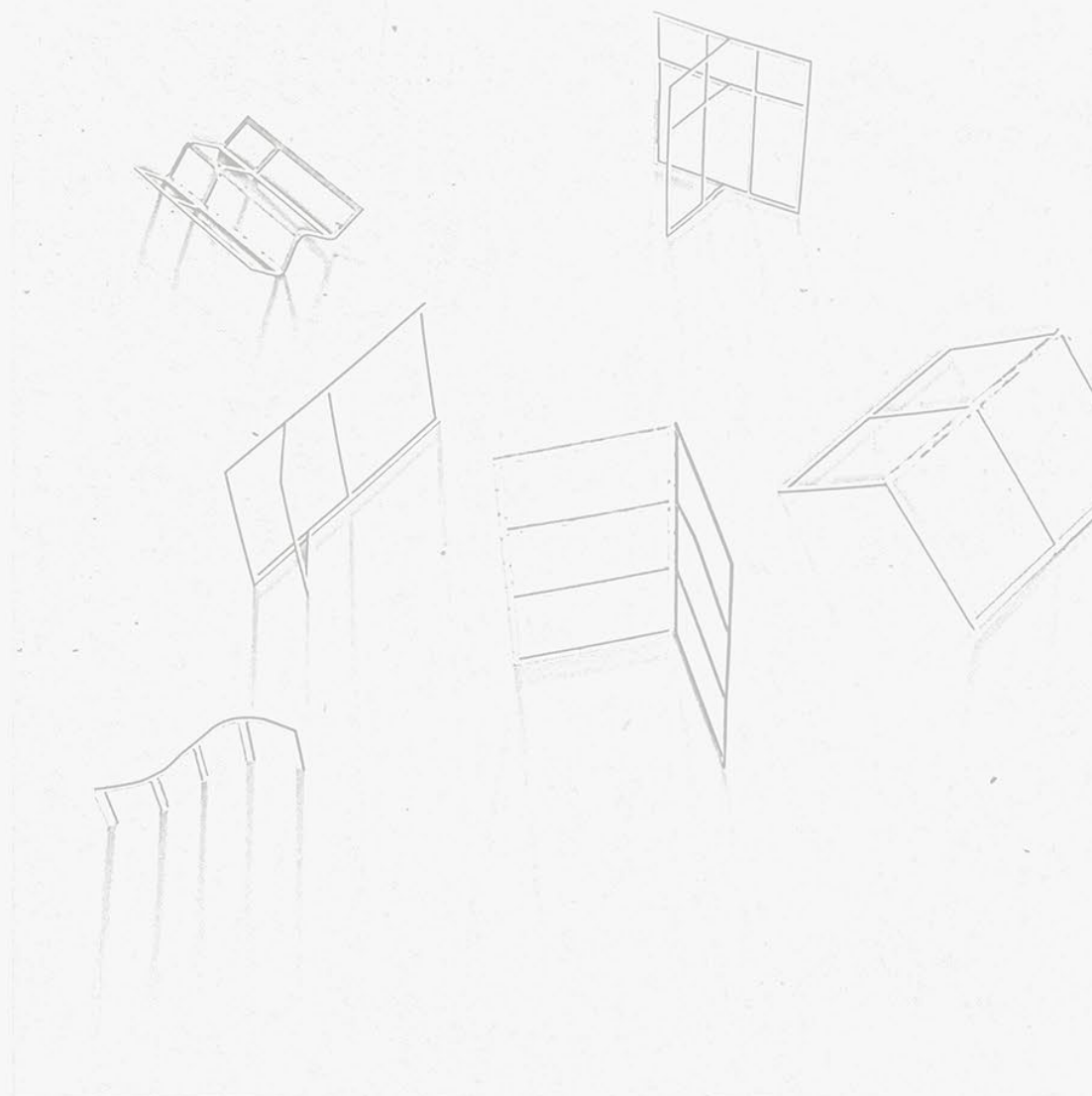


Emma Choi

Jeong as Affective Imaginaries

Placemaking that Activates Public Life
in Spatial and Social In-between Spaces

Co-supervised by Dr. Carl Douglas and Dr. Emily O'Hara



An exegesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Design.

2023
School of Art and Design

Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor any material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

23 May 2023

Declaration of Collaboration

Part of this thesis was carried out as a live tactical urbanism project commissioned by Auckland Council's Tāmaki Makaurau Design Ope. It was undertaken in collaboration with AUT Master of Design students Leah van Wyk and Jessica Juno, led by Claire Davis (Auckland Council), Dr. Sue Gallagher (AUT) and Dr. Carl Douglas (AUT). Details of this collaboration are given in cycle 4 of Chapter Five.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost,

I thank my supervisors, Carl and Emily, for their unlimited support, knowledge, and insights throughout this design research. Your pragmatic yet caring supervision has been the greatest drive of my practice, and this thesis owes you immensely.

Thank you, Sue Gallagher, for your constant guidance and support from undergrad to current. Your cheerful insights have inspired my practice greatly, and I appreciate all your organisation throughout the postgrad courses.

Thank you, Claire Davis, for rendering us a fantastic opportunity to be involved in prototyping St Paul Street Activation for Auckland Council. I genuinely appreciate your kindness in helping us complete the concept design with your professional support.

Thank you, Leah and Jess, for being amazing peers to work with in SPSA. Your presence and collaboration have made every step far more enjoyable than if I had worked alone. I will miss the regular chats over our studio table.

Thank you, Harriet and ET, for your willing help and productive discussion in the wet lab. Your professional support has always added great inspiration to my practice.

Thank you to the visitors who came to the exhibited projects of this research. Your feedback and participation have been invaluable resources in progressing this research.

Thank you to the MDes cohort for making and sharing the friendly studio culture. It has been a great pleasure to know you all and develop my thesis around amazing creatives.

I also want to thank my family and friends who have always supported my academic journey with their kind hearts and gestures.

Lastly,

I thank my husband Brian and my furry sister Midnight for taking care of my welfare in the closest place. This work is dedicated to the deepest *jeong* I share with you.



Abstract

Drawing upon the cultural heritage of Korea, this research unfolds spaces of *jeong*, a notion of collective emotion between different beings that accommodates affective relations. The study finds an interesting confluence between *jeong* as a social threshold and urban street as a spatial threshold. It inquires into this crossroad through a series of design settings, particularly staged events and streetscapes.

In this research, *jeong* finds its contextual position within the relevant fields, including embodied knowledge and the concept of the gift as an intrinsic human practice. The conceptual framework of *jeong* provides a design rubric to analyse local and international place activation projects. The study discovers marginal spaces as design opportunities and cultivates spatial and social practice to activate material and social interactions.

The practice entails heuristic explorations, such as experimental making, embodied field studies, expressive drawings, and prototyping. It gravitates around everyday interaction and develops into process-based care, a praxis that acknowledges spatial gaps and grows *jeong* space. The research renders *jeong*-embodied place activation, a design plan that elicits a collective urban ritual for saturating the public life of city streets.

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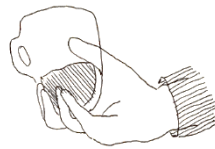


Figure 2. Emma Choi, Holding a mug, 2022, Auckland.

Introduction

When I lived with my parents and younger brother, I had this plain white mug with bold writing in red that read “*Jeong*”. It was part of a giveaway promotion for a Korean biscuit called Choco Pie, which had the slogan, “(I) know although no word is spoken.” I used it every day – drinking all sorts from cold tap water to chicken-flavoured Cup a Soup with tiny croutons. It soon became my mug that no other family members used. After a few consecutive years of drinking rituals, its handle broke without apparent reason. My dad started to use the mug's body as his ashtray placed out on the deck. I tried hard not to look at its new state, as every time I did, I could hear the mug's resentment, calling on our old days.

Growing up with the cultural heritage of Korea, I came across manifest traces of *jeong* in everyday life. The Encyclopedia of Korean Culture defines *jeong* as the “mind that arises from feeling something or subject,”¹ while affection, attachment, empathy and relatedness are common words used to explain what *jeong* is.² You give *jeong* (*jeong joo-dah*) when you get close to someone. A person is full of *jeong* (*jeong-e mahn-ta*) when affectionate and caring to others. An object is saturated with *jeong* (*jeong deul-dah*) when it is integral to someone's life. *Jeong* develops over time when one repeatedly interacts with their surroundings, melting the boundaries and connecting the related.

My sentimental experience with the broken mug exposes the *jeong* between me and my endeared object. My *jeong* towards the mug flourished with years of pouring, holding, sipping and washing, building gooey fibres that melded the object with my daily peripheries. When its handle broke, what I felt was more than the void of a ceramic vessel. It was an intricate network of *jeong* disconnected, leaving stains of delicate matters such as the remnant of my daily ritual and the familiar feeling of the mug in my hands. Such fuzzy elements – affects, memories, experiences and time that are lived and shared – become the building materials of *jeong*. As *jeong* occupies and grows in marginal spaces, it softens the sharp edges and creates permeable thresholds between different beings. *Jeong* is our affective and cognitive abilities amassed through interactions, acknowledging how we relate to others and defining our boundaries.

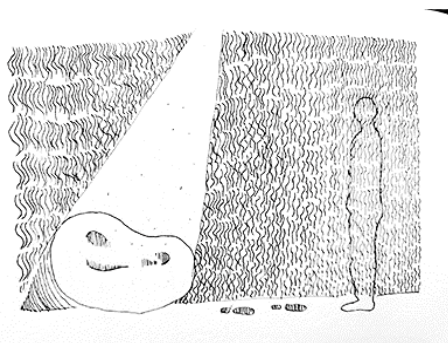


Figure 3. Emma Choi, Expressive drawing of *jeong*, 2022, Auckland.

I remember when my world felt microscopic as I moved to Auckland with my parents. Having my *jeong* attached to nowhere, it took a while to redefine my shape and boundaries, rebuilding myself around new environments. Chung and Cho, professors at UCLA Department of Psychiatry, claim that *jeong* is an “emotional glue” that bonds one to another, creating strong nuances of

relatedness, commonality and belonging.³ As I began living public life within Auckland, understanding the lush culture, geography and people, *jeong* space accumulated between me and the city, building the social bridges that extend the self to the collective. I realised from my experiences that *jeong* is ubiquitous and comprehensive, applicable to people, objects, places and many other things that we interact with in everyday life. It is a lens directing our focus to felt dimensions, the materials that crisscross and weave one into another, the in-between space between the mug, me, and the community of Tāmaki Makaurau.

¹ *Encyclopedia of Korean Culture*, s.v. “정(情),” [In Korean]. (1997). <http://encykorea.aks.ac.kr/Contents/Item/E0049894>.

² Kyung Mi Lee, “Jeong,” *Yale Daily News*, 2018, [https://yaledailynews.com/blog/2018/11/02/jeong/#:~:text=Jeong%20is%20a%20Korean%20word,or%20a%20favorite%20stuffed%20animal;Yohan%20Ka,%20Jeong-han%20as%20a%20Korean%20Culture-Bound%20Narcissism%20Dealing%20with%20Jeong-han%20Through%20Jeong-Dynamics,%20Pastoral%20Psychology%2059,%20no.%202%20\(2010\)](https://yaledailynews.com/blog/2018/11/02/jeong/#:~:text=Jeong%20is%20a%20Korean%20word,or%20a%20favorite%20stuffed%20animal;Yohan%20Ka,%20Jeong-han%20as%20a%20Korean%20Culture-Bound%20Narcissism%20Dealing%20with%20Jeong-han%20Through%20Jeong-Dynamics,%20Pastoral%20Psychology%2059,%20no.%202%20(2010).).

³ Christopher Chung and Samson Cho, “Conceptualization of *Jeong* and Dynamics of *Hwabyung*,” *Psychiatry Invest* 3, no. 1 (2006).

Auckland, where my *jeong* is adhered to, has experienced multiple transitions over the last few years, including the town centre's redevelopments⁴ and a series of lockdowns with Covid-19 outbreaks. People have been talking about how the city centre “feels” different, and the most talked-about space is the streets.⁵ City streets, the thoroughfares from buildings to buildings, zones to zones, are abundant and open public places that tell us much about the city. The pedestrians and their movements, the shops, street activities, and their relations to the buildings all entangle to form an atmospheric scene of the street, and each scene makes up the sequence of the city as an experience. Jane Jacobs, US-Canadian author of *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, believed that streets are more than borders or channels to keep order, but rather are generative places where rich public life can grow if equipped with the right facilities.⁶ Streets are vessels for moving bodies and a public theatre staging our shared experiences of the city.

Where everyday interactions are, there are *jeong* and streets. They situate in transitional spaces, define boundaries, and become a node that connects each other. The site of *jeong* and streets is abstract yet concrete, chaotic yet synergetic, and separating yet unifying. While streets are abundant and meshed into many peoples' lives in Auckland, they largely remain as physical routes to get from one location to another, especially when the city is going through a transitional period. In this research, I align with Jacobs' perspective on streets as the most vital organs of a city,⁷ and imagine city streets as the centre of public life – in-between places that permeate, meld and activate a growing mass of rituals, exchange and relationships. To cultivate this idea, this research proposes to dive into *jeong* space through my design practice, entailing a series of experimental making to understand *jeong* as a social practice. *Jeong* is explored through constraints-driven heuristics, embodied field notes, expressive drawings and object-placemaking, suggesting a crossroad between social practice and urban place activation.

The intended outcome of this research is the design of an experimental place activation that is communicated within an exhibition context through various interactive materials, including drawings, prototype objects, scaled models and publications. The study unfolds in four chapters. The first chapter inquires into the fuzzy ground of *jeong*, analysing relevant literature to situate *jeong* and its space contextually. The second chapter discusses real-life projects of place activation, providing insights into *jeong*'s relevance to spatial and social design practice. The third chapter analyses three main methods I used in undertaking this design research, elaborating on how they supported this research and addressing design gaps as well as their limitations. The final chapter discusses the experimental projects of my practice, including a live street activation project for my local context, St Paul Street in Auckland. The key findings are discussed at the end of this chapter, providing an in-depth analysis of the final project, a place activation kit that supports public life in-between St Paul Street Gallery and its street.

⁴ Auckland Council, “Auckland's Future in Progress,” October 1, 2021. 2:51, <https://youtu.be/R6Og8nDNIi8>. Major redevelopment plans, including City Rail Link and the waterfront projects, are outlined here.

⁵ Chris Schulz, “Will Queen Street come back from this?” *The Spinoff* 2022; Todd Niall, “Covid-19: Dozens of Empty Stores on Queen St as Auckland's 'Golden Mile' Reels.” *Stuff*, 2020, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/122889871/covid19-dozens-of-empty-stores-on-queen-st-as-aucklands-golden-mile-reels>.

⁶ Jane Jacobs, *The death and life of great American cities*. (New York: Random House, 1992), 70.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

Under the proposed structure, this research intends to address the following aims:

- a. To creatively explore the space of *jeong* and analyse its key elements through experimental social-spatial practice.
- b. To understand and analyse the crossroad between the framework of *jeong* and city streets by working on a live project for a tactical urban intervention.
- c. To suggest design strategies based on *jeong* that activate city streets as main open spaces, growing public life.



Figure 4. Emma Choi, Moments of city streets, 2022, collage of photography, Auckland.

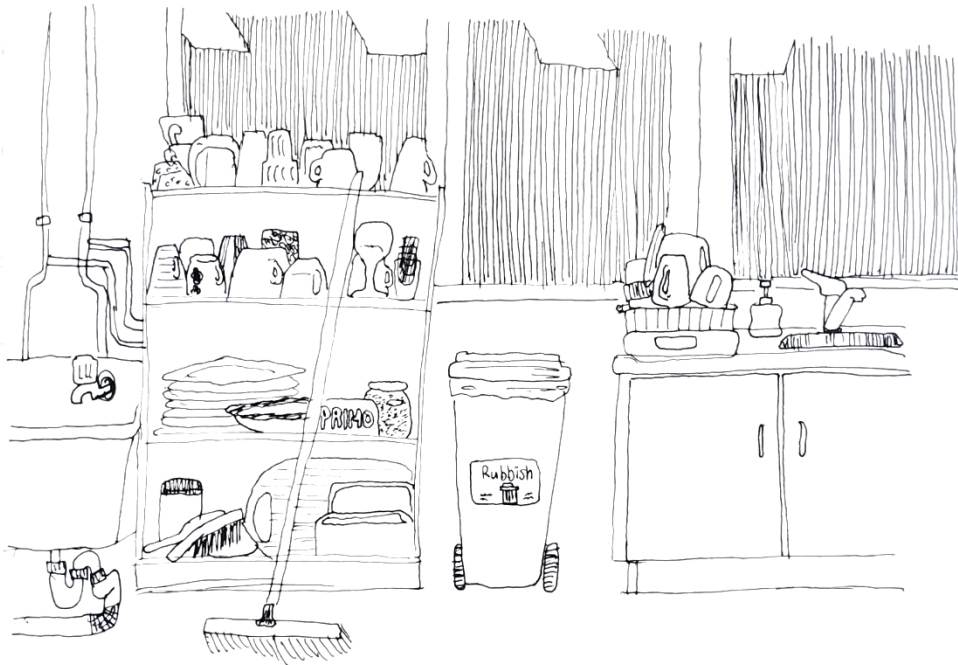


Figure 5. Emma Choi, WE3 studio kitchen, 2022, pen on paper, Auckland.

