

PRACTICE

INTERIOR EDUCATORS CONFERENCE 2024

MAKING THINGS HAPPEN

A slightly mischievous practice

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Abstract.

My pedagogic research stems from an ongoing interest in the progressive pedagogies of Ward and Fyson (1973), Illich (2011), Goodman (1971), Reimer (1973), Freire (2000) and Hooks (1994) that encourage 'us' to utilise the city as a place of learning and experimentation. City-as-school or in our case city-as-studio. This is exemplified through a long-standing Semester One studio brief, Wearable Architecture, where students are required to make a 1:1 enclosure. Up until recently, this was a collaborative endeavour between our BA(Hons) Architecture and Interior Architecture and Design students.

Educated beyond the confines of the University, this situated project provides students the opportunity to speculate and to play, to imagine the city as an extension of the interior, challenging the narrow definition of what the interior might be. Avoiding any explicit reference to the domestic, enables students regardless of discipline, to explore the connections across alternate spatial practices, the 'anatomy', idiosyncrasies and 'temperament' of our built environment, the consequence(s) of architecture.

To use the city as a testbed for contemporary spatial production, exploring: alternative or unorthodox forms of occupancy. To help inform constructions that might be considered, part model, part furniture, part interior, part garment and part architecture. Celebrating the exploration of the city through the performative and temporal, and being 'slightly' subversive, mischievous, disruptive and at moments absurd. Provoking students to engage with spatial design as agents of social, cultural, political, economic, and ecological change.

This photo-essay showcases some of the explorations from over the last three academic years, 2021 to 2023, which demonstrate that our First-Year students continue to produce work that is challenging and ambitious from the outset.

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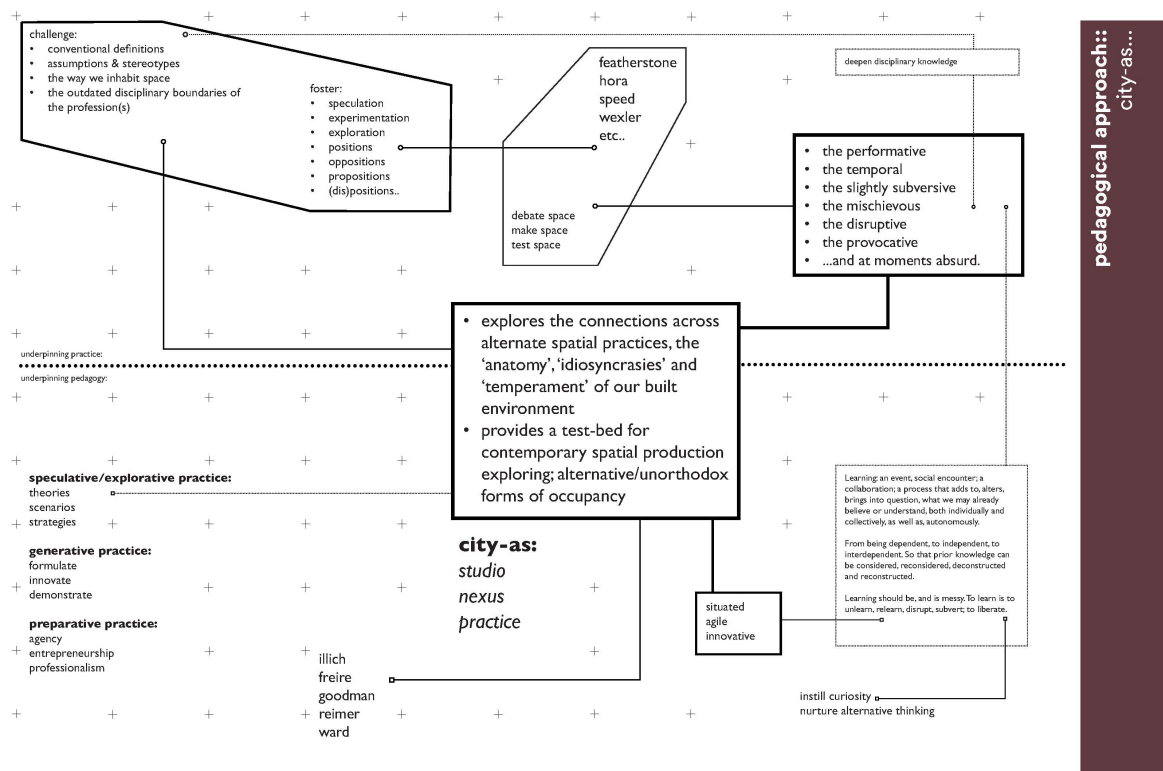


Fig.1 Nice, R. (2024) Pedagogical approach: City as... [Diagram] In possession of: the author: Canterbury.

