

# Love and [re]Organising

Rediscovering architectural agency through gathering

Tessa Forde

**Love and [re]Organising:** rediscovering architectural agency through gathering

Tessa Forde

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# Abstract: *Gathering Ground*

This practice oriented research posits that the architecture discipline is formed not only through the research, conception, and design of buildings and other shared environments but is constructed by and depends on gathering: around ideas, people, actions, values, and shared ritual. In this the history of architecture can be understood as a history of gathering. This suggests that architecture's gathering spaces: its collectives, institutions, clubs, publications, and so on hold significant sway in what is central to the profession and how this manifests in shared environments.

The research presents a theory of the 'Ground' discovered through practice—a vast conceptual space of interacting ideas, knowledges, and ways of being that determine real and experienced outcomes in the world. Everything is always producing and interacting with the Ground, but gatherings generate connection to the Ground and allow collective curation and agency in its outcomes. The research suggests that a lack of connection to the Ground of architecture in Aotearoa weakens architecture's agency, and therefore looks to how architects gather, what they gather around, and how the relational nature of these gathering spaces allows opportunity to imagine, create, discover, reinforce, or influence knowledges and practices and therefore strengthen connection to the Ground. More specifically the research reflects on a series of practice oriented explorations of how to design, organise, envision, enact, and sustain current and new modes of gatherings that can allow architects more agency in anticipating and responding to global challenges and opportunities.

From this, the research advances a methodology of Ground-making which involves creating gatherings where ideas and ways of being can be explored, a diverse array of practices can interact and exchange, and where other futures can be imagined and actioned. Ground-making encompasses four practice approaches:

*Traversing The Ground* surveys architecture's field, a review enlivened by being out and with the world in architecture's gathering spaces, engaging in architecture discourse across a vast array of sources, and going to events and meet-ups;

*School-making* creates experimental learning platforms for knowledge sharing, creative exploration, and testing and performing other realities;

*Trouble-making* develops strategic actions that critically target the legal and structural systems that underpin the creation of the built environment;

*Creating Community Infrastructures* designs and fosters rituals and relational systems that sustain collective gathering;

The research thus seeks to theorise and propose tactics and tools for making gatherings that engage and reveal the Ground. It concludes that for the reimagined gathering spaces to garner momentum, a Ground-maker should engage organising principles capable of creating dynamic connection between diverse and otherwise disparate practices, people, and ideologies; foster deep Love for all beings and things material and immaterial; and emphasise a re-organisation of relationships to each other and the world. Finally, a practice of Ground-making that creates the conditions of possibility for gathering can also offer a methodological approach to conventional architecture practice, proposing methods for the design and nurturing of existing or incidental communities in the imagination and realisation of their shared, public spaces.

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*Tessa Forde*

Preface

***Pepeha and Preamble***

*Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.*

*He whakapapa tō ngā mea katoa, nō reira, me mihi ki a Ranginui e  
tū nei, me Papatūānuku e takoto nei.*

*Nō Aerana, nō Kōtirana, nō Hāmene ōku tīpuna.*

*He tangata Tiriti mātou ko tōku whānau.*

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tangata whenua o ngā wāhi katoa i noho ai au.*

*Ka mihi hoki au ki ngā maunga me ngā awa o te rohe nei.*

*Nō reira, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā tātou katoa.*

Kia ora, my name is Tessa Forde. I am a sibling, child, partner, friend, architecture worker, researcher, teacher, writer, swimmer, maker, reader, and organiser. I was born at North Shore Hospital in Takapuna and grew up in Te Onewa (Northcote). Most of my ancestors migrated to Aotearoa (New Zealand) from Ireland, Scotland, and Germany, with many arriving via what is now known as Australia, either as colonist settlers or convict settlers. One of my great-great-grandfathers was 16 when he was sentenced for seven years for ‘coining’—turning his grandfather’s war medals into coins to buy food—a sentence he was required to serve on a ship bound for a penal colony in Australia, never to return to Ireland. In my grandfather’s research into our family history, he suggests that most of my Irish and Scottish descendants were probably fleeing famine or “the clearances”—evictions by their English landlords. I am a descendant of settlers on Indigenous lands in Aotearoa and approach my practice and research from my positionality as Tangata Tiriti, with respect, reciprocity, and relationality. *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* and its principles act as foundations and a guiding map for personal and collective belonging in Aotearoa, and by navigating with this map, I feel encouraged to call Aotearoa my home.

This practice oriented research argues that how and where architecture workers gather is central to the agency of the discipline in affecting outcomes in the built environment. It proposes that skills and principles of organising learned through gathering can embolden collectives to discover, celebrate, and create diverse ways of being and knowing, and that these models can be applied back into the process of designing public buildings and spaces through conventional architecture practice. It also proposes that it is through these gatherings and the process of forming and sustaining them that the relational nature of architecture is revealed; conceptual ideas are produced, shared, and generate collective movements; and that it is through this interconnectedness that architects and architecture have influence. I look back at the stories of architecture in Aotearoa, suggesting that the history of architecture has always been a history of gathering, and in this our institutions and our collectives hold significant sway in what is central to the profession and how this manifests in the world. I theorise a vast conceptual space of interacting ideas, knowledges, and ways of being—where architects gather—as ‘The Ground’ and position my practice as one of *Ground-making*. Ground-making involves creating gatherings—where ideas and ways of being can be explored, a diverse array of practices can interact and exchange, and where other futures can be imagined and actioned—and exploring what conditions sustain me in enacting those gatherings. The research identifies four key practice approaches to offer a methodological framework of Ground-making: Traversing the Ground: being out and with the world in architecture’s gathering spaces, engaging in architecture discourse across a vast array of sources, and going to events and meet-ups; School-making: creating platforms for knowledge sharing, creative exploration, and testing and performing other realities; Trouble-making: strategic actions that target the legal and structural systems that underpin the creation of the built environment; and Creating Community Infrastructures: designing and fostering rituals and systems that sustain collective gathering.

Through my practice, I wanted to find, discover, test, and invent spaces where ways of being and knowing in the world that approach designing and making shared environments with care, respect, and relationality could be explored by myself and others. My practice, this process, and the research was fundamentally collaborative. While I have independently authored the writing of this thesis and as a Ground-maker initiated and produced many of the projects that will be discussed, authorship is slippery. The outputs, events, and conclusions of the research—The Ground it makes—would not be possible without shared work, enriching conversations, and support. I must especially acknowledge Leonard Hobbins and Simon Glaister whose ideas are all through this document, composting with my own and with others. I also want to acknowledge the expanded network of pre:fab who similarly shape the projects, make food, send emails, design workshops, and imagine together what this space we are making could be.

The function of this preface is to introduce myself and briefly describe how the document is written and structured. Firstly, maintaining the presence of my practice and the things it made throughout the document seemed critical. Rather than group them at the end, appendices are provided at the end of each chapter that are descriptions of the actions, products, and contexts of my practice. These are framed as 'Contexts', 'Gatherings', 'Rituals', and 'Matter'. 'Contexts' are useful reference points that underpin the research, like key #definitions-32 and descriptions of the #grounds-34, #collectives-36, and #institutions-38 involved in my practice. 'Gatherings' are the events that took place and are written descriptively with some reflections that contribute to the theorisation of Ground-making. 'Rituals' are living, replicable, evolving how-to guides to capture and offer the possibility of reenactment of the events or ritual practices that form part of my practice. 'Matter' is tangible stuff that was made, written, and produced through the research that provides important context to the types of output emerging from the events, rituals, and collaborative relationships. They are not required reading, the thesis does not depend on them, but they combine, compost, interact, fertilise, and agitate to form ideas and theories described in the body text. They invite the reader to read across and through them, choosing to which extent they wish to engage them, and to draw their own conclusions with how they make Ground, and how The Ground made them. They are visually different to the body text—they have a coloured background: green, pink, blue, and purple; feature more images; and are titled accordingly—and each is labelled with a hashtag for reference through the chapters. Their titles appear like this: #potato-puppets-106, #detecting-the-darchive-251 etc and the number denotes their page number.<sup>1</sup>

Secondly, it was important to me that the writing be accessible. I produced much of the work this thesis describes in collaboration with many others: family, friends, theorists, ancestors, teachers, mentors, places, pets, objects, and so on. This is as much a gift to them, a recognition of our collaborations, as it is a contribution to the academic world. In this I tried to resist overly-esoteric language, honour and maintain my voice, and tell stories. The writing has also been a tool of theorisation given so many of the ideas emerged through practice, and so personal reflections are present throughout this thesis, balancing experiences from my practice against and in dialogue with observations from existing architecture history and theory. Where personal reflections feature amongst more theoretical exposition, I have backgrounded them with a pale yellow (as in my introduction above). The amount of practice theorisation and reflection gradually increases, where ultimately the final chapter is more richly embedded with reflection on the practice. Throughout this document I am both theorising my practice as a methodological enquiry and testing theories and ideas that emerged from practice against broader histories and conceptual thought. I hope that these visual tools help to capture and represent this duality.

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<sup>1</sup> This hashtag labelling is based on the form of the thematic 'channels' of the messaging platform *Discord* which pre:fab uses to gather and organise online.

Introduction

***Untethered***

This introduction will open with a story. This is to present, through personal narrative, my motivation for undertaking this research and to reflect on the problem I was seeking to address: that architecture workers of all types have a lack of agency in affecting outcomes in the built environment. This will frame the emergence of my theory: that architecture gains its agency through connecting with its conceptual and material Ground and that gathering is what allows this; and suggest that claiming agency is more critical than ever as the world undergoes rapid material development. I will describe my objectives for both my practice: a methodological enquiry to discover what conditions support shared and sustained spaces for collective gathering; and the document: to enter into dialogue with existing histories and theories of architecture around ideas that emerged through practice. I will then briefly outline the structure of the thesis.

## The Problem: Architecture's Lack of Agency and a Personal Framing of the Research

For three years while undertaking this research I lived with my partner in a 24m<sup>2</sup> apartment in the central city of Tāmaki Makaurau on the eighth floor overlooking Horotiu (Myer's Park), where you can still imagine how, before it was buried, the Waihorotiu Stream would have carved its path from the Karangahape ridgeline through the deep belly of the park to the ocean. There were 12 storeys in this building, each with seven apartments. I had somewhere between 80 and 120 neighbours, at least eight on my floor. I would have seen four of them, on a maximum of 10 occasions in three years. They often felt so close—I could sense their movement, hear the bang of a drawer closed too quickly, their music through the doors, the cry or laugh of a grandchild come to visit—but we never spoke. I didn't know any of their names. When I would come home at night, I often had a profound feeling thinking about how many human bodies there were living on that small street. It was a T-shaped dead end, perhaps not even 100 metres long, and there were three large apartment blocks and a strip of terraced housing. We were all stacked and layered; we had people living on all our sides. In other places, denser places, this is much less novel, but in Aotearoa, where single family homes ooze<sup>2</sup> into our most fertile soil, to be surrounded by bodies is to be set apart. I was a renter. With 90 days' notice or, exceptionally, with 63 days' notice, I would have had to find another place to live. All the imaginings of my ghost neighbours and their lives would hover in that place, yellow window squares of light in the darkness.

I loved living in that apartment. I loved walking everywhere and listening to how the steep sides of the park amplified people singing late into the night. I loved how the circular window in the bedroom made a huge pool of light on the bed, and I loved watching the sunset into the Waitakere Ranges from so far away. But, while there, I had a persistent feeling of being *untethered*. While the concept of tethering is bound by language and ideas of being tied, restrained, and of animals—the tethering of an animal to something unmovable in order to restrain it—to be untethered can also have negative associations: to be detached, to be lost, to be adrift. I believe this feeling of untetheredness came from a sensation of being disconnected from The Ground. Both physically—I could go days up there without going outside, weeks without touching 'dirt' or 'soil' or 'grass'—and conceptually, feeling ungrounded, disconnected from a sense of belonging to people, place, and the future, which felt hazy, impossible.

Of course, architecture, understood as the design of buildings, has a role in my feeling of untetheredness. The apartment building lacked communal spaces and those that existed, windowless and barren, hardly encouraged loitering or chance encounters. In 2021 I attended a zoom panel discussion about build-to-rent development in Aotearoa.<sup>3</sup> Matt Heal, a Property

<sup>2</sup> Will Martel's 2023 thesis described the suburban sprawl around a large wetland and neighbouring Wellington suburb as the "ooze", weaving a fictional narrative of community organising and resistance to offer a message of hope and other alternative futures. Will Martel, "The Ooze" (Master of Architecture (Professional) ResearchSpace@Auckland, 2023).

<sup>3</sup> "Build to Rent, Sustainable, Low Carbon Communities," (New Zealand Green Building Council, 2021), Online Panel Discussion. <https://nzgbc.org.nz/build-to-rent-sustainable-low-carbon-communities>.

Director at New Ground Capital who specialise in build-to-rent apartment schemes, said that they don't include communal spaces in their complexes because New Zealanders don't want them. It was hard not to jump to the conclusion that this deduction is a convenient out to provide what is seen to not have capital value compared to what it costs to provide, rather than providing quality of life for those who inhabit their apartments. From their perspective, New Zealanders do not want to pay for shared amenities. If this is a perspective held by a development company whose model demands higher quality products because their client is the tenant, as opposed to an investor, then one can only imagine the perspective of those development companies who sell small apartments as investment rentals, prolific in the CBD.<sup>4</sup>

The amount of rent a property owner can charge in the Auckland CBD is only loosely linked to the quality of the abode, and is much more tightly linked to labour markets, mortgage interest rates, and demand.<sup>5</sup> The value of architecture understood through this lens is not in its capacity to create functional shared spaces, a sense of belonging, or even to create beauty; but in its capacity to generate wealth. Of course, this is not a novel observation, this is the manifestation of land/housing/buildings-as-commodity that plagues the globe. In 2023, demand for Auckland CBD apartments was up 900% according to a property management company, largely related to the reversal of a demand slump during the previous pandemic years as the market of international students decreased.<sup>6</sup> This demand increase coincided with a rental cost rise in the CBD of 16% over a 12 month period.<sup>7</sup> When I moved out, my benevolent landlord who had kept my rent deflated to pandemic levels, listed the apartment with a nearly 30% increase. I couldn't have afforded to move back in. My apartment was still single glazed, still part of a leaky building, still lacking in shared amenity, the front door was smashed on occasion, and a transition to laundry tokens purchased at the local liquor store had seen a 50% increase in the cost of a load. The architecture of my apartment complex is just another physical manifestation of political will (in that communal areas are not legislated in apartment complexes or other multi-unit dwellings), societal norms, and the flow of capital.

The architecture of my apartment building provides window into a possible root of my untetheredness. The tangible things around me might be physically tethered to the 'earth' through their thick foundations, but conceptually they are tied to values I can't identify with and to these incomprehensible systems of finance and politics, which are themselves untethered from everyday lived reality. Money itself has become untethered—duplicating in these seemingly irrational ways; flowing upwards; borrowing from the future (debt); and assuming that the people of the future will be more prosperous, more powerful, wealthier—all the while digging cavernous holes around their societal foundations. The architecture discipline—so tightly tethered to systems of extraction and exploitation in the name of capital—is part of an oppressive and self-destructing system. It felt almost impossible for me as an architecture worker to practise, teach, learn, know, and be in a way that reflected my values.<sup>8</sup> I felt I had no agency to change

<sup>4</sup> This opinion also seems to be widespread, though rarely evidenced by data, similarly referenced in Lynda Simmons' 2024 review of Ockham developers' new Greenhouse in Ponsonby where shared spaces in apartment buildings in Aotearoa are described as "notoriously underused". Lynda Simmons, "Re-Imagining Urban Communities," *Architecture Now*, 2024, accessed September 12, 2024, <https://architecturenow.co.nz/articles/re-imagining-urban-communities/>.

<sup>5</sup> Alan Bentley, Enzo Cassino, and Nam Ngo, *What Drives Rents in New Zealand: National and Regional Analysis* (Reserve Bank of New Zealand Te Pūtea Matua, 2023).

<sup>6</sup> Miriam Bell, "Huge Spike in Auckland CBD Rental Demand," *Stuff*, 2023, accessed November 04, 2024, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/property/132914554/huge-spike-in-auckland-cbd-rental-demand>.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Horrobin, "Auckland Apartment Report – October 2023," *Ray White*, 2023, accessed November 04, 2024, <https://rwaucklandcentral.co.nz/news/auckland-apartment-report-october-2023>.

<sup>8</sup> When working in offices I felt a disconnect between the noble visions of architecture as a public good—giving form to shared meanings and meaning to shared forms—and the realities of mainstream architecture practice which is intimately tied to the economy and struggles to reflect its noble ideals, let alone disentangle itself from oppressive societal structures. The projects I worked on that did reflect my values, namely schools and kindergartens, felt tentative and disparate, and somehow dependent on the existence of projects of a different typology—private houses. It was hard to feel like I was making a difference when debating tile details for a wealthy person's second holiday home.

this. I found it difficult to see or find shared spaces within the architecture discipline to test ideas, imagine and theorise other ways of being and knowing and practicing architecture, and then see these ideas reflected in the built environment. And in the absence of these spaces, I could see the readiness of these other forces to fill the gaps, dominate the narrative, determine the outcomes in our shared environments.

## The Theory: Architecture Gains Agency Through Gathering

If the problem is an ungroundedness, a sense of disconnection from the vast, interconnected array of ideas, people, and things that define and impact the architecture discipline and the built environment, then my theory is that architecture workers gain agency in affecting these outcomes through connection—to the conceptual space of the discipline and to each other. The cultural production of the architecture discipline is produced in its overlaps, interactions, in the relationality of its ideas and outcomes, its *gatherings*. If we look to a history of the architecture profession, we can understand it as a history of gathering: around styles, types, ideologies, magazines, materials, schools, institutions, and so on. In this I suggest that architecture gains its agency in affecting its outcomes in the world not through individual practices or buildings, but through this collectivism and shared discourse. These gatherings ‘make’ architecture. To consciously design these gatherings, consider their forms, hierarchies, and rituals as tools for reconnecting architecture to its cultural production could augment the possibility for change and ground architecture workers to the discipline and each other.

*Thus, the central premise of this research is that the act of gathering grants social, political, and disciplinary agency to the contemporary architecture worker, through reconnecting them to the conceptual and material Ground.*

## Why it Matters, Why Now

This is a critical time for the discipline. The United Nations Environment Programme has reported that the square meterage of the world’s built environment is predicted to more than double by 2060, adding a New York city worth of building stock to the planet, every month, for 40 years.<sup>9</sup> This is in spite of the construction industry’s responsibility for 21% of greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>10</sup> In a time where calls for de-growth and *build nothing, build less*, echo in the deep pits of sand mines and battered landscapes across the globe, the planet enters a period expected to have the most rapid human-made growth and expansion in history. I believe that this expansion needs architects—or at least—needs architectural thinking. Architects and designers have a particular capacity to imagine the future in a material way—in what physical form it might take and how others might engage with those forms. This type of spatial intelligence—beyond technical capabilities—presents an opportunity for the discipline in the face of these challenges. Architects could be working with collectives, communities, and other disciplines to strengthen and develop the community infrastructures, rituals and gathering spaces that imagine how to live better together and then manifest a physical reality that represents and supports that. How we discover this mode of practice depends on how architecture workers collaborate and organise, how we gather to imagine and enact new ways, *first amongst ourselves* and then beyond.

<sup>9</sup> Global Alliance for Buildings and Construction (GlobalABC) United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), *2021 Global Status Report for Buildings and Construction: Towards a Zero-Emission, Efficient and Resilient Buildings and Construction Sector* (United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), 2021), <https://www.unep.org/resources/report/2021-global-status-report-buildings-and-construction>.

<sup>10</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), *Climate Change 2022: Mitigation of Climate Change*, ed. Priyadarshi R Shukla et al., Contribution of Working Group III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, (2022). <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg3/chapter/chapter-9/>.

## Practice and Methodological Approach

It is important to note here that this research document is the culmination of reflections on my practice and its emergent ideas, and the construction of a relational theoretical field in which to project and test those ideas in context. The structure of this thesis is an attempt to capture this important duality. It resists convention and institutional codes in order to hold apparently small actions and occurrences present within and alongside large and complex systems, and to incrementally theorise and build a methodological framework. This formal model was also a process of discovery and an act of practice—much of the theorisation of the work and its emergent ideas were developed *through* this writing. I will start by describing my initial practice approach and how this drove the practice, and then how the action-reflection cycle shifted the qualities and strategies of my research design. I will then outline a series of key objectives of my practice. I will then discuss the specific strategies for the document and its key objectives. This will be used to expand upon the structure of the document and the contents of each chapter.

This research is fundamentally about practice and about exploring new models of research for the architecture discipline. It is a practice oriented methodological enquiry to explore, test, and discover strategies for granting architecture more agency through reconnection to the conceptual and material Ground. Practice oriented research involves undertaking a series of actions with or without a clear directive, and then theorising what these actions contribute to, and contextualising them within fields of thought. This thesis works to both theorise my practice and the methodological framework it produces and apply emergent theories from the practice to existing conceptual narratives.

I started this research motivated to initiate ‘change’ in the discipline through ‘trouble-making’ tactics and the establishment of a free platform for knowledge sharing and methodological testing. The idea was to create a space of convivial exchange, to showcase practitioners engaging in ‘alternative’ architecture practice, and replicate the methodologies of current and historic practices. This was part of embracing what JK Gibson-Graham define as a “performative epistemology,” where rather than purely reflecting on the alternative, or believing in its capacity, it is also about *being* the alternative.<sup>11</sup> I was also motivated to challenge and ‘agitate’ the discipline through media, memes, and so on. Within these contexts I intended to work through an action>reflection cycle, with my role oscillating between autoethnographer (reflecting on and connecting my personal experience to broader contexts) and ‘embedded ethnographer’. The “embedded ethnographer”, a role explored by Holmes et al., is about being a player in the research as much as an observer, using ethnographic and autoethnographic knowledge to “explore, encourage and evaluate... knowledge exchange practices” in explicitly “project-based” settings, using ethnographic techniques.<sup>12</sup>

My practice was responsive to ideas that emerged, opportunities that became available, and to problems that were revealed—in both my own research emphasis and in the discipline more broadly. Because of this, the focus of my practice was constantly expanding, as my relational networks grew. Rather than limit myself to the original question or framing of the research, I embraced this shifting landscape and followed connections and possibilities where I thought learning could occur and which satisfied a growing desire for a sense of community. It was a heuristic approach, responsive to what was happening in relation to my practice and its generative affects, and to developments in the architecture discipline.

Through this process, the objective of the practice came to be:

- Embrace opportunities to create the conditions that would make an architecture discipline that I want to practise in feel possible.
- Develop a practice that could make this space, and discover, reveal, and invent the processes, methods, tools, platforms, and communities that could sustain it over time,

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<sup>11</sup> JK Gibson-Graham, “Diverse Economies: Performative Practices for ‘Other Worlds’,” *Progress in Human Geography* 32, no. 5 (2008).

<sup>12</sup> Helen Holmes et al., “Interdisciplinarity in Transdisciplinary Projects: Circulating Knowledges, Practices and Effects,” *disP-The Planning Review* 54, no. 2 (2018).

and that might allow different types of architecture practice to emerge.

- Find and amplify those practices that I saw already reflecting this, connect across them and all interested people, and discover strategies for collective agency.
- Explore methods for nurturing the connective tissue that binds the discipline, sustaining my own practice, and also the relation web it is a part of.

This practice included making spaces for gathering outside of professional, institutional, commercial, and academic boundaries where architecture workers and others can share ideas, knowledges, experiment, organise, and imagine and perform other ways of being and knowing. It also included attending gatherings formed by others, making submissions, writing, having conversations, reading a lot, and so on, most of which is captured in the appendices interspersed through the document.

Critically, the practice produced and was shaped by a series of emergent theories which form the basis of this thesis and its core propositions.

These are:

- Collating, sharing, and performing different methods of practice drew attention to an intangible but ever-present backdrop of conceptual ideas, things, people, places etc. bound in their relationality. I came to think of this as the Ground.
- What expanded my practice and revealed the Ground, was these acts of being together. The *gathering* was as, if not more, important than the content explored in these collaborative spaces. Acts of being together reveal and connect people to this relational web, and thus gathering might have the potential to grant architects more agency in impacting outcomes in our shared environment.
- Acts of 'troubling' or 'undisciplined' practice can generate energy within a collective, but that energy can be difficult to sustain and can focus too much on opposition as opposed to imagining and enacting alternatives. 'Trouble-making' is instead a collective practice targeting systems and is one approach through which architects can exercise their agency.
- The architecture discipline was largely lacking in the social and community infrastructure needed to exercise our agency, and my practice, more than anything, was about creating and nurturing the community infrastructures needed for sustained gathering and collective momentum.

These were personal reflections that largely capture my own experience, and I suggest that these reflections have relevance in the broader context of the architecture discipline. It seemed crucial to not only theorise my practice, but also to build out these ideas and contextualise them.

In this the document has two objectives:

- Theorise the practice and the methodology and present a methodological framework that developed through practice.
- Establish a theoretical field in which to apply key ideas of gathering, agency, and organising that emerged through practice to a history of architecture in Aotearoa.

Each chapter takes one of the theories described above and tests them within and against histories of architecture in Aotearoa and beyond, at all times positioning them within a disciplinary ecosystem. Each chapter also uses this lens to build up to an argument for a key 'practice approach', which combined form a methodological framework of 'ground-making'. Ground-making creates architecture gatherings, explores what pre-conditions need to exist for them to be self-sustaining and generate collective momentum, and considers how to nurture these relationships and spaces. It consists of four key practice approaches: Traversing the Ground, School-making, Trouble-making, and Creating Community Infrastructures. The amount of practice theorisation and reflection gradually increases where ultimately the final chapter is more richly embedded with reflection on the practice.

## Structure of the Document

**Chapter One—The Ground: Architecture's Lack of Agency and a Methodological Enquiry** theorises the conceptual idea space of architecture and then elaborates on 'the problem' by exploring what disconnects architecture from this space and how this results in a lack of agency for the discipline. I suggest that a feeling of instability created by a discipline that fundamentally works in service to the supply chain and global economic systems creates a precariousness that suggests the need for new forms of gathering. I look to institutions as a site of potential agency but explain why their protectionist ideals and instrumentalised methods limit their agency. I present the gaps in the gathering space left by institutions as an opportunity, introducing in more depth the methodology of 'Ground-making' and the framework it encapsulates. Finally, I discuss and reflect upon the first practice approach of 'Traversing the Ground': a practice of being out and with the world, immersed in the discipline of architecture by going to events and lectures; reading theorists, history, magazines, novels; looking at memes; watching YouTube videos; talking to people; reflecting on my own subjective positioning and so on; and largely being non-discriminatory about what might support a practice of Ground-making.

**Chapter Two—Disciplinary Gathering: Foregrounding Gathering in a History of Architecture in Aotearoa** suggests that the history of architecture is really a history of gathering. It will discuss how unlike other professions, architecture's area of expertise has been fluid and dependent on shifting areas of conceptual importance—from style to ideology to type—and yet while the history of architecture is often presented as a chronology of popular styles, I suggest instead that it is the collectives, institutions, publications and other gathering spaces that generate and sustain the discipline and its relationships to the world. I describe this phenomenon as the 'Disciplinary Gathering space': where architects have gathered; why, how, what these gatherings produce; and what affect they have on The Ground. I present an abridged history of architecture in Aotearoa, focusing on both the gathering spaces of professional institutions and the academy, and those gatherings that form outside those institutes and that wax and wane over time. These gathering spaces are posited as historical key sites of Ground-making in architecture, where the discipline is both defined and contested. School is presented as a key site and fertile gathering space for exploration and experimentation, and a convivial setting for the sharing of knowledge. These conditions of 'school' and an absence of spaces like this outside of the academy suggest the need for the second key practice approach of 'School-making': a practice of making spaces that capture the feeling of school through open platforms that can imagine and practise other ways of doing architecture. Examples from the practice like The Night School and the Architecture Beyond Capitalism School foreground the particular skills and tools a practice of School-making entails.

**Chapter Three—Undisciplined: Developing a Theory of Agency** theorises how architecture workers could exercise their agency through action that targets systemic and regulatory structures. The chapter is framed by a discussion about the 'theory of change' or the 'theory of agency' of the research and how it developed through the course of my practice, reflecting a shift in approach and priority. Undisciplined practices, tricksterdom, and aesthetic vs systemic trouble are discussed in their capacity and shortfalls as frameworks for gathering spaces that aim to shift conventional narratives and make space for new ways of doing architecture. I point to figures and groups that were central to the narrative of trouble in architecture in Aotearoa, and those that shift the discipline from outside. Learnings from these reflections and the emergence and actions of pre:fab and inform the third practice approach of 'Trouble-making': pointed, targeted critique and action based in organising principles that focuses on systems, laws, and the deeper structural underpinnings of the discipline and society.

**Chapter Four—Love and [re]Organising: Tools and Tactics for Sustained Gathering** is where the theorisation of the practice is most present. I reflect that new models of gathering require principles of organising, a renewed position on the of the concept of values, radical administration, and deep love. These arguments are framed by specific methods and tools of my practice and its learnings and suggest that disciplinary and otherwise gathering spaces create communities of practice that are fertile Ground for experimenting with practice and life and invite a mixing of values and ideas in a space of conviviality, collaboration, and action. These

tools and tactics combine to describe the fourth practice approach of ‘Creating Community Infrastructures’: imagining, creating, administrating, and sustaining the social and relational systems that support ongoing gathering, and empower collectives with the tools to weather challenges. Community infrastructures allow collectives the space to develop and then figure out how to apply organising skills to real problems; and foster the love and deep respect for each other and all things that is required to support collective action and initiate a paradigm shift that embraces a multitude of ways of being and knowing.

**Conclusion—Architecting Other Ways to Be [Together]** reflects on the document, summarises its key findings, and explores how the methodological framework of Ground-making could also provide a model of practice for the design and delivery of buildings within conventional practice. I discuss future possibilities for the research, what it has inspired for my own practice, and where pre:fab might go in the future.

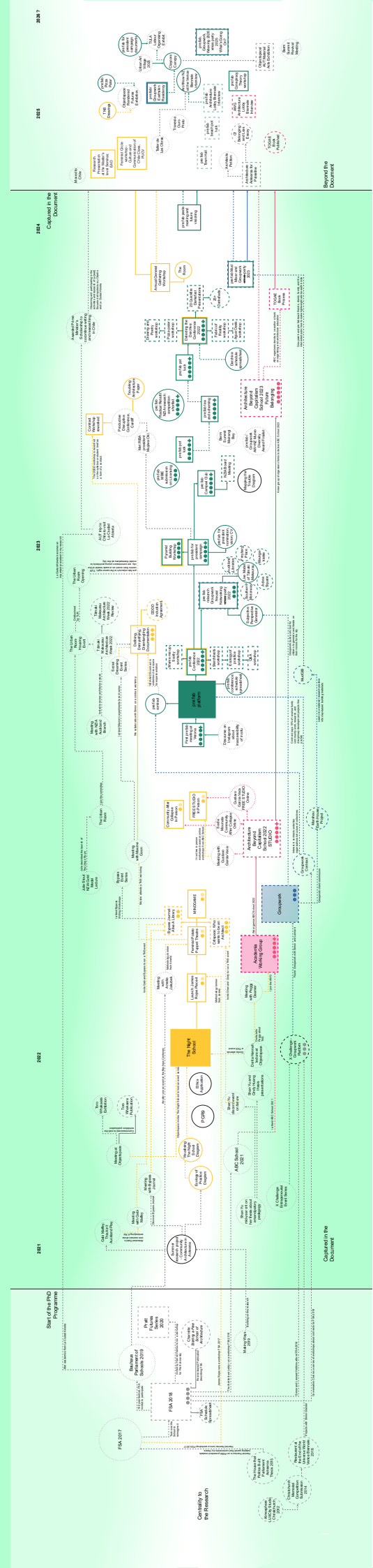
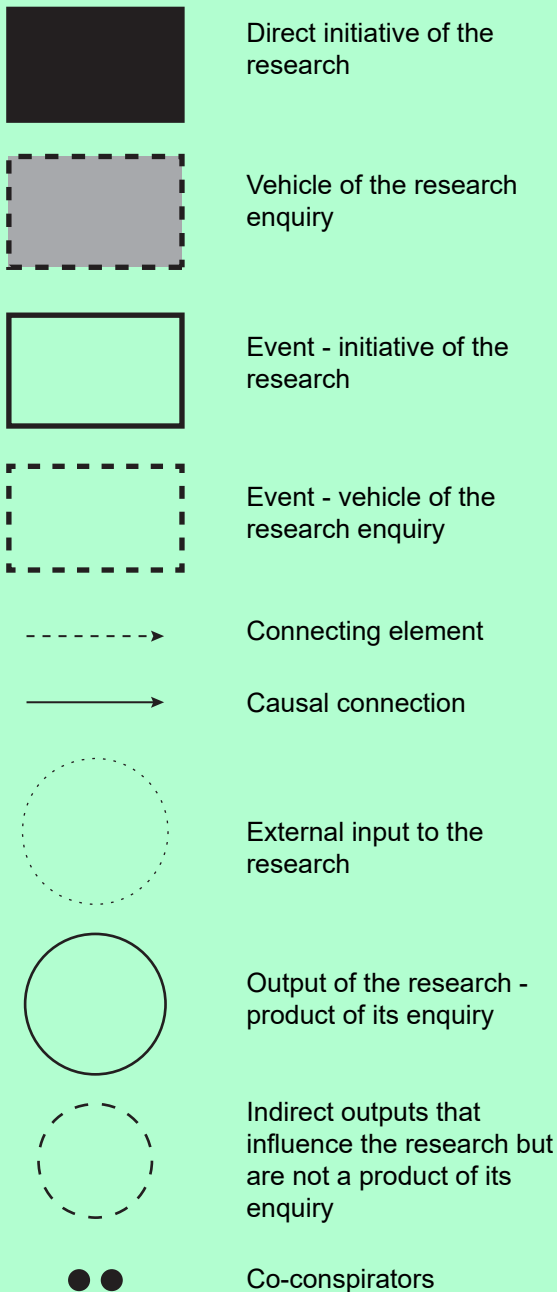
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This document traces my practice oriented methodological enquiry into Ground-making—a relational, situated, and evolving practice that creates, explores, and reflects on gathering spaces in architecture, and how architectural practice might help make them—and theories and ideas about architecture agency and gathering that emerged through practice. My contribution to knowledge is in the offering of gathering as a lens through which to reinterpret the history of the architecture profession; a theory of The Ground of architecture; and a methodological framework of Ground-making with a reflection on its tools, methods, ideas, and feelings and what they imply for generating connection and agency in the architecture discipline. I conclude by suggesting that this framework may have practical application for more conventional architecture practice in what it could offer for the imagining, forming, and strengthening of existing, incidental, and future communities through the processes of designing and delivering their shared, public buildings and other spaces. In addition, a key site of new knowledge production is also the new networks and communities that have emerged around, in, and through my practice. Separately and together, each of these has a particular affect—partly designed, partly discovered, and intentionally tested and developed—all of which together constitute my practice and reveal and make The Ground of architecture in Aotearoa.

# #imag[in]ing-the-ground

## Map

Imag[in]ing The Ground is a diagrammatic map that attempts to capture the relational web of my practice—charting across time and visualising what is central to the research. Here you can better understand which actions and gatherings were initiatives of my practice—things I started or organised to advance my research—and which things I connected to or joined to collaborate with others and learn: events and products that were vehicles of my enquiry. This is an attempt to visually represent the vast network of relationships at play, and some of the results of those interactions. I hope to capture the dynamic nature of my practice—always responsive, expanding, and increasingly collaborative.



