ON LONGING

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Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Ephraim

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## CONTENT

1. **Proposition**
   - 1.1 Introducing the content, method and mode of the research
   - 1.2 The Monolith: ‘A Formal Declaration’

2. **Emergence of the monolith**
   - 2.1 My ancestors
   - 2.2 An upbringing
   - 2.3 Wax and feathers
   - 2.4 Time and Matter; the nature of the monolith
   - 2.5 Holding the hand of absence

3. **Inevitable reconstructions;** explaining my practice vis a vis a concept of time
   - 3.1 Looking at urban sites as inevitably historical
   - 3.2 Implementing a pluralistic view towards history to deploy the concept of relative authenticity
   - 3.3 Continuation of historical experiential spatial qualities
   - 3.4 Expressing duration as a spatial quality
   - 3.5 Time as duration
   - 3.6 On remembrance
   - 3.7 Plurality of systems of interpretation

4. **Drawing as a third party phenomena;** explaining my practice vis a vis a concept of space
   - 4.1 Tracing the performance of space
   - 4.2 Using autographic drawing as mode of representation to unpack historical – experiential qualities of a site
   - 4.3 The autonomous object
   - 4.4 Isolation and replay

5. **Towards a Chronotopos (timeplace);** explaining my practice in terms of matter
   - 5.1 Understanding place not to be spatial but phenomenological
   - 5.2 Tensile structures
   - 5.3 Gateway structures

6. **Towards a future practice**
   - 6.1 Contribution to knowledge
   - 6.2 Conclusion
ON LONGING: Undertaking this research has transformed my practice radically. In the past five years research only gradually merged with practice. At first, research was something that happened late at night after everyone had left the studio. The process of the PhD however accommodated a major shift changing the nature of my practice allowing a new focus on self-initiated work and for research to become much more integrated. With this work I evaluate the idea of an architectural phenomenology recasting history as the experiential content of speculative architecture. Such work and research is structured by architectures unique mode of intellectuality where the intellectual act cannot be separated from aesthetic experience.

Through the course of the PhD my practice (integrating research and practice) nurtured the development of a drawing process, which I describe as a ‘Practice by Replay’; very much a protocol for producing architecture through the recollection of history to explore the possibilities of continuing historical experiential spatial qualities in new architectonic constructions. This drawing practice has brought forward a tool through which I can evaluate old work and produce new work as part of a reflective practice.

It is at this point (whilst producing such drawings, mostly in the second half of my PhD) a particular dynamic quality in my practice emerged. Through drawing I find myself engaging with various levels of perception (personal viewing), avoiding post facto representations in favor of using drawing as a primary investigative resource. At the same time I actively use historical archetypical elements in my work to explore aspects of duration freed from historical classification and taxonomy. As such my current practice holds a paradoxical emphasis on the congruence between intuition and tradition. It is this emphasis that drives my current practice in order to produce architecture through a heightened awareness (developed through the research) accommodated by a collapse of time in space.

‘Longing’ stands for the incorporation of many ideological believes in the pantheon of architectural deities insisting on avoiding moral conflict yet expanding on formal encounter and divergence. Such promise, to gain strength trough a practiced economy of forces, is experienced through drawing, set as a stage exploring theatrical configurations with various levels of preservation. Although this alliance of material form is important the sudden and overwhelming shadows of new and hidden spaces (discovered through a process of subtraction) mark new areas of access, both physically and conceptually. The drawing is thus equal mind as it is material.
1.0 PROPOSITION

In the first instance I aim to demarcate a supporting territory, bedding in which sands drift ashore and where decamping is intently maintained. In this drifting, a being from ground up, I observe earth bodies dwindling in the winds of a postmodern era. The earth’s mount of architectonic polarity between history and phenomenology draws a circle in which I have been seated to look at what has passed; in terms of personal architecture practice and out of which I have reached to experience-through-drawing a recollecting of multiple architectonic histories.

1.1 INTRODUCING CONTENT, METHOD AND MODE OF THE RESEARCH

This research is conducted within the framework of the Invitational Reflective Practice Stream at RMIT University outlining the research method as reflection through projects. “At the heart of the RMIT doctoral process is the belief that practice needs to be studied through the practice of (i.e., doing) practice, rather than as some object to be studied “independently.” It is the insistence on practice as a medium of study.” (van Schaik 2003a; Glanville 2003). This writing provides an unpacking of a particular attitude towards architectural history in the way it has structures my design practice over the course of doing the PhD. Looking at the past 15 years of my practice I will discuss the crystallization of an intellectual position on the idea of architectural history in relation to my work.

What long ago started as a practice of modern architecture placed within the remains of a pre modern past shifted towards the idea of an architectural phenomenology recasting (a personal reading of) history as the experiential content of a prospective architecture (Jorge Oteiros-Pailos, 2013). This idea of historical continuity finds its basis in the writings of Jean Labatut (1899-1986) translating the work from Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger into an architectural discourse which impacted greatly on my education as an architect in the 90’s, somewhat setting the stage for a reinterpretation of the relationship of modern architecture to its history now 15 years later.

I will start with a short critique on early work and describe this as following a modernist paradigm without denying the merits of modernism however describing such discourse as incomplete towards the architectonic objectives set in my practice, which at the end of my research are clearly aimed at a reciprocal dialogue between new architectonic interventions and the historical context they arise from. This critique first and foremost allowed me to demarcate my own spatial history or that what Leon van Schaik describes as spatial intelligence (van Schaik 2008), allowing me to deploy an explicit awareness
opening up a discourse on architectural production integrating diagrammatic methods to al-
leviate a previous conceptual distance between my own spatial being and the work produced. At a later stage during the course of this PhD this method chrysalises in a drawing process of recuperating historical architecture as a muse for new design.

Through the commentary on research I will explain this drawing process as a ‘Practice by Replay’; very much an experiential protocol for producing architecture through the recol-
lection (very different from reconstruction) of history and explore the possibilities of the continuation of historical experiential spatial qualities in new architectonic constructions. As I will explain in more detail in chapter 3, this process starts with a ‘wandering’ through vast collections of acquired historical photographs and video material of a particular site or era. With a firm believe in the primacy of such ‘lived experience’ over an analytical discourse on history, objective information such as dates, place names, conquerors and kings fade in the shadow of the immediacy of the image. What typically follows is a drawing process by ‘replay’, set up as a conversation between an initial monolith, which silhouette is the delineation of site-specific boundaries and a series of ‘subtractors’ which are in fact secondary monoliths de-
lineating site-historic margins. Chapter 4 explains this process as lithic reduction where mass is subtracted from the initial monolith by choreographed intersections of ‘subtractors’. Form is thus indirectly produced; lines are not actively drawn but are the result of the intersection of delineated site-historic margins.

The Monolith drawings have allowed me to develop the process of drawing myself into the history of a project or site. To allow myself to embody previous design acts not through rep-
etition but through change. The Monolith drawing – a major outcome of this research – is an instrument for remembering and working through the history of a particular site.

I see myself as a friend, student and colleague of a great Architect, Jo Van Den Berghe. In his Overarching essay: Theatre of Operations, part of his Doctorate thesis, he describes how at the start of his research his process of architectural design was interpreted as commencing with the dream of a poetic image for it to subsequently become matter of the world (substance). He ends his thesis by reversing this formula more or less and describes his architectural discourse as working through the performance of a construction practice in order to produce the poetic image.

As I said his work and his research, which I followed closely during the many RMIT GRC presentations, has greatly impacted the way in which I have looked at my own practice. The presence of the poetic image in my practice gains importance as an instrument for imagining. In architectural terms a sensitive and emotional portal for someone (be it the architect or end-user) to participate in the production of its meaning.
I will write about the presence of the poetic image at the start of a design process and the importance of erasing this most carefully yet thoroughly. In the following chapters I will explain how I deploy the Monolith drawing (an instrument devised towards the end of my research) to surpass the presence of the a-priori poetic image and break the path of ‘self-projection’ to take a predetermined sense of self out of the drawing. Only then can I surpass my own locality (here I refer to the idea of Spatial Intelligence as described by Leon van Schaik) and enter the drawing; a meditative instrument for something to be revealed beyond (my) imagination unearthing an architectural language inhaling a complexity beyond the capacities of a mere subject. Ironically, the result however - as my Monolith drawings aim to exemplify - is the poetic image. Yet this image allows for a rendezvous with something much larger than a personal stance, something approaching the idea of a collective historical consciousness.

Drawing thus plays a crucial role in the process of discovery hence strategizing drawing as a generator of thought and not so much as the distributor of the poetic image, without denying the value of such outcome. Consequently I present a manuscript in which my thoughts on architecture practice are for a large part explored and consequently communicated visually. The image, as it performs in this document, acts in two very different ways. I have included a number of reference images such as from my own practice but also other architects and artists. These images clearly relate to particular sections within the writing (as indicated) in order to demonstrate and expand on the written text. However the main body of drawings exists as very distinct, in that they never coincide with writing nor do they stand in reference to the written text. Such ‘detachment’ is a consequence of the previously denoted performance of each drawing as an autonomous instrument. These drawings do not illustrate yet stand symmetrical to the written text, as dark windows in which writing takes on the form of drawing for the pages of printed text are the moments in which drawing takes on the form of writing.

Important is thus the avoidance of post facto representations in favor of using drawing as a primary investigative resource. The research is therefore structured by architectures unique mode of intellectuality where the intellectual act cannot be separated from aesthetic experience (in my case through the Monolith drawing) something Arnaud Hendrickx writes towards in his 2012 Doctoral thesis Substantiating Displacement.

A large part of the knowledge unpacked in this research can thus be accessed through an aesthetic experience of the Monolith Drawings. These drawings are the substantiation of the central idea embedded in this research; to continue experiential historical qualities of Architecture.
The research is produced through two types of inquiry, resulting in an interwoven questioning of ‘what, when and why’. The first level of inquiry looks at the genealogy of my most current work. Tracing relevant provocations, situating my work in context over time, deciphering the authorities in my own conceptual constructs and trying to find out how an obsession with the monolithic results in more than just a formal endeavor. The second level of study operates through the actual practical application of what I will explain as ‘Practice by Replay’ to qualify the nature of architecture through historical recollection. Interwoven with literature references and in dialogue with the first level of inquiry, this aims at providing a demonstrated account on the discourse of my design practice.

A lot of writing on architectural models is settled within the confines of rational inquiry. However, without launching into a discourse on mysticism, it remains to be said that - in dialogue with reflective writing where one aims for analysis and critical commentary - a large portion of the content of this research is perceived through introspection, as the nature of the research is auto-ethnographic or indeed produced through self-study.

I have had the privilege to be mentored in this research method by two of the most inspiring academics, Ranulph Glennville and Leon van Schaik, both foremost authorities in the field of reflective research through the theory and practice of second order cybernetics (see Glanville 2002 for an introduction) (Glanville 2003; van Schaik 2000a, 2003a). As I will explain in more detail further on, numerous tutorials with both Ranulph Glanville and Leon van Schaik have guided this research.

A very particular yet important act as part of this reflective practice stands out in my work. This act is explained as ‘the gaze’ and stands in line with Merleau-Ponty’s description of a painting or drawing as capable of demonstrating what he refers to as a ‘figured philosophy of vision’ where he describes how the act of looking and the position taken by the observer is included within the drawing. For Merleau Ponty this is a central quality of creative practice in that the artist is seen as much as he is seeing. As such he exposes the falsity of separating subject from object as he describes;

that which looks at all things can also look at itself and recognise, in what it sees, the “other side” of its power of looking. It sees itself seeing; it touches itself touching, it is visible and sensitive for itself.

The drawing – an instrument to observe and being observed - allows for the perception or embodiment of knowledge, far removed from an objectified or distant approach to architecture as I aim to comment from within (Joris 2013).
At the same time I actively use historical archetypical elements in my drawings to explore aspects of duration freed from historical classification and taxonomy. This perhaps renders my practice as paradoxical because of the appearing congruence between intuition and tradition. It is this emphasis that drives the drawing practice in that such paradox can be studied by augmentation and enlargement; slow practices of study which are possible through drawing; seeking for levels of coherence which is much more difficult through writing because writing always remains distant and open-ended and never formalised.

This research thus looks at ‘the self’ (the practicing architect) as a source of data and aims at externalizing (through drawing and writing) the inner dialogue of an architectural design discourse as it happened through the 4 years of research.

Such research method finds its origin in a postmodern academic world of the second half of the 20th century driven by a desire to look at the world from multiple vantage points thus opposing an assumed objective positivist stance (van Schaik 2003a; Glanville 2003). It was this zeitgeist responsible for steering the early stages of my architecture practice by providing the intellectual basis for the idea of historical duration through contemporary architecture. Set in motion by authors such as, A Peshkin and M Polyani the individual researcher (myself in this instance) is seen to be an instrument through which technique (the way in which architectural designs are produced) and past experience (15 years of architectural practice) can play an important role.

I can only look at the world as a constantly changing reality, in flux, driven by the dynamics of changing perceptions and beliefs. Auto-ethnography aims at deploying a heightened sense of awareness and attention for nuance towards work produced as part of this vigorous world to indeed describe a particular design discourse in dialogue with such a dynamic reality. In order to indeed produce architecture in dialogue with the dynamics of a changing perception I engage with the description of objects (architecture) as phenomena beyond their physical limits. This is of course one of the important tasks of phenomenology as thought by Husserl and Merleau-Ponty who describe the performance of a transcendental consciousness as a perception caught up in the flow of internal time and levels of memory and anticipation.

Chapter 5 will explain this idea of memory as a collection of all the interpretations made through a particular object complemented with possible anticipations corresponding inevitably to that object. Within phenomenology this is referred to as cognitive reduction for it allows one to move beyond analytic observation and the mere physical reality of an object and indeed think about such an object as phenomenon.
The drawings I present as part of this research operate as explicit instruments through which architecture (and with it architectural practice) is looked at beyond analytic scrutiny and physical realism. The drawing explores architecture as sets of phenomena, which through the act of drawing are constantly regrouped to explore different consequential outcomes. By means of such drawing practice, a particular object or architectural element such as an arch or a dome can be observed holding multitude of interpretations and anticipations. For example a dome could be a roof of a church or the shape of a cradle, the outline of a bunker or part of the silhouette of a pregnant women. This process of ‘reduction’ has allowed for a particular architecture to emerge. Architecture I refer to (for the time being) as The Monolith collecting the following characteristics, all of which will be unpacked in chapter 2.

1.2 THE MONOLITH: ‘A FORMAL DECLARATION’

- The Monolith references ancient form without having to subscribe to strategies of historicised formal continuity (neo / post) therefore instilling a somewhat reversed anachronistic quality. From Borromini’s rounded interiors to the continuous space of Mies.
- The Monolith aims to surpass stylistic/iconic/typological values -as such - excludes compositional rationalism and makes it impossible to decompose a design process in a set of rules.
- Formal distancing – instilling strangeness perhaps – is used as a tactic to delineate a critical region to actively engage with questioning the origins of architectural formal qualities implicit in my work.
- The Monolith resists its tectonic decomposition into assemblages of skin and structure.
- The spatial intentionality of the Monolith is to create ‘room’ through subtraction, which consists of a slow process of carving into stone; as an antithesis to composing architecture by means of architectural elements such as column and beam. This process of subtraction creates spaces without a clear inside or outside and instills in-between spaces to install a conceptual triad exploring the architectural potencies between inside and outside through the idea of ‘mediating space’.
The Monolith as stone cut architecture is characterized by the correspondence between form and structure. As such the expressive value of its form is a direct result of its structural capacity and vice versa. The vault and dome as primary ‘subtractors’ therefore play an important role in the design of the monolith for there is structural reasoning with each carving of empty space.

The Monolith works with the peculiar quality of ‘an activated absence’ in which the original object gains potency by being subtracted leaving a trace or contour. This contour generates ornaments and in doing so performs an interesting duality; at first glance this contour will look like the delineation of the monolith but in fact it is not for it delineates empty space within. As such ornamentation exists primarily surrounding interior void carved out the monolith.

Ornamentation serves not as figuration but as part of a tectonic expression. Ornamentation is seen as an “art of connection” (Frampton 1999, p.22) where architectural elements gain form through a process of ‘mutual sympathy’ (Lars Spuybroek, 2011, p.234) as part of an overall aesthetic intention. This mutual sympathy allows for a window opening to be announced by the surrounding wall or ceiling and the perpendicular force of a column to be revealed by the receiving floor. The Monolith moderates the above principle to one instantaneous act; obliterating any sense of arrangements of individual elements in the construction of architecture and instead instill entireness through various stages of mutation.

The aesthetic intentionality is to strengthen this mediation by developing ornamentation as a mereological system in which boundaries between spaces become regions of dialogue allowing a sense of continuity where one element implicitly speaks to all other.

This speaking of architecture drifts on the currents of a particular ideology. It speaks of a kinetic fullness towards a surrounding geology of movement. Any constant is instantaneous and its meaning seized in that moment only, for we can exit the simplicity of polarities with its imbued perception of counterparts and syncopating moralities. In this architecture there is a consistency in the way both design process and architectural form are organized. The act of remembering creates ripples in the surface of historical thinking, a forceful continuation with a changing capacity allowing the monolith, this embryonic architecture, to engross these forces as they carve into its stone surface in a way that each carving implicitly speaks to all other.
And here absence is activated as a potent spherical giant of undulating gradients of not-being-there, for the monolith to become a framework in which individual consciousness can coincide with shared understanding. As the monolith takes form by subtracting forces it now illustrates a discourse avoiding architecture to be reduced to subjective idealism. In that subtraction is not enslaved as carving tool only yet widens its scope by removing the ability of the architect to project the preconceived image or poetic dream into the making of the Monolith. As such, the architect’s imagination bounded by unbearable ‘nowness’ can be surpassed to enter the immensity of Architecture itself. This double act of subtraction, vacating void out of mass and the limitations of a personal imagination from a design discourse, allows the monolith to exist not as abstract form but as a figure freed from its previous task of figuration. The monolith does not reference a historical origin; it does not exist along such linearity of time. Through its double act of subtraction it allows for something much greater, something that changes the modus operandi of making architecture. The monolith instills the idea of the absence of an origin.
- monolith - tasked with compacting an itinerary of practice in which lays its density - softly overthrowing inherited discourse, a density in which to project new insights, excavators for concepts and introspective expectations - we do not want to see as we enter solid darkness for it takes time for eyes to adjust and see through pixelated dust a décor supporting gentle doctrines of cultural scepter
as time is passing - a purposeful dwindling takes paraphrasing characters in a production of disharmonic castles – subtractors are hailing the metaphor – they break and crust surfaces of what we see to instill what is left as void – however - for a brief moment - and every time - they dance
2.0 THE EMERGENCE OF THE MONOLITH

To explain the emergence of a monolithic language I comment on 4 'layers of practice' from the past 15 years out of which I develop core ideas to support the description of modes of work and thinking. Each of the 4 layers speaks of a specific intellectual climate instigated by many different people from art and architectural practice.

I speak of layers and not of stages to avoid a lineage in which these strata might be put into relation with each other. People impacting on these ideas indeed seem to form conceptual sediments in the total landscape of my architecture practice. However what might be understood as a simple horizontal layering of intellectual deposits is in fact a landscape under critical pressure, mainly through the forces of self-evaluation, creating tectonic folds and thus new and ever-changing connections. The following strata are discussed;

An Upbringing; an introduction to stone-cut spaces and the validation of an architectural heritage by designing autonomous structures at a measured distance from the historic object. Mentors who have played a very important role at this stage and continue to play are; Konrad Buhagiar, David Felice, Alberto Micheli-Farrugia and David Drago.

Wax and Feathers; an architectural vocabulary investing in a diagrammatic paradigm to suppress the emergence of habitual modern typologies. Mentors who have played a very important role at this stage are; Leon van Schaik, Ranulph Galanville, Dale Jones-Evans SueAnne Ware and Richard Blythe during my Master years at RMIT.

