

May 2025

WHISPERS OF PRANA

Designing dance studios through Vaastu Shastra Hindu philosophy and
personal embodied dance experience.

Kimera Rose Chetty

A thesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology in partial
fulfilment of the requirements of Master of Design

Nātyāloka (नाट्यालोक), World of Dance
A realm built around embodied expression

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	Page 4
Acknowledgements.....	Page 5
Introduction	
Where breath meets blueprint.....	Page 11
Contexts	
Mapping the sacred, sensing the city.....	Page 13
Methods	
The body as compass, the ritual as method.....	Page 29
Practice	
Spaces choreographed by memory and motion.....	Page 49
A Return to Orientation.....	Page 59
Exhibition	
Inside Nātyāloka.....	Page 65
Conclusion	
When space inhales.....	Page 75
Future Applications	
Carrying the sacred forward.....	Page 76
Bibliography.....	Page 78

ABSTRACT

This practice-led research thesis explores the choreography of space. A quiet unfolding between body, memory, and spatial design. It listens to the echo of footsteps long after the music fades, tracing how movement leaves imprints not only on the floors but on the very spirit of space itself. Rooted in dance and guided by Vaastu Shastra, the ancient Hindu spatial system, it asks how architecture might learn to breathe, how built form can soften, respond, and evolve with the rhythms of the bodies it holds.

Dance by nature is ephemeral, lived moment by moment, never quite the same twice. Architecture, by contrast, is often conceived as permanent, fixed, and enduring. This work lingers in the space between them, questioning what becomes of built space when it begins to listen to motion, when it bends to rhythm and pauses for breath without losing its grounding.

As a South African-born, Aotearoa-raised, Hindu designer, my project is a return. An inward turning toward something I in perpetuum carried but hadn't yet claimed. Born into Hinduism but only sincerely meeting its philosophies through this work, I began to see space not as a container, but as a being. Through Vaastu Shasta, space reintroduced itself as alive, not merely shaped by us but shaping us in return.

The result is a speculative design: The Nātyāloka Dance Complex, imagined within the layered heart of Auckland's urban rhythm. More than a building, it's a vessel of breath, a keeper of rhythm, and a spatial partner to choreography. Nātyāloka repositions spatial design not as a backdrop for dance but as its collaborator. A place where the city's energy gathers, where culture pulses through every surface, and where movement becomes a language used to sculpt space.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work carries the fingerprints of many hearts. It is woven with memory, love, and the quiet strength of those who walked beside me; some in this world, some in spirit, all part of this journey.

To my mom, Yogandri, and my dad, Sagren, your sacrifice and constant belief in me gave me the foundation to rise. To my brother, Reshlen, you taught me to move with both courage and compassion; your loyalty and grounded presence were a steady thread through every chapter in this process. Thank you for being there always.

To my grandfather Krishna, though you are no longer with us, your devotion to Hinduism lives on in everything I do. Your teachings, your rituals, and your quiet discipline shaped the soul of this work and echo in these pages. Through my grandmother, your wisdom still speaks, steady, spiritual, and enduring. This is for you. Be good, do good.

Adrian. Thank you for standing beside me with unwavering patience and faith. You reminded me to rest when I pushed too hard and to breathe when I felt overwhelmed. You never let me forget why I started.

To my supervisors, thank you for holding space for me to find my voice and guiding me through the unknown. For understanding the complexities of my schedule and supporting the cultural weight this project carries. I am grateful for your patience, professionalism, wisdom, and for encouraging me to root this project in who I truly am. Your encouragement helped shape this work into something deeply personal, which gave me the courage to follow the thread of culture back to myself.

To my friends. Your presence softened the intensity of this journey.

And finally, to my ancestors, my culture, and the traditions I am still learning to carry— this is my offering. This thesis is a return. A dance between memory and becoming. Thank you for waiting for me to come home.

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 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.

Signed

06/05/25

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How can built space be reimagined as a dynamic, culturally grounded system that embodies movement, rhythm, and energy through the lens of dance and Vaastu Shastra?
- How can Vaastu Shastra principles, particularly the Brahmasthan as a spatial and conceptual core, be reinterpreted within a contemporary urban context to enhance energy flow, spatial awareness, and cultural connectivity in performative spatial design?
- In what ways can dance, an ephemeral and embodied art form, inform spatial language, materiality, and rhythm of spatial design?
- How can built space move beyond static form to become an active participant in choreography, one that not only holds the body in motion but also echoes the cultural memory and identity of those who move through it?

Footnotes:

Vaastu Shastra (वास्तु शास्त्र) Ancient Hindu spatial system aligning architecture with nature and energy.

Brahmasthan (ब्रह्मस्थान) The sacred central space of a structure; a spiritual and energetic core

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 *Kimera Chetty, The Journey of Embodied Memory, 2025*

Figure 2 *Kimera Chetty, 31 High Street rooted in Vaastu Shastra, 2025*

Figure 3 *Kimera Chetty, Directional Energetic Choreography, 2025*

Figure 4 *Kimera Chetty, Beneath the Concrete Skin, 2025*

Figure 5 *Kimera Chetty, Auckland City's Dancing Spine, 2025*

Figure 6 *Kimera Chetty, Spatial Conditions across Auckland's Dance Studios, 2025*

Figure 7 *Kimera Chetty, Visual Depiction of HIT Studios, 2025*

Figure 8 *Kimera Chetty, Visual Depiction of Kinetic Studios, 2025*

Figure 9 *Kimera Chetty, Conceptual Mapping of Spatial Frameworks, 2024*

Figure 10 *Kimera Chetty, Illustrations tracing Sacred Strength onto False Skin, 2024*

Figure 11 *Kimera Chetty, Ritual of Abhishekam, 2024*

Figure 12 *Kimera Chetty, Ritual Immersion, 2024*

Figure 13 *Kimera Chetty, Progressive Erosion of a Flour Mandala, 2024*

Figure 14 *Kimera Chetty, Documenting Rhythm, Congregation, and Spatial Memory, 2024*

Figure 15 *Kimera Chetty, Where Choreography becomes Offering, and Space becomes Memory, 2024*

Figure 16 *Kimera Chetty, A Surface breathed into Being, 2024*

Figure 17 *Kimera Chetty, Tension and Balance, 2025*

Figure 18 *Kimera Chetty, Liner Alignment with Forward Focus, 2025*

Figure 19 *Kimera Chetty, Prana Circulation: The Interplay of Raised and Lowered Positons, 2025*

Figure 20 *Kimera Chetty, Spatial Stability Controlled, 2025*

Figure 21 *Kimera Chetty, Pranic Arc of Limbs, 2025*

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 22 *Kimera Chetty, Balance and Gaze*

Figure 23 *Kimera Chetty, Bodies weave currents of Breath and Force, sketching unseen architecture into Space, 2025*

Figure 24 *Kimera Chetty, Whispers of Movement crystallised into Veils of Architecture, 2025*

Figure 25 *Kimera Chetty, Bodies Entwine and Rise, stitching memory into the Sketon of Space, 2025*

Figure 26 *Kimera Chetty, Waves of Stone and Breath carve Sacred Currents through the Void, 2025*

Figure 27 *Kimera Chetty, Spiralling energy ascending through Grounded Anchors, echoing the Body's Rise and Return, 2025*

Figure 28 *Kimera Chetty, Rhythmic Congregation of Movement, 2025*

Figure 29 *Kimera Chetty, Flowing Containment, 2025*

Figure 30 *Kimera Chetty, Where Gesture becomes Structure and Memory takes form, 2025*

Figure 31 *Kimera Chetty, Exploring Emergence and Energy release between Static Forms, 2025*

Figure 32 *Kimera Chetty, Tracing Internal Currents, 2025*

Figure 33 *Kimera Chetty, Layering Movement, Light, and Shadow into a Breathing Skin, 2025*

Figure 34 *Kimera Chetty, Tracing Flow, 2025*

Figure 35 *Kimera Chetty, Tracing Layering, 2025*

Figure 36 *Kimera Chetty, Tracing Spatial Breath, 2025*

Figure 37 *Kimera Chetty, A Spatial Choreography, 2025*

Figure 38 *Kimera Chetty, A layered Massing Study exploring Facade Expression, 2025*

Figure 39 *Kimera Chetty, Shaping Spatial Memory and Orientation, 2025*

Figure 40 *Kimera Chetty, Evoking Ritual Intimacy, 2025*

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 41 *Kimera Chetty, Nātyāloka's Inner Rhythm, 2025*

Figure 42 *Kimera Chetty, A Carved Threshold of Ritual and Reverence, 2025*

Figure 43 *Kimera Chetty, A Contemporary Temple of Motion, 2025*

Figure 44 *Kimera Chetty, Living, Breathing Body, 2025*

Figure 45 *Kimera Chetty, Veins Frame the Studio, 2025*

Figure 46 *Kimera Chetty, A Sacred retreat carved in Curve and Shadow, 2025*

Figure 47 *Kimera Chetty, Sanctuary sculpted from Movement, 2025*

Figure 48 *Kimera Chetty, Axis of Prana, 2025*

Figure 49 *Kimera Chetty, Cavern of Collective Breath, 2025*

Figure 50 *Kimera Chetty, Echoes of Grace, 2025*

Figure 51 *Kimera Chetty, Portal of Arrival, 2025*

Figure 52 *Kimera Chetty, Light in Motion, 2025*

Figure 53 *Kimera Chetty, Threshold of Gathering, 2025*

Figure 54 *Kimera Chetty, Rituals of Transformation, 2025*

Figure 55 *Kimera Chetty, Sanctum of Renewal, 2025*

Figure 56 *Kimera Chetty, The Cosmic Stage, 2025*

Figure 57 *Kimera Chetty, Layers of Becoming, 2025*

INTRODUCTION

Auckland doesn't speak to me in signage or infrastructure; it speaks in rhythm. The city is not a grid, rather a pulse. I don't navigate by street names; I follow movement. Dance studios are my constellations. HIT on Cook Street, Kinetic on Lorne Street, these are more than physical locations, they are emotional anchors. They mark where I feel safe, where I return, and where I expand. They are gravitational forces drawing me into rhythm, community, and presence.

This way of moving through the world is not metaphorical, it's embodied. My choreography maps my geography. The body becomes the compass; the floor becomes the terrain. And yet, Auckland offers no formal recognition of this way of navigating. Dance here is displaced, pushed into borrowed rooms and vacant halls. It survives in the margins, tolerated but not embraced. Its presence is improvised; its absence is structural.

As both dancer and designer, this absence became urgent. I move to feel alive, so why doesn't the city make space for that aliveness? This thesis began as a question of spatial design, but it quickly became a question of belonging. What would it mean to design a space that doesn't just contain dance but listens to it? That breathes with it?

My project is an offering. An act of return and remembrance. Born in South Africa and raised in Aotearoa, I inherited Hinduism through ritual but only began to understand its philosophies through design. What I once saw as tradition, I now understand as a system of spatial intelligence. Vaastu Shastra (वास्तु शास्त्र), the ancient Hindu science of architectural harmony, reintroduced space to me as something alive, pulsing with energy, orientation, and breath.

Vaastu Shastra is not a style or aesthetic; it is a cosmology. It orients spatial design to the cycles of the sun, the elements, and the human spirit. At its center lies the Brahmasthan, the sacred void, a still point from which energy radiates outward. In dance, I know this space intuitively, it is the moment between movement and stillness, the inhale before the release. It is not emptiness but potential.

Through this lens, built space is no longer static; it becomes choreographic. My building is not drawn; it is danced.

The outcome of this thesis is Nātyāloka (नाट्यालोक), meaning world of dance. Situated on High Street in central Auckland, nestled between Freyberg Square and Albert Park, this multilevel complex is conceived as a spatial organism, a body that breathes with its users. It is a vessel for movement, memory and rhythm. A place where the space adjusts to the dancer.

Nātyāloka is not just a building; it is an argument. For visibility. For culture. For energy in motion. It proposes a model of spatial design that responds to bodies, not blueprints. One that understands space as felt, inhabited, and activated through presence.

This thesis is also personal. It is shaped by memories of dancing in garages, studios, and borrowed spaces, by rituals I carried without knowing their meaning. It emerges from the tension of not quite fitting, and the desire to build something that does. It reclaims space for stories like mine, ones that move between cultures, disciplines, and traditions.

Traditionally, architecture is a practice of permanence; dance, one of impermanence. Both shapes how we inhabit the world. This work exists in the space between them, asking how we might design for rhythm, for breath, and for the sacred pulse of movement.

I challenge conventional performance architecture, rejecting static enclosures in favour of spaces that move, breathe, and shift with our bodies. Dance is no longer contained within space; it informs it. Studios are not passive rooms but dynamic systems.

The Nātyāloka Dance Complex is an unequivocal spatial response to an unspoken choreography, one that dancers like me follow daily as we navigate Auckland in search of space, community, and creative expression. I am reimagining how cities might honour movement as an essential and cultural form of spatial engagement.

Nātyāloka begins not with form, but with energy. With the dancer. With the void.

CONTEXTS

Vaastu Shastra: The Energetic Body of Space

This project began with the body but quickly turned toward the forces that shape the spaces around it. Beneath every studio I've danced in, from polished timber floors to concrete garage slabs, I have felt the quiet tension between movement and the built space. Some spaces resist the body; others seem to breathe with it. The difference, I came to understand, was not about the aesthetics or scale. It was about alignment, not only structural but also spiritual.

At the center of this thesis is Vaastu Shastra (वास्तु शास्त्र), an ancient Indian system of architecture that governs spatial arrangement in harmony with cosmic principles. Often translated as the science of architecture, Vaastu is a philosophy of place. Rooted in Hindu cosmology, it treats built space as a living organism, one infused with Prana (life force), oriented by the sun, and shaped by elemental balance (Bansal, 2003, p. 87).

Vaastu Shastra imagines the site as a charged field of energy. The orientation of each room, wall, and void is informed by cardinal direction, solar rhythm, and the body's energetic centres. Its core principle is the Brahmasthan, a central space left open and undisturbed, the still axis from which energy radiates outward (Doshi, 2019, p. 110). Unlike Western design, which often centres circulation or focal points on utility, Vaastu centres nothingness, the sacred void. This void is not emptiness but activation. A pause. A breath.

For me, encountering Vaastu Shastra was a personal reconnection. As a diasporic Hindu, I had grown up with ritual, mantras, and architectural norms that I hadn't always understood. Through this research, I began to see those patterns not as superstition but as spatial wisdom passed down across generations. I realised the way my grandmother arranged her home, the placement of our prayer alter, the way the light entered in the morning, it was Vaastu Shastra. I had been living within its geometry without yet understanding its power.

Nātyāloka is built on this foundation. Vaastu Shastra is not applied here as a symbolic gesture, it is the structure itself. The orientation of the entrance (facing east), the alignment of the performance space (north-east), the central void that anchors the complex, each design emerges from Vaastu's energetic map (Svoboda, 1998, p. 132). Rather than replicating traditional temple design, this project adapts those principles for a contemporary, urban dance environment. It asks, what happens when the sacred is not a statue or shrine, but the moving body? What if choreography becomes the ritual?

Footnotes:

Prāṇa (प्राण) Life Force

Khushdeep Bansal, Vaastu: The Origin of Architecture (New Delhi: Wisewords Publishing, 2003), 87.

B. V. Doshi, Paths Uncharted (Ahmedabad: Vastu-Shilpa Foundation, 2019), 110.

Robert E. Svoboda, Prakriti: Your Ayurvedic Constitution (Twin Lakes: Lotus Press, 1998), 132.

Vaastu Shastra allows for this reinterpretation. It is a fluid alignment, a system that listens to time, place, and purpose. In designing Nātyāloka, I drew on Vaastu to root the future, to create a space where movement and stillness, breath and form, dancer and structure are all part of the same energetic ecology.

This section continues by mapping how Vaastu intersects with other contextual layers such as urban Auckland, dance culture in Aotearoa, case studies, and my personal lineage of movement. Together they form the prismatic lens through which this thesis unfolds.

Rhythm of the City: Dance in the Margins of Auckland

Dance does not yet belong to Auckland's architecture, at least not formally. It lives in borrowed time and borrows space in community centres at night, in studios carved from former retail units. It does not yet have a place built for its specific rhythm. And yet, for dancers like myself, the city is navigated through choreography.

From HIT on Cook Street to Kinetic Studio on Lorne Street, these are not just rehearsal spaces; they are cultural anchors. The city pulses through these places, but they exist on the edges of zoning logic. This project responds to that spatial omission by proposing a building that centres dance functionally and spiritually. Where space is turned to the body's intelligence (Pitts, 2011, p. 44).