# Start of the PhD Programme

FSA 2017

Bauhaus Parliament of Schools 2019

Pratt Futures Series 2020

FSA 2018

FSA Schedule Spreadsheet

Charrette *Starting a Free School of Architecture*

Making Ways 2019

## Centrality to the Research

Atmosphere LUXCity Studio Christchurch 2012

The House that Politics Built: Parliament Aotearoa Thesis 2015

Christchurch Memorial Competition Submission 2014

Restaurant at the End of the Universe World Venice Biennale 2016

Harriet Harriss is on RIBA president medals judging panel that commends my thesis  
Harriet Harriss runs a workshop FSA 2017

Took over the School to reimagine it

100 year festival, FSA invited to participate

Met academics from La Ciudad Abierta

Invited by Harriet Harriss to run a workshop for Pratt University

Peer-reviewed Publication describing FSA

James Rojas runs a workshop FSA 2017

The Architecture Lobby run a workshop FSA 2018

Building on this research

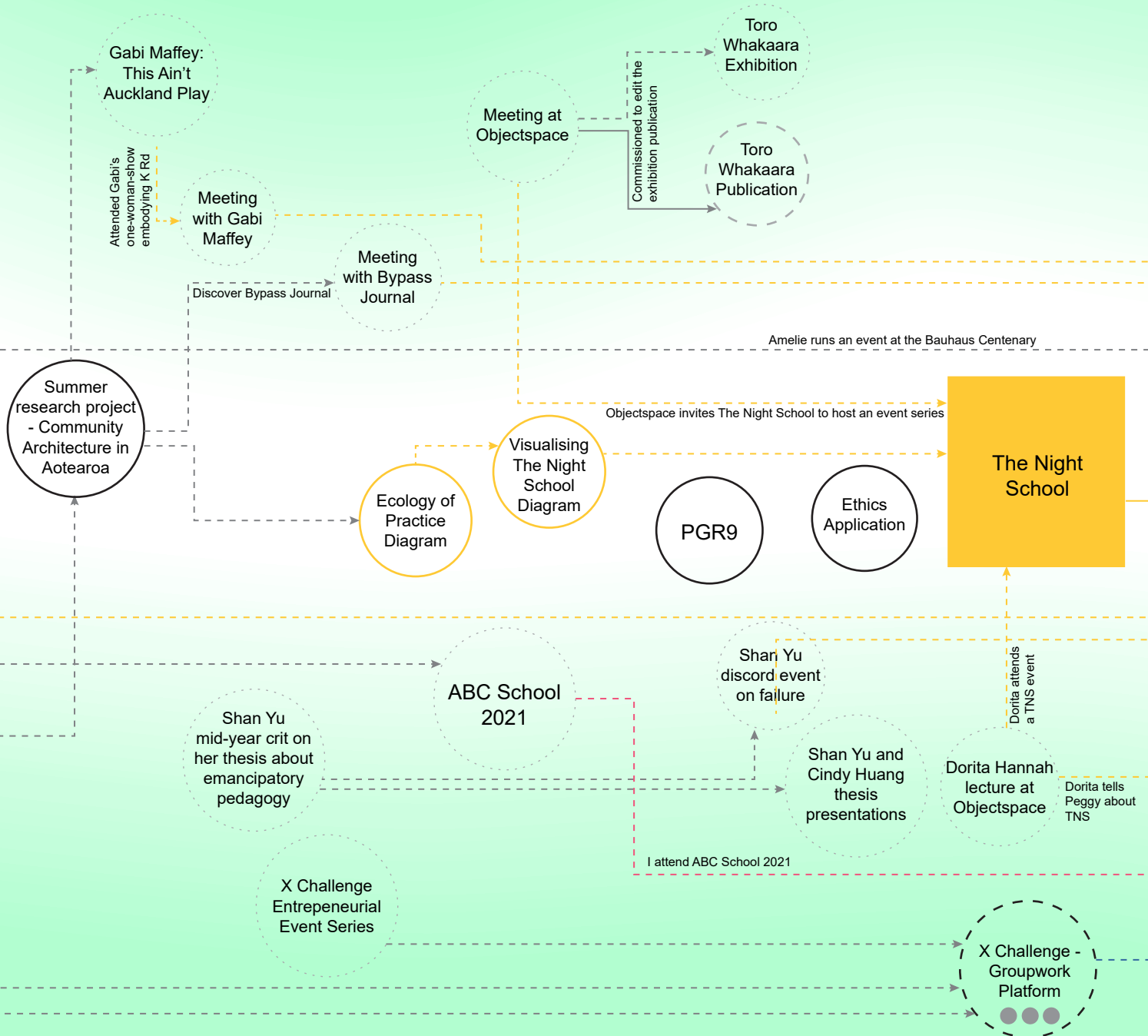
Simon and Leonard Hobbins attend FSA 2018

Projects with Simon Glaister

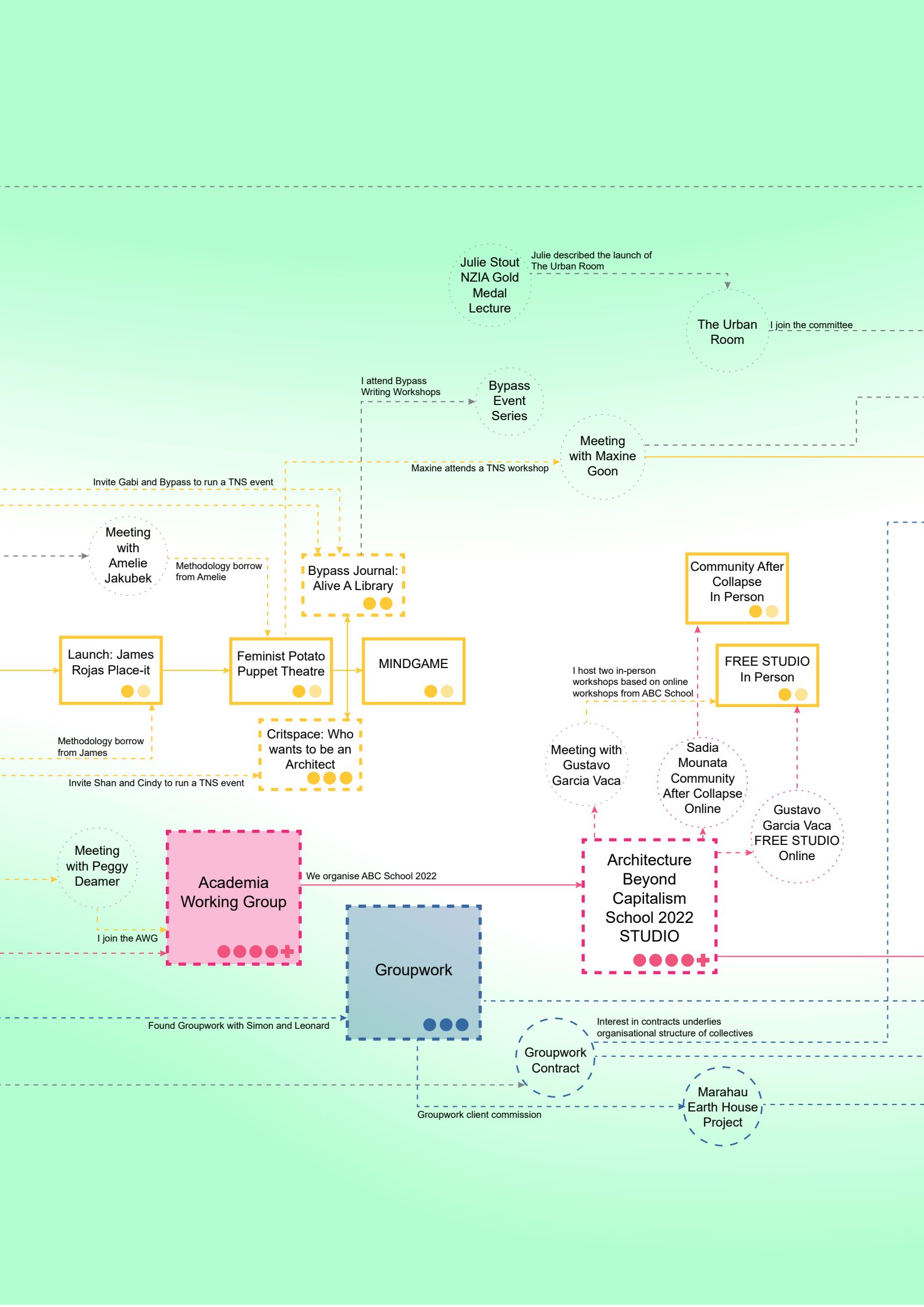
Conversation Club run a series of workshops about contracts for FSA 2018

2021

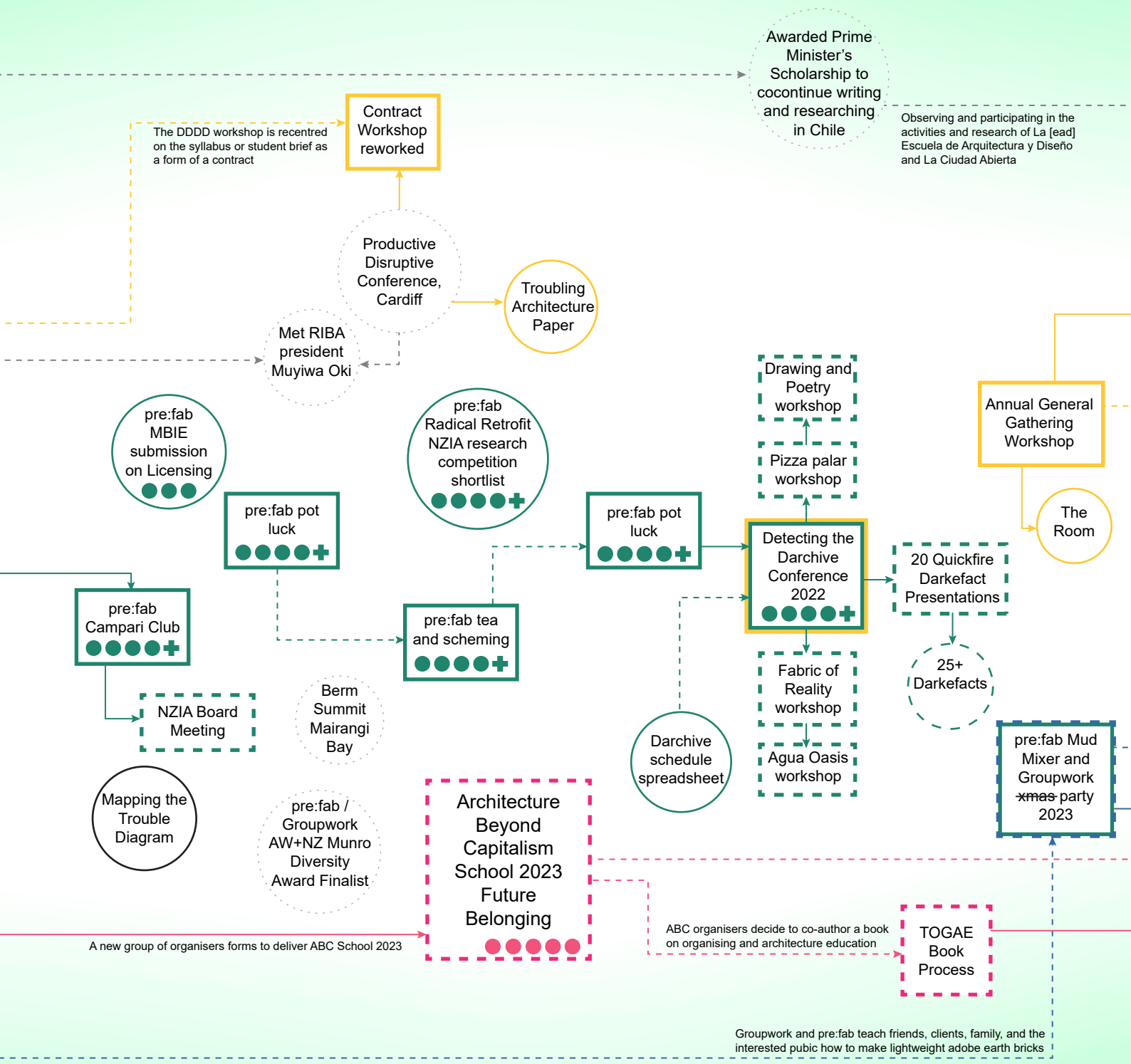
2022



Captured in the Document







2024

2025

2026 ?

Captured in the Document

Moved to Chile

Research Presentation at the Master's level Seminar, EAD

Feminist Circle workshop - Culture and Communication of Chile Class, PUCV

TNS Drawings

pre:fab Pizza Palar

Objectspace Rendered Futures Exhibition

pre:fab for president campaign documents

Urban Art Village 2025

TULA Labour Organising Exhibit

Taller de Las Obras

pre:fab/ Groupwork Earthskin Residency

Travesia Ouro Preto

Claycore Canopy

pre:fab pasta making and future visioning

ArchNow NZ at the Venice Biennale interview

pre:fab Town Hall

pre:fab beach pot luck

pre:fab Architecture Lobby Biennale Interview

pre:fab, Groupwork, Weaving 2026 xmas party 2025 What's Going On?

Architects Petition

Of Belonging and Loss Essay

AWG Architecture Lobby Biennale Interview

pre:fab Conspiracy Theory workshop

Architecture Aotearoa for Palestine

Objectspace/ AUT Material Acts Exhibition

TOGAE Book Published

Berm Summit Revival Meeting

Beyond the Document

## Definitions

This research is about making, designing, and uncovering tools and implements through which to understand, discover, and make gatherings that connect to and reveal The Ground. Through these tools, this process, and trying to examine and traverse The Ground in which my own practice has its footings, its tethers, its roots, I have come to the definitions below for architecture and its accompanying structures. These are reductive, and really where I am right now. They will probably shift, and evolve, but for now we need to pin something down, hold it here in time.

The way I understand the architecture discipline is like this:

There is **The Environment**: everything that is not thoughts—everything that is physical and tangible.

Most of the work of **architecture** is to take parts of The Environment (materials) and re-arrange them through a collaborative process into new forms in a way that directly changes something in that environment, and through this act, or through a rearrangement of ideas related to those materials, changes shared and personal understandings of it. This reorganising is related to making physical the form of rituals, how beings move in the world and where they dwell.

**Architecture** can also be a speculation of these material changes, a changing of the meaning of something material through a rearrangement of ideas—the creation of an affect which changes the environment through changing perspectives of it—or a capturing of those shared and personal understandings, a contemplation of meaning. This is usually called architectural theory.

Aside from complex scientific processes, the re-organisation of materials does not change the physical material quantity of the world, and so the thing that changes in making things is the idea space—the conceptual Ground—is how we relate to those materials, and the knock on affects of the reorganisation process. Architects engage consciously with what these relationship changes might mean, either through the things they make, things others make, or things made. In this way architecture can reveal forms of connectivity between people, people and places, people and ecologies, people and other beings, people and ideas, that already exist but remain otherwise unseen; shared meanings in those relationships that point to a different future and foster belonging. In this we can also understand that while the physical Ground is finite, the conceptual Ground is infinite, constantly being made, and re-made.

An **architecture practice** is an engagement with acts of the reorganisation of materials and their associated ideas and with the repeated making and doing of architecture and meaning. A being can be practising architecture consciously or not. Architecture, as defined, is a lens through which to observe and discover practice.

An **architecture worker** is anyone who participates in the discipline of architecture and has an architecture practice. This term is non-exclusive and ranges from bosses to those just starting out. All those who practice architecture are working towards its collaborative construction.

**The discipline** of architecture is all those architecture practices that are encapsulated in the above definition, collected on The Ground.

**Disciplinary Gathering** is the organisations, institutions, clubs, collectives, spaces, and platforms around which people come together to discuss, think, share, and collectively practise architecture both inside and outside of commercial, educational, and professional settings. It is also the ideas, practices, materials, feelings, and tools that act as focal gathering points for the discipline.

What I will call **commercial practice** throughout this document is the act of making architecture as a service, and the exchange of that service for money. Commercial practice doesn't typically engage with the expansive view of architecture as defined above and is usually confined to the exchange of services related to making drawings of buildings and building details so that those buildings (of all kinds) may be realised in the future, in exchange for money, to produce capital. This ranges in scale from sole practitioners to large scale companies with hundreds or thousands of employees. For the sake of clarity and to avoid confusion of the double entendre that is 'practice', when I mean the repeated making and doing and thinking of architecture I will use 'practice', and when I mean the repeated companies that have their primary purpose in the work of architectural services I will say 'companies'. Commercial practice will be used to describe the general space within which these companies work. All commercial practice *is* architecture practice, but not all architecture practice is commercial practice.

**The profession** is the collection of institutional bodies, mostly operating on behalf of their associated nation state, who usually manage the legal boundaries around 'who' an 'architect' is, what their mandate is, and set standards of behaviour that an 'architect' is expected to abide by under law. The profession defines what can be sold as architecture by companies within commercial practice, and provides rules, codes, and laws within which to practise.

The history of architecture extends back as far as there was environment to give meaning to, and materials to reorganise in relation to that meaning (very far). The history of the architecture 'profession' extends back over the last couple of centuries and is historically and presently most interested in the arrangement of materials of the environment into 'buildings.' The professional movement was a significant moment in the history of the Disciplinary Gathering space, which will be discussed in much greater detail in 'Chapter Two—Disciplinary Gathering'.

**Architecture education** is a space to learn about the practice of architecture and can be a site and form of discovering a practice, a practice in itself, and a training ground for workers for commercial practice, whose required skill sets are mitigated through accreditation by the profession.

When I refer to **the Academy**, I am referring to architecture education sited within the university, particularly that which is accredited by professional institutions acting on behalf of their nation state.

## Grounds

The places I have lived and engaged with while undertaking this research, grounding it in specific physical realities.

***Tāmaki Makaurau*** (Auckland) is the city in which I was born, grew, and continue to grow. I feel a deep sense of connection to Te Onewa (Northcote), the suburb where my immediate family have lived for more than 30 years. We have lived in several houses but always in Te Onewa, only a few kilometres from the city centre (though separated by the Waitematā harbour), and yet I walked each day to my high school through the native bush of Wai Manawa (Le Roys Bush). When I think of home I think of the damp green smell of wet ferns, how houses would appear through the Nīkau, of toes full of thick mud while walking out through leaning boats at Little Shoal Bay to reach the sea. It is a landscape so familiar to me I know the season by its scents; the time of day by how the light falls; every bend, every street, every valley and ridgeline. It is a place where I feel grounded.

***Valparaíso, Chile*** is where I lived for the final year of my PhD, and where much of the writing and theorising of my practice took place. It is a city full of urban complexities, shaped by its function as Chile's major port during the nineteenth century, and then by its loss of that status in the early twentieth century with the opening of the Panama Canal. It has reckoned with earthquakes and tsunamis; the Pinochet dictatorship in the 1970s and 80s; a social revolution in 2019 that left many businesses destroyed amongst political unrest; and the closures, curfews, and loss of life of the COVID-19 pandemic. Valparaíso is a city of ocean and hills full of rapid informal development, colour and murals, make-do construction, and stairs and paths that weave clandestine routes through neighbourhoods. It was one of the great privileges of my life to live in Valparaíso for a year, exploring this rich fabric of self-imagined and built architecture, learning a language, and learning other ways of being and relating with the world. Valparaíso is not so unsimilar geographically to Tāmaki Makaurau: it is a port city on the ring of fire, cradling one side of Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa. Tāmaki and Valpo are like the parentheses of this great ocean, facing each other across a vast unknowable distance.

***La Ciudad Abierta*** (The Open City) is a 270 hectare piece of coastal land owned by La Corporación Cultural Amereida that is independent yet operates parallel to La Escuela de Arquitectura y Diseño (The School of Architecture and Design) in La Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso.<sup>14</sup> La Ciudad Abierta is a kind of experimental Ground founded in 1970 for teachers and students of the school to understand the practice of architecture, poetry, design, and teaching as a practice of life. Many of the academics build houses and live there, and the students visit every Wednesday to play sport and learn about the history of Amereida (the founding document and principles of the school). The land is a vast dunescape around an estuary with a large hill behind. The rituals of the school—celebratory gatherings to welcome students or mark key events, a weekly shared lunch in a music hall, poetic acts that engage the body in space, the construction of experimental structures, and so on—shape the landscape and are shaped by the landscape. All decisions made by the corporation are made by consensus, and while the school has a campus for most of its classes, La Ciudad Abierta provides an 'other' space for experimentation, theorisation, and exploring ways of being together that can exist outside the boundaries of the university and regulatory frameworks of the city. Where other experimental models of education and architecture that emerged around the same time no longer exist, La Ciudad Abierta persists, with solid Ground on which to gather, and ritual practices that capture and sustain its intentions and practices. I would go to La Ciudad Abierta with other students of the school to play sport, and I participated in a Taller de Obras (studio of artworks) that sought to bring energy back to the land after the isolated years of the COVID-19 pandemic through experiments with rammed earth construction.

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<sup>14</sup> e[ad], "Ciudad Abierta," e[ad], accessed October 16, 2024, <https://www.ead.pucv.cl/espacios/ciudad-abierta/>.

**Los Angeles, California** was my home and workplace for nearly three years before returning to Aotearoa during the pandemic and starting my doctorate. I was endlessly fascinated by its strange urban condition, the low-lying sprawl, the long necks of freeways in the city, the sun and the heat everywhere. I learned a lot about architecture and about life and connected to a community of practice in LA through organising the Free School of Architecture (FSA). I reflected after FSA that LA is a city where failure feels possible because its major industries (entertainment) are built on 'failure', on making things with the likelihood that no one will ever see them.<sup>15</sup> While LA was a Ground for the emergence of my practice, it didn't otherwise play out there, and so I hoped to carry some of the energy of possibility, the potential of anonymity, and the attitude of reckless abandon in the face of failure through to Aotearoa, even if in Tāmaki Makaurau it feels like everyone is watching.

**The Online World** is also a Ground for my practice. I gathered in the digital space to organise FSA; throughout the COVID-19 pandemic on zoom calls with friends, loved ones, and in lectures about architecture all over the world, then accessible; connected with practitioners for The Night School; and through organising with the Architecture Lobby, Academia Working Group, Architecture Beyond Capitalism, and pre:fab. This digital space is where a lot of the matter of the practice was collaboratively produced, making use of the sophistication of google docs and groups as generative working spaces that allow for the asynchronous production of ideas all over the globe.

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<sup>15</sup> Forde, "Starting a free school of architecture," 123.

## Collectives

Groups and platforms I have formed or been part of and which contribute to my research.

**The Night School** (TNS) is a platform I launched in 2022 to host events, collaborations, and workshops to learn and explore ideas about the built environment, about art, economy, ecosystems, poetry, and how architecture might and does fit into these spheres, particularly through strategies of resistance and challenge.<sup>1</sup> Each event either takes a practice of a practitioner and presents it through a workshop related to the context of Aotearoa, invites a practitioner to share their practice through an embodied workshop, or collaborates with others to invent new workshop forms. TNS events are always free and open to anyone who wishes to attend. TNS sits intentionally apart from the academy in a space between education and commercial practice—it is a school, but not a school—believing in the capacity for all people to hold and share knowledge on The Ground of architecture. The events don't always happen at night, but often they do, because night-time is for dreaming.

**pre:fab platform (pre:fab)** emerged from the community and collaborative network created by TNS around the creation of a free conference for architectural workers in 2022.<sup>2</sup> pre:fab is now a collective of around 30 people in Tāmaki Makaurau who gather in different ways to explore, generate, and organise for the cultural production of architecture. pre:fab is a collaborator, educator, researcher, producer, promoter, publisher, and (not-for-profit) practice; a collective of collectives; a framework to aggregate, cultivate, and support alternative practices in Aotearoa New Zealand; a space to create and share resources, make stuff, produce research, be the audience for that stuff and that research, and generally create a collaborative, generative, and convivial space for new and different modes of architectural practice. pre:fab uses discord to organise online and gathers regularly around shared food.

**Groupwork** is an architecture company I share with Leonard Hobbins and Simon Glaister.<sup>3</sup> We started Groupwork in 2022 and it became an important site for my practice—where the ideas explored across the platforms above could be deployed in the context of built projects, client relationships, and business dynamics. With *Groupwork* we strive for a cooperative model of practice and redistribute revenue to research and community development work, including that undertaken through pre:fab.

**The Free School of Architecture** (FSA) was a six-week summer program held in downtown Los Angeles, California over the summer of 2017. With noble intentions of reimagining the focus and hierarchies of architecture school, it attracted around 40 students (including myself) from around the world at various stages in their architecture careers to “question the edges of architectural education”.<sup>4</sup> FSA17 struggled to avoid replicating the hierarchies and patterns of conventional education models and so—following a benevolent coup of the school's founder—the student body took ownership of the program, to deconstruct its hierarchies, self-organise, and re-imagine it for the following year. This marked a re-founding of FSA, coordinated by Lili Carr in Mexico City, Mexico; Karina Andreeva in San Francisco, USA; Elisha Cohen in Dessau, Germany; and myself living in Los Angeles, USA. After nine months of intense organisation, FSA re-launched in 2018 as a free six-week summer school where everyone was a participant, anyone who applied would attend and could teach, and a Tuesday-Sunday, 10-hour a day schedule was composed of over 70 sessions related to alternative ways invited collaborators and participants were engaging with the built environment. FSA was about sharing and performing different methods and practices—a kind of tasting platter of approaches—through interactive workshops and a wide range of architecture conversations. FSA is a marker of the emergence of my own practice—of making schools, of organising, of aggregating—and a key site of the development of the ideas, skills, and community that drove this research.

<sup>1</sup> Tessa Forde, “The Night School,” *The Night School*, 2022, accessed October 16, 2024, <https://www.thenightschool-arch.com/>.

<sup>2</sup> “pre:fab,” 2023, accessed May 1, 2023, [pre-fab.xyz](https://pre-fab.xyz).

<sup>3</sup> “Groupwork,” *Groupwork*, 2023, accessed October 18, 2024, [www.groupwork.co.nz](http://www.groupwork.co.nz).

<sup>4</sup> Tessa Forde, “Starting a free school of architecture,” *Charrette* 6, no. 1 (2020).

**The Architecture Lobby** (TAL) is a “grassroots organization of architectural workers” founded in 2010 to advocate for an equitable built environment and just labour practices in architecture.<sup>5</sup> It is made up of a series of local chapters and national working groups who organise events, support union efforts, make policy submissions, and so on. TAL operates mostly out of the United States of America; however, membership is global, and some cities in other countries have local chapters. As a result, a significant amount of their central organisational structure is managed online through tools like Mobilize, Google Workspace, Miro, and Zoom. They are structured with an overarching organising committee of nominated and then voted-in representatives; into chapters based on location; and into working groups currently consisting of Green New Deal, Academia, and Unionization.<sup>6</sup> Each of these groups uses specific tools and strategies to manage online conversation and workflow. Members pay 0.2% of their annual salary or a \$25.00 base fee if they are unemployed or students.<sup>7</sup> All workers within TAL are volunteers and leadership positions rotate annually. I met Lobby members through FSA in 2018 and joined TAL in 2022 to connect my practice to an international context and learn from the organisational strategies of others.

**The Academia Working Group** (AWG) is an online working group of TAL that was initiated in 2020 during the pandemic to “address the origin of architectural precariousness and social irrelevance” by those members in the Lobby who teach.<sup>8</sup> Initially they gathered around three approaches: one being to ‘hack’ architecture programs by sharing a course that taught labour, capitalism, and collectivity across different schools; the second to initiate a summer school to supplement the standard curriculum by offering courses on topics missing from academic education; and the third to set up a school they wanted to teach at. In lieu of the person-power to achieve all three, they focused on the summer school and launched the Architecture Beyond Capitalism School in the northern hemisphere summer of 2021. I joined AWG in 2022 after attending the school in 2021 to learn about organising, connect to teachers from other schools and countries, and contribute to the collective.

**Architecture Beyond Capitalism School** (ABC) for 2021 was a six week online programme organised by AWG that sought to collaboratively to understand “the terrain in which we are operating” and “the contemporary ecological and social crises and of architecture’s roles and responsibilities within”.<sup>9</sup> The school was broken down into three thematic sections: “Capitalism, Labor and Collective Practice”, with each of these engaging discussion and debate with theorists and practitioners whose work aligns with that theme, and through a series of salons and collaborative design assignments. I joined ABC in 2022 and was part of the core team that organised ABC 2022 and ABC 2023. The 2022 session of ABC, focusing on studio educational practices, was organised as a series of workshops where participants and facilitators developed strategies for empowering models for effecting change in the built environment to replace traditional studio (the class in architecture school that usually teaches ‘design’). As an initiating prompt, ABC 2022 asked: “how do we understand studio to support and encourage activist organization? How might design be taught in ways that do not perpetuate and reproduce capitalist exploitation?”<sup>10</sup> In 2023 we invited participants and contributors to gather under the theme of “future belonging” to consider the complex problem of “how to capture, share, redeploy, and evolve liberatory practices across different scales, contexts and cultures from around the world”.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> “The Architecture Lobby: About,” The Architecture Lobby, accessed September 28, 2021, <http://architecture-lobby.org/about/>.

<sup>6</sup> The Architecture Lobby, “Working groups,” The Architecture Lobby, accessed September 22, 2024, <https://architecture-lobby.org/working-groups/>.

<sup>7</sup> The Architecture Lobby, “Join Us,” The Architecture Lobby, accessed September 22, 2024, <https://architecture-lobby.org/join-us/>.

<sup>8</sup> The Architecture Lobby, “Academia,” The Architecture Lobby, accessed August 04, 2024, <https://architecture-lobby.org/working-groups/academia/>.

<sup>9</sup> “2021 A-B-O-U-T,” Architecture Beyond Capitalism, 2021, accessed February 28, 2023, <https://abc.architecture-lobby.org/architecture-beyond-capitalism-2021>.

<sup>10</sup> “A-B-O-U-T,” Architecture Beyond Capitalism, 2022, accessed February 28, 2023, <https://abc.architecture-lobby.org/#about>.

<sup>11</sup> Architecture Beyond Capitalism School, “F-U-T-U-R-E B-E-L-O-N-G-I-N-G,” Architecture Beyond Capitalism School, 2023, accessed November 04, 2024, <https://abc.architecture-lobby.org/architecture-beyond-capitalism-2023>.

## Institutions

The key organisational groups within and around which the research unfolds.

***Huri Te Ao*** (School of Future Environments) at ***Auckland University of Technology*** (AUT) is my school, host university, and the context within which I undertook this research. Huri Te Ao is a transdisciplinary school founded in 2020 as a “collaborative project to co-create an outward-facing civic research platform for sharing ecologically positive design thinking across diverse communities of practice”.<sup>12</sup> I was drawn to AUT for its commitment to Mātauranga Māori and regenerative design and for the possibility and potential that a new school implied of exploring different methods of practice and teaching in architecture.

***La Escuela de Arquitectura y Diseño*** (The School of Architecture and Design EAD) in ***La Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso*** (PUCV) has a partnership with AUT which creates opportunities for shared research projects and student exchanges. I received a 2024 Prime Minister’s Scholarship to spend a year at the EAD finishing my doctorate, fostering relationships, and participating in and observing the life of the school.

***Te Kāhui Whaihanga*** (The New Zealand Institute of Architects NZIA) is the largest institutional body of architects in Aotearoa.<sup>13</sup> They are an incorporated society first established in 1905. While they originally managed the licensure and accreditation of architects, in 1963 the institute was reformed under the Architect’s Act to pass the remit of regulatory functions to the New Zealand Registered Architects Board (NZRAB). Te Kāhui Whaihanga now administer Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programs; organise the largest annual conference for architects ‘in:situ’; and provide a ‘club-like’ gathering space for awards, news, events, and competitions.



Figure 0.1: pre:fab, *We Should be Friends*, 2023, graphic. Courtesy of pre:fab.

<sup>12</sup> Amanda Yates et al., “A transformative architectural pedagogy and tool for a time of converging crises,” *Urban Science* 7, no. 1 (2022).

<sup>13</sup> NZIA, “Who we are,” Te Kāhui Whaihanga New Zealand Institute of Architecture, accessed October 16, 2024, <https://www.nzia.co.nz/about-us/who-we-are/>.

# Chapter One

## ***The Ground***

Architecture's Lack of Agency and a  
Methodological Enquiry

The core theory of this research is that architecture workers gain agency through connection to a conceptual space of interacting knowledges, ideas, ways of being, things, shared understandings, gatherings, tools, methods, and so on that is continuously being made and remade. I theorise this space as 'The Ground'. This chapter builds a theory of The Ground and speculates on some of the things that have disconnected architects from The Ground to help describe why gathering is so essential to my practice, and why I believe that it is the starting point for increased agency for the architecture profession. I consider what it means to 'make Ground' and use three metaphors to describe my particular practice of Ground-making as the design and enactment of processes and tools which allow one to sense, reveal and engage The Ground, and creating the pre-conditions for ideas and practices to emerge, interact, and create new affects. I conclude by discussing 'Traversing the Ground' as a key practice approach of Ground-making and speculate on why it might be critical for gathering, reforming, and forming new models of gathering in architecture.

## Theory of The Ground

The Ground is a conceptual idea space where ideas, knowledges, thoughts, and feelings interact, overlap, aggregate, and repel. The Ground is not a physical space that you can touch but is something you can sense and therefore create tools that allow you to experience it more acutely. Comparing this conceptual Ground with the physical ground, usually understood as land, is helpful to clarify and communicate what I mean by it. The physical Ground is complex, layered and composed of tangible materials and intangible ideas—feelings about place, belonging, and so on. You can touch and experience the tangible layers of the physical Ground like grass (ok zoomer),<sup>13</sup> dirt, sand, silt, rocks, the road, and layers of concrete and plastic that accumulate like strata, but not the ideas of Ground. The physical Ground encompasses all these material things, and all ideas of them, also layered like strata. The physical Ground is *the environment*—everything that is not thought—and is captured by thought itself, the space of imagining, creating, and affect that give rise to ideas about the physical Ground. Architecture's physical Ground consists of all the materials of the world reorganised to make habitable spaces and its conceptual Ground consists of all the ideas, feelings of belonging or exclusion, stories and ghosts, thoughts and theories, meaning, policies, relationships, histories, and so on that inform and emerge from that reorganisation. The conceptual Ground has layers, visible and invisible, that are intimately connected and influencing one another. They create particular environments that are then shaped by human activity and processes. The physical Ground may be finite, but ideas of it are not. This to say that The Ground is always being made and remade, consciously or not.

Over time people are attracted to different areas of this conceptual Ground, gathering around ideas or things that resonate, or areas that feel more fertile, or exploitable, creating hotspots of nomenclature and specialisation. Disciplines like architecture observed areas of The Ground where certain types of interactions differed from others and could be claimed as special or unique. This was seen as an opportunity to fence in, compartmentalise, and formalise knowledge into distinct portions of Ground, much like the treatment of the physical Ground, of land. Over time these patches of Ground become carefully curated to resemble, reinforce, and recreate that particular state of the field, becoming increasingly monocultured, as professions and the institutions that define them build thick boundary walls through rules, regulation, and rituals. Some of these rules and regulations are about making it safer to navigate The Ground, while others focus on prestige, exclusion, and power.

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<sup>13</sup> Touching grass is a zoomer meme—a codeword for going out and being in 'nature' when you've been spending too much time online. Grass is seen to be 'real' and grounding. They take photos of themselves touching grass and post them online. There is an irony in grass taking on this role as a symbol of what is natural, especially in Aotearoa where most of the grass species found in parks, schools, backyards, and so on was introduced by colonial settlers, is mostly highly groomed, and has historically been a symbol of wealth (proof that a person doesn't need to use their valuable land for agriculture).

Boundary-making on The Ground makes it difficult to understand that there can be other configurations of The Ground, other arrangements of ideas and ways of being. It can have the affect of making it feel like the way things are organised on that patch of Ground—for example the rules, rituals, social norms, definitions, and practices of a discipline like architecture—are just the way that things are, inevitable and unchangeable. The boundaries on The Ground and how they are maintained are part of what gives legitimacy to the architecture profession but also creates the impression that there is only one way for architects to be and know, and this can disconnect architects from the conceptual space of imagination and preclude adaptability and versatility in the face of unexpected challenges. I suggest that reconnecting to The Ground is a starting point to reveal different types of organisation, arrangement, and relationships that allow other ways of being and knowing—other futures—to feel possible.