‘...where does the interior end and the exterior begin?’
(Weinthal, 2011:576).

It is my belief that interior architecture and design is situated at the junction of critical spatial practice, politics, philosophy, literature, geography, anthropology and economics, that enables students, to explore the connections across alternate spatial practices, the ‘anatomy’, idiosyncrasies and ‘temperament’ of our built environment. The consequence(s) of architecture.

It is a trans-disciplinary practice that amongst other things, supports the transformation of underused and unused spaces and places, oscillating somewhere between artefact and architecture. It is a discipline that provides an opportunity to explore new, alternative and sometimes unorthodox forms of occupancy, creating work that is performative, temporal, and in some instances a little mischievous, ‘slightly’ subversive, can be disruptive and at moments absurd. A form of social, cultural, political, economic, and ecological practice. Whether designing a structure, situation and or event, the interior architect must respond to how society interacts with and inhabits space. Making it a human centred and narrative driven discipline. It is therefore important to recognise that the spatial designer addresses issues of creative and intellectual stimulation, to ensure design proposals stimulate the mind, as well as, the body, beyond the demands of the commercial realm and the clichéd image of TV make over shows. Encouraging students to see the city as an extension of the interior, a living organism, comprised of people, animals, artefacts, buildings, spaces, histories, rituals, myths and narratives, not as a passive container of everyday life (de Certeau, 1988; Lefebvre 1991b).

It is a contested discipline, that on the face of it doesn't quite know what it does and doesn't want to be, or do, I guess to some degree that's what makes it exciting. I don't believe it's as simple or crude as; outside vs inside, interior vs exterior, public vs private, contained vs uncontained, (en)closed vs open, accessible vs inaccessible, occupied vs unoccupied, secure vs insecure or eyes open, vs eyes shut. Possibly it's about stepping into, stepping across and steeping out of (Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986). Regardless, you can take ownership of it and mould it.



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Progressive pedagogies (we can no longer be radical).

'A more expansive understanding of the role of pedagogy in our institutions and beyond requires rethinking not just our curricula, but also our practices and sites of teaching. We call these pedagogies subversive, because they challenge the dominant transmission model of education prevalent in the neoliberal colonial university.'

(Schick, & Timperley, 2021:2)

I believe that learning is fundamentally a social endeavour, underpinned by progressive pedagogies. And so, during my time teaching in Higher Education (HE) I have continued to evolve my definition of learning, informed by the work of Ward (1973), Illich (2011), Goodman (1971), Reimer (1973), Freire (2000), Hooks (1994) and Wenger (2004). *Learning: An event, social encounter; a collaboration; a process that adds to, alters, brings into question, what we may already believe or understand, both individually and collectively, as well as, autonomously. From being dependent, to independent, to interdependent. So that prior knowledge can be considered, reconsidered, deconstructed, and reconstructed. Learning should be and is messy. To learn is to unlearn, relearn, disrupt, subvert; to liberate.*

The performative / temporal / absurd / disruptive

'The ordinary practitioners of the city live "down below", below the thresholds at which visibility begins, they Walk – an elementary form of this experience of the city; that are walkers, wandersmänner, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban "text" they write without being able to read'.

(De Certeau, 1988:18)

The idea of sharing the Level 4 students Wearable Architecture (or versions of) to a wider audience has been sitting on the backburner for a long long long time. Over 15+ years, it has been informed by the experimental constructions of Emily Speed, Tracey Featherstone, Ingrid Hora, Haus Rucker and Allan Wexler, blurring the boundaries between disciplines. Resulting in constructions that might be considered, part collage, part object, part model, part furniture, part interior, part architecture and part garment. Even during COVID we rewrote the brief to enable the students to map their socially distanced walks, through the construction of a series of worn drawing devices. Wearable Architecture exploits the rich and sometimes less rich heritage assets that can be found in and around Canterbury's City Centre. It celebrates the performative, the temporal, and at moments the absurd. The project is a playful collaborative introduction to our students' studies. It takes place in the first ten/twelve weeks of Level 4 (First Year), providing the students with an opportunity to create work that is ambitious, provocative and in some instances, humorous. In its simplest form, the project results in students dressing up, rekindling the free spirit of their younger days, and in the first weeks of their new lives form a bond with the city. It also gives students the freedom and *confidence* to speculate, to play, to imagine, to take detours. Empowering them to question the sometimes-outdated disciplinary limitations, and to write their own futures.