The Nature of The Monolith; space is carved out of solid mass, making present that what has become absent; such implicit qualities of the monolith are informed by works of art and architecture guiding a spatial vocabulary through which architecture is produced. Mentors who have played a very important role at this stage are Martyn Hook, Jo Van Den Berghe and Arnaud Hendricks.

Holding the Hand of Absence; architecture as a site-specific exploration of spatial transitions through time and matter for architectonic objects are set against a horizon of memory and anticipation to fill each object with immanent meaning.
2.1 AN UPBRINGING

In 1999 I stood there, drinking cheap wine out of a plastic cup, midst fellow graduates lounging the foyer of our Faculty of Architecture in Brussels. I just finished my education as an architect. A rather eclectic mix of academic input lived fresh in me. Prevailing narcissistic Belgian minimalism exists in contrast with the political manifestos by Luc Deleu, rescued by a grounding in Cultural history by Prof. dr. Raoul Bauer and released into the concept of phenomenology by prof.em. dr Guy Van Kerckhoven. This perhaps typical Belgian status of an idealistic coalition was allowed a view of the world at large under the mentorship of Elia Zenghelis and Dirk Coopman during my master years. A month later Riet Eeckhout and myself left Belgium to start our careers in Malta.

My first project as young employee at Architecture Project (Riet and I became partners of Architecture Project in 2007 after working in Asia and London for a while) was an international UNESCO competition for a temporary shelter for five medieval churches in Lalibela, Ethiopia (figure 2.1-2.2). I never made it to Lalibela and worked from survey drawings and photographs only. However, at that point in time I had just made it to Malta, a small island where the first pre historic settlers arrived from Sicily 5000BC. Called the ‘temple builders’ they are responsible for the building of large monolithic structures on land and the excavation of vast catacomb complexes underground (figure 2.3). Both types of architecture are dedicated to ‘The Earth Mother’, reflected in the tactile curvature of the rock carved spaces of the hypogeum; the ultimate space of the womb in Mother Earth itself as Richard England explains to Richard Rudgley in his 1999 documentary Secrets of the Stone Age. These structures are of course much older than the medieval churches of Lalibela yet allowed me to enter a project such as Lalibela, a project that would carve out my future career.

The Lalibela project was conceived as a semi-translucent ‘cloud’ floating above the sacred site, with minimal attachment to the rock face in order to preserve the physical and symbolic continuity between the monuments and the landscape out of which they were carved. A variety of site-specific factors determined by the consecrated area were mapped. These contextual parameters, such as ceremonial routes, trees and obstacles in the landscape, came to define the silhouette of each of the shelters. The perhaps novel aesthetics of the resulting shelters in fact revealed specific physical and ceremonial characteristics of the site.
The ‘clouds’, casted by the setting beneath, formed a secondary landscape, a structure appearing to belong to the sky to protect a small part of an all-encompassing earth. This was my first architecture act outside academia and now 16 years later it seems uncanny for this project to hold all the ingredients of my current practice; an interest in the heritage of stone cut architecture in combination with lightweight tensile structures. Seeming opposites yet complementary in a way I will aim to describe in chapter 5.

As mentioned in the introduction, my early work as part of Architecture Project does follow a modernist paradigm. A deep interest in the idea of place making however is already installed, combining the re-activation of existing identities with newly designed ideas. My first built project Casa Perellos (figure 2.6-2.7) indeed invests in such permutations yet defines place only as a spatial, mathematical construct excluding any notion of place as a phenomenological construct which only occurs in later work. In doing so the project positions itself in relation to its ancient surroundings - seen as objects from a past - against which it portrays a glittering image of glass and steel. Surrounded by Malta’s historical legacy such work incorporates a particular reading of history. Work is driven by a view on conservation practice relating to what is generally defined as absolute authenticity. This term will be explained in more detail in the following chapter yet could be summarized as a mode of thinking urging the design of distinct architectonic bodies placed within a meticulously restored historical fabric. Such projects aim for a critical yet distant dialogue between the designed object and the surrounding heritage. As a result the idea of volumetric abstraction exists as pre-set in the design where form remains ‘scientific’ and spatial investigations drift in modes of a ‘functionalist’ canon exploring architectonic compositions taking on ephemeral qualities suggesting new interventions could eventually be moved or taken away to ‘restore’ the historical context in its ‘original’ state, suggesting a certain moralistic undertone.

The Barrakka Lift (figure 2.4-2.5) in Valletta Malta, a project by Architecture Projects yet without my direct involvement marks an important stance in the way a dialogue with historic architecture is established. The project serves as a retrospective model and illustrates the context for my ‘upbringing as an architect’. This twenty storey high panoramic lift, commissioned by the Grand Harbour Regeneration Corporation plc, is located on the edge of Valletta’s bastion wall. The structure is designed to augment the movement of large numbers of visitors and residents between the Grand Harbour and Valletta inner city. The new Barrakka lift project stands where the original lift was built in 1905 to connect the harbour with the town. The operations closed down in 1973. With the structure abandoned the eventual dismantlement happened during the 1980s.
The geometric qualities of the new lift as stand-alone object are a direct consequence of heritage regulations denying any structural connection to the adjacent bastion wall. As such the 60m high lift tower stands at a negotiating distance from the 18th century city. An observing giant with footage in ancient beddings yet shrouded with contemporary armor of corrugated aluminium to mask the glazed lift carriages and provide shade to those who travel. From a distance this slender titan is a visitor to the stone island very much like those who arrive at the shores of this harbor city every day.

Casa Perellos in Malta is a much earlier project does very much the same. The project is set within the historic center of the southern town of Zejtun, “Citta Rohan”, and was built by the Grand Master of the Knights of St John, Ramon Perellos y Roccaful, in the first half of the 18th Century as a country retreat. The entire villa was refurbished and fully restored with the more recent accretions removed and replaced by twin-glazed wings on either side of the courtyard to house the necessary service spaces (kitchen, bathrooms, guest bedroom). As such infrastructural works in the old palace could be prevented thus minimising the impact of the renovation. The two new lateral wings are built of glass and steel and shaded by folding hardwood louvered shutters. The new structures exist as ‘plug-ins’ to the old house suggesting a temporal nature as a courtesy towards the 18th century structure. The autonomous architectural object in dialogue with its historic context was born here although the content of its dialogue remained premature. The object’s performance as autonomous stands antithetical to the current performance of the monolith. Where the twin-structures of Casa Perellos remain distant in terms of formal and conceptual negotiation vis a vis architectural heritage the monolith calibrates a closeness to its architectural predecessors; a transformative juxtaposition.

Qualities that are not easily detained by a photograph are perhaps the mode in which this architecture integrates by means of its distance. An inherent part of the practice in Malta, certainly at the time, is the need to engage with thorough observations sometimes archeological in nature, which nurture the coming into being of architecture. I remember the afternoons spent in the empty house long before any work had started. Days of wandering, observing, drawing, predicting structural inconsistencies for indeed the process of restoration revealed hidden staircases and doorways, probably for staff to travel unhindered through the 18th century palace. The basements of the house gave up its hidden cave with markings on the wall dating back to the Great War. Such archeological and historical work forms an implicit and integrated part of the design process supported by people in the office with specialties
in history, renovation and restoration. As such the house accommodates a process of making present that what had become absent, hidden under layers of plaster. A process in such pressing certainty, an inward settling of architecture as one stands in ancient courtyards to experience the sun’s cycle in composition with a 300 year old surrounding city fabric.

Here linger vast amounts of cliché in romantic stance but if endured long enough one comes out cleansed from the lusty emergence of romantic play for this architectural summer throws the yearning hand far away to overcome this Mediterranean certainty of historical play at least for a northern European such as myself. To overcome the initial skepticism towards the ease in which people from this land remain participants in this historic landscape in which architects act with endurance to remain masters of this kind of architecture.

Notwithstanding a current interest in the absence of an origin this work does seem to reference the idea of origin; not ‘origin’ in a Platonic sense referencing an a priori knowing eroded over time as one enters the experienced world. Just an indication of the origin of a professional attitude where working through ancient architecture gains meaning in two ways; literally in that most projects take place in heritage buildings but also in a wider intellectual sense in that the architect indeed works through previous knowledge or perhaps even towards a previous knowing; rendering this to be a Platonic construct after all. This uncovers a number of important questions. What would be required to consider remembering, repeating and working-through, also described as a psychoanalytic technique by Freud, as a productive means to architecture. What would be required in order to vaguely transpose this psychoanalytic technique onto an architectural discourse? Very different from psychoanalysis of course would be that in doing so the focus would not be the subject but a topic within the subject (architect), in part responsible for forming the world around us (architecture). If this indeed would be ‘psychoanalysis’ of architecture what would architecture become or what kind of architecture would come of it as we start to qualify what we need to remember, repeat and work through. I will revisit this conceptual slippage in chapter 5 and 6.
Lalibela, Ethiopia: 12431.299N 12231.314E

A design for a man-made shelters to cover the churches of Lalibela. The design takes into account the sacred site as a whole (1) to maintain as much as possible the implicit relationship between the churches and their surroundings.

The eventual form of the new site cover is determined by the following parameters:

1. Vegetation, fractures and trenches in the surrounding rockface.
2. Site use.
3. Topography.
4. Climate (Wind direction), Sunlight (protection), Rainfall (catchment's area to provide the neighboring village with water).
A design for a network of shelters to cover the churches of Lalibela.
The design takes into account the sacred site as a whole (1) to maintain as much as possible the implicit relationship between the churches and their surroundings.
The eventual form of the new site cover is determined by the following parameters: 

(1) - Vegetation: Factures and trenches in the surrounding rock face. 
(2) - Site use. 
(3) - Topography. 
(4) - Promote Vile (Vile). Sunlight protection. 
(5) - Rainfall (catchments area to provide the neighboring village with water).
“Island, A Poem for Seeing”

Yesterday
We walked hand in hand
Across time's long worn tracks
Where once a temple stood
Of lines curving into secret circles
And man knelt in prayer
Your hands and mine
Reached across the waters
To caress an outcast rock
Icon of solitude
Altar of sacrifice
Crucified against the sky
In a sea devoid of logic
An island burned but not consumed

Today
I sit and watch
A lonely island rock
Awaiting your return
In hypnotic trance
Midway between waking and sleeping
In petrified vision and ossified dream
I hold the hand of absence

with permission of the author
(figure 2.3) The Hypogeum
(figure 2.6-2.7) Casa Perellos
From 2004 onwards the architectural design work, once conform to an architectural vocabulary of ‘modern politeness’, starts to invest in a diagrammatic paradigm. Still in awe with the stagnant march of an old military renaissance city (Valletta) the process of architecture design is not envisaged as a line-on-paper-exercise anymore, initially to suppress the emergence of habitual modern typologies. Instead the creative process is redeveloped into a machinic morphogenesis where form is curated by series of extrusions, projections and subtractions in endless AutoCAD space. This machinic, diagrammatic interface gains importance in order to strengthen this resistance to what was previously a mere process of borrowing form. Projects are executed in methodical alignment with the very first Lalibela project. To start each project, a variety of site-specific factors are mapped to define the silhouette of an initial architectural solid and surrounding ancillary objects with which a process of projection and subtraction is accomplished in order to subtract volume out of the initial architectural solid. As such drawings become context-specific-data-compositions to design unforeseen volumetric arrangements, juxtaposed against yet in dialogue with a historic context.

The drawings on Wands Business Centre (figure 2.8-2.9) illustrate this; by notating subsequent transformations and mutations of an initial spatial envelope placed on site. The narrative is captured in the apparent coming into being of a building. The Wands Business Centre is a horizontal volume that lifts itself from a continuing landscape underneath. The volume is sliced and carved with solar and wind path transcriptions to provide sunlight and air penetration throughout the building for gardens and courtyards to exist. The resulting gridlines are in perfect alignment with the city grid of Valetta, which of course is no coincidence. The city plan of Valletta was conceived to serve both military means and natural ventilation and cooling requirements. Projects such as Wands Business Centre seem aesthetically distant and perhaps alien to their immediate surrounding but very certainly engage in a dialogue by absorbing or allowing to be carved by a variety of physical and historical parameters.

The conceptual detachment from a historical context, previously criticized with Casa Perellos, is now avoided to allow for a design process allowing a much more plastic confrontation with history. The architectonic object of The Wands Building aims to surpass stylistic and typological values but only remains an outside (without an interior). As such the monolith comes into being; referencing ancient form and engaging in formal distancing, instilling strangeness perhaps.
(figure 2.8-2.9) Wands
2.3 TIME AND MATTER: THE NATURE OF THE MONOLITH

As I mention, a major shift in this research has been the positioning of architecture as a far gazing (I will explain this act of gazing in detail) instrument. This has been enabled in my practice through the production Monolith drawings. The following chapter will mainly comment on the quality of the Monolith(ic) in the drawing. It speaks of (drawing) technique as architecture. This is why most of the following references are artists. In what follows I aim to illustrate the way in which certain works of art and architecture have informed the conceptualization of the monolith. Without the provision of an all-inclusive list I will comment on 9 artists and 1 architect who, at this moment, inform my practice in a fundamental and productive way.

As the technique of projection and subtraction allows perpetual new beginnings the monolith gains qualities of lustrous gatherings of light as it dances with gravity in ways only small objects do. The implicit qualities of the monolith are manifold.

A grey sooty vase by Takiguchi Kazuo (b. 1953) (figure 2.12) appears as a strangely formed river stone. Standing there, its interior suggests thickness towards the lower part for its ability to balance upright despite the rounded base seemingly challenging gravity. Its surface, smooth yet complex suggests skin more than stone, as if stretched, glowing in somber, settling shadows. The irregularity and asymmetric form of the vase is the result of a technique originally used by early 17th century Chinese potters who deformed their pots purposefully. Takiguchi, born and raised in Kyoto, began as an apprentice under Kiyomizu Rokubei VI (A.D. 1901-1980). Studying art at Geidai University under Yagi Kazuo (A.D. 1918-1979), one of the founders of the Sodeisha ceramic group in Kyoto, he opposed folk art with all its rustic aesthetics, known as Mingei. Instead Sodeisha’s focus on the referencing of ceramic art history through abstract and non-functional form making. Takiguchi Kazuo does this by preparing large sheets of thin clay and draping these over molds made from various assemblies of everyday components. The resulting geometry as a result of draping and gathering everyday and sometimes ancient formalities implies history and references memories; hidden form direct view yet implicit to everything else such as the embalming form of a vase or indeed the silhouette of a monolith. Such contours, referencing ancient form instilled by an activated absence allow for a remembering without the need for picturesque or rustic clutter. Such form allows for a gazing through time and space simultaneously instilling a somewhat reversed anachronistic quality; as time misplaced in an object.
Such are the Autonomous Structures by James Turrell (1989 – 2010) (figure 2.13) made as astral observatories yet referencing monumental architecture of Étienne-Louis Boullée and Claude Nicolas Ledoux. These etheric structures, if built, would allow desert light to transform their interiors to realms of celestial encounter. Influenced by ancient observatories such as Angkor Wat and Machu Picchu, the environmental character of craters, moments of celestial encounter and vast subtraction, is used as starting point to construct spaces for looking. This looking is firmly directed by Turrell; pointing the viewer’s eye to frame their engagement with the sky through time within the space of each structure. By an opulent formal referencing of ancient form in archetypical manner the Autonomous Structures dream of ancient palaces. They stand there as strangely reversed; seeing through time – a history of architecture - yet meant to see through; to enter and experience a coming into being of space. As Turrell makes these miniatures of eventual constructs to line his crater, the notion of form making seems to wander a critical archeology. As he explores the vastness of his Roden Crater, a 400,000-year-old cinder cone in the San Francisco Volcanic Field, he develops an alliance between such prehistoric geological formations and the ancient architectures he admires. Through the design of his Autonomous Structures he continues a tradition of linking geology and architecture; making spaces through the construction of void where the mass of the earth is mitigated and space is carved out of its landmass. Such architecture resists its tectonic decomposition into assemblages of skin and structure to celebrate uncompromising mass surrounding that what appears to be empty but in fact is full of time.

Negotiating history yet freed from celestial encounter are Renato Nicolodi’s sculptures (figure 2.14-2.15), coagulating time as they operate as typological reiterations serving a collective memory and perhaps nurturing historic consciousness. Nicolodi describes his work as ‘architecture of remembrance’, in memory of his deceased Italian grandfather who suffered in prison during World War II; a story he once recorded on tape now nourishing interpretations on power, ideology and form. The sculptures are not to be mistaken with architectural models Renato Nicolodi iterates in numerous interviews. Nonetheless, gazing at these structures one can observe the latent potential, the urge for being large, as they encapsulate architecture histories, such as the memory of his grandfather has encapsulated the mind of the artist. As indeed these structures nurture a reciprocal relationship toward historic, they act as ‘objects’ of replay. Objects through which the artist can remember images of the Second World War as told by his grandfather. The imprint of these stories has been with such force that a perpetual recollection stands at the basis of an artist oeuvre.
Replay thus stands for recollection through change in order to derive meaning out of the preordained collision between past and present. In his work we observe closeness to historical typologies coinciding with enigmatic qualities of abstracted form, mostly maintained in ash black. It is this darkness, this constant casting of shadow providing an important quality to the work of Renato Nicolodi. Robert Boyle writes indirectly about such quality in his preface of *The Origin of forms and Qualities*. When he sets out on explaining the quality of the color white in opposition to other 17th century theorist he writes:

> We ask: how does it come about that snow dazzles the eyes?  
> Theorist answers: It happens by a quality of whiteness that is in it; which makes all very white bodies produce the same effect.

> We ask: What is this whiteness?  
> Theorist answers: It is a real entity that makes ‘white’ the right word for any portion of matter to which it is joined.

> We ask: How does it come about that white bodies in general do produce this effect of dazzling the eyes rather than effects of green or blue?  
> What he ought to answer: It’s because white bodies reflect outwards—and so reflect onto the eye—far more of the incident light than green and blue ones do.

As we look at Nicolodi’s dark objects in servitude of remembrance, we experience a strange and anachronistic feeling, which fills the cerebral space between his objects and the onlooker. For the works do not reflect outwards as Boyle’s white objects yet distance themselves from an audience as they project inwards. In doing so they seem to produce or indeed allow a space for longing.

This formal distancing – instilling strangeness perhaps – is of great importance to allow the delineation of a critical region for architecture to actively engage with questioning the origins of its formal qualities. Clark M. Thenhaus, founder of the Michigan-based design research office Endemic, writes how his Belvedere project (figure 2.16-2.17), in part, exists as a study in generating anachronistic typologies.
(figure 2.12) No. 5, Stoneware with dark gray matte textured glaze; Takiguchi Kazuo; Hesei era (1989-present) Arthur M. Sackler Gallery
(figure 2.14) Circo II by Renato Nicolodi, 2009, concrete, 54 x 67 x 141 cm

with permission of the author
(figure 2.15) Retable I by Renato Nicolodi, 2014, lamdaprint on plexi, 160 x 120 cm

with permission of the author
With the model of the Belvedere project one can observe a process of manipulating a set of familiar historicized forms in order to establish new incited geometries. The work however is very different from parametricism where architectural elements dissolve into fluid form to instill an overall intensification of continuity. Such formal continuity would not allow for a compositional discourse investing in a mereological study of part-to-part-to-whole relationships. The work thus takes on a critical position between constructivism and parametricism by seeking levels of formal continuity yet maintaining the geometric legibility of its architectonic parts therefore allowing historic reference to be maintained without agreeing to known clichés. This process of formal recollection positions itself between figuration and abstraction for it allows an architectonic expression in reference to a formal heritage without having to subscribe to strategies of historicized formal continuity.

The monolith can thus be seen as architecture escaping a historical periphery in order to (re)enter history in search for productive points of intersection and overlap. The monolith wants to erase any boundary between historicized architecture and present day architecture. As such any safe distance between the historical and the contemporary is eliminated.