In Auckland, there is no designated cultural infrastructure for independent dancers. Spaces come and go, reliant on landlords, funding cycles, or private interest. As a result, the presence of dance becomes fragmented, difficult to sustain, easy to displace. The absence of permanent, purpose-built movement space has real consequences. It inhibits growth, isolates practitioners, and erodes cultural momentum (Martin, 2018, p. 23).

This thesis proposes Nātyāloka as an act of cultural anchoring, one that does not insert dance into leftover urban space but places it at the centre of spatial design. Through this gesture, movement becomes direction.

Footnotes:

Virginia Pitts, "Dancing the City: Mapping Urban Dance Cultures in Auckland," *Performance Research* 16, no. 2 (2011): 44.

Rosemary Martin, "Dancing in the Margins: Aotearoa Dance and Cultural Infrastructure," *Theatre and Performance Studies Journal of NZ* 22, no. 1 (2018): 23.

A visual trace of my weekly movement between studios, particularly between HIT and Kinetic, reveals a rhythmically patterned geography, an unspoken route of muscle memory and time (see figure 1: Movement Map between HIT and Kinetic Dance Studio).



Figure 1: The journey between HIT and Kinetic Dance Studios is an act of embodied memory, where rhythm, purpose, and personal history converge to summon 31 High Street, not as a site selected by zoning but as one revealed through the choreography of lived experience.

Eyebeam Atelier (Diller Scofidio + Renfro): Fluid Thresholds

The work of Diller Scofidio + Renfro in their design for the Eyebeam Atelier (2002) offers a precedent for thinking about spatial design as a medium for blurring boundaries between performer and audience, inside and outside, and public and private. Their concept of a moveable “media wall”, part partition, part screen, allowed spatial boundaries to be literally reconfigured in real time, blending zones for performance, exhibition, and interaction (p. 56).⁶ The wall acted not as a divider but as a facilitator of movement, both architectural and social.

Footnotes:

6. Diller Scofidio + Renfro, “Eyebeam Atelier,” in *Architecture in Motion: The Art and Science of Responsive Space*, ed. John Beckmann (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2003), 56.

What intrigued me was the attitude toward space as choreography. In Nātyāloka, the principle is echoed, not mechanically but energetically. Rather than altering walls, the spaces shift through the way they are used. Studios double as gathering spaces; voids become stages; thresholds blur depending on the time of day and energy of the body. Like Eyebeam, Nātyāloka is porous, not in material but in purpose.

Where Eyebeam blurred form through movement of matter, Nātyāloka blurs energy through intentional emptiness, through alignment, rhythm, and sacred spatial tension.

The Fred and Ginger Building (Frank Gehry and Vlado Milunić): Exterior Dynamism vs. Internal Embodiment

The Fred and Ginger Building in Prague (1996), designed by Frank Gehry and Vlado Milunić, is iconic for its fluid external form: two structures seemingly caught mid-dance, frozen in a fluid duet. The exterior is expressive, dynamic, and suggestive of movement (Cohen, 1999, p. 144). But the dynamism is skin deep. Inside, the building adheres to conventional office layouts; the choreography stops at the facade.

Nātyāloka responds to this contrast. It does not perform movement on the surface; it embodies it from within. The building's dynamism is not stylistic but spatial. It is choreographed in circulation paths, in voids that breathe, in spaces aligned with energetic direction. Where Fred and Ginger perform dancing as a metaphor, Nātyāloka enacts dancing as a structure. Rooted in Vaastu Shastra, it begins at the Brahmasthan and extends outward like a ripple, not a spectacle, but spirit.

This comparison highlights the distinction between gesture and embodiment, between appearance and alignment. Gehry's building embodies metaphor; mine seeks to embody ritual. Where Nātyāloka begins with the dancer's inner rhythm and expands outward, the Fred and Ginger building begins with spectacle and moves inward toward stasis.

Footnotes:

Jean-Louis Cohen, Gehry Talks: Architecture + Process (New York: Rizzoli, 1999), 144.

Reading the City Through Energy: Vaastu as Urban Compass

I created this Vaastu Energy Map to reorient the idea of movement inward, not as a gesture but as a flow. Where the Fred and Ginger building choreographs from the exterior, Nātyāloka begins with Prāṇa, aligning itself with cardinal directions and elemental flows across the city grid.

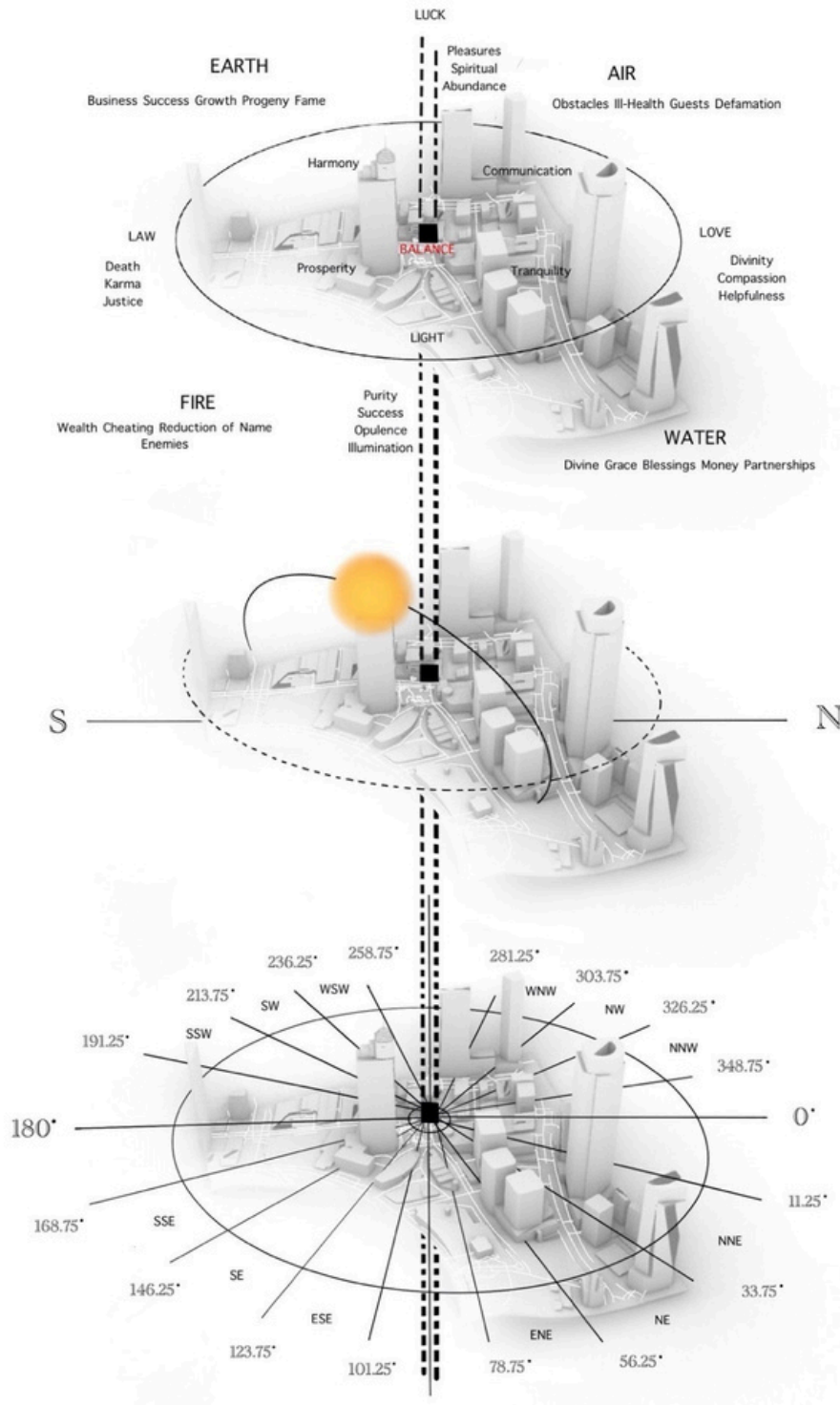


Figure 2: Rooted in Vaastu Shastra, Nātyāloka aligns with elemental flows and an eastern orientation, guiding dancers inward and upward through a structure that breathes with prāṇic energy and embodies the wisdom of spatial harmony.

In this reading, 31 High Street becomes an energy point within a larger field. Nātyāloka responds to this by placing the entrance to the east, the Brahmasthan at the centre, and the performance space elevated above the northeast, aligned with light, flow, and sacred pause Bansal, A. K. (2002). This isn't about symbolic adherence; it's about cultivating resonance. The building doesn't just fit on the land; it listens to it.

As noted by Simo (2016), "Sacredness in space is not found in what it contains, but in how it is moved through" (p. 7). Nātyāloka seeks to embody this principle, not to recreate temples, but to honour the flow of energy and to design a building where energy activates spirit. In this sense, Vaastu Shastra becomes a tool of resistance. It rejects sterile, Western models of spatial neutrality and instead invites energy, ritual, and ancestral memory into designedly thinking.

Footnotes:

Bansal, Vaastu: The Origin of Architecture, 27.

Ingrid Simo, The Moving Sacred: Architecture and Embodiment in Ritual Practice (New York: Routledge, 2016), 7.

The site is read through Vaastu Shastra as a body of energy in motion. The Directional Energy Map (see figure 3) shows Prāṇa entering from the east, aligned with the rising sun, while the Brahmasthan remains clear, a still centre in a moving field. Yet the energy draws westward, following the flow toward Albert Park and Freyberg Square, two sites pulsing with presence and public breath. The Water Flow Map (see figure 4) traces this further. Hidden streams and historic channels ripple beneath the surface, shaping where energy gathers or dissipates. At Freyberg Place, Isthmus Group’s design amplifies these flows through terraced steps and water features that echo the site’s volcanic geology and historical waterways, creating space that invites movement and occupation (Isthmus Group, n.d.). The land breathes. It shifts. Design here is not about imposition but alignment, a tuning into what already moves.

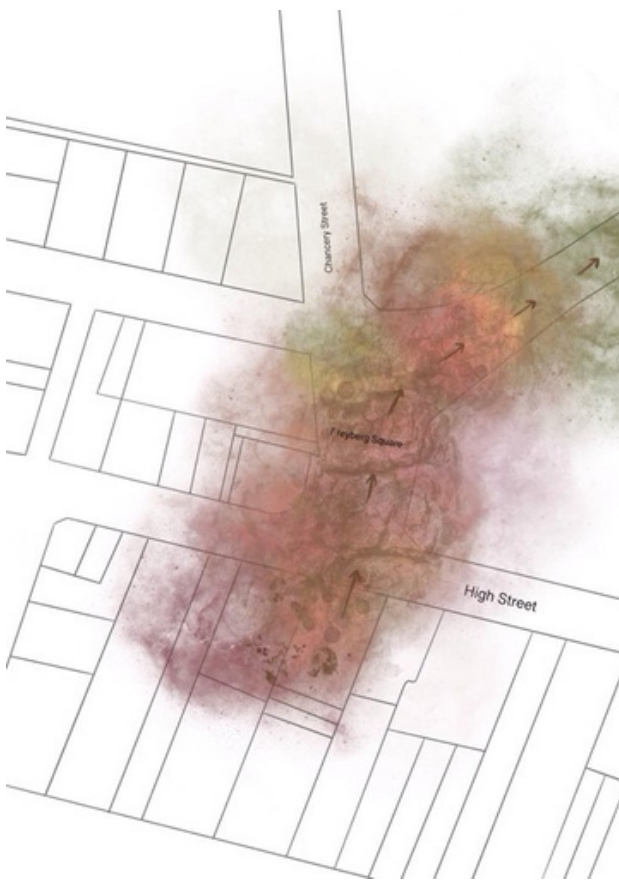


Figure 3: Directional Energy Map. This overlay maps the energetic choreography of High Street and Freyberg Square, where movement, sound, and sightlines flow from north to west.



Figure 4: Water Flow Map. Beneath the city's concrete skin, buried streams trace the memory of water, echoing the body's own hidden flows of blood, lymph, and breath. These ancient paths through the site remind us that movement does not begin when we arrive; like water, it is a continuous choreography already in motion.

Footnotes:

Isthmus Group, "Freyberg Place," Isthmus Projects, accessed April 3, 2025, <https://isthmus.co.nz/project/freyberg-place/>

This tension between stillness and movement also echoes in the design of the Floating Pavilion in Rotterdam (2010), created by DUS Architects, which embraced spatial impermanence as a response to environmental flux (DUS Architects, 2011, p. 71) It floated, literally, yet remained anchored by intention. Nātyāloka (नाट्यालोक) does not float on water, but it listens in the same way: to undercurrents, to shifting ground, to the weight of presence. Its foundations are fixed, but its energy flows outward, east to west, from breath to gathering, from body to city.

An Activation Map (see figure 5) traces this daily choreography, highlighting where dance is currently sustained in Auckland Central. It reveals the makeshift terrain dancers must navigate: borrowed garages, nighttime community halls, parks, or mirrored glass. These spaces, like the Pavilion, are temporary by necessity. Where the Pavilion embodied adaptability through material lightness, Nātyāloka carries it through ritual and rhythm, transforming fleeting occupation into sustained presence, allowing dance to inform structure and energy to guide form.



Figure 5: This map traces layered sites of dance. Studios, theatres, and nightclubs alongside alleyways and mirrored glass, each pulsing with activation, performance, practice, and gathering. Within this living choreography, 31 High Street becomes a vertebra in the city's dancing spine, the quiet inhale that anchors and aligns the energy flow of a pranic system already in motion.

Footnotes:

DUS Architects, Floating Pavilion Rotterdam: Architecture for a Climate-Adaptive Future (Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2011), 71.

Adesola Akinleye (2021) writes, “reading the room with dance, understanding it's still and changing conditions, cues and qualities, can help develop architectural sensibilities”(p. 1). This framework of spatial awareness, drawn from the body rather than blueprints, demands that architecture listens, shifts, and responds. As a dancer, I experience the city as a shifting score. As a spatial designer, I seek to transcribe that score into form.

From a theoretical lens, Rudolf Laban’s concept of Space Harmony provides further context. Laban identified spatial patterns that emerge naturally from movement, describing how the body inherently seeks paths of least resistance and maximal expression. Laban (1966) proposed that “each movement trace in space increases the kinaesthetic and spatial awareness of the moving person and balances the body’s relationship to its surroundings”(p. 10).

His work suggests that architecture designed with these energetic paths in mind can not only support movement but amplify it. By moving through these spatial scales, dancers can develop heightened awareness of space and a grounded sense of bodily equilibrium.

If, as Akinleye proposes, architecture must listen to how space is moved through, and as Laban reveals, movement patterns awaken spatial awareness, then what happens when spatial design begins with the body rather than the blueprint? Through my work, I ask: what would it mean to build not for movement as utility, but as language? To design not with fixed geometry, but with the rhythms of lived motion?

Nātyāloka (नाट्यालोक) becomes my response, a design that recognises movement as identity, as orientation, and as cultural memory. It emerges from a city that, while vibrant in dance culture, continues to relegate dancers to borrowed rooms and garages. In these improvised spaces we bend ourselves around space that was never meant for us. This thesis seeks to reverse that, to center the moving body, to let space arise from motion.

I do not design from a distance. I’ve been dancing since I could walk, on tiled kitchen floors, school hall stages, asphalt streets, and spotlight-lit theatres. Today, I’m a professional dancer performing for music artists, touring, and taking the stage at some of Aotearoa’s biggest music events. I’ve felt the ache of spaces that confine, and the freedom of those that let me fly. I am both inhabitant and interpreter. The one who moves and the one who maps. I’m also a spatial designer, with experience as a design lead in commercial planning and now working professionally in bathroom and kitchen design. This is a design not just for dancers, but by one. Someone who knows the body and the blueprint. In this rare crossing of roles, I carry both the question and the answer.

And so, I return to the places my body remembers: studios, garages, and streets. These are more than memories; they are lived experiences that now guide my design decisions.

Footnotes:

Adesola Akinleye, Dance, Architecture and Engineering (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021), 1.

Rudolf Laban, Choreutics (London: Macdonald & Evans, 1966), 10.

Bodies That Don't Vanish: Ritual, Erasure, and Reclamation

Reflecting personal accounts of exclusion and the deeper narrative of reclaiming space through cultural visibility and embodied presence.