Boundary-making is just one among a series of complex and intertwined forces that have disconnected architecture from The Ground. If we understand The Ground as a conceptual possibility space that, through gathering and re-combining the components of its surface, can provide architecture workers with the agency to change their conditions and the world at large, why does it appear that this condition not been leveraged in the past, and why do other possible futures seem so far from our present reality as a discipline? In this next section I will elaborate on this problem, discuss some of the possible causes, speculate on the affects they have on architecture workers and the public perception of architecture in Aotearoa, and what explore conditions were present that provided opportunities for my practice.

## The Problem: The State of The Ground

I am always interested in how my mum describes my practice to other people. She is a true disciple, a true believer, with no architecture training, no reading of Haraway or Morton or Escobar, or any of the other, profound, inspiring, esoteric, complex, sometimes exclusionary, sometimes bullshit content I have absorbed over the past four years. One day on the phone, while helping me with an accounting problem for Groupwork, she described my work as a huge horizontal plane that encapsulates everything, as opposed to her work, which she described as linear and balanced: there is credit and there is debit, only when they are not in balance do you have a problem. If my practice and the practice of architecture really is a huge, horizontal plane that encapsulates everything, an expanded field of interacting ideas, things, and ways of seeing, being, and knowing, then her practice of finance and economics is the thick mantle below that surface, regularly bursting up through to form something that resembles a building. Much of the work of the architect is to turn money (finance) into capital (buildings) that generate more money to be turned into more capital in a spiral of extraction and consumption that services the complex flows of money and materials that constitute the global supply chain and ultimately produces and secures wealth.

Reiner de Graaf, architectural theorist and partner at the Office for Metropolitan Architecture, argues that because there is no way to separate architecture from investment value, it is impossible for an architect to do private building work that doesn't perpetuate the systemic relationship between architecture and capital.<sup>14</sup> De Graaf charts the trajectory of architecture through the 20th Century—inseparable from the political, social, and economic contexts of the time—which shifted from an unusual period of stability under social democracy where return on labour exceeded return on wealth; through the egalitarian movements of the 1960s and 1970s that rejected universalism and modernist principles; to the rise of the conservative right and the fall of the communist bloc in the 1980s that had incentivised governments to provide robust public welfare systems, including housing. After this conservative revolution, architecture and buildings moved even further “from a means to provide shelter” to a “means to generate financial return.”<sup>15</sup> Real estate—or the commodification of land and right to shelter—has more value than

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<sup>14</sup> Reiner de Graaf, “Architecture Is Now a Tool of Capital, Complicit in a Purpose Antithetical to Its Social Mission,” *The Architectural Review* 24 (2015).

<sup>15</sup> de Graaf, “Architecture Is Now a Tool of Capital.”

the “world’s stocks, shares and securitised debt combined”.<sup>16</sup> In this paradigm, an architecture worker becomes an economist, an actuary in the management of a client’s investment, and a cog in the machine of the global supply chain. Architecture professor and researcher Khairul Anwar Mohamed Khaidzir likewise tracks this progression for the architect over the history of the profession, from architect as artist, to architect as social engineer, to architect as entrepreneur, “whose task was to lead the building design team in providing services to the competitive construction ‘market’”, thus becoming an integral part of the production line of “human, material and financial capital”.<sup>17</sup> The architecture worker loses their agency when the immaterial outcome of their work is not the creation of shared meaning, belonging, or even expression of culture and or power, but instead the creation of speculative economic value.

The conversion of buildings to capital is part of a process of dematerialisation. The relationships of architecture to capital tethers it to these seemingly immaterial “hyperobjects” like debt and the global supply chain. Philosopher Timothy Morton describes “hyperobjects” as things that are “massively distributed in time and space relative to humans”.<sup>18</sup> Objects like the biosphere, the solar system, oil spills, capitalism, the totality of plastic, global warming and so on are “viscous”, “non-local” and exist outside of human-scale temporalities, unable to be understood in their completeness.<sup>19</sup> Debt in particular—“a vast bureaucratic apparatus for the creation and maintenance of hopelessness, a giant machine designed, first and foremost, to destroy any sense of possible alternative futures”—has an outsized role in effecting The Ground; it digs out the foundations of one part of The Ground, to make thinner, weaker Ground somewhere else, and puts owed, immaterial, increasing value on material things, and yet feels untouchable, untethered, and impossible to engage.<sup>20</sup> Buildings are built with debt, architects are paid with debt, the elite invest in debt, and nation state governments increasingly depend on debt to provide weakening public services while insufficient taxation and other regulatory failures subsidise the capital growth of those who have it and, meanwhile, whose buildings and properties somehow accumulate capital value in the grand pyramid scheme that is capitalism. Dematerialisation and the tethering of architecture to immaterial things makes The Ground seem incomprehensible and allows these hyperobject forces to readily fill the gaps that incomprehension creates.

The industrialisation of material products and technologies is also part of this dematerialisation and, while it has pushed the boundaries of what’s possible in the construction industry to the point where entirely new typologies are emerging even now,<sup>21</sup> it has also created a void into which human ideas go, and predetermined outcomes emerge. What built outcomes are possible in architecture are determined by a largely finite set of pre-designed products and, increasingly, what defaults are present within proprietary software. Some of the limitations on these materials are related to safety but much of it is related to monopolised material industries, risk aversion, and of course corporate profitising.<sup>22</sup> Even the tangibility of architecture as a material re-organising

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<sup>16</sup> Oliver Wainwright, “Outrage: Form Follows Finance,” (September 23 2019), <https://www.architectural-review.com/essays/outrage/outrage-form-follows-finance>.

<sup>17</sup> Khairul Anwar Mohamed Khaidzir, “Shaping the Future of the Architectural Profession,” *FAB Journal* (2007): 10.

<sup>18</sup> Timothy Morton, “Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World,” *University of Minnesota Press* (2013).

<sup>19</sup> Morton, “Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World.”

<sup>20</sup> David Graeber quoted in Metahaven, *Can Jokes Bring Down Governments?: Memes, Design and Politics* (Strekla Press, 2014), 8.

<sup>21</sup> For example, the super-skinny, super-tall towers for the super-rich in New York. Oliver Wainwright, “Super-Tall, Super-Skinny, Super-Expensive: The ‘Pencil Towers’ of New York’s Super-Rich,” *The Guardian*, February 5 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2019/feb/05/super-tall-super-skinny-super-expensive-the-pencil-towers-of-new-yorks-super-rich>.

<sup>22</sup> Nigel Brown looks at the limiting factors for material innovation in Aotearoa related to the high level of control that preferred suppliers have over the marketplace. The rebate system, specification stringency, and an anti-competitive culture with bullying type behaviour by construction industry monopolies like Fletcher Building and Carter Holt Harvey. Nigel Brown, “What Are the Barriers to Preferred Supplier Status: The Case of the Building Materials Industry” (Master of Commerce University of Otago, 2023).

practice has been compromised and this distances architects and building users from the tacit knowledge captured in built spaces and from material whakapapa.<sup>23</sup> Most shared, constructed environments are no longer made from familiar things sourced from nearby places or built using commonly understood methods by community members, neighbours, or other familiar people and this produces environments that feel alien. Architecture is disconnected not just from the conceptual Ground, but from the physical Ground.

To use a tangible and ubiquitous industrialised material as an example: most carpet tiles are made from highly processed petrochemicals, mined far from where they are assembled, shipped further, and manufactured in machine-based processes alongside exploited workers; and it's not that carpet tiles wouldn't exist without spaces like convention centres, but that carpet tiles make vast, generic, inhuman spaces like convention centres possible. Architect Martin Hill, in his history of architecture in Aotearoa, observed as early as 1976, that the same could be said for glass curtain walls.<sup>24</sup> The "perfecting" of the glass curtain wall through the industrial process generated an "international style that could be seen in most cities of the world".<sup>25</sup> Hill observed that these contribute "little" to architecture as a cultural product, with office buildings simply a "mathematical essay", a spreadsheet made manifest.<sup>26</sup> Aotearoa as a remote island, has depended on imported building materials since its colonisation in the 1800s.<sup>27</sup> The process of globalisation has both eased and exacerbated this condition, granting the country access to a vast range of material possibilities, and yet isolating the architecture industry further in its dependence on a regularly opaque and incomprehensible global supply chain. Globalisation similarly creates an island-like affect for all places, as regulation and financial pressures demand that resources come from 'somewhere else'. This process creates a discipline that is deeply disconnected from the origins of materials—the fundamental and literal building blocks of architecture—and thus, deeply disconnected from the physical Ground. This disconnection proliferates socially and culturally, imposing a homogenous material organisation and aesthetic that is not representative of diverse ways of knowing, being, and making, and limits the capacity of constructed environments to be expressions of meaning and belonging, and be part of community-led processes. The disconnection of architecture to its physical Ground again reinforces the disconnection to the conceptual Ground. An architecture worker with a deeper connection and better knowledge and awareness of the systems that determine the physical manifestation of their buildings has more agency in their choices of material re-organisation, and more agency to advocate for different systems and outcomes.

The process of the dematerialisation of architecture and the world was *designed*. In *Designs for the Pluriverse* the anthropologist Arturo Escobar cites a United Nations Document from 1951 as a characterisation of the beginnings of the global 'development' project that drove this untethering through the 20th Century.

*There is a sense in which rapid economic progress is impossible without painful adjustments. Ancient philosophies have to be scrapped; old social institutions have to disintegrate; bonds of caste, creed, and race have to burst; and large numbers of persons who cannot keep up with progress have to have their expectations of a comfortable life frustrated. Very few communities are willing to pay the full price of economic progress.*<sup>28</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Whakapapa, in short, translates to genealogy or lineage. See page XX for a comprehensive definition.

<sup>24</sup> Martin Hill, *New Zealand Architecture* (New Zealand: School Publications Branch, Department of Education, 1976), 35.

<sup>25</sup> Hill, *New Zealand Architecture*, 35.

<sup>26</sup> Hill, *New Zealand Architecture*, 35.

<sup>27</sup> Stacks of corrugated iron and even kit-of-parts style houses were shipped from the United Kingdom, influencing early style and construction techniques, and thus the emergence of an architecture. Bill McKay, "The Story up to Now," *KOHA*, no. 1 (2016).

<sup>28</sup> (United Nations, Department of Social and Economic Affairs 1951, 15) Quoted in Arturo Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds* (Duke University Press, 2018), 30.

The effect of this global project was to carve out a void under The Ground of society, under ancient, shared practices, it was to create an upheaval, a disconnection in the name of progress. This coupled with the untethering of the dollar from gold in 1971, when “something dirty became unhinged”, acts as a continuation of colonial global ‘development’ but through dematerialisation, a conversion of all that remains real into capital.<sup>29</sup> In architecture this was exacerbated through cultural realignments of the 20th Century under the banner of modernism following the global wars.<sup>30</sup> Architect and Professor David Gloster posits that the European powers, shocked at the horror they had wrought upon themselves, attributed the heart of this horror to “traditional cultures” and their “corrosive elements” that had contributed to the conflict, and so “the stuff of culture had to be radically reappraised, and traditional values subverted”.<sup>31</sup> Architecture had to be cleaned. As architects, artists and educators Cruz Garcia and Nathalie Frankowski discuss, it was also a further erasure, a rendering invisible from the world the cultures of others and of the horrors of colonialism and the global slave trade that had attempted to eviscerate those cultures and that haunts all infrastructure, all buildings, all places.<sup>32</sup>

We can see the trajectory that de Graaf and Escobar describe play out in architecture in Aotearoa over the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The social welfare state created by Prime Minister Michael Joseph Savage during the depression of the 1930s included the launch of the *Housing Construction Department* in 1936, which employed architects to improve housing standards and suburban planning, changing both how the city was constructed and how houses were conceptually viewed.<sup>33</sup> The right of a person to a decent home was seen as akin to their right to education, and the department pioneered not only The State House, but improved town planning.<sup>34</sup> This was soon followed by the post war boom of public housing, the search for a ‘New Zealand style’, and a period of interest in the community architecture movement in the 1970s (all to be discussed in ‘Chapter Two—Disciplinary Gathering’). In the 1980s as the world turned to more conservative economic policy, the Ministry of Works (MOW)—established by the government as the Public Works Department in 1871 to undertake the majority of construction and infrastructure work in Aotearoa—came under scrutiny. The MOW Architectural Division, headed by the New Zealand Government Architect, was asked in an official audit to prove their value to the Government against private practice. The Division’s position within government bureaucracy meant they had a significant contribution to policy relating to the built environment and the development of public infrastructure, and part of their value lay in the public acknowledgement that good design and architecture’s expertise were of value to all people.<sup>35</sup> With the help of several private practices they were able to demonstrate that the Division was both efficient and cost-effective relative to the private market.<sup>36</sup> In spite of this, the incoming financial ideology of “Rogernomics”<sup>37</sup> prevailed

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<sup>29</sup> Hélène Frichot, *Dirty Theory: Troubling Architecture* (Germany: Spurbuchverlag, 2019), 62.

<sup>30</sup> David Gloster, “Instability, Innovation and Emergence within Architectural Education,” in *Radical Pedagogies: Architectural Education & the British Tradition*, ed. Harriet Harriss and Daisy Froud (RIBA Publications, 2015), 7.

<sup>31</sup> Gloster, “Instability, Innovation and Emergence,” 7.

<sup>32</sup> Cruz Garcia and Nathalie Frankowski, “Notes on (Post-)Modernist Abstractions and (Post-)Colonial Resolutions,” Jencks Foundation, 2023, accessed July 23, 2024, <https://www.jencksfoundation.org/explore/text/notes-on-post-modernist-abstractions-and-post-colonial-resolutions>.

<sup>33</sup> Hill, *New Zealand Architecture*, 28.

<sup>34</sup> Hill, *New Zealand Architecture*, 28.

<sup>35</sup> The Architectural Division was known for being a collegial workforce, a good place to learn the tools of the trade, and was subject to public servant accountability and benefits, meaning salaries were public, profit was not an end goal of projects, multidisciplinary collaboration across built-environment divisions was encouraged, and staff at all levels were engaged in all areas of interesting and varied public design projects across the country. Duncan Joiner, “The Government Architect’s Office: 1940-1992,” Te Kāhui Whaihanga New Zealand Institute of Architects, accessed February 15 2021, <https://www.nzia.co.nz/explore/articles-and-essays/the-government-architect-s-office-1940-1992>.

<sup>36</sup> Joiner, “The Government Architect’s Office.”

<sup>37</sup> Rogernomics pertains to the widespread deregulation and privatisation of the public sphere in 1988 by Minister of Finance Roger Douglas. For more information see: Andrew Dean, *Ruth, Roger and Me: Debts and Legacies* (Bridget Williams Books, 2015).

and the Division, and the entire Ministry of Works was split up and privatised.<sup>38</sup> The concept of an architect as a public servant was no longer official or legitimised. This was a political decision that shifted architecture as a discipline from a public good into a private commodity, a rupture in The Ground that disconnected architecture from the public.

The affect of architecture's disconnection to the Ground in Aotearoa has been to compromise the discipline's contribution to public environments. Much of the work of the architect remains in the domain of private housing, providing, as architecture educators Kathy Waghorn and Mike Davis describe, a particularly "narrow field in which practice operates".<sup>39</sup> Students of architecture, whose final projects increasingly reckon with complex concerns of decoloniality and regenerative design,<sup>40</sup> often find that their political, social, and ethical ambitions are not "fully reflected in the current make-up of [the] industry".<sup>41</sup> While I was Traversing the Ground of architecture in Aotearoa over the past four years, I observed many opportunities for discussion about these values and ideas, but little in the way of collective action that could enact them at a structural level, and a limited perception from the general public about what value the discipline brings to public life.<sup>42</sup> Their perception is that architecture is for rich people. It is inaccessible to those who can't afford it, and to those who feel excluded from the development of increasingly privatised or corporatised public spaces.<sup>43</sup> When I edited the publication for the Objectspace's show *Toro Whakaara*, I was struck by a reflection on architecture from photographer and "Rānui Flâneur" Edith Amituanai in her interview with architecture graduate Icao Tiseli. When considering the initiating brief of "hostile architecture", hostility felt familiar to Amituanai, it was a "cultural norm of navigating life as a Samoan woman," while architecture felt foreign, distant, and "not something [she] can find in [her] immediate circle".<sup>44</sup> She said that architecture feels like "things *done* to people".<sup>45</sup> Architecture, for some communities, is something that just appears, public or not, existing somewhere else from their day to day lived experience, and yet defines the spaces in which they live without giving them any autonomy in shaping that definition. Matilda Phillips, co-founder of Maunga: Pacific Architecture Collective<sup>46</sup> who formed to address a "huge disconnect between Pacific Island Communities and the architectural profession",<sup>47</sup> similarly reflected that

<sup>38</sup> Joiner, "The Government Architect's Office."

<sup>39</sup> Kathy Waghorn and Mike Davis, "Looking Backwards to Look Forwards," in *Making Ways*, ed. Kathy Waghorn and Mike Davis (Auckland: Object Space, 2020), 128.

<sup>40</sup> This can be seen across the student projects most visible in the NZIA Student Design Awards. NZIA, "2024 Student Design Awards," Te Kāhui Whaihanga New Zealand Institute of Architecture, 2024, accessed December 09, 2024, <https://www.nzia.co.nz/awards/student-design-awards/2024-student-design-awards/>.

<sup>41</sup> Waghorn and Davis, "Looking Backwards to Look Forwards," 127.

<sup>42</sup> I reflected on this in my review of the Te Kāhui Whaihanga NZIA Tāmaki Makaurau + Te Tai Tokerau Architecture Week in 2022. Tessa Forde, "Highlights from Architecture Week Tāmaki Makaurau 2022," (Community Kōrero: NZIA Auckland Branch, 2022).

<sup>43</sup> There have been many celebrated projects in downtown Tāmaki Makaurau CBD over the past 20 years, which has seen a significant influx of investment that isn't reflected across other areas of the city. In 2015, Auckland Council sold the public QEII Square to Precinct Properties. At the time there were "no alternatives for public space" that had been secured as part of the deal and much debate around the value of the sale. Amelia Melbourne-Hayward, "Sale of QE Square Raises Questions," *Architecture Now*, August 5, 2015, accessed September 30, 2021, <https://architecturenz.co.nz/articles/qe-square/#img=1>. The site's subsequent development into 'Commercial Bay' has included a redevelopment of the street front to a pedestrian-only public plaza, reminiscent of a previous version of the square, but the 'public' space overall is net negative, and designed for the benefit to the mostly internationally-owned franchise tenants of the complex. This accompanies a series of public space initiatives in the area like Silo Park at Wynyard Quarter and Takutai Square in Britomart that, while providing public amenity, are often policed or guarded. This brings into question whose bodies are being kept 'safe' in these spaces, and whose are excluded.

<sup>44</sup> Icao Tiseli, *Edith Amituanai*, ed. Tessa Forde, *Toro Whakaara: Responses to Our Built Environment*, (Objectspace, October 26, 2021).

<sup>45</sup> Tiseli, *Edith Amituanai*.

<sup>46</sup> "Maunga: Pacific Architectural Collective," *Parlour: Intersections*, 2017, accessed September 18, 2021, <https://archiparlour.org/intersections/maunga-pacific-architectural-collective/>.

<sup>47</sup> Unit Y and Maunga: Pacific Architecture Collective, "Fast Forward Breakfast Series," interview by Kathy

as Pasifika women, they felt that the longer time they spent working within the architecture profession, “the further away [they] move from [their] communities”.<sup>48</sup> Phillips and Amituanai describe a similar sense of ungroundedness, or unease when thinking about the architecture discipline to what I describe when I say that I feel untethered, that The Ground feels unstable.

These are some of the conditions and artefacts of social history that cause a disconnect between architecture and The Ground and this disconnect affects the agency of architecture workers in experimenting with new forms of gathering and in the outcomes of their practices in the shared environment. Cultural theorist Mark Fisher has theorised the affect of a dematerialised, haunted Ground, suggesting that a lack of a stability caused by the austerity and economic policy since the 1980s has rendered difficult, or even impossible, the capacity for people to imagine the future and manifest it through cultural production (the art, music, writing, and so on that captures a moment in time). In *Ghosts of my Life*, Fisher proposes that the gradual removal of The Ground of cultural production—public services, a social safety net, state funding—and the massive increase in the cost of rent and mortgages, have rendered the places and tools of art-making inaccessible.<sup>49</sup> De Graaf likewise refers to a “standstill” of thought production in architecture after the neoliberal policies of the 1980s and 1990s moved “the initiative to construct the city...to the private sector.”<sup>50</sup> If the private sector is primarily motivated by financial return, then most architecture becomes a reflection of this motivation, rather than a project of creating spaces of shared meaning and community-driven places of living and ritual. The cultural production of architecture has always been linked more intimately to finance than other cultural forms—part of the profession’s rise in United States for example, was in the increase of real estate speculation as North America urbanised in the late 1800s<sup>51</sup>—but the relationship between finance and built form became rampant with the privatisation of public services from the late 1980s as our institutions, public systems, and infrastructures have been instrumentalised to protect global capitalism from the threats that social democracy and decolonisation movements pose to corporate profits.<sup>52</sup>

If the main future for architecture is imagined in terms of assumed future value and future profit—immaterial and invisible outcomes—there is little room for future visioning of different types of relationships, material conditions, and political opportunities, and less room for cultural production, unless it is seen to have some kind of capital value, which in the face of risk, usually means emulating an aesthetic of cultural production that has had financial success in the past, reinforcing only referentialism. Fisher argues that an incapacity to imagine the future makes the current reality, what he defines as “capitalist realism” feel inevitable, unchangeable, and wholly exhausting, precluding an ability to capture and understand the “now”.<sup>53</sup> This is not to suggest that we look to the past fall into the trap of “nostalgia mode”, longing for the supposed solid Ground of the past (which was largely solidified by the violence and exploitation of colonialism and the global slave trade), but to reinforce the proposition that architecture gains its agency,

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Waghorn, *Making Ways*, September 18, 2019, 54.

<sup>48</sup> Phillips in Unit Y and Collective, interview.

<sup>49</sup> He uses music as the site for his argument, claiming that most music production in the 21st Century (until the book was published in 2014), was entirely referential, capturing sounds and visuals of all the eras preceding it, while somehow avoiding being categorised as “retro” in a way that music that did the same in the 1980s would have. The example Fisher provides is of the Arctic Monkeys, saying that if you showed the music video of their 2005 hit “I Bet that You Look Good on the Dancefloor” to an audience from 1985, sonically and aesthetically it would feel to that audience “of that time”, and yet it existed in the 2000s, without the “retro” feeling that an Elvis-sounding track would to the 1985 audience. Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures* (John Hunt Publishing, 2014).

<sup>50</sup> de Graaf, “Architecture Is Now a Tool of Capital.”

<sup>51</sup> Niall Patrick Walsh, “How ‘Architect’ Became a Protected Title in the United States,” Archinect, 2024, accessed June 03, 2024, <https://archinect.com/features/article/150428227/how-architect-became-a-protected-title-in-the-united-states>.

<sup>52</sup> This definition and function of neoliberalism is discussed by historian Quinn Slobodian in Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Harvard university press, 2018).

<sup>53</sup> Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Zero Books, 2009).

and its capacity to imagine the future, by reconnecting to The Ground in the present—to diverse, shared knowledges and ideas—in order to imagine the future.

Some approach to reconnecting to The Ground, some search for stability, is what my practice hoped to achieve. I'm going to discuss two key avenues that appear to be an appropriate site for Ground-making but really reveal the need for different modes of gathering in architecture. The first is institutions and the second is the production of ideas. Once you postulate that architecture workers and ideas gain agency through gathering, a seemingly obvious next step is to look to the professional institutes that act as the architecture discipline's largest representative bodies as sites for potential change. They appear to have solid, well-tended Grounds and access to power and influence. I am going to briefly describe why this is a misdirection.

### Institutions are not in the Habit of Making New Ground

Professional institutes uphold the discipline through determining, teaching, and regulating its boundaries and manage the necessary functional requirements that allow the discipline to continue to be 'professionalised'—including licensing for architects and accreditation for architecture schools. They work on behalf of their nation state and therefore have some influence in shaping the mandate of architecture within the political sphere. In Aotearoa this is charged to the New Zealand Registered Architects Board (NZRAB), though the National Standard of Competency for Architects is set by the Architects Accreditation Council of Australia. These processes were largely managed by the Te Kāhui Whaihangā New Zealand Institute of Architects (NZIA) before it was splintered to form the Architects Education and Registration Board (AERB) under The Architects Act 1963. The NZIA became an incorporated society in 1992 to provide “flexibility to continue to identify and expand its range of activities and membership base”, and the NZRAB took over the regulatory functions from the AERB under the Registered Architects Act 2005.<sup>54</sup>

Professional institutions are, by definition, protectionist. Their position on what architecture is and could be is driven by its legal purview and current manifestation. Therefore, if the architecture discipline acts as a service industry for the supply chain and the production of capital, institutes become support mechanisms for the continuity of this practice, forced too to proliferate it. Even the NZIA, whose role is no longer to manage the functional demands of the profession, largely commit to maintaining and supporting the status quo. Aside from salaries, a significant portion of the budget of the NZIA goes towards running the awards program, and to the annual in:situ conference, which celebrates individual international architects.<sup>55</sup> Their other activities involve administering Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programs—which are designed based on the requirements of the National Standard of Competency for Architects—and providing contracts, practice notes, and other legal documents. They tend to stay politically 'neutral' (therefore conservative), or at least it is rare that they would take a position on key issues. These all constitute spaces rife for experimentation and change, but they largely remain slow to adapt in a context of a conventional hierarchical organisational structure, and long-held ideas about what architecture is.<sup>56</sup> There are well meaning and hardworking people in these organisations, but they likewise remain bound by preserving architecture's relationship to capital.

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<sup>54</sup> NZIA, “Who We Are,” Te Kāhui Whaihangā New Zealand Institute of Architecture, accessed October 16, 2024, <https://www.nzia.co.nz/about-us/who-we-are/>.

<sup>55</sup> In 2024, in:situ and the awards program had a combined projected budget of \$1,452,339 out of a total of 5,473,586. Te Kāhui Whaihangā New Zealand Institute of Architects, *NZIA Te Kāhui Whaihangā 2024 Budget*, [https://www.nzia.co.nz/media/wb2ctevr/2024\\_approved-budget\\_member-subscription-rates.pdf](https://www.nzia.co.nz/media/wb2ctevr/2024_approved-budget_member-subscription-rates.pdf).

<sup>56</sup> In *Notes on pre:fab* ep. 2 pre:fab speculates on how modern institutions arose from a change in social relationships as defined and regulated by the Catholic Church, in that outlawing of cousin marriage forced familial clans to broaden their reproductive horizons, thus drastically changing intersocial and economic relationships that feudalism had depended on. pre:fab ultimately concludes that the “NZIA is based on a 600 year old innovation in response to a now 1000 year old change in social relations... our professional body is a product of the abject discomfort we feel we should feel when contemplating copulating with our cousins”. pre:fab, “Notes on pre:fab: Episode 2 - Wave Equations,” pre:fab, 2024, accessed May 24, 2025, <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1rnXASnSHXpLhMAtxQUWhz4bLx7EQcLahoua0xP47lq0/>.

This is not to say that the profession and its institutions have not been taking steps towards a more generative and ethical discipline, but that they often do not have the tools to realise broader ambitions, or fear alienating their members. In 2021, the Architects Accreditation Council of Australia released the new National Standard Of Competency For Architects, which outlines the professional capabilities and performance criteria required of an architect upon graduation, at registration, and post-registration through Continuing Professional Development (CPD).<sup>57</sup> This standard forms the basis of the competencies that the NZRAB use for the accreditation of architecture schools and for requirements for registration and continued registration in Aotearoa. This new standard included many more clauses related to “environmental practice”, including:

- *Minimising the impact on, and use of, limited natural resources, recognising their inherent value, and prioritising design for a circular economy and longevity.*
- *Demonstrating an ethical, service-oriented commitment to the responsible care for Country, the environment and regenerative design.*
- *Promoting health, integrating accessibility for all, and respecting the diversity of culture, gender and experience in our communities.*
- *Understanding and integrating relevant design principles and technological applications to support the transition to a carbonneutral built environment.*<sup>58</sup>

And introduced competencies related to cultural awareness like:

- *Developing a cultural awareness to enable the integration of the values of Country within architectural services. Where possible, partner in meaningful and respectful ways with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples who are local to the place and Country on which the project is located.*<sup>59</sup>

This reflects an ambitious and aspirational picture of what the discipline of architecture could be, who it should represent, and how it should relate to the environment. It is an institutional recognition that architecture needs new Ground. But the institutionalisation and professionalisation that resulted from the concentration of power, energy, resources, and technical knowledge in bureaucracies results in tight systems of control which systemically disables “convivial modes of living”.<sup>60</sup> As architect and educator Rau Hoskins reflects, The New Zealand Institute of Architects was founded on a western model of professionalism that persists to this day and “arose from bourgeois society – the rape of the new world” making it flawed at its roots.<sup>61</sup> Physicist and Māori scientist Ocean Ripeka Mercier reflects that systems of colonial oppression resonate prolifically through built environment legislation, cultural norms, and the organisational structures of the government and the professional institutes that represent it.<sup>62</sup> And so it is difficult for academies and institutions to deliver on this radically shifted new standard of professionalism when they are constrained by systems that are highly instrumentalised, transactional, and commercialised, and demand the use of tools that run oppositional to the kinds of gathering needed to create this new Ground.

For example, the existing system for carrying out upskilling and knowledge sharing among architecture workers is through Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Te Kāhui

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<sup>57</sup> Architects Accreditation Council of Australia, “2021 National Standard of Competency for Architects,” Architects Accreditation Council of Australia, accessed July 23, 2024, <https://aaca.org.au/national-standard-of-competency-for-architects/2021nsca/>.

<sup>58</sup> Architects Accreditation Council of Australia (AACA), *National Standard of Competency for Architects (NSCA) (2021 Edition)*, Architects Accreditation Council of Australia (2021), 4, <https://aaca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021-NSCA.pdf>.

<sup>59</sup> (AACA), *National Standard of Competency for Architects (NSCA) (2021 Edition)*, 4.

<sup>60</sup> Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse*, 33.

<sup>61</sup> Rau Hoskins in Mike Barns, Tony Ward, Rau Hoskins, and Peter Maher, “Relish the Difference,” *Architecture NZ* MARCH/APR (1994): 72.

<sup>62</sup> Ocean Ripeka Mercier, “What Is Decolonisation?,” in *Bwb Texts*. (Wellington, New Zealand: Bridget Williams Books Ltd, 2020), 66.

Whaihangā administer CPD on behalf of NZRAB, events that are often webinars; presentations by companies about their products; lectures or panel discussions; or tours and parties with drinks and nibbles.<sup>63</sup> Alternative CPD provider Tuelo provides more content, but it is hosted exclusively online and doesn't include content filters for things like cultural awareness or environmental practice.<sup>64</sup> It is likely difficult for the CPD framework—designed and established for a purpose related to the ensuring of professional standards—to provide adequate support and knowledge sharing opportunities that make space for architects to shift their practices and how they relate to the world, let alone hold architects to account to these objectives, particularly when the discipline is still so entangled in a system that for the most part makes the opposite feel inevitable. In his book *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World*, academic and indigenous thinker Tyson Yunkaporta describes a need to slow down (and drastically reimagine) both community “consultation” processes and the development of community rituals. Processes that can be engaged through his “complexity agent protocols” which include Connectedness (creating bonds to each other and wider networks), Diversity (respecting across difference), Interaction (continual transfer of knowledge and resources), and Adaptation (remaining open to the constant nature of change).<sup>65</sup> It is difficult to have these kinds of conversations in disparate locations, online, passive at a desk with your camera off and Revit open on the other monitor. They take time, patience, and vulnerability. Initiating what architect and educator Peggy Deamer calls the “swerve”<sup>66</sup> to other ways of knowing, being and relating in architecture likely will only happen through some kind of external upheaval (not preferable), or through deep connection and sharing in non-competitive learning spaces that allow vulnerability and openness to the discomfort of discovery and not knowing.

The other reality for these institutions is also that in Aotearoa the legal capacity of an ‘architect’—to sign off on the consent drawings of buildings of all scales—is not even exclusively protected, in large part due to the system of Licensed Building Practitioners (LBP).<sup>67</sup> This is a challenging tension for ‘architects’, who demand their importance yet struggle to point to what differentiates them from these other architecture workers.<sup>68</sup> The registration of architects is long and complex and yet offers an exclusivity purely titular in nature. This leaves Te Kāhui Whaihangā and the NZRAB with limited scope in terms of advocating and creating professional regulatory structures that would impact on a large scale the way land is treated, the way materials are used, and the way buildings are constructed in Aotearoa. Even if they would legislate the ethical responsibilities of architecture differently to attempt to counter some of the discipline’s ties to capital, only a small subset of the construction industry would be affected, and it may make ‘architects’ even less attractive to costly developments. The real change to how materials are arranged in space

<sup>63</sup> This is regularly captured by the NZIA ‘What’s On’ page. NZIA, “What’s On,” Te Kāhui Whaihangā New Zealand Institute of Architecture, accessed July 23, 2024, <https://www.nzia.co.nz/what-s-on/>.

<sup>64</sup> teulo, “Teulo CPD Events,” teulo, accessed July 23, 2024, <https://teulo.co/events/>

<sup>65</sup> Tyson Yunkaporta, *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World* (Text Publishing, 2019).

<sup>66</sup> Peggy Deamer argues that architecture education requires “a swerve in how we prepare architects and designers to contribute to spatial and social justice.” Peggy Deamer, “Design Pedagogy: The New Architectural Studio and Its Consequences,” *Architecture\_MPS* (2020): 7.

<sup>67</sup> LBPs are “building practitioners who have been assessed as competent to carry out building work essential to the structure or weathertightness of residential buildings” in Aotearoa. Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment, “About the LBP Scheme,” Licensed Building Practitioners, accessed October 18, 2024, <https://www.lbp.govt.nz/about-us/about-the-lbp-scheme/>. However the scheme also includes three licensing classes of design work covering small scale residential to multi-storey or large scale private and public projects—the entirety of project type available to registered architects. Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment, “About the LBP Scheme.”

<sup>68</sup> In early 2023, the Ministry of Business Innovation and Environment (MBIE) began a review into the licensure of architects. The institute responded in an open letter, pointing to the expertise of architects and their technical knowledge, but without being able to point to any particular technical or conceptual capability that is unique to registered architects, or protected by the professional boundaries and legal framework. Te Kāhui Whaihangā New Zealand Institute of Architects, *Occupational Regulation Reforms in the Building and Construction Sector - Our Response to Consultation: Registered Architects* (Te Kāhui Whaihangā New Zealand Institute of Architects, 2023), [www.nzia.co.nz/media/5568448/registered-architect-act-submission-2023-final.pdf](http://www.nzia.co.nz/media/5568448/registered-architect-act-submission-2023-final.pdf).

will come from radical changes to economic policy and lending criteria as it relates to land and property, and currently the professional institutes of architecture appear to have limited capacity or willingness to engage in political discourse, regularly remaining apolitical or actively conservative.<sup>69</sup> They also provide limited spaces where the effective reimagining of relationality to land and materials—necessary precursors to organising and policy advocacy and relevant to architecture workers—can take place.