Chapter One: Contextual Position

Jeong and Everyday Interactions

To situate this design research within the conceptual framework of *jeong*, the forefront challenge became to define and materialise my understanding of *jeong*. After giving it a few tries, I had to admit the difficulties of translating my experience-based knowledge into swift words. Most attempts to describe *jeong* became complex and vague to grasp – entangled expressions of emotions, bodies, relationships and such. Reading contextual allies’ literature, I realised this is a commonly experienced challenge. Deeply rooted in Korean heritage, *jeong* developed into a distinctive cultural concept that scholars struggle to find a direct equivalent notion in other languages.⁸ Professor of psychology based in Korea, Sang-Chin Choi, described *jeong* as “a comprehensive experience that includes emotion, cognition, attitude, word, and concrete practice like sharing material goods.”⁹ His study gives a glimpse of *jeong*’s multifaceted complexity due to its extensive scope, ranging from a primordial mode of relating to something or someone¹⁰ to a complex social experience of “we-ness” at a national level.¹¹ Given that, we need to identify the specific areas of *jeong* that this research will explore.¹²

⁸ Chung and Cho, “Conceptualization of *Jeong*,” 47.

⁹ Quoted in Yohan Ka, “Jeong-han as a Korean Culture-Bound Narcissism.”

¹⁰ Chung and Cho, “Conceptualization of *Jeong*,” 47.

¹¹ Sang-Chin and Han Choi, Gyuseog, “Immanent Trust in a Close Relationship: A Cultural Psychology of Trust in South Korea,” in *Trust and Distrust: Sociocultural Perspectives*, ed. Ivana and Gillespie Marková, Alex (NC, USA: Information Age, 2007).

¹² Such conceptual complexity that makes its experiences exhaustive is commonly observed in other universal emotions, for example, love. Love is a collective experience comprised of diverse elements, such as affection, belonging, commitment, desire, excitement, and so on. To avoid being lost in the multifaceted dimensions of collective experiences, this research seeks to focus on the role of *jeong* in our public social life.

One relevant perspective that appears consistently throughout many texts is that *jeong* is an affective bond that is felt emotionally and acts as a social resource connecting one with another through the sense of togetherness. Professor of psychology Yohan Ka explains the mechanism of *jeong*:

When a person accumulates concern and love for others through long-time, intense interactions, the emotion of *jeong* slowly and steadily is accumulated in that person. Then *jeong* as love toward an object can be turned into *jeong* as personality/character. *Jeong* as personality/character can also practice *jeong* as object love. Thus, it is a circular process.¹³

Here Ka illustrates the transitional qualities of *jeong*. *Jeong* is not a definite state of emotions or sociability but a comprehensive experience that transits different fields, including affects and relationships. Ka's work reminds me of the active *jeong* I developed with a cat, a long-haired tabby that appeared around my house from nowhere. The first encounter was when I spotted the cat on our driveway, lounging in the afternoon sun. I briefly gave it a few strokes, and from the next day onwards, the cat decided to pop over to my house's deck every day. Our encounters accumulated in and around my house, and one rainy evening I noticed my thoughts going out to the cat. I was physically and emotionally connected to the cat through *jeong*, an affective culture that saturated the space between me and my furry friend.

Jeong grows like a snowball, amassing through everyday interactions, and once it starts rolling, it embeds what comes in contact with it and leaves traces behind. The cat turned out to belong to my neighbour's partner Liz, who was temporarily living next door. We instantly tapped into the *jeong* space, sharing conversations about our collective knowledge of the cat Easy Pie and growing this social threshold with other matters, such as the favourite beach this summer. Easy Pie and Liz moved out within a few weeks, but my affective bond with them remains to this day. Within *jeong* space, knowledge embodied with ubiquitous interactions amasses, building gooey fibres of sentiments that adhere and tap into other relationships.

Sprouting silently, often unintentionally, *jeong* emerges from localised knowledge based on everyday interactions. We create and accrue little rituals, such as gentle strokes given to a cat, in our daily periphery, embedding the presence of others. *Jeong* extends and flourishes as one's boundaries collide with others, developing sentimental bridges that grow collective experience-based knowledge, entangling us affectively. This research is particularly fascinated with the location of *jeong*. Inhabiting marginal spaces between different beings, *jeong* tends to soften the boundaries of the related, growing into a transitional vessel that transcends the self to blend with others. In the following sections, I will review embodied knowledge and French anthropologist Marcel Mauss' *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* as *jeong*'s contextual ally, discussing the mechanism of *jeong* space.

¹³ Ka, "Jeong-han as a Korean Culture-Bound Narcissism."



Figure 6. Emma Choi, *Jeong space with Easy Pie the cat*, 2023, collage of photo, Auckland.

Embodied Knowledge and Affective Dimensions

Often germinated by localised interactions, *jeong* feeds on physical exchanges and develops into a felt mesh that entangles one with one's surroundings, socially and affectively. Maurice Hamington, Professor of Philosophy and a care ethicist, wrote in his book *Embodied Care* about the role of the body in acquiring knowledge.¹⁴ Much of his work refers to French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, and views our bodies as the cohesive mode of relating to the world. To Hamington, the knowledge obtained through the body – forms, textures, behaviours and so on – is one of the requisites to elicit care, making an abstract subject a “concrete other”¹⁵ that shares corporeal existence. As Merleau-Ponty put it, “my body is made of the same flesh as the world (as it is perceived) and moreover this flesh of my body is shared by the world.”¹⁶ Not only do our bodies learn about other embodied existences through sensory fields, but they also make us resonate with others using the explicit and tacit knowledge of sharing bodily existence.

Hamington's perspective – that to render care, we need experience-based information about the subject – does not come across as unfamiliar. His written work supports the fundamental mechanism of *jeong*, explaining why *jeong* often develops with bodily interactions between different beings. To care about Easy Pie, for instance, I needed to know how she looks different

¹⁴ Maurice Hamington, *Embodied Care* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁶ Quoted in Hamington, *Embodied Care*. 53.

to other cats, what time of the day she tends to visit our deck and the sweet spots around her ears that she likes to be scratched on. Hamington further suggests another layer of embodied knowledge, “a web of entangled feelings and subtle perceptions”¹⁷ that remains unarticulated but makes care possible. This felt dimension of knowledge grows silently within the amassing body of explicit knowledge, affecting our sense of relatedness and proximity with other beings. What Hamington is assessing here shares the same boundaries with the space of *jeong*, making his study helpful to elaborate on how ubiquitous interactions build sentimental fibres of *jeong*. This analysis sheds light on the design approach of urban placemaking and encourages me to consider *jeong* as a social resource that leverages everyday rituals to activate public life. Chapter Three further discusses this idea with case studies, analysing how other creatives activated their projects using this social dimension.

Gift and Entanglements Beyond

While Hamington’s *Embodied Care* explains how bodily interactions evolve into affective resonance similar to *jeong*, it also poses a limiting framework for *jeong*. In Hamington’s perspective, direct interaction between different beings is the core requisite for *jeong* to develop and bridge the gaps between them. However, in my experience, this was not always true. Even though I had no direct physical interactions with Liz, the owner of Easy Pie, I felt an instant emotional proximity to her that flowed through *jeong* space. Such phenomenon coincides with the description by some scholars of *jeong* as a “collective emotion” or an emotion that “exists outside of oneself.”¹⁸ To understand this implicit entanglement and the magnetic effects of *jeong*, my research borrows the perspective of Marcel Mauss, a sociologist and an anthropologist who approached human relations and society with a holistic view in his pioneering work *The Gift*.

To Mauss, *The Gift* is a structural phenomenon of one emerging from self to others, requiring people to “become sentimentally aware of themselves and of their situation in relation to others.”¹⁹ Mauss’ perspective takes acts of exchanges beyond physical interactions and sheds light on deeper, unarticulated engagements between people, such as stories, emotions, culture, and regard imbued within interactions. According to Mauss, gifting is an intrinsic practice of humankind, constituting our common life.²⁰

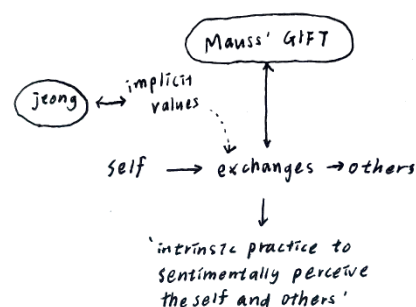


Figure 7. Emma Choi, Abstract diagrams, 2023, Auckland.

¹⁷ Hamington, *Embodied Care*, 45.

¹⁸ Chung and Cho, “Conceptualization of Jeong,” 48.

¹⁹ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), 102.

²⁰ Mauss, *The Gift*, 107.

Mauss' sense of gift acknowledges implicit yet evocative mechanisms that revolve around our physical transactions. To him, the essence of "gift" lies in its social implications on the receiver and the giver, blending their worlds through understanding each other's situations, expressed in material exchanges. While materials or services are commonly rendered and received as "gifts," the intrinsic practice of acknowledging me and others flows through the exchange, making *jeong* embodied within the materials' circulations. This suggests the capability of *jeong* to exist outside of one's body or mind, and to circulate as a "collective emotion" that transcends physical interactions.²¹

In a way, *jeong* works similarly to Mauss' sense of gift. What makes the potential difference between the two may be their logistic locations – Mauss' gift emerges from the space of "self" to be exchanged with others back and forth,²² whereas *jeong* roots and grows in marginal spaces between people to be cultivated and shared. This may be explained if we view *jeong* as a comprehensive matter comprising collective knowledge accumulated over time, providing a permeable social module for one to relate with another. To discuss this idea further, my participation in the St Paul Street Activation research collective is reflected and analysed in Chapter Four.

²¹ Chung and Cho, "Conceptualization of *Jeong*," 48.

²² Mauss, *The Gift*, 91.

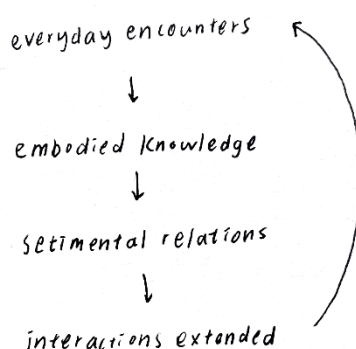


Figure 8. Emma Choi, Mechanism of *jeong*, 2023.

Jeong as Social Practice

The contextual boundaries of *jeong*, embodied knowledge, and Mauss' *gift* overlap in many aspects, bolstering each other by facilitating social and affective interactions. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and embodied knowledge support how *jeong* can develop from experience-based knowledge. In particular, *jeong*'s affective qualities resonate with Hamington's view on the felt dimension of embodied knowledge, highlighting its implicit yet evocative mechanism as a primordial social resource. Mauss' sense of gift transcends material exchanges and interprets the act of gifting as an intrinsic practice of humankind, sentimentally acknowledging self and others. *Jeong* may differ from gift in its logistic location, because it grows in collective margins to be shared, while gift emerges from the self to be exchanged with others. A contextual review of *jeong* in its own and neighbouring fields has revealed a range of conceptual elements, which have helped me understand the characteristics of *jeong* in depth and breadth.

This research defines *jeong* as a comprehensive experience saturated with affective and cognitive interactions between different beings, including people, animals, objects, and places. These experience-based interactions are often unexpected and non-contractual, and accumulate embodied knowledge of the subjects, including "a web of entangled feelings."²³ *Jeong* is an intrinsic practice that sentimentally acknowledges the locations of self and others, making it an affective social resource. It roots from in-between spaces and grows into "a collective emotion,"²⁴ transcending direct exchanges and allowing multiple individuals to tap into it. Taking this contextual position of *jeong* forward, we will look at local and international place-activation projects created by artists and designers, examining the relevance of *jeong* as a social practice within urban placemaking as a spatial practice.

²³ Hamington, *Embodied Care*. 45.

²⁴ Chung and Cho, "Conceptualization of *Jeong*," 48.

Chapter Two: Case Studies

Figure 9. Satellites, The Claw, 2018, Image by David St George, Auckland.

Public Life Growing on Margins

The Claw (figure 9), a public installation by the design group Satellites in collaboration with Auckland-based artist Hanna Shim, temporarily took place over three weeks in the town centre of Northcote, Auckland.²⁵ The installation was enacted in an empty retail shop filled with assorted soft plush toys, inviting the public to engage with a giant arcade-like claw machine to win the plushies and take them home. The work recognised the tension pervading Northcote due to the ongoing redevelopment plan, and it strategically occupied an untenanted shop floor to enliven the neighbourhood in transition. While the plushies' journey from the installation to the players' home spoke to certain urban narratives, including disruption and displacement,²⁶ *The Claw* translated such local contexts into a more enjoyable experience in the form of leisure and play.

The Claw is a great example of temporary public activation that enlivened an unused space and activated memorable encounters open to the locals passing by the street. The empty retail shop became an active transient place, a spatial extension to the pedestrian footpath, and gathered people around a familiar encounter that recalled the arcade crane game (see fig. 10). The high-spirited experiences staged in an arcade-like format made it easy for *The*

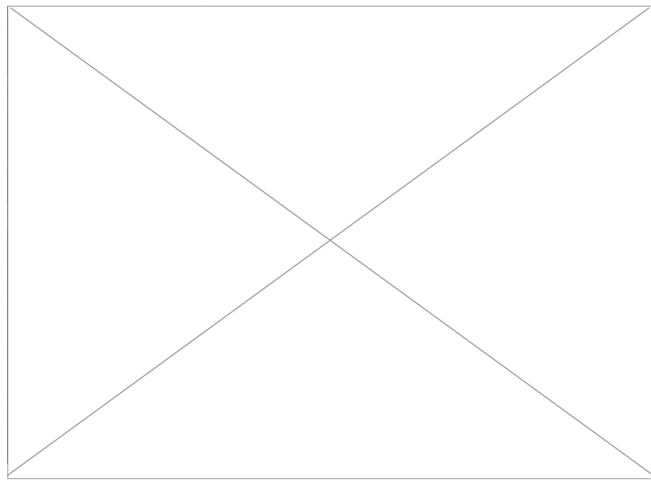


Figure 10. Satellites, *The Claw*, 2018, Image by David St George, Auckland.

Claw to be shared and enjoyed even between strangers, eliciting a collective emotion among the public participants. The fun, light-hearted and commonly understood rituals of *The Claw* made this place-activation relevant to the conceptual terrain of *jeong*, as *jeong* also emerges from mutual experiences and understanding. *The Claw*, which was ingrained with leisure rituals, became a public resource, a playful node that activated social opportunities to share emotions and conversations with “concrete others”²⁷ through acts of play. In turn, *The Claw* became a relevant local case study to this design research by demonstrating how a marginal space such as a vacant shop alongside a public footpath could become a strategic annex activating Auckland’s urban community. It indicated that staging leisure rituals was an effective way to create *jeong* space between the work and its audiences, leveraging our common life and adding to the public life.

²⁵ Satellites, *The Claw*, 2018. <http://satellites.co.nz/2018/>.

²⁶ Micheal Michael. “The Claw,” Accessed November 16, 2022. <https://www.micheallicheal.com/the-claw>.

²⁷ Hamington, *Embodied Care*. 42.

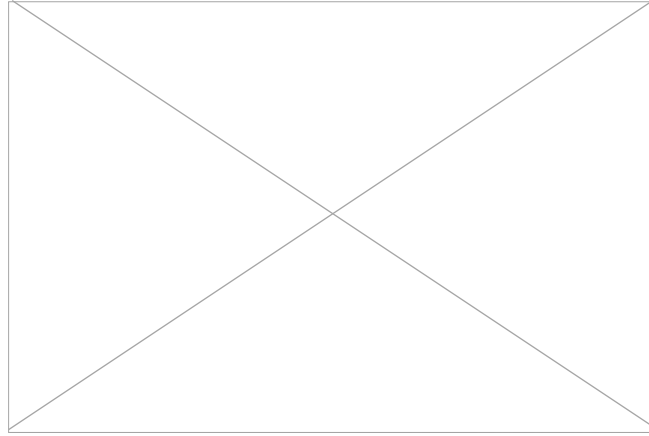


Figure 11. Lee Mingwei, *The Moving Garden*, 2009 - present.

Activating Spatial and Social Thresholds

The spatial and relational design elements of *The Claw* remind me of Taiwanese-American contemporary artist Lee Mingwei's work, *The Moving Garden*. This ongoing series of interactive installations revolve around our abilities to give and receive, inviting gallery visitors to join the acts of gifting.²⁸ On the cracked opening of a granite garden bed (fig. 11), Mingwei offers fresh flowers for the public to take and gift to a stranger they come across along their detoured journey from the gallery. The artist's provision of flowers becomes an initiating gesture of *jeong*, that in this case can be universally understood as gift ritual. His practice ripples around the site through moving bodies and flowers, connecting strangers through unexpected generosity and spreading invisible seeds of giving and receiving in the city. While *The Claw* emerged from Northcote's urban narratives associated with its long-term development plan, Mingwei's *The Moving Garden* evolved from the artist's interests in commercialism and human exchanges,²⁹ making his work less site-specific but perhaps more permeable across different sites.³⁰ *The Moving Garden* is relevant to this design research as it is an example of activating urban in-between spaces socially and spatially. The work transits various urban thresholds – from an opening of the granite flower bed, around gallery spaces to grids of urban streets and into a stranger's hand, extending its presence through ubiquitous transitions of moving bodies. While we can quantify the materials of Mingwei's work, it may be impossible to trace all the implicit social trajectories of his project, which speaks back to the nature of *jeong*'s unmeasurable scope.