I remember the cold sting of disinfectant wipes against my skin, the friction of a fibre cloth scrubbing against my hands. The mehndi that traced my palms, intricate and delicate, a marker of celebration, was seen as a stain to be erased. The red Lakshmi string tied around my wrist, a symbol of protection and devotion, was cut away without my permission. I stood in the middle of a dance studio in Birkdale, stripped of the symbols that made me feel rooted in my culture.

I was the only person of colour. Others like me had come and gone, passing through as quickly as they arrived, bodies unrooted, unable to find belonging in a space that erased who they were. The space has no room for us. No acknowledgment of difference and no understanding of the rituals and traditions we carried with us. Instead, dance was framed within a rigid, singular structure, one that required erasure in order to belong.

That moment shaped more than my relationship with that studio; it shaped my understanding of space itself. The space was not what excluded me; it was the invisible expectations of neutrality, the silent pressure to conform to a blank aesthetic that was never truly neutral. Western-centric dance environments often mistake whiteness for universality, stripping spaces of cultural expression under the guise of professionalism.

This erasure is not unique to dance. In 2023, a Destiny Church member in Auckland painted over the rainbow pedestrian crossing on Karangahape Road, a site that had become a visual symbolic expression of queer identity and resistance. In doing so, they attempted to overwrite the presence of the very community that had claimed visibility through colour, movement, and symbolic spatial markers. This act wasn't just vandalism; it was spatial violence, a forced return to architectural silence (RNZ, 2024).

Designing inclusive movement space requires more than access; it requires visibility. As bell hooks (1990) writes, "Spaces can be real and imagined. Spaces can tell stories and unfold histories. Spaces can be interrupted, appropriated, and transformed through artistic and literary practice" (p. 152). This framing insists on spatial design as a narrative act, one that must be receptive to histories, bodies, and identities often excluded from spatial design discourse.

Footnotes:

"Auckland's Karangahape Road Rainbow Crossing Covered in White Paint," RNZ News, March 28, 2024, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/512867/auckland-s-karangahape-road-rainbow-crossing-covered-in-white-paint>.

bell hooks, "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness," in Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 152.

Furthermore, architect and theorist Lesley Lokko critiques the imposed neutrality of dominant architectural systems, noting that “architecture does not exist in a vacuum... spatial practices are cultural practices.” (*Mileo, 2019*). Her work unpacks how architecture can either uphold colonial silence or make space for plural voices, cultures, and identities. I resonate deeply with her approach. As someone designing through movement and memory, I too believe spatial design must acknowledge where it comes from, who it serves, and who it excludes. Culture is not an aesthetic; it is the foundation.

Inclusive design must challenge spatial assimilation. It must allow for visible difference, not as an exception but as essence. Dance, as both embodied knowledge and cultural practice, becomes a tool for reclaiming spatial energy.

I imagine Nātyāloka as cultural realignment, inviting difference into the space. Becoming a place where mehndi-stained hands and red threads are not removed but revered. Where dance does not require erasure to exist in built form. Where community can be formed without first being flattened.

Footnotes:

Mileo, D. (2019, September 4). Decolonising architecture with Lesley Lokko. Assemble Papers. [Lesley Lokko, “Decolonising Architecture with Lesley Lokko,” Assemble Papers, September 4, 2019](#)

Breath Made Space: Aligning Spirit with Space

Evoking the transformational process of activating ordinary space through intention, presence, and Vaastu Shastra energy flow.

The garage was never meant to hold dance. It was built for cars; static, unmoving, cold. The concrete floor was unforgiving, the space dimly lit, a place of storage rather than movement. For ten years, this unassuming and unyielding space became my sanctuary.

Before each class I would move the cars, roll out the carpet, and shift the space from its intended purpose into something entirely different. The garage was not designed to be a dance studio, but that didn't matter; the act of transforming it was part of the ritual. The moment the music started, the cold, dark space disappeared, replaced by rhythm, sweat, and the warmth of movement. It was my oasis hidden within an ordinary structure, a place that only existed when it was inhabited.

When I started teaching, the space changed again. Students filled the room, their energy making the walls feel wider, the air lighter. The garage became alive when they arrived. Later, when we installed wooden floors, it felt different. In comparison to the softness of the carpet, the polished wood was cold underfoot, beautiful but unfamiliar. Material shifts changed the way I felt in the space, reinforcing that spatial design is not just about what is built but how it's activated.

This transformation, from static to dynamic, from structure to sanctuary, is what informs my spatial design approach. How does space come alive? Is it the material, the energy of those who enter, or the intention behind its use?

The scuffed concrete was never meant to hold choreography, yet it became my sanctuary. This transformation, from garage to sacred ground, reflects an energetic shift that aligns with the core principles of Vaastu Shastra. In Vaastu Shastra, space is not static, it breathes, it holds energy, direction, and vibration. It can be activated by presence and sanctified through intention.

The Unseen Choreography: Spatial Memory, Stillness, and Knowing

Centering proprioception, hierarchy, and internalized spatial intelligence as modes of architectural understanding.

Dance imparts more than movement; it unveils how space is perceived, felt, and inhabited. My earliest experiences of spatial hierarchy began in the studio, long before I could identify it. New dancers instinctively find the back of the room. It's a place of observation, safety, and quiet absorption. Over time, as confidence grows, we move forward, toward the front, toward visibility. The migration isn't just about courage; it's a choreography of belonging, a shifting claim to space.

This spatial positioning, front versus back, reflects deeper dynamics of power, presence, and visibility. It aligns with Michel de Certeau's notion of spatial practice as a "tactic of resistance" (*de Certeau, 1984, p. 98*). The dancer at the back resists being seen until they are ready. The dancer at the front asserts presence, claiming sightlines and attention. Spatial design defines sightlines, foregrounding some elements while backgrounding others. In studios and cities alike, power is spatialized.

In traditional classes, all dancers face one direction, towards the teacher, the mirror, the authority. The energy of the room is not neutral; it is directional, channeling attention along a single axis. Henri Lefebvre refers to this as "representational space," lived and experienced space imbued with bodily rhythms and codes (*Lefebvre, 1991, p. 39*).

This relationship shifts again when stepping onstage. The studio is inward facing, a dialogue with the self, the mirror. The stage turns the body outward, toward an ocean of faces. The lights obscure the crowd, turning individuals into a wave of presence. There's a collective breath, a pulse. From an elevated perspective, the performer sees not people but patterns. The transition from rehearsal to performance is not only technical; it's energetic.

This transformation echoes Maurice Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of embodiment, "the body is our general medium for having a world" (*Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 169*). Dancers don't just move in space; we move space. Our bodies, conditioned through repetition, sense dimensions beyond geometry. This is proprioception, the awareness of the body's position in space without visual cues. We train our feet to land without sounds, our arms to extend within the limits of breath, and our spines to spiral in concert with rhythm.

Footnotes:

de Certeau, M. (1984). The practice of everyday life (S. Rendall, Trans.). University of California Press.

Lefebvre, H. (1991). The production of space (D. Nicholson-Smith, Trans.). Blackwell.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (2012). Phenomenology of perception (D. A. Landes, Trans.). Routledge. (Original work published 1945)

One of the most formative tools in my training was blind dancing; choreographing and rehearsing without the presence and reflection of mirrors. This practice removes the visual crutch and forces the dancer to feel their alignment, their spacing, and their presence. At first it feels like a loss; you search for yourself in reflection and find nothing. Over time, it sharpens internal awareness. You begin to dance not from sight but from sensing. Not from control, but from knowing. This is embodied spatial intelligence, something that cannot be found on a blueprint or plans but is intrinsic to every dancer.

Stillness too reveals the vastness of space we often overlook. Lisa Landrum (2016) posits that choreography is “not merely a sequence of steps but a spatial narrative, an architectural event enacted by bodies” (p. 7).

Cartographies of Constraint: A Comparative Study of Studio Space

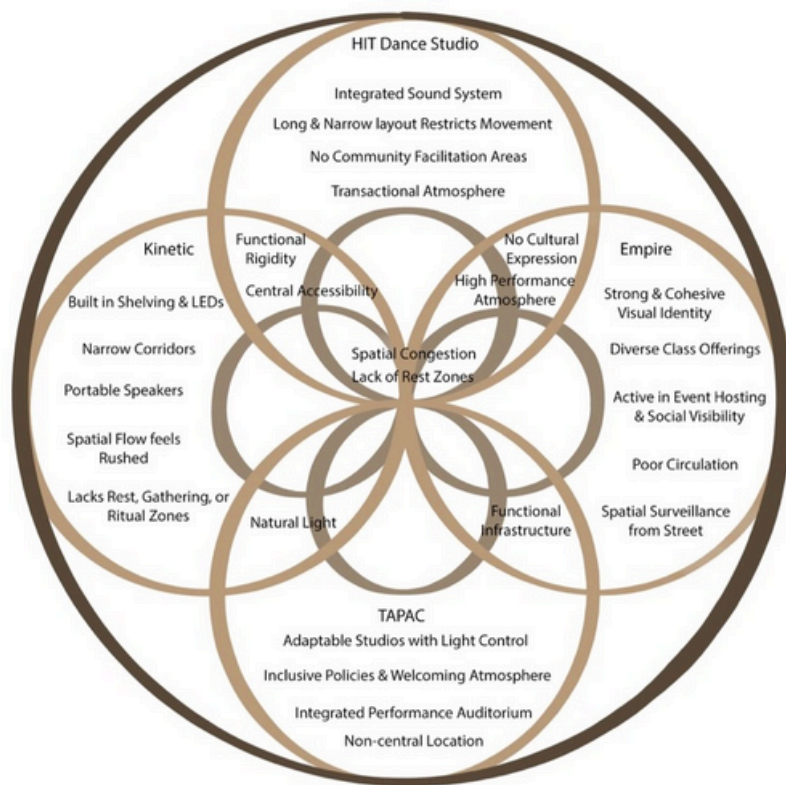


Figure 6: Spatial Conditions Across Auckland Dance Studios. Visual synthesis of comparative strengths and limitations.

Footnotes:

Lisa Landrum, "Theory's Theatricality and Architectural Agency," *Architecture and Culture* 4, no. 1 (2016): 7.

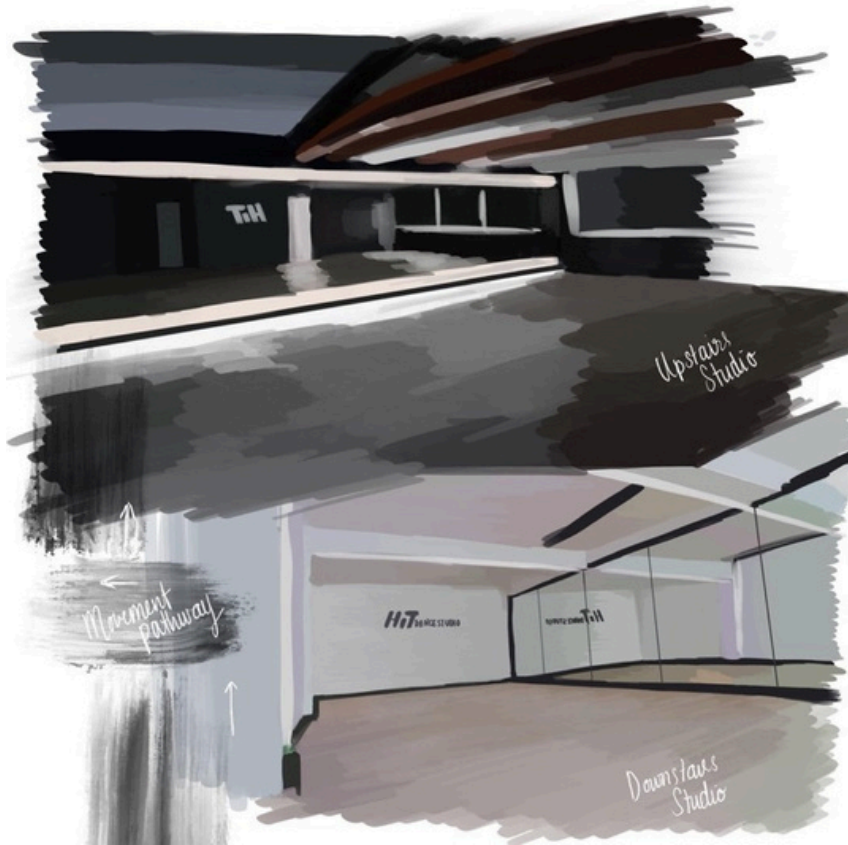


Figure 7: Visual Depiction of HIT Dance Studio on Cook Street.



Figure 8: Visual Depiction of Kinetic Studios on Lorne Street.

Design Implications for Nātyāloka

From the spatial gaps observed across Auckland studios, several key principles emerge to guide the design of Nātyāloka Dance Complex

1. Hold All States of Movement

Design must support more than performance. Spaces for rest, ritual, and reset are essential.

2. Embrace Spatial Flow

Avoid linear, restrictive layouts. Design for circular, radial, and spiral movement in line with Vaastu Shastra principles.

3. Honour Cultural Identity

Reject spatial neutrality. Use materials, orientation, and symbolism to make culture visible and felt.

4. Foster Community & Gathering

Integrate lounges, cafes, and shared spaces to build connection beyond the dance floor.

5. Protect the Brahmasthan

Keep the energetic core open and central. Let studios orbit around this void, each with distinct energy.

6. Build Adaptive Infrastructure

Design spaces that can shift with time, use, and energy. Modular, responsive, and never fixed.

7. Connect to the City's Rhythm

Create soft thresholds that draw in urban energy while preserving internal sanctuary.

METHODS

Embodied Design as Becoming

This research unfolds through my body, a vessel in constant motion, moving across studio floors, ancestral thresholds, and shifting cityscapes. It is a creative, practice-led inquiry where design is not a fixed destination but a choreography of becoming. Through spatial rituals, iterative drawing, storytelling, dance, and modeling, I trace the arc of lived experience as a Hindu dancer navigating Aotearoa's fragmented urban fabric. Nātyāloka emerges not from abstraction, but from an embodied process in which memory becomes method and ritual becomes spatial intelligence.

Embodied Knowledge: Knowing Through the Body

My body, trained, tested, and transformed through decades of dance, has always been my first site of knowing. Before drawing a plan, I traced floorboards with bare feet. Before placing thresholds, I felt them underfoot. This thesis aligns with Sarah Pink's notion of "emplaced knowing" (2009, p. 25). Where understanding is grounded in the lived, sensory movement through place. Here, the body becomes both the subject and method of spatial research.

My embodied experiences, particularly as a Hindu woman in Aotearoa, form a cultural archive from which spatial design emerges. In 2023 I returned to South Africa, dancing barefoot on ancestral land. Surrounded by family and unfamiliar yet familiar rhythms. I was reminded that movement is not just expressive but grounding. It returned me to a spatial compass embedded in memory, rhythm, and ritual.

This approach also echoes Erin Manning's view that movement is "pre-articulated thought" (2009, p. 14). A way of thinking through action before cognition intervenes. The design of Nātyāloka follows this; orientation, presence, and grounding are energetic necessities. Design begins with breath, not blueprint.

This conceptual grounding led to an early mapping of the ideas, energies and symbols guiding my research journey. Using mind mapping, I laid out keywords such as heritage, sacred, threshold, dance and ritual, exploring how each word branched into spatial principles.

Footnotes:

Sarah Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (London: SAGE Publications, 2009), 25.

Erin Manning, *Relationescapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 14.

Situating Ideas - Locating ideas through mindmapping.