Up until recently, Wearable Architecture was a collaborative project for both Architecture and Interior Architecture and design students. However, with changes in the curriculum and course titles, the 'Interiors' students no longer take part in the project, which in my mind is unfortunate.

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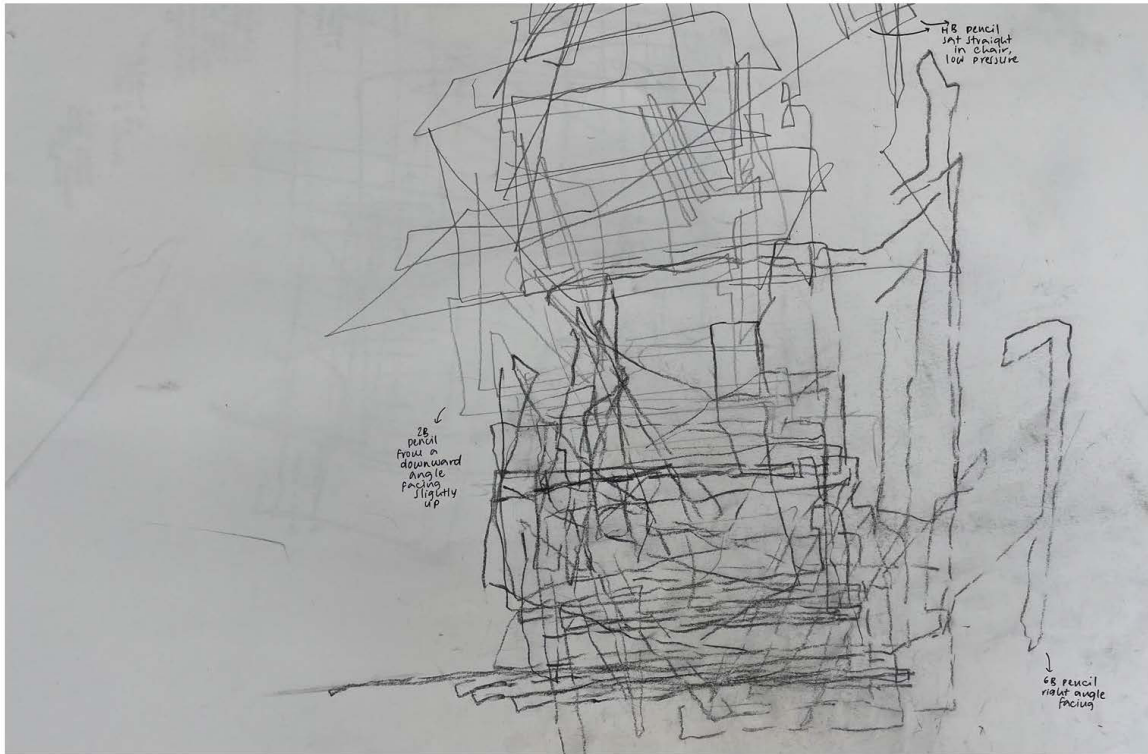


Fig.2 Nice, R. (2023) Student Explorative Drawing [Photograph] In possession of: the author: Canterbury.