Adrian Ghenie, a figurative painter, also alters the role of the artist-observer by entering the painting. With his work he confidently navigates via notions of the representational and the abstracted, the figure and the de-figured. In doing so he offers us glimpses into his viewing of history: conveying potent ideas on human/political power and its abuse, forced exile and migration even from the body itself as the artist carries with him a socio cultural heritage of the Ceausescu propaganda machine active throughout Romania till the end of the eighties. With his 'Self-portrait as Charles Darwin' (figure 2.18) Ghenie explores the presence of evil, or the possibility for evil to be found everywhere. He explores this by connecting Darwin's work on Natural Selection to the Nazi quest for Aryan perfection. The painting depicts an artist studio with Charles Darwin seemingly seated in an armchair. Yet upon closer inspection one notices the person in the armchair is in fact wearing a mask with the rather grotesque fleshy outline of Charles Darwin's face and beard veiling the identity of the artist, identifiable from his particular haircut. Around the figure swirls a thick mass of paint. In the background the space opens up to reveal a dark distant landscape holding the ghostly remains of a German bomber. With this painting the artist traces a connection between the act of self-portraiture and the idea of universal evil. It seems the artist allows himself not only to direct or compose the act of painting but also to act as a model in the figuration of
evil consequently erasing the boundary between the observer and the observed. This seems to illustrate an important point Slavoj Žižek makes in his introduction to ‘The Metastases of Enjoyment’ published in 1994. He recalls after delivering a lecture on Hitchcock at an American campus in 1992 an outraged student criticizing him for daring to talk about Hitchcock while there was a war raging in the Balkans. The student accuses Žižek indirectly for behaving like a ‘normal American’ rather than a ‘victim’ of war. As a reply to this student Žižek explains: “The unbearable is not the difference between normal life and life at war. The unbearable is the fact that, in a sense, there is no difference. There are no exotic, bloodthirsty ‘Balkanians’ in Sarajevo, just normal citizens like us. The moment we take full note of this fact, the frontier that separates ‘us’ from ‘them’ is exposed in all its arbitrariness, and we are forced to renounce the safe distance of external observers.” Ghenie does exactly that; in his painting there is no safe distance anymore between the evil he observes (throughout history) and himself. The monolith, so far, is not looking at evil yet is looking at history without any safe distance in order to be changed by it, meticulously. I will revisit this topic in chapter 5.1 where I will explain the idea of place not to be spatial but phenomenological as I comment on a film project produced in 2013.

Change is conducted by means of subtraction. An act part of a design process explained in detail in chapter 3, however as previously mentioned, not limited to the deduction of mass either physical or virtual.

Michael Hiezer’s ‘Double Negative’, (figure 2.19-2.20) an architecture of monumental minimalism presents itself as a double cut in the landscape on either side of a thresh. The work is produced through the act of making absent. Known mostly from pictures ‘Double Negative can only be ‘seen’ after traveling the dessert (for many hours) to eventually arrive at a topography of subtraction allowing one to re-read that what remains. Michael Hiezer defines his work as conceptual art in which this appearing contradiction between presence and absence is rendered productive. The trace is of huge importance in order to generate a readable evocative absence. The trace of a subtraction is what is read producing an activated absence through which the subtracted material gains potency.

Born in Berkeley, Calif., Heizer comes from an accomplished family of academics, geologists and miners with a history in Nevada. During the 1960’s, sculpture migrated from the studios and galleries to the open landscape and Heizer played an important role in this move. In the early 60’s Robert Smithson, Carl Andre and Walter De Maria invested in a practice of working directly with the landscape.
(figure 2.16) The Belvedere by Clark M. Thenhaus obo Endemic. Photography by Grant Herron with permission of the author
(figure 2.17) The Belvedere by Clark M. Thenhaus obo Endemic. Photography by Grant Herron with permission of the author
(figure 2.18) Adrian Ghenie, “Self-portrait as Charles Darwin,” 2011, Oil on Canvas, 200 x 230 cm
(figure 2.18b) Adrian Ghenie, “Pie Fight Study 2”, 2008, oil on canvas, 55 x 59 cm
(figure 2.19) Michael Heizer’s Double Negative (1969)
PHOTO COPYRIGHT 2011, TRIPLE AUGHT FOUNDATION
(figure 2.20) Michael Heizer's Double Negative, Taken on August 22, 2012 by RETIS on flickr
De Maria was imagining mile long parallel walls in the desert; Robert Smithson was mapping the New Jersey landscape, making “Non Sites”. Abstract Expressionism had linked American art with scale. Jackson Pollock’s paintings were said to refer to the Western landscape. Michael Heizer took this idea and literally made art out of the Western landscape. He refers to his work as Negative Sculpture, made out of the space left behind after subtraction or erasure. Heizer inserted this negative vocabulary in a general consciousness allowing work such as the Ground Zero memorial park in New York, designed by architects Michael Arad and Peter Walker or the Vietnam Veterans Memorial by Maya Lin. In architecture there is of course the work of Gordon Matta Clark and more recently a project with bunker 599 by Atelier de Lyon and Rietveld Landscape.

The bunker (figure 2.21) is placed on the ‘New Dutch Waterline’, a military line of defence used from 1815 until 1940 aiming to protect the cities of Muiden, Utrecht, Vreeswijk and Gorinchem from invasion by means of intentional flooding. Bunker 599 served as one of the outposts to detect an approaching invasion. A meticulous cut slicing the bunker in two equal parts serves as a field inquiry where observation and intervention collide. The project serves as a memorial project and includes the reprogramming and renovation of a historical building. With this task the designers invests in the combined task of studying historical cultural phenomena in order to generate new ones. As such the clear distinction between the descriptive practice of ethnographers and the prescriptive practice of designers starts to dissolve. Cutting into this concrete structure seems to reveal as much as it takes away. In a film by Roberto Rizzo the designers make a beautiful comment on what could be called the ‘mythology of stone’. They comment on their interest in the secret of stone; in what exists within its darkness, its impossible interior; a quality which seems to be relevant for bunker 599. When in search for such quality one could cut into the stonework but in doing so light will filter through, inevitably erasing darkness and secret qualities within. The paradox is of course that one can only enter stone by partly erasing it. Only a ghostly presence of what was once there is to be revealed. Large steal cable-cutters were used to cut into Bunker 599. But as with the ‘mythology of stone’ the light shining through the first cut washes away this dark and secret interior. What remains is a memory, a ghostly outline. As we gaze through this wounded structure, we are reminded that our need to observe often leads to an act of erasure, ironically very much the original purpose of this bunker.
What is recoiled is an apparent impossibility of effectively implementing the qualities imagined with the mythology of stone. Only an approach or a circling around is allowed to perhaps come closer in due process. This attitude of trying to make present something that in fact can only be absent has revealed a number of implicit techniques through which the process of making architecture has changed, at least in my practice.

The Monolith, an architectural body, part absent and part present, engages in a process of seeking self-consciousness to question its own status. Such being of architecture seems to demand a distancing between the architect as author and the authored architecture. Chapter 2 explains in detail how this is accommodated by allowing form to be indirectly produced; lines are not actively drawn (by the architect) but are the result of a process of lithic reduction set up in a drawing construct of the Monolith. The Monolith (as a drawing) is thus partly responsible for its own becoming, the architect standing at a critical distance. Such positioning of the architect, as the maker of drawing constructs, as choreographer of information input, as handler of the drawing, extrapolates aspects of craft in relation to time.

The Monolith is drawn using a machine (a computer) without targeting automated, generic or standardised output. However, in line with the Arts and Crafts movement in the second half of the nineteenth century the Monolith is in search of new levels of authenticity in relation to historical styles. Craft is not seen to be in conflict with the machine anymore since the 21st century machine is capable of singular and specific outcome. It is however craft as a mental act requiring recalibration. Our fast-culture out of which we are born has made us children of an outcome-driven society where the making of something is subject to constant optimization in terms of production time. As set out in my Formal Declaration, the Monolith excludes compositional rationalism resulting in the impossibility of decomposing a design process as a set of rules. This defines the Monolith as a perpetual process of recuperating history or indeed recuperating time. For this to be possible the architect requires to nurture the ability to work through time, with time and thus recollect historical references (in my case through drawing). The drawing, where virtual stone is be sculpted, allows for the visualization of working through time with time. The drawing, a meditative instrument where one can remain and prevail in nowness, invests in sculpting this movement through time. This idea of remainder or rest (in the drawing) in order to visualize a working through time is somehow illustrated by “Boulevard du Temple”, a daguerreotype made by Louis Daguerre in 1838 (figure 2.22), generally known as the earliest photograph of a human being. The ‘photo’ shows the view of a busy street in Paris, but because the exposure time was at least ten minutes the moving traffic left no trace.
Only the two men near the bottom left corner, one apparently having his boots polished by the other, stayed in one place long enough to remain visible. Craft (as a mental act) in relation to time is understood as this ability or need to occupy the drawing in order to make visible traces of time, references of history. The architect standing still in order to work with time and in doing so eliminating any safe distance between the portrait (the drawing) and the portrayed (history) allowing for a collapse …

In ART IN REVIEW published on October 15, 1999 in the New York Times, Roberta Smith equates the rawness of Jenny Saville's paintwork with that of flesh. She describes Saville's work to be inline with a particularly English obsession with flesh, traceable from Francis Bacon and Lucian Freud to Damien Hirst and Richard Billingham, and a particularly American attention to paint such as in the abstract oeuvre of Pollock and Rotko. In an interview with Jenny Saville, Simon Schama describes her work to be really about the anatomy of paint as it constructs the body. In reply Jenny Saville describes how she has to work at the tension between getting the paint to have a sensory quality and be constructive in terms of building the form of a human body. In doing so her practice takes place between abstraction and figuration.

Jenny Saville has indeed established a critique towards the representation of the female body in art. She describes her work to have a feminist grounding yet how through the years of her practice this direct reference has weakened in favour of a focus towards paint and painting. Still, reading commentaries on Saville's work, both by male and female writers, a focus on the portrayal of immense and somehow disobedient female bodies remains a primary focus. As if indeed the sheer scale in which Saville looks at the female body still exists outside a socio-cultural institution.

When Jenny Saville made ‘Closed Contact’ in 2002 (figure 2.23) she pushed her body against a Perspex sheet while fashion photographer Glen Luchford took photos. Saville thinks of these photos as art that uses her flesh as medium. What these photos and her paintings seem to have in common is a particular view on the proximity between figure and canvas not very different from Adrian Ghenie entering his canvas. In traditional figurative painting the figure exists beyond or beneath the canvas, within perspectival space. With ‘Closed Contact’ Saville seems to eradicate any sense of distance between the canvas and the figure. The pressing of her figure onto the canvas allows for an immense closeness. In an interview with Elaine C. Smith she describes how “the photos provide an almost sectional view of the body”; as if we as the viewer are allowed to enter the figure.
At the same time, this pressing of the figure against the canvas allows for the canvas to become articulate by separating the figure from the space in front of the canvas, disciplining the figure as she squeezes her flesh, void of any perspective for it to become strange, vague and distant.

With her paintings a similar ‘closeness’ to the canvas is negotiated. As Saville paints in a classical and masterly way, we expect her figures to exist within this perspectival space beyond the canvas; this institutional space often detaining the female body as an iconographic object. With her thick and lavish paintwork the figure seems to be ‘painted-out’ of this space, as if Saville with every brushstroke pulls the figure out of the canvas. In their final state her portrayed woman seem to exist in front of the canvas, freed from the confinement of the iconographic and entering a space of flesh.

As I speak of the Monolith as a body, although not made out of flesh, it seems to share this kind of disobedience. As an architectural body it also wants to shed its figurative task not through modes of reduction or abstraction but through modes of proliferation and enlargement to a point where such increase breaks representational imprisonment for the Monolith to exit a mimetic framework and allow new points of view through which its value inevitably changes. The monolith does this in particular by developing ornamentation not in service of figuration but as tectonic expression.

I thus proclaim certain qualities of distance and nearness; nearness vis a vis history in order to shed any safe distance yet distance to the drawing to avoid the projection of preconceived imagery.

Master ‘distant observer’ (to disrupt the preconceived image) is Elizabeth Heyert well known for her books; ‘Metropolitan Places’, a classic anthology of 20th century interior design and the ‘The Glass-House Years; Victorian Portrait Photography 1839-1870. After a striving commercial career working for clients such as The NY Times, Vogue, Ralph Lauren and Tiffany & Co. she took the decision to close her commercial studio in 1999, to return to a more experimental practice exploring different forms of portrait photography. Up to this date, this exploration into portrait photography has produced four intriguing projects of which I will briefly discuss the first three. The opening investigation goes under the title “The Sleepers” and explores portraiture of sleeping nudes. Reviewing the exhibit of “The Sleepers”, The New Yorker wrote that the photographs: “conjure thoughts of human fragility and impermanence even if the sleepers have become heroic sculptures rising from a deep slumber.” Following “The Sleepers”, Heyert embarked on a one-year project titled “The Travellers” (figure 2.24) working with a funeral director in Harlem, named Isaiah Owens who still does traditional
Southern Baptist burials where the dead are dressed up to be prepared for paradise. Elizabeth Heyert comments in an interview with Stacey D’Erasmo; “I first took a black and white picture, but it was simply a record of somebody in a coffin. It was a façade, and I had thought I was interested more in what I did with my last project, The Sleepers, which was so much about the interior. But I kept looking and looking at the image; it was as if she (her subject) was surrounded by all this stuff that shouldn't be there …” Eventually Heyert places all subjects against a black background, erasing the coffin with its ornamentation, engulfing her travellers with carefully choreographed lighting referencing traditional portrait photography. In 2009, she finished the third part of this portrait series with her project ‘The Narcissists’, a series of life-size colour triptychs taken through a one-way mirror for her to become invisible to her subjects and take on the role as a silent witness watching private moments of men and women as they are immersed in their reflected image.

With these projects Heyert assumes the role of a ‘distant observer’ constructing levels of remoteness between her and the subjects observed. Yet through this act of distancing she enables immense levels of closeness with which an audience can engage with her photos and the people in her photos; a closeness rarely ‘seen’ in portrait photography. Of course the role of distant observer stems from a need, as a photographer, to seek nearness with a subject; to pierce into a space of intimacy and capture that what lies behind appearance; that what is unseen. However, this distant-near established by Heyert to get to ‘interior portraiture’ only describes part of the interchange between her and her subject. As she carefully situates her ‘point of view’ she also allows for a gentle deconstruction between subject and camera. Elizabeth Heyert explains in an interview with Stacey D’Erasmo how in one of the preceding experiments towards the making of ‘The Narcissists’ she tried to photograph one of the models as she stood alongside a mirror. However, in this scenario the model became too aware of the camera and inevitably started posing. Here one observes how during the event of having a picture taken, a subject answers the urge to project a preconceived idea of self onto the future image; the subject seems to already exists within the photo as predetermined, destined by a sense of self. Heyert therefore chooses very particular circumstances to allow distance between her subject and the camera breaking the path of ‘self-projection’, thus accommodating an act of erasure by taking the predetermined sense of self out of the photo. What remains are images with great intensity, exploring interior qualities of self. Each portrait allows an inwards looking far beyond its surface. They are windows revealing deep perspectives; a space of distant-near where both photographer and subject can disintegrate and merge; as they dwell between idea and matter.
Emma McNally, a London based artist is also interested in the merger or collapse between subject and object. She describes her drawings (figure 2.25-2.26) as chambers through which she explores the idea of mapping the unseen qualities of possible connections between things. This search takes place in in-between space in which she implicitly critiques the apparent separations between subject and object, which historically has provided a basis for the idea of an abstract world, an external entity from which we redraw as the early 20th century scientist would. This clear opposition is deemed problematic by McNally because if one is meant to find meaning in the world how can such thing occur when standing outside of it. Her drawings, allow such individual definitions to collide and collapse. In fact everything in her drawings is constantly subjected to disintegration; a meticulous and incremental process of making and unmaking.

Her work circulates around the idea of network topologies in terms of drawing in ways we see this to be used in cartography, weather maps, neural networks, etc. What such drawings have in common is that they trace the effects of linking different points, objects and concepts to form time-specific conditions. Such environments remain unstable and dynamic for connections are subject to constant flux and adaptation. For that reason her drawings incorporate rhythm as the manifestation of such dynamics of forming and un-forming. Although her drawings seem to act as a regulatory system of mapping these fluctuating forces they remain in a state of becoming; visualizing the connection between things as the grouping and re-grouping of forces.

The Monolith, a body developed through craft or indeed the need to occupy time - in order to visualize traces of history as gathering detail - portrays a certain quality of distant-near. Such a collapse of terms is made possible by a constant breakdown of barriers between past and present, the portrait and the portrayed, figuration and abstraction, the drawing hand and the machine. The latter has made it possible to distance the hand from the drawing for one to become free of selfhood and escape the constraints of preconceived ideas. The Monolith is thus conceived through process; projection and subtraction, acting and responding, making and unmaking in order to allow new conditions to emerge … planned yet unforeseen.
(figure 2.21) Bunker 599 by Rietveld Landscape + Atelier de Lyon.
(figure 2.22) “Boulevard du Temple”, a daguerreotype made by Louis Daguerre in 1838, is generally known as the earliest photograph of a human being.
(figure 2.23) JENNY SAVILLE & GLEN LUCHFORD Closed Contact #10, 1995-1996, C-print mounted in Plexiglas, 96 x 72 x 6 inches (243.8 x 182.9 x 15.2 cm), Ed. of 6
30 x 38 inches (76 x 97cm), chromogenic color print
(figure 2.25) Cartographic Polyrhythms by Emma McNally, digital hybrid from drawing (graphite/carbon on paper)
(figure 2.26) Cartographic Polyrhythms - close up - by Emma McNally, digital hybrid from drawing (graphite/carbon on paper)
When the wax has melted and wings have disintegrated, one rejoins crushing sand and small island rubble to walk a reasonable dream where obstacles have dissipated for one to wonder through time. The interest in stone has never been so strong and with it the understanding of what Raimund Abraham meant when he said architecture to take place at the horizon where land and sky collide, for architecture has only two choices; to either mount earth towards the sky or enter the land. So it is, a dreaming of an architectural origin takes place to explore space as a transition through time and matter.

An important project supporting such viewing of architecture has been the 'City Gate' project by Renzo Piano Building Workshop, in collaboration with my practice Architecture Project, taking on the complete reorganization of the principal entrance to Valletta. The project currently includes 3 main parts: the Valletta City Gate and its site immediately outside the city walls, the design for an open-air theatre within the ruins of the former Royal opera house and the construction of a new Parliament building. The landscaping of the ditch will eventually complete the project. However, in support of my research I will only address the Valletta City Gate project.

The first city gate to Valetta known, as Porta San Giorgio was a single arched entrance built during the reign of Grandmaster La Valette between 1566 and 1569. The second city gate, built in 1632, provided a slightly wider central archway yet accompanied by a smaller arch on either side. The third city gate (figure 2.27), built in 1853 at the height of British rule over Malta, provided an even wider entrance with two central arches flanked by smaller ones on both sides. Throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, this City Gate was known as Porta Reale, which became “Putirjal” in Maltese, and “Kingsway” in English. In 1964 the fourth gate was inaugurated (figure 2.28), a design in line with Italian modernism featuring large openings. This gate was demolished in May 2011 to make way for the fifth city gate. History in the making, people used to say when cranes started to eat into the concrete. Described as yet another institutionalised break with the past by Maltese media we recorded this event in the form of a film documentary (figure 2.29) with German video artist Bettina Hutschek and the financial input of the Malta Arts Fund programme. dr Riet Eeckhout, a partner of Architecture Project, worked with Bettina Hutschek’s video footage for a project, entitled 'Drawing Out Collapse'(figure 2.33-2.34) a project in collaboration with Australian artist Jon Tarry (figure 2.31-2.32), aiming to investigate generative methodologies of spatial construction born out of a demolition process to incorporate (in the drawing) the
physical and conceptual collapse of structures or indeed the continuous breaking down and reshaping of order which is an inevitably personal process.

The reflection upon this project of the gate demolition allowed me to distill a fundamental logic for our practice, which in many ways allows the collapse of object and subject through the act of observation.