## Making The Ground with the Production of Ideas

Much of the narrative around the cultural production of architecture centres around charismatic individuals with big ideas that act as magnetic nodes on The Ground and who shift the trajectory of the discipline through these ideas. Rem Koolhaas stands out as key example. Koolhaas reframed urbanism as something existing to be theorised and revelled in; he challenged the modernist legacy, bending its logic to critique systems of capitalism, surveillance, and spectacle that shape contemporary cities; and he encouraged and practiced through an embracing of contradiction; all of which has significantly changed how architects draw, write, and research.<sup>70</sup> His 1995 book *S,M,L,XL* emerged in the moments where architecture's connection to The Ground began to dissolve, and thus it remains one of the most significant and one of the last artefacts of an era in which monoculturalism existed, still gracing the desks of architecture students when I was studying in the 2010s, and still influencing the graphic output of students and architects now, 30 years on. Koolhaas' ideas were in part so compelling because he was theorising architecture's disconnect from its Ground, and how much the built environment was being made by all these other things who and which were not architects or architecture.<sup>71</sup>

In Aotearoa some of the most significant ideators were 'The Group' who emerged in the post-war boom around the ideas and vision of architecture student Bill Wilson. The Architectural Group—known most significantly for their call for and delivery of a New Zealand modernism—started as a kind of rebellion at Auckland University College School of Architecture. A collection of second year students led by Wilson wrote a manifesto and produced a publication in 1946 calling for a shift in the imagining of architecture. Charged and political, the manifesto claimed that “architecture cannot be imposed on anybody. It can arise only out of the daily life of Everyman [sic] ... Building nice houses for nice people is not architecture,” and that “only a vital and communal architecture can seize this chance” and architects, by “forgetting petty gains and differences” must “sink [their] skills and energies in the common task.”<sup>72</sup> World War II was seen as a proof of the ultimate failings of the existing societal systems, and The Group formed as a student community, with a non-profit, non-commercial, fee-free, social and political ethos that was open to anyone.<sup>73</sup> The Group (as they came to be called), disenchanted with the beaux-arts inspired education they were receiving, turned their energies to passionately calling for a change

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<sup>69</sup> In May 2025 the NZIA announced that they have “selected and briefed an advocacy resource intended to position the role of architects with the public and to increase our engagement in central and local government”. To back up my otherwise unsubstantiated observation of the profession's lack of political advocacy and engagement, CEO Mark Abbot helpfully added that: “we are coming from a zero base, so an increase shouldn't be difficult”. Te Kāhui Whaihanga NZIA, “Te Mātāreke the Bulletin,” (NZIA 2025).

<sup>70</sup> Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* (The Monacelli Press, LLC, 2014). Office for Metropolitan Architecture, Rem Koolhaas, and Bruce Mau, *S,M,L,XL* (United States: Monacelli Press, 1995). Rem Koolhaas, *Content* (Taschen, 2004).

<sup>71</sup> Koolhaas' significant work *Delirious New York* offers an example of this in that it posed urban space as something unplanned, full of complexity, to be *theorised* by the architect rather than *produced* by the architect. While appearing to disempower the architect, it actually empowers architecture to recognise that their agency may lay elsewhere, in the spatial interpretation of urban complexity and in engaging in deep understanding of how cities work. Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*.

<sup>72</sup> The Architectural Group, “On the Necessity for Architecture,” in *Group Architects: Towards a New Zealand Architecture* (Auckland University Press, 2010), 22-23.

<sup>73</sup> Julia Gatley, *Group Architects: Towards a New Zealand Architecture* (Auckland University Press, 2010), 22.

in teaching style, outlining an agenda for the transformation of the school.<sup>74</sup> For the remainder of their years there until 1949 the students advocated for this alternative curriculum, one that would draw on the knowledge of modernism and promote the use of science and technology to deliver architecture to the “Everyman” but insisting on a locally driven response, and that beauty and standardisation were not mutually exclusive.<sup>75</sup> Meanwhile, The Group graduated from school and put their energy into developing a vernacular style that came to be one of the most influential in the history of architecture in Aotearoa.

Wilson was also in attendance at one of the early meetings of The Architectural Centre in Wellington in 1946. The Architectural Centre was established “to promote good (modern) design to the Wellington public. It also aimed to provide support to local architecture students at a time when New Zealand’s capital city did not have its own architecture school.”<sup>76</sup> It is an early, and still operational example of the development of a community of designers to operate as a support network, to share resources, and to allow the space for critical conversation around architecture. Wilson, no doubt inspired by the ongoing conversations and work of the Centre, later went on to establish the Auckland Architecture Association (AAA) with other architects and students in 1965 to “provide a common meeting Ground for architects, planners, teachers, students and graduates.”<sup>77</sup> The AAA was set up with similar community ambitions, aiming to provide a forum for “speaking on architectural and planning matters, organising exhibitions, and meeting socially for discussion.”<sup>78</sup>

The ideas of Koolhaas and Wilson gained traction because there were places to put their ideas and a culture of critical discourse—there was Ground. There were publications, debates, clubs, collectives of architects—gathering spaces—where those ideas could be nurtured, constructed, adopted, or even rejected; and, critically, there was a built environment that was being constructed for ends other than the production of capital and so their ideas could be seen and felt. In the case of The Group, there were also precedents organised collectives of architects internationally like CIAM10 who held significant sway in the political sphere and led the reconstruction of Europe after the destruction of the Second World War (for better or worse).<sup>79</sup> Their ideas may have been represented by an individual, but they could not exist without gathering, collective buy-in, and

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<sup>74</sup> Gatley, *Group Architects*, 29.

<sup>75</sup> The key impact the students’ agenda sought to achieve was a shift away from the teaching of solutions, and toward the development of an ability to solve problems using architectural tools. A call for “actual sites” and “realistic design problems” was particularly pertinent. In 1948 the student body assembled and unanimously passed a vote of “no confidence” in their training. While elements of the agenda began to play out at the school between 1949 and 1952 with evolving towards realistic design studios and greater interest in urban design, large curriculum changes did not occur until 1961. Eight years later in 1969 Allan Wild, a Group member, took over the school until 1993, and Bill Toomath, another active Group member, was head of the School of Design at Wellington Polytechnic from 1979 until 1989. Gatley, *Group Architects*, 29-33.

<sup>76</sup> Julia Gatley and Paul Walker, “John Cox, Gordon Wilson, George Porter, Al Gabites: The Architectural Centre’s Summer Schools of Design,” *Radical Pedagogies*, 2011, accessed February 15, 2021, <https://radical-pedagogies.com/search-cases/102-architectural-centres-summer-schools-design/>.

<sup>77</sup> Bill Wilson, “Auckland Architecture Association,” Auckland Architecture Association, 1965, accessed July 02, 2024, <https://www.flickr.com/people/89514661@N06/>

<sup>78</sup> Gatley, *Group Architects*, 11.

<sup>79</sup> From 1928 until 1959, the Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne (International Congress of Modern Architecture or CIAM) was a coalition of architects who organised to influence the construction of cities required after the World Wars, and to assert their views on this urban construction. Their goal was to “place the new architecture into its ‘true economic and social environment’”. They had significant influence on landscape and cities globally, and while many of their visions were noble (like allocating the best sites in the region for housing districts, requiring solar exposure minimums in houses, setting aside large swaths of land for green parks and so on), their heavy-handed approach, commitment to universal modernism as the only valid gathering site for architecture, and unwillingness to adapt to changing environments and ideals caused their own collapse (when younger members declared their lack of confidence in the original charter and splintered to form their own cohort) and create distrust of architects in the public sphere. This is a somewhat cautionary tale, but one that points to the power architects have when collectively organised. Eric Paul Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928-1960* (MIT press, 2002), 9.

cultural production by others in relation to, and in response. Their ideas and products are also necessarily collaborative, working within complex networks of people that both produce ideas and deliver the physical outcomes of those ideas. What isn't often discussed as part of this era are those who nurture The Ground and create gathering spaces for those ideas to go.

An example of a place for these ideas to go, a Ground-making gathering in Aotearoa that provided inspiration for this research, is the 2019 exhibition *Making Ways*. Kathy Waghorn and Mike Davis undertook a research project to locate, analyse and bring together different examples of 'alternative' architecture approaches from the past 50 odd years, examining their financial, social, and operational structures.<sup>80</sup> This research culminated in an exhibition which showcased four contemporary alternative practices—ĀKAU, Hatch Workshop, Makers of Architecture and Unit Y—and in the publication of a book that contextualised the exhibition within a broader history of alternative practice in Aotearoa. *Making Ways* brought these practices and their methods off the page to overlap and collaborate in real time with each other, other practitioners, and with the public through a series of events and conversations.<sup>81</sup> The exhibition was designed not to 'display' the methods of these practices but to embody them in some way, inviting visitors to engage with the processes and feelings of the work. *Making Ways* revealed The Ground by bringing alternative practices in architecture into dialogue and closer to the foreground of architecture's collective consciousness. Its temporality suggests an opportunity. Disciplinary gathering spaces like *Making Ways* create connective tissue between change-making practices and so the question becomes how to build off this Ground for *sustained* collective momentum to enact the kind of change they attempt to embody more widely. This sustained space for gathering—for reimagining architecture and the world—and the tools and methods needed to sustain it, is what I felt was missing from the architecture discipline, and, through practice, what I hoped to discover and generate.

The challenges of reconnecting architecture with its Ground presents several opportunities: discover, invent, design the tools and rituals of new modes of gathering where ideas can be nurtured; recognise that a lack of a clear monoculture makes richer interactions between a multitude of ways of being and knowing more possible; and recognise that The Ground itself is a hyperobject, we too can make hyperobjects, and that the hyperobjects of global warming and the global financial system and all those things that feel so intangible and untethered are, as Morton describes, "titans, they're not gods... they're finite, so they can be defeated".<sup>82</sup> Although all of this seems to render independent architecture workers less powerful than human-centred individual-exceptionalism might suggest, gathering as a starting point offers a return to intimacy and connection, it speaks to the ways in which all humans are bound, tethered to each other and to all other beings and things, and that while systemic impacts affect all of it, humans can affect systems them too. How to create those gatherings, nurture them, sustain them and those who make them, is a key motivation for a practice of Ground-making.

## Ground-making: A Methodology

Practice-based research is a field concerned with theorising and understanding things that are 'made' through research processes, typically in 'creative' fields like art, design, music, and architecture. Leon Van Schaik, the 'architect' of the practice-based research programme at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology explains how the research is "not 'about' architecture" in the way that "history, theory and sociology of architecture are about architecture" but rather it is about examining the making and doing of architecture to reflect on the themes that run through a body of work, speculate on where and how they emerge, gain insight into creative processes,

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<sup>80</sup> *Making Ways: Alternative Architectural Practice in Aotearoa*, ed. Kathy Waghorn and Mike Davis (Auckland: Objectspace, 2020).

<sup>81</sup> "Making Ways: Alternative Architectural Practice in Aotearoa," Objectspace, 2019, accessed June 13, 2021, <https://www.objectspace.org.nz/exhibitions/making-ways-alternative-architectural-practice-1/>.

<sup>82</sup> Morton, quoted in Laura Hudson, "At the End of the World, It's Hyperobjects All the Way Down," *Wired*. November 16 (2021).

and reveal sites of disciplinary knowledge and expertise.<sup>83</sup> Subjectivity and intersubjectivity are given more importance than more traditional research formats as practitioners describe how they “bring their own mental spaces into play” to illuminate particular ways of making.<sup>84</sup> For my own research, I embarked not only on a reflexive process to theorise a body of work, but also to develop and explore a way of practicing that could establish a practice framework for myself going forward in both commercial practice and my personal life. My practice was a search for a methodology. My intention was always to explore a practice of ways in which I, and other architecture workers, gain agency and create a context within which I would want to practice. I recognised from the beginning that while contributing to the discipline through making buildings does make Ground, the production of individual buildings by individuals alone will not grant architecture more agency in impacting broader outcomes in shared environments. For every thoughtfully designed building that engages in community processes and reflects a quest for belonging, hundreds of others sprout from The Ground to make their owners money.

In this sense my research is even less ‘about’ architecture in the way that Van Schaik describes, and more about its conceptual space of ideas and relationships—its Ground—and how to engage it. The Ground is in many ways the finishing point of this research, its conclusion, and an artefact that my practice produced. It was emergent from my practice because the more actions I took to engage in the cultural production of architecture, the more I connected people and practices, the more events I ran and so on, the more I could sense The Ground and feel its interconnectedness. I was initially interested in ‘alternative’ practice, things outside the ‘boundaries’ of the profession, but overtime I became more interested in the spaces situated across the boundaries, how disparate practices connect and overlap, how the ideas produced by the academy, companies, commercial practice, and the profession interact, repel, and exist not as isolated nodes and their in-betweens but as an interconnected array that is also interconnected to everything in existence, and I became interested how this interconnectedness can be encouraged, and how it can be *made*.

I draw a lineage of Ground-making from several schools of thought led by practitioners and academics exploring similar themes. My interest in ‘alternative’ practice led me to look at ‘alternative’ practitioners theorising their practices of exploring the ways in which architecture can perform differently with respect to the marketplace, and the new roles and rules which might emerge. In her Doctoral thesis, architect and educator Mel Dodd examines twelve years of practice across work with muf architecture/art and within the academy.<sup>85</sup> Dodd is similarly motivated to create open, experimental spaces; reveal collaborative modes of working; recognise her position within the system but try to imagine new ways outside of it; and suggest that the architecture discipline could be more ambivalent. She theorises her work through five new ‘roles’ she could recognise in her practice, reflecting the multiplicity of architecture and challenging the discipline’s boundaries. Dodd’s practice and thesis attempt to occupy the space between architecture as a profession and architecture as it is experienced by the users, “allowing the lived to intrude on the built”.<sup>86</sup>

Kathy Waghorn, and architect and educator Anthony Hoete take a similar approach. Waghorn proposes that architecture might be expanded through artistic practices that engage more critically with complexities of place. Key tactics of practice are revealed and performed through the “*mode of an experimental self*.”<sup>87</sup> In response to Grierson’s position on the formation of the ‘self’ through practice-based research, Waghorn purports that the activation of the *experimental self* “is a means of escaping a narrow definition of architectural practice attendant only to form

<sup>83</sup> Leon van Schaik, “Practice Makes Perfect,” *The Architectural Review* 234, no. 1400 (Oct) (2013): 82.

<sup>84</sup> Leon van Schaik, “Spanning Continuums: Addressing the Separation of Research and Practice in Architecture,” *Architectural Design* 89, no. 3 (2019): 45.

<sup>85</sup> Melanie Dodd, “Between the Lived and the Built: Foregrounding the User in Design for the Public Realm” (2011).

<sup>86</sup> Dodd, “Between the Lived and the Built,” 18.

<sup>87</sup> Kathy E Waghorn, “The Practice of Feeling for Place: A Compendium for an Expanded Architecture” (RMIT University, 2017), 44.

and the exigencies of the market.”<sup>88</sup> The research is interested in forms of ‘agency’ that bring ideas and stories of place together, and how these might expand architecture. In this there is a feeling that resonates with my research that agency might be found in a deeper connection to place—or Ground—and its narratives. Hoete similarly explores where architecture might regain its agency, positing that the discipline is a complex field of rules, guidelines, and legislation which the architect has little control over.<sup>89</sup> He argues that other tactics and strategies of ‘Gameplay’, through manipulated information, playing with data, and exploring what forms of ‘play’ might exist for architecture might assert architects as more effective players, and allow more innovative practice.<sup>90</sup> Ideas of agency and where they might lie connects these practices to a practice of Ground-making. Ground-making is both a practice of exploring other ways of being an architect, like these examples and it builds on them to posit the importance of creating and nurturing the connective tissue between these types of practices, spaces for knowledge sharing and in which others may form or discover their own ‘alternative’ practices. It is a role of curation and organisation of gatherings, centring these spaces as catalysts for cultural production and change.

In its emphasis on gathering, Ground-making finds kinship with others who similarly forefront relationality and the ‘ecology’ of practices that sustain a discipline. Philosopher Isabelle Stengers suggests that different modes of thinking and acting—practices—can be thought of as living entities that are constantly adapting and responding to interactions within a complex field of actors. This “terrain” is the habitat of operation, representing a changing landscape of old and emergent ideas that are deeply connected and whose recognition can reveal new modes of practice, resistance, challenge and collaboration.<sup>91</sup> Economic geographers JK Gibson-Graham likewise see networks as a way to enable the collective performing of alternatives to capitalism, and discuss how it is the network that allows the “productive understanding of diverse economies” and offers a way to build more “ethical and ecological relationships”.<sup>92</sup> A Ground-making practice of nurturing this ecology-network reflects an interest not only in the function of the habitat alone, but in what sustains its production and effectiveness in impacting tangible things in the world, the pre-conditions that make it fertile.

Escobar’s approach here is to look specifically at how design skills can contribute to enabling communal agency that underlie the “Life Projects” and transition visions of Afrodescendant, indigenous, and marginalized urban groups in Latin America.<sup>93</sup> He proposes the need for a complete ontological shift towards relational ways of being in an with the world. Ground-making likewise seeks architectural ways of being and knowing that engage in relational, material realities and a concern with the physical Ground. This is about both engaging with big systems of material and capital flows and working with the hyper-local, believing in the power of small, local efforts to reimagine systems and build or empower communities with the skills to navigate change and adversity. David Turnbull claims that “all knowledge is inherently local,” and that collective bodies of knowledge lie in “the work involved in creating assemblages from the “motley” of differing practices, instrumentation, theories and people.”<sup>94</sup> Exploring how local knowledge is shared and traded is a key interest of this research, and how through that trade the ‘assemblage’ into a collective knowledge base can be catalysed. Local movements critically ground the theoretical need for global system change in the action of “performing new worlds”, a phrase frequently used by Gibson-Graham.<sup>95</sup> “Performing” becomes an ontological framework

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<sup>88</sup> Waghorn, “The Practice of Feeling for Place: A Compendium for an Expanded Architecture,” 46.

<sup>89</sup> Anthony Hoete, “Game of Architecture” (RMIT University, 2015).

<sup>90</sup> Hoete, “Game of Architecture.”

<sup>91</sup> Isabelle Stengers, “Introductory Notes on an Ecology of Practices,” *Cultural Studies Review* 11, no. 1 (2005): 185.

<sup>92</sup> Community Economies Research Network, “Ce Research Network (CERN),” Community Economies, accessed September 29, 2021, <https://www.communityeconomies.org/about/ce-research-network-cern>.

<sup>93</sup> Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse*, 9.

<sup>94</sup> David Turnbull, “Local Knowledge and Comparative Scientific Traditions,” *Knowledge and Policy* 6, no. 3 (1993): 30.

<sup>95</sup> Gibson-Graham, “Diverse Economies.”

within which to understand the act of practicing re-imaginings of economies that sit outside of capitalism. The key transition here is the move from ‘imagining’ new worlds, to ‘performing’ new worlds, a transition into action, testing and experimenting with modes of operation that rethink the discipline and the system it sits within. Performing makes ideas material.

Ground-making is the overarching methodology of my practice that encompasses the key approaches of Traversing the Ground, School-making, Trouble-making, Creating Community Infrastructures, and the tactics and methods they enact. Ground-making is an organisational practice of creating gatherings that allow people to develop systems for collaboration; share, develop and action ideas; and relate to each other and the world. It explores, tests, and discovers the pre-conditions needed for those spaces to be sustained. It is *a conscious engagement with revealing The Ground*, a making of conceptual spaces that can manifest as shared collective, physical realities. It suggests that if we set up the conditions to consciously change something on The Ground, we might also change something in the world. My body of work is represented by an interconnected array of people and practices, a series of actions and activities that developed and formed those relationships, and of course, all the material stuff that emerged from those interactions.

I want to use three metaphors to better explain how I understand a practice of Ground-making.

The first involves re-imagining The Ground as a giant collection of stuff in space—beings, ideas, information, etc—that has a form which cannot be understood as a whole. It could be a big field, or plane, or sphere, or a bending universal infinity where if you go straight long enough you end up where you were,<sup>96</sup> but however you imagine it, it is unknowable in its totality. One of the practices of Ground-making can be compared to using a LIDAR laser scanner to reveal parts of The Ground as if to produce a point cloud of information. Each action of the research is a way to shine a light on an area of The Ground, think about where it is, what it is connected to and what form it takes. The Night School (TNS) is a key example of this in practice as it sought to highlight methods for thinking and practising architecture and continually design and redesign the framework through which to explore them. Because looking is also making, the event also acts as the design of the type of laser through which you view The Ground—akin to biologist and philosopher Donna Haraway’s concept of how “what ideas you use to think other ideas with” matters.<sup>97</sup> Traversing the Ground provides the fodder for the kinds of lasers that are out there, and what other kinds of lasers might prove useful. Ground-making is the design of these LIDAR scanners and the interpretation of what they reveal. It lights up an area of Ground, creates new Ground around the scanner/event/action, and generates a connection between them. This metaphor is useful for acknowledging that while I carried out relatively small and disparate actions, they began to sense the nature of The Ground, its shape and feeling, and through firing lasers to reveal the surface, allow others to see and sense The Ground too.

The second metaphor is comparing a practice of Ground-making to western science’s idea of a laboratory. In this metaphor a laboratory is understood as the space in which to develop instruments that allow a person to see, understand, or experience something that they previously couldn’t, or that can’t be experienced directly. It acknowledges that the world exists, and we know it is real, but we can only experience it through our limited sensory perceptions, and so to better understand the existence of an atom (for example), we need tools that sense the world in a manner impossible to humans. A Ground-making practice attempts to construct these tools, using material reorganisation and making (of things, social interactions, and ideas) to create an affect that reveals something about The Ground. pre:fab’s projects like #prefab-conference-160 and #prefab-for-president-180, attempted to reveal things foundational to Te Kāhui Whaihangā and the professional systems of architecture that remain otherwise obscured by its dominance and dominant projection of architecture on The Ground. The laboratory allows for the conjuring of The Ground through different means. Ground-making then is also a practice of using existing tools in novel ways and developing new tools that reveal things about architecture that were

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<sup>96</sup> Modest Mouse, “3rd Planet,” in *The Moon & Antarctica* (Epic Records, 2000), CD.

<sup>97</sup> Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Duke University Press, 2016).

otherwise imperceptible and making a space in which these tools can be explored collaboratively.

The third metaphor looks less at revealing The Ground and making tools to interpret it and more to the connective tissue that binds The Ground and creates relationality between all things that produce organic, seemingly inevitable, and sometimes unexpected outcomes. It is to imagine The Ground like land, a garden, an ‘untamed’ field with interacting flora and fauna and complex ecosystems. We can begin to consider how humans interact with that land and those others that inhabit it and what effect it has on those ecosystems. Things live, grow, emerge, die, compost, are gated and tilled, fertilised, take different forms, and are fundamentally dependent on a vast network of hidden connectivity that exists below the surface of The Ground. Ground-making engages with this space below the surface, it creates and nurtures the threads that bind diverse ways of thinking and being, and by doing so makes The Ground more solid and more fertile. The Ground-maker thinks about their role in a complex ecosystem, not imposing ideas or ways of being but identifying patterns, thinking about where they are in those patterns, and creating conditions for regeneration within a system that they are dependent on, and likewise depends on them. Ground-making in this sense is both about watering the flowers (if they need it), nurturing the seedlings, and especially working with the soil and rhizomes within it that foster interaction and relationships above the surface. Everything makes The Ground, and so everything that makes The Ground also has some relationship to this mycelium-like network in the soil, whether it be to cut ties to others, or to cluster and reinforce connections. Ground-making is about strengthening the connective tissue and enacting novel collaborations between things on The Ground.

Ground-making is not centred on any particular architectural approach or practice, but on making the kind of fertile Ground in which diverse ideas and practices can mix and be understood across their similarities and differences. This includes thinking with other species, thinking with ecologies, thinking with spirits and intangible things. It is about the work necessary to nurture and care for the preliminary space *before* action for change. It lights up The Grounds of others; it makes tools to reveal things otherwise imperceptible; it creates rhizomatic connections across places, people, species, and ideas; and it fertilises this space with ideas, love, deep care, and empathy. All of this fundamentally depends on gathering together on The Ground, in new and ancient ways, but first requires a Traverse of The Ground, a venture out onto the field to better understand why it feels the way it does, and how and where to make it.

## Practice Approach: Traversing the Ground

The Ground itself is a hyperobject that cannot be understood in its completeness and can only be understood through engaging with parts of it, examining how it is indexed, and discovering connections—the relationality—between apparently disparate things. Thus, to feel more connected to The Ground, to imagine and design spaces for ideas to go, to think and organise for what is needed, requires a traverse through and beyond the architecture discipline. Traversing the Ground is the initiating practice approach in a methodological exploration of Ground-making. It is the first step to finding places and ways to gather.

Traversing the Ground takes an approach akin to architectural theorist Hélène Frichot’s *Dirty Theory*, which suggests that new worlds are discovered in the dirt, the things under your feet and your fingernails, unexpected overlaps in disciplines and knowledge types, “pamphlets, brochures, maps and postcards, snatches of conversation and grabs of social media feed”.<sup>98</sup> Traversing the Ground involves turning over the top soil, digging a little, taste-testing mystery fruits, pulling out weeds and then taking them seriously, and navigating The Ground with curiosity and openness. In practice this meant reading across architectural discourse and beyond it; harvesting ideas from novels and poetry; going to copious events; following architecture meme pages; taking seriously feedback on my work from those outside like discipline (like my mum, for example); watching TV; working as an architectural worker; teaching; subscribing to newsletters;

<sup>98</sup> Frichot, *Dirty Theory: Troubling Architecture*, 5.

writing opinion pieces; agreeing to critique student projects; saying yes to opportunities that would allow me to better understand The Ground of architecture and to contribute to it;<sup>99</sup> talking to students, workers, organisers, bosses, and so on; and examining my own subjectivity against all these inputs to better understand where architectural culture was being produced and where opportunities lay for making change. Ground Traversing is thus an understanding of The Ground through an embodied practice of being there, being together with others, and being in constant conversation with The Ground and those on it. Ground is also made by Traversing it, in moving towards or away from different sites of gathering and discovering novel or otherwise unrevealed connections. It started as a way to become more cognisant of what was happening on The Ground of architecture in Aotearoa, but it remains as a critical tactic for meeting people, learning about new practices, connecting across different gathering spaces, and understanding where Ground could be made.

Traversing the Ground also helps to reveal structural systems and the avenues that might allow architecture workers to action their agency for change. Frichot argues that dirt draws attention to “the complex environmental background that is composed of vast networks of material flows”.<sup>100</sup> Being unafraid of a little dirt on The Ground, is one tactic for experiencing it more closely and finding unexpected interactions, connections, and foundations. The dirt starts to point to what systems hold up parts of the architectural Ground that are often invisible or incomprehensible. The dirt can be a byproduct and an index of hyperobjects.<sup>101</sup> Part of Morton’s argument is that hyperobjects cannot be understood or reckoned with in their completeness as objects, and that the particular human-made hyperobjects that dominate cultural discourse, and yet regularly remain invisible, slippery, and untethered, have already “brought about the end of the world”.<sup>102</sup> The dirt evidences the existence of these hyperobjects and, even if they are invisible, it starts to reveal them to us. Traversing the Ground and engaging with the dirt can be an attempt to bring aspects of these hyperobjects into focus, particularly in their relationship to the discipline of architecture, which is intimately connected to complex material flows and economic systems.

Traversing the Ground is an ongoing process that continually finds new ideas, theories, and dirt and adds them to my subjective perspective of The Ground. Haraway’s idea of ‘compost’ provides fertile soil for this approach—nothing is ‘waste’—everything has something to contribute and ideas stack and biodegrade and get eaten by worms and take on new forms and “require each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations” on the hot compost piles.<sup>103</sup> The things that dominate The Ground, resonate, or pique my interest play out on the page in this document (in a conversational, and somewhat diagrammatic way: mixing, interacting, fertilising, and composting to form a kind of meta-ground for theory to emerge) and were used to inform the actions of the practice. Above I have collated and conversed with some of the conditions that have influenced my understanding of architecture and Ground-making and discussed the aspects of my Traverse that make me feel uneasy, untethered, specifically in relation to architecture in Aotearoa. They should be understood as ingredients that aggregate and fertilise to influence the series of key #definitions-32, and permeate the thinking across my practice, its outcomes, and its theorisation.

Traversing the Ground is critical in a practice of Ground-making, because it allows for a deeper understanding of what is out there and where the gaps are. It is both foundational to imagining new ways of gathering in architecture, and something that should be ongoing for longevity and collective momentum. Traversing the Ground with openness could resist the rigidity

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<sup>99</sup> Editing an architecture publication for Objectspace, reviewing architecture events, co-authoring a book on architecture education etc.

<sup>100</sup> Frichot, *Dirty Theory: Troubling Architecture*, 15.

<sup>101</sup> As an example, reality television offers an often unapologetic index of architecture’s Ground in its clear emphasis on high-end design and property as a commodity to be manipulated, renovated, gussied up for wealth generation through shows like *The Block*, *New Zealand’s Best Homes*, *House Hunt*, etc, to be discussed in ‘Chapter Two—Disciplinary Gathering’.

<sup>102</sup> Morton, “Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World.”

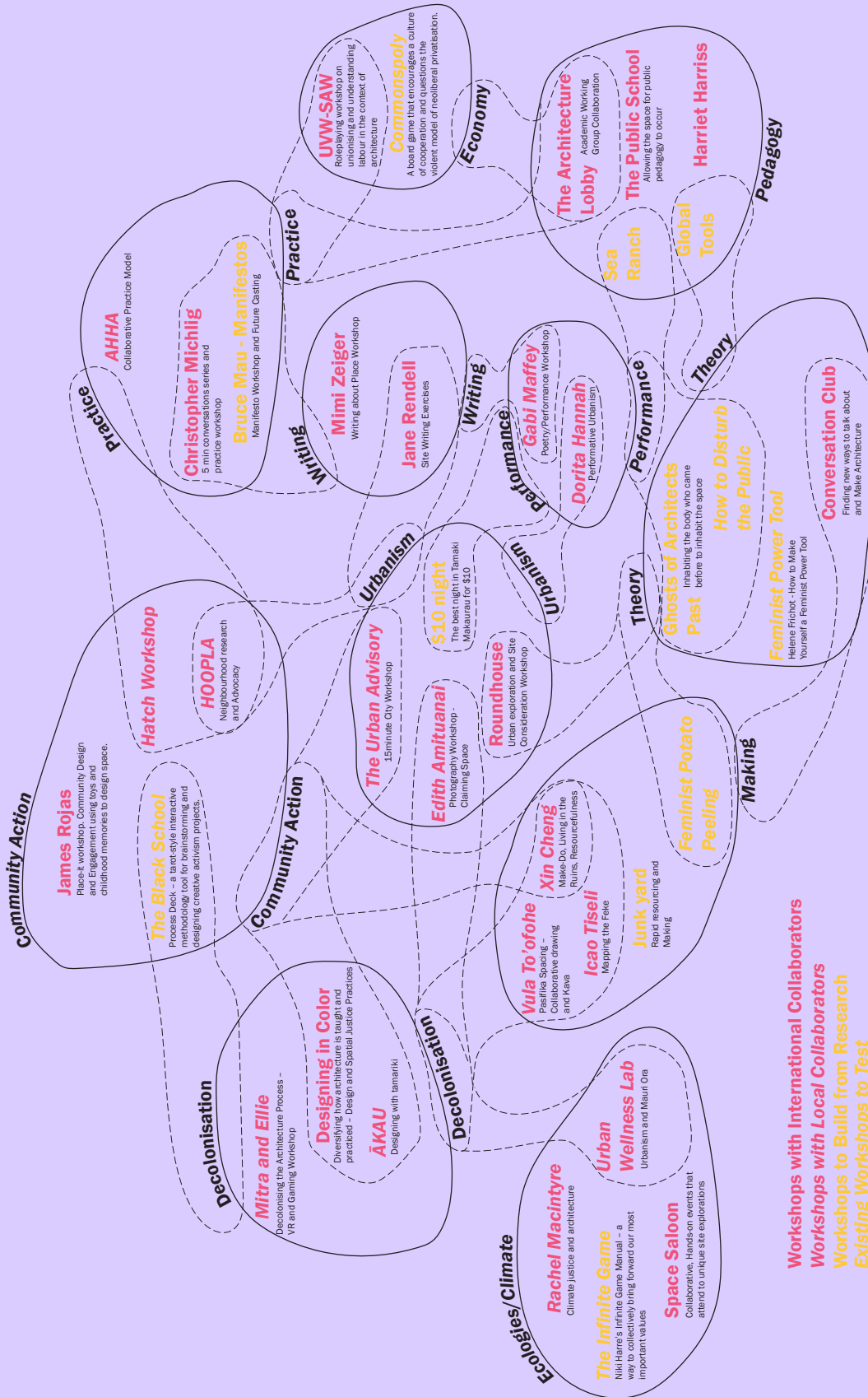
<sup>103</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 4.

of institutional boundaries, keeping the site of architecture open to novel configurations and definitions and maintaining relevance and nimbleness; it can reveal what agency architecture has now and what is needed to action it; it could reveal underlying rhizomatic networks and where they might need strengthening; it demands a lifting of the top soil to reveal and examine structures and systems below their surface manifestations; and it could disrupt fixed ideas, hierarchies, and approaches to gathering through the discovery of other ways of being and knowing, other rituals. It is a powerful practice approach in the context of collective gathering because it is something that can be engaged by an individual but is still fundamentally relational: anyone can venture out on to The Ground at any time and return to the origin point with renewed insight, tools, and tactics.

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This chapter presents my theory of The Ground: a conceptual and relational idea space that is continuously being made and remade by the interaction of knowledges, people, practices, systems, and things visible and invisible. I discuss how the architecture discipline's entanglement with systems of capital, dematerialisation, and exploitation make it difficult for architecture workers to connect to The Ground and have agency in how it manifests physically in the built environment. I suggest that reconnection to The Ground is less likely through institutional pathways or through the contribution and/or valorisation of individual ideas and practices, but instead through shared and sustained gathering. Drawing on a series of metaphors that imagine the space of The Ground, a methodology of Ground-making is framed as a means to create the pre-conditions for gathering, reveal The Ground, and offer tools and strategies for maintaining those gatherings for collective momentum and increased agency. Finally, the chapter introduces the first practice approach in the methodological framework of Ground-making, suggesting that by 'Traversing the Ground'—through disciplinary and interdisciplinary exploration, critique, being out and in the world—architecture workers can become more aware and thus active in the shaping of the discipline, and illuminate and strengthen connective tissues between disparate ideas and practices. Reconnecting to The Ground thus becomes a critical condition in reimagining the role of the architect, not just in the making of buildings, but as an agent with agency to shape social, material, political, and ecological systems.

The following chapter, 'Chapter Two—Disciplinary Gathering', is a Traverse across The Ground. It is a recognition that the cultural production of architecture and its Ground is created, experienced, theorised, and strengthened most profoundly in and by its gathering sites. The chapter will make this traverse to discover where Ground-making might have existed in the history of architecture in Aotearoa, and what insights this might reveal for a practice of Ground-making and the making or remaking of architecture's gathering sites.

