostalgia**

Vidler The Architectural Uncanny

Abstract

How can architects design more meaningful and narrative spaces using architectural memory? This question is examined by applying the lens of surrealism to issues of the architectural memory. The lens of the surreal and uncanny helps develop a cursory understanding of how these types of architectural memories are formed, communicated, recognized and reinterpreted into multitudinal architectural possibilities.



Beginnings

Reconstructive remembering is an architectural act that warps actual lived spaces and construes and constructs a distorted memory space from them with the intention of determining how this type of memory can be used as an architectonic design tool

This exploration into reconstructive memory began by the researcher having family and former roommates remember and reconstruct shared living spaces. This exercise raised more questions than it answered. It led to multiple questions: is there such a thing as a collective reconstructive memory; is it possible to decipher another's values or experiences depending on their memory of space; is it possible to create a stratified space of superimposed recollections through the layering on of different individuals' memories, and is it possible to create more meaningful places through this layering and retracing?

This exercise in looking back led to the idea of anacoluthon, which is traditionally a grammatical term meaning a non-sequential or illogical sentence construction. However, this type of scattered construction is highly applicable to an architecture of remembering that collages together disparate spatial and temporal recollections.

The Enlightenment thinker and Constructivist Giambattista Vico claimed that the act of making is one and the same as the act of understanding.

Through anacoluthon, then, it seems it is possible to reconstruct the present "from behind," that is, through past memories, as a way to understand the past and the present through this act of weaving seemingly unrelated temporal and spatial experiences together. Through memory it is possible to create a "scaffolding in reverse," a construction that builds itself at the same time it builds up new memory constructions.

The reconstructive memory is also capable of constructing the autobiographical self. Individuals map memories on to the physical environment in the same way memories map neural pathways in the human brain. The cartography of the memory makes brain maps that can potentially help make sense of anacoluthic place memories. Brain maps locate the self in a coherent collection of neural patterns that map the physical state of the individual. These maps are created to represent the relationship between the individual and objects and places-- these relationships are temporary and always in flux. The attempt to mentally create connections between the self, place and object demand the same type of constructing and construing as architectural anacoluthon and can potentially lead to a better understanding of self, memory and meaning through space.

These mental brain maps are projected onto the landscape of consciousness. The autobiographical self orients itself along this landscape to create self-

 <p>Vaughn Street Detroit, Michigan</p>	 <p>Steadman Street Dearborn, Michigan</p>	 <p>Jonathan Street Upper Flat Dearborn, Michigan</p>	 <p>Plainview St Detroit, Michigan</p>	 <p>Riverdale Dearborn Heights, Michigan 1999-2006 (parents' current residence)</p>	 <p>Forest and Cass Second Floor Apartment Detroit, Michigan</p>
<p>1988-1990</p>  <p>Dad Lived memory</p>	<p>1990-1993</p>  <p>Dad Lived memory</p>	<p>July 1993</p>  <p>Dad Lived memory</p>	<p>1993-1999</p>  <p>Dad Lived memory</p>	 <p>Dad Lived memory</p>	
 <p>Mom Lived memory</p>	 <p>Mom Lived memory</p>	 <p>Mom Lived memory</p>	 <p>Mom Lived memory</p>	 <p>Mom Lived memory</p>	
 <p>Sydney Ages 0-4 Some memory/ home videos/ photos</p>	 <p>Sydney Ages 4-8 Vague memory/ photos</p>	 <p>Sydney Ages 4-8 Vague memory</p>	 <p>Sydney Ages 8-13 Lived memory</p>	 <p>Sydney Ages 13-18 Lived memory</p>	 <p>Sydney Ages 20-21 Lived memory</p>
 <p>Molly Ages 0-2 Pre-memory/ photos/ videos/ stories</p>	 <p>Molly Ages 2-6 Vague memory/ photos/ videos/ stories</p>	 <p>Molly Summer of 6th year Vague memory</p>	 <p>Molly Ages 6-11 Lived memory</p>	 <p>Molly Ages 11-18, return 19-20 Lived memory</p>	 <p>Molly Ages 18-19 Lived memory</p>
 <p>Hannah Ages 0-3 No memory</p>	 <p>Hannah Ages 0-3 No memory</p>	 <p>Hannah Summer of 3rd year No memory</p>	 <p>Hannah Ages 3-7 Lived memory</p>	 <p>Hannah Ages 7-18, return at 21-current Lived memory</p>	
			 <p>Patrick Ages 0-5 Vague memory</p>	 <p>Patrick Ages 5-18 Lived memory</p>	

 <p>Second and Canfield Third Floor Apartment Detroit, Michigan..... July-September 2008</p>	 <p>3rd and Canfield Second Floor Apartment Detroit, Michigan..... 2008-2009</p>	 <p>Ardmore Lower Flat Ferndale, Michigan..... 2009-2010</p>	 <p>Borgman Huntington Woods, Michigan 2010-2011</p>	 <p>W. Chesterfield Ferndale, Michigan 2011-2012</p>	 <p>Vassar Hazel Park, Michigan 2012-2013</p>	 <p>University Lower Flat Ferndale, Michigan..... 2013-2014</p>	 <p>Fielding Upper Flat Ferndale, Michigan..... 2014-current</p>
 <p>Sydney Few months when 22 Lived memory</p>	 <p>Sydney Ages 23-24 Lived memory</p>	 <p>Sydney Ages 24-25 Lived memory</p>					
 <p>Molly Few months when 20 Lived memory</p>	 <p>Molly Ages 20-21 Lived memory</p>	 <p>Molly Ages 21-22 Lived memory</p>	 <p>Molly Ages 22-23 Lived memory</p>	 <p>Molly Ages 23-24 Lived memory</p>	 <p>Molly August-April 23-24 Lived memory</p>	 <p>Molly Ages 24-26 Lived memory</p>	 <p>Molly Ages 26-current Lived memory</p>
	 <p>Ben and Shoabana Out of contact</p>	 <p>Noel Lived Memory</p>	 <p>Alena Ages 23-24 Lived memory</p>	 <p>Alena Ages 24-26 Lived memory</p>			

knowledge. This landscape is continually re-remembered and re-constructed and, therefore, the self is constantly recreated. There are strong parallels between these landscapes and reconstructive memory places: both allow for endless projection of experience, object memory and place memory and the endless construction and re-construction of self and identity. Both are interested in emergence and engaging in a constant state of becoming.

The move from a mental landscape to the built environment is facilitated by the idea of containment. Whereas the autobiographical self can roam along an infinite mental landscape, the built environment provides space to actually gather and hold memories. The philosopher Edward Casey said, "place stabilizes the content of memories by containing them; it fixes them in a place which acts as a locating matrix for these contents." This containment is bidirectional: actual lived places provide inhabitable spaces that contain and create memory and meaning and it is through these contained memories that we can recreate and reconstruct memory places.

We can use productive remembering as a generative tool to create affinities between these various contained memories. Instead of falling into a sense of nostalgia, the montaging of memories through productive remembering leads to a deliteralization of space into a metaphysical landscape. Therefore, through memory, we create not a certain

house or a certain building, but rather a mode of being in the world and of creating the world.

To create this metaphysical landscape it is necessary to bear in mind that these contained memories are clusters, not units. Place memories work associatively or as a kind of architectural "Tip of the Tongue" phenomena—stimulating a fragment of memory can activate a whole image; albeit one that is more collaged than cohesive. These partial activations of memory create a ghost image of the sought after place or object.

Memory places are created through the overlay of these ghost images.

When thinking of reconstructive remembering it is important to consider distributive memory wherein no one element has a separate trace, yet every indirect element can be retrieved. This information can be stored in compound traces without the danger of interference, but with the potential for interaction.

Memory Architecture
&
Memory Formation



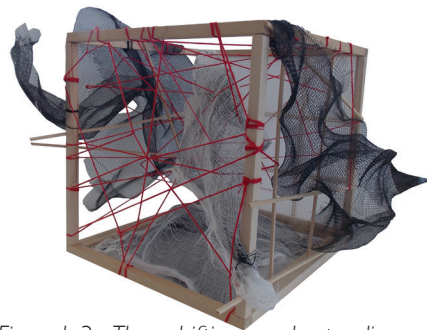
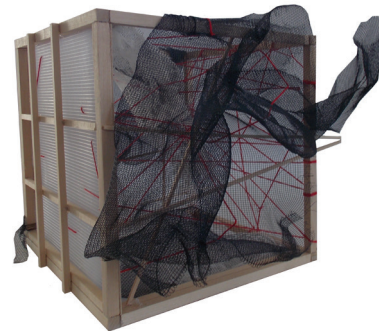
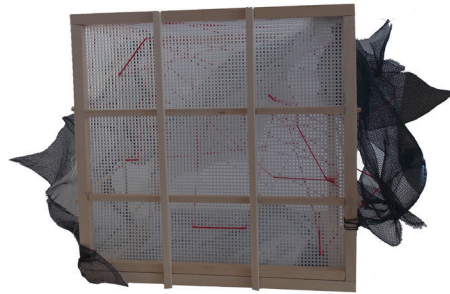
In order to understand how a memory architecture functions, it is imperative to make strong connections between architecture memory and the formation process of memory in the brain.

In the Middle Ages, orators would use the architectural convention of the Memory Palace as a mnemonic device. The Memory Palace was a static repository for rote knowledge; it functioned as a simple input/ output system. Knowledge was compartmentalized (Figure 1).

During the Renaissance, the idea of memory as a creative and generative tool emerged. This shifting understanding of memory resulted in a more dynamic use of architectural memory spaces; these spaces could freely complicate and inspired dense and layered architectural memory spaces (Figures 2 and 3).