Bettina Hutschek comments; “For several weeks in May 2012, I spent all day in and around the site, observing and filming. I filmed falling stones, dust, workers, concrete, onlookers, pigeons, machines, tourists, and loads and loads of rubble... machines working their way through layers of construction of former times, making space for a new construction, maybe even a new vision, which was best epitomized by the pigeons: having lost their sleeping convention in the gate, the birds had become homeless fragments of moving history.”

Riet eekhout and Jon Tarry write in a paper titled ‘Drawing out Collapse’; “How through drawing to examine this moment of collapse? One method chosen was to use lines to trace falling fragments in the mode of stop animation. A still of one frame of 18 per second was used. Similar to the moments recorded by Edward Muybridge of galloping horses and people walking, this still motion captures and contains the subject ... what is seen in the world through observation, action, idea, interrogation and conveyance. When drawing collapses it is creating this new space of (observational) possibility. Then begins the heuristic picking apart once the crash has taken place and all is still.”

I engage in the making of architecture through close observation of the world around me as I engage with the act of interpreting our sense of ‘the material’ in order to render a consciousness of the world. As a result of this my work - be it through drawing, building or film - aims to communicate this consciousness. Such practice forces an understanding of place not to be purely spatial but phenomenological for place exists as a relationship of materiality to consciousness. Dr. Bill Thompson describes this in his paper Architectural Hermeneutics with a term grouping three very important concepts; he claims that indeed to engage with a phenomenological space one requires being able to construct a personal manifestation of its spatial organization in other words one requires a phenomenological existentialist hermeneutics. This of course is set against a concept in which the referent (that what exists in the real world such as a building) would be capable of holding predetermined meaning. Thompson’s statement represents a shift to self-creation (by each of us) of the meaning of spatial environments in which it
becomes important for the architect (and others but certainly the architect) to develop a conscious awareness of the ever-changing relationships between objects and subjects. This erases any a priori value to an object and instead focuses towards achieving specific experiences or a set of experiences of the spatial environments we encounter. (6) This sets up an important connection between subject, other subjects and the material world (object). I generate knowledge of the world around me by being immersed in that world as living body. I share opinions with others about this world. Opinions created by others also by being immersed. As such the self, the other and the world cannot be separated in terms of existence. It reminds me of a pro cycle advert on billboards around London in 2013; using the line “You are not stuck in traffic, you are traffic” which in part illustrates how I exist simultaneously as individual and as world. Thus Phenomenological Existential Hermeneutics puts forward the participation of each individual in a life world through a sensorial relationship with that world (its material objects and other subjects). In order to know others ‘perception’ it is thus important to communicate however this holds an interesting paradox. When communicating ones own perception to someone else a suspension of the others freedom to explore is required. In order to acquire the impression of others one needs to exit the self in order to enter the other. As previously stated this is in fact only possible if indeed self, other and world are connected. It is however only through such acquisition of other impressions that one can become free to explore these impressions as implicit to the world in order to construct a consciousness of that world. What I perceive as greatest value in the set up of this triad is the dynamic relationships that ought to exist between an individual consciousness, the other and the world. This informs my architectural practice as the manufacturing of relationships between people and objects. One could call the product of these relationships ‘affect’ constructed through movement; in and around objects and by moving individual objects possibly through time. Such architectural practice cannot follow a ‘perfect method’ but instead requires the openness or freedom to move through endless sedimentations of relationships as a product of the interdependence between the self and the other. This also permits the projection of different ideologies upon similar form and vice versa different form upon similar ideologies. Such practice is however not entirely open. It leaves space for struggle such as the new entrance to the city of Valletta designed as a ‘breach’ of only 8m wide, reinstalling the narrow transition from outer to inner city. The narrow opening, similar to the width of first gate, is established by constructing infill-bastion-wall, tracing back 3 centuries of enlarging the city gate.
This new ‘gate’ (figure 2.30) is as much a material space as it is metaphysical; a non material space or void in which a mental object is to be constructed for the absence of the new gate has made present all the previous others.

In conversation with Ranulph Glanville, taking place during a number of tutorials with him and referenced in his impromptu introduction during the 2013 conference of the American Society for Cybernetics in Bolton, a Theory of Objects was developed, in line with his 1975 thesis “A Cybernetic Development of Epistemology and Observation, Applied to objects in Space and time (as Seen in Architecture)”. We discussed the need for some kind of structure; a framework in which individual consciousness of the world or an object in that world can coincide with a shared understanding of such an object in that world. This seems important in order to avoid an entirely solipsist attitude and necessary to avoid architecture to be reduced to a subjective idealism. The framework proposed is based on the previously mentioned nearness between subject and object. Glanville explains how this nearness is in fact a collapse of both subject and object. This can be explained through the self-observing subject; in which the subject looks at itself as object. Glanville also explains that if this act of self-observation is indeed reflective something happens with the subject-object.

This is in line with Merleau Ponty’s concept of the ‘figured philosophy of vision’ where he describes how the artist is seen as much as he is seeing; an instrumental capacity implicit to creative practice criticising the absolute Cartesian split between subject and object, observer and observed. Merleau-Ponty’s describes object and subject as intertwining concepts. He explains how embodied perception of the observer is inevitably enmeshed with our physical world, as we are bodies holding knowledge of this physical world as we form part of this world. A subject looking at itself (or indeed its practice which is very much the modus operandi of this PhD) through reflection will change itself because if one reflects upon his or her own practice the practice will change and with it the practitioner. This circulatory practice of reflecting and change stands at the basis of a particular didactic model of which this PhD is a product. What is important is that one can observe this change of the other. I will always be unable to know what the others consciousness is of the world but what I can see if I look at the other is his or her behavior and the change in such behaviors as the consequence of a reflective process. I can only observe consciousness or awareness if I observe myself. The important requirement for a practice in which individual consciousness of the world or an object in that world can coincide with a shared understanding of such an object in that world is freedom; the freedom for each individual (employee) to explore and learn (reflective practice) and represent this exploration and learning for others to observe.
In Drawing Out Collapse Riet Eeckhout and Jon Tarry describe “Drawing as making marks on a surface, a way to describe, inscribe and create knowledge, to investigate notions of spatiality.” They describe two positions of spatial and descriptive representation. One expanding inwards to enclose and describe a material world, the other expanding outwards into the world, searching. “One approach is continuous and holds in, while the other is a release that is partial and fragmentary. In order to come to terms with, and represent, our contemporary environment that changes and unravels at great and unpredictable speed, resisting the exclusion of one of these divergent positions is imperative. To acknowledge the condition of dynamic acceleration of change, the moment of drawing needs to encapsulate both the process of construction as that of breaking down. The process of construction is being continually developed and refined while the idea of undoing and collapse is much less explored as part of a disciplinary language. This lacuna in our tradition of representation, we felt, is worth examining further.”

“...We used this methodology to represent the evolution of a fragile urban area like that of the entrance into Valletta, the city built by the Knights of the Order of St John of Jerusalem. Here, a discontinuous transformation of the physical fabric has taken place throughout the centuries, marked by the unpredictable rise and fall of architectural and functional ambitions of the area. Historical continuity is guaranteed by the continuation over the years of interventions that mark time but do not necessarily blend seamlessly one into another. The interface between one phase and another, characterized by the intervention itself, the demolition of the old and the construction of the new, contains a wealth of information relating to the cultural, economic and technological context that generated it. But it remains often unchartered and unrecorded.

In 2011 the demolition process and rebuilding of the City Gate was presented as a transcendent condition of change to a public area and arrive at the new and desired situation. When a society builds, demolishes and rebuilds, it is mainly interested in the transformation, the discarding of the old in favour of the new, regardless of the process necessary to achieve this or the intermediary, transient condition that is an irrevocable part of the process. This is due to the traditionally irrelevant character of the latter, to its existence merely as a means to an end. As a result, the history of an urban area is conventionally narrated through a series of defined episodes or projects. The overlap of therefore analytical and cultivated operation mode we use to rationalize life; the activity that takes place on the left side and the right side of the brain respectively.”
The third city gate built in 1853 known as Porta Reale, which became “Putirjal” in Maltese, and “Kingsway” in English.
(figure 2.28) In 1964 the fourth gate was inaugurated. This gate was demolished in May 2011.
(figure 2.29) film still from a diary of demolition. A documentary by Bettina Hutschek
(figure 2.30) 'City Gate' project by Renzo Piano Building Workshop, in collaboration with Architecture Project.
(figure 2.31) Extracts from the drawing process of 'Drawing Out Collapse' by Jon Tarry & Riet Eeckhout
(figure 2.32) Extracts from the drawing process of 'Drawing Out Collapse' by Jon Tarry & Riet Eeckhout
(figure 2.33) Extracts from the drawing process of ‘Drawing Out Collapse’ by Jon Tarry & Riet Eeckhout (explained as Process Drawing)
(figure 2.34) Extracts from the drawing process of 'Drawing Out Collapse' by Jon Tarry & Riet Eeckhout (explained as Process Drawing)
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3.0 INEVITABLE RECONSTRUCTIONS
ADDRESSING A PARTICULAR NOTION OF TIME IN THE DESIGN OF PLACE

3.1 LOOKING AT URBAN SITES AS INEVITABLY HISTORICAL

I see my practice as part of an interdisciplinary practice with a central aim to accommodate a synergy between the description of objective propositions (i.e. conceived space) and the description of the ostensible (i.e. perceived space) and this in relation to an architecture practice where each project aims to address both historic and current aspects specific to a site. I observe space as deeply rooted in a cultural and socio-political history, as such, actively acknowledging what Henri Lefebvre describes as Social Space; a space that is ultimately experienced and not merely objectively observed [1]. Throughout the following chapters I correlate the principle of combining this focus towards conceived and perceived space or indeed social space with the principle of combining the idea of absolute and relative authenticity (in relation to renovation practice); ideas I will unpack later on. The main argument in this writing is the need for a specific drawing practice allowing me to indeed work through this conceptual triad. To explain this particular drawing practice I first need to explain a particular position on history, time, memory and repetition.

The world we experience today is entrenched by an infiltrating and ever extending communication apparatus, surpassing travel and physical migration, giving birth to simultaneous attendance in a super-metropolis of multiple interlaced localities. With my practice I deploy an explorative platform in search of many specific yet coherent views of this metropolitan landscape and with it its history. As such, work is not set in linear reference to a previous timeframe yet acknowledges history as a network of intersecting timelines. These intersecting timelines, suggest something resembling a fabric of history, a woven mesh, as opposed to a merely linear thread. This allows a viewing of urban sites through multiple pasts still resonating in the present. An important output here is a mode of thinking where it becomes increasingly more difficult to think outside or after history and much more appealing to sustain within its mesh of time. This way, I am confronted with the study of history beyond the scholastic notion of objectivism and serial events. Instead I can look at histories; as simultaneous drifts [4] of story telling drafted by particular zeitgeists, constructed and deconstructed and allow for an unpicking, a re-evaluation and eventually a re-composition of what once appeared as ‘matters of fact’.
To do so, a critical positioning is required, a ‘relative attitude towards history’ [2] by escaping a historical periphery in search for relevant points of intersection and overlap, particular to the site and the project at hand. The projects discussed in this paper address the city through the lens of place making, in search for what we refer to as relative authenticity. This involves a design attitude where an urban site is investigated as a place of intersecting social, historical, and technical trajectories. Projects thus address environments of ‘connective-ness’, where a multitude of indigenous and distant elements start to overlap and intersect in search for a site's reciprocal identity and this mainly through the act of drawing.

3.2 IMPLEMENTING A PLURALISTIC VIEW TOWARDS HISTORY TO DEPLOY THE CONCEPT OF RELATIVE AUTHENTICITY

To better understand a practice in search for a site’s reciprocal historical identity, it is of great importance to acknowledge various doctrines guiding an attitude towards renovation and restoration practice. Up to this day, the preservation doctrine established through the Venice Charter (1964) [3], still defines renovation practice as part of a ‘positivist truth-based method’. This objective approach to renovation implies somehow the substantiation of a material fetish aiming to consolidate historical sites as valuable material substance, ideally ‘frozen’ in a distant past; thus designating it to a particular timeframe. This notion of looking at historical sites as pure material form, isolated in time, does allow for certain blindness towards significant socio-cultural information, implicit to any location still active in the present. With the Burra Charter, issued in 1979 [4], we see a shift towards the incorporation of a more relative or contextual notion of truth in the way the status of a historical site is defined. By looking at historical sites inclusive current socio-cultural information surrounding the site, the understanding of its authenticity is not developed through a singular historical timeframe but through understanding history as a simultaneous ‘drift’ of important information uninterruptedly connecting past with present. The Nara Documents, issued in 1994 [5] build on these ideas of cultural relativism and express a strong desire to oppose the notion of authenticity as a ‘fixed concept’ and instead propose a more evaluative attitude; taking into account the context of individual cultures particular to the site. As such, we observe two contrasting concepts; defining or searching for authenticity through the reconciliation of a material past on the one hand and defining authenticity through a ‘relative attitude towards history’ on the other.
With my practice I combine these two concepts; sometimes I indeed reconcile a material past other times I do initiate new readings and adopt the idea of relative authenticity to allow myself to look at places as a pluralist; inclusive the mnemonic richness of a site across different timeframes. It is through research however I have come to understand the importance of implementing the idea of relative authenticity to allow me to develop a contemporary architectural vocabulary in dialogue with its own past. Too often, in the narration of history, (i.e. exhibitions, theatre, film but also architecture) history is portrayed through the notion of a false unity or 'pure historical timeframe' supporting the narration of history following a preset historical classification system; separating renaissance painting from baroque sculpture etc. In real life, of course, objects and spaces from many periods, old and new, surround us simultaneously; any pursue in excluding such mix-up and overlaps seems to accommodate a sense of denial. In 2003 I developed an architectural proposal for the New Valletta Coldstores (figure 3.01-3.02). The work illustrates an early take on the cultivation of a relative attitude towards history. The project is set against the outer bastion wall of Valletta; a UNESCO protected city and capital of Malta and describes an architectonic object as a collector and re-distributor of indigenous information to generate a 'site-explicit' proposal [6]. The new design for the Valletta Coldstore building accommodates a warehouse extension to the existing subterranean vaults within the Valletta Bastions, built by the Knights of Malta. Additional to the warehouse function the new design also provides for new office spaces and a small retail outlet. The site for this new building is a narrow ditch between a row of 18th century shop houses, facing the Valletta Harbour and the Valletta Bastions. As a design initiator, a preliminary stone volume is imagined, lodged in-between these two major limestone constructions, the very material the entire island is made of. This preliminary megalith is subjected to a series of subtractions to gradually generate its final outline. Local climatic conditions are used as parameters to subtract portions from the preliminary megalith; slanting the west façade to protect this from direct sunlight and carve into the east façade flanking the bastion wall to provide views of the sky above (figure 3.03-3.04). The use of limestone urges a solidity to withstand the Mediterranean climate and takes on old concepts of stone construction and climate regulation. The drawing of this building is established through what I have come to describe as an aesthetic sensing of, in this case, 18th century military architecture molded by 19th century trade routes. In doing so, direct references to historic aesthetic precedents or iconic linkages are avoided, supporting the driving principle of dislocating the form of this building from its conventionally associated meaning or symbolic value, without denying the presence and even the importance of such values [7].
Wind diagram indicating a prevailing NW wind, tunnelled by the Bastion walls.

In order to naturally ventilate the building, a double curtain wall system is used with the outer skin shaped as air streamsers to direct this prevailing NW wind into a ventilated cavity.

Glass air streamsers as flaps directed the prevailing wind into a ventilated cavity, providing the interior spaces with fresh air.

(figure 3.03-3.04) Coldstore
A design process through traditional encounters and multiple historical considerations thus allows for the avoidance of picturesque clichés. The resulting architecture gains an almost ‘observational’ status, reciprocating an active gaze towards history and sets up a paradoxical spatial interchange of simultaneous qualities of ‘distant and near’. Architecture as latent observer takes on a critical distance for it does not need to accommodate a literal resemblance to observed historical elements and principles. It is through this ‘strangeness’ that such architecture can perform as part of a cumulative yet inter-subjective memory nurturing the construction of a state of remembrance for all who enter and experience the stone carved spaces. This act of inscribing such kind of narrative capacity into architecture addresses that what I have described as the memorial and monumental values of our built environment. [8] To develop a negotiating position vis-à-vis concepts of absolute and relative authenticity (and with it develop the skills or techniques in order to work towards the idea of relative authenticity) I work through a practice set-up where drawing is used to describe both objective and experiential environments; urging the setup-of an intellectual interchange between conceived and perceived spaces or indeed absolute and relative authenticity. As a conduit into exploring these modes of conceived and perceived space I compose my drawing practice as a meandering between the use of drawing as a representational tool, in line with architectural professional codes, thus describing quantifiable space and the use of drawing as a perceptive tool in order to examine performative aspects of everyday life. As such, objective observations towards the physical and technological are complemented with more subjective observations towards the sensorial and emotional to enable a critical dialogue between that which might be categorized as allographic drawing practice and that which might be explored through autographic representational strategies. Robin Evans describes how architectural drawings throughout history have been seen as instruments allowing the projection of an idea towards built realization. Still today, we find within architectural practice and education priority is given to the referent of the drawings and their capacity to indeed describe a building-to-be. In ‘The Projective Cast’ (1995), Robin Evans studies the ways in which architecture always exceeds its representations “Architecture begins and ends in pictures, but I would urge resistance to the idea that pictures give us all we need. . . . The question is, how much more is ever brought within the scope of the architect’s vision of a project than what can be drawn” [9] Architect and author Stan Allen [10] describes the architectural drawing as a combination between three distinct practices. On the one hand as representational; since it describes quantities and qualities in a space other than that of the medium of the drawing. On the other hand he describes architectural drawing practice through notation and the production of diagrams which are often much more successful in expressing an experience of a building for example.
His definition of architectural drawing; representational on the one hand and ‘expressive’ (through notation and diagrams) on the other is in fact based on a distinction between autographic and allographic art forms as first described by the American Philosopher Nelson Goodman (1976). The concept of autographic art forms is defined through the notion that its value is in the original, which means that its authenticity is clearly depending on direct contact with the author. An example of this would be a painting or sculpture where a replica of the artwork cannot be considered equal. Allographic art is “capable of being reproduced at a distance from the author by means of notation” [9]. An example of this would be music scores. As it is a notational system musicians can interpret through learned conventions and then perform anywhere with the possibility of creating new experiences. One can see how architectural construction drawings can be considered to perform in line with musical notation. The diagram however, as Stan Allen describes it, is again different from notation in that it does not rely on learned conventions. The diagram is a drawing specific to its author and can be open to many interpretations because it is not conceived through learned conventions. We all know the diagram serving an explanatory function clarifying how to put together a toy or a piece of furniture for example. However, as Stan Allen explains [9] the primary function of the diagram is an abstract means of thinking about organization or indeed program its distribution in space, excluding the conventional dichotomy between form and function. Let us intersect this for a moment with the image of Ai Weiwei holding two hands full of his Sunflower Seeds standing in the Turbine Hall of the Tate Modern where 100 million of these hand-painted ceramic objects covered a section of the vast floor. With this image in mind we could re-read what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari wrote in A Thousand Plateaus [10]; “An abstract machine in itself is not physical or corporeal, any more than it is semiotic; it is diagrammatic…. It operates by matter, not by substance; by functioning, not by form…The diagrammatic or abstract machine does not function to represent, even something real, but rather constructs a real that is yet to come, a new type of reality”. When the exhibition opened in October 2010 people could walk over this carpet of handmade Sunflower Seeds. 1600 Specialists working in small-scale workshops in Jingdezhen for about 6 years followed traditional methods of crafting for what has historically been one of China’s most prized exports. When Ai Weiwei invited the masses to walk over Sunflower Seeds he in fact invited all of us to re-assess the ‘Made in China’ phenomenon and with it the geo-politics of cultural and economic exchange today. Very quickly however did Tate Modern make it impossible for people to walk over Sunflower Seeds, officially due to health and safety issues regarding dust but it also – and probably more importantly - prevented people from taking away hands full of porcelain.
There are thus two ways of reading this work of art; one could value Sunflower Seeds as indeed something physical, which of course it is, explaining why people would take away porcelain. In resistance to this, one could value the installation as diagrammatic; operating as “a basic structure which can be open for possibilities, a tool to set up new questions” as Ai Weiwei himself explains in an interview with Tate Modern Unilever Series in 2010. It is this type of ‘diagramming’, performing as a distributor - a tool for thinking - that I am interested in to allow me to ‘draw’ and study experiential and social qualities of space. To support a capacity to observe the world beyond its objective appearance and investigate that what I have come to describe as a site’s relative authenticity.