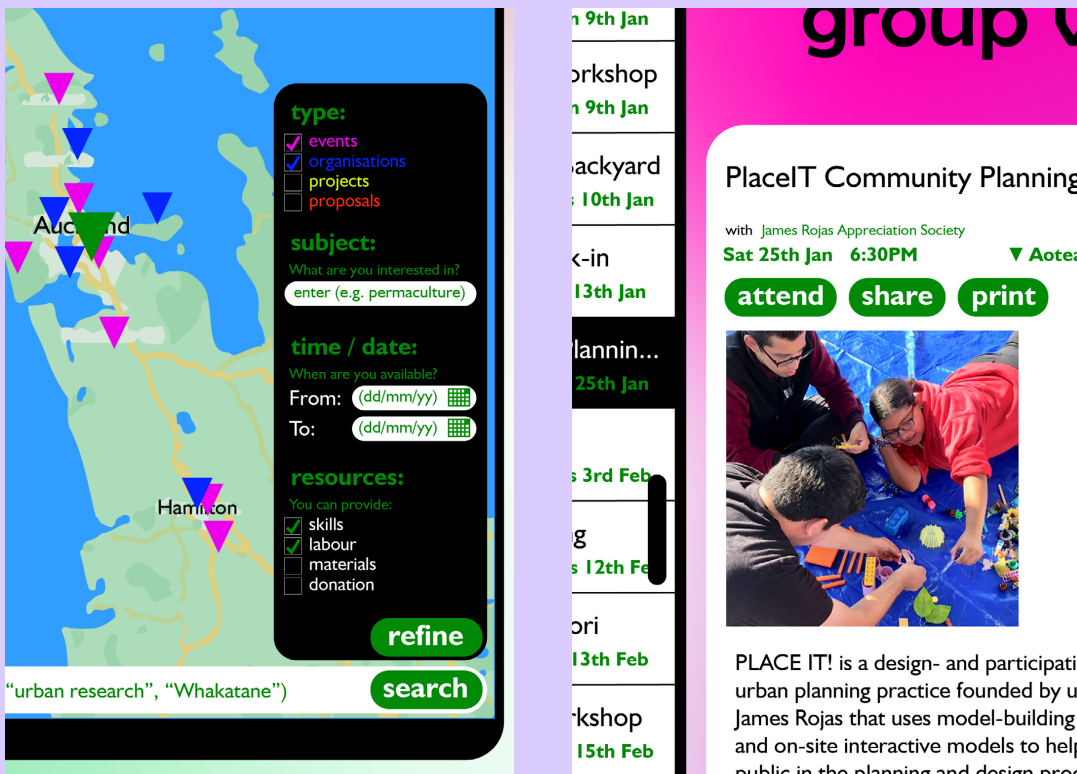
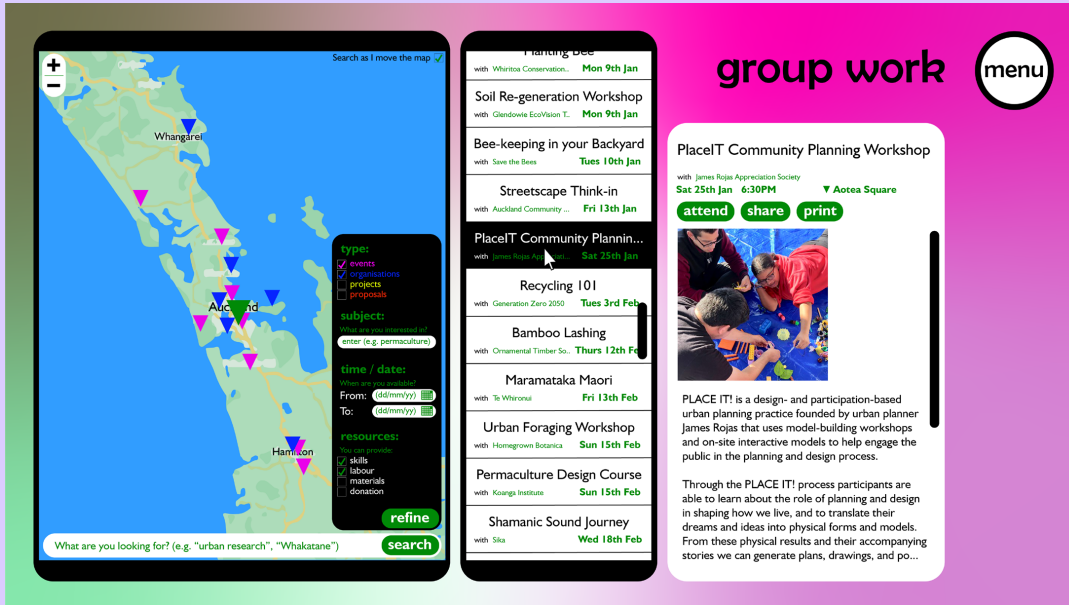


2021  
 Diagramming an ecology of practices that could be engaged for workshops with The Night School or other parts of the research.  
 Figure 1.5: Tessa Forde, *Practice Ecology Diagram*, 2021, graphic.

	MLA	WUHO	WUHO	MLA
	WEEK 2 - PRACTICE: How can we to			
	FRI June 22	SAT June 23	SUN June 24	MON June 25
	TUES June 26			
10am-1pm MORNING SESSION 3 HRS	<p>Title: <b>Beyond Contextualism</b> By: <b>White Architektur</b>, Guest Place: <b>MLA</b> Type: <b>Presentation + Workshop</b> Public/semi-public/privavte: <b>Private</b> No. of expected ppl: <b>30</b> Max-capacity:- Required equipment: <b>projector, internet, tables</b> Time: <b>10-12</b> Sessions: 3/3</p>	<p>Title: <b>Spaces of Community Learning</b> By: <b>Lukas WinklerPrins</b>, Guest Place: <b>WUHO</b> Type: <b>Presentation + Workshop</b> Public/semi-public/privavte: <b>Private</b> No. of expected ppl: <b>30</b> Max-capacity:- Required equipment: <b>projector, computer, indiv. writing space, group discussion space</b> Sessions: 1/1</p>	<p><i>Libertarian Utopia Seasteading</i></p>	<p>Title: <b>Collegia of Propoganda</b> By: <b>Melissa J. Frost</b>, Participant Place: <b>MLA</b> Type: <b>Workshop</b> Public/semi-public/privavte: <b>Private</b> No. of expected ppl: <b>30</b> Required equipment: <b>projector, internet, printer</b> Sessions: 1/2</p>
1pm - 3pm LUNCH  (lunchtime lecture/ discussion 1.30-2.30pm) 1 HR	LUNCH BREAK	LUNCH BREAK	<p>Title: <b>Alternative Forms of Practice</b> By: <b>Architecture Lobby - LA Chapter - Guests</b> Place: <b>WUHO</b> Type: <b>Presentation + Workshop</b> Public/semi-public/privavte: <b>Private</b> No. of expected ppl: <b>30</b> Max capacity: Required equipment: <b>projector, multiple group discussion space</b> Sessions: 1/1</p>	<p>Title: <b>People for the Preservation of Unremarkable Photographs [PPuP]</b> By: <b>Joe Moore</b>, Participant Place: <b>MLA</b> Type: <b>Workshop</b> Public/semi-public/privavte: <b>Private</b> No. of expected ppl: <b>30</b> Required equipment: <b>projector, internet</b> Sessions: 1/4</p>
3:30pm - 5:30pm AFTERNOON SESSION 2 HRS	<p>Title: <b>Defining the 'User'</b> By: <b>Elisha Cohen</b> Place: <b>MLA</b> Type: <b>Presentation + Workshop</b> Public/semi-public/privavte: <b>Private</b> No. of expected ppl: <b>30</b> Required equipment: <b>projector, computer, butcher paper, post its, pens</b> Sessions: 1/1</p>	Fundraising Workshop		<p>Title: <b>WUHO Charette</b> Place: <b>WUHO</b> Type: <b>Workshop</b> Public/semi-public/privavte: <b>Private</b> No. of expected ppl: <b>30</b> Required equipment:- Req. Equip.: <b>tables, trace, floorplan of WUHO, brief</b> Sessions: 1/1</p>
6.30pm - 8.30pm POST-WORK EVENING SESSION 2 HRS	Evening walk with Ken - Details to follow	Night hike?	<p>Title: <b>Conversation Club - Interview / Confessional</b> By: <b>Eleanor Tullock, Simon Glaister, Dan Schulz - Participants</b> Place: <b>casual, easy to chat (TBD)</b> Type: <b>Discussion + Dinner</b> Public/semi-public/privavte: <b>Private</b> No. of expected ppl: <b>20</b> Required equipment: <b>tables</b> Sessions: 2/6</p>	PETER CONFIRMED WUHO
<b>ATTENDANCE</b>				
LC			fly out 20:30	
EC				
TF				
KA	6 hrs working		flight out 8:50 am	
# of participants				
9pm - 11pm - FUN				
HOUSING				
<b>LEGE ND</b>				
negotiated by LC	Conference on Architecture 2018 - NYC			
negotiated by EC	BY Na			
negotiated by KA				
negotiated by TF				
FSA SUMMER 2018 EVENTS - need to seek out cool venues / drinks and catering, etc				

2018  
The Free School of Architecture was organised remotely through an online spreadsheet consisting of task allocation and the scheduling of over 70 workshops across six weeks.  
Figures 1.1-1.2: FSA, *FSA Spreadsheet Schedule*, 2018, spreadsheet. Courtesy of FSA Organisers.

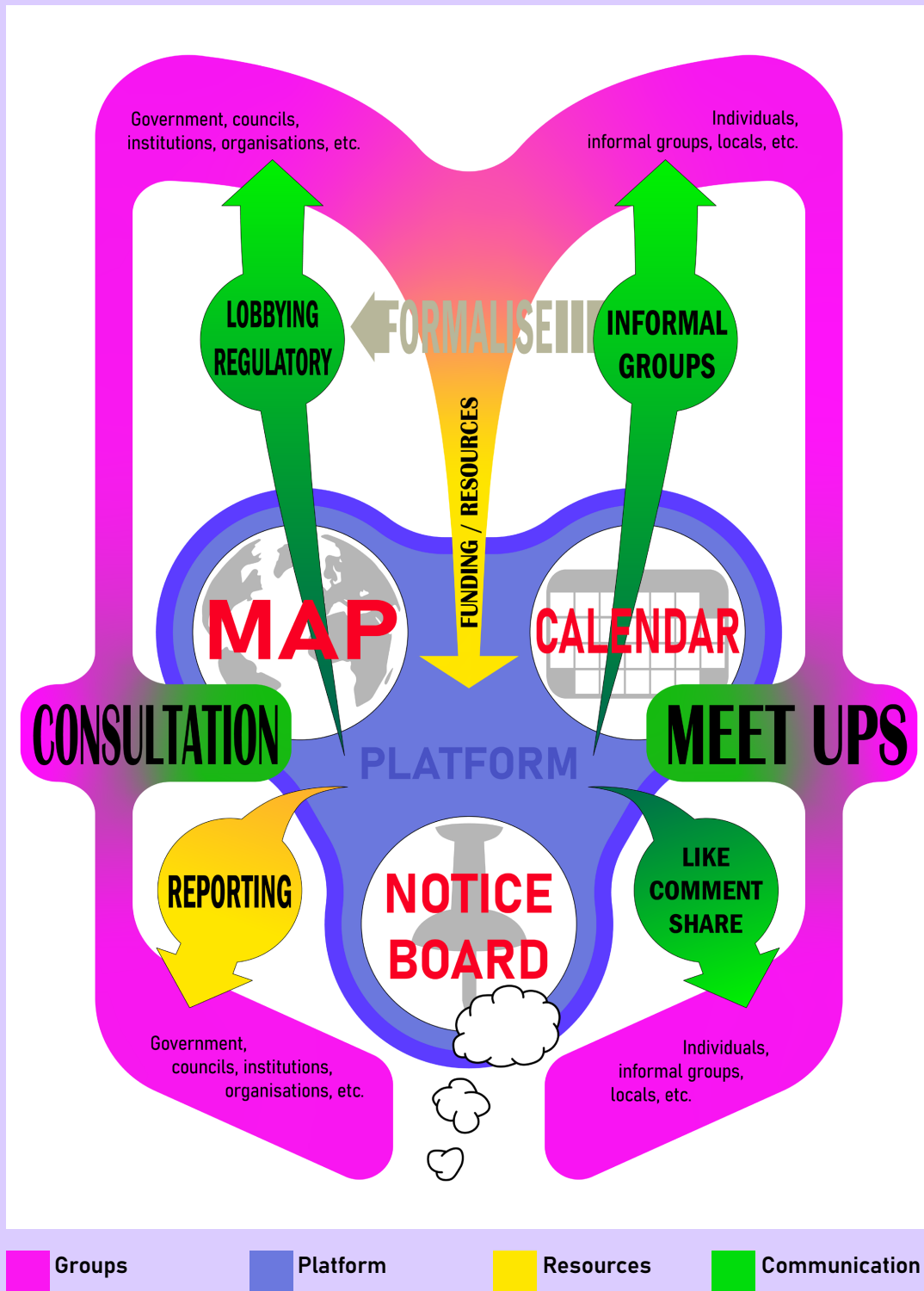
JUNE/JULY - PHASE 2				
I ourselves to raise objection and make change? What are the different ways of getting things done?				
WED	THUR/ LA FORUM TAKEOVER	FRI	SAT	SUN
June 27	June 28	June 29	June 30	July 1
<p>Title: <b>Forget Architecture - Practice at Play</b>                      By: <b>Eric Baldwin, Participant</b>                      Place: <b>WUHO (?)</b>                      Type: <b>Workshop</b>                      Public/semi-public/privavte: <b>Private</b>                      No. of expected ppl: <b>30</b>                      Required equipment: <b>projector</b>                      Sessions: <b>1/3</b>                      Time: <b>9 am - 12:00</b></p>	<p>Title: <b>Collegia of Propoganda</b>                      By: <b>Melissa J. Frost</b>                      Place: <b>WUHO</b>                      Type: <b>Workshop</b>                      Public/semi-public/privavte: <b>Private</b>                      No. of expected ppl: <b>30</b>                      Required equipment: <b>projector, internet, printer</b>                      Sessions: <b>2/2</b></p>	<p>Title: <b>Forget Architecture - Practice at Play</b>                      By: <b>Eric Baldwin, Participant</b>                      Place: <b>WUHO (?)</b>                      Type: <b>Workshop</b>                      Public/semi-public/privavte: <b>Private</b>                      No. of expected ppl: <b>30</b>                      Required equipment: <b>projector</b>                      Sessions: <b>2/3</b>                      Time: <b>9 am - 12:00</b></p>	<p>Yunhee Min Gallery Tour follow up with confirmation of times and schedule (Assume Culver City)</p>	<p>Title: <b>Forget Architecture - Practice at Play</b>                      By: <b>Eric Baldwin, Participant</b>                      Place: <b>WUHO (?)</b>                      Type: <b>Workshop</b>                      Public/semi-public/privavte: <b>Private</b>                      No. of expected ppl: <b>30</b>                      Required equipment: <b>projector</b>                      Sessions: <b>3/3</b>                      Time: <b>9 am - 12:00</b></p>
<p>Title: <b>Site Visit with Bestor Architects</b>                      By: <b>Barbara Bestor of Bestor Architects</b>                      Place: <b>Bestor Architects - 2030 Hyperion Ave</b>                      Type: <b>Presentation + Discussion</b>                      Public/semi-public/privavte: <b>Private</b>                      No. of expected ppl: <b>20</b>                      Required equipment: <b>transportation</b>                      Sessions: <b>1/1</b></p>	<p>LUNCH</p> <p>FSA FLASH (1/5) (editorial meeting)</p>	<p>LUNCH</p>		<p>JAMES ROJAS walk lunch workshop - WUHO</p>
<p>Title: <b>Eco-House</b>                      Place: <b>Michael Tessler's Prototype - Mount Washington</b>                      Type: <b>Site Visit</b>                      Public/semi-public/privavte: <b>Private</b>                      No. of expected ppl: <b>30</b>                      Required equipment: <b>transportation</b>                      Sessions: <b>1/1</b></p>	<p>Title: <b>How to Start an Architectural Practice</b>                      By: <b>see arch. - Sarah Ebner and Michael Tessler, moderated by Karina Andreeva</b>                      Place: <b>WUHO</b>                      Type: <b>interview/conversation</b>                      Public/semi-public/privavte: <b>Private</b>                      # Exp.ppl: <b>30</b>                      Req. equip.: <b>projector</b>                      Sessions: <b>1/1</b></p>	<p>Title: <b>Towards Grumpy Futures: How our visual and verbal aesthetic has us building Dystopia.</b>                      By: <b>Autodesk - Radha Mistry, Guest</b>                      Place: <b>WUHO</b>                      Type: <b>Presentation</b>                      Public/semi-public/privavte: <b>Private</b>                      # Exp.ppl: <b>30</b>                      Req. equip.: <b>projector</b>                      Sessions: <b>1/1</b>                      Time: <b>4:00 pm</b></p>		
			4-5:30 Press Preview	
<p>Title: <b>FSA Check-In</b>                      Place: <b>Phillipe's (1001 N. Alameda)</b>                      Type: <b>Discussion</b>                      Public/semi-public/privavte: <b>Private</b>                      No. of expected ppl: <b>20</b>                      Required equipment: <b>Bring: notebooks/mtg. min</b>                      Sessions: <b>Weekly Weds</b>                      Time: <b>5:30, direct from eco house</b></p>	<p>Title: <b>LACCLA @ Libros Schmbros</b>                      By: <b>The Los Angeles Center for Community Law and action</b>                      Place: <b>Libros Schmbros</b>                      Type: <b>Discussion</b>                      Public/semi-public/private: <b>Semi-Public (TBD)</b>                      No. of expected ppl: <b>30</b>                      Required equipment: <b>TBD</b>                      1/1</p>	<p>Title: <b>Happy Hour with Synthesis DNA</b>                      By: <b>Synthesis DNA, Curious Minds LA, FreelandBuck - Guests</b>                      Place: <b>Synthesis DNA Rooftop 724 South Spring Street, Suite 1101</b>                      Type: <b>Presentation + Discussion + Drinks</b>                      Public/semi-public/privavte: <b>Private</b>                      No. of expected ppl: <b>20</b>                      Required equipment: <b>N/A - they will provide wine and snacks, us to provide beer, soft drinks, additional snacks if possible</b>                      Sessions: <b>1/1</b></p>	<p>6-9 pm</p> <p>SATURDAY DEBATE SERIES                      FSA x LAF COLLABORATION                      LAUNCH @ WUHO</p> <p>LAUNCH PARTY w/ LA Forum Newsletter</p>	<p>Title: <b>Conversation Club - Trial</b>                      By: <b>Eleanor Tullock, Simon Glaister, Dan Schulz - Participants</b>                      Place: <b>WUHO</b>                      Type: <b>Discussion + Dinner</b>                      Public/semi-public/privavte: <b>Private</b>                      No. of expected ppl: <b>20</b>                      Required equipment: <b>tables</b>                      Sessions: <b>3/6</b></p>
fly in 3:53 pm	Sarah Staying at House	Sarah Staying at House	Sarah Staying at House	Sarah Staying at House
	Sarah Staying at House	Sarah Staying at House	Sarah Staying at House	Sarah Staying at House
we can enter WUHO from here				



## group work 2021

December 2021  
 Simon Glaister, Leonard Hobbins, and myself pitch an online-based platform for community gathering, resource sourcing, and development to AUT's business startup competition - X Challenge.

Figure 1.3: Groupwork, *Groupwork Platform app mockup*, 2021, graphic. Courtesy of Groupwork.



group work 2021

Figure 1.4: Groupwork, *Groupwork Platform Diagram*, 2021, graphic. Courtesy of Groupwork.

## Chapter Two

# *Disciplinary Gathering*

Foregrounding Gathering in a History of  
Architecture in Aotearoa

Through the process of my practice, through making events, schools, actions, and collectives, and through engaging with a number of existing platforms for these in Aotearoa, I identified a specific disciplinary lineage of gathering in architecture which I term ‘Disciplinary Gathering’. This is made up of practices that intentionally or otherwise have engaged in ways of doing architecture that have a critical relationship to diverse forms of being together. The most visible of this gathering happens within commercial practice and the professional and academic institutions that support it, but The Ground of architecture includes other forms of gathering—clubs and collectives, publications, event series, protests etc.—that have the capacity to affect change. They often emerge to fill gaps in the services, resources, and ideologies provided by professional bodies and institutes, and/or to pull the discipline in a different direction. They can be reactionary, nimble, small but effective; they can be to support groups, focused on a particular problem, advocating for an alternative pathway, actively protesting; they can be formal, informal, or makeshift; and they can be short lived or long-standing—often becoming institutionalised, or absorbed by larger disciplinary bodies. This gathering can also be subconscious: it can manifest as ideas that react and respond to each other or even cling together to form dominant ideologies. Often these ideas are represented by a charismatic individual, but they generate their magnetism through the gatherings around them; their commonality exists in their transcendence of institutional and individual boundaries. Everything that engages with architectural ideas generates a focal point, a node of intensity, on The Ground around which the discipline might gather and aggregate knowledge and resources. The cultural production of architecture is not possible without these kinds of gatherings, The Ground they make, and their cross-contamination of ideas.

‘Chapter One—The Ground’ discussed how the disciplinary gathering space has been weakened by hyperobject-scale relationships to land and capital, antiquated societal hierarchies, and fetishisation of the enigmatic individual. This can make it seem like the discipline has no power and/or that it lacks the big ideas and charismatic individuals who promote them, when really, I feel that it is lacking places to put ideas, to connect to each other across boundaries, and shared spaces and collective strategies to action our agency. To support this idea, I wish to posit a re-framing: *that the history of the architecture profession is actually a history of gathering*. Yes, architecture creates gathering in the spaces that buildings make on the physical ground, but its conceptual Ground is also made up of a vast collection of ideas, things, places, people, and so on that find their narrative and cultural significance through the gatherings around them. These gatherings are dynamic and changeable, and are part of what differs architecture from other professions, whose focal points can be much clearer and more fixed or whose diversions are formalised within their profession (mechanical engineering vs engineering overall, for example). In generating various types of gathering myself, and through Traversing the Ground, I have discovered a series of pre-existing affects (here encompassed under Disciplinary Gathering) that I can hold up to retell the history of architecture as a starting point for new models of gathering for rediscovering the agency of architecture workers to imagine and shape other futures.

This chapter traverses The Ground of Disciplinary Gathering and its cultural production, meandering through an abridged history of architecture in Aotearoa to illuminate relationships, connections, and methods that relate to and inform my practice of Ground-making. I will identify three categories that describe the way architects converge in Disciplinary Gathering: ‘Sites’, ‘Ritual Forms’, and ‘Organisations’. A Site is a point of magnetic force on The Ground—an ‘attractor’—where ideas and people and forms of gathering tighten and cluster, with a nebulous cloud of stuff—ideas, objects, people, materials, buildings—orbiting around it. I will discuss what has been gathered around; what effect or affect this might have had; and what has been overlooked as nodal, central, and impactful to the discipline. The sites of Disciplinary Gathering I will discuss are Style/Materials/Ideology; Type; Supply Chain/Finance; Struggle; and Nostalgia/[be]longing/Identity.<sup>104</sup> I will then discuss Ritual Forms of Disciplinary Gathering:

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<sup>104</sup> It might be helpful to note that these are different to knowledge specialisation featuring in other professions. While architecture can specialise in specific areas akin to disciplines like engineering (think landscape architecture vs electrical engineering), the sites discussed here are less about compartmentalising the discipline into more defined knowledge areas, and more about organic areas of focus for the architecture discipline that have emerged and changed over time and are often fluid and disconnected from architecture’s professional boundaries.

protocols that define and emerge from social relationships that are generated by gathering around various sites. A Ritual Form is the category of codified rituals that set out how ideas will be collectively explored, cultivated, and manifested. These include Media; Peer Respect (like awards); and Contracts/Regulation. Describing the Sites and Ritual Forms within Disciplinary Gathering provides context for a discussion of Organisations, which describes how groups of people gather consciously to engage with The Ground in some way. These can range from big, magnetic, gravity-heavy forces on The Ground (like a professional body), to collectivised practices, to clubs, to a tiny spec of an architecture practice trying to gather momentum with other specs around it (like me). From this exploration I will narrow in on 'School' as a particularly fertile site for gathering and connecting to The Ground and argue for the necessity of non-competitive spaces for knowledge sharing beyond institutional boundaries. Across the three super-categories of Sites, Rituals Forms and Organisations, I will reflect on how these various Disciplinary Gathering spaces relate to The Ground and have contributed to the cultural production of architecture.

Finally, I will discuss how examining Disciplinary Gathering practices inspired the second practice approach of 'School-making' as a critical method for organising and as the origin for the emergence of my practice, manifesting in The Night School (TNS). TNS and its conceptual beginnings will then be described to elaborate on School-making, which speculates on 'school' as a convivial virtual-reality space of knowledge sharing that can operate around institutional spaces of the discipline to experiment with and develop new modes of practice. The gathering Sites, Ritual Forms, and the Organisations and their tools and methods discussed in this chapter culminate and compost to inspire and interact with my practice and locate it in a relational web of things on The Ground.

## Sites of Disciplinary Gathering

Sites of Disciplinary Gathering are where ideas take root on The Ground and draw in other people, ideas, and gatherings around them. They wax and wane over time and can deeply impact the physical manifestations of architecture. I describe below a collection of Sites that have potency in architecture in Aotearoa.

## Style, Materials, and Ideology

Style as a site of Disciplinary Gathering in architecture is about the aesthetic logics of buildings, and culture more broadly. Materials are the tangible stuff of the environment re-organised to make buildings in a particular style. Ideologies are ideas that have a magnetism in an era (big global things like Christianity or modernism, to more specific things that more closely resemble style like art nouveau). They are discussed here together because it is challenging to separate them—for example where material availability and ideology overlap, style emerges. I will work through somewhat chronologically, considering each category both separately and together. I want to start with style, because the professional movement clung to style as its way of legitimising the expertise of architects and architecture in something specific, tangible, and visible. If we understand architecture through its professional framework as a discipline that is about drawing to-be-built buildings (as opposed to my expansive, loose, and fuzzy definition), then the first gathering site of the architecture 'profession' was neoclassicism.

Advancements in education, technology, and organisational structures during the industrialisation of societies in the 19th Century gave rise to the professional movement, as traditional vocations gathered to formalise their specialist knowledge through institutionalisation.<sup>105</sup> Professions sought a structured link between training and a sheltered corner of the market where they could distinguish themselves from other types of work, standardise practice, establish ethical codes, and elevate their social status for exclusivity and economic gain.<sup>106</sup> The architecture

<sup>105</sup> Magali Sarfatti Larson, "The Rise of Professionalism: A Sociological Analysis," *California: University of California* (1977).

<sup>106</sup> Sarfatti Larson, "The Rise of Professionalism: A Sociological Analysis."

profession, attempting to model itself off what were seen as prestigious professions like law and medicine, struggled to lay claim to a specialist knowledge set that could be protected (unlike engineering for example, which had splintered from architecture and claimed proprietorship over the technical aspects of the construction industry), wavering between art and technology to land somewhere in the middle with the forms, proportion, and orders of neoclassicism.<sup>107</sup> The Neoclassical revival period which ‘rediscovered’ the Greek and Roman knowledge of the enlightenment—centres of architecture’s history that possessed desired prestige—coincided with the emergence of professionalism (The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) was founded in 1834, the American Institute of Architects (AIA) in 1857), and thus was the first Disciplinary Gathering space for the ‘profession’ of architecture, distinguished from the guilds that came before it. The architecture profession was born as a creative expression reengineered out of the ruins of antiquity, neoclassicism as its table of togetherness, its original Ground. Neoclassical aesthetic was something to tether to—the physical and visual proof of expertise—with enough perceived prestige to stake out some Ground and form a profession.

Stylistic endeavours like neoclassicism influence material choices and technologies, and vice versa, and influence ideological priorities as they relate to building. Availability of stone drove the original aesthetic and development of classicism and was thus used for the neoclassical revival. Accompanied by technological conditions, this was both the cause and product of a privileging of the ‘wall’ as the play space, or the gathering site for architecture, evidenced in ornamentation and solidity in building form during this era. As building technology around climate control advanced, and material type and availability changed, architecture critic Reyner Banham observed that the privileging shifted to the ‘window’.<sup>108</sup> As style, materiality and ideology are all tangled, the Modern movement coincided with this shift, as well as the “emergence of the American business ethos”,<sup>109</sup> and so where neoclassicism was associated with power and prestige, Modernism aesthetic and the glass curtain wall found its associations in finance, efficiency, and growth. This is clearly an extremely abridged example spanning the history of the architecture profession, yet it illustrates how stylistic choices are inextricably linked to material conditions, technological advancements, and societal values.

In any case, the point is that this tangle of materiality, style, and ideology made neoclassicism (or any style) a tentative Ground upon which to form a profession, foreshadowing its later troubles and current state of public irrelevance. Architectural historians Mark Crinson and Jules Lubbock describe how the architecture profession regularly struggled to defend its legitimacy, being described as a “weak profession”, encroached on by other disciplines and market forces,<sup>110</sup> and, as architect and journalist Niall Patrick Walsh discusses, “harboring deep fears and insecurities over its future” as models emerged, and remain to this day, that exclude architects from the design process of buildings altogether.<sup>111</sup> Architecture likewise lost its tentative foothold in public relevance that it briefly held after World War II when RIBA fought for the importance of the discipline in the rebuild of European cities, and where organisations like CIAM10 presented a united front of architects with a vision for the future.<sup>112</sup> Gathering around style meant that the profession had to constantly adapt to maintain relevance, which is somewhat antithetical, given the precise function of a profession, according to architect Roger Tijerino, is to protect “their jurisdictional boundaries”, and provide an agreement over what constitutes a successful outcome from a professional engagement.<sup>113</sup> Without a clear jurisdictional focus or Ground upon

<sup>107</sup> Roger Tijerino, “The Architecture Profession: Can It Be Strengthened?,” *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* 26, no. 3 (2009): 260.

<sup>108</sup> Reyner Banham, *Architecture of the Well-Tempered Environment* (University of Chicago press, 2022).

<sup>109</sup> Harriet Harriss, Rory Hyde, and Roberta Marcaccio, “Introduction,” in *Architects after Architecture : Alternative Pathways for Practice*, ed. Harriet Harriss, Rory Hyde, and Roberta Marcaccio (New York, New York ; London: Routledge, 2021), 2.

<sup>110</sup> Mark Crinson and Jules Lubbock, *Architecture - Art or Profession? Three Hundred Years of Architectural Education in Britain* (Manchester University Press, 1994), 2.

<sup>111</sup> Walsh, “How ‘Architect’ Became a Protected Title in the United States.”

<sup>112</sup> Crinson and Lubbock, *Architecture - Art or Profession?*

<sup>113</sup> Tijerino, “The Architecture Profession,” 259.

which to gather, the profession is forced to subject itself to alien metrics of evaluation and value defined by external forces in the dominant systems—attractors on The Ground—of society and economics: capitalism, science, and technology, with a sprinkling of ‘art’.

In Aotearoa, as a relatively recently inhabited land,<sup>114</sup> architecture gathered first and foremost around material availability and climatic conditions, starting from the adaption of building techniques from Te Moananui-a-Kiwa to a new climate, lifestyle, and material availability.<sup>115</sup> The built forms of the early settlement era shifted from that of the warmer islands (lightweight, open-plan structures, and elevated forms) to being low-roofed, single-roomed and dug into The Ground for insulation.<sup>116</sup> In her history of Māori architecture, art and architecture historian Deidre Brown argues that discussing aesthetic logics of most of this early built environment in Aotearoa is antithetical to the organisational principles of Māori architecture, where architecture was organised around spaces for gathering, manifesting through the open spaces of marae and the porch.<sup>117</sup> The development of carving tools in the sixteenth century had “consequential effects on industry, social organisation and cultural development”, and on architecture, as intricate carvings told stories of “ancestors, legendary culture heroes, and events”, adding important “social, cultural and spiritual dimensions to the utilitarian functions of Māori architecture” and thus producing styles and types of buildings that came to act as gathering spaces for meaning and the embodiment of ideas and ideology.<sup>118</sup>

The architecture of colonist settlers arriving in Aotearoa in the nineteenth century likewise depended on material availability, with early buildings constructed from rough sawn timber clapboard, stone, some cob, and imported materials that were cheap, ubiquitous, and easy to transport like corrugated iron.<sup>119</sup> Exchanges between Māori and settlers created a unique hybrid building style in early colonial Aotearoa, blending Māori practicality and knowledge with European building designs and needs. While collaboration was significant, it was often informal, dependent on local relationships, and varied greatly across regions. There was also a temporality to these buildings, where a house would start as a simple “wooden tent” and then grow over time through lean-tos and additions, or be moved to another site as jobs and circumstances changed.<sup>120</sup> The first building designed by an ‘architect’ (inverted commas reference those who identified or were licensed as architects) in Aotearoa was what is now known as the Treaty House at Waitangi. In 1832 James Busby approached John Verge from Sydney for the plans of the house,<sup>121</sup> and it was pre-cut in Australia out of local hardwood and shipped for on-site assembly in 1834.<sup>122</sup> Architecture gathered around imported ideas and materials, reflecting a nostalgia for architectural styles of England, and an importing of ideology of stature. One of the first ‘architects’ in Aotearoa was William Mason, who was commissioned to design the Old Government House in Tāmaki Makaurau in the 1850s. Here style met material availability, and timber was used to resemble stone on the facade, so that the building would appear in a classical style associated with wealth and power as ‘Auckland’ tried to regain its status as the country’s capital.<sup>123</sup>

<sup>114</sup> Aotearoa was the last habitable land mass on the planet to be discovered by humans, likely around the fourteenth century. John Wilson, “History,” *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, 2005, accessed November 04, 2024, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/history/print>.

<sup>115</sup> Deidre Brown, *Māori Architecture: From Fale to Wharanui and Beyond* (North Shore, New Zealand: Penguin Group, 2009).

<sup>116</sup> McKay, “The Story up to Now.”

<sup>117</sup> The porch was a key space for sheltering, relaxation, and industry and emphasising the importance of the threshold. Brown, *Māori Architecture*.

<sup>118</sup> Brown, *Māori Architecture*, 32.

<sup>119</sup> Hill, *New Zealand Architecture*, 7.

<sup>120</sup> Hill, *New Zealand Architecture*, 7.

<sup>121</sup> John Stacpoole and Peter Beaven, *Architecture 1820-1970*, *New Zealand Art*, (Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1972), 9.

<sup>122</sup> Waitangi Treaty Grounds, “Treaty House,” Waitangi Treaty Grounds, 2023, accessed October 18, 2024, <https://www.waitangi.org.nz/visit/treaty-house>.

<sup>123</sup> Hill, *New Zealand Architecture*, 15.

Aotearoa thus had an unusual relationship to the neoclassical when it came to what it represented and how architecture gathered around it. While it was used for banks and large public buildings, there were instances where it couldn't be followed entirely, which resulted in what architect Martin Hill describes as a kind of "flattened variety of pseudo-renaissance".<sup>124</sup> The built environment of this era was "prey to the whims of various architects who set their standards by the English architecture of the Industrial Revolution," but found a more generative gathering site in the construction of Neo-Gothic churches<sup>125</sup> and through the interaction of missionaries and Māori, resulting in complex religious-political movements and profound architectural projects that merged Māori, biblical, and colonial ideology to produce places that supported religious missions and gatherings to mourn the losses endured "during and after the New Zealand Wars".<sup>126</sup> Stylistic shifts in Aotearoa through the Victorian style;<sup>127</sup> to a rejection of the pseudo renaissance and neo-gothic styles;<sup>128</sup> to the emergent styles of naturalism, neo-Georgian, Voysey, and art nouveau;<sup>129</sup> appeared as the settler project expanded, bringing with them the aesthetic of the British Countryside—a Ground of somewhere-else—and often arriving with this 'flattened' effect. Architects gathered around magazines and memories.

Even in the search for a "New Zealand style", playing out in various gatherings in Ōtautahi (Christchurch) from Gothic churches to Gothic modernism, with Warren and Mahoney and others, at the Auckland School with Vernon Brown and The Group, and through an influx of war-time immigrants from Europe in Tāmaki Makaurau and Te Whanganui-a-Tara (Wellington) largely resembled and imported the ideology of the 'international style' of modernism.<sup>130</sup> According to architect William Toomath, Modernism was seen to present a blank slate on which to form a vernacular 'anti-style' for Aotearoa emerging not from "the old attitude of designing in a particular 'style'", but that it emerged from "the manner of its doing, from exploring the needs at hand with integrity of purpose, not by imposing some predetermined label".<sup>131</sup> Modernism had many noble, well intended ideas but, as a gathering site, encouraged the effect of further erasure of cultural difference through its assumption of a universal aesthetic expression, grounded in new technologies like air conditioning and the effect of changes in the price of energy, steel, and glass production on the supply chain. Its aesthetic persists, interrupted by the community architecture movement in the 1970s<sup>132</sup> and postmodernism and deconstructivism in the 1980s and 1990s which nonetheless relied on the same technologies and exist within the same economic conditions.<sup>133</sup>

The formation of the architecture profession was in style, but this was always tentative ground. In this, the fragility of the profession presents immense opportunity. Architecture workers can gather and apply their skills in other ways, around different things, on different Ground, and

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<sup>124</sup> Hill, *New Zealand Architecture*, 18.