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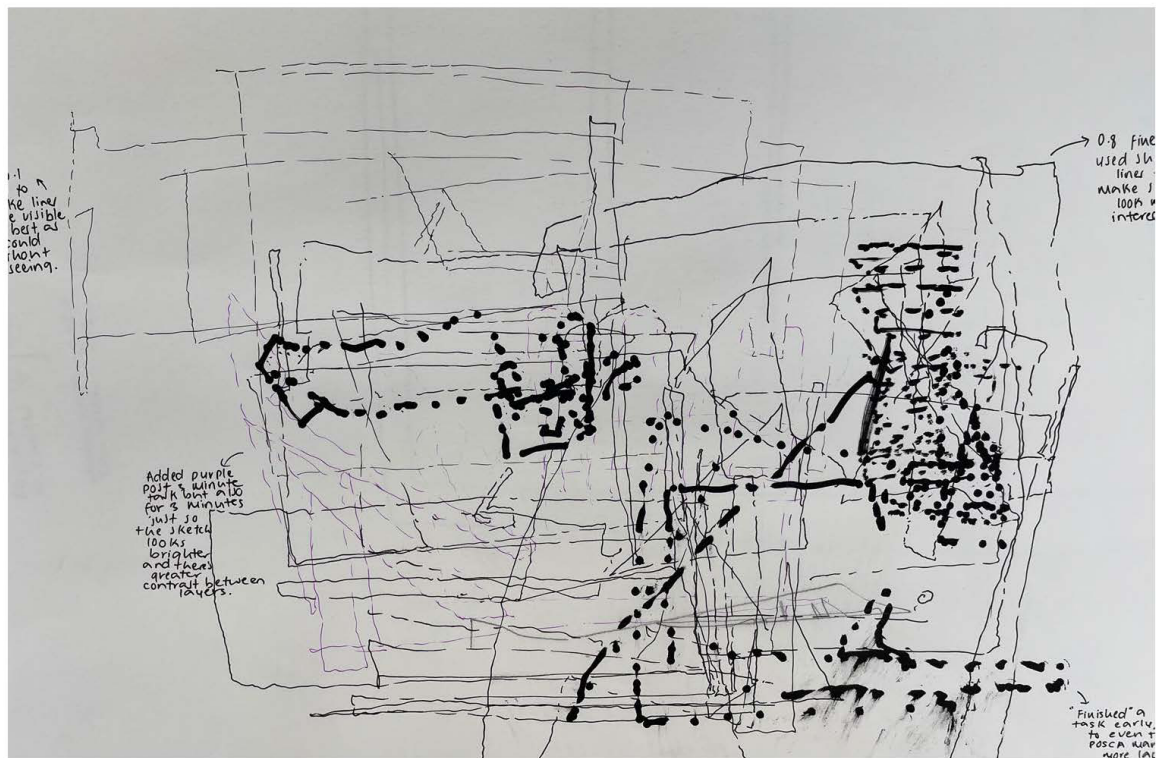


Fig.3 Nice, R. (2023) Student Explorative Drawing [Photograph] In possession of: the author: Canterbury.

Obsessive observations of the elements.

During the initial phase students interrogate typologies of architectural elements, windows, doors, staircases etc that form the architectural whole. They focused on the physical qualities of an empty Debenhams in the heart of Canterbury City Centre, mass, void, structure, surface, material qualities, structural systems, construction methodologies, spatial characteristics, heights, widths, openings and volumes. Exploring issues of standardisation and the bespoke. Using a variety of explorative drawing exercises (manual drawing techniques), students were required to observe, research, analyse and evaluate a series of architectural elements, while also exploring the histories, rituals, myths and narratives.

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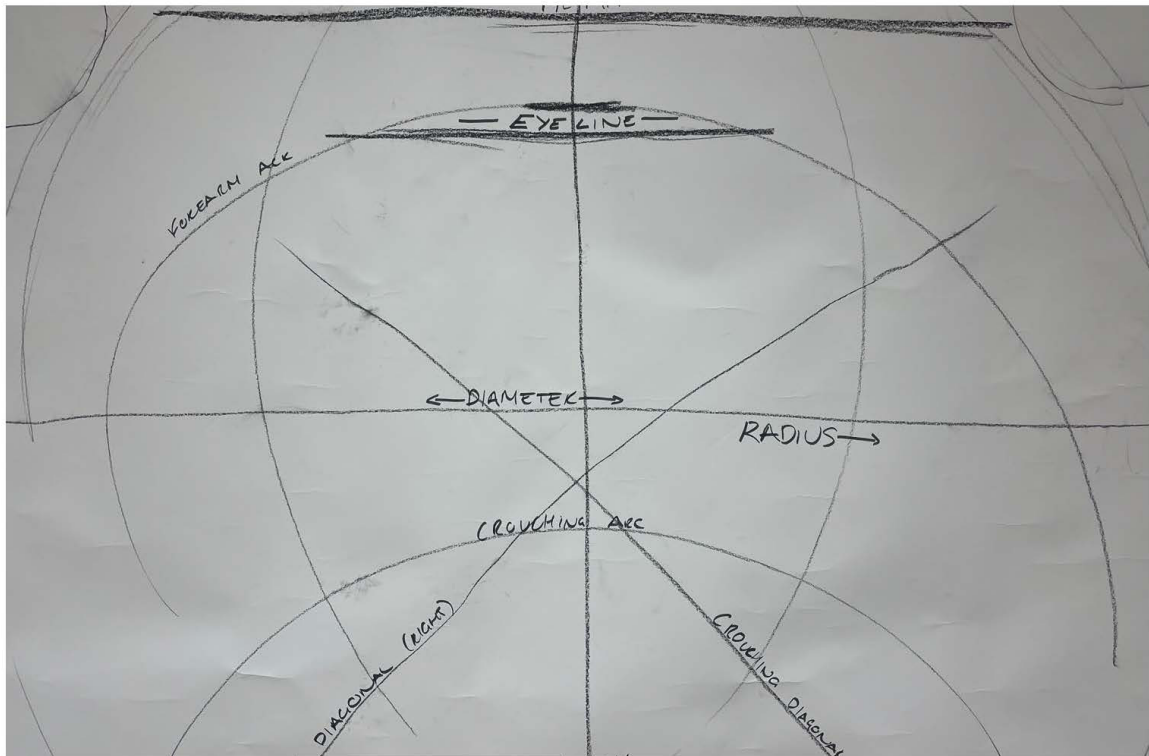