3.3 CONTINUATION OF HISTORICAL EXPERIENTIAL SPATIAL QUALITIES

In today’s urban environments, sited in network, the notion of place, as described by Marc Augé [1] and Michel de Certeau [2] has a reduced capacity to acquire ‘stability’ or apply the idea of absolute emplacement. Typically, when I analyse sites within the contemporary metropolis, I aim at understanding their identities through exploring relations of proximity, connecting a network of information such as local climate and socio-historical data with newly designed form, in order to generate contextual relevance for its new spatial conditions. A place, as defined by Marc Augé [1] and Michel de Certeau [2] is relational to its surrounding and its history. Yet in these current environments of ‘connective-ness’, the idea of relational proximity starts to show signs of absolute vastness. Where Marc Augé describes the emergent phenomenon of non-places [1] as a result of these global mediated conditions, I aim to put forward, as part of my research, the idea of rescaling the technique by which I assume emplacement. As illustrated through a number of projects later on, many urban sites I work with have gained a particular quality of emptiness. Erasures upon erasure of urban fabric, the subtraction of a local community, the abundance of vehicular traffic infrastructures interlaced with generic architectural mass has transformed such sites to urban vacuums. “Architectures that were once specific and local have become interchangeable and global; national identity has seemingly been sacrificed to modernity”, Rem Koolhaas states in his role as director of the Venice Architecture Biennale 2014 in which I participated with a counterproposal (figure 3.05-3.06). With the exhibition I present a film, in part, as a challenging force against this state of modernity not to promote national identities but to develop an architecture establishing continuity between past and present, architecture of duration to allow a narrative capacity to re-emerge in the way we assume emplacement. As I will explain I do this by according to a collapse of time, firstly within the space of the drawing.
Through drawing I place objects within the simultaneous-ness of all time past to allow endless possibilities of conceptual and formal intersection. Within this space I record décor for the object to accumulate historical traces with the aim to continue certain historical experiential spatial qualities without creating a theatre for nostalgic clichés.

3.4 EXPRESSING DURATION AS A SPATIAL QUALITY

In doing so I aim for the escape of a scholarly landscape of memory-theory to actively search for useful overlaps between indeed a scholarship of memory and a scholarship of vitalism [3]. My interest in memory is thus not entrenched in pursuing acts of conservation and tradition. When I speak of continuing historical experiential spatial qualities, I carefully act through tactics of duration and repetition to allow memory to be subjected to a variety of transformational forces. The act of repetition is thus subjected to conversion as opposed to conservation to engender what one could call architecture of becoming as opposed to architecture of being (with a certain Deleuzian connotation). The trajectory force in this instance is thus more oriented towards the future than it is towards the past, clearly without denying the importance of the past.

Like Constantin Constantius [4] I find myself trying to regain sensations and impressions from a past; not just my own but the past of any site anywhere in the world. Very much like Constantin Constantius I find that no such thing is possible; in that a repeated experience is a new experience in reference to the old and never ever equal or even remotely similar. Sensations and impressions cannot be regained as they were; as one would hold time in detention in a representation of the past without allowing the world to continue its ever-changing momentum. Repetition, as defined by Kierkegaard, has indeed a very significant property in that there can only be repetition through change. This understanding of generating difference through repetition opens up new exploratory roots of investigation into more profound understandings of architectural design in reference to its own history. Of course amongst everyone else, I undergo an uncompromising force towards the future as my grinning face gleams in the brightness of the future. However, as the mother of all inventions walks her ancestral path, modernism has allowed (but is not fully responsible) for a bridging of a historical topography and has offered us the highroad. Here I trace my scope for architecture; sustaining these urges for progress without the amplified need for fast semi-normalized architecture. Instead I want to recognize, time and time again the potency, the implicit sense of duration, history holds.
(figure 3.05) With our exhibition at Venice Biennale we presented 3 projects of which this is just one. Stanhope Gardens is an interior designed and built by us in which we explore aspects of relative authenticity. For each built work we produced a film through which we re-viewed our work [see chapter 5].
(figure 3.06) As a revisit of the project we thus produced a film (https://vimeo.com/71431382) exploring more in depth ideas on repetition and memory [see chapter 5]. This work set the basis for a ‘Practice by Replay’ through which I have produced series of drawings standing in composition with this writing from here onwards.
a fumed tactile dither – in-drawing - one accords to a collapse of time – dwelling the simultaneous-ness of time-past to allow endless possibilities - intersection - replay – embalmed by gaze as ones drawing in swaying candor collects historical trace
a summer tree is hailing seasons from afar - as deep inward large whispering mass - calibrating surface into tethering measure - for one to enter - stone mass - mind-body mustered rupture - taken apart in gathering
white dusty dunes intermit the toffee garden as one walks a path of intertwined wisdom and obsessions - to become instilled in what is stone - in what lays in dark geology - where our fathers quarried stone to build a cathedrals skin, their fathers discerned the quality of stone, in what exists within its darkness, its impossible interior - I invest in slow cuttings to explore compressed darkness
3.5 TIME AS DURATION

Time in this instance is perceived as a force on which multiple pasts; memories and chronicles drift simultaneously and interdependently. As such I observe the status of the past as a positive presence sustaining a momentum of actuality.

Henri Bergson opposes the concept of time and the idea of our consciousness within to be a linear construct of divisible instants such as hours, minutes and seconds [3]. Mainly because this Newtonian understanding of time as quantified segments does not allow us to understand or even come in contact with the qualitative nature of time and our being conscious of that time. For example; if I enter the Duomo in Milan I can experience an overall experience of contentment and awe (which I do every time). Walking through a field of gigantic stone pillars this feeling cannot be subdivided in moments. One experiential moment of walking along the nave continues into a next experience of walking along the transept windows without clear boundaries or identifiable margins between these experiences. Bergson defines this as duration; a progression of qualitative changes allowing one to impact the other. In a conversation with Joel McKim [3] at a conference in London where we both presented a lecture he provided me with an account of what Bergson and Deleuze unravel as an elaborate structure of time and addresses two very different kinds of past; on the one hand he accounts for a past that was once present such as us walking past the transept windows of the Duomo. On the other, he explains the existence of an a-priori past into which the former present can drift. This pure-past pre-exists the passing present and forms a repository for all former presents to exist in a virtual state of coexistence [6]. Deleuze writes; “it is the whole, integral past; it is all our past, which coexists with each present” (Deleuze 1991, 59). It is precisely because of this co-occurrence of past and present that one can never repeat an event from the past without significantly changing the experience of this. This also explains the impossibility of reclaiming or reconstructing the ‘original meaning’ of any historic event or object, as many art historians have attempted to do.

So I ask myself; how can I work productively from an inevitable present through memories of the past? With my Monolith drawings I associate with what Bergson and Deleuze explain as the process of remembering through a double act of expansion and contraction taking place in what they refer to as the pure-past. Bergson describes the first act of remembering as an expanding action; bringing oneself into the realm of the pure-past in which all past events coexist in reference to the presence. Here one enters a simultaneous-ness of all time past; a duration of monumental vastness. Although not directly translatable into a cognitive exercise I engage with such consciousness first of all by accepting such concept of time.
This acceptance allows me to tear down earlier barriers between past and present architecture. Between historical references and contemporary precedents. Between the palaces meticulously restored and the new architectural proposals I designed for them. Although such walls are merely metaphorical and the tearing down only a conceptual act the output is enormous. The effect on my practice of architecture represents a shift from being a humble observer of history to activating a vast architectonic heritage as part of a contemporary practice. This has allowed me to develop the Monolith drawing in order clearly aimed at reversing the idea of history being irrevocably.

The second act would be a movement through a specific event I want to recollect. This is possible, as Deleuze describes, through an action of compression; through which the entirety of the past remains present yet in a contracted form and positioned towards a specific event. Both authors describe the recollection of past events into the present as a movement through a pure-past. In many ways my Monolith drawings are to be seen as compressions of an a priori past into particular drawing present. As earlier explained they do not represent objects in a secular reality yet engage with space as a phenomenological entity. As such, the drawing illustrates a looking for an architectural vocabulary holding an entirety of the past yet in a contracted form.

This ‘Practice by Replay’ produces drawings designed through a process of recollection as opposed to following a practice of reaffirming existing historical interpretations. I allow drawings to take form in a field of relational conditions drawn as volumes; cutting into one another, to slice, to part, to recompose and eventually create new sectional conditions. In this space of intersectional forces, old data becomes potent again, dormant images awake just before they indeed intersect with others and intensely change. This work resists the use of the metaphor; in that I do not aim for the transposition of older concepts and tradition to a present architecture. Instead I aim for instilling new substance through the intersection and replay of old form; like a musician plays an ancient melody instilling this with new significance as he/she plays the notes.

Deleuze suggests the possibility for memory to be an active creative process. I use my Monolith drawings to excavate previously unseen memory in a landscape of current and historic imagery to form new embankments and guide possible streams of thought.

Like most pictures, the imagery I choose to retrace holds implicit qualities of duration; a latent certainty of continuity. When I look at a photograph, study the instilled moment, I know something happened before and after that photo was taken. In fact I look at the picture with this exact knowledge. This concealment of information generates its magnificence; providing meaning to that-what-is by means of that-what-is-not (visible).
One could say this to entail the performative nature of the medium of photography; in that the image can act as décor against which new memory is to be constructed by the onlooker. The still image is keeping still for a moment or indeed is keeping a moment still. It is holding back and continuously speaks of it’s holding. The exact knowledge of this holding is of no importance, not to me. Essential to the performance of the image is for it to allow an audience, through a responsive consciousness, to coauthor the photograph’s meaning. The act of drawing - the retracing of the image – aims at the consolidation of this responsive consciousness; recording décor through the act of drawing as one expands in the image only to enter a state of perception taking place in what Deleuze describes as pure-past; a space in which all past drifts simultaneously and lines are allowed to intersect and correlate indiscriminately.

3.6 ON REMEMBRANCE

In the spring of 2009 Nicolas Bourriaud proposed the term ‘Altermodernism’ announcing a new era following Postmodernism to describe aesthetic proposals critically engaging with an increasingly global context [1]. This ‘new’ term is deployed as an explorative platform in search of a 21st century modernism, very different from Postmodernism for example, which is setting us after or outside the historic period of modernism. As such, Altermodernism does not exist in linear reference to a previous timeframe yet acknowledges history as a network of intersecting timelines where it becomes increasingly more difficult to think and thus design outside or after history.

John Ruskin describes in his sixth chapter of the ‘Seven Lamps of Architecture’ [2] the importance of a narrative capacity implicit to architecture and urban design. In this pursue of story telling, architecture thus exemplifies its capacity to engage with the idea of recall, setting up a state of remembrance for its users. He describes the architectonic body, in line with literature, to perform as part of a cumulative memory underlining the memorial and monumental values of our built environment. Very much in line with writing, this conveyance of historical information is described to perform in the stone surfaces shrouding space where metaphors, in the form of ornamentation, support its users ‘remembrance’. As a child after modernism I was educated to deliberately dislocate and abstract historical associations in favor of an industrial vocabulary, celebrating concepts of objectifying abstraction. I remember my first experiments (even before my architectural education) in engaging with historical tradition whilst looking at Ruskin’s oeuvre did not succeed in breaking out of the imprisonment of a
present and contemporary discourse. Even Ruskin eventually recognised his stylistic legacy of
the Pseudo-Gothic to have resulted, as he describes, “in an accursed Frankenstein monster of
my own making” [3].

Now many decades later, during the final stage of my PhD, the Monolith drawing allows for
reading the city as part of a cumulative memory, unlocking a critical attitude towards the
representational tools through which I analyse and describe urban space. More in particular
how I aim to reinstall ‘remembrance’ (not to say the poetic image) by combining classical
representational tools (i.e. plan, section, elevation), in line with architectural professional
codes, with modes of phenomenological reading through autographic media. The need to
juxtapose material ideas and concepts against layers of historical and social information,
explored through the Monolith drawing, can be explained as a process of inclusion, aiming to
incorporate a multitude of contextual information, seen and unseen, particular to a site and
across different timeframes. As previously mentioned, spatial compositions, embracing me-
memorial and monumental values, do hold qualities of ‘strangeness’ and stand explicitly different
against their material setting. In doing so I avoid working through pre-established arche-
typical vocabularies to indeed allow me to surpass my own locality and enter the drawing;
a meditative instrument for something to be revealed beyond imagination (very often filled
with clichés) but as a product of time.

3.7 PLURALITY OF SYSTEMS OF INTERPRETATION

In a world where memory has become part of a global culture the social act of remembering
has changed in our recent history. Not so long ago history provided relative stability in its
representations of past events. This stability has been shattered and ‘today we think of the past
as memory without borders rather than national histories within borders’; today memory
is understood as a mode of re-presentation and as belonging to the present.’[5] Through the
work of my practice I engage strongly with the idea of the past performing through the pres-
ent. Such practice is not marked by the design of explicit memorials tied to official histories of
specific communities; yet aims at a process of including residues of (perhaps mythical) nar-
ratives when I design new architecture. As such, my work does not want to gravitate towards
designing places for exception yet involves designing places of the everyday. In recent work,
and perhaps in seeming conflict with the previous statement, work references ideas on mor-
tality, not so much to commemorate the death but to instill a specific experiential, sensory
quality. A quality we have all experienced when we pass a grave and are confronted with
death as we become conscious of the presence of human remains. In this moment we expe-
rience a halt in our everyday life and seem to be carried to another place [6], a place usually
submerged within the self. It is in this moment time collapses to a dense mesh through which
we experience a lingering consciousness stretching into an immensity of time-space; a vast-
ess approaching a state of nullity.

It is such description of monumentality, as incalculable enormity, I look for, to complement
the notation of the material with a phenomenological monumentality; in such a way that
a certain place or object allows me to feel or perceive something beyond itself. It is thus
important for me to set myself outside the practice of designing exceptional spaces in that
such spaces often become substitute environments upon which political agendas are trans-
posed, unavoidably diminishing the richness and diversity of individual experience. I want
to contemplate architecture and urban design freed from compensating moralizing tactics
for it cannot embody any truths or act as a correction of life (such as in war memorials). The
architectonic body does not have to warn or remind us, but can remain 'empty' and in doing
so become endlessly more forceful.

“How would the painter or poet express anything other than his encounter with the world?”
exclaims Maurice Merleau-Ponty at the start of his seven lectures on science and perception
[7]. Around the same time, Jean-Paul Sartre states Architecture to mediate between the outer
and the inner worlds by means of its suggestive and mediating metaphors [8]. This metaphor-
ical performance does not limit itself to a symbolizing relationship; the metaphor is implicit
to the world and spaces we inhabit. As an architect I aim at such mediating performance to
gaze at the world and my being in it as I draw and model space. Architecture, and urbanism
as such, is a performing event. ‘Gaston Bachelard introduces in his 1957 La poétique de
l’espace the concept of topo-analysis [9]; ‘a psychoanalysis of places’, in such, studying our
phenomenological relationship with places. The object of study here is not merely architec-
ture; the aim is to study how space (that what exists within and around architecture) accom-
modates consciousness or as Bachelard denotes; reverie. A consciousness accommodated
by a collapse of time; where multiple pasts and present come together. Any attempt to locate
this moment however, would allow us to understand the placeless-ness of this event. Past and
present do not come together in one point. Any definition of such point would be a falsifying
act. Through this research having become interested in generating structures of conscious-
ness (that what started with studying my own spatial consciousness) (van Schaik 2011) I can
only enter an incalculable enormity to experience vastness beyond any point. I will explain
this further in chapter 5 after a more in depth commentary on drawing the Monolith drawing.
- arching - ogling a hollowing middle - ribs of stone row – for we did not enter space – for we have been swallowed by an amassing giant - mistaken for Romans – we are Levantines – hollowing the under-ground
architecture predating modernity does not present statuettes or moralising ornament - for all there is - is stone carving empty space – thrusting into a fronting world - imbedding densities - a particular forcefulness for one to encounter
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4.0 DRAWING AS A THIRD PARTY PHENOMENA
ADDRESSING A PARTICULAR DRAWING PRACTICE OF REPLAY

4.1 TRACING THE PERFORMANCE OF SPACE

My practice, like most others, is often led by preconceived sculptural images (what I explained as poetic images in my introduction) as I mediate within a network of intersecting timelines. They manifest themselves as figurations lingering in the poiesis of each project. As part of my design method (developed through this research), I strive for a resistance of these figurations and eliminate implicit figurative qualities by deploying a drawing discourse of ‘replay’, as will be explained later, through which a multiplicity of historical data is embraced without the inclusion of archetypical elements that would lead to figuration. The term figuration is used to denote levels of conventionally associated meaning or symbolic value; often through the use of archetypical historicised elements in the composition of architectures; something I thus want to avoid. This sets up a practice of paradox; negotiating the architectonic body as figure in the storey telling of place yet resisting figuration (avoiding a subordination to the preconceived image) and therefore designing presence through levels of absence. Projects born out of this practice exist as ‘circulatory systems’ as previously mentioned including film, drawing and writing with the aim to define a broad practice-platform with a central methodological concern; language as primary material - designing the (architectural) figure freed from its figurative role.

This drives a design discourse where subordination to a historical taxonomy can be side-stepped. In doing so, the Monolith drawings have become instruments of internal dialogue [10]. They guide a process of discovery setting up a continual recording of boundaries as a graphical manipulation of solid and void. These recordings, subject to specific parameters, seen and unseen and across different timeframes, set up a multifaceted interchange between drawing and context yet aim at repressing any passive recording of nostalgic clichés. The outcome negates the creation of an architectural metaphorical mark (buildings as symbols or icons) and instead aims for the description of a new and highly contextual object/landscape supporting a state of remembrance; reciprocating an active gaze towards history interweaving multiple pasts with present.

As intrinsic part of this practice the drawing is used as detour, only to arrive at a more direct interest in the mediating metaphorical performance of spaces. Mainly by drawing through levels of sensation rather than drawing representations of an a priori formal
vocabulary (historicised archetypes) in order to look at symbolising relationships freed from the picturesque. As such, symbolising relationships in space are explored through ‘the making visible of forces’, sequentially moulding form. I look at this drawing practice as an aesthetic sensing of forces within the space of the drawing to trace the performance of a space. Through my education and the early years of my practice I had become very distant to such practice. Although for many cultures throughout history such practice has always been on the foreground. To illustrate, we could look at differences between ancient languages. In Anglo-Saxon sentence structure the verb is subordinate to the noun for example. This partly supported the development in western civilisation of an enlightened view of the world where a Cartesian understanding of things allows us to describe the world as the relationship between objects (as opposed to the subject-object which I will explain later on). So when I speak of a ‘house’ in English I denote an object or a cluster of objects. With this, I identify a principle keystone to the inherent characteristic of a consumer society wherein everything can be defined as (consumable) object [11], even the sensory aspects of life, ultimately to be turned into quantifiable commodities. As mentioned before my education as an architect very much trained me to think and work through concepts of objectifying abstraction to describe and engage with abstract space; privileging the objective over the element of experienced space [12]. When I look at the Hebrew language for example I see a sentence structure where the noun is subordinate to the verb. When I speak of ‘house’ in Hebrew I denote a performance and not an object. Therefore ‘house’ becomes ‘housing’ and the idea of an abstracted object is replaced by the idea of a performing space.