<sup>125</sup> Hill, *New Zealand Architecture*, 21.

<sup>126</sup> Brown, *Māori Architecture*, 20.

<sup>127</sup> Marked by a transition from the working cottage to the Villa. McKay, "The Story up to Now," 4.

<sup>128</sup> Starting with inspiration from the William Morris 'Red House' which manifested in Aotearoa as stripped back buildings with materials in their pure states, and a rejection of symmetry. Hill, *New Zealand Architecture*, 25.

<sup>129</sup> Peter Shaw, "Changing Influences in Domestic Architecture," in *A History of New Zealand Architecture* (Auckland: Hodder Moa Beckett Publishers Ltd, 2003).

<sup>130</sup> This is covered across the essays in Peter Shaw's *History of New Zealand Architecture*. Peter Shaw, *A History of New Zealand Architecture*, 3rd ed. (Auckland: Hodder Moa Beckett Publishers Ltd, 2003).

<sup>131</sup> William Toomath, "Into the Post-War World," in *Exquisite Apart: 100 Years of Architecture in New Zealand*, ed. Charles Walker (Auckland, New Zealand: Balasoglou Books, 2005), 44.

<sup>132</sup> Nick Wates and Charles Knevitt, *Community Architecture: How People Are Creating Their Own Environment* (London: Penguin, 1987). provides a starting point for understanding Community Architecture as it was emerging in the 1970s and 1980s. Russell Withers wrote on Community Architecture in New Zealand in 1981. Russell Withers, "Community Architecture in New Zealand," *NZ Architect*, no. 1 (1981): 24-31.

<sup>133</sup> Postmodernism and deconstructivism in the 1980s and 1990s took referentialism to the extreme, subverting aesthetic style through extrapolation, juxtaposition and re-organisation of materials and ideas.

professional institutes could embrace this. This could also help architecture shake its deep ties to what Banham calls an “arcane and privileged aesthetic code,” a “vulgar cultural imperialism that leads the writers of general histories of architecture to co-opt absolutely everything built upon the earth’s crust into their subject matter”.<sup>134</sup> It reveals too, that the skills and knowledge of the architect might also be found in some other part of the architecture process, in the arrangement not just of materials, but of managing relationships, ideas, and histories for a successful built outcome: something else to gather around.

## Type

Despite some forays into churches, the most significant site on The Ground for the exploration of architectural ideas in Aotearoa has always been, and remains to be, the *house*. This is somewhat oppositional to the origin Grounds of architecture, which centred on public gathering buildings: temples, arenas, tombs, and monuments, as opposed to the ‘texture’ of cities represented by housing, but is aligned with architecture historian Beatriz Colomina’s perspective that architecture of the 20th century was defined by media and by the house: “understood not simply as one type among others, but as the most important vehicle for the investigation of architectural ideas”.<sup>135</sup> Across the histories of architecture in Aotearoa, the house features again and again: there’s the working cottage, the villa, the bungalow, the bach.<sup>136</sup> Where public and commercial buildings of early colonist settlers were expected to reflect Aotearoa as an extension of imperial growth, the house was a space to experiment with architectural ideas and embrace difference, in order to “satisfy architectural ambitions and express identity”.<sup>137</sup> This can be seen across the work of Vernon Brown and The Group, in the experimental post-modernism of architects like Ian Athfield and Roger Walker,<sup>138</sup> and now, in the dominance of the private house across media related to architecture, from the Instagram of Te Kāhui Whaihanga to Reality TV. Journalist and critic Kate Wagner describes how the architecture discipline promotes “the bespoke single-family home as a kind of pure expression of the craft — simple, formal and unbothered by the peskier plagues of public and large-scale projects”.<sup>139</sup> The house has become a formal spectacle, the “aestheticized execution of the architectural ideal”, divorced from the complexity of politics, history, and social contexts that otherwise underline public and shared spaces.<sup>140</sup>

Before its growth into a formal spectacle of high-end product curation, there were instances where the house was leveraged not just for its potential for stylistic experimentation, but also as

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<sup>134</sup> Reyner Banham believed it was insulting to the innovation and complexity of those buildings and structures that exist outside of colonial Europe, to call what they do architecture. That they should be kept separate, that architecture should stop trying to lay claim to their practices and through this relinquishment “might then have a better view of the true value and splendours of the building arts and design methods of other cultures”. Architects should let architecture be “the making of drawings for buildings in the manner practised in Europe since the Renaissance,” and find something else to call and capture these other things that architects, academics, designers, and others are doing now—the expanded field—thus releasing architecture from its “intellectual muddles”. This idea proposes that The Ground of architecture is complete, and that non-canonical theories of the built environment and “other cultures” can continue in the new Grounds of other disciplines. Reyner Banham, “A Black Box: The Secret Profession of Architecture,” *New Statesman and Society* 3 (1991): 24.

<sup>135</sup> Beatriz Colomina, “The Media House,” *Assemblage*, no. 27 (1995): 56.

<sup>136</sup> When a depression hit Aotearoa after 1880, property owners were less affected and additions made to their houses became more extravagant while the desire for a front bay window while still maintaining an entry porch to shelter from the weather, resulted in the emergence of the villa. Hill, *New Zealand Architecture*, 21. The villa emerged from the growing wealth of settler colonists and is now leveraged as a tool through policy to maintain and continue to increase that wealth, remaining a particularly potent and ubiquitous example of architecture gathering around the house, and as a symbol of wealth, clustering in inner-city neighbourhoods in Tāmaki Makaurau.

<sup>137</sup> McKay, “The Story up to Now.”

<sup>138</sup> Shaw, *A History of New Zealand Architecture*.

<sup>139</sup> Kate Wagner, “Against House Porn,” *Azure Magazine*, 2023, accessed August 12, 2024, <https://www.azuremagazine.com/article/against-house-porn-kate-wagner/>.

<sup>140</sup> Wagner, “Against House Porn.”

a tool for ‘change-making’. It was recognised as a fundamental human right within the political sphere and was imagined through a completely different lens of the Te Ao Māori worldview. For example, the house was a gathering space that generated a strategic avenue into the architecture discipline for women. Architectural historian Elizabeth Cox discusses how as societal norms shifted in the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was “an increasing perception that house design was radically failing women,” and so women gathered, in publications and forums and eventually in parliament to argue for the importance of women in the design of healthy and functional homes through their embodied knowing and define and defend their value to the architecture profession.<sup>141</sup> Historian Peter Shaw discusses how Architecture’s gathering around housing also changed in the 1930s and 1940s when Aotearoa welcomed European architects seeking refuge, who hoped that a labour government that had already initiated a progressive housing policy would be amenable to “the democratic socialist ideology which lay behind their Modernist forms”.<sup>142</sup> This was coupled with Gordon Wilson’s appointment as Architect to the Department of Housing, who advocated for new ideas opposed to “the desire of most [housing] applicants that they should be able to live in detached houses”, experimenting with semi-detached units and multi-unit dwellings.<sup>143</sup> The ethos around denser living however could not outlast the influence of Vernon Brown, and later The Group, who “believed that an indigenous architectural expression would spring not from high-rise flats but in the field of detached housing”.<sup>144</sup> Brown’s houses and design ideas, mostly catering to “left-leaning academics, professional people or artists only too eager to escape the uniformity into which state-sponsored housing schemes seemed to be plunging”, became gathering sites due to his influence in the Auckland architecture school at the time, and their publication in *Home and Building* and *Yearbook of the Arts* where “New Zealand culture” was being explored in the post-war years.<sup>145</sup>

In a country colonised so late, when the industrial revolution and the radical individualism that would follow it was in full swing, it makes sense that the house might take on elevated importance. It manifested in the suburbs, in the quarter acre dream, in the villa and its contemporary prominence as a symbol of wealth. This is problematic for several reasons. The obsession with individual housing ownership is wildly inefficient from a materials perspective; it puts pressure on shared public spaces and already strained public services for providing social support,<sup>146</sup> and from a Disciplinary Gathering perspective, it traps architectural knowledge and cultural production in the private sphere—enclosing it behind literal and conceptual fences—weakening architecture’s resolve as a public good and decreasing collective spatial knowledge. Charles Walker points to the mythologising of the house as a model of architecture gathering that might have “hindered the development of a more sophisticated, more urbane, local architecture culture”.<sup>147</sup> Gathering around the house leaves public and shared spaces at the whim of the

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<sup>141</sup> The labour of housework was increasing across the 20<sup>th</sup> Century due to the reduction of house staff and family size (with less daughters available to help out), and so women began arguing that the poor design of houses—“dark, gloomy, unpleasant and unsafe”—was making their work more difficult and suggesting that an architect couldn’t design a good kitchen unless he had done six months as a housemaid. Elizabeth Cox, “A ‘Work-Room Pure and Simple’: Florence Field,” in *Making Space: A History of New Zealand Women in Architecture*, ed. Elizabeth Cox (Massey University Press, 2022), 38. The house was a foot in the door for women in the profession, and while they could later extend into other spheres of the discipline the stigma of around interior design as gendered work remains, and “the depiction of architecture in New Zealand as something that has been almost entirely created by men, at least until very recent years, lingers”. Cox, “Introduction,” 10.

<sup>142</sup> Shaw, “The Search for the Vernacular,” 140.

<sup>143</sup> Shaw, “The Search for the Vernacular,” 140.

<sup>144</sup> Shaw, “The Search for the Vernacular,” 144.

<sup>145</sup> Shaw, “The Search for the Vernacular,” 145–46.

<sup>146</sup> For example, the function of spaces like libraries has changed to be much more akin to ‘third spaces’, providing social support and spaces for gathering around an increasing suite of services beyond books. For example: James K Elmborg, “Libraries as the Spaces between Us: Recognizing and Valuing the Third Space,” *Reference & User Services Quarterly* (2011).

<sup>147</sup> Charles Walker, “Introduction,” in *Exquisite Apart: 100 Years of Architecture in New Zealand*, ed. Charles Walker (Auckland, New Zealand: Balasoglou Books, 2005), 11.

capitalist economy, and is a comforting escape route in a discipline that feels so untethered from its capacity to have an impact on architectural outcomes in the built environment at large. The house as a gathering site had fruitful outcomes for experimentation with individual living but if architecture workers want to shift the site of their practices and impact, it might pay to start by gathering around a different type.

Te ao Māori, for example, offers a completely different spatial organisation for living and for imagining the house, one that separated different functions into different sheltered spaces, treating the spaces between them, and their porches or thresholds, as the principle place of living and interacting. The varieties of whare (translating to house) include wharepuni (sleeping houses), wharekai or kāuta (cooking houses), wharenuī (meeting houses), whare whakairo (carved meeting houses), pātaka (storehouses), wharepaku (toilets) and whare ora (health centres).<sup>148</sup> These communal living spaces, named papakāinga, are re-emerging in Aotearoa through the perseverance of “Whānau and hapū-led papakāinga and whenua development initiatives... despite the barriers and challenges to doing so”<sup>149</sup> and through the support of Kāinga Ora Whenua loans.<sup>150</sup> This creates a steady movement to a reimagined idea of the house, with architect and writer Jade Kake pointing to “homes that are culturally appropriate for [Māori], that are responsive to the site and to our whānau dynamics, and that are eco-friendly”.<sup>151</sup> The resurgence of papakāinga as a site for change and the cultural production of architecture takes away the power of the single-family house and focuses the gathering on The Ground around ways of living together beyond oppressive and relatively new nuclear-family boundaries.

## Supply Chain / Finance / Violence

‘Chapter One—The Ground’ introduced the architecture discipline’s deeply entangled relationship with capitalism and its servitude to the global supply chain and here I want to elaborate on what this means for the cultural production of the discipline, and how it impacts architecture’s gathering sites. In response to economist Thomas Piketty’s *Capital in the Twenty-first Century*, Reiner de Graaf charts architecture’s trajectory alongside the financial and political systems of the 20th century that he argues act as “an anomaly: a brief interruption in the systemic logic of capitalism”, where an unusually stable time economically for social democracies following the Second World War, meant that economic growth outpaced capital gains.<sup>152</sup> The widespread necessity to re-build after the war, alongside the ‘threat’ of communism meant that governments were incentivised to invest in public life and infrastructure and provide public welfare systems under capitalism to keep their populations in positions of stability.<sup>153</sup> Yet in the 1970s, as the resistance movements of the time were becoming increasingly disillusioned with modernism, the agenda to take economic liberalisation and reduced government spending to the extreme began to take hold, and “the initiative to construct the city comes to reside increasingly with the private sector”.<sup>154</sup> As the construction of shared environments moved to the private sector, the architecture discipline followed it. Not only in its dependence on the work that was there, but because the profession has always been drawn to things that literally and visibly give it value, hence gathering around the aesthetic prestige of neoclassicism. The Ground feels thicker where the money is. To not compromise the capacity of architects to earn money, institutes and architectural gathering sites must pander to the private sector to keep that Ground feeling

<sup>148</sup> Deidre Brown, “Māori Architecture - Whare Māori,” Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, 2014, accessed March 31, 2021, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/maori-architecture-whare-maori/print>.

<sup>149</sup> Jade Kake, “The Future of Papakāinga: There’s No Place Like Home,” The Spinoff, 2019, accessed June 28, 2024, <https://thespinoff.co.nz/atea/11-10-2019/the-future-of-papakāinga-theres-no-place-like-home>.

<sup>150</sup> Kāinga Ora, “Kāinga Whenua Loans for Individuals,” Kāinga Ora, accessed June 28, 2024, [https://kaingaora.govt.nz/en\\_NZ/home-ownership/kainga-whenua/kainga-whenua-loans-for-individuals/](https://kaingaora.govt.nz/en_NZ/home-ownership/kainga-whenua/kainga-whenua-loans-for-individuals/).

<sup>151</sup> Jade Kake, “Māori by Design,” interview by Dale Husband, 2019, <https://e-tangata.co.nz/korero/jade-kake-maori-by-design/>.

<sup>152</sup> de Graaf, “Architecture Is Now a Tool of Capital.”

<sup>153</sup> de Graaf, “Architecture Is Now a Tool of Capital.”

<sup>154</sup> de Graaf, “Architecture Is Now a Tool of Capital.”

thick and fertile. This can mean obscuring the violence that underlies the work upon which most architects depend. This has the affect, similar to Fisher’s argument about a diminished capacity to imagine the future after the 1980s,<sup>155</sup> of drastically reducing what de Graaf the “thought production” of architecture, its discourse, social commentary, and capacity to contribute to its own conceptual Ground, and the shared conceptual Ground of knowledge and ideas about the world.<sup>156</sup> Within this context de Graaf argues both that there are no good buildings unless they are provided by the state, and that there is no way to produce architecture in private practice that doesn’t perpetuate the systems that tie architecture to investment value.

Frankowski and Garcia of WAI Thinktank point to this obscuring of the underlying mechanisms of the architecture discipline as part of the modernist erasure of history and cultural context, and that much of the history of architecture concerns aesthetic and spatial outputs while omitting the power structures and financial mechanisms that generate them.<sup>157</sup> Frankowski and Garcia argue that modernity and colonialism were interchangeable, and are still linked today, and that much of the job of modernism was to create a ‘cleanness’ in society, one way of living and being, a single gathering. And yet, they claim, this makes it one of the most significant abstractions, a way to hold its violence at arm’s length, or to whitewash it completely: “Modernist abstraction consists of obscuring, behind ideas of enlightenment, development and progress, the brutal violence of colonialism—the engine of European economies, and as a result, the maker of Europe”.<sup>158</sup> Likewise Post-Modernism “in its refusal to question and sever its ties to the capitalist–colonial project”, remains a continuation of Eurocentric abstraction.<sup>159</sup> They offer post-colonial critique in architecture as a counter, a way to reveal and resolve the overlooked and hidden violences that contextualise modernism and postmodernism. For them, the post-colonial “adjusts the picture to the high resolution of the colonial condition and makes it impossible to imagine modernity (and by default, post-modernity) without the regimes of brutality, capture and predation at the centre of the plantation economy that makes it possible and maintains it”.<sup>160</sup> And so the opaque does not become transparent but becomes high resolution.

This is evidenced most profoundly through their reimagined version of architectural cultural theorist Charles Jencks’ *Evolutionary Tree*. Jencks’ diagrams capture visually the idea that the history of architecture is really a history of gathering. His first in 1970, a landscape of bounded blobs consisting of the names of well-known architects weaving and aggregating around historical moments and ideologies through time, presents architecture discourse as having, what architecture theorist Mark Wigley describes as, “an ever-changing shape but a constant self-sustaining ecology” as architecture clusters around gathering sites, connected to other ideas by wavering threads.<sup>161</sup> The ‘ground’ of this diagram, driven by “technologies, regulations, infrastructure, services, chemicals, drugs, electronics, vernaculars, popular taste, consumer culture, eclecticism and improvisations”, suggests that these things are what underpin most of the built environment, yet remain detached from architecture, which is “floating away and interacting with itself under very little external constraint”, disconnected from the very things it claims to address.<sup>162</sup> Frankowski and Garcia’s diagram extrapolates the evolutionary tree further, to argue that the real Ground of architecture’s gathering lies in a “network of white supremacist, anti-Indigenous policies, and anti-Black legal systems that make architecture inherently an instrument of segregation policies and genocide”.<sup>163</sup> It is this that reveals that the gatherings of architecture—“movements, events, institutions, policies and acts of resistance”—cannot be untangled from the legal and structural systems of oppression that reflect and drive how the built

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<sup>155</sup> Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*.

<sup>156</sup> de Graaf, “Architecture Is Now a Tool of Capital.”

<sup>157</sup> Garcia and Frankowski, “Notes on (Post-)Modernist Abstractions and (Post-)Colonial Resolutions.”

<sup>158</sup> Garcia and Frankowski, “Notes on (Post-)Modernist Abstractions and (Post-)Colonial Resolutions.”

<sup>159</sup> Garcia and Frankowski, “Notes on (Post-)Modernist Abstractions and (Post-)Colonial Resolutions.”

<sup>160</sup> Garcia and Frankowski, “Notes on (Post-)Modernist Abstractions and (Post-)Colonial Resolutions.”

<sup>161</sup> Mark Wigley, “The Drawing That Ate Architecture,” Jencks Foundation, 2023, accessed August 03, 2024, <https://www.jencksfoundation.org/explore/text/the-drawing-that-ate-architecture>.

<sup>162</sup> Wigley, “The Drawing That Ate Architecture.”

<sup>163</sup> Garcia and Frankowski, “Notes on (Post-)Modernist Abstractions and (Post-)Colonial Resolutions.”

environment is shaped, by who, and what further impact that has in society.<sup>164</sup> In their diagram the white space is both secondary and arbitrary, the clustered gathering creates a much more solid ground, one that is explicitly connected and self-reinforcing.

To understand The Ground in Aotearoa, it is important to look at the gathering of architecture through a similar lens. Lucy Mackintosh in her history of Tāmaki Makaurau references the need for a deep time perspective on history suggesting that if “we venture closer to the ground and explore the stories crafted into the contours, stones and hollows, then longer and more nuanced histories become apparent” and thus bringing into view a more “textured past”.<sup>165</sup> Across the various histories of architecture in Aotearoa, that much of the early built growth of the country occurred using funding provided by the crown to advance the New Zealand Wars, is mentioned mostly in passing. For example, Stacpoole simply says that Auckland “enjoyed a building boom which was made possible by the influx of money brought by the Imperial troops engaged in fighting in the Waikato”.<sup>166</sup> Where architects struggled to find work and turned to other pursuits from through the 1840s to 1860s,<sup>167</sup> in 1870 Colonial Treasurer Julius Vogel launched a development scheme to accelerate European colonisation, provide the built infrastructure needed to sustain it, and purchase and illegally seize Māori land, and thus architects suddenly found themselves designing a new country.<sup>168</sup> The population of Pākehā settlers doubled in 10 years, Māori were forcefully evicted from their lands, central government expanded with increasing levels of power, and the architecture profession was *made* by this violent opportunism.<sup>169</sup>

The origins of the architecture profession in other places are connected to finance and violence too. Niall Patrick Walsh describes how in the United States the rapid urbanisation of the late 1800s coincided with the emergence of the financialisation of property, and gave rise to “a prevailing business and capital-motivated culture” and thus even from early days, architects emerged as tools in real estate speculation, required to adapt to a “new political economy of building, one still emerging from a tradition-bound building culture founded upon patronage and handicraft”.<sup>170</sup> Much of the infrastructure in place for this rapid urbanisation was built by enslaved people, and this period too coincided with the ongoing violence of the colonisation of Native Americans, and practices of extreme segregation following the abolition of slavery.<sup>171</sup> In the United Kingdom, Crinson and Lubbock say that the qualified architect was an exclusive role undertaken by those with privilege and power and so the architect “remained a gentlemanly figure with a brass-plate practice specialising in private mansions, churches and major public and commercial buildings well into the 1930s”.<sup>172</sup> Similarly, Aotearoa as an example, the United Kingdom’s wealth of the era of emerging professionalism was intimately related to ongoing projects of colonisation.

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<sup>164</sup> Garcia and Frankowski, “Notes on (Post-)Modernist Abstractions and (Post-)Colonial Resolutions.”

<sup>165</sup> Lucy Mackintosh, *Shifting Grounds: Deep Histories of Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland* (Bridget Williams Books, 2021), 15.

<sup>166</sup> Stacpoole and Beaven, *Architecture 1820-1970*, 11. The two major periods of conflict during the New Zealand wars were the mid-1840s, and the 1860s and 1870s resulting in the loss of an estimated 2000 Māori (close to 5% of the population), 500 men from the colonial forces, and the confiscation of 1 million hectares of land by the Crown in Waikato, Taranaki, South Auckland, Bay of Plenty and Poverty Bay. Danny Keenan, “New Zealand Wars,” *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, 2012, accessed November 05, 2024, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/new-zealand-wars/page-11>.

<sup>167</sup> During this period architects turned “...temporarily to other pursuits—farming, surveying, auctioneering, or even giving drawing lessons”. Stacpoole and Beaven, *Architecture 1820-1970*, 9.

<sup>168</sup> “The Vogel Era,” *Manatū Taonga — Ministry for Culture and Heritage*, 2014, accessed June 28, 2024, <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/politics/the-vogel-era>.

<sup>169</sup> “The Vogel Era.” After moving to back to Britain two decades later, Vogel stated that this Public Works Policy “seemed to the Government the sole alternative to a war of extermination with the natives.”

<sup>170</sup> Walsh, “How ‘Architect’ Became a Protected Title in the United States.”

<sup>171</sup> Joshua FJ Inwood, “The Modern Infrastructure Landscape and the Legacy of Slavery,” *The Professional Geographer* 75, no. 1 (2023).

<sup>172</sup> Crinson and Lubbock, *Architecture - Art or Profession?*, 3.

The architecture profession and architects gather around manifestations of finance, in service to the supply chain, because this is where the work is. Finance and the Supply Chain are both massive, external, seemingly unavoidable hyperobject forces that suck The Ground towards them or dig it out from below; and internal gathering sites for the discipline of architecture and its physical manifestation as beautiful houses, or assemblages of whatever the market deems valuable, and thus legitimises the discipline to those with power. In many ways, this is problematic (violent) and tentative Ground. Architecture is wedded tightly to “the whims of an inflationary economy”, one that perpetuates inequality, rampant material extraction and exploitation of people and ecosystems and is fundamentally unpredictable.<sup>173</sup> Reorganising materials ‘differently’ in this context does not change where those materials come from, how the capital flows, and who profits, suggesting for my practice and this research that an area of The Ground around which to organise then should not be new types of buildings, but new types of financial policy, systems and processes, new ways of gathering on The Ground around these things that make it.

## Struggle

I am going to talk about struggle in two ways. Both create gathering sites and have an impact on The Ground of architecture. The first is how architecture reacts and responds to real violence and adversity and what emerges; and the second is aesthetic struggle, the self-manufactured struggle of the discipline in its quest for legitimacy.

The Whareniui (meeting house) is a key example of an architecture that emerged from collective struggle. In the 1840s, problems for Māori associated with colonisation and the New Zealand Wars, including sovereignty issues and land sales and seizures, drew disparate iwi together, and carvers were spending less time carving pātaka to emphasise distinction, and more time embellishing buildings used for meeting and political discussion.<sup>174</sup> The form of these meeting houses had been taking shape around Māori interest in Christianity through the arrival of early missionaries, and it led to the development of the idea that a building could be used to assemble for discussion.<sup>175</sup> Among some iwi, like Ngāti Porou, the form of the Whareniui also emerges from the world of the gods, having more ancient origins.<sup>176</sup> From the start of the New Zealand Wars in 1845, and from their significant escalation in 1860, Māori architecture changed drastically, including significant developments in scale and technique to the Whareniui, and to spiritual buildings which reflected the growth of Christian Māori religions following the abandonment of the missions.<sup>177</sup> These changes marked a reaction to the conflict, a way to make spaces for gathering, and also leveraged architecture as a tool to indicate tino rangatiratanga (sovereignty and self-determination), and to express unity between tribes.<sup>178</sup>

The religious-political buildings of the prophet Te Kooti that emerged in this time as he travelled the country are some of the best evidence of this architectural emergence. Others, like the Hīona in Maungapōhatu in the early 1900s also formed around ideas of Christianity, and in resistance to colonial rule. For three years from 1878, Parihaka Pā used the idea of settlement—the development of an architecture around a carefully planned community—as an act of defiance to the colonial government and their confiscation of the land.<sup>179</sup> Their non-violent resistance to ongoing encroachment and arrests drew Māori from across Te Ika-a-Māui to make it the largest community of Māori in Aotearoa at that time. After the violent raid by the Armed Constabulary of the government in 1881, destroying homes and displacing more than 1500 people, the leaders of Parihaka Te Whiti and Tohu returned to rebuild in 1883.<sup>180</sup> Unconvinced that the

<sup>173</sup> Tijerino, “The Architecture Profession,” 260.

<sup>174</sup> Brown, *Māori Architecture*, 49.

<sup>175</sup> Brown, *Māori Architecture*, 49.

<sup>176</sup> Brown, *Māori Architecture*, 51.

<sup>177</sup> Brown, *Māori Architecture*, 58.

<sup>178</sup> Brown, *Māori Architecture*, 59.

<sup>179</sup> Brown, *Māori Architecture*, 71.

<sup>180</sup> Brown, *Māori Architecture*, 73.

benefits of Pākehā culture could only be enjoyed by assimilation, their re-building of Parihaka embraced western technologies and architecture on their own terms, and despite appearing like a “Pākehā-style village” by the turn of the century, was still a centre of resistance.<sup>181</sup> The whareniui, other temples, and pā and papakāinga like Parihaka act as examples of architectural gathering because the spatial outcome and their meanings were central to the conversation, acting as a direct output of the events of the time and a physical and conceptual Ground on which to come together. As Brown argues, the architectural appropriation of settler colonial techniques and styles was a form of counter-colonialism: the buildings are a protest embodied, a making of architecture to make a claim. These examples don’t aim to romanticise the struggle, but to suggest that architecture has been a gathering site for resistance, recovery, opportunity, and not just a tool for those in power.

Other external forces generate struggle that the architecture discipline must respond to, or that present opportunities for architectural development. The Ahuriri (Napier) earthquake and fire of 1931, and the Ōtautahi earthquakes of 2010 and 2011 generated a sudden and drastic change in the built environment. In Ahuriri, Shaw describes how an association of architects gathered to “prevent architects and builders from outside coming in and grabbing all the work”, and to foster the quick rebuild of the city.<sup>182</sup> Architects gathered around Art Deco, a symbol of modernity in sky scrapers internationally, yet in “struggling Napier”, were built no higher than two stories.<sup>183</sup> Art deco, while elaborate in surface ornamentation, was also “stripped-back”, suited to concrete construction and provided a facade of security, given many people had been killed in the earthquake by falling masonry.<sup>184</sup> The aesthetic uniformity of Ahuriri “dictated by economic, seismic, geographical and stylistic features”, makes it unique, and a literal manifestation of an architectural gathering site, a tangible Ground. The Ōtautahi earthquake presented a similar challenge to architecture, one that continues in the city’s slow re-build, and many collectives and groups emerged to imagine the city from the bottom up and the top down. Some examples of these will also be discussed in this chapter under Organisations.

The other struggle that dominates architectural gathering, is the aesthetic ‘struggle’ for disciplinary Ground. Multiple times in describing the emergence of the profession, I used the word ‘struggle’ in reference to architecture’s tentative beginnings. This struggle was really, what Walsh describes as, the struggle to create a “self-selecting elite” class in the strive for legitimacy, power and prestige, and to protect the ‘architect’ title in a way that curtailed “the aspirations of women, people of color, immigrants, and other demographics subject to institutionalized discrimination”, those with the real struggle.<sup>185</sup> This aesthetic struggle continues to underpin architecture as the discipline still tries to defend its relevance.<sup>186</sup> Meanwhile, over time it has even distanced itself from its supposed role in serving public welfare, for example the American Institute of Architects changed its nearly 100 year old mission statement in the 1950s to one that “placed serving its members as the first of three major goals” above serving the public.<sup>187</sup> While there are a number of architects engaged with real struggle, many manifestations of Disciplinary Gathering as they pertain to institutions and collectives, are about bonding over this aesthetic struggle. Designer and educator Bruce Mau makes an impassioned case for ending the complaints of being an architect and embracing the incredible possibility of the discipline. He claims that the “cynicism and navel-gazing,” “the whining malaise” and the “never ending complaints of powerless and

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<sup>181</sup> Brown, *Māori Architecture*, 76.

<sup>182</sup> Shaw, “Modern, Moderne and Deco,” 127.

<sup>183</sup> Shaw, “Modern, Moderne and Deco,” 128.

<sup>184</sup> Shaw, “Modern, Moderne and Deco,” 128.

<sup>185</sup> Walsh, “How ‘Architect’ Became a Protected Title in the United States.”

<sup>186</sup> You can read the submissions made by Te Kāhui Whaihanga and other institutions in response to the Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment’s proposed review of the licensure of architecture and design professionals here: NZIA, “Submissions - Occupational Regulation Reforms in the Building and Construction Sector,” Te Kāhui Whaihanga New Zealand Institute of Architecture, accessed November 05, 2024, <https://nzia.co.nz/about-us/what-we-say/submissions/>. And a submission made by Groupwork and The Night School in #licensing-the-future-environment-238.

<sup>187</sup> Tijerino, “The Architecture Profession,” 259.

economic hardship” are luxury problems, not because they are not valid, but because they are privileged problems, and largely self-inflicted by a discipline that obsesses over protection of its boundaries rather than the possibilities found at them.<sup>188</sup> Mau then challenges architects to reflect more on the immense possibility in the changes facing architecture, that as architects we get to “constantly learn new things,” be part of what could be “the most important movement in history, the movement to redesign the world and everything we do to sustainably meet the needs of the 4.5 billion children who will be born before mid-century” and learn that the practice of architecture that “generates massively complex and diverse inputs,” might be the kind of operating system needed to face global challenges.<sup>189</sup> He invites us to revel in that, to join the movement, to “join the revolution of possibility.”<sup>190</sup>

In many ways real struggle remains independent of disciplinary Ground. Real struggle is responsive to external forces and sees architecture as an answer to a challenge, rather than as a question to be answered. The Ground of real struggle is often far outside The Ground bounded by the profession, and so the architecture it produces can generate new Ground, new ideas about architecture. We can see this dynamic reflected in Wigley’s reflection on Jencks’ *Evolutionary Tree*. As Wigley notes, in the diagram The Ground—the real struggle—is only connected by a couple of thin strands to the Disciplinary Gatherings drifting and aggregating above, the idea space that architecture largely concerns itself with. WAIThinktank’s version meanwhile, implies that the two have never been disconnected, that the real struggle was there all along, obscured or actively silenced by mechanisms of architecture that claim to be value-neutral or for the benefit of all, but really perpetuate violence, while claiming that they too *struggle*.

Sites of Disciplinary Gathering reflect how and where The Ground of architecture is created. I have traced this phenomenon through a history of architecture in Aotearoa, considering the complex dynamics between the aesthetic manifestations of architecture in style and materials and their ideological underpinnings that are driven by histories of colonisation, finance, and power. The profession has leaned on style and aesthetic expressions of power to claim its legitimacy, while becoming increasingly dependent on and in servitude to the global supply chain in its ‘struggle’ for survival. But other sites of gathering, around real struggle, belonging, community-forming processes and ways of living together, reveal that for ‘change-making’ and for ‘Ground-making’, a shift in where architects gather may act as a starting point. For my own practice of exploring the pre-conditions needed for change, it is important to consider not just where architects gather, but what practices and methods cultivate, reinforce, and attract people to these sites, the Rituals Forms that sustain Disciplinary Gathering.

## Rituals Forms of Disciplinary Gathering

Many aspects of Disciplinary Gathering are about ritual: the actions and processes that represent the social, political, and economic relationships around Sites of Disciplinary Gathering and that work to develop or reinforce their cultural production and significance. Institutions, collectives, and other groups gather around rituals to create and maintain hierarchies and social arrangements. This is to suggest that “every community practices the design of itself” and that this design is made up of rituals.<sup>191</sup> Here, I look to how architecture in Aotearoa practices the design of itself and frame its ritual practices as: The Media—how things are written about, what ideas are prioritised and reinforced, and what forms these conversations take, both indexing and generating The Ground; Peer Respect—evidenced through ritual processes that recognise ideas and aesthetic outcomes of architectural production and can play out through the media, but mostly plays out through awards; and Contracts, rules, and regulation—mechanisms that

<sup>188</sup> Bruce Mau, “You Can Do Better,” *Architect Magazine*, January 3 2011, accessed April 06, 2021, [https://www.architectmagazine.com/design/you-can-do-better\\_o](https://www.architectmagazine.com/design/you-can-do-better_o).

<sup>189</sup> Mau, “You Can Do Better.”

<sup>190</sup> Mau, “You Can Do Better.”

<sup>191</sup> Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse*, 29.

ratify and reinforce ritual and hierarchy and render it fixed and invisible. Ritual spaces can be about power, and they are also about tradition and tikanga. Gathering sites like style and type generate tradition, acting as sources of inspiration within which architect and educator Tony Van Raat participation says “creates a community of practice which enriches” an understanding of the profession and of The Ground.<sup>192</sup>

## Media

Media is both a site of Disciplinary Gathering, where architects come together to theorise and debate the discipline, and a kind of Ground-making rhizome that underpins and connects different disparate ideas about architecture in an attempt to capture its diversity, or to further reinforce specific ideologies. Media uses writing and language to *make* architecture (a concept explored by #alive-a-library-118), piecing together the built environment and pulling it apart, examining it against its hang-ups and pitfalls, politics, and social dynamics. It has always been a place for architects to gather around styles, ideology, type, materials, nostalgia, and so on. The forms that media takes like newspapers, maps, and colonial archives can also be, as New Zealand historian Lucy Mackintosh describes “powerful ideological constructs that reveal much about the crafting of selected (often authorised) narratives about place”, to define what is legitimised as ‘true’.<sup>193</sup> Media is where The Ground is most visible, and where its absence is most apparent.

Beatriz Colomina argues that architecture is constructed “in the space of photographs, publications, exhibitions, congresses (CIAMs, etc.), fairs, magazines, museums, art galleries, competitions, advertising”.<sup>194</sup> All of these act as gathering sites, physically and conceptually. Media can be curated expressions of architectural ideas like design magazines or journals, or it can exist in advertisements, reality TV, memes, and ‘low-brow’ content—the kind leveraged by Le Corbusier in his avant-garde magazine *L’Esprit de Nouveau* in the early 20th Century.<sup>195</sup> Architecture in this era came to be understood mostly through its reproductions, buildings become “familiar” even when only experienced through photographs.<sup>196</sup> A photograph is of course not even the first reproduction of a building, the building itself is a reproduction of a drawing, which have always had crucial value for architects, not only in a commercial sense but that “being unable to think without drawing became the true mark of one fully socialised into the profession of architecture.”<sup>197</sup> Architecture media in Aotearoa has traversed various forms, from the early influence of reports from RIBA, to the influx of American magazines accompanying a post-war disillusionment with Britain and the rise of Modernism,<sup>198</sup> to the NZ Architect journal of the mid to late 1900s which featured passionate opinion pieces and letters to the editor. Architects gather in this space to debate and dialogue around critical aspects of the field.