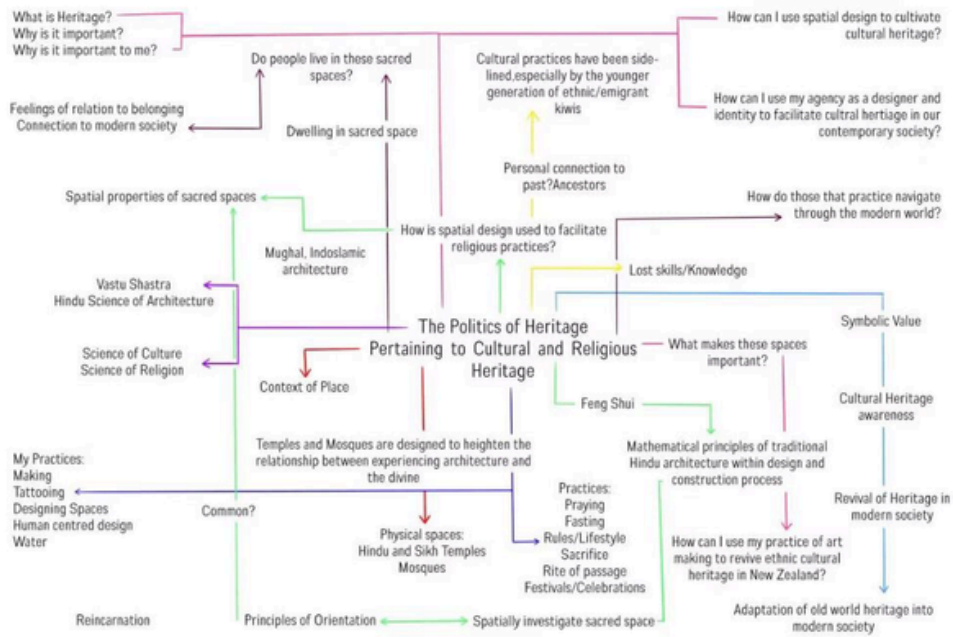


Figure 9: *Situating Ideas through Mind Mapping.* A conceptual mapping exercise linking heritage, sacred space, and cultural memory as spatial frameworks.

Autoethnography: Dance as Spatial Archive

The personal is political; in my research, it is also spatial. Autoethnography allows me to narrate lived experience not as anecdote, but as architectural material. As Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) write, “Autoethnography shows people in the process of figuring out what to do, how to live, and the meaning of their struggles” (p. 274). I am not just designing from reflection, but from rupture, from ritual, and from resistance.

The studio in Birkdale, where my mehndi was perceived as a stain and my Lakshmi thread was cut away, became a spatial wound. It raises the question: what does cultural erasure look like in built form? Nātyāloka responds to this through materials and moments that honour what others tried to erase, a mirrored thread of resistance stitched through space.

One of the earliest expressions of this reclamation was through the tattooing of synthetic skin. I illustrated Durga and Kali as contemporary protectors, inscribing their presence into skin-like surfaces, not to replicate tradition, but to honour its evolution through the body. Tattooing became both offering and rebellion.

Footnotes:

Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams, and Arthur P. Bochner, "Autoethnography: An Overview," *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 12, no. 1 (2011): 274.



Figure 10: Illustrations tracing sacred strength onto false skin, where the goddesses emerge not as relics of the past but as living protectors woven through body, memory, and devotion.

This exploration continued through the medium of ritual. Reimagining the Abhishekam ceremony, I etched Kali's form into black acrylic and poured milk over the surface. The milk did not erase her; it revealed her. The ritual did not dissolve the linework; it filled it with clarity. As Bruce Kapferer writes, ritual is "an intensification of experience, a condensation of meaning into action" (Kapferer, 2004, p. 42). In this performance, offering became architecture.

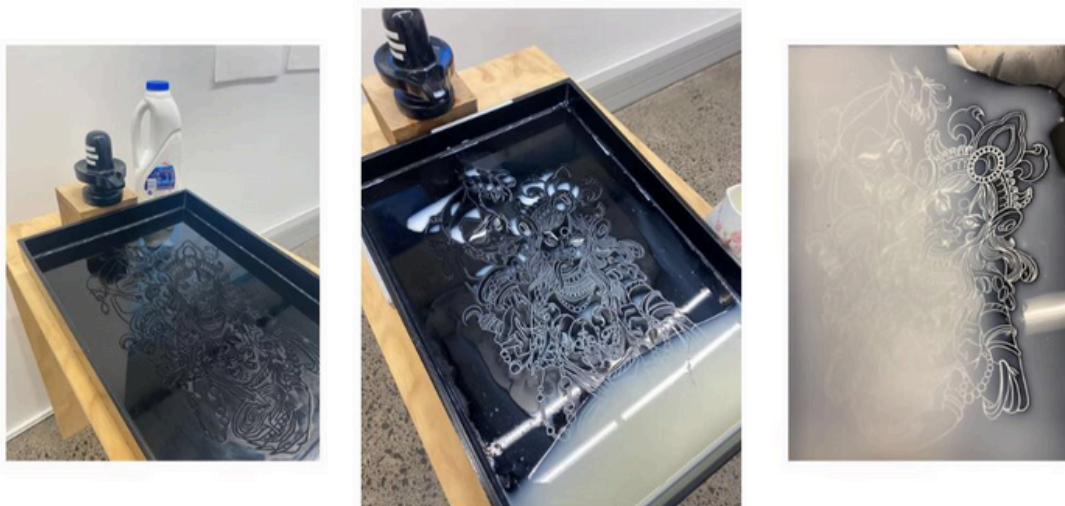


Figure 11: Ritual of Abhishekam. Milk Offering over Etched Kali. A sacred performance where milk traces and dissolves, transforming the surface into living devotion.

Footnotes:

Bruce Kapferer, Ritual Soundings: Reflections on Ritual, Performance and the Everyday (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2004), 42.

In a final act of embodiment, I submerged myself in milk, my skin covered in turmeric and sindoor, printed with sacred traditional woodblocks. This was no longer performance; it was surrender. The pigments bled into the water. Milk, once a symbol of purity and ritual, became a vessel for memory, identity, and quiet resistance. The ritual enacted a return to self through sacrificial immersion, a choreography of letting go.



Figure 12: Ritual Immersion. The body carrying sacred impressions surrenders to milk (a ritual offering), where pigments bleed into water and identity softens into breath, memory, and becoming.

Creative Practice-Led Research: Making as Knowing

This thesis is grounded in creative practice-led research, where movement and making are the pivotal forms of inquiry. Design is not a solution; it is a discovery. It does not begin with a fixed outcome but with a gesture, an offering to uncertainty.

Each stage of making became a form of movement. I began by scattering flour onto my kitchen floor and imprinting sacred mandala designs using traditional Indian woodblock stamps. As breath, breeze, and body moved through the space, the intricate patterns began to erode. The sacredness did not disappear; it shifted, reminding me that, in Hindu philosophy, impermanence is part of divinity.

Footnotes:

Figure 12: The final act of ritual embodiment, where my own body became the site of offering. The act of dance shifted inward, no longer performance but absorption. Through tattooing, etching, and ritualised embodiment, heritage was activated as a living, evolving spatial practice.



Figure 13: Progressive erosion of a flour mandala by breath and movement. An ephemeral sacred form that reveals beauty in transience. This experiment reflects Hindu notions of sacred impermanence found in practices such as kolam and rangoli.

From this, I danced barefoot across the flour-dusted floor. My steps pressed deeper into some areas, forming congregations of weight and energy. In others, my lightness left the surface untouched. Through this, choreography of traditional Indian dances I had performed across Aotearoa became cartography. Each footfall etched rhythm and spatial presence into the surface, transforming dance into a form of sacred residue.

Footnotes:

Figure 13: This act draws on devotional Hindu rituals and embodied ritual as spatial communication.



Figure 14: Tracing movement patterns through flour dispersion, documenting rhythm, congregation, and spatial memory.

To make the energy more visible, I dipped my feet in red paint, a symbolic echo of sindoor, and danced across white fabric. The pigment imprinted the directions of weight, repetition, and pause. These were not rehearsals. They were invocations. The body became a tool of inscription, the floor a sacred manuscript. This method aligns with Lisa Landrum's argument that architecture can emerge through the ritual of embodied motion (*Landrum, 2016, p. 7*), turning performance into a generative design process.

Footnotes:

Figure 14: This process extends Sarah Pink's sensory ethnography by literalizing the embodied trace through material response. See Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography*, (Pink, 2009, p. 49).

Lisa Landrum, "Theory's Theatricality and Architectural Agency," *Architecture and Culture* 4, no. 1 (2016).

Pink, S. (2009). *Doing sensory ethnography*. SAGE.



Figure 15: Red pigment mapping movement. Where choreography becomes offering, and space becomes memory.

Modular Movement: Dancing across the Facade

The body continued to guide material exploration. Treating the facade not as surface but as skin, I laid white ceramic tiles onto the floor like a blank manuscript. Dipping my feet in paint, I danced across them, spiraling, pausing, and turning. Each step left behind arcs of pressure, rhythm, and intention. The static grid of the tiles yielded to movement, becoming a choreographic field of expression.

Footnotes:

Figure 15: The red pigment ritual was inspired by both South Indian Bharatanatyam traditions and contemporary printmaking processes as embodied narration.



Figure 16: A surface breathed into being, where each step inks memory into the skin of a space.

The result was not a decorative pattern but a modular memory. Like dancers adjusting within formation, the tiles could be read as spatial notations, smudges and pauses, spirals and accumulations of energy, and streaks as directional force. The body reorganised the grid into lived experience.

Henri Lefebvre (1991) reminds us that “space is not a container but something continually shaped by movement and rhythm” (p. 205). In *Nāṭyāloka*, the facade is not an envelope but an act, a danced skin that records motion and becomes memory.

Footnotes:

Figure 16: This performance-based method aligns with performance art strategies of imprinting and score-writing, merging ceramic materiality with spatial dance.

Henri Lefebvre, The Production of Space, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 205.

Spatial Choreographies: From Movement to Design

Movement has always been my first language. Nātyāloka was not drawn; it was danced. Performing at One Love in Tauranga marked a turning point. As I reviewed stills from the performance, I began to notice both Vaastu Shastra and architectural principles embedded in the choreographic formations: thresholds, voids, weight shifts, and alignments. These were not staged arbitrarily; they were intuitive structures that could be translated into spatial form. See figures 17 – 20.

Tension and Balance

Despite the expansive energy, the formation maintains tension through mirrored movements, creating a dynamic equilibrium.

Balance and Harmony: The symmetrical formation reflects the Vaastu Shastra principle of maintaining equilibrium in space, ensuring stability and positive flow.

Prana Distribution: Expansive postures mirror the outward flow of Prana (life force), emphasizing the importance of dynamic energy circulation in both dance and spatial design.

Unified Height
Symmetrical Expansion: Symmetrical triangular arrangement, with equal spacing and mirrored body positions, creating a sense of balance and harmony.
Vertical Emphasis: Dancers' upright position/posture with extended arms emphasize vertically suggesting growth and expansion.
Central Focus: Krisy acts as the pivot point, with Erin and I's movements radiating outward, establishing both cohesion and expansion.
Elevated Postures: The raised arms and vertical extension symbolize aspiration, freedom and openness.
Subtle Variations: Slight differences in arm angles introduce dynamic tension while preserving the overall symmetrical balance.



Spatial Dynamics: Outward energy flow. Triangular formation directs energy outward from the center, symbolizing expansion and dynamic growth.

Visual Hierarchy: The symmetry guides the viewers' gaze naturally from the center to the periphery, reinforcing the prominence of the central figure.

Vaastu:
Fire Element (Agni): The triangular shape aligns with the south east direction in Vaastu Shastra, representing the fire element, symbolizing transformation, passion and energy.

Directional Energy: The upward movements correspond with the north east direction, associated with enlightenment, spiritual growth, and creativity.

Space: Triangular or Pyramidal Spaces: The formation inspires triangular architectural layouts or spaces with upward slanting walls, representing growth and elevations.

Central Atrium: A dominant central space acting as an anchor, with extensions or pathways radiating outwards – ideal for performance spaces or gathering/communal spaces.

Symmetrical Layouts: Mirrored body positions inspire balanced architectural design promoting harmony and spatial coherence.

Figure 17: Tension and Balance

Linear Alignment with Forward Focus

Body Positions & Formations:

- Strong linear formation, creating a sense of directionality momentum.

Central Figure (Krisy) anchors the formation with a grounded stance. Side dancers (Erin and I) compliment the symmetry through dynamic postures.



Rising Energy (Vaastu):
East. Symbolising the start of motion.

Spatial Concept:
A linear corridor/hallway or transitional space leading to a central node – movement from periphery to core.

A rectangular studio with clear sightlines, emphasizing forward motion – required for technical dance drills.

Anchor Space:
A dominant central area (inspired by Krisy), flanked by symmetrical extensions – entry halls? Void space?

Visual Pathways:
The linear progression encourages the creation of sightlines within architectural designs, promoting visual connectivity between spaces.

The linear arrangement suggests forward momentum. Intentionally guiding the audience's gaze from periphery to the center.

Upright postures, emphasizing vertical strength and stability.

The subtle stagger in the positioning introduces depth – three-dimensional spatial experience.

Symmetrical extensions – amplify formations. Stability.

Balance: Despite the dynamic energy, there is a deliberate balance achieved through mirrored arm and leg positions – creating a cohesive visual flow.

Clear focal point. Horizontal linear formation.

Vaastu Shastra:

- **Directionality:** Forward facing alignment mirrors east-west axis in Vaastu Shastra. Representing the rising sun and new beginnings.
- **Energy Flow (Prana):** Energy radiates outward from Krisy (center), resembling the Brahmasthan (core energy center/source from which all movement emanates).
- **Symmetry and Harmony:** The balanced positioning reflects the Vaastu principle of maintaining harmony between spaces, ensuring stability and positive energy flow.

Figure 18: Linear Alignment with Forward Focus

Prana Circulation: The interplay of raised and lowered postures mimic the rise and fall of breath, essential for creating a living breathing architectural environment.

Layered Depth: The varied heights introduce depth and dimensionality, encouraging an immersive perspective.

Interconnected Zones: Open spaces that flow into one another, mirroring the interwoven movements of the dancers.

Dynamic Asymmetry:
Staggered, layered,
asymmetrical positions
create a sense of movement
and spontaneity.

Contrasting Levels: Erin and I
are positioned lower, while
the other is mid height
stance, establishing a multi-
layered composition.

Interwoven Movements:
Various directions +
intersecting movements
create visual complexity.
The interplay between
upright and lowered
positions emphasizes
diversity in movement and
energy.

Structural Implications:
This can translate into a
space with tiered platforms
or multi-level dance area to
accommodate different
movement intensities.

Non-linear Circulation:
The unpredictable postures
suggest pathways are curved
or nonlinear, encouraging
exploration.



Vaastu Shastra: Air Element
(Vayu):

The movement driven
asymmetrical nature aligns
with the north west direction,
which governs movement,
transformation and
adaptability.

Energy Shift:

Unlike the grounded nature of
previous formations – this
one represents an active state,
embodying the energy or
transformation/transitions
and progress.

Unpredictable Flow:

The varied positions reflect
the Vaastu Shastra principle
of adapting to environmental
and energetic changes while
maintaining balance.

Multi-level Performance
Spaces:

Inspired by the varying
dancer heights, incorporating
tiered spaces, mezzanines, or
staggered platforms for varied
perspectives.

Directional Tension:

The diverging movements/heights create tension, pulling energy in multiple directions, yet remaining interconnected.

Movement through Space:

Unlike the previous formations in this dance, this composition suggests fluidity, as if the dancers (us) are in transition.

Dynamic Shift:

Unlike linear or symmetrical formations, this arrangement conveys change and adaptability, influencing the way space is perceived and used.

Figure 19: Prana Circulation: The interplay of raised and lowered postures mimicking the rise and fall of breath.

- Low Wide Structures: Inspired by our grounding positioning, spaces designed with a lower ceiling height or embedded structures to enhance stability and rootedness.
- Expansive Open Floor Plans: The lateral spread suggests large, uninterrupted spaces that encourage free flowing movement.
- Community Focused Areas: The interconnectedness gestures inspire architectural layouts that emphasize collective experiences, such as shared studios or communal zones.

Body Positions and Formations:

Grounded Stances – Our bodies are positioned lower to the ground, bent knees and static arms, emphasizing a strong connection to the earth.

Horizontal Emphasis – Our formation expands outward rather than upward, creating a wide/broad spatial presence.

Balance and Stability: Despite the actual open nature of our movement, we maintain a firm, rooted posture, suggesting control and strength.

Layering through Movement: While our physical heights remain low, our movement create layered visual depth, influencing spatial perception.



Vaastu Shastra:
Earth Element (Prithvi): The grounded stance strongly aligns with the south west direction, which governs stability, security and resilience.

Directional Balance: Our broad positioning suggests stability in the west, symbolizing strength and endurance in Vaastu.

Rooted Energy Flow: Our positioning also represents the Vaastu principle of maintaining low, strong foundations for structural and energetic balance.

Prana Circulation: Unlike the other upward energy flows, this formation suggests an even, steady distribution of life force, reinforcing calmness and perseverance.

Our positioning near the ground suggests an intimate spatial experience, suitable for introspection and movement.