My preoccupation with sensation is not only a strategy to look at experienced space but also allows me to proclaim a feeling of discontent, of a disagreement of form, of current form as a normative formal language; a guiding force in our consumerist apparatus. As such, my drawings exist in a state of emancipation claiming back territory from this normative imprisonment. At the same time they exist in a state of becoming, of en-forcing form towards unimagined spaces. In the drawing of these spaces, or more specifically the drawing towards these spaces, different levels of figuration are mediated. The architectonic figure could be described as signifying form deeply embedded in a cultural language. Figures are archetypical elements such as front porches, pitched roofs and clock towers. When I speak of negotiating the architectonic body, as figure yet resisting figuration in the storytelling of place, the none-figurative is not accomplished through abstraction but through a process of isolation and replay; this I will explain in greater detail in chapter 4.4 after a more general account on a particular status of the Monolith drawing.
4.2 USING AUTOGRAPHIC STRATEGIES AS MODE OF REPRESENTATION TO UNPACK RELATIVE – EXPERIENTIAL QUALITIES OF A SITE

In his ‘The Production of Spaces’, Henri Lefebvre [1] describes how our western industrialized world overwhelms us with concepts of objectifying abstraction. With this, he refers to the inherent characteristic of a consumer society wherein everything can be turned into a traded object, in such a way that even sensory aspects of our everyday life are dealt with in terms of quantifiable commodities and categories. He describes how concepts of objectifying abstraction stand at the basis of a professional authority, such as architecture, to describe and engage with abstract space by privileging the element of ‘conceived space’ (mathematically qualified and conceptualized space), and repressing the element of experienced space or ‘perceived space’.

This observation leads Lefebvre to distinguish three categories of spaces (or what he calls ‘fields’); physical space (conceived as a product of processes of thinking, abstracting, measuring, categorising, etc.) and mental space (perceived through experience, memory, allegory, smell, touch, etc.) form the basis. Then there is a third field that he describes as social space, a space that can only be lived and that is a combination of physical space and experienced space, becoming, as a result, a container of social myths and narratives. With my latest work produced towards the end of this research (Stanhope Gardens film and the Monolith drawings in particular) I navigate between allographic and autographic ‘drawing’ to accommodate a study of this lived space and allow for the production of architectural proposals that are not just an answer to physical or programmatic issues but something much more complex; the idea of social space; lingering everywhere in the city but as it appears to me - too often overlooked. Lefebvre argues, in line with what I will write on Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s ‘figured philosophy of vision’, that our basic understanding of the world is devised by a sensory spatial relationship between our body and the world. Our understanding of space is in direct correlation to the understanding of our bodies spatial presence, long been suppressed by Cartesian duality. His central claim, that space is a social product, directly challenges the predominant western (Cartesian) “idea that empty space is prior to whatever ends up filling it.” [1]. “Western philosophy has betrayed the body; it has actively participated in the great process of metaphorization that has abandoned the body; and it has denied the body.” [1] Lefebvre describes the body, as simultaneous subject and object and can therefore not tolerate the conceptual division between body and space. This of course is important to indeed accomplish a point of view that I previously explained as looking at history without any safe distance. It is only without safe distance one can enter its mesh of time, present and past.
4.3 THE AUTONOMOUS DRAWING VS THE IMPLICIT SUBJECT

Until now I have explained an interest in architectural history vis-à-vis contemporary practice as a meandering between two opposing concepts; absolute and relative authenticity, models borrowed from restoration and renovation practice. As previously explained [7] my work is positioned between a searching for absolute authenticity (when dealing with historical sites) through the reconciliation of a material past and relative authenticity allowing current socio-cultural parameters to impact the identity of the renewal of a historical site. This indeed explains an attendance to the already existing stone landscapes of ruin. However the urge for the previously denoted quality of ‘strange’ in the resulting architectural output (an more recently the Monolith drawings) remains partially unexplained.

Understanding the deceptiveness of historical rhetoric, capable of performing a profound yet dangerous political swagger, my working methods escape the supremacy of written transcripts and favor the use of the pictorial; the image as self-determining object. As such, my work does not reference old ideals symbolically. Instead I draw forms of old form through a process of multiple reiterations and repetitions. Drawings are transposed onto one another to allow lines to interfere and create new sectional conditions permitting architectural form of unforeseen complexity; a grammaticism of collisions and compressions to eventually expand in time.

Ideas on the cultural implications of form can be traced through multiples of debates and opposing theoretical strata. On the one end of the theoretical spectrum I observe self-confirming discourses of form making through sets of pre-defined cultural operations. Examples of such operations would be a Classist Architecture based on Roman ideals. On the other end of the spectrum I observe languages of pure formal abstraction detached from the contingencies of place and history such as the 5 points of modernism in early 20th century architecture.

I actively search for a positioning between these two appearing oppositions by indeed remembering history through a process of repetition (and thus change) allowing the autonomy of an abstract formal system to develop and instill a space of critical displacement, as illustrated in the following chapter. Important is however to identify the difference between the role of a designer (me) and the role of a cultural historian for example, with regards to positioning oneself against the historic architectural object.

I do not negate the implicit cultural value of a historic formal language and the significance of its form as expressions of previous cultural values. I do not negate the correspondence between a pervious culture and its architecture however would find it problematic if this retrospective viewing would be a lone theoretical route taken to qualify the historic object.
If this would indeed be the case all historic architecture could merely be seen as completed and instilled in time past, which is explained in the above as impossible. Nor do I believe in an alternative were the absence of historical concern would clear the way for a practice concealed in pure conceptual space where architecture is conceived as an autonomous object by means of contained sets of formal operations. With my practice I position myself as equidistant from both ends of this theoretical spectrum and work towards historically insinuated architecture by using semi-autonomous formal systems of repetition. As such I can ponder as a child of my time, fascinated by the role of the image as it drives our mediated world and its architecture. It was sociologist and philosopher Georg Simmel who described a chaotic world in the first half of the 20th century as such; “the rapid crowding of changing images, the sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance, and the unexpectedness of onrushing impressions. These are the psychological conditions which the metropolis creates” [8]. He described this to stand at the basis of a certain indifference by bystanders and architects alike; symptomatic of a voluntary cognitive castration to survive the chaos. I see my work and mainly through the Monolith drawings as an attempt to contemplate on the vitality to counter such indifference and work with the ambiguities and disjunctions created by the metropolis as we stand at its crest. I pay tribute to Jean Arp and his comment: “Dada wished to destroy the hoaxes of reason (in its pursue for order) and to discover an unreasoned order” [9] when I draw new architectures. Even if it is just to remind myself, time and time again, I can only strive for a creation of architecture which cultural significance is inherently unresolved.

4.4 ISOLATION AND REPLAY

With an overall speculative positioning of my drawing practice in place I can now describe in more detail important procedural aspects in the Monolith drawing. In general, my drawing discourse is initiated by isolating a figure from its original narrative framework. The first ‘act’ in the drawing entails a tracing of site-specific information. As such, the figure (and with it, the person drawing the figure) is placed in an empty field allowing the drawing of the figure to become site. Within this field, the act of drawing accommodates a tracing of forces through which a process of reconfiguration takes place. The isolation of the figure does not install inertia yet accommodates a looking, an exploration of the figure within the operative field of the drawing. Through this isolation of the figure, its relational symbolic ties are momentarily broken and the figure becomes image. In Lacanian terms, the figure trans-locates from the symbolic order to the imaginary order or what has been described as
the pre-mirror phase; the moment in the psychological development of a child where it fails to recognise itself in the mirror yet only sees the image of another child. One could say that through this process of drawing, a momentary state of psychosis is established where the figure becomes image, disrupting any relation to signified meaning. Here the act of figuration has been compromised and the drawing enters a state of the figural, as described by Foucault [14]. In this state of the figural (the non-figurative yet non-abstract) relations between image and object are broken. The image as such, does not illustrate the object anymore and becomes pure image. The drawing in this momentary state of psychosis halts the act of figuration in the performance of the drawing and instead submits the image as image without reference but to itself. Such image accommodates an inwards looking and reveals a self-exploring figure. With this type of drawing I can invest in sensation freed from the demands of representation and thus pre-set architectural vocabularies. If one describes the pre-set vocabulary within architecture and urban design as a set of figurative figures (architrave, column, portico) it is important to understand that the drawing freed from the demand of figuration does not erase the figures. In line with what I have written in relation to Jenny Saville her work, figures remain present in the drawing however within the drawing there is the emergence of figures freed from figuration. This state of the drawing; the state of psychosis, dislodged from reality, is only momentarily in my drawings. In such a way that at certain points the drawing becomes an illustration of architeconic or urban space again. As such, the shift from the representational to pure image is at some point reversed; the drawing shifts from pure image back into a representational state. This moment of the re-representational marks a moment in the drawing were its symbolic relationships are re-established after a process of isolation and replay. This confirms the drawing as detour, only to arrive at the study and design of symbolising relationships in architecture and urban design yet freed from the picturesque, the cliché or the archetype. The Monolith drawings placed in composition with this writing hold the above-mentioned qualities. They are in fact preparations for 7 large drawings I aim to exhibit in Barcelona. They are all situated within a site of historical significance, suffering greatly from an almost total erasure of its mnemonic properties. Every drawing starts with ‘visiting’ vast visual repositories of deleted urban scenes, places with ghostly properties connecting our world with an intangible past. [15]. In doing so the drawing actively resists any act of objectifying these deleted urban scenes (by not using exact formal references) in order to focus more on an aesthetic sensing or replay of historical spatial qualities and this in relation to the current site.
As such, the design of place (which is of great importance) is the result of composing spaces, objects and times [15]. The Monolith drawings are thus not a matter of composing form or harmonies but are occupied with unraveling implicit forces within existing form and harmonies as the drawing meanders through multiple spaces, objects and times. This indicates perhaps a lesser interest in ‘new form’ for the drawing assimilates a practice of continuing form by studying forces within (historical) form (16). As such, the act of drawing engages in the unraveling of forces within the memorial realm of an architectural consciousness in order to bring into presence what has become absent. Paul Klee states in his famous formula ‘not render the visible but to render visible’. Similarly, Monet paints forces of light and Bacon paints forces of de-figuration, energies that are invisible unless made evident through third party phenomena such as Newton’s apple falling from the tree. I see my drawings as third party phenomena; indirectly making visible, as opposed to typical architectural drawing practice which annotates a projected state of the visible [17].

The use of drawing as such cultivates a design process towards remembrance; to reinstate the presence of historical figures freed figuration to allow a spatial performance of these figures, not through a process of post modernist iconic recycling yet through a process of making visible, implicit forces and harmonies in the world we see around us and this through multiple timeframes.

An important output in this research – cultivated through a deeper understanding of my stance towards historic architecture – is a method of drawing reversing the idea of history being irrevocably. I achieve this by a mode of drawing implementing the above-mentioned operations and associate the solidity explored in the Monolith drawing with a robustness of substance; architecture as a far gazing instrument accumulating continuously...

The following set of drawings illustrates a step-by-step process of lithic reduction as part of the drawing construct of the Monolith drawing. As set out in my Formal Declaration, the Monolith excludes compositional rationalism resulting in the impossibility of linking the aesthetic output to a clear set of rules. However the Monolith does indeed engage with a perpetual process of recuperating history or indeed recuperating time. In doing so the Monolith allows for the visualization of working through time with time.

This starts with interpreting a sense of ‘the material’ in order to render a consciousness of a particular place through time. The drawing aims to communicate this process of developing such consciousness and its relation to materiality. This gently erases the a priori value of an object and allows for a more sensorial relationship with that object. I have previously explained this as nearness between subject and object.
This allows for embodied perception as I - as observer and author of the drawing - become inevitably enmeshed with the drawing as I am enmeshed with the physical world of which the drawing and I form part. The Monolith is thus developed through the craft of occupying time (and not so much occupying space since I am inevitably part of that space).

As I mention before, The Monolith is conceived through a process of projection and subtraction, acting and responding, making and unmaking in order to allow new conditions to emerge. I have mentioned the mythology of stone in previous chapters as one of the important conditions or spatial qualities explored with the drawing of the Monolith. I have explained how this entails the making present of something that in fact can only be absent since the mythology of stone can only remain in the solidity of stone. The Monolith is thus part absent and part present, as I work through act of remembering, repeating and working-through.

Figure 4.01 The Monolith drawing starts with the composition of a primary volume; a vault in this case with surrounding 'subtractors'; a series of cone-like volumes and a set of spheres. The expressive value of vaults and domes as primary volumes play an important role due to their implicit structural capacity both as positive and negative volume. With each subtraction of such volume a weight bearing capacity is developed in the remaining monolith.

Figure 4.02 Subtractions create voids in the primary volume. What is shown here as a simple step in fact consists of a slow process of multiple projections and subtractions to move gradually from the outside of the monolith to the inside in search of the mythology of stone. This process of subtraction creates spaces without a clear inside or outside in order to instill in-between space or indeed nurture an architectural potency between inside and outside.

Figure 4.03 The resulting negative space is shown as positive in this drawing. This serves as an intermediate evaluation. This casted negative space explores that what has become absent - 'an activated absence' in which the coalition of subtractors gain potency as they trace the contours of this continues interior.

Figure 4.04 This is an intermediate moment in the drawing where the idea of symmetry is explored by creating a subtractor out of the mirror image of the resulting monolith. The composition illustrates a recognizable sense of ornamentation with a somewhat anachronistic quality. However the subtractor will not remain for it will subtract
negative space out of the monolith as seen in figure 4.05. Here one can see how the presence of symmetrical ornamentation becomes absent yet present in its absence for it has created traces of its being in the drawing – an activated absence.

Figure 4.05  The Monolith carries traces of ornamentation however these do not serve as figuration but as part of a tectonic expression. Ornamentation is seen as the creation of an architecture where elements gain form through a process of ‘mutual sympathy’ as part of an overall aesthetic intention. This mutual sympathy allows for the opening to be announced by traces in the surrounding mass. The Monolith moderates the above principle to one instantaneous act; obliterating any sense of arrangements of individual elements in the construction of architecture and instead instill entireness through various stages of mutation.

Figure 4.06  Here again the resulting negative space is shown as positive in this drawing. The resulting space also speaks of ‘mutual sympathy’ between spaces, areas, and alcoves. Each space is engaged with being empty and always in process of announcing the emptiness of surrounding spaces; this to instill a sense of entireness and continuity between different spaces both inside and outside.

The Monolith drawings have allowed me to develop the process of drawing myself into the history of a project or site. To allow myself to embody previous design acts not through repetition but through change and consequently prepare the set up of a design discourse occupied with the continuation of historical spatial qualities. These drawings are thus instruments for remembering and working through the history of a particular site. 15 years of practicing served as a laboratory of exploring different attitudes towards historical architecture. Venturing from distant approached to much more close encounters. The Monolith drawing now finally allows me to enter history.
References;


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[28] Eeckhout R.: Resisting the representational, conference presentation; Why is it so difficult to speak about architecture, UCL faculty of Architecture, 3,4,5 December 2013.


[34] Allen, S. Field Conditions, Points + Lines, Princeton Architectural Press, 1999
gripping tender correlations, a pulpit of object specific consciousness
- drawn into riverbeds subsists dried textual nuance for when it rains
the grounds absorb life through prewritten conjunction - we drink
our stories out of deep wells of scattered text with no imputation,
elbowed till afternoon, tea heats up the chatter and the evening wine
gives rise to an unconsidered markings in the sand - we drink stories
of previous consistencies and coincidences
caverns guide cultures in which we do not enter and though we have settled for the multitasking of every ones identity and persuasive expectations – what there is - in fact - are crusting fractures for one’s pondering gaze
Within the timeframe of developing this PhD two projects were constructed (complementing a number of exhibitions); one on site in London (fig 5.01) and the other in a factory in Bristol (fig 5.02). Both projects allow for an evaluation of the concepts laid out in previous chapters. This evaluation comes with a critique. The conceptual design of both projects started at the beginning of the PhD and took 3 to 4 years to complete. As such the projects indeed integrate preliminary ideas explored in the PhD but due to the nature of an architectural design and construction process could not meander in line with the research process. As such both projects hold fossil qualities; pre-requisites of an early thinking process yet incomplete as they are now ‘set in stone’. Nevertheless these provide an interesting opportunity to look back and formulate an evaluation.

The first project is a renovation project of a listed 3-storey Victorian property in London in which Riet and I designed a ‘super furniture’ (fig 5.01). This project combines the approach of relative and absolute authenticity in relation to the heritage value of the site. I evaluated the project through the making of a film, which in itself became a new project exhibited at the Venice Biennale 2014. The cinematographic means of this evaluation allowed me to alter my perception of the built work. Film in this instance becomes an instrument through which built structures are re-viewed and eventually recomposed. The observed physical entity, of course, remains the same but the film provides the construct for new spatial qualities and eventually refreshing views upon a project and consequently my architectural practice. As such, the film explores the concept of memory as a collection of possible interpretations and anticipations corresponding to this ‘super furniture’ and its surrounding interior space. In doing so the film thus becomes an instrument with which I can guide a process of cognitive reduction to allow me to move beyond mere analytic observation of a physical reality. This individual process of reflection evolved into public work for the exhibition in Venice with the aim to illustration to people a viewing of architecture beyond analytic scrutiny and physical realism. The productive possibilities of film allow the regrouping of elements in order to compose different consequential outcomes. Literal forms of projection and subtraction were executed during the recordings and postproduction of the film. Subtraction is implicit by means of framing and directing the camera. Projection is explored through the actual duplication of footage during the filming on site. Subtraction is also executed during the editing of the film. Such production process
allows me to change the lineage of time and with it the geographical perception of certain places in the film. Very much like the Monolith drawings, this process of filming constitutes a working-through previous work. I in fact allowed myself the fetish to perceive this as a Practice by Replay to the second order. Since the film constitutes very much a working-through the working-through of a project. This with the aim to accommodate an evaluation of how the process of ‘reduction’ has allowed for a particular architecture to emerge and how the working-through the working-through of a project can guide a cyclical developmental process of production and reflection. This I will explain further in the following chapter.

The second project is a new-built project where I developed a mobile modular tensile structure with which to construct nomadic settlements in South East Asia. The module is called IDE (fig 5.02) and stands for Instant Domestic Enclosure entailing 60 square meters of domestic space divided into four internal areas; a central heart with a sleeping area, bathing area and lounge. IDE operates as a portable dwelling with the aim to contribute to levels of social and ecological sustainability, combining this with advanced standards of living to provide for camp experiences surpassing the idea of provisional housing. First point of implementation will be North of the Philippines. As such the module integrates 3 indigenous characteristics as found in traditional Nipa architecture, such as being elevated from the ground creating a raised entrance, having a large pitched roof with a central opening for ventilation and indeed a central heart around which different ‘rooms’ are organized referencing a core concept found in Sagada and traditional indigenous dwellings around the world (fig 5.13-5.14). The design of this tensile structure addresses a sense of origin as I engage with working through ancient architectural principles. However the current design does not yet succeed in working towards that what I have previously termed ‘a previous knowing’. The structure also merely suggest only partially in the idea of the third space, something I explore in much more depth in the Monolith drawings as I will explain in just a moment. While IDE is the product of an extensive R&D process in collaboration with local experts who I had the pleasure meeting in Sagada I never entered the phenomenological construct of remembering, repeating and working-through as part of IDE’s design process. As such the design of IDE remains rather pragmatic with its current design not yet surpassing an artistic mimicry of ancient architectural principles. The new IDE drawings (fig 5.19-5.21) explore the continuation of a design process aiming to surpass this mere expressive use of traditional elements and perform on a phenomenal level as the evocation of history. To do so I submit IDE to a drawing process where the design of space is modulated on presence and absence, exploring the reciprocal relationship between the making-present-of-absence and the-making-absent-of-presence. The structural principle guiding this process is again the act of drawing indirect lines by choreographing
various intersections of projected volume. As mentioned before, this creates ‘unexpected’ lines holding a particular status since these outlines are the product of the making absent of volume. In turn these outlines make present that what has become absent. This process of design/thinking is based upon the idea that (phenomenological) space can only exist upon the assumed foundation of absence. The Lacanian interpretation of absence assumes that there cannot be absence in an objective world for absence can only exist through symbolic or representative means. Hence the importance of representation (in my case drawing) to explore the phenomenological quality that there may be a presence there where there isn’t one; the presence of void, the presence of past.