²⁸ Lee Mingwei, *The Moving Garden*, 2009–present. Granite and fresh flowers, 1200 x 134 x 60 cm.

²⁹ *The Moving Garden*. <https://www.leemingwei.com/>.

³⁰ The work was staged around the globe in America, Asia, Europe, and Oceania.

The biggest beauty and limitation of *The Moving Garden* both lie in this untraceable characteristic of the work. While participants may discover the joy of relating to others through giving and receiving as the work intended, the possibilities of unpredictable situations always prevail, such as receivers refusing the flower gifts, or participants keeping flowers for themselves or misunderstanding the artist's intentions. The design challenges of *The Moving Garden* are also highly relevant to my research as I propose to work with *jeong*, which involves crossing social thresholds. My response to this matter may align with Mingwei – surrendering my work to others' eyes and hands and trusting in the principles of *jeong* as design safeguards embodied in the work. In Mingwei's case, the fresh flowers offered to the visitors were his artistic method of rendering kindness to others, encouraging them to extend the gesture by doing the same to their others. *The Moving Garden*, thus, can be interpreted as Mingwei's creative agent relating to others, germinating "concrete" exchanges in public using the social power of gift.³¹ Mingwei's practice is a fascinating case study for my design research. It suggests how our everyday practice of relating to others, such as *jeong* and gift, can add delicate layers to creative work and activate places, bodies and emotions. It is also an exciting discovery that Mingwei synthesised his interests in giving and receiving with his creative practice, making material and social circulations through fresh flowers. His approach effectively extended *The Moving Garden* beyond the physical boundaries of galleries, out to stairs, lifts, streets, someone's home and all other possible places. It is in an imaginative public life growing in spatial and social thresholds, where I believe *jeong* can amass and saturate our shared world, too.

Figure 12. Emma Choi, Centorian pet newsletter, 2020, risograph on paper, Auckland.

Temporary Practices project that activated spatial and social thresholds.



³¹ Mauss, *The Gift*, 17. Mauss claims that to receive a gift is to enter into contractual alliances, obliged to give back.

Everyday Placemaking

In the previous section, two temporary installation projects, *The Claw* and *The Moving Garden*, were analysed to suggest that *jeong* is an intrinsic practice that acknowledges social thresholds and can activate transitional urban spaces with growing interactions. Interestingly, both projects unfolded closely with city streets, inviting and disseminating the work's gestures to the public, but not necessarily being permanently embedded into the streetscape. According to the contextual position discussed in the earlier chapter, *jeong* roots and saturates through ubiquitous interactions in our daily surroundings. I looked at another case study to address this gap and inquire what *jeong* may look like if it was more permanently embodied in Auckland's urban fabric.

Redesigned and re-opened in mid-2017,³² Freyberg Place is one of a few public places in the heart of Auckland city that supports varying scales of public life, accommodating different urban activities from a city commuter's lunch break to large cultural festivals (see fig. 13). The design of Freyberg Place revolves around Auckland-based artist John Reynolds' *One hundred and eighty-nine steps*, a drawn narrative that acknowledges the volcanic lava that once flowed downhill from Albert Park in the form of cascading flights of stairs.³³ His drawing developed into a series of iterating concrete steps, integrated with planting beds of native trees and a water feature flowing down the staircases, commemorating Auckland's ancient streams. One notable design strategy is that the new design of Freyberg Place was co-developed with the refurbishment project of Ellen Melville Centre,³⁴ Auckland's midtown community hub. As a result, the ground floor of Ellen Melville Centre opens out to the plaza level through its long-sheltered porch, making the building an extended part of Freyberg Place.

³² "Women take the lead on central city redevelopment," OurAuckland, 2017, <https://ourauckland.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/news/2017/02/women-take-the-lead-on-central-city-redevelopment/>.

³³ "One hundred and eighty-nine steps," Isthmus, accessed April 17, 2023, <https://isthmus.co.nz/project/freyberg-place/>.

³⁴ "One hundred and eighty-nine steps."



Figure 13. Emma Choi, K-pop concert in Freyberg Place, 2023, Auckland.

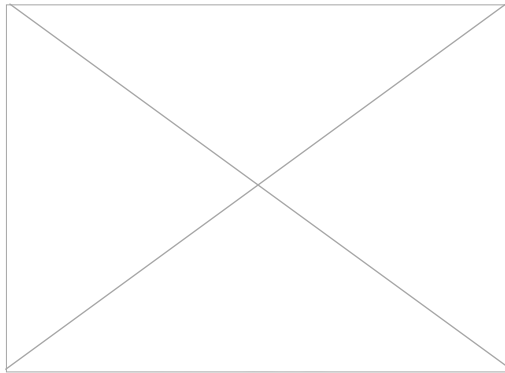


Figure 14. Isthmus, Freyberg Place, 2017, Auckland.

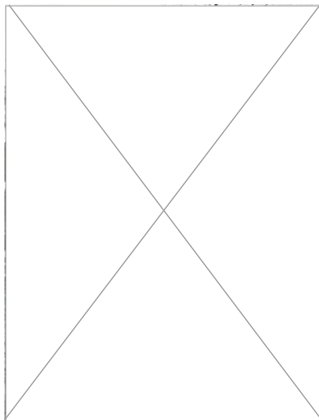


Figure 15. Joseph Beuys, 7000 Oaks, 1982, Kassel. Reproduced from "Fett, Filz und 7000 Eichen: Kassel feiert 100. Geburtstag von Künstler Joseph Beuys," *Lokalo 24*, January 15, 2021, <https://www.lokalo24.de/lokales/kassel/fett-filz-7000-eichen-kassel-feiert-100-geb>

Reynolds described Freyberg Place's concrete steps as his attempt to design a civic artwork that would not be like "a plonked-down bronze sculpture but a participatory public installation."³⁵ His statement reminds me of German scholar and artist Joseph Beuys' social sculptures, a praxis developed with his interests in the fields of sociology and anthropology. Beuys saw our social relations as sculptural materials and the acts of contributors as sculpting processes.³⁶ In turn, his artistic work became a social practice empowering the audience to participate in the process of sculpting, encouraging people to view their everyday relations as a work of art and themselves as artists.³⁷ In Freyberg Place, a cascade of concrete steps is provided for the public to define their uses, making Reynolds' idea contextually aligned with Beuys' social sculpture. The concrete steps become spatial casts moulded with peoples' bodies, changing their forms from waiting room seating to a granite bed for napping in the sun, a kids' playground to a busker's stage, an elevated balcony for a festival to concrete plinths for other public arts, to speakers' corners. (see fig. 14) Although flights of stairs are familiar urban thresholds commonly experienced between floors and between the ground and buildings, the way that Freyberg Place has unexpectedly staged the steps calls for the public's imaginative power, giving people opportunities to exercise their own relations. This open plaza is in constant flux, a social sculpture shaped by the public and shaping public life.

A study of Freyberg Place reveals an interesting avenue for this design research to follow in its footsteps, especially the way in which public design can support vibrant urban life by creatively staging familiar threshold moments, such as transiting from one place to another through flights of stairs. Reynolds' steps were iterated, repeated and amplified to accommodate various urban activities, effectively inviting the public to sculpt his work collaboratively with peoples' bodies. The design of Freyberg Place is permeable as it encourages people to tap into its features using their embodied and imaginative knowledge, saturating the transitional design with the growing mass of everyday interactions. The study suggests my practice could explore *jeong* through social and spatial thresholds, which will encourage people to bring in their own embodied knowledge and imaginative interactions. In Chapter Four, I explore various material and social thresholds through creative making, piloting the staging of *jeong* towards the intended outcome of this design research and bridging my practice of *jeong* and placemaking.

³⁵ "Freyberg Place by Isthmus," Landezine International Landscape Award, accessed May 2, 2023, <https://landezine-award.com/freyberg-place/>.

³⁶ Robert Huber, "Defining Sculpture: Beyond the Expanded Field," *International Journal of the Arts in Society* 6, no. 5 (10/2012), <https://doi.org/10.18848/1833-1866/CGP/v06i05/36094>, 70.

³⁷ Huber, "Defining Sculpture," 70.



Figure 16. Emma Choi, *Experimenting with soil and shredded paper*, 2022, Auckland.

Chapter Three: Methods of Making

To explore *jeong* space and its relevance to our everyday spatial and temporal experiences, my practice drew particularly on methods from social art practices and the Temporary Practices / Temporary Publics group at AUT.³⁸ A set of methods were explored and revised throughout the research, which developed its own design roadmap. There were three main methods used to synthesise *jeong* with my creative practice: embodied study of the field, drawings as imaginary inquiry, and constraint-driven heuristics. These methods worked as building blocks in my design practice, changing their configurations in each project but interlocked to buttress the new findings. Most importantly, each method helped me embody spatial and social thresholds that contextualise the making process, supporting my practice to identify and respond to relevant design gaps.

While each method supported this research's journey to a great extent, some limitations were also revealed, such as difficulties in making embodied study for a conceptual field, and ambivalent design boundaries. Under each method's heading, I attempt to discuss how the method was used to make creative findings, as well as how the acknowledged limitations were challenged.

³⁸ Temporary Practices / Temporary Publics are a group of "artists practising in the inter-related fields of social, temporal and installation practices." L. Meyle, E. Ohara, M. Redmond, "The Colophon: Where moving parts come together." *Revista GEMInIS*, [S. l.], v. 13, n. 2, p. 59–72, 2022. DOI: 10.53450/2179-1465.RG.2022v13i2p59-72.

Method 1: Embodied Study of the Field

My practice always starts with site studies to unfold, involving three main cognitive processes: observing, documenting and reflecting. I refer to this as an embodied study of the field, since I understand the site through my physical presence within it. I wander through the site, make stops in between, observe my surroundings, take notes, sketch, and document any bodily-learned information that stands out during the field visit. Using various documentation techniques, from making a list to taking photos, field studies materialise my embodied knowledge of the site through cognitive interpretation, becoming the fundamental groundwork for unveiling key narratives that speak throughout my design.

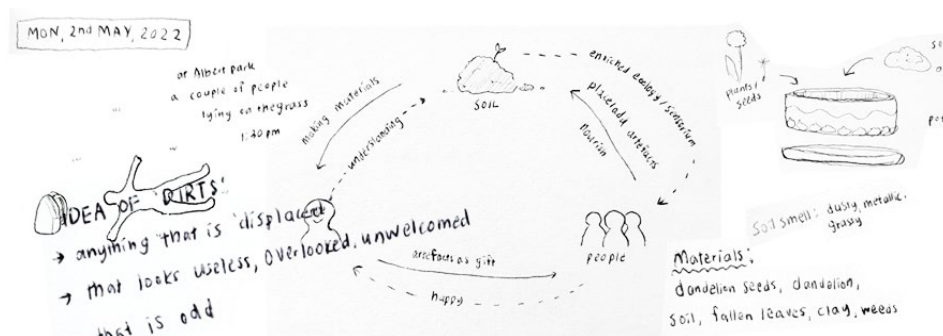


Figure 17. Emma Choi, Embodied field notes and sketches, 2022, Auckland.

For instance, the Material Imaginaries project, *Circling with the Displaced* (discussed in Chapter Four: Cycle 2), evolved from my field notes in Auckland's Albert Park (see fig. 17), where I was intrigued by observing varying forms of relationships with the ground.³⁹ Sitting on a Victorian bench, I sketched people lying on the grass, worker bees buzzing around sunflower beds, sparrows foraging on concrete floors, and a used plastic spoon misplaced under the bench I sat on. Slowly digesting bodily interactions within the site, the observations of my outside world synthesised with the flow of implicit inquiries, making my fieldnote a cognitive lab where I distilled my embodied perceptions. Amanda Coffey, United Kingdom sociology lecturer and author, described fieldwork as the “scholarly endeavours from the bodily reality of being in the field”⁴⁰ that help researchers learn about their own and others' perspectives.⁴¹ The field study gravitated my thoughts around the reciprocity of bodies feeding off soil and soil feeding off bodies. This led the project to work with excavated earth, exploring gift rituals in the exhibition context. Amsterdam-based artist Elena Khurtova's project *Displace* entailed a similar process; involving a two-month intimacy with soil, it embodied her contextual narratives such as human-soil relations, deforestation in soil's origin, and the interdependence of all life forms.⁴²

³⁹ The Material Imaginaries Research Collective in AUT's School of Art and Design, led by Sue Gallagher and Carl Douglas, explores material-led creative methodologies with a focus on the way materials have imaginative, narrative, and affective agency. In June, 2022, I participated in a group exhibition with the MIRC at St Paul Street Gallery 3.

⁴⁰ Amanda Coffey, *The Ethnographic Self*, (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 1999), <https://methods.sagepub.com/book/the-ethnographic-self>. 68.

⁴¹ Coffey, “The Ethnographic Self,” 75.

⁴² Elena Khurtova, *Displace*, 2020. soil, Montperrin Hospital bedsheets, rope. 3 bis f Art Centre. <https://mater.digital/chapterone/elena-khurtova/>.



Figure 18. Emma Choi, Embodied study with excavated earth, 2022, Auckland.

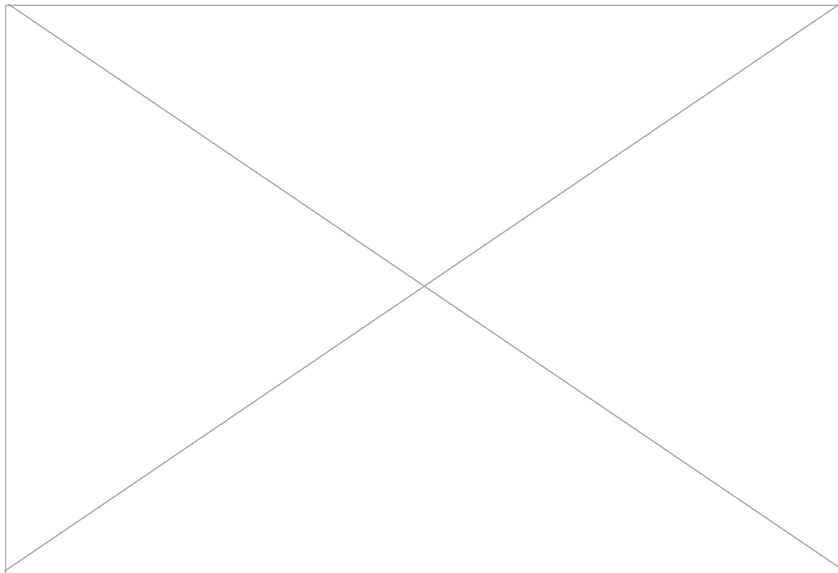


Figure 19. Elena Khurtova, Displace, 2020, Aix-en-Provence.

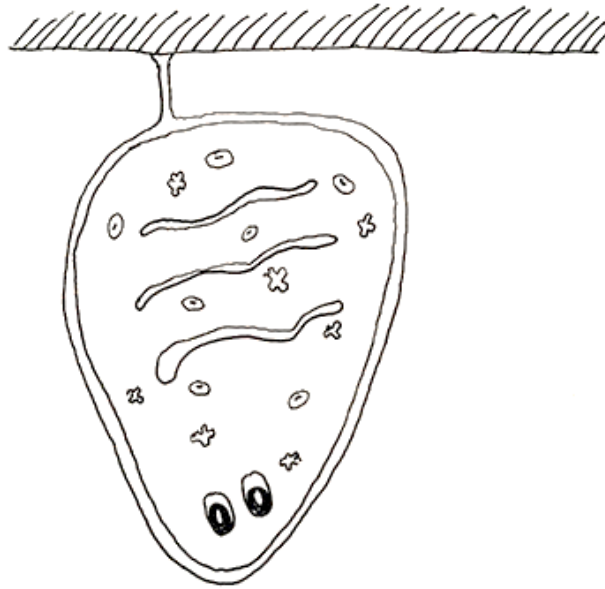


Figure 20. Emma Choi, *One fragment a day*, 2022, Auckland.
More details in Chapter Four, Cycle 3.

Making an embodied study of a conceptual field such as *jeong* was trickier to start with as there was no single location to visit or be in physically. I realised that *jeong* is a field made of consecutive fleeting moments that involve amorphous, innate, and subjective emotions, but that is still acknowledged through interactions with others in an everyday context. This research, in turn, made an embodied study of *jeong* through daily journal entries, recording the forms of interactions, physical surroundings, and my cognitive emotions to document the field experiences as they arose. It served as an in-depth study of affective and social relations with my surroundings, providing this research with a uniquely distinctive lens to frame and apply *jeong* in my making. The biggest limitation of an embodied study of *jeong* is its subjectivity, as my own perspectives and feelings constituted a significant portion of the exploration. In response, the contextual review of relevant literature, which addresses *jeong*-relevant topics, became an accompanying technique to help this research analyse the field studies within a broader pool of perspectives. As a result, embodied field study became more than a practice of documenting experience-based learning but an explicit and implicit process of positioning myself as a creative researcher within everyday life contexts.