The idea of contained spaces that hold infinite connections and possibilities is central to the idea of reconstructive memory; it is through a sense of containment that memory architecture is capable of holding and creating rich meaningful memories.

In his book *Spatial Recall*, Mark Treib outlines the three facets of architecture as a memory device:



Figs. 1-3: The shifting understanding of memory formation

I. Architecture materializes and preserves the course of time and makes it visible

II. Architecture concertizes remembrances by containing and projecting memory

III. Architecture stimulates and inspires us to reminisce and imagine

The solid materiality of architecture gives a tactile memory and the accretions and erosions of time and use are clearly written onto the very fabric of works of architecture.

The idea of containment alluded to earlier is important to understanding Treib's facets because it is through this containment that architectural memories are able to become transcendent. Architecture also projects; inhabitants project their memories or desires onto architecture and architecture, in turn, projects itself onto other buildings and onto the individuals who inhabit it.

Lastly, architecture inspires individuals to reminisce and imagine. It does this by creating contained places that are rich receptacles to deposit memories. Architecture also inspires imagination and reminiscing by encouraging the individual to retrieve those deposited memories. This can be achieved through the use of a similar architectural language or through reference to archetypal architectural elements.

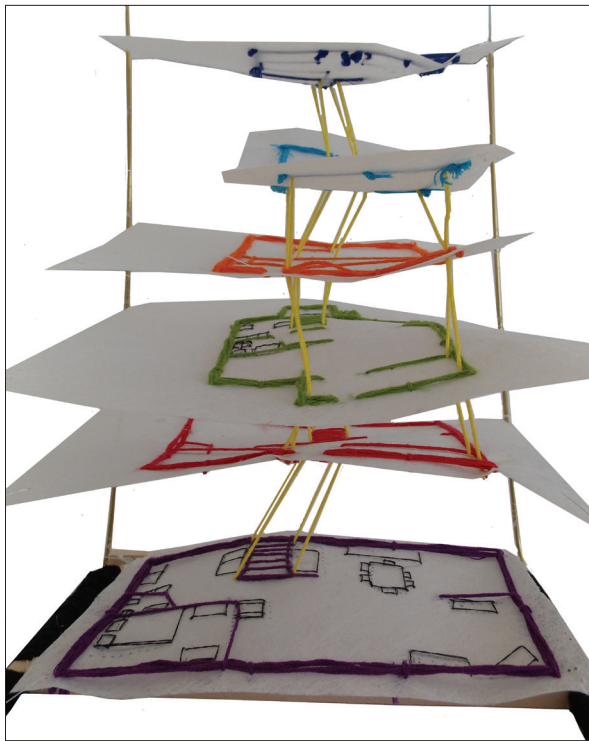
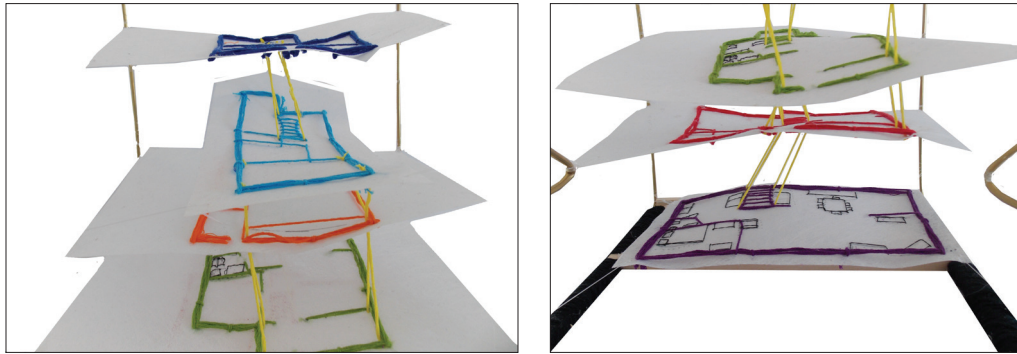
Treib's explanation of architecture as a

memory device relates to neuroscientist Antonio Damasio's concept of the *protoself*. The protoself is essentially a collection of neural patterns that create reference points within the brain that get woven into an ever changing autobiographical narrative. There are significant parallels between the neurological creation of reference points and identity and the way individuals pin memories on architectural reference points to weave together an ever-changing architectural autobiography.

The models on the following page demonstrate the idea of writing and rewriting an architectural autobiography and the creative potential found in connecting architectural memory points.

These stitchings (Figures 4-6) are floor plans drawn of a shared house. The intent in this exercise was to see if there were architectural spaces or reference points that were consistent throughout each individual's memories. These layers represent one house occupied by six members of the same family; as the layers indicate, there was a huge disparity in overall memories of the space, but there was some overlap in particular areas; in this case at thresholds and stairs- these were the architectural reference points for the family in this home. The weaving together of these shared reference points suggest that the overlay and interplay of different layered architectural memories can introduce new potentials and new spaces.

Echoics and Imprinting



Figs. 4-6: Stitched floorplans showing overlap in spatial memory

From this foundational understanding of memory formation and architectural memory reference points, it is important to look more closely into the neurological processes of memory formation and connect them with the poetics of architectural/ spatial elements.

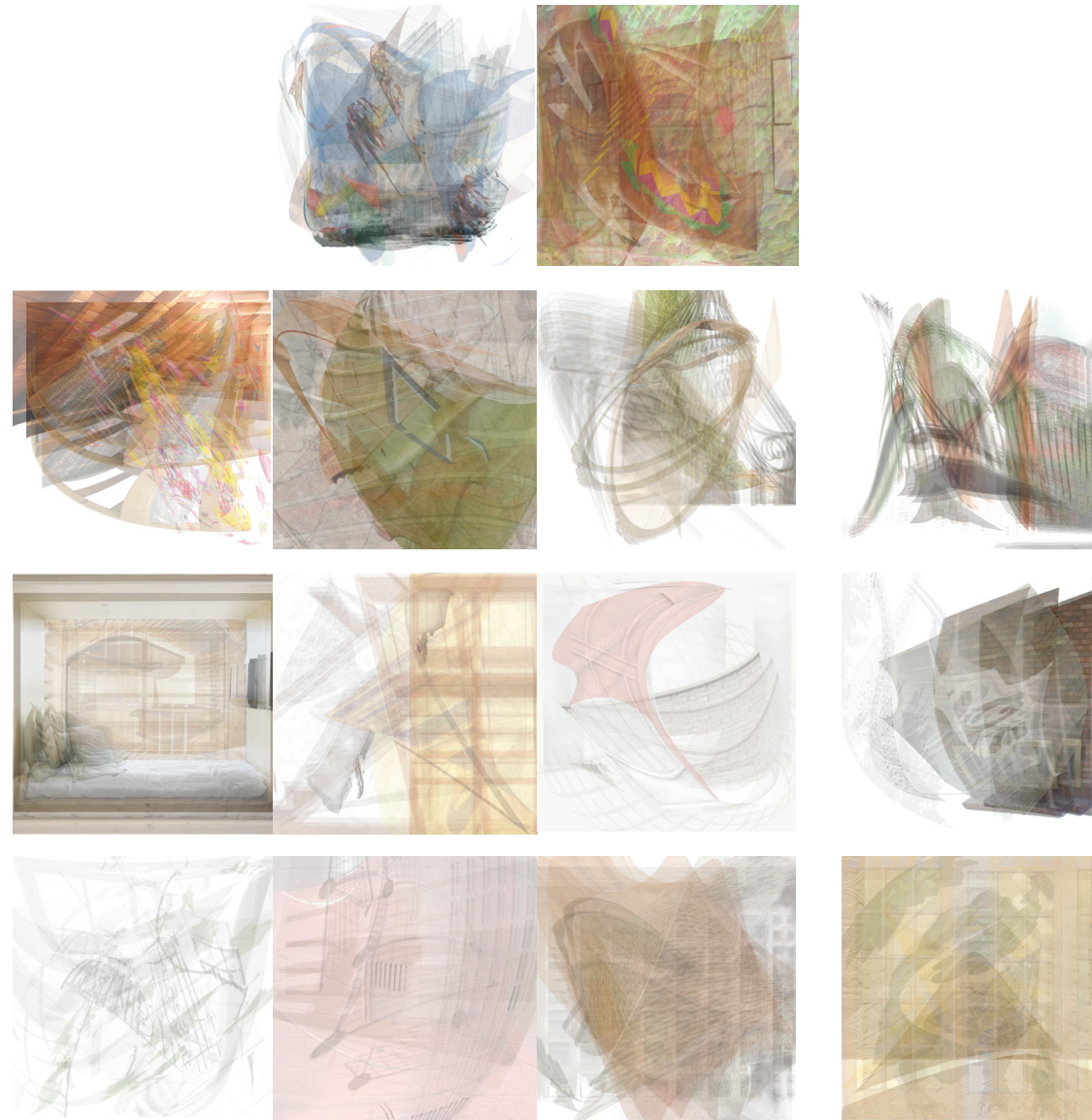
This phase of the project attempts to connect the neurological processes of memory formation with the poetics of architectural/spatial elements to generate an understanding of how to better design places that encourage the creation and activation of meaning and memory. This phase examines sensory memory formation via:

- The Echoic (audial)
- The Iconic (visual)
- The Haptic (tactile)