Fig. 4 Nice, R. (2023) Students Performative Drawing [Photograph] In possession of: the author: Canterbury.



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Fig. 5 Nice, R. (2023) Students Performative Drawing [Photograph] In possession of: the author: Canterbury.

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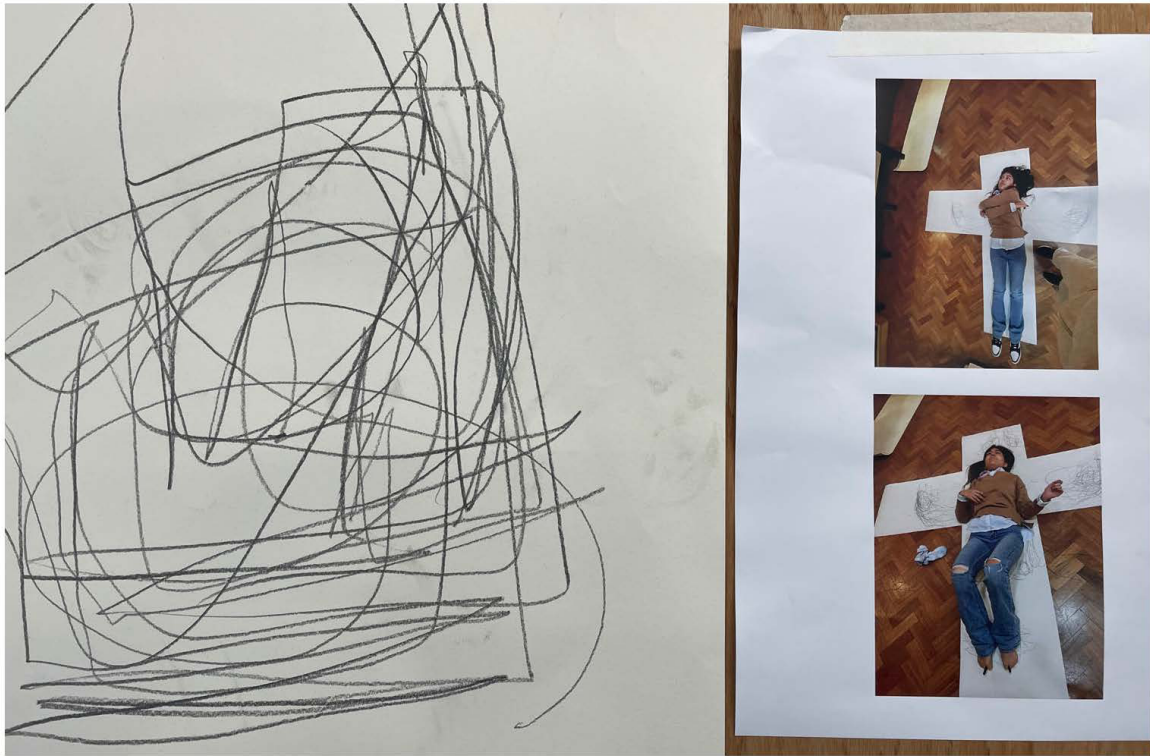


Fig. 6 Nice, R. (2023) Students Performative Drawing [Photograph] In possession of: the author: Canterbury.