This constitutes the great difference between the constructed IDE and my new IDE drawings. The constructed IDE, drawn conform to the making present of lines and surfaces, performs solely through the presence of the line indicating layers of tensile as separators between exterior and interior (figure 5.03-5.04). As a result of this, the subsequent architecture performs through the binary qualities of a line as it divides space in two opposite regions on either side of the line; an in or out, a left or right, an under or above. The line only divides space by means of minimal matter thus allowing the silhouette of an inside and an outside to fuse. The new IDE drawings aim to oppose such system of binary space in order to construct space as a ternary system; composed out of 3 regions. To accomplish such composition of space, the drawing favors the juxtaposition of volume as opposed to the tracing of lines with the aim to render a less unified relationship between inside and outside. The juxtaposition of volume has allowed me to create spaces with a greater distance between inside and outside. The process of subtracting void out of a solid volume brings into being a composition of remaining mass in which the interior morphology can be very different from its exterior outline. It is this unyielding in-between mass, this seeming barrier that performs as 3rd space. This mass, this architecture becomes a spatialising divide between inside and outside, a transitional space, which is constantly negotiated although impossible to enter. One cannot enter for it remains solid however as one occupies the vaulted spaces of the Monolith the synthesizing mind - pressing for an overall understanding - can enter this third space. This in part allows for the dissemination of partial occupancy of body and mind; never only inside, never only outside. This ternary system nurtures a baroque quality of dynamic spatial occupancy where body and mind meander between void and solid. In this state of flux one is allowed to occupy that what is not there; the in-between mass, the third space. One is allowed to inhabit absence. In this structure without a true inside or outside I trace intermediate spatial qualities through time (movement) and matter (the solid).
(figure 5.03-5.04)
In 2013 the renovation of a 180 sqm, 3-floor apartment in a grade II listed building at Stanhope Gardens was completed. Here I observe a combination of a working method deploying pre-defined cultural operations with a strategy of formal abstraction. The interiors as presented to us by our client had entered a state of neglect and despair. Most of the interior had been damaged by unpleasant renovations over time. Because of this, the first course of action was a gentle reconstruction of the Victorian formal language to reiterate the correspondence between a pervious culture and its architecture. The predominant in-white reconstruction acknowledged the theatricality of the outcome.

Newly designed program, such as kitchen, toilet, storage, etc, were designed as one large autonomous object (not unlike Casa Perellos) with prefabricated objects installed onsite (figure 5.05-5.06). At the basis of its conception stood an abstract formal system; tracing implicit directionalities of the interior and allowing these to impact the geometry of the pre-defined autonomous object (in line with what I explain in chapter 4.4 ‘the isolation of the figure’) (figure 5.05). This formal system was very much guided by the progression of qualitative changes, as contextual data started to collide with the object, allowing one set of parameters to impact the other. The resulting object is referred to as ‘super furniture’ and aims at instilling a space of critical displacement. This happens on two levels. On a discrete level the ‘super furniture’ acts as a diagram communicating a geometry freed from archetypical clichés. On a more interconnected level, it stands aesthetically distant from the reconstructed surroundings even though its form is a result of reacting to site-specific parameters. This uncoupling (from formal archetypes and surrounding aesthetics) allows me to experiment with an architectural vocabulary aimed at re-evaluating the cultural implications of its form. As I have explained in chapter 4, in everyday life a given form, such as a table for example, allows us to establish connections between the object and its encoding through language. With the design of the ‘super furniture’ I aim for a momentarily breaking of such connections for the user to reconfigure new associations and construct new meaning. The resulting geometry of the ‘super furniture’ wants to challenge existing interior typologies for the body to re-adjust and rediscover new possibilities in terms of spatial occupancy (figure 5.09-5.10). This can be seen as an exercise in installing an object as image without reference but to itself in order to accommodate an inwards looking or even entering. The visiting subject reveals her/himself as a self-exploring (figure 5.11-5.12) and the ‘super furniture’ like the painted figures of Jenny Saville, emerges as figure freed from figuration.
After its completion, this disjunctioned interior became the location for a film project [https://vimeo.com/71431382] aiming at the recording of this process of memory-formation, as explained in the above. [NOTE: please when watching the film use good speakers or good headphones since low-herz sound is a prominent ingredient in the film]

With this film I condense the process of ‘remembering’ into a short instance, an occurrence I refer to as chronotopos or time-place, setting up a stage through which I can look for and indeed construct the previously unseen.

The film holds three acts; the opening scenes portray the view and viewing of a woman moving around a large object flanking a Victorian interior (figure 5.09-5.10). Close ups display tactile interaction with wood lined surfaces. Her wandering movements seems to suggest a searching, perhaps for meaning; the meaning of this object. As her hand travels the veneer, panels are opened up for the body and mind to enter. The occupying mind-body fills the space with presence and constructs a dualism between subject and object as her presence assumes filling the space with being present (of both object and subject).

The second act slowly meanders away from a clear dualism between subject and object for the body starts to shed its primacy changing the status of both subject and object. The protagonist must accept the fact that this space, with its large flanking object, will be there when she is not. This space does not assume her existence for it can exist without her. It is not her bodily occupancy rendering this space present. She must also accept that her body does not assume the existence of this space for she can exist outside of it. After all, she was born out of the interior of a subject as subject. So what kind of being is to be observed through her presence since it is not her body’s occupancy filling the space with being?

In a final act where the picture becomes darker and darker as her image duplicates (figure 5.11-5.12) in order to illustrate her state of being. Both mirrors in the room integrate her reflection for what she observes is her observing self. She observes herself through the observation of the object in space. The subject obverses the subject through the object as the object dissolves in the subject and the subject dissolves in the object. Here the film presents us a being through the double act of seeing and being seen.

The tree acts lead the viewer from a simulation of spatial conception defined in Cartesian terms (i.e. conceived space where objects are clearly delineated) to a simulated consciousness where we engage with the idea of the subject-object to indeed observe the emotional and spatial attribute of perceived space (the dynamics of a changing perception of objects (architecture) as phenomena beyond their physical limits).
The medium film as a tool to investigate certain ideas demands a particular status of its filmic image, which in this case moves away from a modernist concern with perspectival space, point of view and film as reflexive medium.

Instead I focus on the restructuring of meaning in the filmic image privileging its plasticity and temporality. The images in the film are seen as returned images or indeed the manipulations of past form. As such the images return not as representational of an actual reality but as repetition and even repetitions upon repetitions responsible for erasing or part-erasing the idea of an original image. As such the film is encoded with ‘pastness’ without the pastiche of formal references but through the structural means of repetition or indeed replay recoding the image itself. Such repetition or re-representation within the image allows for the decomposition of acculturated models such as a cupboard, kitchen or living room. These models are metonymically re-experienced through the repositioning of meaning but within its original category. An example of this would be the expression; ‘the pen is mightier than the sword’ which is very different from a metaphorical re-experience where meaning can shift far out of its original category such as in the expression; ‘The Lord is my shepherd’. In the latter we see how the metaphor allows for the intersection between very different categories of meaning.

The film consciously aims to operate on a metonymical level to engage with the careful decomposition of meaning of certain models yet within their respective categories of meaning. As such I want to avoid postmodern results like coffee cans in the form of the Eifel tower (this does not mean I don’t like coffee cans in the shape of the Eifel tower). However, certain closeness is thus maintained between subject and object in that the rereading of meaning always takes place within its original category. The subject's gaze is directed to particular subject-object relationships.

This stands in relation to Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s ‘figured philosophy of vision,’ as a concept where the position and role of the artist's gaze is contained within representation itself; in this case film. As I have mentioned in previous chapters Merleau-Ponty describes this to be one of the basic premises of creative practice in that the artist is seen as much as he/she is seeing. This in turn allows for a certain collapse between subject and object;

“… that which looks at all things can also look at itself and recognise, in what it sees, the “other side” of its power of looking. It sees itself seeing; it touches itself touching, it is visible and sensitive for itself”

With this Merleau-Ponty criticizes the absolute Cartesian split between subject and object, observer and observed in that Merleau-Ponty’s description of the gaze
artist within the produced image as with ‘Self-portrait as Charles Darwin’ by Adrian Ghenie. As Merleau-Ponty explains:

“… Mirrors are instruments of a universal magic that converts things into spectacle, spectacle into things, myself into another and another into myself. Artists have often mused upon mirrors because beneath this ‘mechanical trick’, they recognised, as in the case of the ‘trick’ of perspective, the metamorphosis of seeing and seen that defines both our flesh and the painters’ vocation. This explains why they have so often chosen to draw themselves in the act of painting […] adding to what they could see of things at that moment, what things could see of them”

In the film I use the experiences of personal subjectivity of a protagonist to portray this inverted gaze. The use of mirrors, shadow and projection of previously recorded film footage enforce the idea of the ethnographic observer, consequentially perceiving architecture as a social event. Through means of repetition or multiplication I aim for the destabilization of the normative social positioning of the protagonist in architectural space. From the second act onwards the domestic interior is challenged through the use of repetition and projection onto present observation to indeed investigate the now unstable liminal space between the protagonist and the space she is in. Very much informed by the work of Maya Derren I continued this strategy as a technique of filmmaking. The protagonist of this film, Kyveli Annastasia, an architect who also worked on the development and construction of the apartment occupied the space on either side of the camera. In doing so she was in control of the passive gaze of the camera as much as she became the receiver of this gaze. As such she gained the dual position of observer and observed in order to develop a sense of mastery in observing that what we had not yet observed (the phenomenological space of the subject-object). A previously explained technique of auto-ethnography allows the protagonist to look at herself observing. This does not constitute to a merely self-referential or autobiographical instrument but is a direct strategy to submit to Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s ‘figured philosophy of vision’. Here the observer is capable of submitting to the objectifying gaze, which positions the observer in this unstable zone between subjectivity and objectivity. After a while, there is no division anymore for the subject dissolves in the object and the subject-object emerges. The film portrays more than anything else this transformation; like the coming into being of a butterfly, appearing as the permutation of various insects; a transformation of a simulated consciousness where space unfolds out the boundaries between object and subject.
5.2 TENSILE STRUCTURES

At the start of this writing I commented on my very first project outside architecture school; a lightweight tensile structures protecting the stone carved spaces of the churches of Lalibella. Now many years later it seems surreptitious how this project predicted the seemingly opposing architectural ingredients of my current practice; an interest in the monolith and the design and construction of nomadic tensile structures.

IDE, as previously mentioned, is addressing different scales, from single housing to urban development. Lightweight tensile architecture is capable of combining notions of temporality with durability, prefabrication with adaptability and architecture with automobile design. Many of the current tensile projects are designed for regions in South East Asia. A region where new types of urban settlements are produced at record speeds and where lightweight interventions can answer typical needs such as rapid growth, flexibility and instant implementation combined with different levels of sustainability. IDE is not built on sites anymore but in factories developed through multiple prototyping stages echoing a certain morality towards mass-produced architecture where lightness is a virtue. Such architecture is not made from nor does it belong to the landscape anymore, however is capable of visiting the landscape with adoration, respect and wonder. In doing so IDE opposes standardized or normative acquisitions of form. In order to operate in symbiosis with an ecosystem and a socio-cultural environment IDE requires the capabilities to stand in dialogue with its context. This renders the difficult yet appealing demand for nomadic structures (such as IDE) to be capable of addressing genius loci in respect to certain regions, which is currently the Northern province of the Philippines. Conceptual work for IDE deployment in other regions is also underway for which I am exploring principles of using a modular IDE infra-structural system, which could support different geometries in terms of tensile design. The geometrical syntax for each IDE variant is based on historical indigenous information. This integration of relevant historical information is seen as one of the principal acts of place making and engages with phenomenological concepts of a genius locus or at-homeness. The study of vernacular environments allows me to look at very direct relationships between people and an environment without the usual technological interfaces and modes of topographical and climatic displacement. As such the most basic person-environment relationships can be studied which I regard as essential heritage for each of the IDE designs to include and maintain. At the same time IDE enhances this by means of technology to provide protection, sanitation and energy management but always in servitude to the before mentioned person-environment relationships. This to establish architecture with a capacity to generate ‘place’ which I
define as a space allowing someone to feel a sense of being at home or indeed recognize something as a home, even if such place is visited for the first time. In line with Norberg-Schulz’s idea on the importance of history as a source for meaning in the design of places, IDE incorporates the idea of ‘pastness’ without the inclusion of pastiche formal references.

As mentioned previously, I integrate 3 important indigenous characteristics as found in traditional Nipa architecture. The main point of reference is the Nipa hut which I experienced first hand on a site in Sagada and which I studied further (with certain adoration) in the office in order to fully understand its structure (figure 5.13). The current IDE design translates the important characteristics as being elevated from the ground in order to keep animals out also creating a raised entrance, having a large pitched roof with a central opening for ventilation and indeed a central heart around which different interior program is organized. Figures 5.15-5.18 show the current IDE design and its several constructive layers. An outer tensile protects the interior spaces from the elements. Three interior tensile structures define sleeping, bathing and lounging areas around a central fireplace. The segregation of spaces and their respective layers of tensile do create numerous in-between spaces, which act as privacy buffer and ventilation belts. Perhaps IDE surpasses pragmatic mimicry of ancient architectural principles after all in that the basic search for a ternary spatial system is already present in this design. The juxtaposition of different tents has allowed me to create spaces with a greater distance between inside and outside which is an important strategy in the design of a protective environment made out of tensile. This in-between space acting as barrier holds the potential to performs as 3rd space. The main difference between the current IDE and the Monolith drawings is that this in-between space lacks integrity for it is not yet designed as a 3 dimensional all-encompassing area defining absence by means of its presence as such failing to act as primary structure of the architectonic object.

The speculative construct of this PhD and the use of the techniques developed in the Monolith drawing allowed me to revisit and redevelop the IDE. The main objective is indeed the implementation of a ternary spatial system to allow a third space to structure the IDE and spatialise the distance between inside and outside. In doing so I create ‘deep interiors’ in this lightweight tensile structure to set up the internalized quality of protection and at-home-ness. Inserting IDE in the Monolith drawing, which allows it to enter the phenomenological construct of remembering, repeating and working-through, performs this redevelopment. Crucial yet very different from the original design drawings is the modulation of space on the idea of presence and absence. The structural principle guiding this process is the intersection of lines and volumes such as in 17th
century Stereotomic drawings where many of the lines drawn (as part of the projected geometry) eventually disappear yet as the result of numerous intersections start to describe new lines (which are by nature often difficult to foresee and in fact, as Stan Allan suggests, produced by the drawing). Before the drawing of the drawing these lines were out of sight. The overall geometry of IDE therefore changes yet its overall structure in maintained. Figure 5.22 shows a testing of new geometries for the IDE interior where a third space is now all encompassing allowing the exterior and interior tent to be the silhouette of one architectonic mass -the in-between mass or absence – as such structuring the architectonic object. Such as in the work of Clark M. Thenhaus, architectural elements seek levels of formal continuity yet maintain their geometric legibility as different parts. The process of formal recollection thus remains visible allowing an architectonic expression in reference to its own process of making and the formal references used. This sense of continuity also allows for the important quality of distance between inside and outside or what Venturi described as the contradiction between inside and outside.

Such contradiction is in fact the result of specific interactions between interior space and the imagined surrounding environment. In this sense IDE could be described as a truly animate form in line with what Edmund W. Sinnott writes on the characteristics of organic form. Its external configuration remains rather simple yet well defined for its interior gains a much more complex arrangement with its structure and different anatomical parts through which a flow of air, fire and people is organized. This internal layout is very much the result of establishing a relationship with an architectural history in which people have embedded their understanding of a home but also to the geographical and climatic conditions of the surrounding site; the specific environment it is placed in. The resulting distance between inside and outside which is already established through the design of a third space – previously explained as spatialised absence – is thus also the result of the perception of this organic form with its implicit distance between inside and outside anatomy. This distance has been identified as a crucial strategy in providing the experience of a ‘deep interior’, a protective center while I am constructing tensile structures. As Kahn has said; the main purpose of the home is to separate inside from outside in order to protect and provide privacy, psychological as well as physical. As such, I combine what now performs as complementary principles; designing experiential qualities of permanent, perhaps even ancient architecture within new lightweight sustainable structures. The contradiction reaches even further. The above-explained distance also allows a sense of continuity between inside and outside.
(figure 5.13-5.14)
With the composition of remaining mass structuring IDE (in the new Monolith drawings) a spatialising divide between inside and outside establishes a sense of transience. Previously explained as the dissemination of partial occupancy of body and mind; never only inside, never only outside this instills a state of flux. The interior/exterior defines continues space around the Monolith.

This Monolith remains an uninterrupted solid without windows or even walls. As such, the eye should not be able to look at this structure identifying positive and negative elements such as window openings as negative elements in a positive element such as a wall, something that requires more development in the new IDE drawings. This sense of continues space is modernist heritage absorbed by the Monolith (and in due time the new IDE drawings). A heritage described by Vincent Scully as originating in the Shingle Style interiors, developed in Wright's Prairie house and celebrated in Mies' Barcelona Pavilion. The Monolith is not limiting this play of continues space to the composition of horizontal and vertical planes but to the composition of organic form as previously outlined. The creation of this continues space into deep interiors where basic polarities between inside and outside become vague allows for a gradual progression of entering. IDE permits this by a composition of spaces as tents within tents within tents. The layering of enclosures within enclosures is an ancient principle and characteristic in Egyptian temples for example such as the series of walls and room within rooms in the temple of Edfu on the west bank of the Nile. Here walls (very much like the layers of tensile in IDE) perform as detached linings. Each outer lining stands in dialogue with the inner lining for which it serves as protector. The plan of Edfu indicates the processional nature of its spatial use with several aligned areas; the outer peristyle courtyard leading to the first hypostyle hall and the secondary hypostyle hall towards the most inner protected space, the sanctuary one. A passage surrounding the sanctuary acts as 'third space'. This also resembles the interior layout of military roman tents, the strata of fortification in medieval castles and the domed spaces surrounding the central cupola of a Basilica. The IDE plan holds three interior tents as shown on the left. These three interior tents are in turn covered by two layers of exterior tensile, which have been omitted from the drawing. These tents form a vestige for a central inner space; the heart. Each tent opens up towards this central space. Surrounding the vestige is an open corridor between inner and outer tensile lining. Complex vaulting patterns of each tensile congregate towards a central oculus as the opening in the outer tensile to manipulate light and air movement. The vault lines are in fact stitch lines allowing the patterning of the fabric to take on double curvature parabolic forms, which creates immense strength. This allows for the IDE to perform as a hard shell or a series of hard shells creating layers of protection.
In many ways the Monolith and IDE are starting to merge for they implement a ternary spa-
tial system allowing a ‘third space’ to spatialise the distance between inside and outside. When
the exact geometry of each surface of the monolith becomes tensile I observe a cascading of
spaces within space, vaults within vaults, void surrounded by void.
5.3 GATEWAY STRUCTURES

To complement the commercial work and the exhibitions produced prior and during the process of the PhD I produced a variety of Monolith drawings (presented in this document as ‘plates’) to investigate ideas explored in my writing and visa versa to discover viewpoints to be unpacked through writing. Such drawings, compared to client led work, can remain responsive throughout the PhD in order to perform as thinking tools through which ideas have grown without the pressure of a commercial ethos demanding commoditized output rather quickly.