- Spatial Stability Controlled.
- Expansive Energy: The outward stretch of our positioning creates a feeling of expansion, yet remains contained with a stable foundation.
- Horizontal Flow: Unlike previous formations in this dance that emphasized upward movement, this composition suggests grounded lateral movement.
- Interconnectivity: Our proximity and mirroring gestures establish a sense of unity, reinforcing a communal energy.

Figure 20: Spatial Stability Controlled.

Footnotes:

This aligns with dance theorist Adesola Akinleye’s approach to “reading the room” through bodily cues and non-verbal spatial knowledge. (Akinleye, 2020, p. 37).

Akinleye, A. (2020). Dance, architecture and engineering. Palgrave Macmillan.

This translation continued through drawing. Sketching dancers' convergences and balances, I began to annotate breath, torque, and spatial extension. I paused at moments where energy pooled, in grounded feet or outstretched limbs, and let those gestures guide the emergence of interior mass. Space did not contain movement; it emerged from it. Dance wrote the plans, and the body became the first blueprint. See figures 21 – 23.

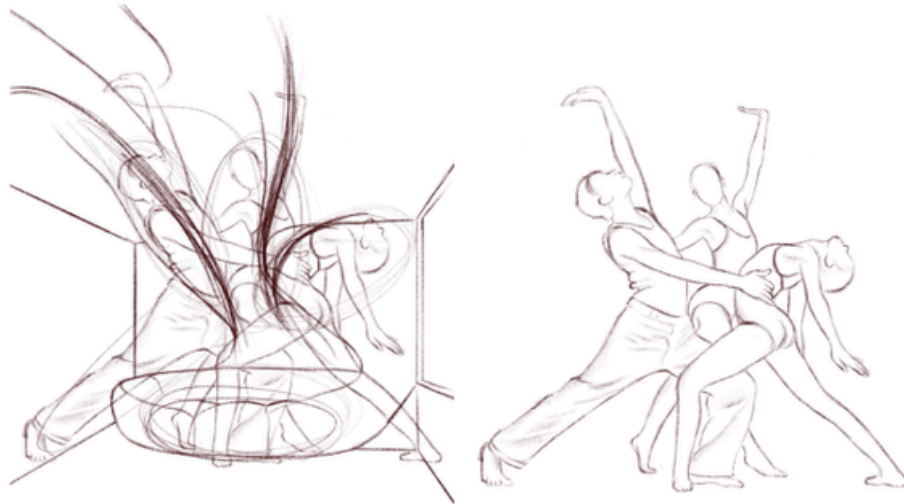


Figure 21: Pranic Arc of Limbs

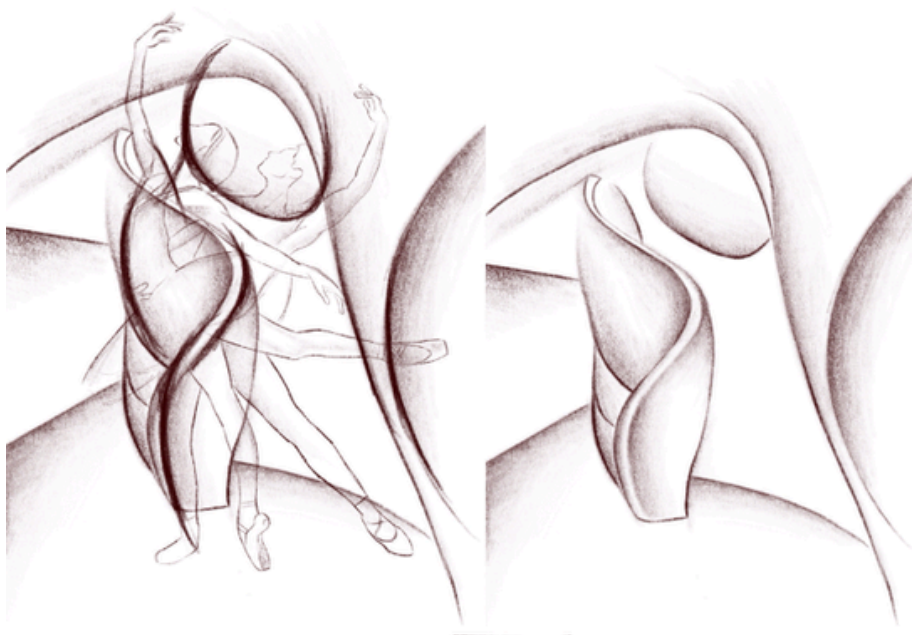


Figure 22: Balance and Gaze

Footnotes:

These sketches draw from Laban Movement Analysis, where space, effort, and shape are used as compositional tools. See Rudolf Laban, Choreutics, ed. Lisa Ullmann, (Laban, 1966, pp. 41–43).

Laban, R. (1966). Choreutics (L. Ullmann, Ed.). Macdonald & Evans.

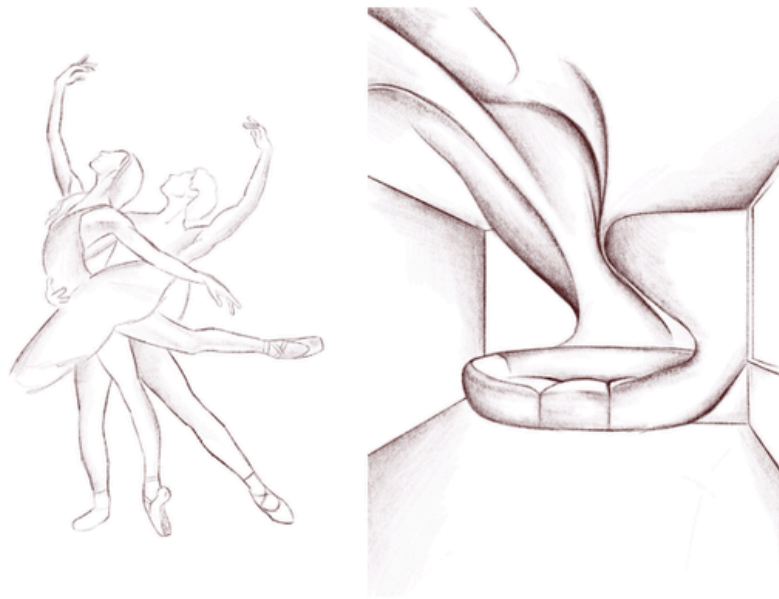


Figure 23: Bodies weave currents of breath and force, sketching unseen architectures into space.

From these sketches, the language of Nātyāloka began to form. Curved volumes opened like breath. Suspended voids anchored with tension. Centers gathered energy through convergence. It was here that the Brahmasthan, the sacred, unobstructed center in Vaastu Shastra, emerged not as a planned insertion but as an inevitable outcome of spatial energy flow.

From this point I moved into conceptual drawing with greater artistic freedom, allowing the forms to evolve intuitively. These drawings are descendants of the previous dance annotations, liberated yet still choreographically grounded.



Figure 24: Whispers of movement crystallised into veils of architecture.



Figure 25: Bodies entwine and rise, stitching memory into the skeleton of space.

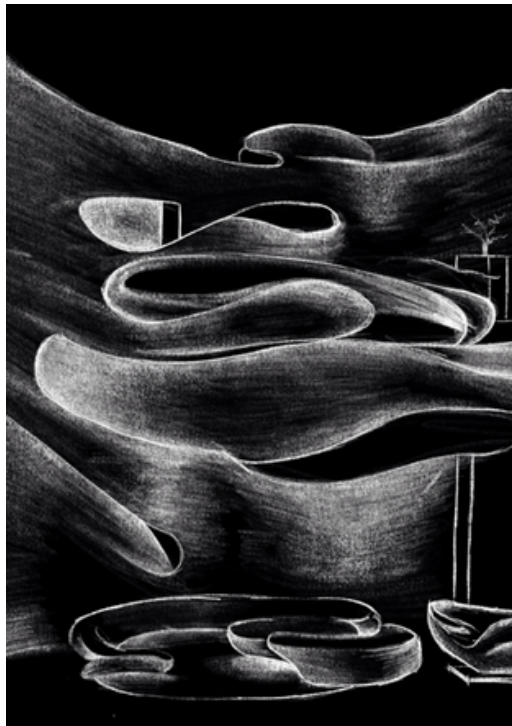


Figure 26: Waves of stone and breath carve sacred currents through the void.

Through the drawing process, I discovered that movement could generate structure, not through replication, but through resonance. Each line became a breathline, a pulse that hinted at volume, gravity, and flow. I learned to trust intuition over precision, allowing rhythm to guide my hand. The drawings revealed where space wanted to expand, where it needed to contract, and where it called for stillness. These insights demanded to be held, turned, and reshaped. This led me into rapid model making, a shift from flat marks to tactile breath, where the gestures of drawing became vessels for space.

Rapid Model Making and Embodied Space

As sketches turned to form, I began exploring rapid model making as a way to channel movement into physical structure and investigate the translation of dance energy into form. Each form captures a moment of breath, gesture, and rhythm, responding intuitively to ideas of flow. A form of kinetic sketching, provocations toward spatial design that breathes, moves, and holds the energy of the dancing body. Emerging themes such as flow, modular repetition, and the dynamic interplay between containment and openness echo Vaastu Shastra's principles of directional energy and circulation, grounding spatial design within embodied movement. See figures 27 – 29.



Figure 27: Spiraling energy ascending through grounded anchors, echoing the body's rise and return.

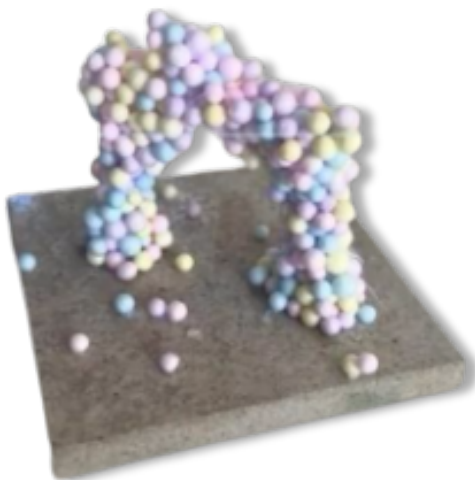


Figure 28: Rhythmic congregation of movement, a porous arch suspended between expansion and release.

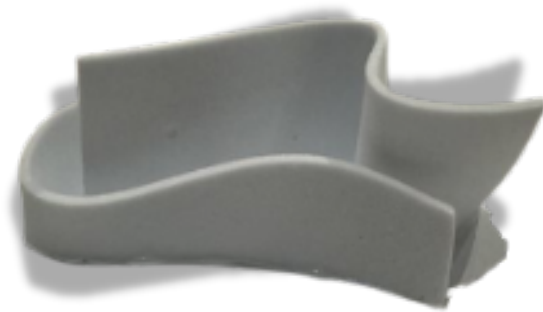


Figure 29: Flowing containment, a soft corridor folding space through breath, curve, and resistance.

I then laid brown paper across the floor and let movement guide the hand, spiraling, pulsing, drawing without intention. These were not technical plans. They were breathlines, scores of rhythms and resistance. Each mark traced energy, not shape. This practice aligns with Tim Ingold's (2007) concept of "lines of becoming," where drawing captures unfolding movement rather than fixed outline (p. 33). See figure 30.



Figure 30: Where gesture becomes structure and memory takes form.

Footnotes:

Tim Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History* (London: Routledge, 2007), 33.

These early physical studies revealed how space might behave like a body, opening, twisting, suspending, and resisting. Architecture became choreographic. I was not composing space from afar but from within the momentum of the dancer's breath. These models responded to Vaastu alignments, internal memory, and directional energy flows. See figures 31–33.

Figure 31: Exploring emergence and energy release between static forms.



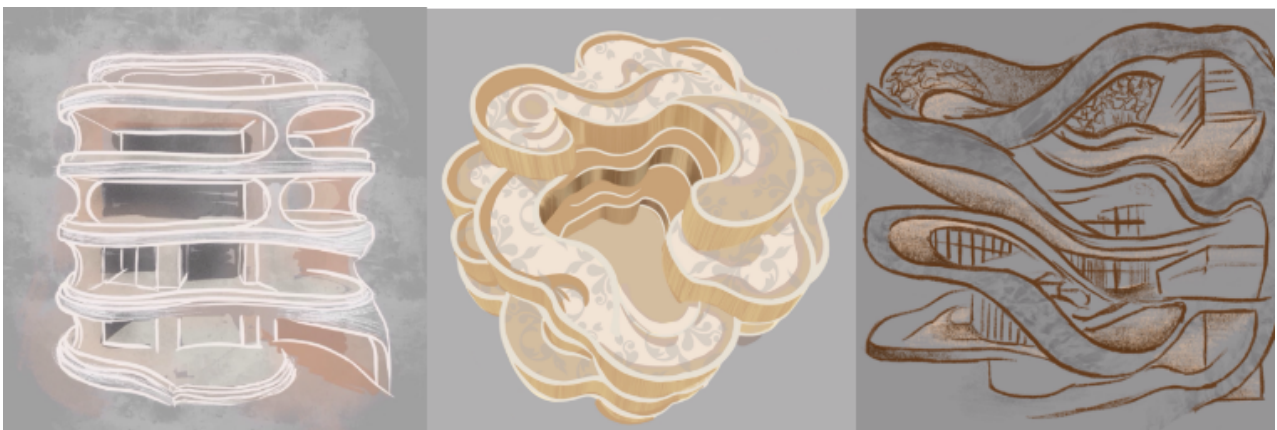
Figure 32: Tracing internal currents through layered, flowing divisions.



Figure 33: Layering movement, light, and shadow into a breathing skin.

Drawn Concepts: From Gesture to Massing

Building on the insights gained from choreographic movement and model making, I turned once more to drawing. Each line now carried the memory of footfall, the echo of spin, and the resistance of curve. These drawings did not represent form; they emerged from it. Space was not imagined from the outside but born from the inside of the body. See figures 34–36.



Figures 34-36: Drawn studies tracing the flow, layering, and spatial breath of movement, imagining spatial design as an extension of embodied rhythm.

This research is as much choreography as it is spatial design, a conversation between movement, memory, and material. Through embodied experience, autoethnographic reflection, creative production, and iterative spatial translation, I arrived at a design process that listens before it draws. Each method, from flour rituals to dance imprints, from pigment choreography to milk immersion, peeled back the layers of form to reveal space as something felt, not imposed.

Vaastu Shastra became more than a framework; it became an energetic compass that shaped how I read land, mapped direction, and aligned spirit with structure. Rather than applying it as a static set of rules, I let it move through me, allowing its emphasis on breath, flow, and balance to guide every spatial decision. It reminded me that sacredness is not found in ornament, but in orientation, in the clarity of a Brahmasthan, the charge of the northeast, and the stillness of the centre.

In doing so, I discovered a spatial intelligence that begins within the body and radiates outward. This shift marked a pivotal transformation in my practice: Nāṭyāloka is no longer designed from the outside in, but from the inside out. The interior becomes the origin, not the afterthought. It is from within the breath, the turning spine, and the moment before the step that space emerges. In this way, spatial design does not contain dance; it becomes it.

PRACTICE

Spatial Choreographies: When Space Listens to the Body

This final concept distills the movement, ritual, and embodied flow explored throughout the methodology chapter into a layered spatial language. Lines of energy sweep across the form, carving spaces of gathering, pause, and ascension. Texture, curvature, and orientation align with Vaastu principles, creating a design that breathes, remembers, and moves with the body. Spatial design becomes an offering, not built against time, but carried by it.