The first examination focuses on making the echoic iconic. The process was essentially one of stream of consciousness design. For each house the researcher inhabited one song was selected that, if heard again, would instantly bring up memories of that space. The song was then listened to on repeat while quickly making a collage (facing page). Interestingly, the Photoshop tools most used for these echoic collages were warp and opacity; perhaps this speaks to the way that spatial memory works: it is layered, distorted and dense. This process was documented and the video of the process speaks to the predominance of the act of reconstructive memory over an end product. This process

was much more about the act of echocially remembering and creating than it was about developing a final static image; the act of reconstructing the architectural memories of these places was what was significant

The neurological theory behind Echoic memory is that an isolated sound is unprocessed until the next is heard. This essentially means that sounds need to be heard in a context and in a sequence in order to be stored by the brain and made sense of. This theory can be applied to architectural elements and memories: is there such a thing as episodic or isolated memories or do they require some sort of context or connection to other memories? It seems that one architectural detail or memory depends on the next to make sense. In this case, an individual's memories of architectural space refers not only to adjacent details, but to an entire line of architectural memories that flow through all the spaces the individual has ever meaningfully inhabited. In this vein, everything really refers to everything else both in terms of architecture and echoic memory formation. All these memory spaces are linked and it does not really matter if this fireplace existed on Second or Canfield or if that wrought iron rail was on Forest or Chesterfield-the specific of each space end up mattering less than the consistent or repeated architectural elements that somehow become persistent and meaningful. Because this thesis deals with the architectural, it seems logical to apply these theories of the



echoic more directly to the haptic. In his book *Metaphor of Memory*, Dr. Douwe Drassisma discusses the mental physiology of memory as being the reactivation of a trace laid down by earlier experience and his metaphoric example for this process was the record. To make a record it's necessary to record on a medium that is soft enough to impress into, but firm enough to retain the trace. In recording, like in memory, there is always a concern about permanence and the loss of richness and sharpness.

This metaphor has a direct link in neuroscience to the ideas of consolidation and potentiation. Consolidation is the

process of stabilizing memory traces after the initial acquisition (the initial recording process) and potentiation is the process by which synchronous firing of neurons make those neurons more inclined to fire together in the future. Echoic memories, the repeated hearing of songs in this case, led to the linking of a particular house with a particular song. This repeated exposure either to songs or to architectural elements cements memory and encourages strong place memories: repetition inspires potentiation.

The second examination centered around Drassisma's idea of memory imprinting and retention. The researcher started out initially trying to imprint architectural

elements (door knobs, bathroom tile, window locks, etc.) into plaster in hopes of representing the idea of architectural imprinting. Unfortunately, these plaster imprints shattered when "reactivated" by removing them from their form work (Figure 7). The fragility and fixity of these castings stand in direct opposition to Drassisma's metaphor of recordings. These same elements were then imprinted into wax- a material soft enough to imprint into but firm enough to retain the imprint. The wax held the shapes, but, if they were heated or remelted, they were capable of becoming malleable and imprintable once again. (Figures 8-11). They were suspended and connected showing how these memory castings

are capable of holding a degree of sharpness and permanence while also being capable of fluidity and connectivity.

The imprinted elements all possess what the Austrian philosopher Jeff Malpas calls a *romantic materiality*. In his understanding, the romantic becomes material via the meaningful and remembered and the material becomes romantic through the meaning and memory given by the materiality of things. Dr. Malpas claims that architecture is constituted romantically and materially at the same time and these elements that possess a romantic materiality are capable of creating, retaining and triggering memory.

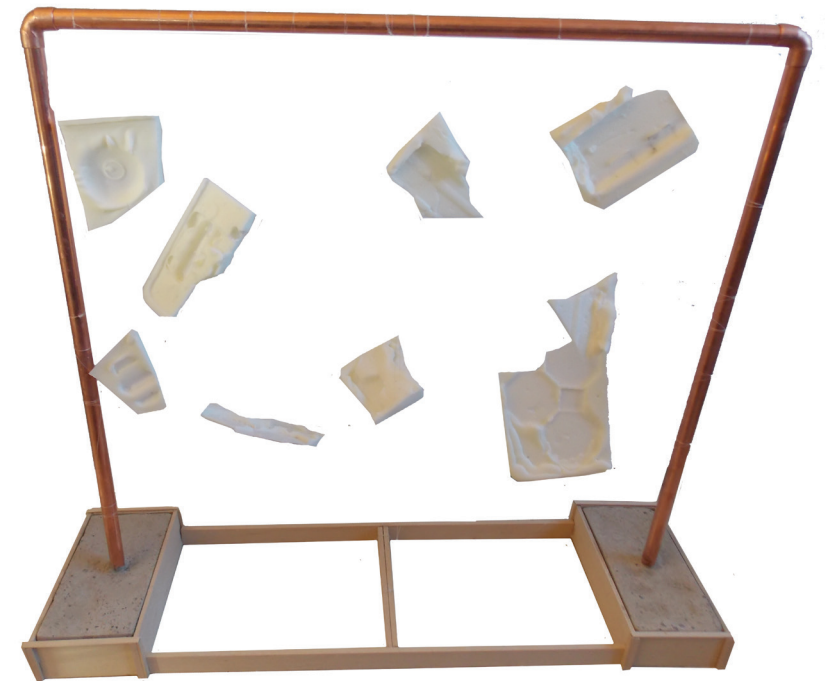


Fig. 7: Cracked architectural memories imprinted into plaster and cement

This phase of research ended with the writings of Peter Zumthor. In *Thinking Architecture*, he claims individuals cannot recollect (and maybe should not attempt to recollect) specific architectural details in isolation, but should rather realize that these details provide a fullness or familiarity.

Like the linking of sounds in echoic

memory, the architectural whole makes sense out of the isolated details. Zumthor claims construction is the art of making a meaningful whole out of many parts; that approach to construction is the approach that re-constructive memory is rooted in. It is an approach that attempts to weave together disparate architectural moments into more meaningful architectural wholes.



Figs. 8-11: Imprinted wax with connections between architectural memories

The Memory Theater

As noted earlier, the role of architecture as a memory device dates back to the Middle Age concept of the Memory Palace. In the Renaissance, the role of memory shifted from rote and encyclopedic to creative and generative; the role of architecture in memory became similarly complex and changeable. This shift is mostly closely demonstrated in the Italian monk, writer and architect, Camillo's, Memory Theater.

Camillo took fragmented pieces of cosmology, numerology and cabbalism and designed an amphitheater that he claimed contained the knowledge of the entire world. He created seven tiers and seven rows of external icons that symbolized the planets and mythologies that would have been widely known at the time (Figure 12).

An individual, Camillo claimed, would be able to stand in the middle of the amphitheater, essentially on the stage, and look out onto these 49 icons and through a process of making connections between the icons and the ideas they represent, be able to access the knowledge of the entire universe. Camillo's Memory Theater sets a precedent for the design of generative and complex architectural spaces. Peter Zumthor said, "construction is the art of making a meaningful whole out of many parts." This quote put the initial stages of this thesis into a sharper focus; many of the phases and experiments were fragments; in addition, there had been a constant struggle between the dichotomies of subjective/ objective, theory/practice and the architectural / the imagined. The

logical step was to try and construct, to artfully put together a meaningful whole out of these various items of research.

This construction also needed to be architectural in order for it to serve a greater purpose in the investigation into re-constructive memory. This architecture, however, would be abstract and fantastical.

This construction focused on unifying disparate parts just as Camillo worked with a fragmented knowledge and cosmology and concentrated on creating an architectural memory space that inspired endless interpretation. Camillo's use of planetary and mythological iconography speaks to his desire to signify and contain the ideas of the whole world using a universal cosmology. He emphasized the fixity of these eternal elements by using a rigid architectural and numerical reference system. It is not the intent of this thesis, however, to promote a universal knowledge. Rather, this thesis is interested in a human and experiential architectural memory and how it can be used as a design tool. It is interested in providing reference points that individuals can utilize to weave their own architectural memories into a stronger spatial history and identity. Furthermore, there is no unifying cosmology; there is no fixity and there is no singular understanding of the world or the places humans inhabit within the world. In order to make sense of architectural memory and make connections between architectural

Re-Constructing Camillo's Theater

“The microcosm can fully understand and fully remember the macrocosm, can hold it within its divine mens or memory” (Camillo)