Students are encouraged to break free from the standard drawing conventions and embrace the unknown, ambiguous and possibly the unquantifiable and, using drawing in an expressive and experimental manner. It is important that they understand that the act of drawing is not just a means of slick representation, but can also demonstrate thinking, traces of change. It requires the students to immerse themselves in any given situation. Even within the restricted world of conventional architectural drawing, there are still many moments when they will apply different pressures and speeds, as they pull the pencil across the page. The pencil will soon become an extension of their bodies. Much like handwriting, you get to the point where you write without having to think how to write. You will begin to draw without having to think how to draw (Have 2012; Frascari, 2011) exploring the intuitive and speculative nature of drawing. Exploring what happens when we draw with the whole body at 1:1. Drawing as process. Drawing as performance (Foá, et al, 2020).

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Fig. 7 Nice, R. (2023) In the studio [Photograph] In possession of: the author: Canterbury.

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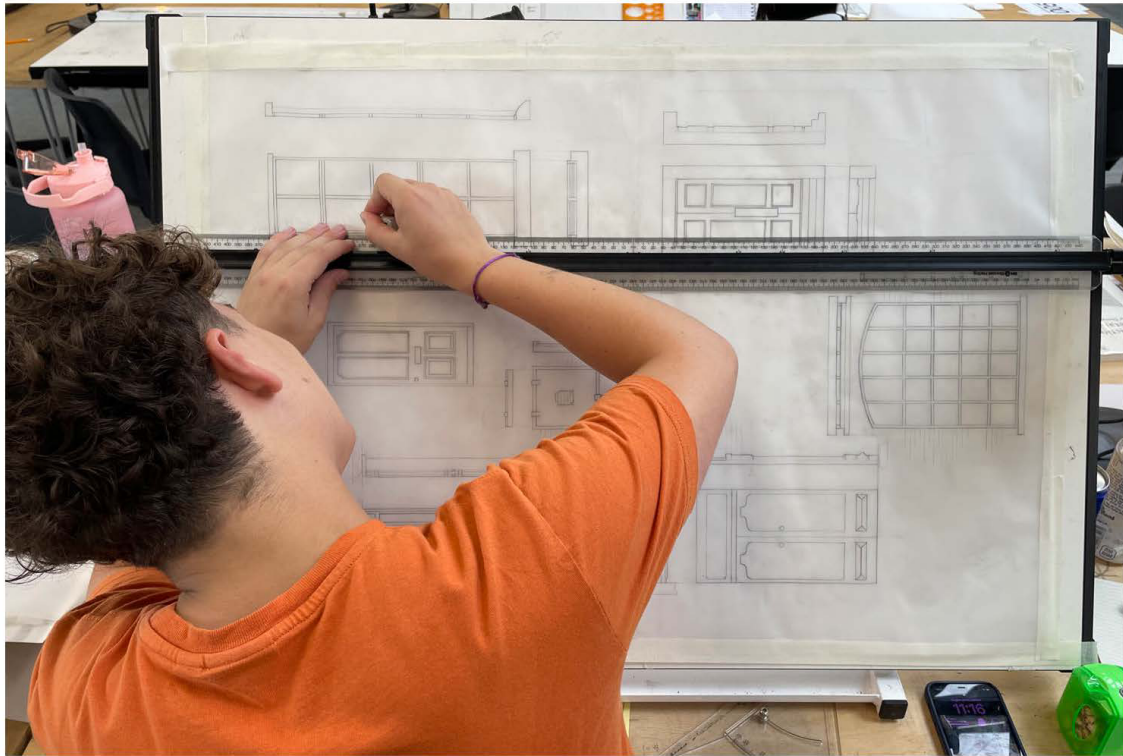


Fig. 8 Nice, R. (2023) In the studio [Photograph] In possession of: the author: Canterbury.

Bodies becoming buildings.

The drawing activities are followed by a task that requires the students to construct a series of 1:5 maquettes in a quick and intuitive manner. Using cardboard to fabricate their wearable architecture, for its associated strength, cost and environmental impact, students begin by constructing the architectural elements they surveyed, which were then collaged together to fabricate an enclosure. The piece of Wearable Architecture must accommodate at least one occupant, and should respond to the user's body, posture and associated movements, be wearable (mobile/transportable), structurally sound and respond to the physical conditions, constraints and opportunities of the context; identifying a 'niche' within the allocated site that students could temporarily inhabit.