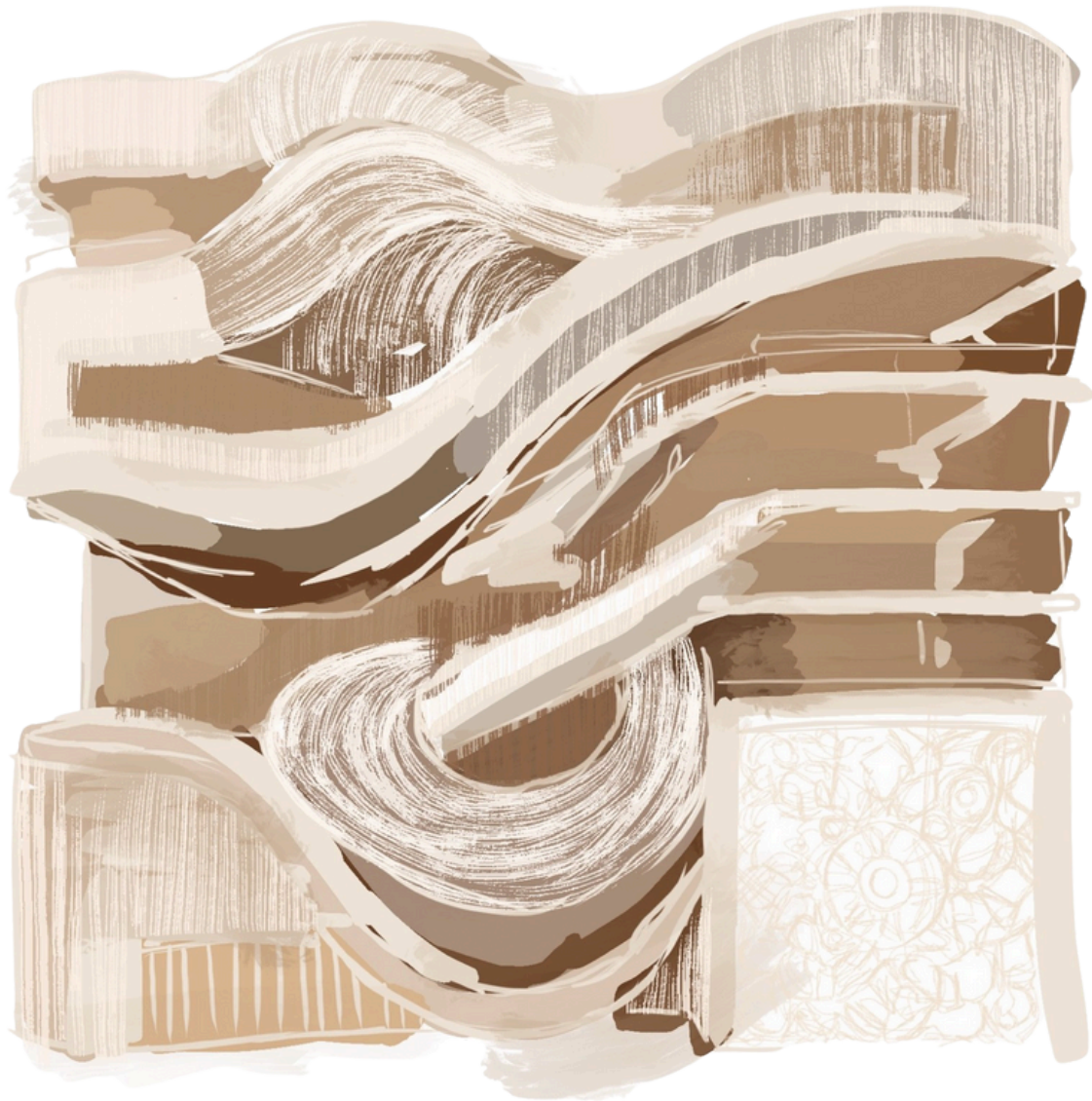


Figure 37: Final design iteration, a spatial choreography shaped by movement, ritual, and embodied memory.

Before entering the realm of 3D spatial modeling, I constructed a series of atmospheric models focused on ornament, reflection, and sacred surface. This was a devotional study, physical prayers carved in card. By layering Indian traditional motifs into the massing, I tested how cultural patterning could activate both surface and spatial memory. Mirrored interiors transformed the contained box into an infinite offering, where repetition and reflection blurred the line between viewer and participant. These early gestures became foundational, revealing how ornament is not decorative but directive. It invites stillness, gaze, and ritual engagement. See figures 38–40.



Figure 38: Exterior model with hand-carved ornamentation. A layered massing study exploring sacred surface, shadow play, and facade expression.



Figure 39: Interior mirrored model with radial motif, testing how reflection, symmetry, and repetition shape spatial memory and orientation.



Figure 40: Interior mirrored model with floral scrollwork, evoking ritual intimacy, where body and ornament meet in quiet reverence.

Sectional perspective of Nātyāloka (नाट्यालोक), a space designed from motion carved by breath and rhythm. Each undulating floor rises in response to choreographic flow, encircling a central stillness, the Brahmasthan. Designed from within, the architecture honours Vaastu Shastra's sacred void, allowing energy to gather, move, and return.

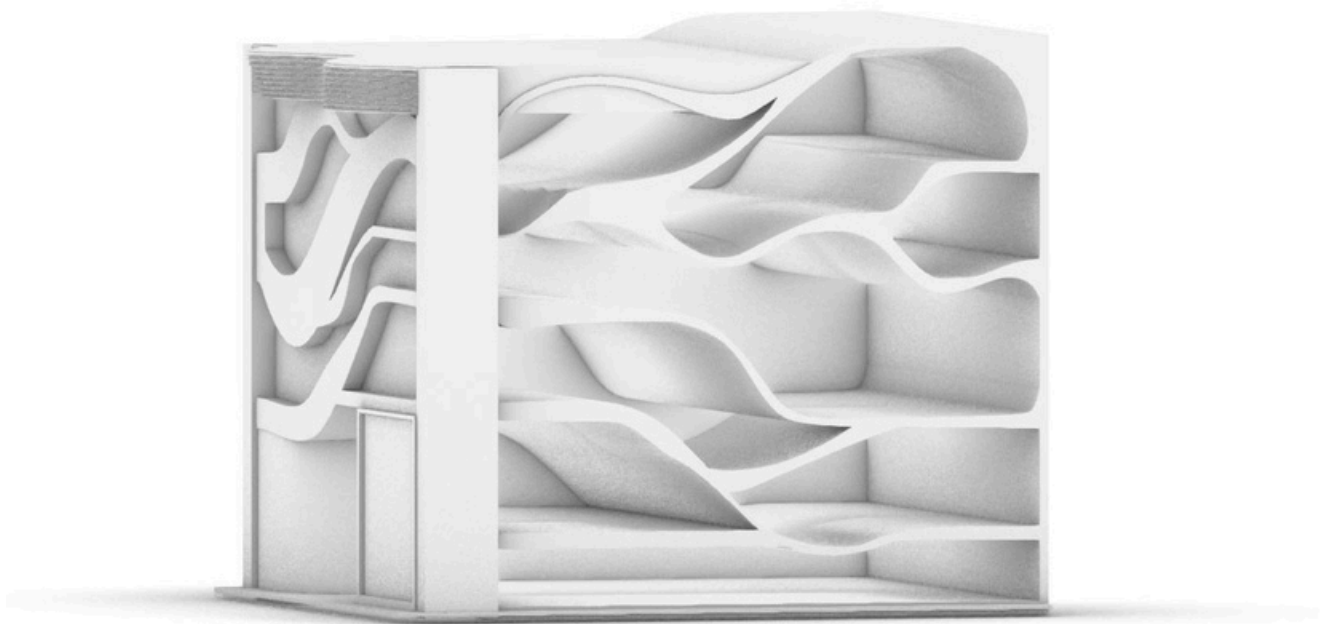


Figure 41: Nātyāloka's inner rhythm revealed, floors ripple around the Brahmasthan, where stillness anchors the dance of space.

Together, these renders capture Nātyāloka's threshold, a sacred transition from street to sanctuary. The flowing timber facade emerges like choreography carved in elevation, pulling movement upward and outward. Between two contrasting urban textures, Nātyāloka breathes, neither overpowering its neighbour nor retreating into silence. The carved mandala on the entry wall grounds the building in ritual memory, offering reverence before arrival. Here, architecture becomes invitation, honoring the body as it prepares to move inward, toward stillness, rhythm, and release. See figures 42–43.



Figure 42: Detail view of Nātyāloka's entry mandala, a carved threshold of ritual and reverence, where dancers arrive not at a door but at a sacred offering.



Figure 43: Street elevation of Nātyāloka. A contemporary temple of motion flowing between heritage and high-rise, carved by rhythm and anchored in Vaastu.

Emerging from the body's earlier trace of movement and ritual, these drawn interior concepts for Nātyāloka imagine the studio not as a static container but as a breathing organism. Each space curves, lifts, and folds in dialogue with energy, choreographing thresholds where dancers can flow, pause, and ascend. Inspired by Lefebvre's (1991) notion that "space is a social product" (p. 26). These drawings approach design as a lived experience, a skin that bends and expands with the pulse of those who move through it. The boundaries dissolve into rhythmic membranes, holding both gravity and lightness in their embrace. Here spatial design begins from within; the body becomes the plan, and the building is designed from the inside out. See figures 44–45.



Figure 44: Flowing ceiling forms and textured surfaces shape a dance studio as a living, breathing body.

Footnotes:

Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 26.

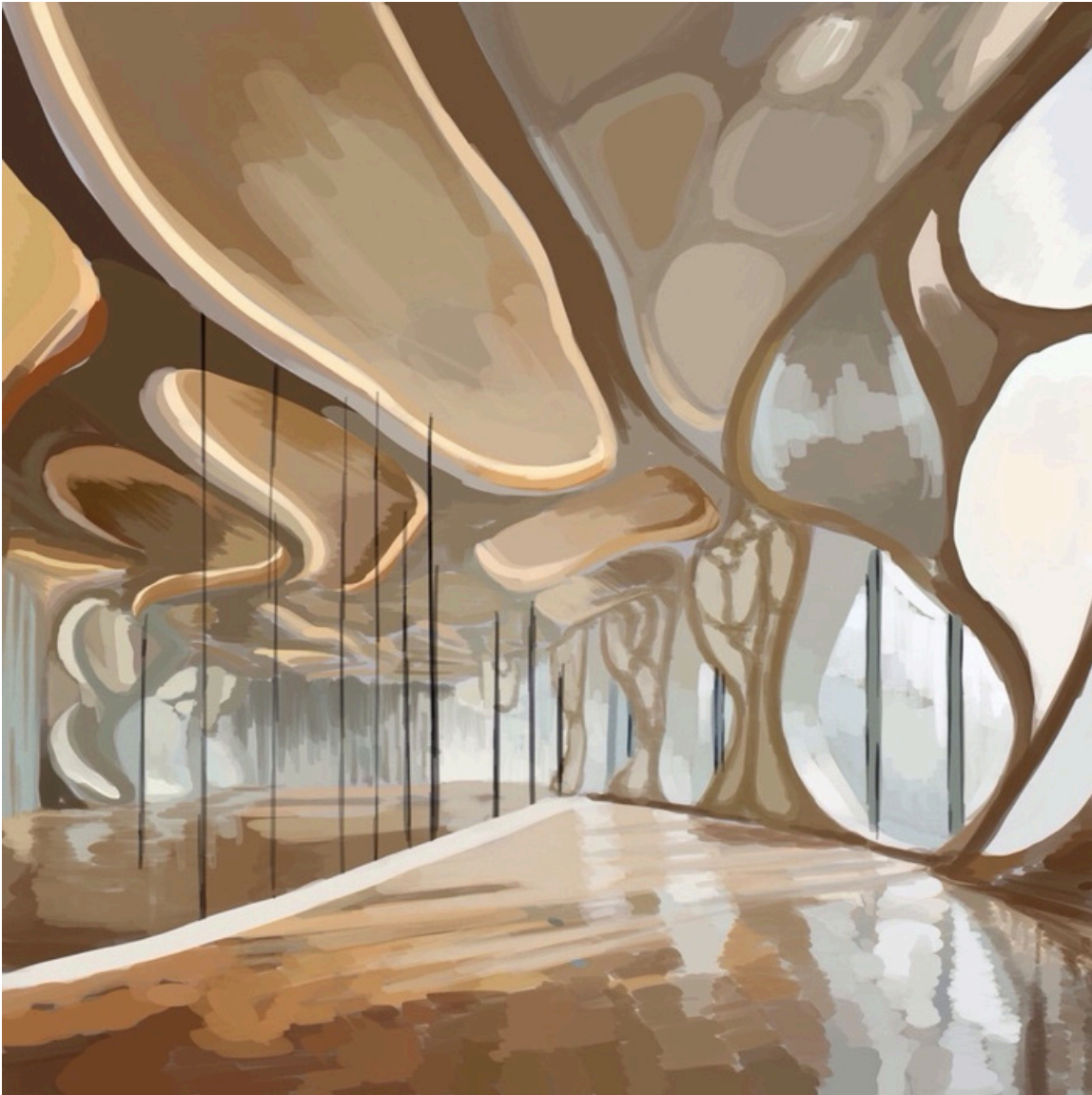


Figure 45: Curved structured veins frame the studio, evoking movement as spatial memory and unfolding ritual.

The following interior iterations explore how performance and rest can both emerge from spaces shaped by embodied experience. The bathroom is rendered as a ritual enclave, where curved, organic walls embrace the body in softness, and living plants root the space in nature and breath. Similarly, the performance space unfolds like a held exhale; layered curves extend overhead like ripples of choreography, guiding both sound and gaze. These are not functional spaces alone; they are sensorial sanctuaries. As Juhani Pallasmaa (2012) writes, “The architecture of the senses... is concerned with qualities, atmospheres and moods, rather than forms and functions” (p. 68). A philosophy echoed here in the transition from static room to spatial feeling. Both spaces were designed from the inside out, informed by the dancer’s breath, pause, and presence.

Footnotes:

Juhani Pallasmaa, The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses, 3rd ed. (Chichester: Wiley, 2012), 68.



Figure 46: A sacred retreat carved in curve and shadow, the bathroom becomes a space of cleansing, grounding, and quiet ritual, where soft forms and plant life echo the rhythms of the breath.

Footnotes:

Juhani Pallasmaa emphasizes that spaces of retreat and ritual “strengthen our sense of self, privacy and silence” by engaging the senses and memory simultaneously. This drawing embraces his philosophy of architectural intimacy and multisensory experience.

Juhani Pallasmaa, The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses, 3rd ed. (Chichester: Wiley, 2012), 55.



Figure 47: The performance space holds the weight of presence; its walls ripple like choreography, embracing both silence and applause in a sanctuary sculpted from movement.

Footnotes:

In Vaastu Shastra, performance and ritual spaces are aligned with Agni (fire) and Akasa (ether), where energy must flow freely yet be held with intention. The rippling interior of this performance space channels directional force toward the northeast, aligning with principles of spiritual emergence, while the Brahmasthan, left unobstructed, anchors stillness at the core.

A RETURN TO ORIENTATION

My name is Kimera Chetty. I'm a South African-born, Aotearoa-raised Hindu designer and dancer. And this project, this building, is a return. A return to something I didn't know I was missing until I began to make my way back to it. Something ancestral. Something embodied.

I've been dancing since I was three. My entire relationship with the world is choreographic. Growing up, I danced constantly, from the garage floors of my childhood home to professional stages and music festivals across New Zealand.

But I always felt like I was dancing on borrowed ground. As a Hindu girl in a Western studio, I learned early that some parts of me weren't welcome. My mehndi was scrubbed off. My red Lakshmi thread was cut away. I was told to neutralize, to fit. So I did. But I never forgot.

This thesis, and Nātyāloka (the design that emerged from it), became the space I needed but never had. It's more than a building; it's a counter-narrative. A spatial response to everything I've experienced as a dancer of colour, as a Hindu woman raised in diaspora, and as someone who has constantly moved through spaces that asked me to quiet parts of myself to belong. It responds to the silences, the ones I learned to fill with movement. The rituals I practiced in private because public spaces made them feel too loud. The erased marks on my skin. The prayers I whispered under my breath in changing rooms that didn't hold space for spirit.

Nātyāloka is a reclamation. It doesn't try to blend in. It doesn't ask dance to be neutral or culture to be ornamental. It allows both to be central. It asks: what if architecture started with rhythm, not walls? What if stillness was designed with the same attention as performance? What if cultural identity wasn't tucked into the background but shaped the very foundation of a space?

This is a place where movement is sacred, not because it's watched, but because it's felt. Where dance isn't contained by four walls but expands through them. Where rituals don't have to be explained to be understood. In Nātyāloka, the dancer doesn't adapt to space; the space adapts to the dancer. Her body, her breath, and her lineage. They are the blueprint.

This project became a form of healing. A way of stitching back what had been cut away. A way of saying, you were never too much. Your culture was never too loud. Your movement was never too soft. You belong. Here. In every curve. Every void. Every breath that the building takes.

The journey took me back to South Africa for two months. I needed to remember. To dance barefoot on ancestral land. To feel what my grandfather must have felt in his quiet, disciplined rituals. He never studied architecture, but he understood spatial alignment better than most. The way he opened windows at sunrise. The way the pooja altar was always in the northeast corner. That was Vaastu Shastra, even if we never called it that.

Through this project, I finally began to understand that Hinduism isn't something you wear. It's something you live. Vaastu Shastra reintroduced space to me not as a container, but as a being. One that breathes, listens, and responds.