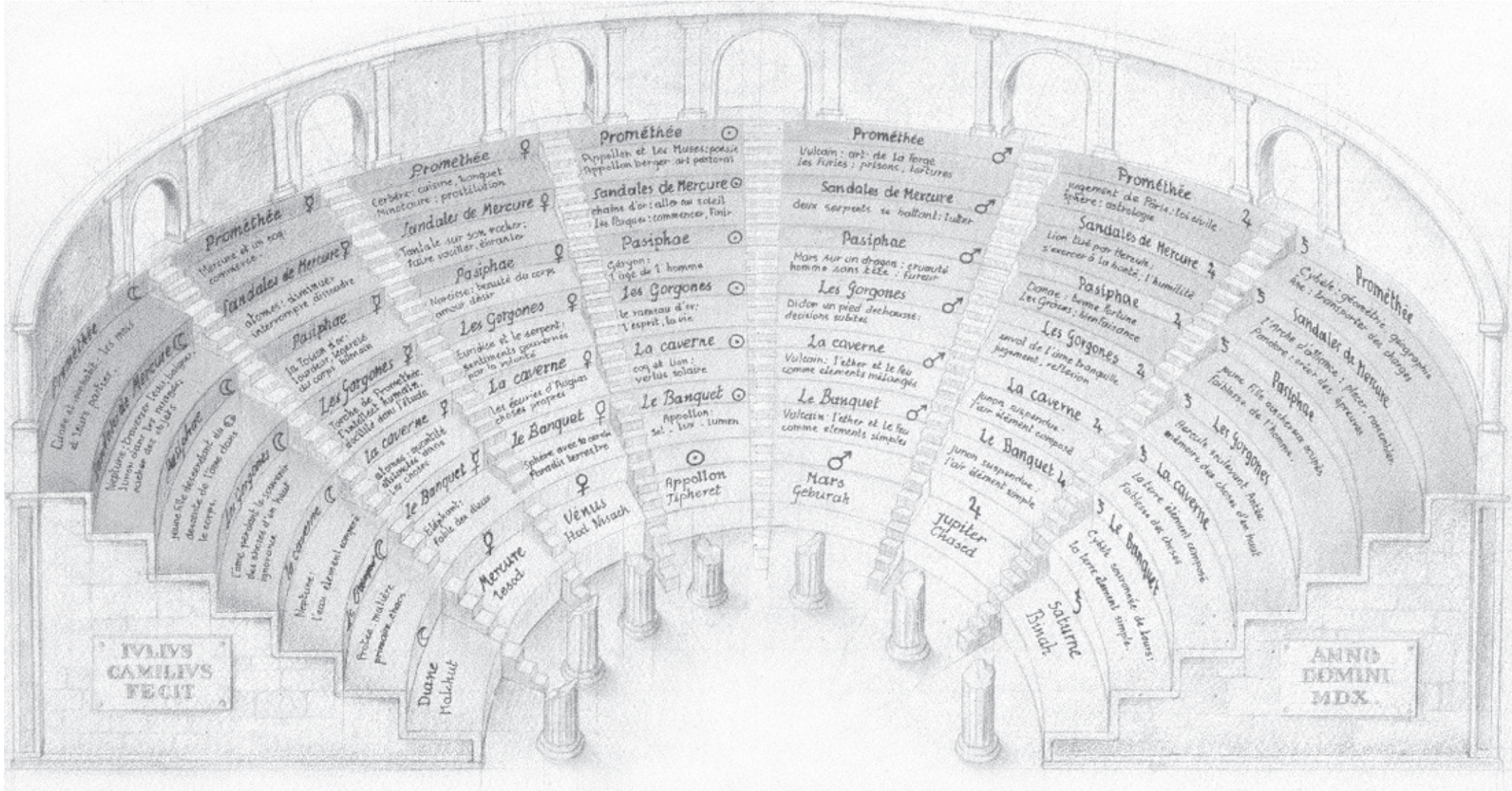


Fig. 12: Frances Bates' reconstruction of Camillo's theater



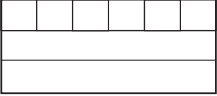
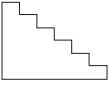


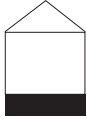
ARCHITECTURAL ICON	ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT	ARCHITECTURAL MEMORY ESSENCE
	DOOR/ DOORWAY	ENTRY / THRESHOLD
	HEARTH	WARMTH
	KITCHEN	GATHERING
	STAIR	MOVEMENT/TRANSITION
	BEDROOM	ENVELOPMENT/ PRIVACY
	CUPBOARD/ CLOSET	CONTAINMENT/ CONCEALMENT
	ATTIC/ BASEMENT	ASCENT/ DECENT

Fig. 13: Architectural memory language of Camillo's reconstructed theater

reference points, it was necessary to deconstruct Camillo's theater; reconstruct and construe its ordering system and empower the viewer to activate their own memories and architectural autobiography.

This reimagining of Camillo's theater is based in the domestic space; culturally it is very American and socioeconomically it is very middle class. In fact, many of the elements chosen to go into the theater were common architectural reference points from the earlier floor plan studies. Despite these limitations, the selected architectural reference points were common within this type of home (Figure 13). These elements were then associated with a particular essence that they commonly convey; these essences were also commonly linked with very basic human needs or desires (the need for warmth or desire for privacy or gathering, for example.)

In this way, the reference points would be recognizable to most while remaining open enough that the subjective experience of the viewer could inform the writing and rewriting of their own architectural autobiography.

Because these architectural memory spaces and reference points are not universal like Camillo's immutable icons and because they exist in a theater; they read more as stage sets. They are movable, rearrangeable and capable of being switched out. They are generic enough that most people can project their own

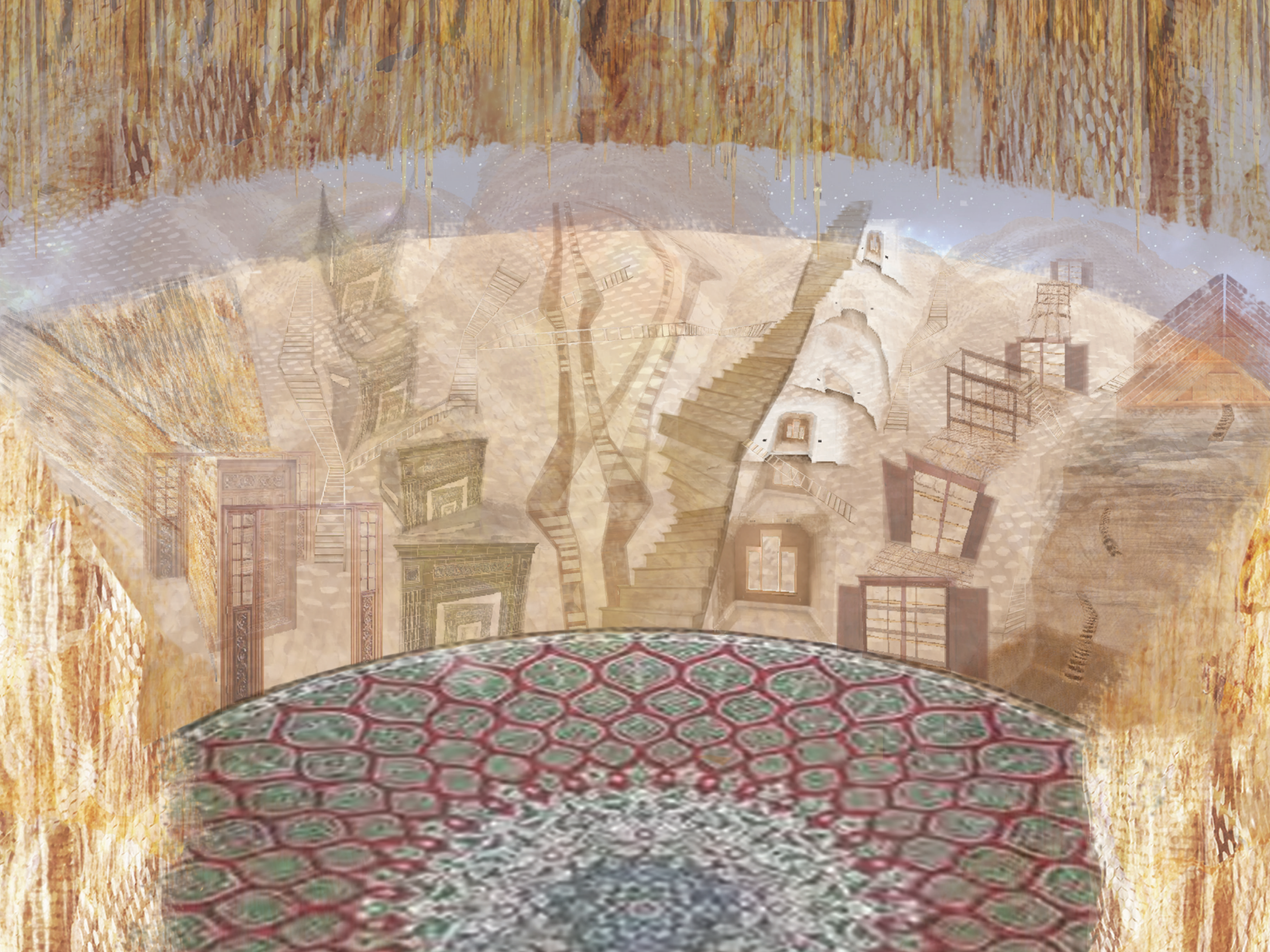
memories onto them and create their own sense of meaning. To the same end, there are no direct staircases separating the architectural elements. Stairs weave and cut through allowing the viewer to exist in the between and make direct connections among elements. Camillo's fixity has been replaced with a loose fluidity.