Evolution of the media space with the rapid growth of the internet has exacerbated and abstracted the relationship between architecture and media. Buildings as capital means their image is also capital. Architecture can become a process of making buildings to make images that sell and that sell products from the supply chain, on Pinterest, Instagram, and through reality TV. At the same time this media space is also leveraged for discourse with Instagram meme pages like Dank Lloyd Wright<sup>199</sup> and sssscavvv<sup>200</sup> providing critical commentary on all aspects of the

<sup>192</sup> Tony Van Raat, “Tradition and Innovation “ in *Exquisite Apart: 100 Years of Architecture in New Zealand*, ed. Charles Walker (Auckland, New Zealand: Balasoglou Books, 2005), 53.

<sup>193</sup> Mackintosh, *Shifting Grounds*.

<sup>194</sup> Colomina, “The Media House,” 55.

<sup>195</sup> Beatriz Colomina, “L’esprit Nouveau: Architecture and Publicity,” in *Architecture Theory since 1968*, ed. K. Michael Hayes (New York: The MIT Press, 1998), 626.

<sup>196</sup> Walker, “Introduction,” 12.

<sup>197</sup> Banham, “A Black Box: The Secret Profession of Architecture,” 7.

<sup>198</sup> Hill, *New Zealand Architecture*, 35.

<sup>199</sup> dank.lloyd.wright, “Dank.Lloyd.Wright,” Instagram profile, n.d., accessed October 18, 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/dank.lloyd.wright/?hl=en>.

<sup>200</sup> sssscavvvv, “Sssscavvvv,” Instagram profile, n.d., accessed October 18, 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/sssccavvvv/?hl=en>.

profession through hastily made images and sardonic captions; while architecture podcasts cover everything from subjective experiences of architecture, to history, to education; and online communities of architects gather in forums like Discord to share ideas, resources, and commiserations.<sup>201</sup> Media is a gathering space of architecture in all its manifestations, now accessible 24/7, and flooded with content. Media can be full of dirt—memes, Reality TV, Pinterest feeds, Instagram reels, ads, and so on—that can be invigorating or energising because they appear to reveal a Ground otherwise unseen, or that they feel full of possibility, that they might be Ground shifting agents prodding at the profession. But media is also always a spectacle,<sup>202</sup> and a simulacrum,<sup>203</sup> which is dependent on a number of ritual practices that can be examined and engaged to understand and shift the ‘where’ of architecture. Media is thus a critical site of enquiry and traverse for a practice of Ground-making, and for ritualising sites of gathering.

In Aotearoa, architecture’s contemporary media space largely exists as magazines, the website *Architecture Now*, instagram accounts and reality television. The discourse that plays out through reality TV shows like *The Block*, *New Zealand’s Best Homes*, *House Hunt*, etc (arguably the most public-facing and accessible medium<sup>204</sup>) reinforces a narrative that housing, buildings, and property are a type of capital, existing to generate more capital. More than half of all household wealth in Aotearoa is held in property and property investment is regularly promoted as the best or only way to accumulate more wealth.<sup>205</sup> With few exceptions,<sup>206</sup> this type of media does little to connect people to ideas about architecture that resist its dematerialisation, and assert it as something that could allow people to feel a sense of belonging to the cities and neighbourhoods they call home.

Of course, the architecture discipline itself doesn’t have so much influence over what television media the people want, but its own media outlets, similarly responding to what content is profitable, do little to construct an alternative narrative. Where the discipline used to have a journal published by Te Kāhui Whaihangā NZIA that included critical commentary on architecture practices, their organisational structures, the happenings of architecture collectives, opinion pieces on politics etc, and “the architectural industry as a whole,” in the 1980s it became a magazine largely focused on the “publication of individual buildings.”<sup>207</sup> It launched as *Architecture New Zealand Magazine* in 1987, welcomed by architects for its focus on a “more market-driven future.”<sup>208</sup> Now it is accompanied by a number of other magazines<sup>209</sup> and its web version—*Architecture Now*. It is difficult to gauge where, aside from television, the public go to engage with architectural commentary. It is likely that, even with the thoughtful opinion pieces and reviews that do feature

<sup>201</sup> There are two popular discord servers for architects—*r/Architecture* and *Architecture Community*.

<sup>202</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Ken Knabb (PM Press, 2024).

<sup>203</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (University of Michigan Press, 1994).

<sup>204</sup> *The Block* peaked at 200,000 viewers *per episode* in 2017, and *New Zealand’s Best Homes* which replaced much-loved, and still profitable current affairs show *Sunday* in 2024, premiered with 490,000 viewers. Duncan Greive, “What You Learn About Tv from Five Years of Ratings for the Block and Shortland St,” *The Spinoff*, 2019, accessed September 29, 2021, <https://thespinoff.co.nz/media/11-07-2019/what-you-learn-about-tv-from-five-years-of-ratings-for-the-block-and-shortland-st/>.

<sup>205</sup> Patrick Aguiar Carvalho, Ben Baker, and Ashley Farquharson, *Housing as an Investment Asset in New Zealand*, Reserve Bank of New Zealand (2022).

<sup>206</sup> One being *The Drawing Board*, a series exploring a “new wave of modern Māori architecture ... sweeping across Aotearoa” through a collection of public and shared projects like marae and papakāinga provided a refreshing alternative but remains sidelined from the mainstream, with far less viewership than shows like *The Block*. *The Drawing Board*, season 1, 2023. <https://www.maoriplus.co.nz/show/the-drawing-board>. Anthony Hōete and Matilda Phillips, “The Drawing Board,” *Architecture Now*, 2023, accessed July 07, 2024, <https://architecturenow.co.nz/articles/the-drawing-board-whakaata-maori/>.

<sup>207</sup> Waghorn and Davis, “Looking Backwards to Look Forwards,” 129.

<sup>208</sup> Bill McKay, “The Last 25 Years,” *Architecture New Zealand*, no. 6 (Nov/Dec 2012).

<sup>209</sup> Magazines like *Home*, *Houses*, *Here*, *Interior* and *Urbis*, which (if the names of the first two don’t give it away) focus on residential architecture. Aside from *Home* and *Here*, they are all owned by AGM publishing who have an effective monopoly on architecture media and also publish *Architecture Now*.

on *ArchitectureNow*, that this discussion stays largely within a disciplinary echo chamber. Te Kāhui Whaihanga have an Instagram page, but it is almost exclusively images and descriptions of private houses, particularly amplified during their award season which runs for most of the year across different regions. Kate Wagner reflects how this phenomenon is prolific across mainstream architectural media globally. Disconnected from the reality of life in cities, life as a renter, life interacting with shared buildings, life reckoning with global warming and inequality; this “house porn”, the “endless feed of concrete houses dripping with houseplants built for rich expats in Thailand is beginning to seem more insulting than inspiring.”<sup>210</sup>

There are other ways to gather around media. Publications like *Making Space*, a history of women in architecture in Aotearoa, create gathering spaces through the act of compiling and researching, but also through the conversations, connections, and overlaps generated in the process. Author of the books, Elizabeth Cox reflects how unexpected connections and outcomes can occur by “pushing people into working collaboratively”, and through these connections the book became something beyond its original goal and rather something that could “augment the narrative of the country’s architectural history”.<sup>211</sup> Digital platforms like Instagram can gather people around ideas, and spaces like *New Zealand Architecture Forum*<sup>212</sup>, and blogs like *Greater Auckland*<sup>213</sup> provide an online outlet for ongoing discussion about key architectural ideas and in the case of the former, a place to share resources, concerns and information about the profession. The Ground in these spaces is active, charged, and generative and it is about *how* the media spaces are leveraged, and through what kinds of gathering.

## Peer Respect

Peer respect—gatherings that recognise or celebrate the practices of others within or outside their community—has been ritualised in a number of ways in architecture. Peer respect is a recognition of contribution to The Ground. Thus, if media indexes The Ground, peer respect offers the opportunity to reveal Ground-making. Peer respect occurs through publication of projects or a body of work, through invitations to give a lecture or contribute in some way in a knowledge sharing gathering, through provision of research grants for worthy projects, and through stories and anecdotal acknowledgement of inspiration and collegiality. The most significant manifestation of peer respect in Aotearoa now, and likely through the history of the profession, has played out through awards. Tasked with charting the history of the architecture profession in Aotearoa 100 years on from the founding of the NZIA, Charles Walker centred the narrative on the NZIA awards programme, where the “contemporaneous aspect” of awards reveals the “diversity of ideas, styles, and concerns that were regarded by the profession at the time as good architecture”.<sup>214</sup> Walker suggests that these offer us some clue to The Ground, some indication of gathering sites through time, and how they manifested as buildings. Professions, especially the architecture profession, has invented complex ritual processes to reward people and buildings dependent on a range of subjective criteria: “institutional, aesthetic, historical, ideological, technical, circumstantial, emotional and inter-personal”, including the particular bent of a jury in that point in time “towards change or conservatism”.<sup>215</sup>

Alongside their national awards for buildings, the NZIA also has: a Gold Medal award to honour an individual contribution to the architecture field; Named Awards as part of the suite of National Awards; Local Branch Awards; The John Sutherland Practice Award introduced in 2022; President’s Awards; Fellows; Distinguished Fellows; Student Design Awards; Warren Trust

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<sup>210</sup> Wagner, “Against House Porn.”

<sup>211</sup> Cox, “Introduction,” 11-12.

<sup>212</sup> New Zealand Architecture Forums is “a private collegial forum for New Zealand registered architects and affiliated professionals”. “NZ Architecture Forums,” NZ Architecture Forums, accessed July 02, 2024, <https://nzarchitecture.net.nz/login>.

<sup>213</sup> “Greater Auckland,” Greater Auckland, accessed July 02, 2024, <https://www.greeterauckland.org.nz/>.

<sup>214</sup> Walker, “Introduction,” 12.

<sup>215</sup> Walker, “Introduction,” 12.

Writing Awards; and the F. Gordon Wilson Fellowship for Public Housing introduced in 2023.<sup>216</sup> The Awards calendar runs from February to November.<sup>217</sup> These exist alongside a plethora of additional award opportunities including: Interior Awards, New Zealand Commercial Project Awards; Resene Architectural Design Awards; Designers Institute of New Zealand Best Awards; Auckland Architecture Association Visionary Architecture Awards; A+W•NZ Dulux Awards; Home of the Year Award; Registered Master Builder House of the Year Awards; Here Awards; Resene Colour Awards; Dulux Colour Awards; Eat Drink Design Awards; New Zealand Energy Excellence Awards; Intergrain Timber Vision Awards; Landscape Architecture Awards; NZ Window & Glass Association Awards; Best Practice Awards; Lightweight Structures Association Australasia Design Awards; Property Industry Awards. I list them all in this way to emphasise the sheer quantity of awards on offer each calendar year.

Awards are a way to recognise achievement, contribution to The Ground and, they capture a sense of what is valued on The Ground at a point in time. They are a location in which the critic in architecture, those with an interest in describing the meaning space of architecture and its affects, is solicited and visible.<sup>218</sup> But awards, as the central gathering space of peer respect, have a myriad of associated problems, particularly in architecture where the discipline's gathering sites, expertise, and metrics of 'success' are so varied and contested. Award programs often reward architecture based on images alone, forgoing the critical experiential qualities of architecture; they don't always take into account questions around budget (let alone where the money from a project may have some from); they don't often consult the users of the project and their experience of it; and so overall, they perpetuate the emphasis of architecture as commodified objects, and architecture as images. They can also be expensive to enter and then to attend, exclusive to membership in an organisation, and overlook the vast network of collaborations (between people and people, people and stories, people, and place, and so on) that occur to make the emergence of the building possible.

Awards are rarely generative, they reward what exists already on The Ground and fix it in the present, rather than examine what its ideas could mean for the future. They generate limited discourse while dominating the media gathering space. How architecture demonstrates respect for its peers is an indication of what work is believed to contribute to the 'common good'. I believe that in architecture the 'common good' is understood too much as what is best for the profession, rather than what is best for society. Architecture's tethers to the economy render celebration of high end residential projects "lavish holiday houses for the well to do" necessary for the institute, who see the promotion of architecture on this part of The Ground as the fuel that will sustain the discipline.<sup>219</sup> Pacific academic Karamia Müller expressed a similar in sentiment in regards to the common good when considering Michael Sandel's idea that "what kinds of work are worthy of recognition and esteem" and "what we owe one another as citizens" (let alone what is owed to other species, ecosystems, and so on), are intimately connected.<sup>220</sup> Müller asks architects to "consider with depth other contributions to our common life worth celebrating", for example engagement with Te Tiriti o Waitangi, or mitigation of the climate crisis.<sup>221</sup> I would go a step further to suggest that the form of awards, and how we understand peer respect also needs to change, if a system that can make Ground in architecture is to be possible in the mainstream.

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<sup>216</sup> NZIA, "Types of Awards," Te Kāhui Whaihangā New Zealand Institute of Architecture, accessed August 06, 2024, <https://www.nzia.co.nz/awards/overview/>.

<sup>217</sup> NZIA, "New Zealand Architecture Awards Calendar," Te Kāhui Whaihangā New Zealand Institute of Architecture, accessed August 06, 2024, <https://www.nzia.co.nz/awards/awards-calendar/>.

<sup>218</sup> Kate Wagner reflects on how usually the role of the critic is oppositional, interrogative, "operates from a perspective of trying to reconcile the building with its historical, socio-economic, cultural, ethical and political contexts" and is thus otherwise rarely solicited. Wagner, "Against House Porn."

<sup>219</sup> Toomath, "Into the Post-War World," 50.

<sup>220</sup> Michael Sandel quoted in Karamia Müller, "Our Moral Agenda," *Architecture Now*, 2021, accessed August 08, 2024, <https://architecturenow.co.nz/articles/opinion-our-moral-agenda/>.

<sup>221</sup> Müller, "Our Moral Agenda."

Moves in the right direction are those like the F. Gordon Wilson Fellowship for Public Housing (in which pre:fab was a finalist in 2023 with #radical-retrofit-246), that generate cultural production through peer respect.<sup>222</sup> This award provides resources and a support network for the delivery of architectural research and through the actuation of the research can generate discourse, conversation, and community. Contribution to the community—of architects, of everyone—is the true gathering site of peer respect, but how it is rewarded or demonstrated remains critical to what Ground is made.

## Contracts / Regulation

Architecture is a process of shaping a material form around rituals, from the location of a baptismal font in a catholic basilica, the aisle that lead to it, and the apse that might exist above it; to the layout of a kitchen that determines the particular way one might make a cup of tea; to the processional open spaces on a marae, shaped around the procedures of pōwhiri. Albert Refiti, in his lecture during the NZIA Auckland Branch Architecture Week 2022, discussed the manifestation of architecture around ritual practices throughout Te Moananui-a-Kiwa, trying to answer the question of “What is Pacific Architecture?”<sup>223</sup> The language of architecture connects across Te Moananui, (for example the word that loosely translates to house: Fale, Vale, Fare, Hare, Ware, ‘Are, Hale, Whare), and describes its ritualisation. Fale translates to: “something drawn over, and underneath the clan gather”.<sup>224</sup> The word used for architect across Te Moananui—variations like tufunga, tufuga, ta’unga—is also the word used for ritual specialist. The gathering of people together to perform rituals, is synonymous with the manifestation of materials around them. This points to the architectural process as an opportunity space for deeper engagement in existing ritual practices, and in the creation of ritual practices to explore different modes of relation between people and place.

Contemporary anthropological research says that ritual interaction is how current political frameworks were discovered—that it is only through repetition and habitual embodiment that they have come to be seen as enduring forms of authority. In *The Dawn of Everything*, anthropologists David Graeber and David Wengrow make the case that the various modern political structures that have organised social relationships since prehistoric times were all invented during the late palaeolithic period through a process of collective ritual experimentation by hunter-gatherer bands to manage novel intra and inter group dynamics that arose as their size and density increased.<sup>225</sup> Collective rituals were used to invoke and sustain spaces of free play in which new and different social relationships could be discovered and iterated to better meet particular challenges, like seasonal variations in food supply, cyclical migration, psycho-social bonding, forgiveness of debts, collective catharsis etc. Survival could be so challenging, that the authoritarian regimes practised through ritual became necessary to manage tribal relations, particularly through cold seasons or extreme weather events. But in the summer, and when circumstances were easier, the ritual space was one of play, experimentation, and celebration. Such ritual spaces could be as short as a day or as long as a season, often in contrast to one another, and involve the redrafting of personal freedoms, social norms, and hierarchies.

Over time, those experimental spaces that proved more generally useful were repeated more frequently. Invariably co-opted by those who stood to benefit from them the most, their particular ritual practices were used by those at the top of arbitrary hierarchies to detach from, rather than reconnect with, the egalitarian field that preceded them, resulting eventually in the

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<sup>222</sup> Sadly, it appears the politics of the institute could not sustain a gathering around public housing as worthy of focus and recognition for more than two years and the award is now called the “F. Gordon Wilson Fellowship for Affordable Housing”, opening the competition to private projects.

<sup>223</sup> Albert Refiti, “What Is Pacific Architecture?,” (Recorded Lecture), Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Art Educators, 2022, accessed October 18, 2024, <https://anzaae.nz/collections/albert-l-refiti-what-is-pacific-architecture/>.

<sup>224</sup> Refiti, “What Is Pacific Architecture?”

<sup>225</sup> David Graeber and David Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* (Penguin UK, 2021).

hierarchical social and political structures we are familiar with today. Manifestations within my practice like #ddd-170 and #prefab-contract-168 explored how *contracts* act as the present-day manifestation of this ritual experimentation, where social relations are fixed and re-fixed. Contracts are an everyday event, yet somewhere between phone apps and marriage, treaties, and mortgage payments, they disappeared from collective imagination, and the current dominant social framework of society (the Commodity-Mediated, Market-Driven, Individual-Exceptionalist contemporary western Anglo-Saxon Neo-liberal Democracy) obscures that it was created and modulated by ritual.

Contracts, rules, and regulation act as a key mechanism to ratify and reinforce ritual and hierarchy and render it fixed and invisible within institutions, collectives, and society more broadly. In architecture in Aotearoa this plays out through contracts and codes like The Registered Architects' Act, council bylaws, building standards, planning overlays, the building code, acceptable solutions, construction contracts, licensure, codes of ethics, client briefs, the Agreement for Architecture Services, accreditation requirements for schools, syllabus or studio briefs, mortgage agreements, contracts that dictate land use, and so on. These documents are where the boundaries of a profession and their 'expertise' are legitimised, regulating the way "specialist expertise is made available in society" and where power structures are reinforced.<sup>226</sup> They also represent a space on The Ground where architects gather to construct ritual frameworks that produce architecture—ideas and buildings.

As discussed, Colomina builds a compelling case that the construction site of architecture is media—the theoretical and formal speculation taking place in publications, competitions, and salons.<sup>227</sup> The contract—as first official engagement between Architect and Client that subsequently regulates all future interaction, and the implied outcome of this relationship: the building—is a critical part of the design process and yet is absent from Colomina's work and much of architectural theory. Banham argues that architects "assume responsibility" for good buildings not through laws, but through their contracts.<sup>228</sup> The contract is the construction site of architecture and underpins the architecture profession.

The AIA, established in 1857 aimed to develop a "a suite of standardized tools derived from architects across the United States", with an aim of "distilling 'best practice'" that would eventually lead to the *Uniform Contract* in 1888, which formalised the role of the architect as "the client's agent".<sup>229</sup> The early model of architecture practice as defined by the AIA's *Handbook of Architectural Practice* was "rationalised through detailed contractual obligations, managerial controls, and instrumentalised procedures", and codified in a further series of standardized contractual documents produced between the period of 1917-1920.<sup>230</sup> Architect and historian George Barnett Johnston even goes so far as to call the "compass, contract, capital" the three main tools of architecture,<sup>231</sup> while architect and educator Mel Dodd points to the contractual space as where the roles of the architect are defined and labelled most clearly—like architect as the client's agent—and thus present an opportunity to imagine "richer definition[s]" by subverting the very mechanisms within which architecture is understood and framed.<sup>232</sup> The contract in architecture practice could provide fertile Ground for how relationships, social constructs, and hierarchies might be considered more critically in relation to the environment, material realities, and ethical responsibilities.

Remnants of an understanding of how society was shaped by ritual play out through the idea of the 'social contract', a mostly unspoken yet supposedly agreed upon set of behaviours that when

<sup>226</sup> Harriss, Hyde, and Marcaccio, "Introduction," 15.

<sup>227</sup> Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (mit Press, 1996).

<sup>228</sup> Banham, "A Black Box: The Secret Profession of Architecture."

<sup>229</sup> Walsh, "How 'Architect' Became a Protected Title in the United States."

<sup>230</sup> George Barnett Johnston, *Assembling the Architect: The History and Theory of Professional Practice* (London, England: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2020), 2.

<sup>231</sup> Johnston, *Assembling the Architect*, 3.

<sup>232</sup> Dodd, "Between the Lived and the Built," 57.

abided by guarantee some protection of rights and maintenance of social order by a governing authority. Governance educator Michael Macaulay describes the myth of the ‘social contract,’ a central pillar of Western Political thought for centuries, as a “complete fiction”, and a dangerous myth that implies some kind of citizen consent, when political order is “overwhelmingly likely to occur through conquest and violence”, and where even when consent is explicitly sought, “the reality of statehood is entirely different to what is agreed upon”.<sup>233</sup> An example of this is Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Te Tiriti is the founding contract of Aotearoa, and its conception, and its breaches, allowed the architecture profession to emerge and develop. Te Tiriti allowed for the rapid expansion of the Nation State of ‘New Zealand’ and the arrival of many architects under the jurisdiction of RIBA, and the many breaches of the agreement in the New Zealand Wars and the years since that saw the illegal seizure of around 95% of all Māori land contribute to the physical Ground of Aotearoa, and the conceptual Ground of how it is related to in architecture. Architecture also gathered literally around Te Tiriti—the first building designed by an ‘architect’ in Aotearoa was the Treaty House at Waitangi. The Treaty House acts as a literal and conceptual grounding moment for architecture, manifested through a building, and through an agreement that would come to impact the relationship of its people to people, and people to land, for the country going forward, whether in respect or breach of its terms. Te Tiriti is a gathering site in itself for a model of collectivity which has not yet been fully activated in the economic, social, and political structures that underpin society in Aotearoa, but provides foundations for other ways of relating to each other going forward. Where other social contracts are mythical, that which underpins relationships in Aotearoa and in architecture doesn’t have to be. Te Tiriti provides a contractual blueprint for architecture and society, it gives all Tangata Tiriti in Aotearoa turangawaewae, a Ground on which to stand.

An acknowledgement of architecture’s professional relationship to Te Tiriti was made explicit and ritualised when Te Kāhui Whaihanga entered into a contractual agreement—Te Kawenata o Rata—with Ngā Aho in 2017. Ngā Aho is a network of Māori design professionals established in 2001 after a Hui was held at Hoani Waititi Marae to discuss Māori architecture and its recent developments.<sup>234</sup> The Kawenata enables “future joint strategies and action plans to be developed between the NZIA and Ngā Aho” and is a values-oriented agreement based around five articles of “Respect – Whakaritenga; Authority and Responsibility – Rangatiratanga; Knowledge and Tikanga – Mātauranga Whaihanga; Cooperation – Mahi Kotahitanga; and Representation – Kanohi Kitea”.<sup>235</sup> These establish the spirit of the relationship between the NZIA and Ngā Aho, “under the mana of the Treaty of Waitangi”.<sup>236</sup> This contract was used to create a new relational framework between the two organisations, create Ground between them, and generate additional ritual processes for gathering together to generate architecture discourse and cultural production.

The ubiquity of the contract in the profession and society also opens opportunity in other contractual spaces. This could include syllabi and briefing documents in the academy, which behave like contracts between teacher and student that could be negotiated based on terms specific to the students’ interests and their values;<sup>237</sup> the Agreement for Architects Services (AAS) is the starting point for any client-architect relationship and could be tailored to go far beyond the standard contract provided by the institute; employment agreements establish

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<sup>233</sup> Michael Macaulay, “Beyond the Social Contract: Knowledge and Citizenship,” in *Public Knowledge*, ed. Emma Johnson, Radical Futures (Freerange Press, 2020), 71.

<sup>234</sup> An outcome of the Hui was the acknowledgement of a need for a professional body of Māori design professionals, recognising that “in the post-settlement era it is more important than ever that Māori design professionals are equipped to support the design needs of a growing Māori economy.” Ngā Aho, “Takenga Mai,” Ngā Aho, accessed February 15, 2021, <https://ngaaho.maori.nz/page.php?m=155>.

<sup>235</sup> Ngā Aho, “New Zealand Institute of Architects and Ngā Aho Sign Te Kawenata O Rata,” Ngā Aho, accessed August 12, 2024, <https://ngaaho.maori.nz/page.php?m=188>.

<sup>236</sup> Ngā Aho, “New Zealand Institute of Architects and Ngā Aho Sign Te Kawenata O Rata.”

<sup>237</sup> More discussion about how sites of possibility for organising within architecture schools can be found in *The Organiser’s Guide to Architecture Education* which I co-authored while conducting this research. Kirsten Day et al., *The Organizer’s Guide to Architecture Education* (Taylor & Francis, 2024).

hierarchies and dynamics in the workforce and could be re-negotiated;<sup>238</sup> and The Code of Ethics managed by the NZRAB is a particularly fertile site for reimagination given it considers architects ethical responsibilities, although right now it largely represents an architect's ethical responsibilities to their client and to the profession, rather than to broader sites of enquiry.<sup>239</sup> The contract is only such an opportunity space because of how much it dominates the space of behavioural and relational mediation. Contracts also have the affect of creating and reinforcing oppressive power structures and are used most prevalently now to ensure that the wealth distribution and hierarchies of today are the same tomorrow. This is evident across laws and regulation but is most profound in the contracts and laws that mitigate land usage, and have done for centuries.<sup>240</sup> These contracts, named things like 'Spatial Planning', in essence are concerned with what architect Tony Watkins calls "allocating the right to exploit".<sup>241</sup> This has been explored in Aotearoa by Fleur Palmer whose research looks at how restrictive legislation has limited Māori from owning and developing land,<sup>242</sup> and by Anthony Hoete who explores how the impediment of building regulations can be overcome in "the return of architectural practice to the Māori community".<sup>243</sup>

Architecture's conceptual Ground is inseparable from the mechanisms that define relations and understandings of the physical ground, and these largely play out through contracts. For my practice, this presented an opportunity space to explore contracts as mechanisms for changing relationships, between the rich multitude of actors within the architectural process, and within the process of developing and sustaining collective gathering. If every community designs itself, then these ritual spaces are critical for imagining new gatherings for architecture, and the Ground-maker is a kind of ritual specialist who creates the conditions for the design of communities and their rituals.

## Organisations

Movements within a discipline—stylistic and conceptual—are necessarily dependent on collective decision making and opportunities to share skills and knowledge that form, re-shape, resist and reinforce those movements. Some kind of consensus must be come to, whether it be dictated by external forces (the availability of materials), or intentionally and internally (through professionalisation), through replication (style as a type of meme), through the manifestation of societal ideology through ritual (political, religious), and so on. Gatherings occur to comply with a site, or to resist it, or to create new sites still connected to the old ones through opposition.

<sup>238</sup> A role a union would typically provide support with, something sorely lacking in architecture in Aotearoa.

<sup>239</sup> Some of these ideas are discussed in this paper by Jessamine Fraser and others. Jessamine Fraser, Andrew Burgess, Megan Burfoot, and Charles Walker, "Ethics, Care, and the Architect's Responsibility to Society and Environment," *Environmental Science & Sustainable Development* (2023).

<sup>240</sup> Alastair Parvin, "A New Land Contract," Medium, 2020, accessed August 12, 2024, <https://medium.com/open-systems-lab/a-new-land-contract-684c3ba1f1b3>.

<sup>241</sup> Tony Watkins, "16 Questions to Ask Your Architect," pre:fab, 2022, accessed July 02, 2024, <https://www.pre-fab.xyz/catalogue#:~:text=Questions%20For%20Your%20Architect%20%2D%20A%20Tony%20Watkins%20Collection>.

<sup>242</sup> Palmer's research looks at the impact of restrictive legislation and how it has prevented Māori from owning land, constructing "Māori-centred developments within urban areas", and even limits Māori developing on Māori-owned land in rural regions. Fleur Palmer, "Building Sustainable Papakāinga to Support Māori Aspirations for Self-Determination" (Auckland University of Technology, 2016). Palmer also points to a reconstruction and a decolonisation of this legislation and these systems as the only way to resolve architectural questions around equity in the CBD, arguing that any effort to integrate Māori history and culture into the built environment without it is a "token gesture". Fleur Palmer, "If Auckland's Plan to Include Māori Histories in City Centre Upgrade Is Genuine, It Must Act on Inequalities," *The Conversation*, accessed August 12, 2024, <https://theconversation.com/if-aucklands-plan-to-include-maori-histories-in-city-centre-upgrade-is-genuine-it-must-act-on-inequalities-120407.2024>.

<sup>243</sup> Hoete experiments widely across materials, concepts, and project types, and leveraging regulatory loopholes, for example in a 2001 home for his whanau realising that the Māori land title actually provided "some flexibility to operate outside of the planning and building codes". Brown, *Māori Architecture*, 159.

While professional institutes are charged to make static these definitions and movements, Johnston argues that “the design and construction field has perennially morphed into novel configurations” reflecting “competing interests of rule-bound players but ones whose respective roles and identities are continually being redefined by chance, available tools, and emerging technologies”.<sup>244</sup> Across the various historical accounts of architecture in Aotearoa, Sites of Disciplinary Gathering are often discussed, in particular style, materials, and type (of buildings); while the Ritual Forms and organisational structures that this gathering takes are largely overlooked or mentioned in passing. But it is within spaces of gathering—clubs and collectivised practices, media spaces and resistance—where the theoretical development of architecture plays out.

In general, these gatherings of architects emerge to define, fix, and re-fix the boundaries of architecture in legislative terms; or as groups who fail to see themselves reflected in the present and future imagined by the dominant Disciplinary Gathering sites and gather to form their own. I am particularly interested in the gathering spaces that exist outside of the professional boundary, those who gather to imagine and practise other ways of being, or who try to shift the boundaries, create new ones, bust the old ones down. Mostly, they start out informal, and sometimes stay that way, sustained through ritual gathering, or they too become formalised institutions in themselves. In any case these gatherings, across types, gather to *consciously engage with The Ground of architecture*, generating a space where The Ground is theorised and where the way it is theorised constructs new areas of Ground which allows new things and affects to be discovered. This is partly because these gatherings occur in this conceptual space—where the primary goal is typically to *make* architecture, rather than to make buildings. The whakapapa of any building includes gathering spaces like this and the cultural production they generate.

This engagement with The Ground through conscious collectivised gathering constitutes organisational practices, here described as ‘Organisations’. ‘Organising’ will be discussed in more detail in ‘Chapter Four—Love and [re]Organising’, but for the sake of this essay, organisations are these conscious gatherings that engage with The Ground and have strategies, methods, and approaches to do so. Discussing them here draws connections across and between them and contextualises my practice—and the organisations it encompasses—within the Disciplinary Gathering space. The conclusions I draw about my own practice come to form a dialogue with other practices and collectives, revealing methods and approaches for Ground-making.

I think it is helpful to start with the most formalised gathering site, around which many orbit. Professional institutions formalised sites of Disciplinary Gathering—collectives like guilds—that were present in the vocation of building design before the 1800s. They defined a fixed and foundational Ground, and then gatekept it, choosing which sites of gathering to include in their orbit. For early colonist settler architects to Aotearoa, their Disciplinary Gathering spaces had been in the United Kingdom, where particular styles and trends were developed and discussed and then imported to Aotearoa. For example, Bishop Selwyn inspired many of the early Gothic churches in Tāmaki Makaurau, having been a member of the Cambridge Camden Society, a collective founded by a group of students in 1839 to promote the study and construction of gothic architecture in the United Kingdom.<sup>245</sup> In this way The Ground is impacted not just by imported materials and style, but also modelled off organisation and gathering types. There was a significant enough collective of architects in Canterbury in the 1800s to form the first architecture association in Aotearoa—The Canterbury Architects Association—formed by William Armson, Fedrick Stronts, Benjamin Mountfort and others in 1871.<sup>246</sup> These men wanted to legitimise the discipline within a context of public suspicion, conservative tastes of those commissioning buildings, and competition juries stacked with “uneducated and ignorant men” unable to appreciate the designs of architects.<sup>247</sup> This gathering of architects met in 1871 to

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<sup>244</sup> Johnston, *Assembling the Architect*, 5.

<sup>245</sup> Stacpoole and Beaven, *Architecture 1820-1970*, 10.

<sup>246</sup> Stacpoole and Beaven, *Architecture 1820-1970*, 12.

<sup>247</sup> Ussher quoting *The Press* Robyn Ussher, *W.B. Armson: A Colonial Architect Rediscovered*

complain about local council bylaws around building, resulting in a letter to the City Council which was later reported in the Lyttelton Times. This “collective action” was a first step towards the formation of a professional body, which would go on to develop a series of strict requirements for architects.<sup>248</sup> The association appeared to dissolve sometime in the 1880s, and other institutes appeared around the country until the formation of the New Zealand Institute of Architects in 1905. But that Christchurch hosted the first official Disciplinary Gathering space amongst a culture of architecture interest, and then in the early-mid 20th century had a “closeknit” community, arguably conceiving of the most historically discussed “New Zealand style”, doesn’t seem coincidental.<sup>249</sup> Where people gather to discuss architectural ideas, The Ground is understood, discovered, and made.

RIBA provided the first professional oversight in architecture in Aotearoa, and most of the professional structures and systems later developed to professionalise the discipline were modelled directly off RIBA’s. Cox describes how The New Zealand Institute of Architects was founded in Wellington in 1905 “to give architects a forum” for debating the use of the title of ‘architect’ and to regulate training.<sup>250</sup> There was controversy around early drafts of a legislation to formalise the profession, with engineers concerned they were being excluded from designing buildings, and politicians expressing concern that the wording of the legislation excluded participation by women.<sup>251</sup> After 8 years of campaigning and a “relax[ing]” of the use of the term ‘architect’, the Architects Act 1913 was passed, and the institute “reviewed the qualifications of hundreds of applicants for registration”.<sup>252</sup> The systems of the institute for registration and education changed over the years,<sup>253</sup> and, as discussed in ‘Chapter One—The Ground’, the NZRAB now manage the functional aspects of the discipline that ensure the continuity of its professionalisation, while the NZIA is an incorporated society that sets standards for professional contracts and CPD. The Architects Act, like other legislation, has been revised a number of times, but in its current form, the Registered Architects Act 2005, a main provision of the act: to “protect the title of registered architect”, remains constant.<sup>254</sup> This differs from other professions like the medical and legal professions, where the language used to describe the purpose of the act is about the protection of public interest. This idea of protection as a site of gathering is what defines the organising approaches of professional institutions, who are limited conceptually by long held ideas, and literally by laws and customs. The myths of society are upheld by its institutions. If we return to the metaphor of Ground-making that was related to science, in general professional institutions are not in the business of discovering new tools or modes of instrumentation to understand The Ground, rather they keep looking at The Ground through the same tools, even as things change around them. Sometimes however, they are given new tools, like the Te Kawanata o Rata, which presented Te Kāhui Whaihanga with a mechanism for initiating a shift in ways of being and knowing in architecture.

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(Christchurch, New Zealand: Robert McDougall Art Gallery, 1983), 21.

<sup>248</sup> These requirements included three years of practice after four years of training, and a scale of charges for design work, which would prove at times to be controversial with clients. Ussher, *W.B. Armson*, 22.

<sup>249</sup> Stacpoole and Beaven, *Architecture 1820-1970*, 75.

<sup>250</sup> Cox, “Very Difficult Circumstances: Lucy Greenish,” 35.