Nātyāloka is situated at 31 High Street, a site that holds both urban density and cultural potential. What drew me to this location was not just its proximity to public transport or centrality in Auckland's CBD, but the way it faces directly onto Freyberg Square. This square, though quiet during the day, becomes something else entirely when activated; it holds the capacity for gathering, for spontaneous dance, and for public ritual. I've performed there before, open-air, among strangers, where the city becomes your backdrop and the ground becomes your stage. There's something raw and energetic about it.

By positioning Nātyāloka across from the square, the building doesn't stand apart from the city; it listens to it. It has the potential to form a dialogue between the interior and the exterior, between choreographed movement inside the studios and improvised performance outside in the square. On event days, the two could operate as linked stages, the building spilling outward, the square drawing energy inward. When aligned, they form a kind of breathing corridor of movement, where the city becomes part of the performance, and the architecture extends into the urban rhythm.

The orientation also aligns with my broader thesis; that movement doesn't begin or end inside a room. It exists in how we move through the city, in how we activate overlooked spaces, and in how architecture can amplify rather than contain embodied experience. Nātyāloka and Freyberg Square together offer that potential, two distinct sites pulsing with energy, capable of becoming extensions of one another through dance.

In Nātyāloka, everything orbits around a central Brahmasthan, the sacred void. It's not an object. It's not a shrine. It's a pause. An inhale. The stillness from which all energy radiates. That void runs through every level of the building, vertically, like a spine, a spiritual axis grounding the structure. I was inspired by temples I visited here in New Zealand; many of them didn't have formal Brahmasthans, yet still, something centered you. That absence carried a presence. That stayed with me.

Vaastu Shastra shaped the entire spatial choreography of Nātyāloka. I didn't use it as a stylistic reference; I used it as a compass. A way to align the building's energy with the body's rhythm and the cycles of the sun.

Every dance space in the building faces northeast. This wasn't an aesthetic decision; it was energetic. In Vaastu Shastra, the northeast, or Ishanya, is considered the most spiritually potent zone. It's associated with clarity, intuition, and new beginnings. As the direction of the rising sun, it holds the light that awakens both space and spirit. By orienting the studios and the top-level performance space in this direction, I'm inviting energy to flow into the room and into the body. Dancers rehearse and perform facing toward openness, not walls. The northeast becomes a directional guide, a space of expansion, not confinement.

The building's entrance is placed in the east, again in alignment with Vaastu principles. Entering from the east brings in renewal and balance. It sets the tone for the spatial experience, not just physically, but energetically. It was important to me that visitors and dancers alike arrive through light, not shadow. The east-facing entry gently shifts you inward and upward, in a way that echoes Surya Namaskar, where every movement begins by facing the sun.

In contrast, the southwest quadrant of the building is used for bathrooms, stairwells, and vertical circulation. Vaastu identifies the southwest, or Nairitya, as a zone of heaviness and grounding. It's not meant for high energy movement or spiritual alignment. Instead, it's a space of mass and function. So I placed services here deliberately, anchoring the building structurally and energetically, allowing the lighter zones of the northeast and east to remain open and charged.

This directional arrangement doesn't just follow rules; it feels right. It reflects how dancers naturally move, rest, and reorient themselves in space. The flow from entry to studio, from practice to performance, from grounding to elevation, all of it responds to Vaastu's energetic intelligence. It's choreography written into architecture. It ensures that every step through the building moves with, not against, the flow of energy.

My design process didn't begin with SketchUp or CAD. It began with ritual. With movement. With pigment, flour, water, and skin. I painted my feet and danced across fabric, imprinting red trails that mapped weight, pause, and flow. I traced floorboards with bare feet. I submerged myself in ritual milk baths, stained in turmeric and sindoor. These weren't performances. They were prayers. Offerings. Ways of listening to the body. Of letting memory rise through motion. They were how I came to understand that space is not drawn. Space is danced.

Those traces, that embodied residue, became the foundation for my drawings.

Drawing, for me, became another form of choreography. I didn't hold a mouse; I used my hand. I let the wrist follow the rhythm. I leaned into curves the same way I would lean into a spin.

When I draw digitally, it doesn't feel like designing; it feels like moving. The line becomes a breath. A curve becomes a shoulder roll. There's no distance between the impulse and the form, no barrier between what I feel and what appears. It is choreography in real time, shaped by instinct, by repetition, and by memory in the muscle.

This is how Nātyāloka emerged. Not through grid logic, but through breath logic. The spirals, the lifts, and the drops weren't plotted; they were sensed. They came from the same place as my dance. A place of flow, of intuitive pause, of rhythm that rises from within. Drawing this way allows space to unfold, not as geometry, but as energy.

Each of the ten drawings is not a depiction of space. It is a movement. A still moment of choreography made visible. They don't just show rooms; they trace how space listens. How it responds to limbs, to lightness, to weight. They are choreographies made visible. A practice of shaping form through feeling, of designing with the body, not in spite of it.

Drawing became not a tool but a translation. The medium between breath and structure. The way I turned dance into space.

I still remember being told by a ballet teacher that the pink tights I was wearing didn't match my skin. I was young, eight or nine, and those words stayed with me. Not because they were cruel, but because they were true in a way that made me feel outside of something I loved. At the time, there were no darker-toned tights readily available. The uniform was universal, pink tights, pink shoes, and a light beige leotard. None of it matched me. I wore it anyway, but it never felt like mine. That experience planted something in me, a quiet awareness that some things weren't made with me in mind. That my body was visible but not considered.

In Nātyāloka, I've woven that memory into the material choices. The warm browns, dusty clays, and muted earth tones throughout the design aren't just aesthetic. They're intentional. They reflect the tones of my skin and the skin of so many dancers who've had to wear pink tights that never matched them, stand in studios where whiteness was the default, and adjust themselves to feel included. Here, instead, The walls don't reflect an imposed neutrality; they reflect lived presence. Culture, tone, and texture, all of it is made visible, central, and sacred.

I chose warm timber, textured plaster, and mid-tone stone because these materials feel *alive*. They absorb breath. They carry sound softly. They shift with light. They're not cold or sterile, they're surfaces that remember. Like skin, they mark over time. They honour presence. The shades of the walls, the textures of the surfaces, and the warmth of the timber, they all reflect the tones I've been told to hide, soften, or neutralize in other spaces.

When I walk into so many dance spaces, I feel like my body doesn't belong to the architecture. The floors are cold. The walls are stark white. The space demands I conform to it. But in Nātyāloka, I wanted to reverse that. I wanted the dancer's body, *my* body, to feel mirrored in the space. To see itself in the surfaces. To feel held, not erased.

I chose sprung timber floors because they return energy to the body. They're soft on joints and responsive to rhythm. They honour repetition. You can rehearse the same jump fifty times and still feel supported. These aren't design gestures. They're acts of care.

Even the curves of the space were intentional. I wanted to design rooms that open, not ones that confine. When a wall bends with you, rather than against you, something shifts. You breathe deeper. Your movement becomes more expansive. The space becomes part of the choreography, not just the container for it.

The textured plaster walls, with their softness and earthiness, absorb sound in a way that quiets the noise but holds the pulse. There's no harshness, no glare. Just quiet resonance like the hum of a mantra or the trace of breath after movement.

Ultimately, every material decision came from the body. *From my body*. From knowing what it feels like to dance in spaces not made for you and choosing to design one that is. Nātyāloka is not neutral. It's not whitewashed. It is brown, warm, and grounded. It reflects who I am not just as a designer, but as a dancer of colour, reclaiming her place in space.

This project is deeply personal. But it's not just about me. It's about creating space for stories like mine: diasporic, hybrid, and searching. Stories that don't sit neatly inside fixed cultural boxes.

Nātyāloka doesn't try to replicate a temple. It doesn't mimic tradition. Instead, it translates it. Through orientation. Through rhythm. Through the Brahmasthan. Through care.

Ultimately, this project is a quiet revolution. A temple without a deity. A stage without hierarchy. A blueprint made from memory. A design that doesn't just accommodate the dancer it emerges from her.

Thank you.

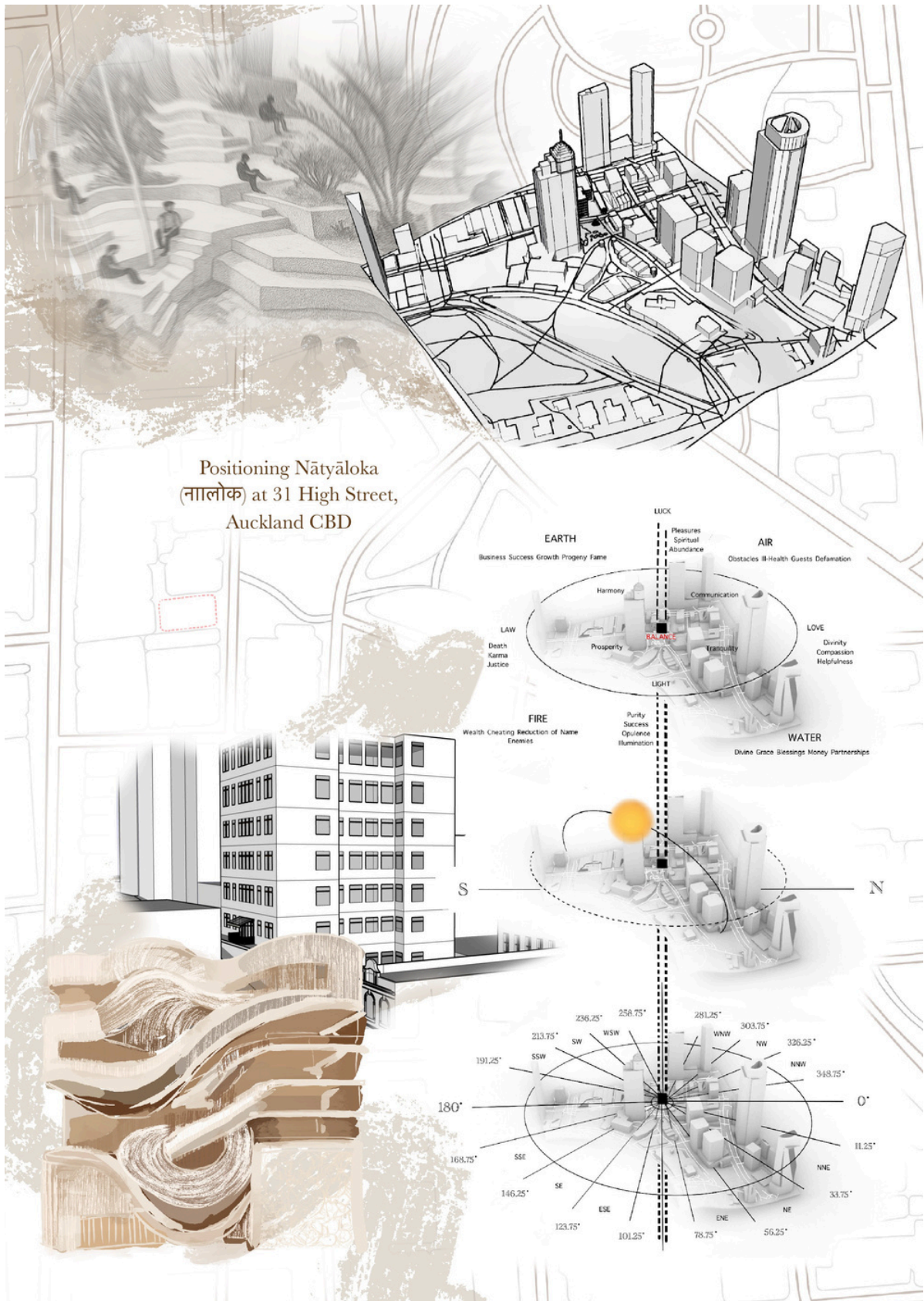


Figure 48: Axis of Prana

Footnotes:

The city becomes a mandala, its streets, towers, and voids aligned with Vaastu Shastra's elemental compass. Earth, Air, Fire and Water weave through the urban fabric, positioning Nātyāloka as more than a building: it is a node of balance, where cosmology and choreography converge.



Figure 49: Cavern of Collective Breath

Footnotes:

The basement theatre gathers people inward, folding them into a womb of performance. Curved walls pull audience and dancer into a single body of energy, where breath is shared and becomes its own choreography.



Figure 50: Echoes of Grace

Footnotes:

The studio ceiling undulates like a suspended raga, its textures vibrating with resonance. In the mirrored walls, dancers see not only themselves but also the room's memory and movement etched into surface, an eternal choreography of bodies and shadows.

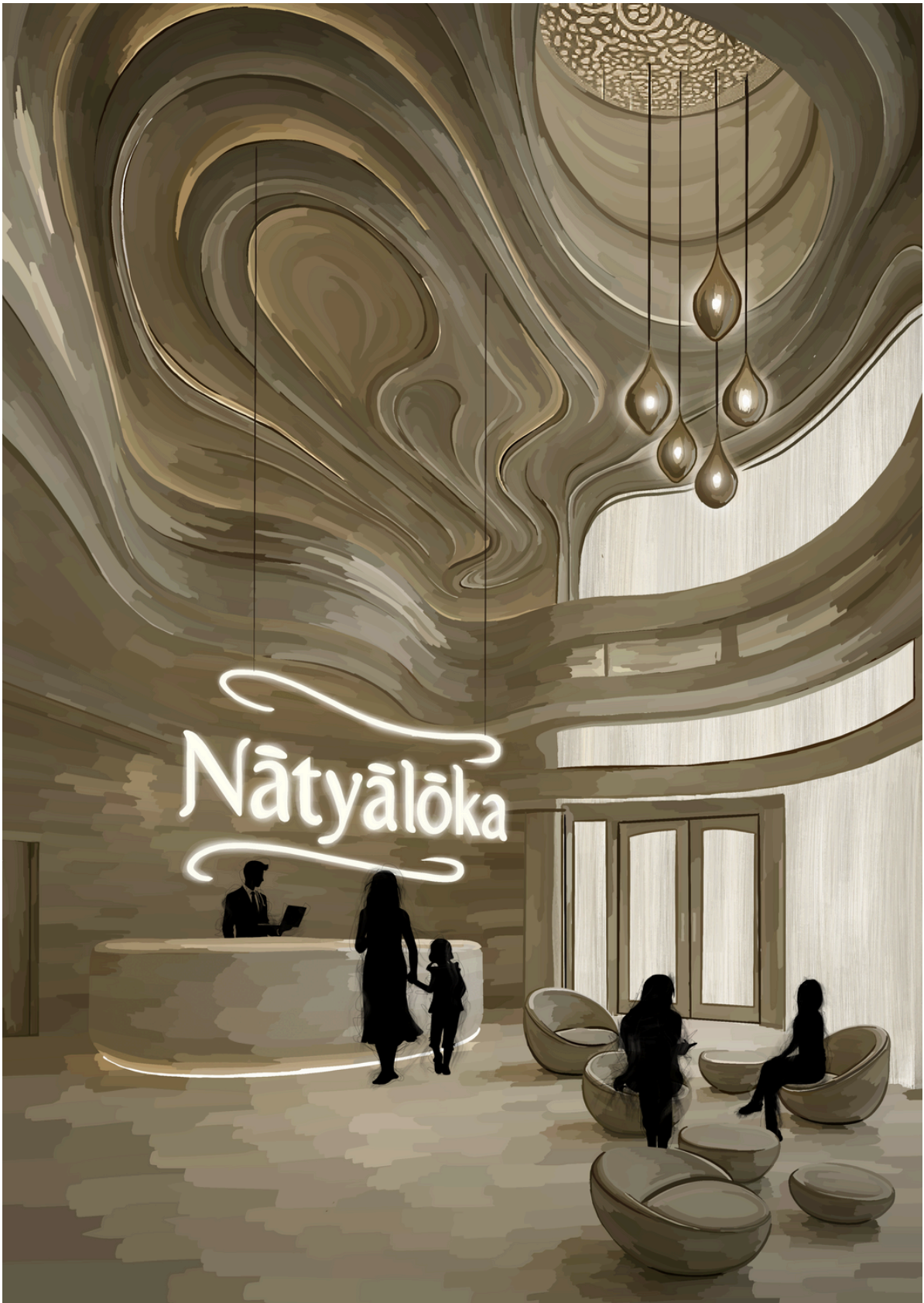


Figure 51: Portal of Arrival

Footnotes:

The reception glows like a temple entrance, a place where the mundane falls away and Prana is acknowledged. The illuminated name Nātyālōka hovers like a mantra, initiating each visitor into a world where movement is sacred.