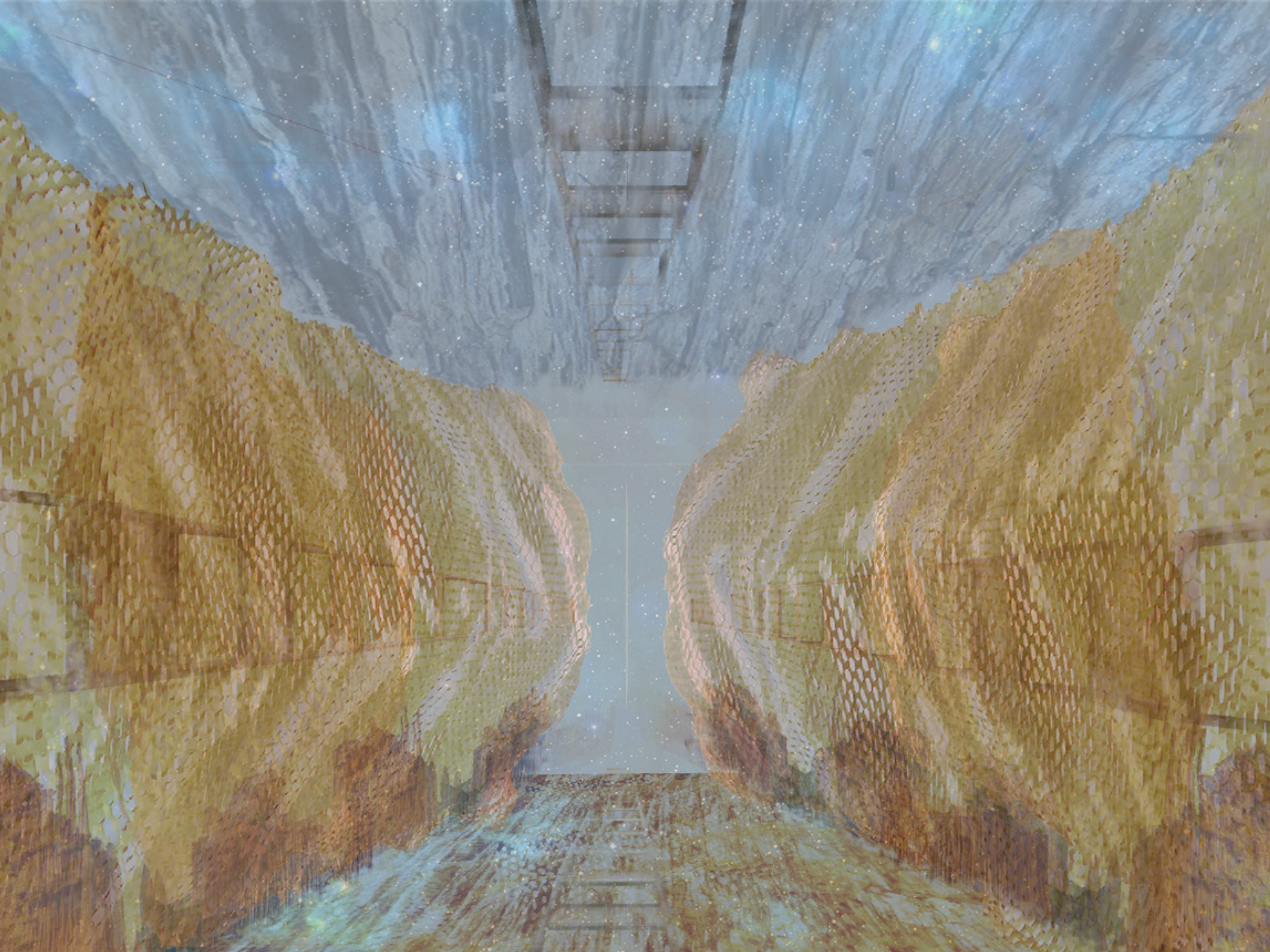
Both the interior and site are semi-prehistoric and semi-futuristic; they are both of all times and no times, everywhere and nowhere. The landscape contains the building, but is capable of shifting with it, through it and over it; the built and the surrounding interact and are one. The surrounding landscape, as well as the skin of the building, is porous and amorphous—they dip down and raise up and move as one. The viewer has a sense of containment within the space but also a sense of infinitude; the space provides the security of containment with the transcendence of infinite space. The landscape of the Memory Theater should reflect the flexibility of our mindscapes; both must be hospitable to constant and complexifying connections. The entry sequence contains the viewer in a rabbit hole of sorts where you're not sure if you are ascending or descending, if you are inside or outside. It is carved in to the landscape and gives a sense of tunneling and compression. The release expands as the viewer gets closer to the theater, closer to the infinite universe of architectural memory.

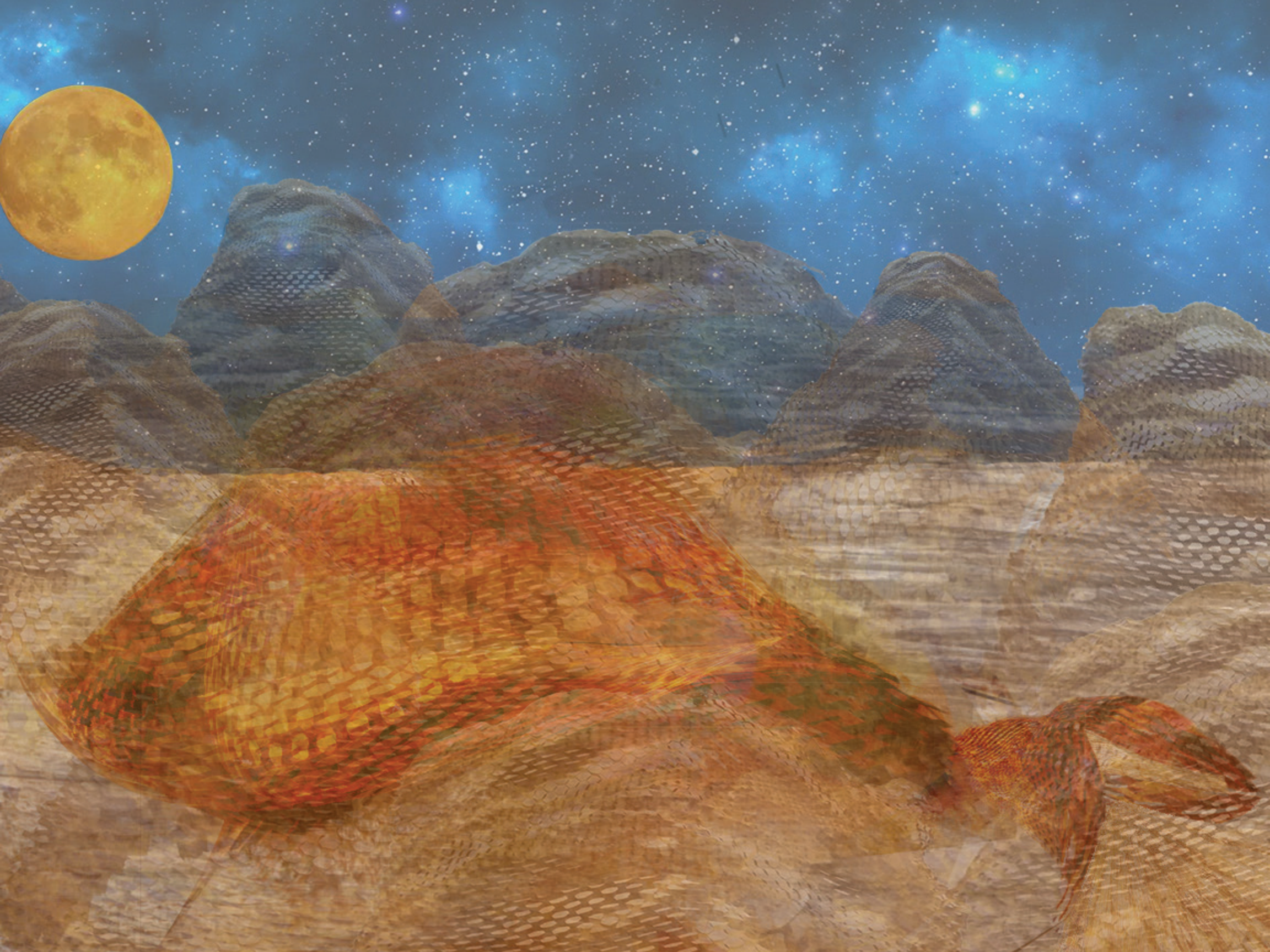
The richness in this revamped Memory Theater is not in some complex cosmology,

but in the simplicity of these architectural elements that embody, to some degree, cultural, if not universal human experiences and needs. The Re-constructed memory theater creates a fertile ground to weave together new meanings and spaces out of archetypal architectural elements. The viewer, or the designer's, job is to reorganize and reconnect these architecture elements in new and ever complicating arrangements. The design of this memory theater is a first attempt to understand the designer's role in an architectural memory and should not be considered an absolute solution; it is more of a loose framework that can be endlessly tweaked and complicated. Memory architecture, like neural memory formations in the brain, is necessarily unfinishable. There are constantly new inputs and memories that keep rewriting architectural autobiographies.

More than a collective memory, the theater begins to examine a re-cognition, or re-thinking of architectural spaces. Recognition and representation of familiar architectural elements or spaces speak to the mechanisms underlying how we see and how we experience architecture; there is an innate desire to remember; but more than this, to re-present or re-cognize spaces in a way that is both familiar and idealized. In a way that is familiar, yet transcendent.







Culture House

Vague House

The exercise in echoic remembering came closest to a reconstructive architectural memory. However, this exercise proved too personal and too subjective. The next logical step was to find a way to communicate these same concepts, but on a less personal level. The key to translating these experiments is surrealism. Surrealism can be used as a language to process architectural memory and elevate it from an individual experience to the level of collective consciousness. It also shifts the emphasis of architecture remembering from the reconstructive memory of the individual to a recognition memory that can be shared by the collective.

This new language helps process architectural memory on a collective level. This new language led to investigations into the Vague House and Culture House. Although the process of constructing these were still both focused on fragmentation and reconstructing as were the Echoics, the emphasis was more on recognizability. Making memory recognizable makes it sharable and, hence, capable of creating meaning and remembrance.

This new way of looking at architectural memory is informed by Dalibor Vesley's *Surrealism, Myth and Modernity*. In it he says, "the surrealist object is a voluntary exercise of imagination and memory-perception and memory are not distinct anymore and the surreal object becomes an internal model, a product of analogy."

Using this quote as a framework, the

following experiments used the surrealist object as a model to break down the distinction between perception and representation and, thus, get closer to an unfiltered and layered collective method of architectural reconstruction and recognition.