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Fig. 9 Nice, R. (2023) At the review [Photograph] In possession of: the author: Canterbury.

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Fig. 10 Nice, R. (2023) At the review [Photograph] In possession of: the author: Canterbury.

Making things happen – live, live(d) and situated.

The testing of the Wearable Architecture is vital to the project's success. It is only by going out into the city that students can start to collect, analyse and interpret any associated events, activities, situations and interactions, through photography and film. Like a choreographer or dancer, students explore the movement of the body through space and time, enabling them to establish a dialogue with(in) the City. A social encounter with the city. An unsanctioned carnival of sorts, where they can create new narratives, myths, dreams, experiences, and histories. And while this project may not be considered 'live' in a conventional sense, it is lived and situated (Haraway, 1988). As a result, the students become active citizens within their host community, working beyond the limits of the institution. Momentarily, relocating the school of architecture into the heart of the city. Creating a civic experience. Responding to the physical conditions, constraints, and opportunities that exist within our built environment. Reassessing the ways in which their bodies interact with space. Enhancing their understanding of place. Familiar or otherwise. Expanding our students understanding of what practicing as a spatial designer might be.

So, by way of a closing remark, over the years, I always admire the student's openness to engage in such a project, after the initial, 'what have I signed up for!' And when you catch up with students' post-graduation, they tend to say one of two things; 'I'm still not entirely sure why we did that', or 'now I think I understand'. Regardless, it is a project that appears to stay in their memories.

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Fig. 11 Ciobanu, V., Rodrigues, D., Critien, J.L. & Alnaki, N. (2023) Wearable Architecture Beyond the studio.

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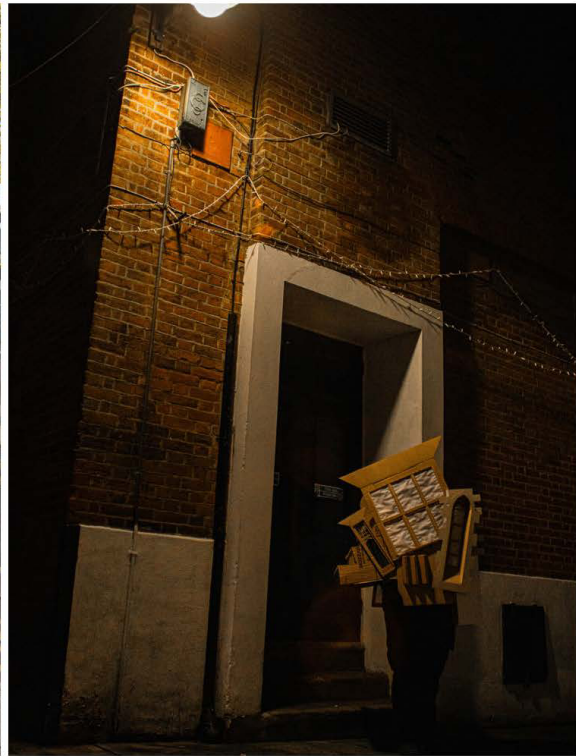


Fig. 12a Oliinyk, M., Talbot, N. & Rezoan, T. (2023) Wearable Architecture Beyond the studio.

Fig. 12b Ryan, S., Phillips, C., Rakotoarisoa, N. & Yorulmaz, S. (2023) Wearable Architecture Beyond the studio.

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Fig. 13a Amos, H., Bekit, O., Burch, L. & Cukic, C. (2021) Wearable Architecture Beyond the studio.

Fig. 13b Ruiz-macua, A., Szejnik, P. & Tolman, H. (2022) Wearable Architecture Beyond the studio.

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Fig. 14 Davison, K., Bonacorsi, M. & Andrews, L. (2022) Wearable Architecture Beyond the studio.

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Fig. 15 Nishikawa, T., Sandi Arias Sritharan, M. & Suistharan, K. (2022) Wearable Architecture Beyond the studio.

KEYWORDS

Wearable. Performative. Situated. Making. Pedagogy.

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BIOGRAPHY

I have been active within art and design education since 1995, delivering, developing, and managing a variety of programmes, all associated with the built environment. My practice led research stems from an ongoing fascination, with what could be described as the consequence(s) of architecture.

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