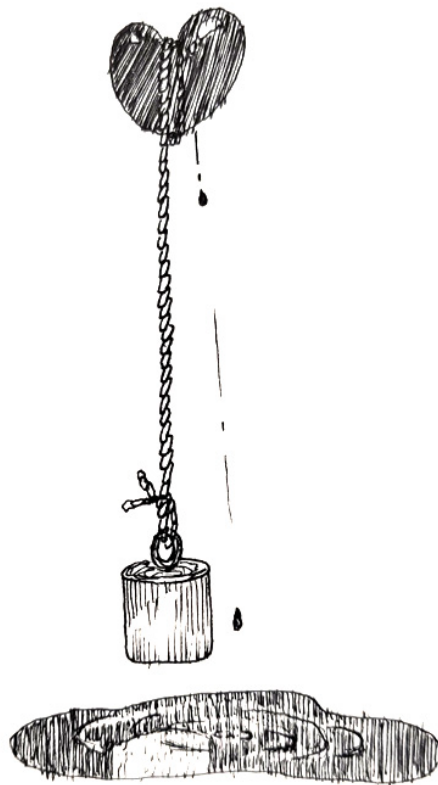


Figure 21. Emma Choi, Expressive drawing based on *jeong* diary, 2022, Auckland.

Method 2: Drawings as Imaginary Inquiry

This research involved three types of drawings throughout the design practice - observational, iterative, and expressive (see fig. 22). The observational drawings emerged from solid visual information perceived through eyes, often acquired during field visits. Iterative drawings mainly supported the process of concept design and development, layering imagined scenarios in semi-solid settings – for instance, configuring possible arrangements for the Material Imaginaries installation in WE gallery three (see fig. 23). The expressive drawing was a new technique I tried in this research, especially as the research ventured into the terrain of *jeong*. Compared to other drawings which fed off material-based perception, expressive drawings emanated from intangible dimensions, such as my emotion-driven memories about particular experiences.

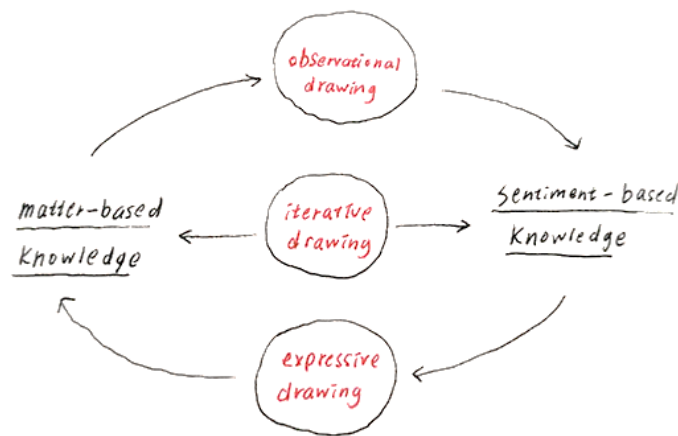


Figure 22. Emma Choi, Drawings as Imaginary Inquiry, 2023.

Following Method 1, drawings were often used to synthesise, intensify and distil the embodied knowledge of the fields. For example, a series of abstract drawings was made based on my diarising entries, imagining how *jeong* space may look (see fig. 21). Coupled with reflection, this exercise elicited the intrinsic textures of *jeong*, effectively making this method the machinery of the imaginary, which crystallised what was impalpable before. “How do I make what is abstract tangible?” Icelandic-Danish artist Olafur Eliasson asks in the documentary *Abstract: The Art of Design*, and continues, “It’s the process of narrowing it down to the bone.”⁴³ To Eliasson, drawing is not as much about making a visual representation as it is a practice of imagination. He claims that abstract drawings encourage people to “see things that are invisible,”⁴⁴ and his perspective supports why this method is critical in materialising *jeong*.

⁴³ Jason Zeldes, *Abstract: The Art of Design*, season 2, “Olafur Eliasson: The Design of Art,” aired 2019, on Netflix.

⁴⁴ “Olafur Eliasson: The Design of Art.”

When I presented my expressive drawings to a group of people, I had an interesting experience of them talking about a range of feelings and memories of their own, effectively making the drawings as surfaces of *jeong* that people can adhere to. American ecologist David Abram describes the perceptive process “as the silent conversation our body has with the world around it.”⁴⁵ Drawing is a creative ritual of building an imaginary playground that is capable of facilitating “silent conversation” between me and the viewers. In turn, this research renders a social gesture to have a collective conversation through its drawing practice, constituting a felt space of *jeong* that activates our affective imaginaries.

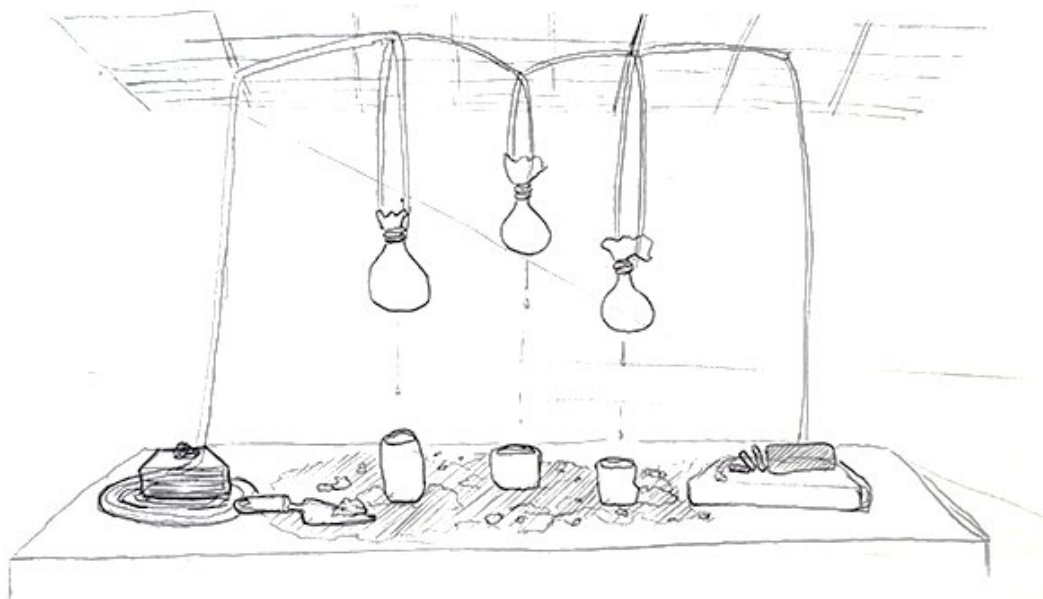


Figure 23. Emma Choi, Material Imaginaries concept sketches, 2022, pen on paper, Auckland.

⁴⁵ David Abram, *The Spell of The Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*, First edition. ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1996). Quoted in Hamington, *Embodied Care*. 47.

Method 3: Constraint-driven Heuristics

My creative practice keeps the work open and responsive to its surroundings throughout the project's life and beyond. I often observe that a project yields a greater fruit when it has the spontaneous process of shaping its conclusion through trials and reflections, rather than systematic methods built around pre-determined steps. This research's exploration unfolded similarly, a fluid operation corresponding to what Clark Moustakas, US-based humanistic psychologist, defines as heuristic research. Moustakas describes heuristic research as "a process of internal search," a self-searching journey that discovers its meaning and develops its own procedures of investigation and analysis through the course of study.⁴⁶ It is a heavily process-oriented approach involving many inner inquiries that provided both benefits and drawbacks for my research design.



Figure 24. Emma Choi, Constraint-driven heuristic making, 2022, Auckland.
Having no access to the school labs encouraged me to work with plastic wastes and tools available at home.

My research began early in 2022 with an underpinning question, "How may I enhance Auckland's public life in the urban setting, designing a collective experience sustained by social resources rather than capital-driven?" The soft framing of this research supported discoveries of heuristic gaps and solutions as my creative practice proceeded. For example, in Chapter Four: Cycle 1, I began working with sugar as my main making material, which led to implementing "baking" as my design method, and this was later used with plastic wastes to make keepsake objects for the donors of the materials (see fig. 24). This project made me contextually delve into Marcel Mauss' *The Gift* as a key text. Heuristic thinking and making may appear sporadic and unrelated as they emerge, but throughout this research, I learnt that the maker has to trust the process and that all it takes is to weave the learnings into a cohesive body of work through deep reflective self-inquiry, beading every fragment together.

⁴⁶ Clark Moustakas, *Heuristic research: Design, Methodology, and Applications*, (California: Sage Publications, Inc., 1990). 9.

While this research benefited largely from heuristic methods, including the moments of encountering delightful surprises by accidental making (see fig. 25-26), I faced some challenges in the later phase mainly due to my project's boundaries being "too soft," making it challenging to streamline my practice in a precise direction. Around this time, I was invited to participate in a co-design process with the Material Imaginaries Research Collective and Auckland Council as part of the St Paul Street Activation (SPSA) project. The project was to replace an existing temporary urban activation with more permanent street features, such as seating and planters. I learnt from working in the SPSA team that solid design constraints, such as the type of design and a specific site, can intensify heuristic design exploration. Working within a strategic boundary helped narrow down the design focus, unleashing more room to explore astute heuristics. Moustakas claims, "There is no substitute for direct, comprehensive, accurate first-person accounts of experience."⁴⁷ The trajectory of my practice within this research has been heuristic, offering a direct experience of balancing between keeping the process fluid within well-defined design boundaries. Anchored through SPSA, this research defined city streets as its main public place to activate, setting St Paul Street as a physical site to further develop my practice.



Figure 25. Emma Choi, Experimental clay object broken inside my canvas tote, 2022, Auckland.

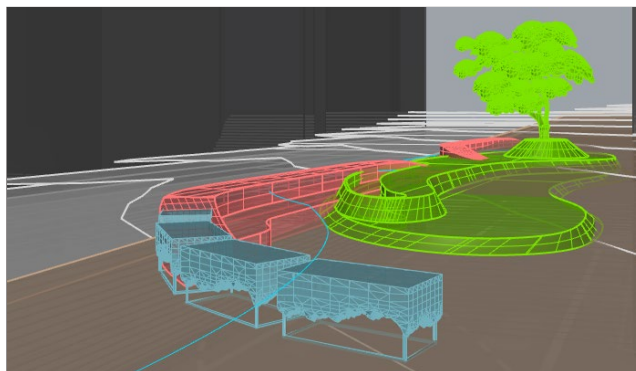


Figure 26. Emma Choi, SPSA digital modelling, 2023, Auckland. Accidentally turning multiple object layers on, an interesting concept model was discovered.

⁴⁷ Moustakas, *Heuristic research*, 90.

Chapter Four: Cycles of Making

Cycle 1: Soft Narrative Beyond Material Exchange

The three methods discussed in the previous chapter came together in a series of experimental acts. The first project unfolded in my house, from the downstairs kitchen area. The “solid” situation – that I had no physical access to school labs – encouraged me to build fluid relationships with the kitchen, transforming it into a site, a studio and a design lab. Such a situation left me with limited options, from materials to fabrication tools. At the same time, it provided the perfect setting to be creative with what is on hand, developing heuristic series of making and thinking driven by the design constraints. First, I started working with common kitchen ingredients, such as sugar (see fig. 27-30). I wondered if my design practice may act as an evocative lens to look through, providing people with alternate ways to see and think of abundant materials. Accordingly, I collected unwanted plastics around my house, making them into literal and metaphorical lenses that shift how we view these waste materials differently. Working with plastic, the transparent objects I created became microscopic lenses enquiring into their material narratives.

As a by-product of capitalist societies, plastic waste circulates even to the most delicate vessels of our lives, making them almost undetectable. I extended my project further by asking my friends to give me any unwanted plastics found in their places, introducing social dimensions to this study. They responded to my call to arms by offering various plastic wastes, ranging from takeaway cups to used cosmetic containers (see fig. 32). With the materials gathered from multiple locations, my practice began to embed the flowing motions of bodies, relationships, and plastics. This particular work left my hands when I gifted the two artefacts to a friend who made her visit to the gallery space (see fig. 37). The plastics went through a full material cycle, travelling from the friend's place as rubbish and taken back as adornments. Within this creative inquiry into waste materials, I observed that my making situates in-between human practices of giving and receiving, attaching new narratives and emotions to an object.

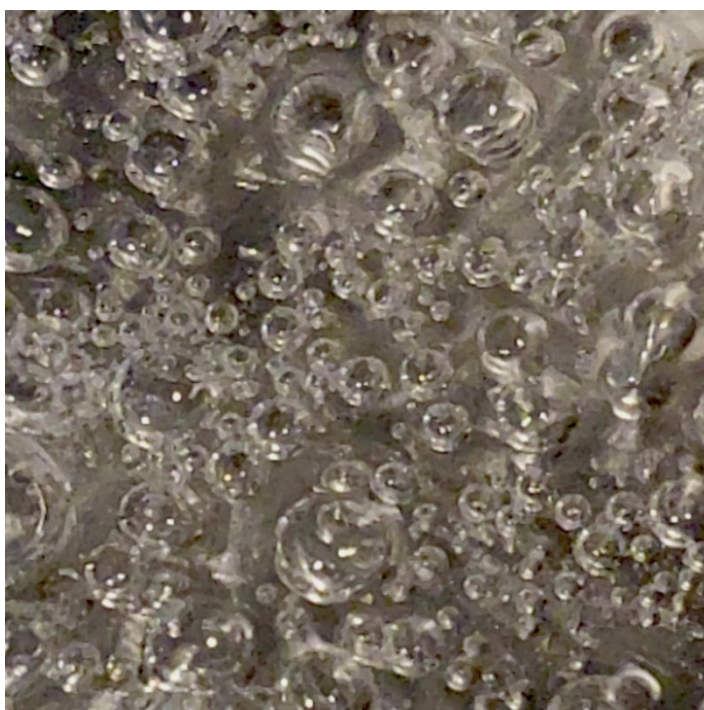


Figure 27. Emma Choi, Boiling sugar water, 2022, Auckland.

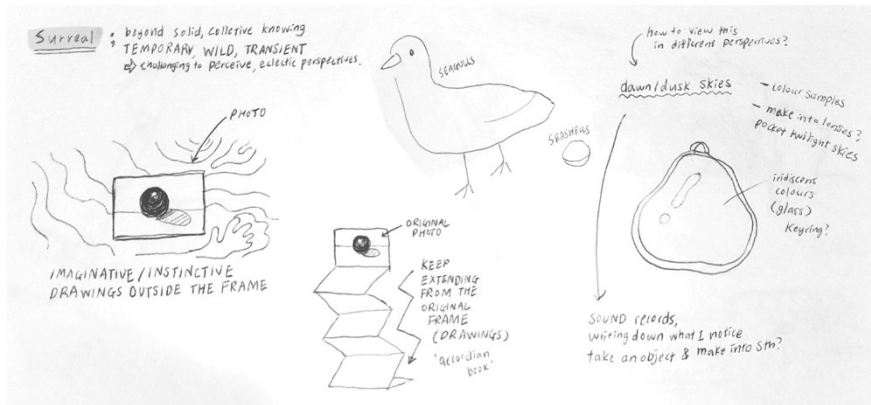


Figure 28. Emma Choi, Idea sketches around the word 'surreal', 2022, Auckland.

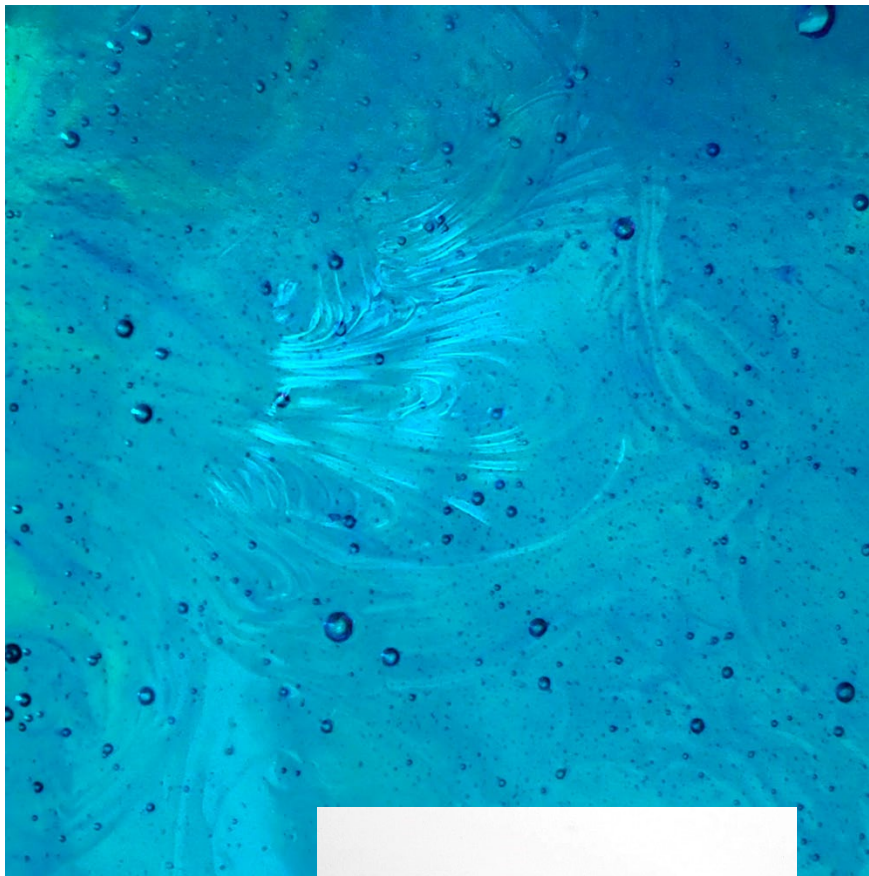


Figure 29. Emma Choi, Closed-up sugar object, 2022, sugar, water, and food colouring, Auckland.