Surrealism also introduces additional levels of information that can be useful in processing and reconstructing architectural memories. Perhaps more than relying on memory, the surrealist scavenged the deeper recesses of the human psyche to inform their art. The individual subconscious, collective unconscious, dreams, childhood fantasies and desires were all fertile resources for the surrealists, resources that remain inextricably linked to the domestic space.

In *Architecture of the Uncanny*, Anthony Vidler says, "the house itself was a object of memory, not of a particular individual for a once inhabited dwelling, but of a collective population for a never-experienced space; the house has become an instrument of generalized nostalgia." This quote suggests that the memory house is a tool that can be used to create a "generalized nostalgia" that allows the collective population to project its desires and idealizations onto a vague, yet recognizable, architecture.

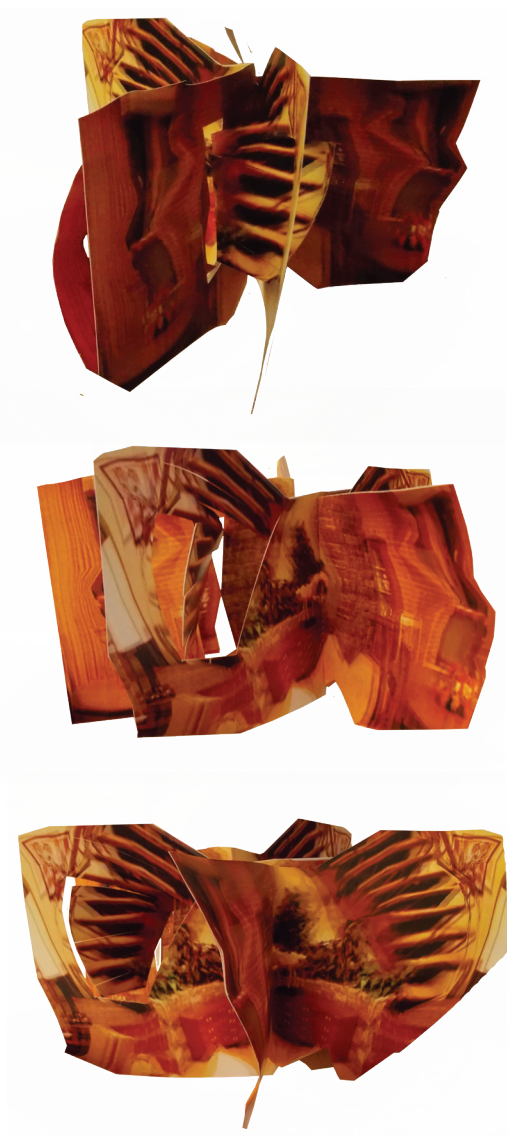
Vidler's discussion of the house as an "object of memory" frames an exploration that diverged into two distinct, yet connected methods of understanding the memory house. The two modes of

exploring the collective unconscious and generalized nostalgia were the Culture House and the Vague House. Before delving deeper into the intricacies of either exercise, it is imperative to layout the major differences between them; the Culture House is a reflection of memory whereas the Vague House is a projection of desires, collaged memories and collective definitions of home; the Culture House makes the familiar unfamiliar where the Vague House makes the unfamiliar familiar through vagueness and an unsettling sense of déjà vu; the Culture House has never been experienced, but most individuals have memories of the spaces, whereas the Vague House provides a blank canvas for individuals to project their actual memories and experiences onto. Both the Culture House and the Vague House play into different levels of recognition.

The Culture House is an exercise in distorting, disrupting and defamiliarizing iconic, pop culture houses. The houses of *The Addams Family* (Figures 14-16), *The Brady Bunch* (Figures 18-19), *I Love Lucy* (Figures 20-22) and *Friends* (figures 23-25) were warped and reconfigured; they are familiar because of their iconic elements (a stair, a couch, a picture on the wall), but create a sense of distance for the viewer who is accustomed to seeing the same domestic sets from season to season. The Culture House plays into never-experienced architectural memories; the individual can remember events (episodes) that they witnessed, but did not directly experienced spatially or in



Figs. 14-16: *The Culture House of The Addams Family*

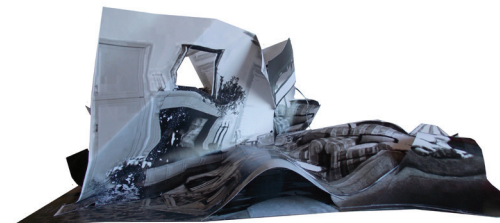
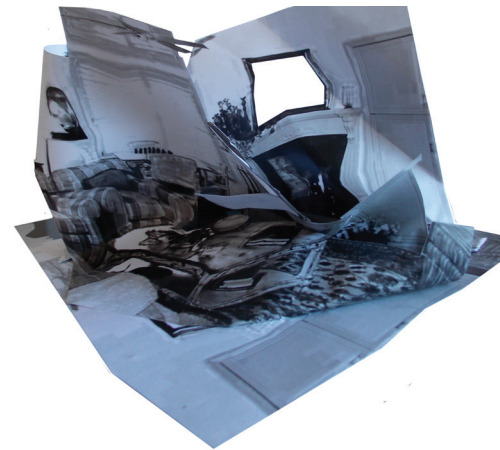
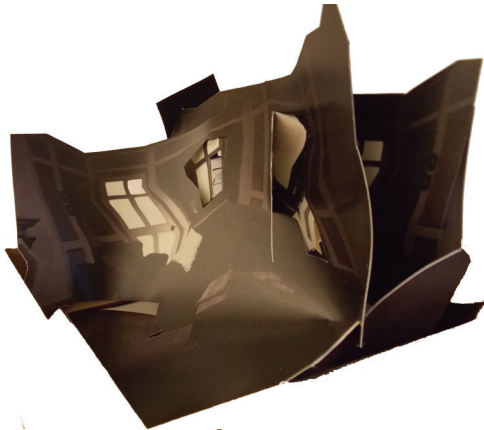


Figs. 17-19: *The Culture House of The Brady Bunch*

person. The Culture House also encourages the individual to mentally complete the architecture of the house. They imagine the unseen bedrooms and exteriors that are never shown. Often these spaces create a collective idealization of home; frequently they are more accessible to the individual than their childhood thanks to reruns and static set design.

The Vague House (Figures 26-29) is an exercise in fragmentation, openness and vagueness. The Vague House is informed by disjointed architectural memories of both real and culturally informed idealizations of home; it holds an alien familiarity, what Freud would call a sense of the uncanny. The process began with a cursory Google search of terms like "middle class living room" or "typical American home." These images were then warped and faded out until they become canvases to project, both literally and metaphysically, layered images of home. The Vague House best demonstrates surrealism's obsession with the fragility and transience of memory and consciousness. In her essay in *The Surreal House*, curator Jane Alison writes, "the house of surrealism [is] painstakingly built, but it [is] destined to collapse, to be blasted apart." Indeed, it is the delicacy of a memory of architecture or surrealism that is so appealing; the fact that it will not last makes the individual want to grasp at it all the more.

As the Culture House and Vague House experiments progressed, it became important to apply the surrealist understanding of space to the visualizations



Figs. 23-25: The Culture House of I Love Lucy

Figs. 23-25: The Culture House of Friends

Figs. 26-28: The Vague House

of these memory types. Alison writes, “the surreal house is then both a real space and a visualized space, it is both the container and the contained, concept and experience, space and object—inside and out.” This dichotomous nature of surreal space informs this phase of the research in terms of providing a language to express cultural and vague understandings of home.

In particular, the idea of contained and container resonates with the depiction of the Culture House and Vague House. (Figures 30-33). The next phase in this exploration centers on the surrealist tradition of objects, containers, box assemblages, cabinets of curiosity and installations. According to the surrealists, these methods allow for the mapping of the surreal onto real, defined spaces.

The black boxes surrounding the sculptural pieces also allow the viewer to become a voyeur. (Figures 34 and following spreads). The boxes encourage the viewer to interact, activate and engage with the surreal object. The slits and viewing holes also create frames that emphasize certain aspects of the sculptures; the idea of a controlled gaze gives the viewer a limited perspective and leaves much to the imagination.

The content of the video projected into the boxes reveals the fragmentation and distortion inherent within an architectural memory through a surrealist lens (Figures 35-40). The content of these clips show