What I have called Monolith drawings throughout this writing are in fact preparatory drawings for a project titled ‘The Seven Gates of Brussels’. Every Monolith drawing in this document forms part of a design trajectory towards a set of large drawings, which I will exhibit in Barcelona in November. The project aims at re-installing the content of 7 medieval city gates around Brussels. The original gates, as part of the city fortifications originally separated the city from the surrounding countryside, were all demolished in the course of the late 18th and early 19th century. Brussels gains its relevance as a site for investigation because, like many other European cities, it is undergoing a complex socio-political transitional process, with half of the current population now of non-Belgian origin. As part of this internationalization of Brussels, ideas on traditional beliefs and rituals, once key elements in spatial practice, are gradually being marginalized, occupying only the periphery of our post/super/alter modern society. As a result of this, older places of cultural identity are gradually eroding and becoming increasingly more detached from a socio-cultural fabric. As part of this drawing project, examples of such places are identified, in this case the previous location of 7 medieval gates, as potential sites to catalyze a reciprocal dynamic between the memory of a place and its current state of anonymity. This anonymity is very much the result of close-proximity cultural enclaves constantly claiming new territories in Brussels and giving rise to territorial shifts within the city. As the capital of Europe and a self-proclaimed symbol of multiculturalism, the city still struggles in using the dynamics of such territorial shift to its advantage. Searching for an anchor in order to allow for a coalition between new spatial and urban identities in relation to implicit memories of Brussels this drawing project explores the re-instilling of historical memory into places of urban anonymity. I approach this question through the concept of emptiness as a possible tool to celebrate that-what-is-not; place making through historical recollection. As explained in chapter 5, within the drawing I value a particular dual quality of ‘past-present’ and this in two directions. The first ‘past-present’ holds a directionality from past to present, therefore making past present.
Its antagonist holds directionality from present to past positioning the present somehow outside its presence. It is ‘here’; within this dual force the Monolith drawing allows me to study transitory moments in architecture (through time and matter) to indeed allow compositions of duration and memory, previously identified as a key act in place making. For each of the 7 sites one monolith is designed as stand-alone architecture referencing the Greek temple perhaps, as an isolated body free in the urban void with particular carvings throwing shadows over its granular concrete surfaces. Very different from the surrounding morphology of the urban façade describing streets and squares yet more and more under pressure by vast office blocks or long-lasting empty plots dreaming of vast office blocks.

As preparatory instruments each of the drawings negotiates an overall speculative positioning and in doing so gain a more or less autonomous status. As explained in chapter 5, each drawing starts with isolating a figure (be it a vault, tower or dome). As such, the figure (and more importantly myself drawing the figure) is placed in an empty field allowing the drawing to become site. A location through which I can visit vast visual repositories of deleted urban scenes to form conduits with an intangible past. This is what I call the Monolith drawing. Within this site, the act of drawing entails a tracing of forces as opposed to drawing objectified formal references. Such forces are explored as multiple figures or indeed monoliths colliding within the drawing. I have explained this process of collision previously as projection and subtraction through which a process of reconfiguration takes place. The act of isolating the figure in endless AutoCad space allows for intense reconfigurations for most symbolic ties are momentarily broken and the figure converts to pure image. I have described this process, taking place within the drawing, as a momentary state of psychosis since the isolation of the figure allows for a disruption of possible relationships to signified (acculturated) meaning. The Monolith drawings as such, do not illustrate gates but remain site-experiments. Each drawing presented in this document retains this inward gaze in order to construct self-exploring figures as the basis for visualizing a working through time with time.

Figures 5.24-5.27 illustrate the process of lithic reduction very much in the way this has been explained under chapter 4. With these drawings I do want to illustrate however a particular quality of ‘the Monolith gazing at itself’. In figure 5.24 I draw three volumes, which are in fact just one volume mirrored twice. The process is as follows; the lithic core (the main volume on the right) creates a primary subtractor (far left volume) by mirroring itself. A secondary subtractor (middle volume) is the mirror image of the primary subtractor.
By mirroring itself, the monolith instills a self-exploring figure as it looks at itself recognizing what Merleau-Ponty describes as the ‘power of looking’. As the secondary subtractor is subtracted from the primary subtractor (figure 5.25) the drawing allows the mirror image of the secondary subtractor to become engraved within the primary subtractor. When in turn the primary subtractor (carved by its mirror image) is subtracted from the lithic core (figure 5.26) the monolith experiences a double carving creating a concave mount within a convex pit. I call these actions first and second order subtractions as they create inward-outward movements by carving into the solid.

The very first Monolith drawing in this document at the end of chapter 1.1 is the result of this exact process. In fact the latest Monolith drawings and the new IDE drawings in particular are constructed following this self-gazing principle rather precisely.

This process of multiple projections and subtractions move gradually from the outside of the monolith to the inside in search of what I have called the mythology of stone. This process of carving into the Monolith therefore creates an increase in the complexity of the carvings as each new mirror image also mirrors the previously established carvings. As such there is an increase in the complexity of the carvings as I reach the innermost spaces of the Monolith.

This reflects what I have previously described as ornamentation as a direct result of the structuring of the monolith. Allowing for a gradual nuance in scale and complexity from outside to inside without disrupting a sense of continuity however nurturing an architectural potency between inside and outside. The resulting spaces are indeed marked by a memory of multiple subtractions, absence upon absence tracing the contours of this continues interior.

This explains why the traces of ornamentation do not serve as figuration but as part of a tectonic expression. Ornamentation is seen as the creation of an architecture where elements gain form through a process of what could perhaps be described as tensional motion. I see this tension as present though the co-presence of two opposite movements; inwards and outwards - concave and convex. The motion inwards is connoted with entering, with becoming one with something, the movement outwards towards the periphery of the monolith can be seen as maintaining contact with the outside world. This rapid succession of inward outward movement as carvings are made in the monolith can thus be seen as a single motion merging two opposite actions or a simultaneous motion in opposite directions. The kinetics of this process of subtraction stands rather closely to the ancient teachings of Cleanthes - a Greek Stoic philosopher around 300BC - in which he describes the cosmos in which inward and outward movements represent a balance between hot (outward) and cold (inward). Perhaps I am coming closer to the mythology of stone after all.
This tensional motion creates thresholds. There where we enter stone we not just enter. We experience two opposing movements and with it two opposing senses; one holding us in the outside world the other pulling us inside inevitably defining the interior as an other world. This tension both in architecture as in perception underlines the fact that we indeed transform when we enter a space, however small this transformation might be.

The architectural form as the result of this tensional motion (merging two opposing movements) creates two opposing qualities in its architectural aesthetics. As this threshold can indeed cause a pause or lengthening in the experience of entering interior space it also invites. When I look at the resulting subtractions in which the one subtraction announces the form of the second and the third something particular occurs. Lars Spuybroek calls it the sympathy of things in his book under the same title published in 2011. The monolith with multiple carvings absorbs this idea of ‘mutual sympathy’ as part of an overall aesthetic intention. This mutual sympathy allows for one opening or carving to be announced by other openings or carvings in the surrounding mass. As such the Monolith obliterates the idea of constructing architecture through the arrangements of individual elements. Instead in the Monolith drawing, in which spaces are carved through tensional motion, an important sense of entireness is established. This consequently establishes similar qualities for the established interior spaces. Each space is engaged with being empty and always in process of announcing the emptiness of surrounding spaces; as such instilling the already mentioned quality of a continues space not entirely inside nor outside.
(figure 5.24-5.25)
References


6.0 TOWARDS A FUTURE PRACTICE

Undertaking this research has transformed my practice radically. This has not been easy and I say this not from a personal point of view but from the perspective of all those who worked with Riet and myself in our studio for the past 7 years. Many times did the practice impact the course of the research and visa versa, did the research alter the nature of our practice. At the start of my PhD I worked on large-scale projects from my middle sized studio in London supported by a larger mother firm in Malta. Projects varied from large master plans, to public building proposals. Research and practice were not integrated for reflection on my practice was something that happened late at night after employees would have made their way home. Only gradually did research merge with practice. Facilitated by the economical crisis in 2008 the first major shift occurred changing the nature of my practice dramatically. Large projects stalled. Riet and myself took this as an opportunity to concentrate on self-initiated projects we could work on (unfortunately with a much smaller team) for very long periods of time. Something that was not possible only a few months earlier. What started as a research on the practice gradually evolved into a research practice. In 2010 I reached a point where a certain design ethos - developed mostly through exhibition work and published writings - reached a level of maturity for it to be employed in newly commissioned work. First project was Stanhope Gardens, discussed in previous chapters. A second project was an installation titled ‘Length of Weighted Wire’, part of an exhibition by Caroline Bergvall, exhibited at the John Hansard Gallery (1) where Joris Pauwels, a good friend and great architect, and myself investigated the representational role architecture or indeed an interior spatial structure could play in a space such as John Hansard Gallery. I will mysteriously not include any photo’s of the work as it was an ‘almost absent spatial structure’. Very thin wires connected in space exposed implicit compositional forces in order to express context specific information. The installation was more a ‘site reading’ than it was an ‘installation proposal’, performing more as a ‘diagram’ than a ‘commodity’. In this state of ‘tension’ its purpose was to accommodate a possible re-reading of the gallery space; not to be seen as an object in space but rather as an object through which one could see previously unseen spatial qualities. It proved impossible to record this work in film something that was indeed only to be experienced at the time.

Again (2), as the research progressed and the GRC/PRS presentation sessions at RMIT supported a gentle deconstruction of my practice, eroding my image of the practice for it’s once statuesque (corporate) representation crumbled and fell apart. The research; clearly aimed towards the unification and/or recombination of ideas about my own architectural practice, dislodged an interesting duality (which I mention in my abstract
and introduction) which has now entered the process of folding into one synoptic effort. At the start of my PhD, my practice of architecture stood in composition with what I perceived as alternative disciplinary strategies of making, drawing and writing. Tools by which I allowed a distance towards my own architectural practice allowing me to develop a critique as set out in chapter 2. After the completion of Stanhope Gardens in 2013 and the submission of the conceptual proposals of IDE (explained in chapter 5) a third important evaluative moment occurred. As I mention at the start of chapter 5 both projects indeed integrate preliminary ideas explored in the PhD thus holding the pre-requisites of an early thinking process. The research however had evolved and through the revisiting of both projects via film and ‘Drawings by Replay’ I can now demonstrate a major shift in my practice. With this recent work (film and Monolith drawings) I relate to the fundamental idea that my design is about instilling a sense of place conceived through multidimensional constructs of ‘remembering’. This has led to an even smaller studio (unfortunately with even less people) still supported by our practice in Malta, which has allowed me to disentangle myself from corporate practice almost entirely nurturing a much more creative practice and if I can be so free to say produce much better architecture.

The Monolith drawings have allowed me to develop the process of drawing myself into the history of a project or site. To allow myself to embody previous design acts not through repetition but through change and consequently prepare the set up of a design discourse occupied with the continuation of historical spatial qualities. These drawings are thus instruments for remembering and working through the history of a particular site. Through drawing I have learned a greater essence (surpassing iconic figurations) of early historic architecture in the way in which it allows for a dialogue between elements; a sense of continuity through the composition of explicit parts.

For now I have become a pupil of history.
6.1 CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

Antiquity has provided me with a large amount of buildings for renovation and restoration, buildings which were designed and executed with a view to eliding historical, chronological time in order to settle among the hills and valleys where time is a-chronic and cyclical (Konrad Buhagiar, 2014). Temples or churches in particular but also national banks and palaces - for which I produced and executed work – are particular indeed for they require “magnificence” in the most archaic sense of the word. In the last 15 years of my practice as part of Architecture Project has been able to master a discipline, in measurable terms (through constructed work), exploring architectural magnitude, scale, and the idea of phenomenological proportion. In so doing, I feel I stand closer to the reconfiguration of nature as Hegel envisioned it, to create “the external environment of spirit” (Sallis 1994: p.47). For I admire the natural environment, it’s splendor, its intelligence, its dynamics and qualities of temporal- ity. I do this without any sense of mimicry, without any impulse to assimilate for my work is born out of a historical heritage determined to achieve a quality of timelessness and continui ty even if it is for a short while.

I do not built palaces, no memorials; I don’t built for kings or occasional dictators. I built for an ever-widening middle class and am slowly venturing in a practice where I can design for people in need. Here I aim to execute my mastery to imbue the historical quality of vastness in everyday architecture.

I have described in my critique under chapter 2 how early work negotiated a distance from the historical context it was placed in.

The major shift in my research has been the evolution and development of an ambition to endow architecture with critical and therefore historical depth, to associate the solidity of its structure and carvings with a robustness of substance; architecture as far gazing instrument accumulating history and therefore critical knowledge. I do this in a world supporting the perceived agenda of commodifying collective amnesia, where the hollow of carcasses are clad and re-clad as a reflection of a weak and superficial society. I have been able to acquire such position through my research, which has culminated in the production of Monolith drawings. It might seem I am endowing architecture with values attributed to human morality; an apparent moralistic underpinning (through drawing) of building ex uno lapide. A value holding sway in romantic traditions where nature is the omnipresent metaphor and container of meaning for nature herself does not accept the works of man.
But as I said, this is not about nature, it is about people; millennia of communities and societies constructing cultural knowledge, realizations and experiences. I propose no deception of unity to contribute to the idea of continuing historical spatial qualities. My Monolith drawings participate in natural time as opposed to chronological time. To misuse Ruskin’s observation of time entirely; time acts as a storm in my drawings as it draws wild signatures upon virtual stone. It is as though this portrayal of the Monolith is the combination of both time and the elements and their erosive effects on the surface of a broad expanse of seamless wall (Ruskin, 1979: p.72-80) for architecture is born in an aged state by having received multiple carvings.

The fundamental change in my practice as a result of this research is for new projects to abandon the idea of history as irrevocably. New work brings back the stone mass of the gateways and thresholds negotiating void even if the eventual construction is a lightweight tensile structure for this does not represent a practice in which I construct out of stone. This is a design practice continuously working through the philosophy of stone.

I state in my introduction this research to constitute a re-evaluation of the way in which I assume emplacement through my architectural practice.

15 years of practicing serving as a laboratory of exploring different attitudes towards historical architecture. Venturing from distant approached to much more close encounters with heritage buildings I have worked with has allowed me to develop a practice with a now central method of drawing in order to reverse the idea of history being irrevocably. I achieve this by a mode of drawing where I place the architectural object within the simultaneous-ness of all time past to allow my designing mind to expand and reach an a-priory space, void of preconceptions to surpass geographical locality and indeed allow the negotiation of relational proximities of absolute vastness. Here I reflect an important aspect of our times; for memory has become part of a global culture. National histories within borders are seizing to exist for they have never existed at all.

This a-priory space is the drawing… the Monolith drawing

Through this research I enabled my positioning as the maker of architecture surpassing just imagination and to avoid myself to be the soul author of a line. For when there is imagination it requires exceeding, to break the path of ‘self-projection’ and take a predetermined sense of self out of the drawing. In order to make this possible I devised the Monolith drawing as an instrument allowing me to exit my own locality and enter the drawing; a meditative instrument for something to be revealed beyond imagination but as a product of time.
6.2 CONCLUSION

I set out this writing as a commentary on an observed polarity between tradition and phenomenology in terms of my personal architecture practice. My research allowed for an elaboration on the reciprocal relationship between new architectonic interventions and the historical context they arise from. The practice of drawing, which had formed the basis of my practice, evolved radically in order to expand this alliance to indeed experience-through-drawing a recollecting of multiple architectonic histories as a muse for new design. Drawing has played and will continue to play a primary role as an investigative resource structuring my research practice by architecture’s central principle in that the intellectual act cannot be separated from aesthetic experience. As such a critical positioning and the act of looking-for is included within each drawing exposing the false separation between subject and object, architect and drawing for I am in the drawing. An objectified or distant approach to architecture is dismissed as I can only comment from within.

A first viewing reveals architectural geometry to be the result of a gathering of everyday and sometimes ancient formalities. History is implied through the particular quality of memory; hidden form direct view yet implicit to the embalming form or indeed the silhouettes of the monoliths I draw. These forms seem to hold a capacity of gazing through time and space instilling a somewhat reversed anachronistic quality; as time misplaced in an object. Each of these Monoliths recover a tradition of linking geology with architecture for space is carved out of solid mass.

Such architecture resists a tectonic decomposition into assemblages of skin and structure. Memory or the act of recollecting is seen as a creative act in order to derive meaning out of the collision between past and present a collapse of historical typologies with enigmatic qualities of abstracted form, mostly maintained in dark stone. This darkness, like an old black and white photograph or deteriorated film footage bolsters an anachronistic feeling where objects distance themselves from an audience as they project inwards and allow space for imagining. The Monolith however is not placed in the past. It is observed as architecture escaping a historical periphery by actively erasing any boundary between historicized and present day architecture. So far, it is looking at history in order to be changed by it, meticulously.

Indeed it seems the Monolith can be written about in third person; the architectural body part absent and part present, engages in a process of seeking self-consciousness questioning its own status. Such being of architecture demands a certain kind of distancing between architect and drawing even if the architect is in the drawing.
As an architect I position myself as the maker of drawing constructs, a choreographer of information input, a handler. This distancing - by setting up a machinic drawing construct where the drawing is partly responsible for its own becoming - breaks the path of ‘self-projection’ (by the architect). What remains are images of Monoliths, visualizing working through time with time; a meditative instrument where one can remain and prevail in nowness. This way, history can be studied beyond the scholastic notion of objectivism and serial events. Instead history is seen as simultaneous drifts of story telling drafted by particular zeitgeists, constantly subjected to forces of (re)composition. The act of remembering is thus not entrenched in pursuing acts of conservation and tradition. The continuation of historical experiential spatial qualities is produced through tactics of duration and repetition to allow memory to be subjected to a variety of transformational forces. Remembering is thus subjected to conversion as opposed to conservation to engender what one could call architecture of becoming as opposed to architecture of being. The trajectory force in this instance is thus more oriented towards the future than it is towards the past. At this stage even this duality between past and present has become impractical for time in this instance is perceived as a force on which multiple pasts drift simultaneously and interdependently. As such I can only observe the status of the past as a positive presence sustained in the present or in my case the Monolith drawing. I have called this ‘Practice by Replay’ through which drawings produced are following a process of recollection as opposed to reaffirming existing historical interpretations. Drawings collect form within a field of intersectional forces where old data becomes potent again, dormant images awake just before they indeed intersect with others and intensely change. This does not negate the implicit cultural value of a historic formal language and the significance of its form as expressions of previous cultural values. Nor does this negate the correspondence between a pervious culture and its architecture. It would however negate for this retrospective viewing to be the only theoretical route possible to qualify the historic object. This does not clear the way for a practice concealed in pure conceptual space where architecture is conceived as an autonomous object by means of contained sets of formal operations. Practice by Replay’ positions itself as equidistant from both ends of this theoretical spectrum to work towards historically insinuated architecture by using semi-autonomous formal systems of repetition.

This system deploying projection and subtraction installs the particular state of tensional motion. Monoliths perpetually negotiate a number of paradoxes; they install continues space with a deep sense of interior-ness, the have become self-gazing objects, they receive carvings through a single motion merging two opposite actions, the hold entrances who guard yet swallow.
The coalition of these ideas which crystalized during the process of my PhD recalibrated the perception of my practice preferencing the design of objects (which are made through the collision of matter) denouncing the conception of architecture as the arrangement of individual elements and the design of spaces outside the remit of clear inside / outside oppositions for space is never isolated, never just a room as space fluctuates in continues emptiness.

Previous chapters have attempted to correlate a number of concepts collected and borrowed from different disciplines and fields of research. Clearly understanding the implicit danger when correlating one concept with yet another and conscious of the fact most linkages provided still hold unforeseen in-between value. I see this current matrix of intersecting ideas as a possible structure through which I can further explore an architecture practice preoccupied with perceived space in which history plays a pivotal role. I connect a practice in search of relative authenticity to a practice of autographic drawing to set up a platform for my studio and the students I teach, to study perceived space through multiple timeframes not as an isolated event but to complement a well versed scientific practice of architecture.
References

Article published with Joris Pauwels on 'Length of Weighte Wire' published in Middling English with Caroline Bergvall launched at The London Art Book Fair, 24 – 26 September.