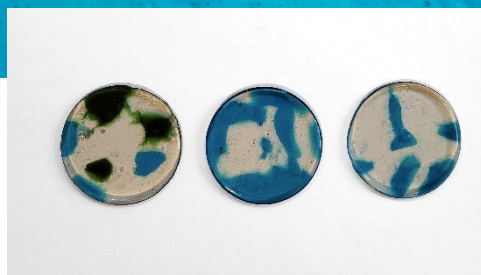


Figure 30. Emma Choi, Sugar pendants, 2022, sugar, water, and food colouring, Auckland.



Figure 31. Emma Choi, Crushed up plastic wastes on baking tray, 2022, Auckland.

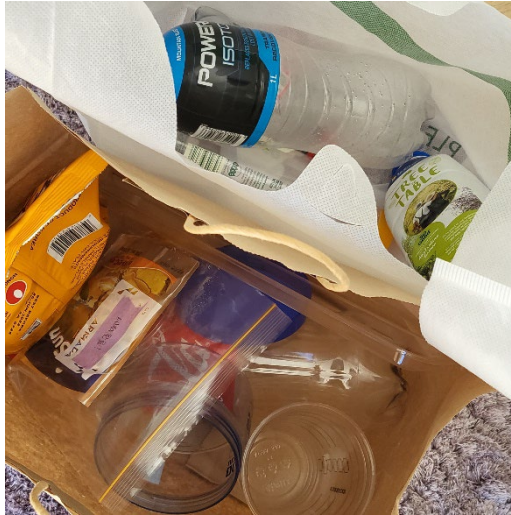


Figure 32. Emma Choi, Plastic waste from houses of multiple friends, 2022, Auckland.



Figure 33. Emma Choi, Close-up of oven-baked plastic wastes, 2022, Auckland. Interesting surface details emerged when different plastic pieces were mixed.

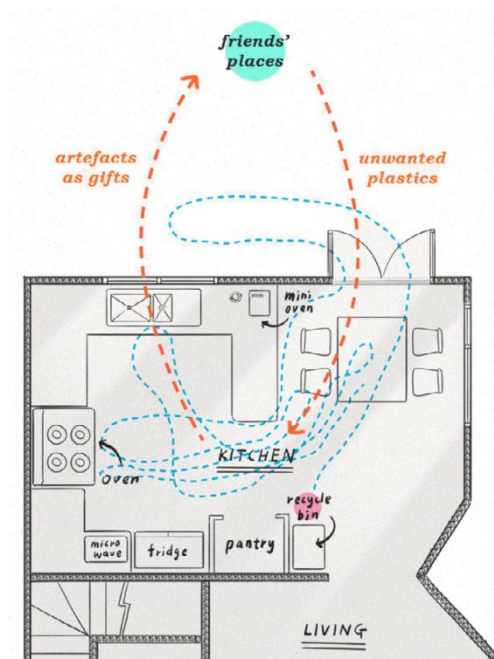


Figure 34. Emma Choi, Site plan showing material circulations, 2022, Auckland.

I also observed that the new material and relational values were realised by my friend excitedly accepting the made objects. By returning her favour through repurposed adornments, my making turned into a social practice entangled with friendly gestures, adding to a gift ritual that anyone can sentimentally relate to.⁴⁸ This cycle of making became a critical study to indicate the capability of my creative practice to comprehend social dimensions through matters exchanged, layering a soft but evocative narrative. The familiar experience of giving and receiving revealed an affective transitional space in-between, which my practice attempted to explore. It shed light on areas to explore further, including how my practice may translate this gap beyond made objects into a collective experience-based emotion, a spatial design embodied with *jeong*.

⁴⁸ My practice becomes a bridging act between giving and receiving, for example: Giving - creative process of responding to the material and social narratives - Receiving



Figure 35. Emma Choi, Coaster, 2022, waste plastics, Auckland.



Figure 36. Emma Choi, Jewellery tray, 2022, waste plastics, Auckland.



Figure 37. Emma Choi, Gifting plastic waste adornments, 2022, Image posted by Laura Lee on Instagram, Auckland.



Cycle 2: Evolving Material and In-between Space

In the second phase of my work, I used clay dug up by excavator buckets at a local construction site. Through the lens of my interest in gifting and social practice, what I saw was not a useless mound to dispose of. Instead, I saw the material in distress – a part of earth displaced from its home below ground, sitting alone in the open air. I saw extracted fragments of earth and the emergence of my affective resonance.

Extended from the previous making cycle, I decided to further explore the ideas of “evolving material” by working with a bucketful of displaced earth, so-called dirt. I poured water onto the bucket, and the dirt went from brittle to muddy. I stirred it with a trowel, and it became a slurry. I sieved gravel and let it sit for days, and the layers of water and clay separated. Earth's dead skin turned into an evolving material, constantly responding to my hands. (see fig. 41)

I poured clay water into a cloth bag, hanging it outside with rope. Its form resembled a chrysalis – the dream state of a crawler as it becomes a flying nomad. The displaced earth entered this temporary liminal space, disconnected from the familiar once again. Uncertainty pervaded it, yet this transient pod conceived a material dream state, silently shifting to form new shapes, textures, and relations. (see fig. 49)

With my hands repetitively melding the excavated earth, which was unwanted and out of place, I saw the resonance between the material's displacement and the empty shop of Northcote's town centre where *The Claw* took place.⁴⁹ The deactivated material and site denoted a design gap of *jeong* space, which got activated through design practice growing connections back to the audiences. Slowly brewing this idea as I processed the wild clay, my making became a process-based *jeong* that adhered to this evolving material, turning my practice into an exercise of care.

Jeong amassed through an unspoken conversation between the displaced earth and my body. The rituals of the evolving material grew tacit knowledge and saturated the sentimental threshold between the made objects and me. This object-person threshold was enacted as the installation (see fig. 50) manifesting a loop of material transition from excavated earth, bags of clay water, sculpted vessels and back to dirt. *Jeong*, staged as a process-based work, gravitated the viewers towards its liminal space, the material dream state activated by the circulation of bodies and conversations around the work. Twelve blocks of ready-to-use wild clay were offered to the visitors on plasterboard, extending *jeong* from myself, through the excavated earth, to others.

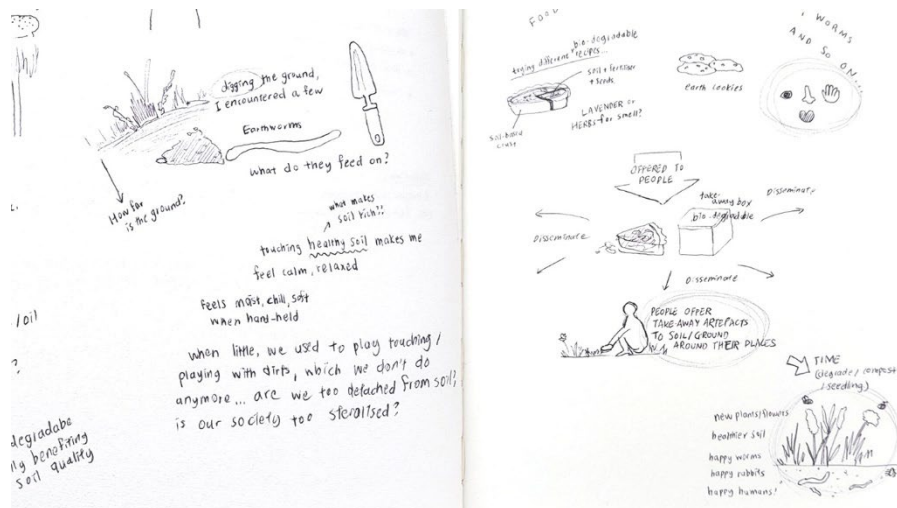


Figure 39. Emma Choi, Field notes with ideation, 2022, pen on paper, Auckland.

⁴⁹ Satellites, *The Claw*, 2018. Case study in the first section of Chapter Two.



Figure 40. Emma Choi, Excavator bucket at a local construction site, 2022, Photography, Auckland.



Figure 41. Emma Choi, Process-based care for excavated earth, 2022, Auckland.



Figure 42. Emma Choi, Wild clay loaf, 2022, Auckland.



Figure 43. Emma Choi, Wild clay vessels, 2022, Auckland.



Figure 44. Emma Choi, Transporting wild clay blocks, 2022, Auckland.
Initially unwanted dirt, now *jeong*-embodied objects that were carried with care.



Figure 45. Emma Choi, Gallery visitor picking up wild clay, 2022, Auckland.



Figure 46. Emma Choi, Gifting clay and card, 2022, Auckland.



Figure 47. Emma Choi, Water dropping from a cloth bag, 2022, Auckland.
Cloth bags with clay water inside. Water drained over time to form wild clay inside.



Figure 48. Emma Choi, Water dropping inside wild clay vessel, 2022, Auckland.
The vessels were not fired so they degraded over time contrasting to the wild clay maturing inside the cloth bags.



Figure 49. Emma Choi, Material dream state, 2022, excavated earth, water, cloth, rope, Auckland.



Figure 50. Emma Choi, *Revolving around the displaced earth*, 2022, excavated earth, water, cloth, rope, card paper, plaster board, bucket, and trowel, Auckland.

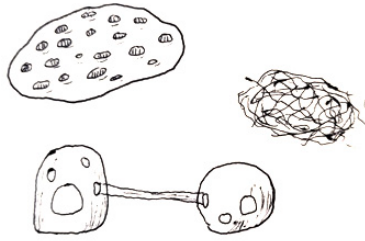


Figure 51. Emma Choi, A participant marked their bodily interaction within WM2 test space, 2022, Auckland.

Cycle 3: Traces of Interaction

To deepen my understanding of *jeong* space within everyday social contexts, a set of heuristic explorations was tried and tested, including visual mind maps, hand-building play with sand, records of daily receipts of *jeong*, and expressive drawings. Following these trials, I decided to conduct an embodied field study of *jeong* in the form of a diary practice, a project called “one fragment a day.” It involved consecutive journal entries documenting the details of experiences I felt *jeong* within, later accompanied by additional expressive drawings (see fig. 52). After a week of consecutive journaling, I made a range of heuristic objects based on the diary, including a porous dome made of masking tapes (see fig. 53), objects such as a sphere oil burner made of wild clay, and lines of threads beaded with masking tape. A collection of these explorations was curated and layered with a social programme of marking the bodily presence with the beaded masking tape provided (see fig. 55), setting up a pop-up exhibition in WM Level 2 test space (see fig. 54). The invitation to the event was made on the day by invitation cards handed to people who happened to be around (see fig. 57). Nine participants took part in marking their bodies with masking tape, and each trace left was promised a handmade clay vessel in return.

1 September 2022, Thursday

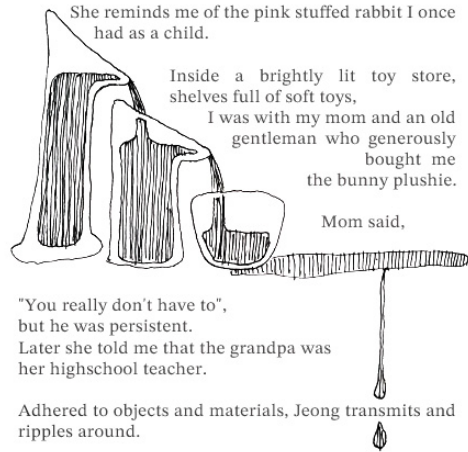


Jeong exists in the midst of taking care of, and being cared for.

It is an affective cord between the related beings, leaving openings. Maybe a person full of Jeong has a porous heart?

2 September 2022, Friday

Waiting for a bus to transit to town, saw a little girl with her mom, holding a husky plush with her arm.



She reminds me of the pink stuffed rabbit I once had as a child.

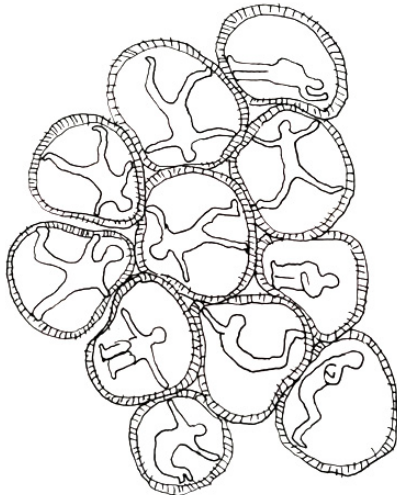
Inside a brightly lit toy store, shelves full of soft toys, I was with my mom and an old gentleman who generously bought me the bunny plushie.

Mom said,

"You really don't have to", but he was persistent. Later she told me that the grandpa was her highschool teacher.

Adhered to objects and materials, Jeong transmits and ripples around.

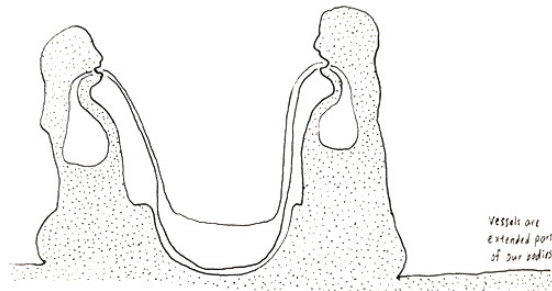
3 September 2022, Saturday



Acknowledging Jeong may mean acknowledging someone's presence in my being.

7 September 2022, Wednesday

To share Jeong with someone is to share the presence with them.



Vessels are extended part of our selves

Figure 52. Emma Choi, Daily fragment of *jeong* diarised and drawn, 2022, Auckland.



Figure 53. Emma Choi, *Jeong*-embodied porous object, 2022, masking tape, Auckland. Following the 1st September diary entry, an experimental object making to explore the warmth and porosity of *jeong* was made.

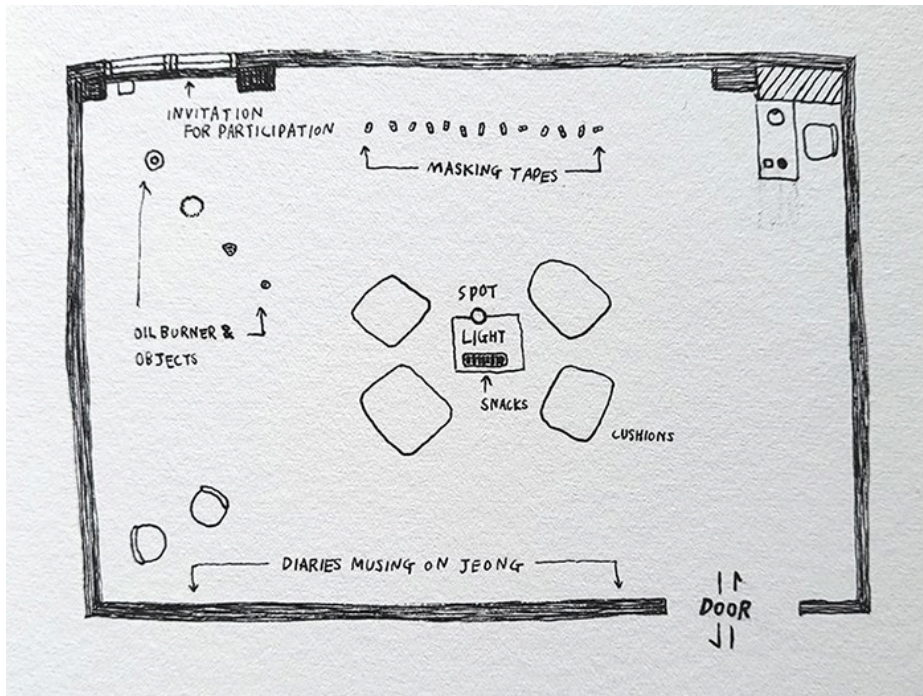


Figure 54. Emma Choi, WM2 test space installation plan view, 2022, Auckland.



Figure 55. Emma Choi, Test space window space, 2022. Light casts interesting shadows on the left wall.



Figure 56. Emma Choi, Participants using provided masking tape and marking their relation to the space, 2022.



Figure 57. Emma Choi, Test space installation invitation card, 2022.