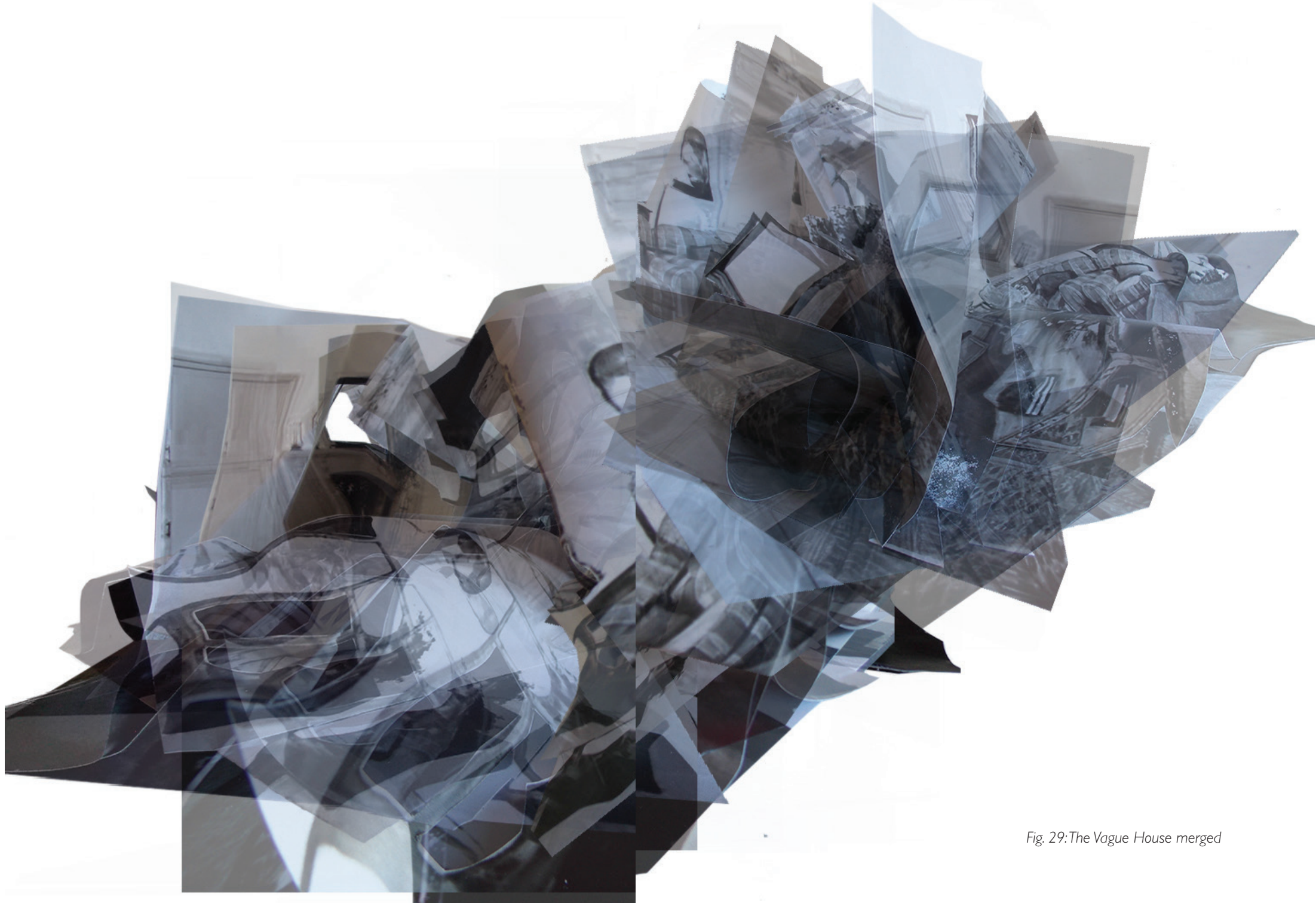


Fig. 29: The Vague House merged

the construction, deconstruction and disintegration of houses, recognizable dream-like elements, scenes out of childhood nightmares and cellars, which speak to the surrealist fixation on the subconscious. The splices of video, when overlaid on the sculptures and projected through the slots, all feature domestic architecture that is familiar without being overtly identifiable. Through these slices, the individual can pin memories onto the splices while knowing it is inaccurate and fragile.

Together, the boxes and projections are an exercise in using the surrealist object as a model or tool to process and examine what Vidler calls a "generalized nostalgia" for a "never experienced space." This vague sense of recognition produced by these pieces reduces the spatial memory to a series of ever shifting and arrangeable architectural elements designers can utilize to create recognizable spaces rich with a collective essence of the domestic and home.

This study in collective domesticity, necessitates parallel examinations. The one side is the surrealist study of the Cultural House. This study is grounded in the consumption of spatial memory. The consumed elements are digested using surrealism and involve the individual recollection of collectively shared source. The Vague House is a study in the recognition and recreation of memory spaces. Like Camillo's Memory Theater, the Vague House employs archetypal and stereotyped domestic elements and relies on the individual's memory to recognize and recreate domestic spaces.

Thus far, the process has been grounded in complication and layering, but how can spatial recognition be clarified? Juxtaposition and simplicity are potential tools that reduce spatial memories and allow for stark contradictions.



Fig. 30: Vague House



Fig. 31: Addams Family



Fig. 32: Brady Bunch



Fig. 33: I Love Lucy

Vague House



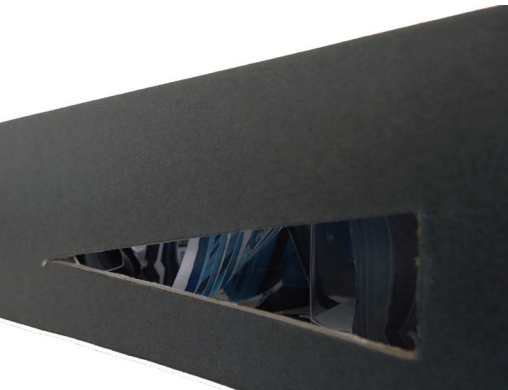
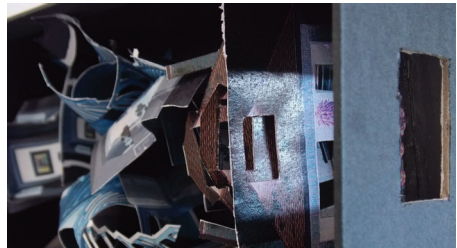
Addams Family



Brady Bunch



I Love Lucy



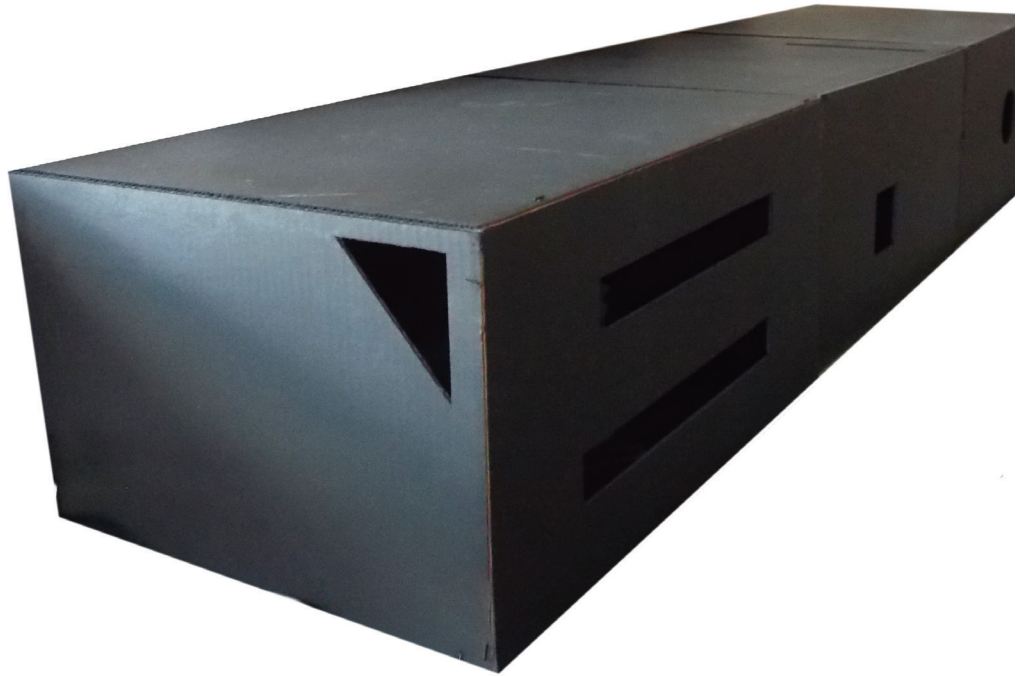


Fig. 34: The black boxes



(Top left to bottom right) Fig. 35: Building a Brick House; Fig. 36: Steamboat Bill Jr.; Fig. 37: Surreal House Grouse Creek, UT; Fig. 38: Gordon Matta-Clark, Splitting; Fig. 39: Night of the Hunter; Fig. 40: Down to the Cellar

Simplifying the Memory House

The examinations in the Culture House and Vague House had the shared trait of complicating architectural spaces and memories, but it seemed that simplification could lead to a more distilled understanding of what some icons of the collective unconscious are. This led to the question: how do individuals take their own personal architectural memories of the domestic space and incorporate them into the collective unconscious? It seems now, more than through network television passively forming the perception of home, it is each individual's own search and linking activity on the internet that informs the wider cultural consciousness. It is through digital archiving. It is where the individual concepts of the domestic and the home become added to the general pool: the collective unconscious is formed through Google search results, algorithms and indexes.

The process to examining the collective cultivation of architectural memory was simple: it involved taking the top Google image results of "house stair" "house door," etc. and then creating a rotating archive of these elements that were the most popular or linked on Google creating over 200 combinations of architectural elements (Following spread). Again, this exercise had a focus on process. The researcher took these elements, hooked a computer up to a projector and actually designed the spaces directly into a blank white box (Figures 41-43). This served two purposes. One, it seems architectural domestic memories have to be shaped in an actual



Fig. 41-43: The white box



space, as Treib and Alison contend, and this containment is actually what gives shape and resilience to architectural memories. The same collages were projected on both a flat surface and into the box simultaneously: the flat surface projection was slightly distorted and was straightened out only when it occupied the space within the container (Figure 44). And second, it is this sort of blank vague space that provides a framework of generalized icons on which individuals can project their own experiences and personal memory.

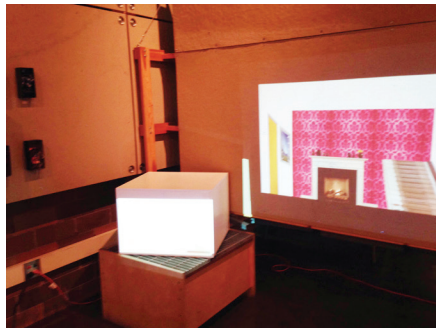


Fig. 44: Simultaneous projection into the box and on the flat surface

These same lessons of simplification extended to the revamping of multiple earlier exercises.