Figure 52: Light in Motion

Footnotes:

In this studio, light perforates the surfaces like cosmic rhythm, spilling into the dancers' bodies. The architecture is no longer still; it moves with them, a partner in dialogue, sculpting every extension, leap, and fold of the body with shadows that dance back.



Figure 53: Threshold of Gathering

Footnotes:

The cafe is a pause between worlds, where the rush of the city dissolves into the slow hum of community. Here, conversation flows like water, bending around carved forms, shaping belonging, before dancers return to their inner rhythm.



Figure 54: Rituals of Transformation

Footnotes:

The changing room is a cocoon of becoming, where mirrors do more than reflect; they reveal. Under the soft glow of lights, the performer adorns not just the body but the spirit, crossing into the extraordinary. It is a sacred pause, a private stage before the stage, where vulnerability alchemizes into presence.

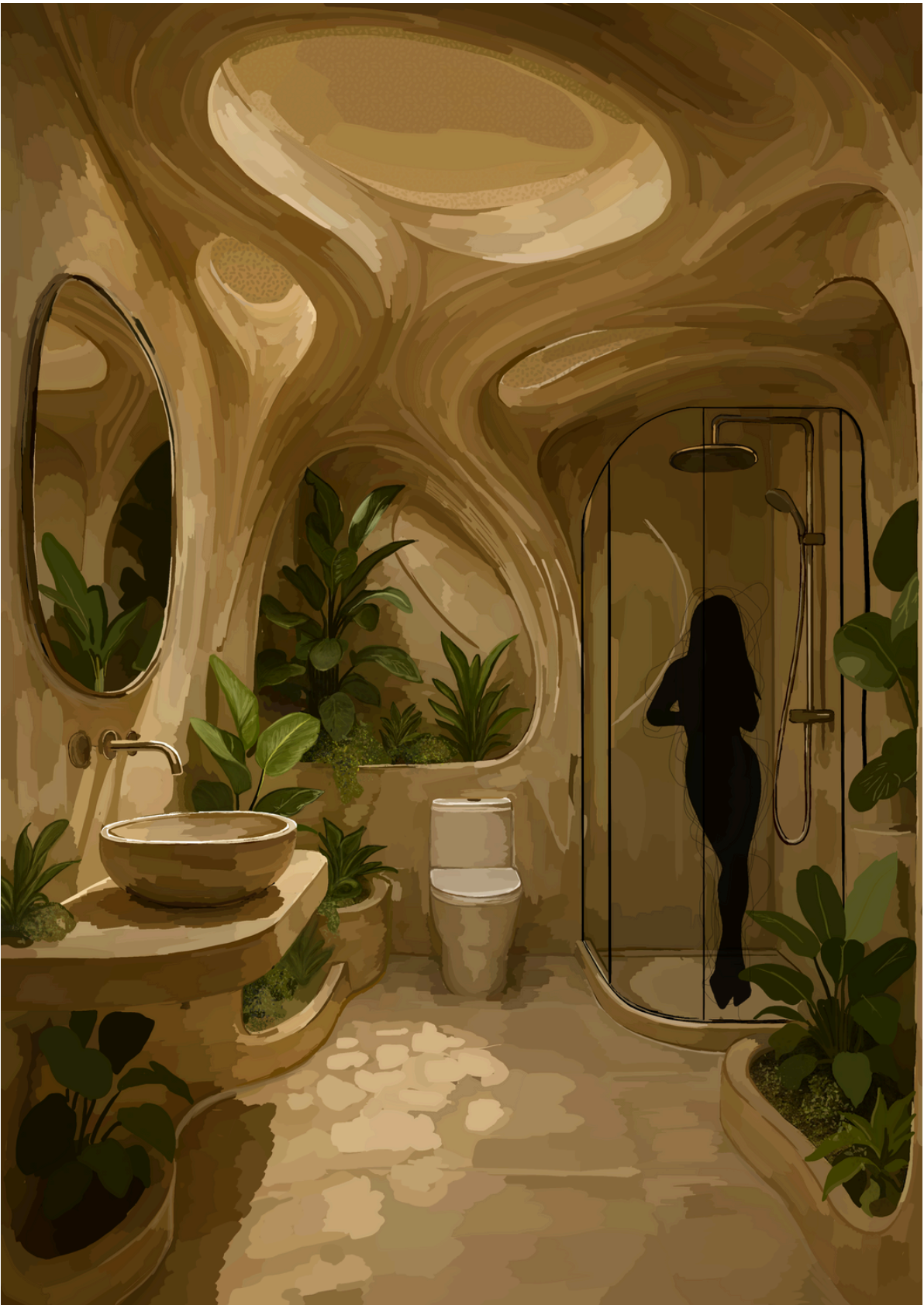


Figure 55: Sanctum of Renewal

Footnotes:

Water, plants, and stone fuse into an elemental chamber of cleansing. The curves cradle stillness, echoing the cycles of purification and return. To prepare the body here is to honour ritual, to step into space reborn, both performer and pilgrim.



Figure 56: The Cosmic Stage

Footnotes:

The performance space is the soul of Nāṭyāloka. A sanctum where earth and sky meet in collective breath. The circular form mirrors a mandala, encircled by tiers of witnesses, while the open void above invites the cosmos to descend. Here, dance translates to spectacle; it becomes prayer, vibration, and offering. The Brahmasthan at its heart is not empty but alive, a vessel of Prana where performer and audience dissolve into one pulse of energy, one rhythm, one world.



Figure 57: Layers of Becoming

Footnotes:

The building unfolds like a dance sequence, each level a gesture, a breath, a step. From the rooted depths of the basement stage to the suspended rooftop void, the architecture ascends as a body in motion, grounded, spiraling, and ultimately elevating.

CONCLUSION

This practice led research has been an embodied journey between tradition and transformation, movement and space, spirit and structure. Through Hindu rituals, personal memory, and dance practice I explored how spatial design can become a living reflection of cultural identity, bodily presence, and collective energy. The work asks architecture to listen first, then speak.

My experiments began on the surface of the body. Tattooing, sindoor, turmeric, and block prints, followed by dissolution in milk ritual, framed the body as both canvas and temple and suggested a sacred spatial language that is worn and remembered. Mapping movement with flour and pigment translated choreography into material blueprints. Vaastu Shastra served as an energetic compass that aligned body, sun, and space, localised for Auckland's southern hemisphere so elemental readings follow the northern sun path while maintaining an east entry, a northeast orientation, and a central Brahmasthan.

Analysing my One Love performance was pivotal. Formations and gestures became spatial rhythm and structural logic, so movement generated space rather than merely occupying it. Rapid models and facade studies prioritised energy over form and treated massing as a breathing vessel that is porous and alive. Drawn studies distilled dance into a language of spirals, lifts, flows, and voids, with digital drawing extending wrist and breath into line.

From this I have articulated a portable method that begins with ritual attunement, proceeds through danced imprint and trace, and moves into spatial reading and material translation. Interiors and performance environments operate as somatic technologies that return energy, quiet noise, and mirror the bodies that use them. The approach proposes community infrastructure that originates culture rather than merely housing it, and an urban logic navigated by rhythm, rest, and ritual as much as by road and sign.

The implications span practice, pedagogy, and care. The method is teachable in schools and studios, and adaptable to therapeutic and community settings with consent, opt in participation, and cultural protocols. It invites careful digital futures where real time movement can test light, height, and curvature, while ethics and sovereignty over embodied knowledge remain central.

This thesis is a situated prototype, not a universal prescription. Different communities will require different translations. Next steps include a one to one studio bay for user testing, studies of embodied comfort and cultural resonance, and comparative work with other cultural frameworks in Aotearoa and beyond, developed with local partners so governance and custodianship rest with those who move in the space.

In closing, this project is both return and invitation. It returns to lineage, body, and orientation, and invites spaces that hold ritual without reducing it to style, that centre dancers and communities without asking them to neutralise, and that let architecture breathe with the lives inside it. In that sense, spatial design becomes a living prayer.

FUTURE APPLICATIONS

As I reflect on this research, I see outcomes that extend well beyond the single proposal of Nātyāloka. The project has generated methods, a working vocabulary, and design logics that can evolve within my practice and, I hope, within wider spatial, cultural, and educational contexts. Rather than culminating in a finished object, the work proposes an approach: begin with the body, align with energy, translate ritual into space, and let the architecture read as a living system rather than a static form.

A key implication lies in cultural infrastructure. Culturally specific community hubs should not merely accommodate activity; they should be born from it. Nātyāloka responds to a clear gap in inclusive movement and dance spaces within Auckland's urban fabric. The approach is transferable: a network of smaller, Vaastu attuned, dance led community spaces could be distributed across suburbs, each co designed with local communities, elders, and youth so programming arises from within rather than being imposed. This argues against architectural neutrality that flattens identity for legibility. Instead, it centres ritual, gesture, and bodies as primary design data, allowing places to be locally legible and culturally confident.

The work also reshapes how I understand performance spatial design. I no longer see the stage as a fixed platform but as a field that breathes with the body. Vaastu Shastra based alignment, localised to the southern hemisphere, becomes performance logic: light, stillness, and energy enter and move in ways that support practice and presentation, with morning orientation toward the northeast for clarity and heavier functions held where the building can spiritually carry them. Modular, elevated, or suspended platforms can bifurcate or cantilever in response to rhythm and group formations, allowing collective energy to configure space in real time. Material choices, such as sprung timber, textured plaster, and mid-tone stone, operate as somatic technologies rather than surface finishes, returning energy to joints, softening noise, and mirroring skin tones often erased by white box studios.

There is a corresponding urban dimension. My own navigation, anchoring to dance studios rather than road signs, suggests a different logic for reading and designing the city. Movement corridors could link existing studios, squares, and civic thresholds through pedestrian routes conceived for rhythm, rest, and ritual; shaded pauses, soft edges, and seasonal gathering points would support embodied wayfinding. Temporary urbanism, such as energy maps painted onto pavements, ceremonial walkways, or pop up platforms, could turn ordinary streets into episodic stages. In this frame, Freyberg Square becomes a civic "breath" that synchronises with programs inside Nātyāloka, and wayfinding can be cued by curvature, material temperature, and acoustic softness rather than signage alone.

The methods developed here also have pedagogical and therapeutic value. The sequences I used, including ritual attunement, floor dancing, foot painting, and imprinting, are more than art exercises; they are healing acts that reconnect participants with proprioception and memory. They can be adapted into a somatic design pedagogy for schools, tertiary programs, and community groups, where making proceeds from ritual to movement to trace to spatial translation. With trauma informed protocols, clear consent, opt in participation levels, and quiet zones, the same methods could support therapy environments and cultural education programs in which identity, embodiment, and creativity intersect.

At its heart, this is a decolonial practice. It challenges Western defaults while refusing tokenism, working with Vaastu Shastra as an energetic framework rather than as a decorative style. The aim is translation over imitation: to design from within my lineage while allowing form to emerge from breath, light, and orientation. The work also acknowledges plurality within Hindu traditions and avoids essentialising them. Crucially, it localises Vaastu to Auckland's southern hemisphere context, adapting elemental alignments to the sun's northern arc while maintaining an east entry, northeast orientation, and a central Brahmasthan, so that tradition is grounded in place specific reality.

Methodologically, the thesis offers a portable toolkit. An embodied drawing protocol moves from ritual attunement to danced imprint, from the extraction of traces to spatial reading and finally to material structural translation. An inside out heuristic begins with somatic need and energetic flow so that the exterior becomes a consequence of interior intelligence rather than the brief itself. A simple Rhythm, Stillness, and Ritual framework tests program and plan to keep performance, pause, and practice in balance. Together these form a repeatable process that can be taught, adapted, and extended.

Although the work is anchored in the physical and ritual, it invites carefully framed digital futures. Real time motion capture could drive adaptive models in which choreography writes geometry, useful for rehearsal scenography, acoustic tuning, or crowd flow planning. AR and VR environments could let dancers test how light, height, and curvature respond to movement before fabrication. Any such expansion must be ethically grounded: bodies are not data points, and movement archives require consent, cultural protocols, and stewardship that respects sovereignty over embodied knowledge.

There are limitations that shape next steps. Nātyāloka is a situated prototype, not a universal prescription for Hindu or dance spaces; different communities will require different translations. Suspended or modular systems must meet safety codes, maintenance realities, and budgets, and custodianship for ritual spaces should be planned with communities rather than assumed. Immediate research priorities include building a 1:1 studio bay that combines floor system, curved wall, and controlled light for user testing with dancers of varied bodies and abilities; conducting post occupancy style studies on embodied comfort, cultural resonance, and wayfinding; and extending the method comparatively with other cultural frameworks, such as Pasifika, Māori, and Afro diasporic, to refine the translation model.

In sum, this research is both a return and a proposal: a return to lineage, body, and orientation, and a proposal for community hubs that originate culture rather than merely housing it; for performance spaces that move with the dancer; for cities navigable by rhythm as much as by road; for pedagogies and care practices that put embodiment first; and for a discipline confident enough to translate ancestral knowledge without reducing it to style. My future work will continue to begin with breath, and build from there.

BIBLIOGRAPHY A - Z

- Akinleye, A. (2021). *Dance, architecture and engineering*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Bansal, K. (2003). *Vaastu: The origin of architecture*. Wisewords Publishing.
- Candy, L., & Edmonds, E. (2011). *Interacting: Art, research and the creative practitioner*. Libri Publishing.
- Cohen, J.-L. (1999). *Gehry talks: Architecture + process*. Rizzoli.
- de Certeau, M. (1984). *The practice of everyday life* (S. Rendall, Trans.). University of California Press.
- Diller Scofidio + Renfro. (2003). *Eyebeam Atelier*. In J. Beckmann (Ed.), *Architecture in motion: The art and science of responsive space* (p. 56). Princeton Architectural Press.
- Doshi, B. V. (2019). *Paths uncharted*. Mapin Publishing.
- DUS Architects. (2011). *Floating pavilion Rotterdam: Architecture for a climate-adaptive future*. NAI Publishers.
- Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. P. (2011). *Autoethnography: An overview*. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 12(1), Article 10. <https://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1589>
- hooks, b. (1990). *Choosing the margin as a space of radical openness*. In *Yearning: Race, gender, and cultural politics* (pp. 145–153). South End Press.
- Ingold, T. (2007). *Lines: A brief history*. Routledge.
- Isthmus Group. (n.d.). *Freyberg Place*. Isthmus. Retrieved April 3, 2025, from <https://isthmus.co.nz/project/freyberg-place/>
- Kapferer, B. (2004). *Ritual soundings: Reflections on ritual, performance and the everyday*. Berghahn Books.
- Laban, R. (1966). *Choreutics* (L. Ullmann, Ed.). Macdonald & Evans.
- Landrum, L. (2016). *Theory's theatricality and architectural agency*. *Architecture and Culture*, 4(3), 463–475. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20507828.2016.1239994>
- Lefebure, H. (1991). *The production of space* (D. Nicholson-Smith, Trans.). Blackwell. (Original work published 1974)
- Lokko, L. (2019, September 4). *Decolonising architecture with Lesley Lokko*. *Assemble Papers*. <https://assemblepapers.com.au/2019/09/04/decolonising-architecture-with-lesley-lokko/>
- Manning, E. (2009). *Relationescapes: Movement, art, philosophy*. MIT Press.
- Martin, R. (2018). *Dancing in the margins: Aotearoa dance and cultural infrastructure*. *Theatre and Performance Studies Journal of NZ*, 22, 23.

BIBLIOGRAPHY A - Z

Merleau-Ponty, M. (2012). *Phenomenology of perception* (D. A. Landes, Trans.). Routledge. (Original work published 1945)

Pallasmaa, J. (2012). *The eyes of the skin: Architecture and the senses* (3rd ed.). Wiley.

Pink, S. (2009). *Doing sensory ethnography*. SAGE.

Pitts, V. (2011). *Dancing the city: Mapping urban dance cultures in Auckland*. *Performance Research*, 16(2), 44.

RNZ News. (2024, March 28). *Auckland's Karangahape Road rainbow crossing covered in white paint*. RNZ. <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/512867/auckland-s-karangahape-road-rainbow-crossing-covered-in-white-paint>

Simo, I. (2016). *The moving sacred: Architecture and embodiment in ritual practice*. Routledge.

Svoboda, R. E. (1998). *Prakruti: Your Ayurvedic constitution*. Lotus Press.