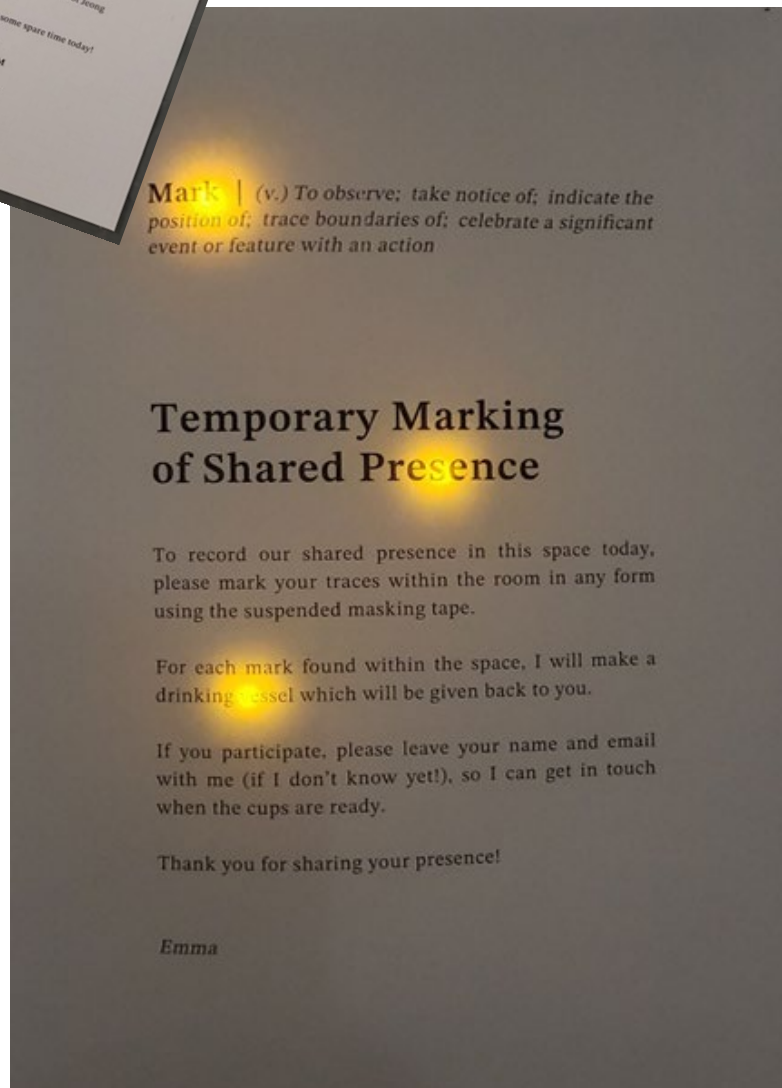


Figure 58. Emma Choi, Test space participating instruction pinned up on a wall, 2022.

The key discoveries of this exhibition happened around a temporary low table I set up in the middle of the test space, where visitors sat around on the floor cushions (see fig. 59). Ideas and everyday conversations unfolded around the table space, and as these exchanges emerged, the visitors tended to inhabit the space for longer, growing social connections with others. I realised that table space in an exhibition context served as a spatial cue to elicit a series of quotidian interactions, for example, sharing a conversation over a packet of biscuits. Our embodied knowledge of common rituals around table spaces encouraged the event to accommodate familiar human practices – social interactions that become ingredients of *jeong* space when they happen consistently. The test space, in turn, became a temporary social space where my practice was shared and opened to others, a series of visitors stopping by and leaving their bodily traces, tapping into shaping the space of *jeong*. Aside from these social discoveries, the exhibition also revealed some creative gaps, including clarity around the participatory actions, potential improvements around cross-reading between different objects, and choosing material and methods that succinctly embody the acts of *jeong*, which all remained to be addressed in the subsequent cycles of making.



Figure 59. Emma Choi, Test space low table area, 2022, cushions, wood, biscuits.



Figure 60. Emma Choi, Clay vessels promised, 2022, Auckland.

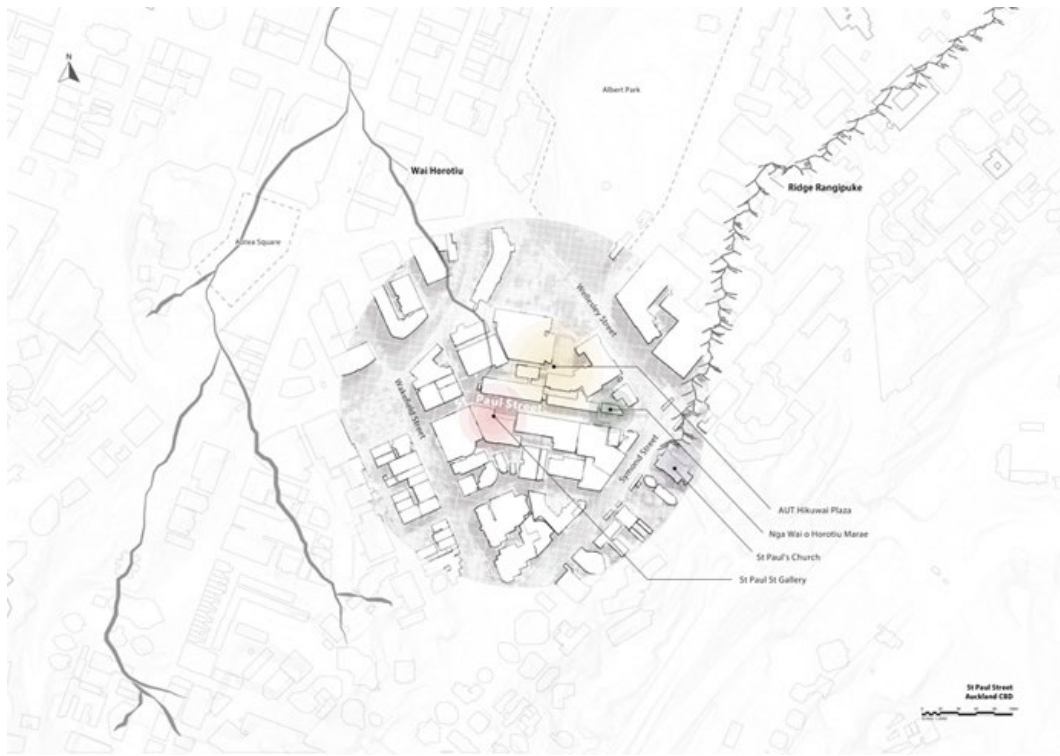


Figure 61. Emma Choi, St Paul St site map, 2023, Auckland.
The map acknowledges Rangipuke and Wai Horotiu as the geographical contexts of St Paul Street.

Cycle 4: St Paul Street Activation Project

Over the summer, I began working on a collaborative project run by the Tactical Urbanism Unit of Auckland Council. The project's aim was to develop a prototype design for St Paul Street that replaces the existing temporary street activation with a more permanent one, promoting pedestrian-friendly experiences. The main goals of the project included the concept design of public seating and the activation of redundant bike racks further up the road. Through a collaborative site research, the master's students' team of Leah Van Wyk, Jessica Juno and I identified the hidden geographical narratives of Wai Horotiu⁵⁰ and Rangipuke Ridge⁵¹ in the area, prompting us to generate ideas with the unearthed local contexts.

⁵⁰ Danny Butt, Jon Bywater, Alex Monteith and Natalie Robertson, *Local Time: Horotiu*, (Auckland: ST PAUL St Gallery, 2012), https://stpaulst.aut.ac.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/211671/Local-Time-Horotiu,-2012.pdf. 8.

⁵¹ "Toi O Tāmaki," Case Studies, Auckland Design Manual. Acknowledging natural ridge of Rangipuke; Felton Mathew, "Plan of the town of Auckland in the Island of New Ulster," (Ithaca, N.Y.: Historic Urban Plans, 1841). <https://kura.aucklandlibraries.govt.nz/digital/collection/maps/id/534/>. An old town map with the natural landscape illustrated.

The aim of the SPSA project aligned with the one of this research - to strategically activate a city street supporting vibrant public life. I applied the Method 1 discussed in Chapter Three and studied St Paul Street with a fieldnote, collecting fragments of my observation and experiences within the site. A grey strip of city street, which at first appeared stagnant, was flowing with a stream of various activities. When opportunities were present, St Paul Street was more than a thoroughfare between concrete buildings. It became an open stage for enacting temporary social acts, a series of pooling moments such as a brief chat under nikau shades, friends sitting on the gallery's staircase, and pedestrians shifting to the left on a narrow footpath when others walking towards them. I recalled how Jane Jacob described streets as 'the main public places of a city'⁵². These 'vital organs' hold what Jacob called 'sidewalk contacts', the local, often fortuitous interactions that grow into 'a web of public respect and trust'.⁵³ The everyday activities of students, staffs, and nearby residents on St Paul Street may not only be trivial byproducts of an urban passage - but unique social resources amassing to a collective feeling of a place.

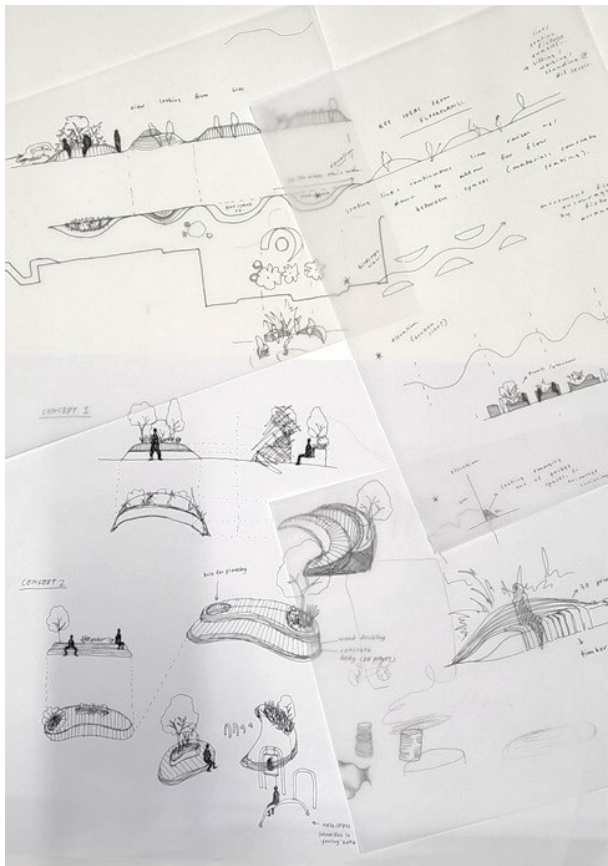


Figure 62. Emma Choi, Jessica Juno & Leah van Wyk, Iterative concept sketches, 2023, Auckland.

Our design group actively took the field study into account, envisioning a new streetscape that may sustain and intensify the quotidian acts orchestrated by the public. As often the 'pooling' moments of St Paul Street emerged from marginal spaces, such as crossings, stairs, and shelters, these spatial 'catchments' became strategic features to further generate ideas. We used drawings as our primary method to think, iterate and communicate (see fig. 62), manifesting the unseen geographical narratives of Rangipuke ridge and Wai Horotiu within the existing streetscape. The heavy, grounded ridge line was reimagined as textured concrete elements, while the energetic, playful line of the stream was commemorated in glossy tubular steels. The collective drawing practice crystallised forgotten local narratives into tangible streetscape furniture, creating different scales of puddles for temporary public activities.

⁵² Jane Jacobs, *The death and life of great American cities*. (New York: Random House, 1992), 29.

⁵³ Jane Jacobs, 56.



Figure 63. Emma Choi, Jessica Juno and Leah van Wyk, SPSA studio table during a group workshop, 2023, Auckland.



Figure 64. Emma Choi, Jessica Juno & Leah van Wyk, SPSA digital modelling, 2023, Rhino, Auckland.
Following the iterative drawings, the street and design elements were digitally modelled for further development.

The final concept entailed cast-concrete benches emerging and disappearing into the ground, extended footpaths with round kerbsides, ramps in-between for increased permeability, and different planting heights for shade and texture (see fig. 65). The design imagined St Paul Street activated with a public sequence of flowing together, a series of spatial cues to transit slow, linger and merge. This collaborative project, to me, had been a practice of understanding and activating relational gaps within St Paul Street. From the forgotten geographical narratives to the barely used bike racks, the street revealed patches of dormant opportunities, waiting to be re-sewn on to the urban fabric. I realised in this cycle that designing with understanding of *jeong*, the maker is encouraged to acknowledge inactive, often overlooked relationships present in the local context. It may be then the practice of *jeong*, a process-based care to reimagine such broken connections as permeable thresholds, devising spatial arrangements that can accommodate collective experiences of the locals. An urban place activation may not be a clear design outcome that can be achieved or measured at one point. Rather, it may be embedded in peoples' everyday activities, such as commuting, unwinding, and socialising, and grow into a living sign of a public place equipped with "concrete, tangible facilities".⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Jane Jacobs, *The death and life of great American cities*. (New York: Random House, 1992), 70.



Figure 66. Emma Choi, SPSA rendering, 2023, Rhino and photoshop, Auckland.

This perspective shows the corner nook of the WM building and the tinted windows of St Paul St Gallery One. SPSA team proposed to activate the street with cast concrete benches, extended footpaths with ramps, and various planting. With the gallery's window spaces and sliding doors, I read spatial thresholds that can be activated with the practice of *jeong*.



Figure 65. Emma Choi, SPSA rendering, 2023, Rhino and photoshop, Auckland.

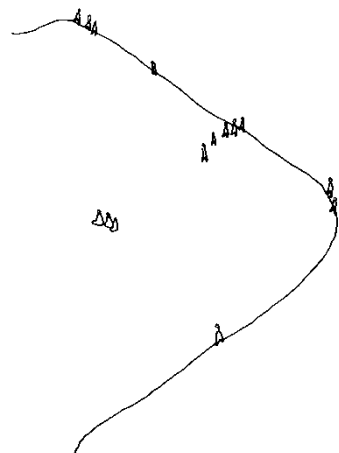


Figure 67. Emma Choi, Line of collective rituals, 2023, pen on paper, Auckland.

Cycle 5: Draw In, Draw Out, Draw Together

This project has evolved from a piece of information discovered in the previous making cycle that once there was a communal well on St Paul Street, currently demolished and forgotten.⁵⁵ Having no pictures or physical traces left of this old well, it was my role to imagine what it was like to have a well on the street. The communal well would have been a place for shared rituals, a long vertical shaft activated by a pulley system drawing the lifeful resource underground. A well allows the hidden, saturated element to draw out from the surface, contributing to the local people's lives. The conceptual reading of St Paul Street's historical well has brought the street's relational gaps to mind, including the spatial and social relationship between AUT Art + Design campus and the public street.

Being a member of AUT Art + Design and commuting to St Paul Street for the last few years, I have noticed that my experiences of St Paul Street in school and on street are often separated, not necessarily continuous or cohesive. When Art + Design galleries host curated shows or opening events, they are usually kept inside the buildings behind doors and walls, letting the public walk past without noticing the creative activities. Such experiential gap has indicated a design opportunity, a margin for *jeong* where new forms of relationship may grow. Designed to be compatible with the SPSA streetscape proposal, the last project of this research proposes a semi-public activation comprising a set of prototype devices. Making design references to St Paul Street's historical well, this project intends to cultivate collective experiences bridging the university and its street, drawing out a creative presence of the institution and drawing in the public's interest to the shared events.

⁵⁵ Butt, Bywater, Monteith and Robertson, *Local Time: Horotiu*, 8.



Figure 68. Emma Choi, WM lightwell ceiling, 2023, Digital photo, Auckland.

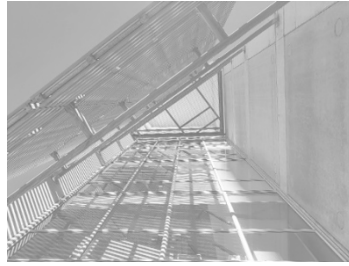


Figure 69. Emma Choi, WM corner nook looking up inside the gratings, 2023, Digital photo, Auckland.

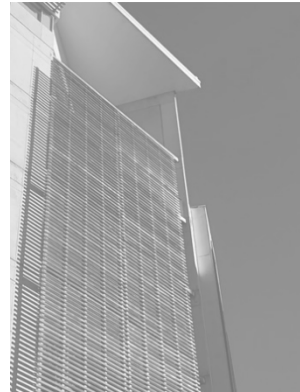


Figure 70. Emma Choi, WM wooden grating screens, 2023, Digital photo, Auckland.



Figure 73. Emma Choi, WM lightwell facade, 2023, Digital photo, Auckland.



Figure 71. Emma Choi, WM gallery window with black tinted film, 2023, Digital photo, Auckland.



Figure 72. Emma Choi, WM entrance staircase leading down to footpath, 2023, Digital photo, Auckland.