The Culture House studies were reframed in black to emphasize the stark juxtaposition between their complication and the simplicity of the white box studies (Figures 45 and 46). Whereas these pieces aim to disorient by obscuring, the white box aims to disorient by bringing architectural memory elements into stark relief.

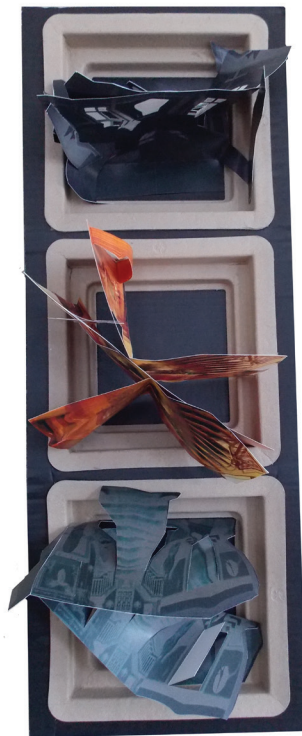


Fig. 45



Fig. 46

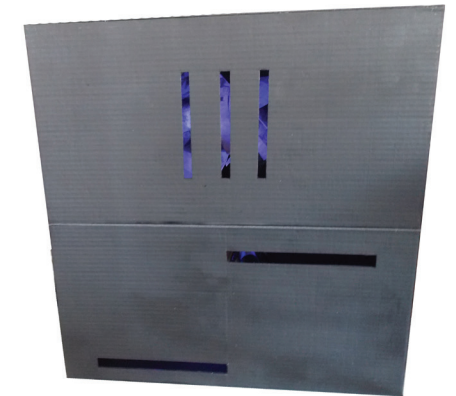


Fig. 47



Fig. 48

The Vague House studies were also refined. Instead of projecting into the boxes, these Vague studies were instead illuminated from within (Figures 47 and 48). This illumination is symbolic of how vague memories and a sense of déjà vu often inform perceptions of new spaces; the Vague House draws the viewer in with a sense of warmth and familiarity that is often times only an illusion (Figures 49 and



Fig. 49

50). The viewing holes cut into the Vague House are evocative of the surrealists' interest in voyeurism. The slits provide extremely intentional views into the Vague House (Figures 51 and 52). They obscure the interior lights that give a false sense of warmth and familiarity, lulling the viewer into a dichotomous sense of comfort and danger. The lights illuminate the unknown, but only enough to give a vague indication of what lies within.

The final presentation for this project aimed to refine and simplify many of the concepts that were the starting points for this body of research.

Because of the strong emphasis on

containers and containment, the presentation space itself acted as a container for both the collection of work and for the individuals viewing the work. Just as the surrealists often worked in installations, it was important that the audience be able to play a role in the work and engage with it. Activation was imperative.

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The overall body of work consistently remained focused on the idea of an architectural memory. The shift from a reconstructive to a recognition memory was secondary to the actual intent that carried the research throughout. This intent was discovering how designers can

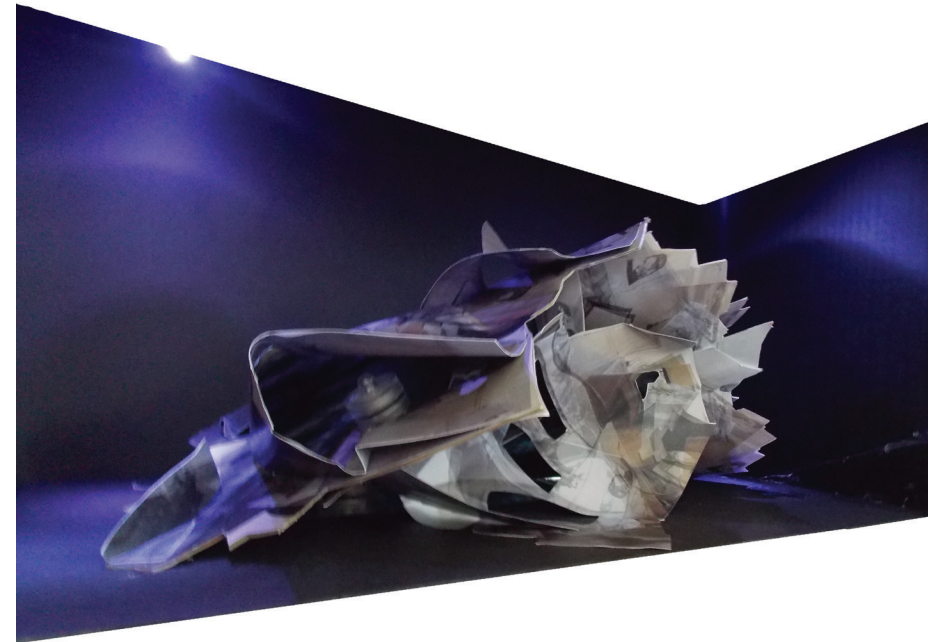


Fig. 50



Fig. 51



Fig. 52

use the memory of architectural spaces as a tool to create new spaces that have resonance and meaning for inhabitants.

This final phase of this research also focused on refining what surrealism is and how it functions in an architectural memory.

The split between starkness and complication and cloudiness played a role in getting to the essence of what makes an element uncanny or surreal. Perhaps more than the warp and confusion it is the stark and out of place that truly unsettles. Maybe seeing an architectural memory object in isolation or out of place does more to stir the imagination and upend the viewer's expectations; it the architectural icon in isolation that both disturbs and attracts. Perhaps it really is an issue of part to the whole; maybe no architectural element and memory can act in isolation so seeing

one architectural element displaced. has the power to stir up a string of old memories.

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Guiding this research was certainly an interest in architectural memory as a design tool, but there were also more fundamental societal issues at play. The idea of the domestic and domesticity undergirds the focus on the house. Gender roles and the role of the maternal and feminine in the domestic shape also led to this interest in architectural memory and the role architects play in forming and perpetuating gender roles within in the home.

The home also allowed for a cursory study of architect as both voyeur into and archivist of the domestic. The work asks why domestic spaces take the form they do and why these spaces have a hold on

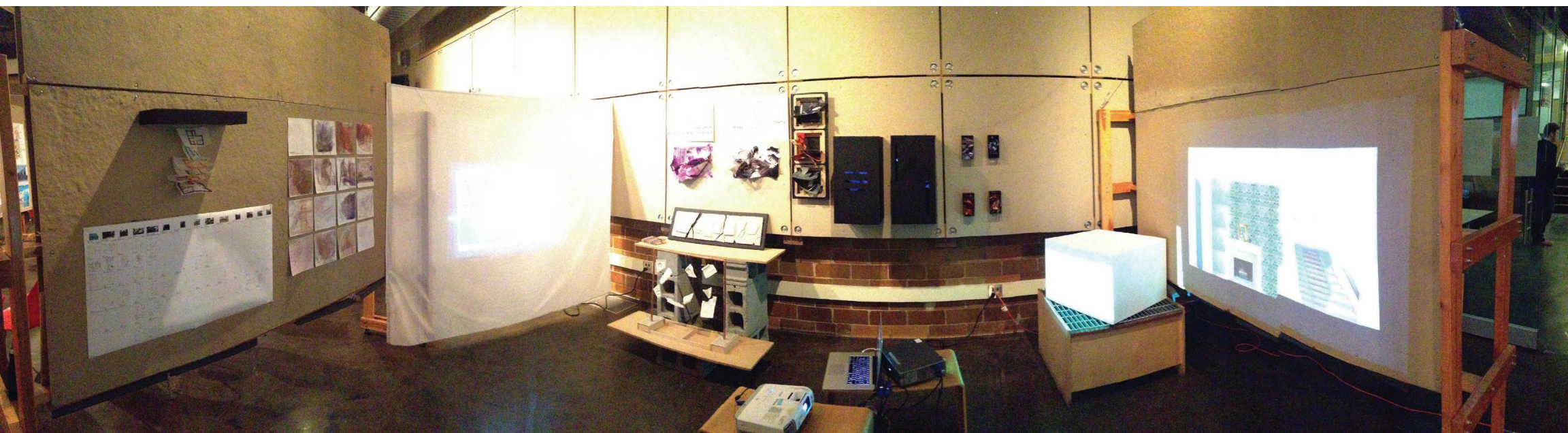
the individual far after they have grown up and moved on. The earlier study of neurological memory formation informs this continued interest in the psychology behind domestic architecture and its enduring allure.

Through the duration, this project attempted to find a language of icons or symbols that could, at least in a middle class Western culture, be applicable and meaningful to most people. Although these investigations were cursory and only began to scratch the surface, they all revealed the importance of narrative in architecture and the architect's role of editor in that narrative. This narrative touches on the desire for continuity with the past and the desire for a future that reinterprets and improves upon that past.

It seems architecture does its job most successfully when it tells a story: when it

references the past, but more importantly, when it moves us forward and allows us to see the potentials of the space unfolding in front of us. Hopefully, by very roughly and quickly examining these architectural icons of what Western culture considers home, designers can begin to design architecture that references past architectural memories and invites inhabitants to find their own connections and meaning within the domestic space.

It is the role of the architect to make architectural references that are recognizable and meaningful while, simultaneously improving upon these references and making new connections and new icons. Memory, and certainly architectural memory, are not static. Rather, they are dynamic and generative. They are capable of endless iteration. They hold the meaningful moments of the past while driving us ever forward.



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