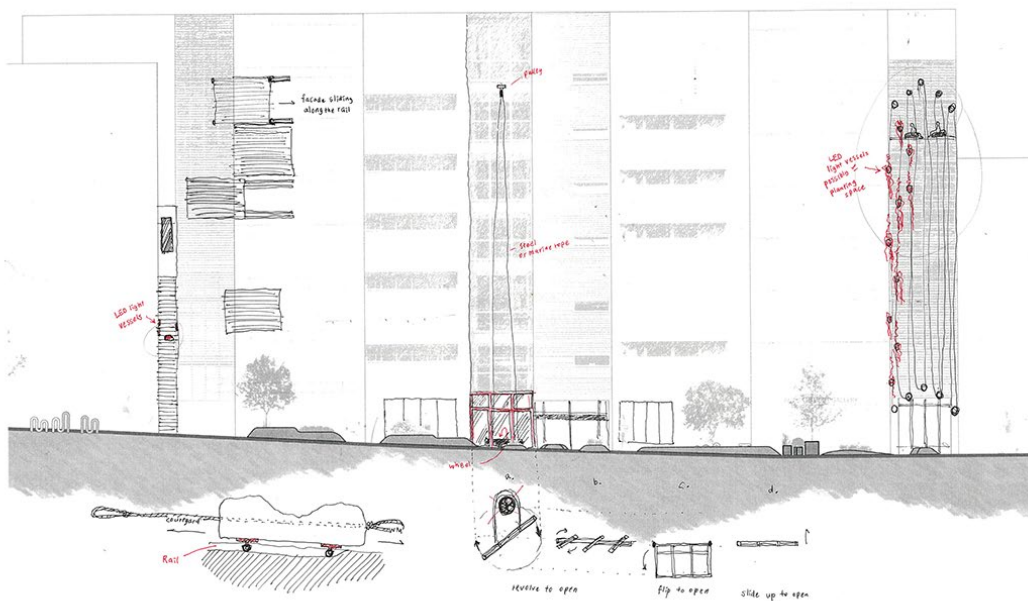


Figure 75. Emma Choi, Ideating spatial rituals in marginal spaces, 2023, pen on print, Auckland.

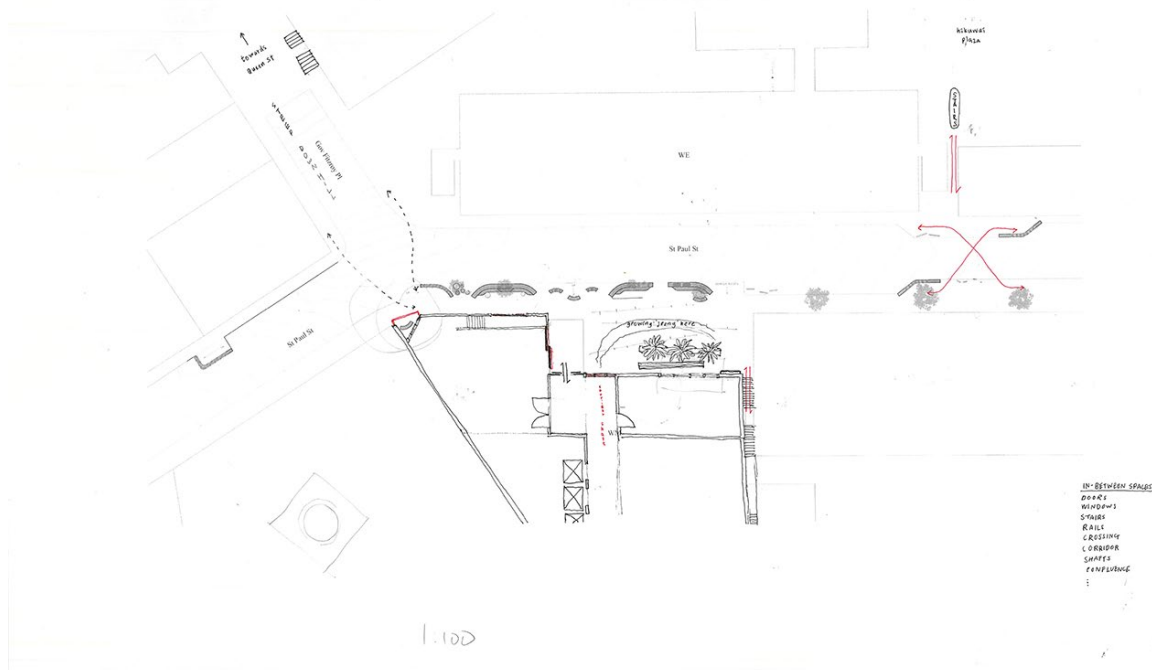


Figure 74. Emma Choi, Locating the strategic thresholds, 2023, pen on print, Auckland.

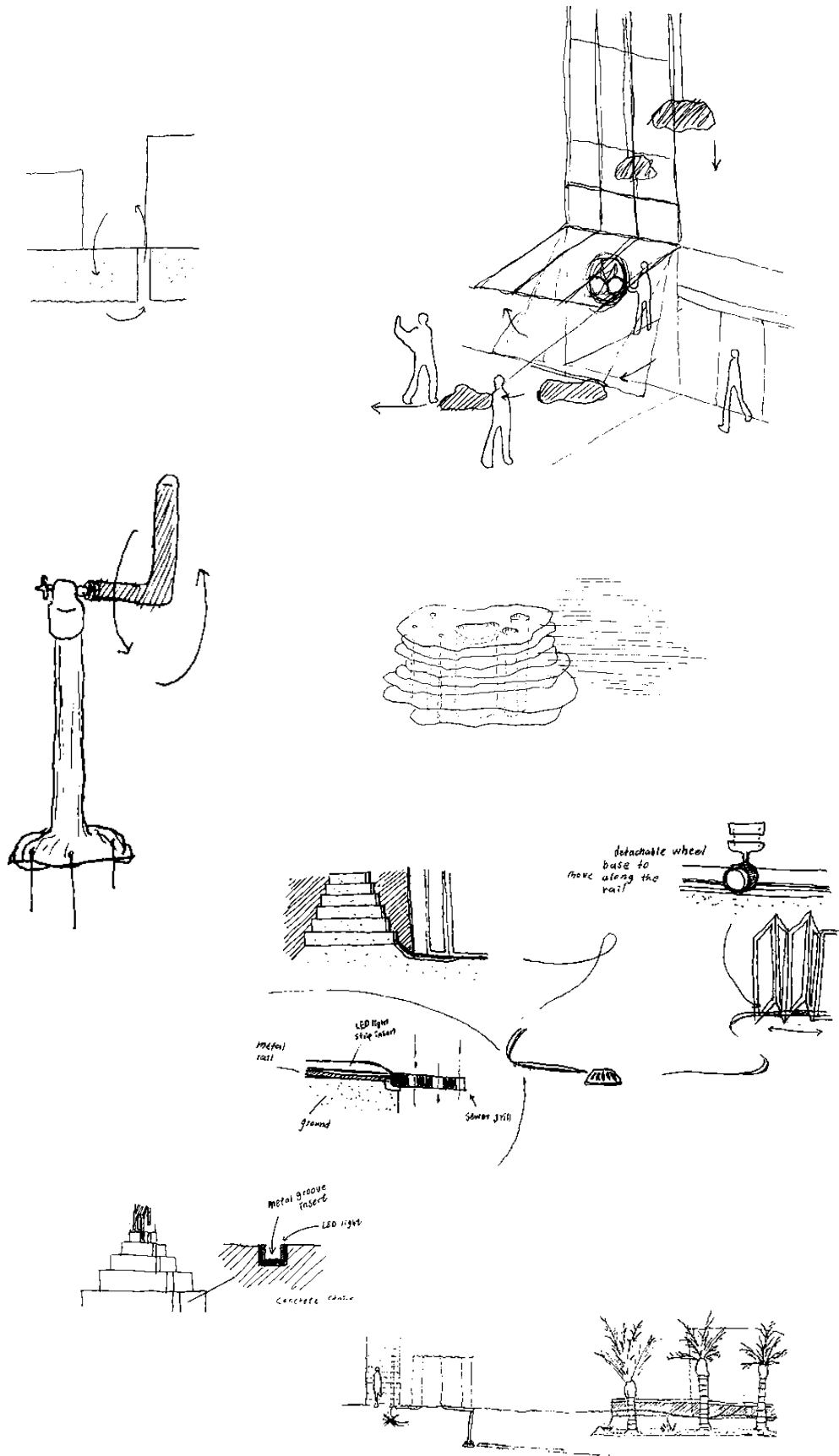


Figure 76. Emma Choi, Sketching ideas around strategic thresholds, 2023, pen on paper, Auckland.

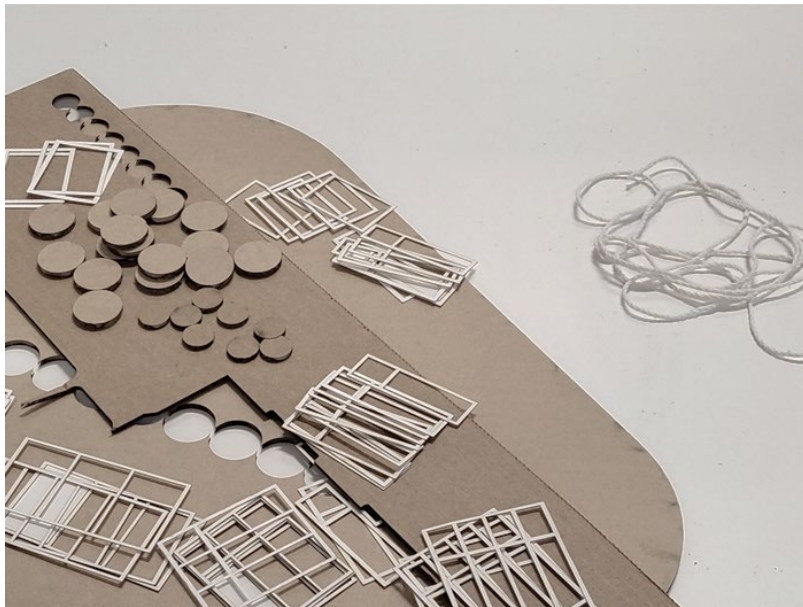


Figure 77. Emma Choi, Threshold modules, 2023, laser-cut paper and thread, Auckland



Figure 78. Emma Choi, Prototyping ideas with modules, 2023, paper, cardboard, thread, clay, Auckland.

The design process of this project has been underpinned by the study of *jeong* I have made so far. Developing a “cycle of *jeong* as a creative practice”, the project seeks to respond to both spatial and social relational spaces. The design cycle includes strategic steps as below:

- Forage for the site’s narratives and rituals that are inactive or forgotten
- Carry out embodied study of the field, noticing spatial and social gaps
- Design in sequence a permeable experience to share with local stakeholders
- Generate iterative drawing and making, responding to marginal spaces observed
- Grow project’s boundaries by embedding others’ perspectives

Drawing In, Out, Together devised three designed moments around the site’s strategic thresholds, which are the window façade of WM building’s lightwell and stormwater drains scattered along the street kerbs. The activities of Art + Design building spill out to the courtyard as an operator spins a handwheel on the top floor, activating a pulley system to lift a large counter-weight glass door on the ground level. The window wall flips out open, creating a horizontal extension to the existing entrance cover. Lifting the door brings the suspended wooden gratings down to the floor, assembled with detachable legs and wheeled out to the courtyards for shared uses, including staging people’s work, moving heavy objects, and extra seating. Lastly, the existing stormwater drains serve as anchor points of pop-up plinths – the cast iron legs are inserted and rotated to interlock with the drain grates, placing a basalt plinth top to secure the structure. The proposed devices work in a sequence unfolding from the Art + Design building, then draw back inside as events cease. *Drawing In, Out, Together* resonates with the lost social rituals of St Paul Street’s demolished well, drawing out saturating activities hidden behind the concrete façade and adding to St Paul Street’s public life.



Figure 79. Emma Choi, Counter-weight windows open out, 2023, paper scaled model, Auckland.



Figure 81. Emma Choi, Scaled model in WM light well space, 2023, Auckland.

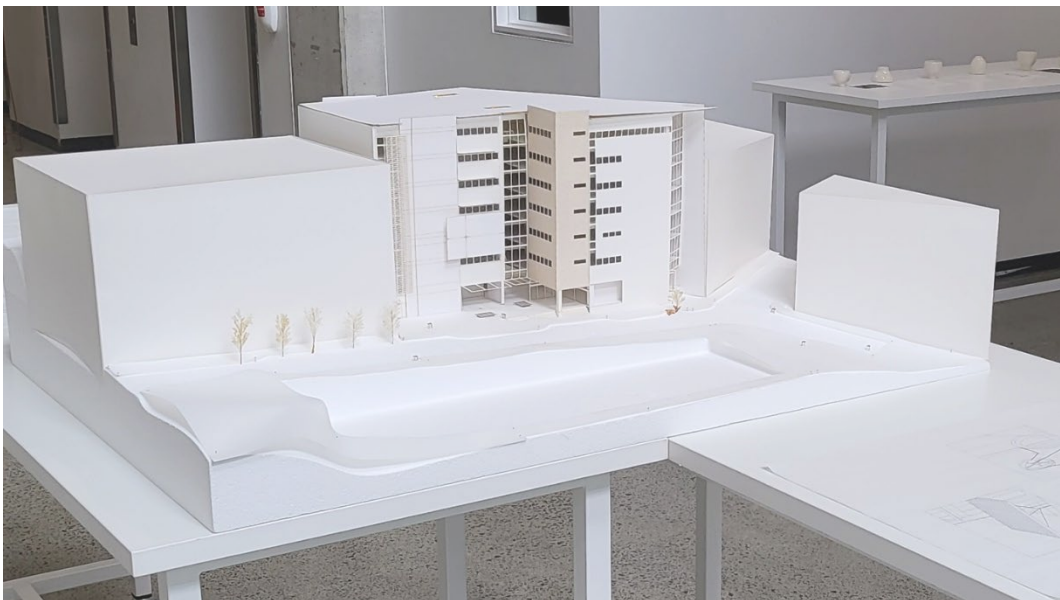


Figure 80. Emma Choi, 1:100 model of St Paul Street, 2023, Auckland.

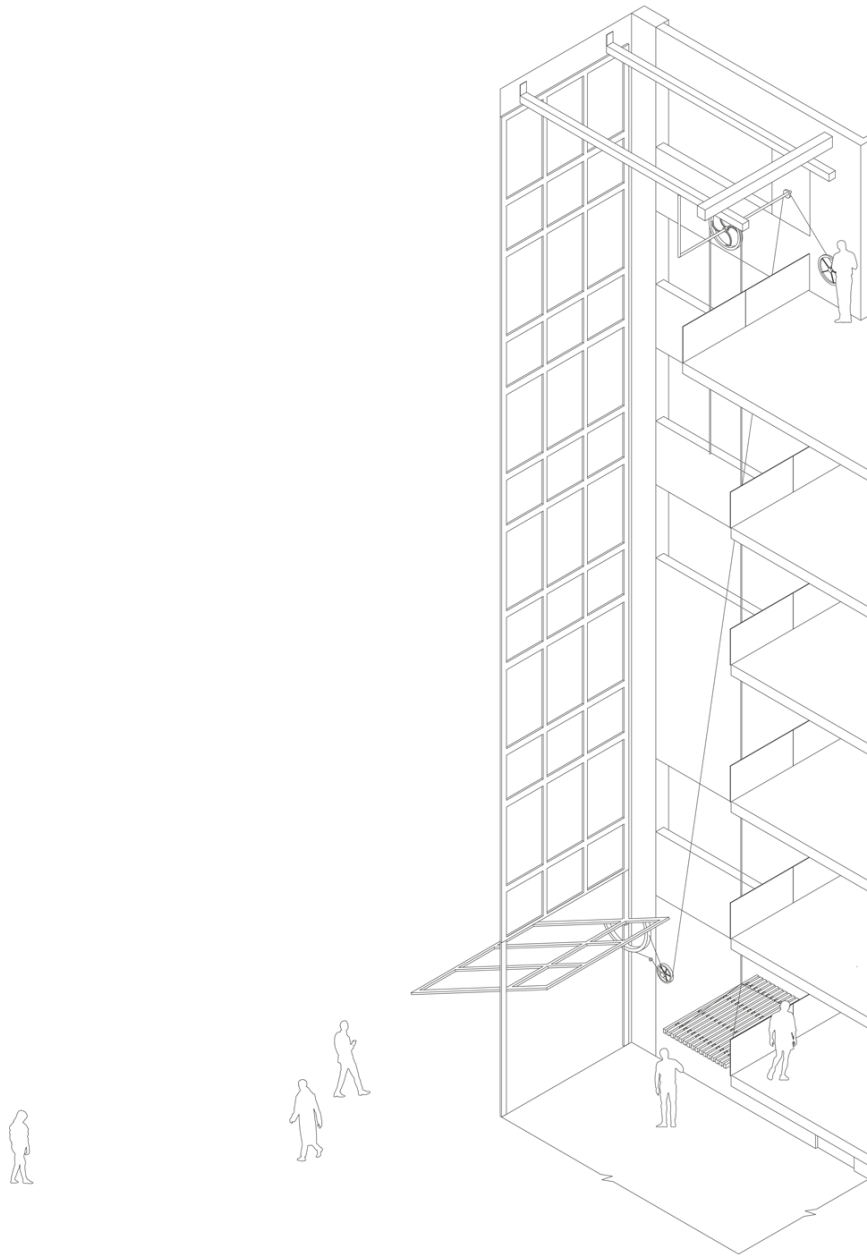


Figure 82. Emma Choi, Drawing of pulley system proposed for WM light well space, 2023, Auckland.

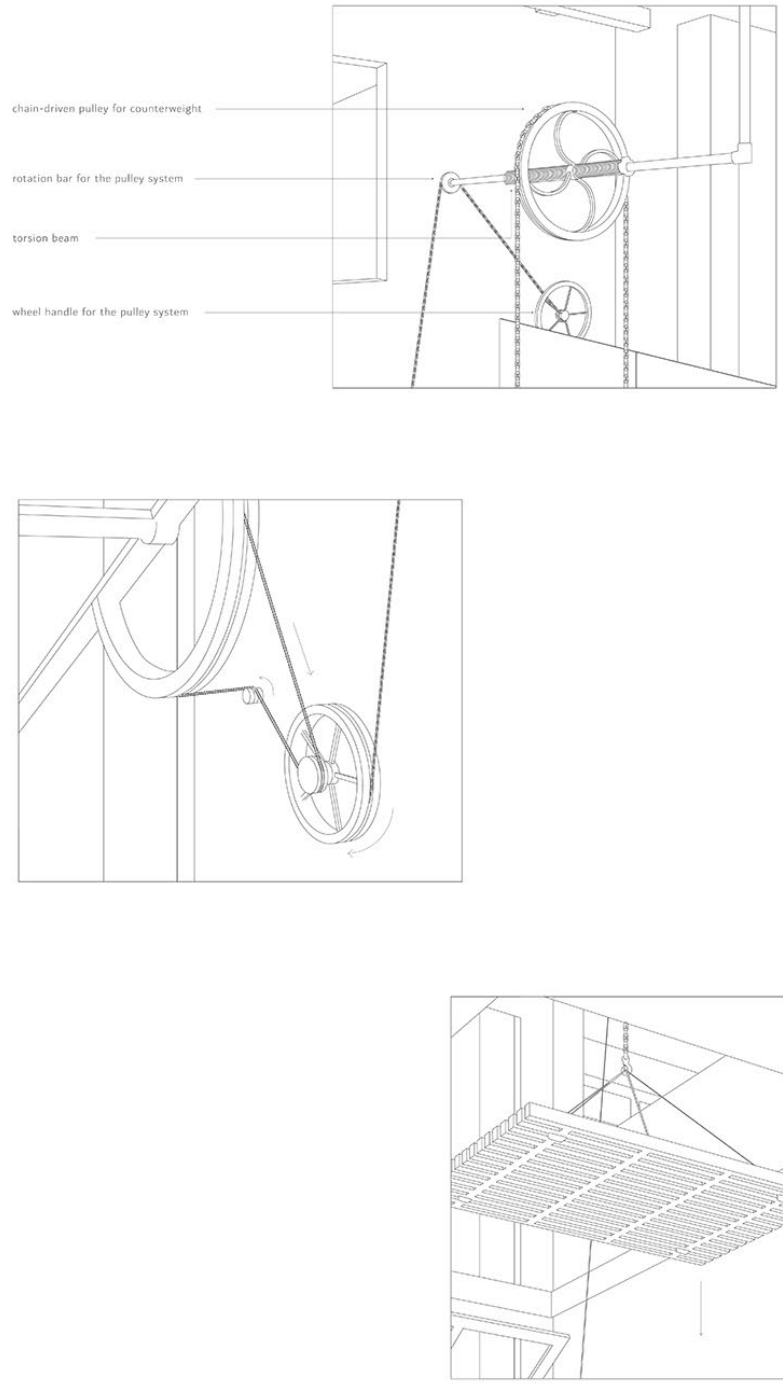


Figure 83. Emma Choi, Detailed drawing of proposed pulley system, 2023, Auckland.

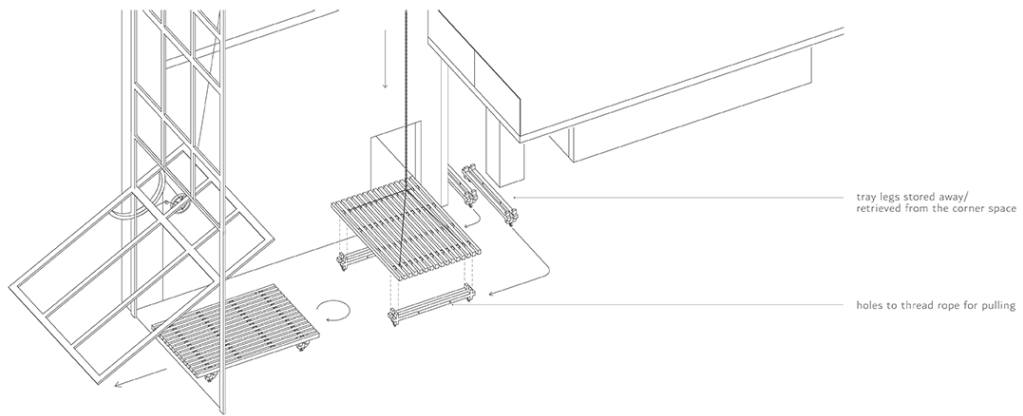


Figure 85. Emma Choi, Drawing of wooden gratings in action, 2023, Auckland.

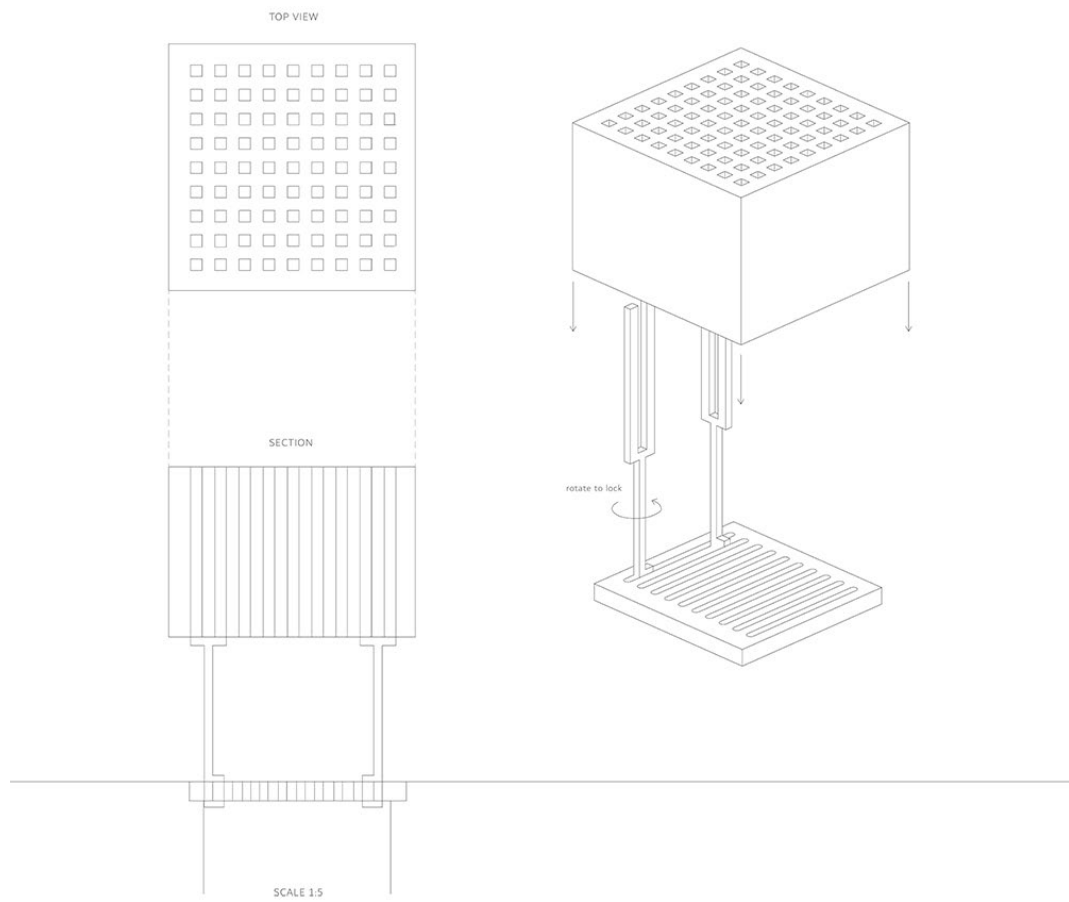


Figure 84. Drawing of proposed pop-up plinth anchored on stormwater drain, 2023, Auckland.



Figure 86. Emma Choi, WM facade opens out to the courtyard, 2023, scaled model, Auckland.



Figure 87. Emma Choi, Pulley on the seventh floor, 2023, scaled model, Auckland.



Figure 88. Emma Choi, Wooden gratings suspended on the first floor, 2023, scaled model, Auckland.

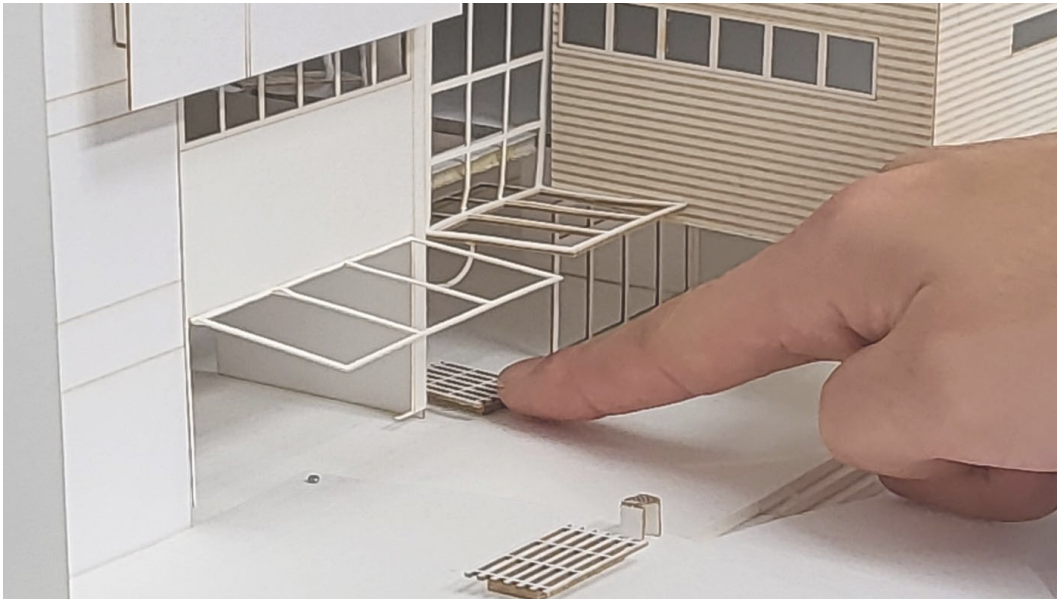


Figure 89. Emma Choi, Folding out an event onto street, 2023, scaled model, Auckland.

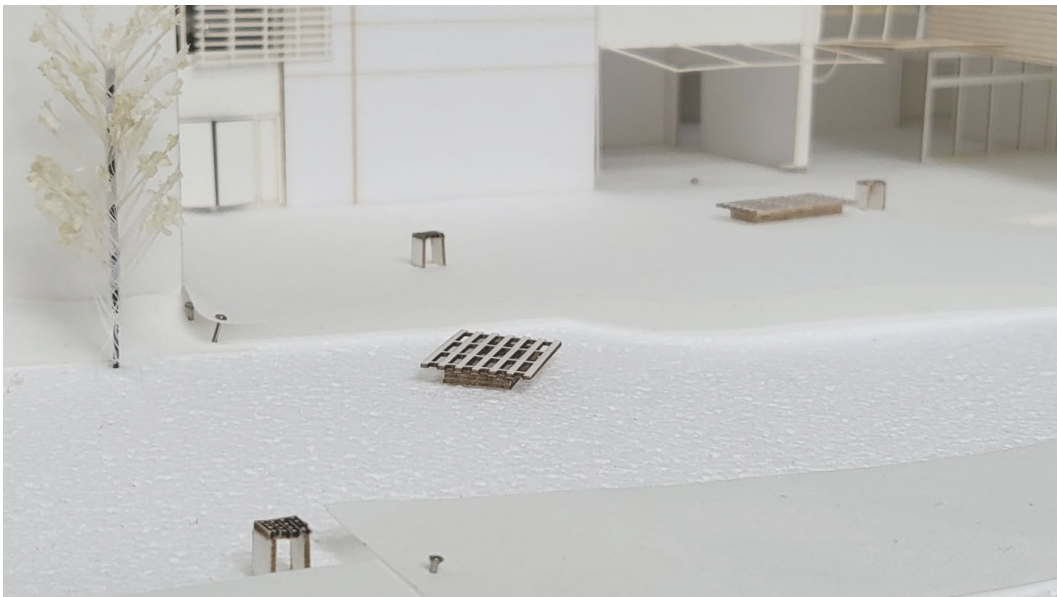


Figure 90. Emma Choi, Tray travelling across the street, 2023, scaled model, Auckland.



Figure 91. Emma Choi, View from Governor Fitzroy Place, 2023, scaled model, Auckland.
Pop-up plinths are installed on existing stormwater drains, leading up to the proposed folding windows of WM Gallery One.

Conclusion

This research began with acknowledging the presence of *jeong* within my daily periphery, observed in quotidian relationships with others. The study inquired into a range of written work, leading this research to understand *jeong* as a collective emotion - a permeable social module that others can tap into. Selected public activation projects were examined through lens of *jeong*, paying particular attention to *jeong*'s spatial and social implication. The analysis revealed conceptual crossroads between activation projects and *jeong*, especially how the staged work leveraged the intrinsic human practice, such as gifting, recreation and transiting, to activate urban marginal spaces.

The research started to question what exactly makes up *jeong*, and how it may be embodied in my creative practice. The first cycle of making explored gift rituals with plastic objects, receiving plastic wastes from friends and returning their favour with repurposed plastic adornments. I was excited to discover my making embedded with friendly gestures through objects exchanged, adding social dimensions to the project. I further explored materialising *jeong* by taking excavated earth from a construction site, turning it into twelve blocks of wild clay. This project observed material-body *jeong* formed by rituals of making, prompting this study to interpret *jeong* as process-based care which activates affective relationships.

Acknowledging the close relations between *jeong* and our daily social practice, I hosted a pop-up exhibition, inviting the visitors to join a performative event and commemorate their presence within the project. Each person's participation was promised with a drinking vessel in return, reenacting the reciprocal social gestures. Later I realised that the participatory acts were designed in a slightly contractual manner, moving away from *jeong*'s quotidian quality. Instead, moments of *jeong* were observed around an ad hoc table space sharing conversation over some packets of biscuits.

Based on a series of experimental making, this research found that *jeong* may not be a solid formula that can be anatomised. It may rather be understood as a cognitive process that acknowledges and relates to one's spatial and social contexts. My project became a creative practice of *jeong* when it responded to marginalised matters such as excavated earth, helping the materials find new forms and relations. It was also noted that my practice is capable of adding layers of social dimensions, when it devised spatial cues eliciting quotidian human rituals. Keeping these learning in mind, this research identified relational margins, evolving materials, and quotidian human rituals as key elements for *jeong*-embodied activation.

Working on a collaborative project called SPSA, this research began to interpret city streets more than the urban thoroughfares between buildings. Embodied study of St Paul Street manifested fortuitous social interactions between people, especially around the street's marginal spaces such as crossing, staircase, and shades. My practice aligned with Jane Jacob's proposition that the presence of "sidewalk contacts" is what develops "a web of public respect and trust"⁵⁶, encouraging my making to centre on existing stakeholders and activities of the street. In the final project *Drawing In, Out, Together*, I closely worked with five strategic steps that reflect the findings from the previous cycles of making. These strategies helped the project to acknowledge St Paul Street's lost rituals around the demolished communal well, proposing a performative design sequence that draws out university activities onto the street.

This research has delivered its three aims⁵⁷ by committing to the five cycles of making. I initially imagined *jeong* to be distilled to its essence, formulating a set of design principles. Rather, my making became a creative process of care, practising *jeong* in a course of actions as expressed in page 72⁵⁸. The research found a confluence between *jeong* and city streets as they both flourish with quotidian rituals, prompting my practice to embed performative design, inviting the public to be part of the transiting place. In particular, it is evident in the last two cycles that *jeong*-embodied practice may effectively posit inactive local narratives to respond, such as the demolished historical well. Understanding *Jeong* may also contribute to designing a place activation in sequence, as it recognises everyday rituals as key ingredients to grow a collective emotion of a place. While *Drawing In, Out, Together* attempted to materialise the forgotten old well into a set of spatial devices, it may have further benefited from more experiments, such as material testing, quick-fire models, and bigger-scale prototypes. Also, the question remains whether the proposed design will effectively contribute to the street's public life or not, as the project is hypothetical. This leaves further areas to explore in my future practice, or for other researchers, to either propose a fully developed activation design to the public audience, or enact a smaller-scale activation project in real life context, testing its efficacy.

⁵⁶ Jane Jacobs, *The death and life of great American cities*. (New York: Random House, 1992), 56.

⁵⁷ Emma Choi, *Jeong as affective imaginaries*, 13.

⁵⁸ Emma Choi, 72. Refer "Cycle of *jeong* as a creative practice".



Figure 92. Emma Choi, WM corner nook reimagined, 2023, scaled model, Auckland.

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