<sup>251</sup> Cox, “Very Difficult Circumstances,” 35.

<sup>252</sup> Cox, “Very Difficult Circumstances,” 35.

<sup>253</sup> Including an examination system established in 1917 (that took the responsibility of skills assessment away from employers for the first time), “testimonials of study” which required that students complete design projects on top of their studies or work introduced in 1920, until the various architecture schools established formalised degree programs. Cox, “A ‘Work-Room Pure and Simple’,” 41-42.

<sup>254</sup> “Registered Architects Act 2005,” ed. Innovation Ministry of Business, and Employment (New Zealand: The Parliamentary Counsel Office 2005). <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2005/0038/latest/whole.html>.

While other organisations like heritage protection groups and Civic Trusts<sup>255</sup> have emerged to protect or reinforce the architecture's existing Ground, many organisations position themselves alongside the institutional boundaries, trying to stretch or extend them. These groups gather to resist or oppose something specific; to fill perceived gaps in the discipline that they feel unserved by; and/or simply to be together and find camaraderie around a shared interest not otherwise represented. They organise in relation to existing Ground and are often interested specifically in the professional framework and what is missing. Some examples include: Architects Against Nuclear Arms who in 1984, inspired by a similar movement amongst visual artists,<sup>256</sup> formed to align with other professional groups in expressing “common concern about the proliferation of nuclear arms, and to make a positive contribution to the education of the public as to the unacceptable dangers of preparing for nuclear war”;<sup>257</sup> the Women's Institute of Architecture founded in 1979 with a name that started as a “satirical joke”, a nod to the exclusion of women from the activities of the NZIA, before the name morphed into Women in Architecture (to maintain the acronym WIA) and who gathered every month or so as a “non-hierarchical and co-operative group” to discuss design and ideas and to support “each other in the world of architecture”;<sup>258</sup> and the Thursday Lunch Group, formed by many of the original members of WIA in 1992, a kind of “unofficial Continuing Professional Development group” established to help women forge a way in the profession.<sup>259</sup> The Thursday Lunch Group are an example of an organisation that made Ground for a new way of being together around the discussion of architecture, which would later have a direct impact on professional gathering. The structure of their group led the way for the formation of the NZIA's Small Practice Groups after the changes to the Registered

<sup>255</sup> In 1964, angered by the overnight destruction of a double row of mature trees on Rolleston Avenue in Ōtautahi, seven citizens formed the “City Planning Study Group” to “keep a watch on the city's well-being”. They met regularly and were described by a local paper as a “vociferous minority,” creating enough of a stir to be engaged by a new Master Traffic Plan for the city. From this action, the group re-formed to create the Christchurch Civic Trust in 1965, including architect Peter Beaven, which became the first heritage lobby group in Aotearoa, followed soon after by civic trusts in other cities, to advocate for the preservation of heritage landmarks. Christchurch Civic Trust, “About Us,” Christchurch Civic Trust, accessed July 02, 2024, <https://christchurchcivictrust.org.nz/about-the-christchurch-civic-trust/>. While conversations around heritage in larger cities can be justifiably complicated by equity issues like access to housing in inner-city suburbs and aesthetic symbolism of colonialism, advocacy for existing environments is critical for a generative approach to architecture. Civic Trust Auckland includes not just buildings in their aims, but “protection of natural landforms”, objects like murals and machinery, and cultural and intangible things”. Isla Stewart, “‘Keeping Wellington's Character’ Means Keeping People in Cold and Mouldy Homes,” The Spinoff, 2020, accessed July 02, 2024, <https://thespinoff.co.nz/society/04-09-2020/keeping-wellingtons-character-means-keeping-people-in-cold-and-mouldy-homes>. Civic Trust Auckland, “Welcome,” Civic Trust Auckland, accessed July 02, 2024, <https://civictrustauckland.org.nz/welcome/>.

<sup>256</sup> Lawlor-Bartlett, “A History of Visual Artists against Nuclear Arms (Vaana),” Disarmament and Security Centre, 2018, accessed July 02, 2024, <http://legacy.disarmsecure.org/History%20of%20VAANA.pdf>.

<sup>257</sup> AANA, “Architects against Nuclear Arms,” *NZ Architect*, no. 5 (1984): 53. This group submitted updates several times to journal *NZ Architect* and hosted a series of speakers who presented on the issue to the NZIA Wellington Branch in 1985. Ian Prior, “Architects against Nuclear Arms,” *NZ Architect*, no. 2 (1986): 52. They also joined the International Architects Designers and Planners for the Prevention of Nuclear War, and some members, including founding member Tony Watkins, travelled to Prague for an Architects for World Peace meeting in November 1989. Lawlor-Bartlett, “A History of Visual Artists against Nuclear Arms (Vaana),” 10.

<sup>258</sup> The group remained un-formalised, finding the rules around setting up an incorporated society too complicated and formal, but wrote articles and updates for *NZ Architect* journal and the journal of the Auckland Architectural Association (AAA), organised conferences, made submissions to the NZIA, and connected with similar groups internationally. Janet Thomson, “Janet Thomson: ‘Women and Architecture, and the Wia Group 1979-85: A Personal Response’,” *Architecture+Women NZ*, 2013, accessed July 02, 2024, <https://architecturewomen.org.nz/research/articles/janet-thomson-women-and-architecture-and-the-wia-group-1979-85-a-personal-response>. They recognised the duality of their purpose as a social organisation for gathering to be together, and to provide “the necessary background for something a little more radical,” expecting “various “political actions” to eventuate. Janet Thomson, “Challenging Titles (Times) for Women Architects,” *AAA Journal* Dec, no. 2 (1979): 14.

<sup>259</sup> *Architecture+Women NZ, Munro Diversity Awards: Thursday Lunch Group - Finalist*, (*Architecture+Women NZ*, 2014), 36.

Architects act in 2005.<sup>260</sup> The Thursday Lunch Group didn't become formalised or expand to be particularly large, but their ritualised consistency of meeting for lunch every week for more than 30 years, and providing Ground for knowledge and resource sharing, had a profound impact on its members and shifted practices within the profession through organising methods.

Disciplinary gatherings like this create avenues of access and a feeling of familiar Ground for those who feel othered or excluded from the discipline. When the Auckland University College School of Architecture (which became the University of Auckland School of Architecture and Planning) first started offering lectures in 1917, they put an express invitation to members of The Auckland Civic League, a women's organisation interested in "improving the urban environment"<sup>261</sup> and encouraging women to run for office.<sup>262</sup> I expect that the existence of the group allowed its members to feel emboldened and supported to enrol, and three subsequently did.<sup>263</sup> Women's groups like this through the first half of the 20th Century formed a network of organisers advocating for policy change in the built environment, including the Women's Committee of the Wellington Town Planning Association; the Civic League who set up a 'Ruskin Circle' for women to "discuss both civic and domestic architecture"; the National Council of Women who "urged the government to develop better housing policies"; The Wellington Women's Social Services Guild; the Play and Recreation Association, later called the Community Sunshine Association; and the Auckland Town-planning League.<sup>264</sup> The Architectural Centre was also established in 1946 "to promote good (modern) design to the Wellington public. It aimed to provide support to local architecture students at a time when New Zealand's capital city did not have its own architecture school."<sup>265</sup> It is an early, and still operational example of the development of a community of designers to operate as a support network, to share resources, and to allow the space for critical conversation around architecture. Bill Wilson of The Group was in the early meetings at the Centre and, no doubt inspired by their ongoing conversations and work, later went on to establish the Auckland Architecture Association (AAA) with other architects and students in 1965 to "provide a common meeting Ground for architects, planners, teachers, students and graduates".<sup>266</sup> The AAA was set up with similar community ambitions, aiming to provide a forum for "speaking on architectural and planning matters, organising exhibitions, and meeting socially for discussion".<sup>267</sup>

The development of support communities in the Disciplinary Gathering space continued, as groups within architecture who felt unserved by the profession leveraged the importance and necessity of a network and safe platform, a Ground to discuss, advocate for, and action change. As discussed, in 2005, Ngā Aho was formed to provide a network and resources for Māori design professionals and have had tangible impact on the profession's boundaries, both conceptually through the integration of Mātauranga Māori in the design professions, and through regulatory mechanisms like the Te Aranga Principles.<sup>268</sup> In 2011 Architecture+Women NZ (A+WZNZ) was formed to "simply [shine] the spotlight on women working in the field of architecture, because it so

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<sup>260</sup> Architecture+Women NZ, "Past Gatherings: Thursday Lunch Group 24 Year Anniversary," Architecture+Women NZ, 2016, accessed July 02, 2024, <https://architecturewomen.org.nz/events/gatherings/thursday-lunch-group-24-year-anniversary>.

<sup>261</sup> Cox, "'Girl as Architect': Training to Be an Architect 1920s-1945," 46.

<sup>262</sup> Sandra Coney, "Melville, Eliza Ellen," Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, 1996, accessed July 03, 2024, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/maori-architecture-whare-maori/240703>

<sup>263</sup> Cox, "'Girl as Architect'," 46.

<sup>264</sup> Cox, "Movers and Shakers: Campaigning for a Better Architecture 1920s-1950s," 78-80.

<sup>265</sup> Gatley and Walker, "John Cox, Gordon Wilson, George Porter, Al Gabites: The Architectural Centre's Summer Schools of Design."

<sup>266</sup> Wilson, "Auckland Architecture Association."

<sup>267</sup> Gatley, *Group Architects*, 11.

<sup>268</sup> Jacqueline Paul and William Hatton, "In Practice: Te Aranga Design Principles," Architecture Now, 2018, accessed September 09, 2024, <https://architecturenow.co.nz/articles/in-practice-te-aranga-design-principles/>.

often misses them.”<sup>269</sup> Their approach, quite explicitly reacting to the gaps in services provided by the NZIA, has seen tangible shifts in the operations of Te Kāhui Whaihangā. A+WNZ provide what’s missing from the actions of the institute on The Ground, and then the NZIA patch those holes. For example, until 2021, in its 22 years of existence, the NZIA’s gold medal, “the highest honour the Institute awards to an individual working in architecture in Aotearoa”, had never been awarded to a woman. In 2014 A+WNZ started their own award series to recognise women in architecture, including the Chrystall Excellence Award which recognises women who have “led expanded and full careers in architecture over several decades” and exhibits “excellence in a body of work, leadership, and contribution to the community through mentorship”.<sup>270</sup> The inaugural prize was awarded to Julie Stout, and likely influenced the awarding of the NZIA’s Gold Medal in 2021 also to Stout.<sup>271</sup> In some ways, the goal of these groups is to render themselves redundant—their success is also their undoing. Architect Janet Thomson of WIA points to a tension within this approach to organising, noting that “while women architects have moved into the profession with great energy and capability, the world of work as an economic and social system has barely changed for half a century”.<sup>272</sup> Surface level structures of institutions and societal norms may stretch to be more accommodating, but the power structures that underpin them often remain undisturbed. In some ways, the gap filling strengthens The Ground of these power structures, as their aesthetic appearance alters, while their foundations remain the same.

In this I observe that in gatherings where the goal is less to stretch professional boundaries and more to ‘make’ architecture outside of those professional boundaries, through collective gatherings that can bridge across practices and commercial and professional limitations, have more agency to shift the outcomes of architecture in the built environment. Examples already mentioned include The Group, whose collective model of practice and the gatherings engaged with around it (including publications, Bill Wilson’s participation in the forming of the Architectural Centre and the AAA, and so on), had significant influence in the both the formal development of residential styles in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and in how architects imagined their practices; while groups like Ngā Aho regularly action their agency through policy engagement (to be discussed in ‘Chapter Three—Undisciplined’); and collective practice models like Gapfiller that emerged after the Ōtautahi earthquake in 2011, whose more than 150 projects utilise the new built-environment conditions of the earthquake to challenge citizens to reconsider their role in built space and seek to “imagine and experience a different possible world that is more fun, participatory, surprising, equitable and sociable”.<sup>273</sup> While architecture has become more

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<sup>269</sup> Their four key organising strategies for building and developing an intersectional community of women-identifying architects in Aotearoa includes Networking—online connections and mentoring; Events—including awards, exhibitions, lectures, workshops etc; Research—publications, articles and oral histories; and Policy—providing guidelines for institutions, practices and public bodies that ensure that barriers are removed, and inclusiveness benefits all those who work in architecture. Architecture+Women NZ, “About Architecture+Women NZ,” Architecture+Women NZ, accessed February 15, 2021, <https://www.architecturewomen.org.nz/about>.

<sup>270</sup> Architecture+Women NZ, “A+W NZ Dulux Awards - Chrystall Excellence,” Architecture+Women NZ, accessed July 02, 2024, <https://architecturewomen.org.nz/awards/chrystall-excellence-award>.

<sup>271</sup> Te Kāhui Whaihangā also recently expanded its award categories to include the John Sutherland Practice Award, a recognition that the practice of architecture encompasses much more than just built outcomes, including “management, project delivery, professional practice, research, business practices and building science ... thinking skills and social and digital innovation”. In a full circle moment, in its first year in 2022 it was awarded to A+WNZ. NZIA, “John Sutherland Practice Award,” Te Kāhui Whaihangā New Zealand Institute of Architecture, accessed July 02, 2024, <https://nzia.co.nz/awards/john-sutherland-practice-award/>.

<sup>272</sup> Thomson, “Janet Thomson: A Personal Response.”

<sup>273</sup> Gapfiller, “A Creative Placemaking Social Enterprise,” Gapfiller, accessed February 15, 2021, <https://gapfiller.org.nz/>. Gapfiller started as a group of friends that grew from “guerrilla-style adaptive urbanism into an international creative placemaking consultancy”, proposing novel spatial interventions for vacant sites around the Ōtautahi offering, in a sense, an architectural lens of understanding to how the city might function and redevelop in a post-crisis state. Gapfiller imagined novel modes of performance and interaction in the street, and played these out through collaborative practice within their collective, with places, and with the public. Gapfiller, “About,” Gapfiller, accessed February 15, 2021, <https://gapfiller.org.nz/about/>.

privatised and splintered, many of those who challenge normative definitions of architecture do this through their individual practices, and it appears difficult for institutions that maintain architecture's gatekept groomed field to extend their Ground to capture and interact with these practices in a meaningful way (beyond giving them awards). Therefore, the kinds of gathering spaces where new models of relationality between people, place, and materials are aggregated and explored are thus not likely to emerge from the regulatory bodies or institutes—as bureaucratic systems and media support private interest and private property over the needs of communities—but from collectives and practices working for change, activist groups, and grassroots movements that are community-led.

Peggy Deamer says the key is in “bypassing our top-down professional associations that coddle an outmoded notion of ‘architecture’ and instead organise offices from the bottom-up to share knowledge, expertise, workers, benefits, political savvy for ‘professional’ empowerment”.<sup>274</sup> To have any hope in influencing political and economic decisions, architecture could use a space in which to imagine stronger collective visions, aggregate across grass-roots hyperlocal actions, and develop the organising skills necessary to bring these imaginings and how they are actioned as data to policy discussion. Architecture could also start to reimagine its disciplinary structures as part of a broader movement to create what Mercier calls “a different constitutional arrangement for Aotearoa in a decolonised future”.<sup>275</sup> I don't have the answers to resolving architecture's complex entanglement with oppressive structures and vast hyperobject material and capital flows, but my proposition is that a practice of Ground-making that begins with gathering to imagine different ways to communicate and relate to each other and materials offers a place to start and can make The Ground more solid for organising for change. The idea is to “start where you are”, what JK Gibson Graham pose as the first step in imagining new modes of humanity, economies; ways of being.<sup>276</sup>

One key organisation and gathering site where this kind of mingling of practices, research and approach already takes place is the academy—the formalised space in which architectural knowledge is developed and shared, where diverse practice methods are discovered and interact, and in which the profession is either reinforced or resisted. I am going to briefly discuss the emergence of architectural school in Aotearoa, its conditions as a gathering space, and then transition to a discussion about the relationship of school to my practice and the methodological approach of School-making that has been central to the research.

## Schools

In the struggle to site its expertise, the profession needs to produce people who demonstrably have that expertise, and thus academies emerge to produce workers for the profession and further stake out sites of exclusive knowledge and technical skill. Academies work to legitimise the boundaries of the profession and often provide long and complex processes to further reinforce that the knowledge of a profession is valid. At the emergence of the profession in the 1800s, and in its formalisation in Aotearoa 1913, ‘architects’ were largely trained under an apprenticeship model. Most early settler architects had been trained in England, were “articled” through an apprenticeship system of pupillage to practising architects in England or locally, or had trained as builders and in the lack of title protection called themselves architects.<sup>277</sup> The articles system imported from the United Kingdom was the most common training for architects during the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, though students would also receive “artistic training” at technical colleges or art schools.<sup>278</sup> From 1917 onwards, the NZIA started to authorise schools to prepare students for their architectural exams until eventually the

<sup>274</sup> Peggy Deamer, “Education,” *AA Files*, no. 76 (2019): 56.

<sup>275</sup> Mercier, “What Is Decolonisation?,” 66.

<sup>276</sup> Julie Kathy Gibson-Graham, “A Feminist Project of Belonging for the Anthropocene,” *Gender, Place and Culture* 18, no. 01 (2011): 2.

<sup>277</sup> Stacpoole and Beaven, *Architecture 1820-1970*, 42.

<sup>278</sup> Cox, “The Talent She Undoubtedly Possesses: Kate Beath,” 29.

Auckland University College (later the University of Auckland) introduced a bachelor program and took over the examination from the Institute in 1926.<sup>279</sup> There were logistical and conceptual changes to education over the course of the 20th century, and as of 2025 Aotearoa has five accredited professional post-graduate Masters programs of architecture, and a number of undergraduate architectural courses across the country.<sup>280</sup>

The separation of the degree program into bachelors (unaccredited) and masters (accredited) is based on the 1999 Bologna Accord, which created a standardised system of tertiary education across Europe, seeing degree programs broken down into the three cycles of a 3-4 year Bachelors, a 1-2 year Masters and a Doctoral degree.<sup>281</sup> Countries like Aotearoa adopted the Bologna process to improve quality and access to higher education and for global legitimacy.<sup>282</sup> The shift of accreditation requirement to the master degree both alleviates and generates the tension of the academy—becoming a structural manifestation of the question of whether architecture school is a space for the cultural production of architecture (represented by the often much looser curriculum of bachelor programs), or whether it is a pipeline for producing architectural workers for the profession as it stands.

And yet academies and architecture schools have also always been sites for research and experimentation and where diverse practices are explored and necessarily co-exist and interact. They are also regularly the site for the emergence of organisations and other collectives. For as long as there have been schools of architecture in Aotearoa, there have also been student organisations. There were student associations established in Tāmaki Makaurau, Ōtautahi, in 1914 and 1915 respectively, influenced heavily by the Architectural Association in London, running competitions and hosting events and talks.<sup>283</sup> While these organisations often have their own moments of alterity to gather around, specific focuses, and advocate for students in the academy and the profession, they are also there as spaces to learn and understand architecture with peers, and to socialise and create connections. In the 1940s, architecture student Mary Hay was known for her social organising, her home becoming the “centre of the architecture school’s social life” and organising many Friday coffee evenings and “large fancy-dress balls” as part of the school’s social committee.<sup>284</sup> This was a significant era for thought production within the architectural school, given 1946 was the year that The Group emerged.

Organisers like Hay make Ground on which to gather and hence create spaces for the cultural production of architecture. The Student Architecture Congresses hosted between Australian and Aotearoa have been particularly radical over the years. Between 1963 and 1971 they invited theorists and practitioners, including Cedric Price, Aldo Van Eyck, and Buckminster Fuller, aiming to build a “sense of community” and challenge the norms of the discipline, building communities in and of themselves.<sup>285</sup> Current student gathering sites include the Student Architecture Network New Zealand, the “student analogue of the NZIA” who connect across the architecture schools in Aotearoa and organise events like the 24Hr Design Competition;<sup>286</sup> school specific groups like the Students of Urban Planning & Architecture from UoA who use Instagram as a platform to

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<sup>279</sup> Cox, “A ‘Work-Room Pure and Simple’,” 42.

<sup>280</sup> NZIA, “Where to Study,” Te Kāhui Whaihanganga New Zealand Institute of Architecture, accessed December 5, 2025, <https://www.nzia.co.nz/connect/careers-in-architecture/where-to-study/>.

<sup>281</sup> Herman Neuckermans, “European Architectural Education in Motion,” *A|Z ITU Journal of the Faculty of Architecture* 2, no. 01-02 (2005).

<sup>282</sup> K Sewell and K Poutasi, “New Zealand and the Bologna Process,” *Wellington: Ministry of Education and New Zealand Qualifications Authority* (2008).

<sup>283</sup> Ann Mcewan, “Learning in London: The Architectural Association and Early Twentieth-Century New Zealand Architects,” *Interstices: Journal of Architecture and Related Arts* (2018): 31.

<sup>284</sup> Cox, “‘Girl as Architect’,” 52.

<sup>285</sup> Barnaby Bennett and Byron Kinnaird, “Australian and New Zealand Student Architecture Organisations and Invited Speakers: Student Architecture Congresses of Australasia, Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea, 1963-1971,” *Radical Pedagogies*, 2011, accessed February 15, 2021, <https://radical-pedagogies.com/search-cases/101-student-architecture-congresses-australasia/>.

<sup>286</sup> SANNZ, “About Us,” SANNZ, accessed July 03, 2024, <https://www.sannz.org/>.

promote students' work and publicise their events and gatherings with industry professionals;<sup>287</sup> and offshoots like Critspace,<sup>288</sup> Bypass,<sup>289</sup> and Social Dreaming<sup>290</sup> who I partnered with in this research because of their Ground-making qualities across media and practice. These practices move beyond commentary and into action and gather others around them through that action in a way that engages in the making of architecture, as opposed to the making of buildings.

The academy allows a multitude of practices to exist in concert as teachers bring their methodologies to the table and students discover their own in a context where the boundaries of what architecture is can be constantly up for debate. Many of the practices and collectives above leverage the opportunities and resources of the university to expand and develop their Ground-making practices. For example, research around community architecture was being picked up and practised in the context of the university during the 1970s and 1980s, and much of this played out through 'live' studios with real sites and clients. Anthony Ward, among other academics, was a particularly vocal and prolific proponent of community architecture, and incorporated community engagement processes into his teaching practice, running and writing about several live studios during his time in the late 1980s at the University of Auckland (UoA).<sup>291</sup> In the 1990s, 'Whaihanga' was established at UoA with the aim of "elevating the status of Maori [sic] architecture...while providing mutual support among Maori [sic] students."<sup>292</sup> The group was later joined by academics, Māori graduates, practising architects, planners, and engineers. Whaihanga was a significant driver of the Community Design Studio at the University of Auckland which undertook several live projects. Rau Hoskins highlights the importance of these studios in this quote:

*We've created learning environments for our students which are located in the community, so the responsibility for the education is not among tutors and lecturers alone, but is located in a wider environment where they're learning from all sorts of people, be they high school students, kaumatua, kuia or whatever. There's absolutely no point in doing hypothetical projects when there's such a need for architectural expertise in the Maori [sic] community.*<sup>293</sup>

The university, and the gatherings of Whaihanga, are leveraged to expand architecture's boundaries into the community, discover unexpected Ground for architecture, inviting others

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<sup>287</sup> supa\_social, "Supa Social," Instagram profile, n.d., accessed July 03, 2024, [https://www.instagram.com/supa\\_social/](https://www.instagram.com/supa_social/).

<sup>288</sup> "CRIT SPACE About," Youtube, 2020, accessed March 01, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/@CRITSPACE/about>.

<sup>289</sup> Bypass Journal is a collection of "young architecture hopefuls" who established a non-profit journal while at architecture school to explore "alternative modes of thought about the practice, discipline, and agency of architecture". They were reacting to a missing gap of places for young architects to publish and explore architecture in the media landscape, and experiment with publication format and writing type and in 2022 ran a series of workshops starting with #alive-a-library-118 that engaged collaborative writing practices through assemblage, collage, image production and exquisite-corpse style writing exercises. Bypass Journal, "About," Bypass Journal, 2023, accessed July 03, 2024, <https://bypassjournal.com/Info>.

<sup>290</sup> Maxine Goon's Social Dreaming was a rallying cry against the architecture school, but proposed an alternative model of practice and pedagogy through successive workshops within and outside of the school itself, including #ddd-170 with The Night School. Maxine Goon, "Social Dreaming: A Collaborative Pedagogy" (Master of Architecture (Professional) University of Auckland, 2022).

<sup>291</sup> Ward's most significant engagement projects included a re-imagining for Aotea square, a project for Highbury Centre in Birkenhead, and a redevelopment project in Whakatane—which can be read about in detail in Anthony Ward, "Biculturalism and Community: A Transformative Model for Design Education," *Journal of Architectural Educators* 44, no. 2 (1991): 90-109.

<sup>292</sup> "Students Adopt Maori Approach for Marae School," *Architecture New Zealand*, 1994, 34.

<sup>293</sup> "Students Adopt Maori Approach for Marae School," 34. Hoskins chairs and advises on a number of public boards and built off the experiences and Ground of the Community Design Studio and Whaihanga to establish the architecture firm designTRIBE, "to provide Māori and wider community groups with access to high quality architectural services." designTRIBE Architects, "Profile," designTRIBE Architects, accessed February 15, 2021, <http://www.designtribe.co.nz/en/profile.html>.

onto architecture's ground, and proposing that architectural knowledge exists outside of professional contexts.

There are numerous similar examples where the academy provides Ground for this kind of sited experimentation. Hoskins frequently used his position at Unitec to engage in sited community projects and practice-based research experiments in architectural technique, including initiating Te Hononga: the Centre for Māori Architecture and Appropriate Technologies at Unitec School of Architecture.<sup>294</sup> Alongside Te Hononga at Unitec, in 2010 architecture firm Strachan Group Architects (SGA) started running their 'live' design paper *Studio19*, engaging students in design-build projects for communities in need.<sup>295</sup> Increases in Health and Safety regulations in the 2010s made it increasingly difficult to run design-build and 'live' studios within the academic context, and so a re-imagining of this model subsequently emerged in 2018 from a succession of 'live' projects run by educator Mike Davis at the School of Architecture and Planning at UoA, in the form of the charitable trust unit Y. The trust was set up to revitalise the concept of the 'project office,' a model that operates an architectural office from within the academy, though in this case the office is its own entity sitting very closely alongside the university.<sup>296</sup> unit Y developed relationships between students and recent graduates of architecture with communities to "realise their architectural ambition through realising building projects."<sup>297</sup> Typically working with communities that would not normally be able to access architectural services, unit Y could capitalise on its non-profit status as a charitable trust, the resources of the university, and the energy and desire to learn of the students, to create a generative speculation process that could be deeply embedded in community conversations, and a financially affordable realisation process—where students are paid for the delivery and permitting phase while also learning significantly through the process.<sup>298</sup> In this sense, unit Y engages with The Ground at a structural level, re-organising procurement processes, employment practices, and the process of project delivery.

In 2010 and 2011 The Ground physically shifted in Ōtautahi, drastically impacting the landscape and built environment of the city. The necessity to imagine a future for the city gave rise to a number of visionary Disciplinary Gathering spaces. The architecture schools around Aotearoa created *Studio Christchurch* providing a platform for all the architecture schools at the time to run design studios and other initiatives that engaged with the urgent architectural response needed for the city. Examples of the outputs of this collaboration include the *LUXcity* light festival held in the until-then unopened CBD red-zone in 2012 that attracted 30,000 people; several summer schools—that combined the students, teachers and resources of Aotearoa's four architecture schools in a six-week studio session and symposium; *CityUPs* Festival in collaboration with the Festival of Transitional Architecture (FESTA); as well as a series of related design studios and thesis research projects.<sup>299</sup> The opportunity to consider design problems and propose solutions in the context of a city grappling with the massive and traumatic upheaval of their built environment was unique in the context of architectural education in Aotearoa, and provided a

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<sup>294</sup> Real-world projects and hands-on building experience built this Centre into a robust teaching approach that centres Māori worldviews and knowledge systems. Unitec, "Building community: Te Hononga (The Centre for Māori Architecture)," 2010, accessed February 15, 2021, <http://tpa.unitec.ac.nz/livingcurriculum/?p=24>. A key project undertaken with artist Carin Wilson and students was a project at Te Patunga Bay in Northland to "revive the construction of whare raupō, or thatched buildings" through the collection of narratives Māori elders and advice from kaumātua with experience of the materials and technique. They were able to learn about the harvesting, skills required for construction, and the passive thermal qualities of this construction type. Four years later they were asked to construct a whare nīkau (a house thatched with a different variety of leaf) using similar procedural techniques of gathering wisdom and collaborating with the community. The process of engaging deeply with local people and materials of place means that the experience takes on "a spiritual dimension", operating in concert with ancestors, ecosystems, those who belong there now, and the physical Ground. Brown, *Māori Architecture*, 158.

<sup>295</sup> Waghorn and Davis, "Looking Backwards to Look Forwards," 142.

<sup>296</sup> Unit Y and Collective, interview.

<sup>297</sup> *Making Ways*, 154.

<sup>298</sup> Unit Y and Collective, interview.

<sup>299</sup> "Home," Studio Christchurch, accessed February 15, 2021, <https://studiochch.wordpress.com/>.

magnified sense of the real potential for architecture to impact communities, and the importance of the communities' involvement in that process.

When schools operate as practices in themselves, engaging The Ground and contributing to the cultural production of architecture, their agency to have an impact on both the discipline and the built environment is more evident. The academy plays a key role in the cultural production of architecture. There is more time and resources for slower and more explorative processes than afforded by commercial practice, and there are hordes of engaged minds who can gather around ideas and projects. With its increasing interest in practice oriented research, the academy can become an active laboratory for architecture practice, imagining and testing different modes of knowing, being, and working.<sup>300</sup> But schools within the academy are also beholden to the requirements of the profession, and access to their resources is limited to students, teachers, and beneficiaries of select processes. There is potential then to engage in the idea that while schools should be practices, practices should also be schools. ĀKAU is an example of a practice like this in Aotearoa. Based in Kaikohe, ĀKAU are an architecture and design practice and education foundation that centre people and community in the development of architecture projects. Through workshops and community engagement, ĀKAU generates opportunities for tamariki to “be involved in the design of REAL projects in their community”, empowering young people to recognise their own expertise and “innate problem solving power”.<sup>301</sup> The end result of ĀKAU projects is not typically a traditional architectural outcome like a building,<sup>302</sup> but rather is about exploring new ways of expressing whakapapa and creating visible signs of identity and place, while empowering young people with agency in shaping their shared spaces. When spaces of knowledge sharing and experimentation leak into professional and commercial spheres in this way it points to other possible futures for the architecture discipline. The boundaries set up by both the academy and a company like ĀKAU point to an opportunity for my practice, whereby imagining a school-type place without these boundaries was a real opportunity for making change and Ground-making. I am now going to examine the potential for ‘school’, and how this lens frames my practice of ‘School-making’ within the methodological enquiry of this research.

## Practice Approach: School-making

As discussed in #definitions-32, when I talk about accredited architecture programs, I refer to the academy, but here I am going to talk about ‘school’: spaces that intentionally and actively engage in the sharing of knowledge, skills, and ideas, which can also be a laboratory for architecture practice, but critically can have no fixed association to a place, people, or an institution.

My practice turns toward ‘school’ as a gathering site because some of its best qualities felt missing from the profession. The word ‘school’ originates from ancient Greek *skholē*, meaning “leisure” or “free time”, and referring to a space where citizens could learn, discuss, and engage in the pursuit of knowledge.<sup>303</sup> The idea of school evolved through structured learning environments, and by the time the word was borrowed by Latin and passed on to English, it implied a place for instruction. In Aotearoa there is a state enforced age limit in which a person is expected to stay in a state enforced school, and after that there is a socially expected age limit by which that person should finish formally learning (which can vary based on class, race, and gender).<sup>304</sup> Ongoing learning is encouraged in how it can benefit the workforce, through point-collecting exercises like CPD, or is otherwise relegated to ‘hobby interests’. Many of the

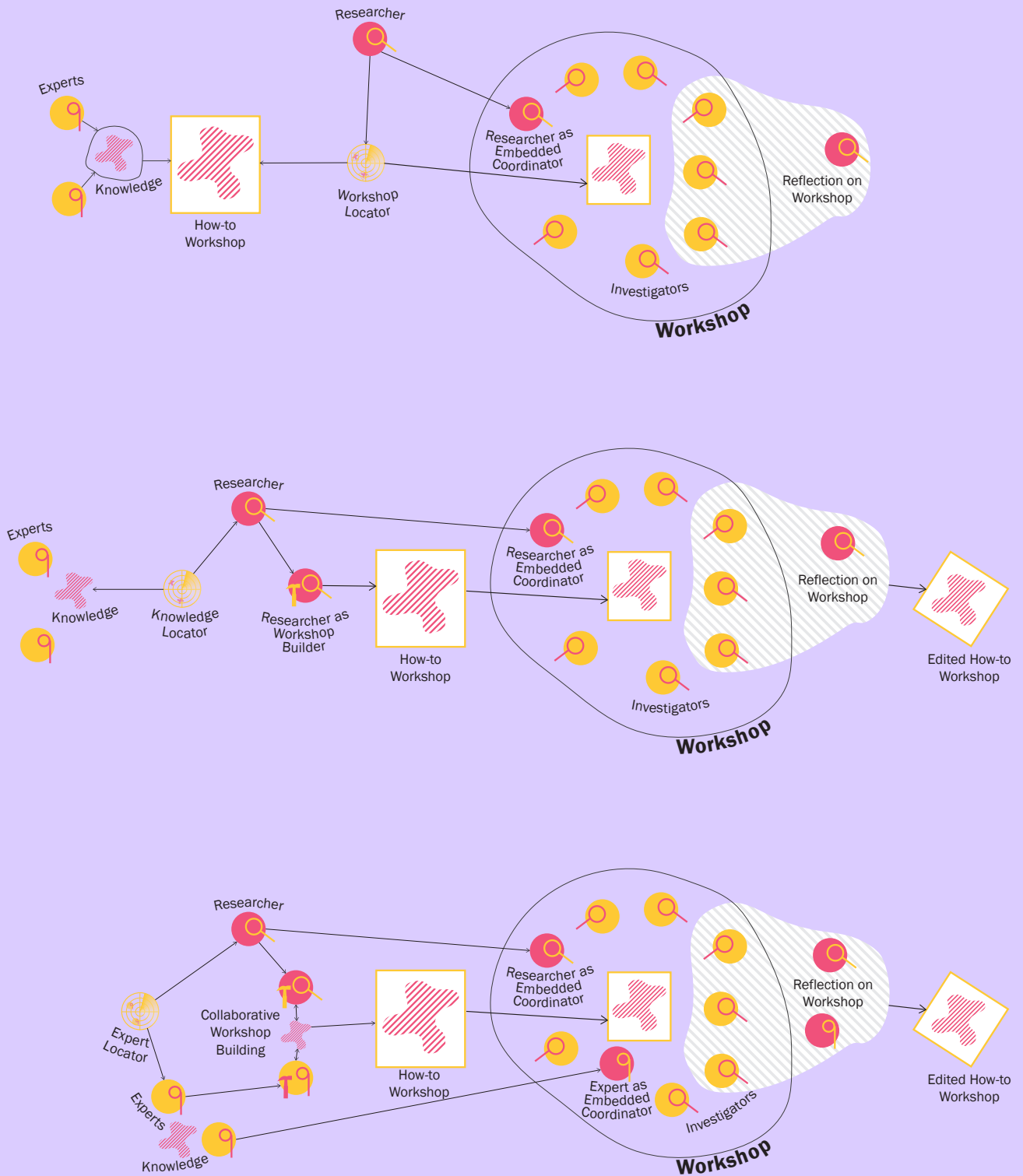
<sup>300</sup> Day et al., *The Organizer’s Guide to Architecture Education*.

<sup>301</sup> ĀKAU, «Foundation,» ĀKAU, accessed February 15, 2021, <https://akau.co.nz/foundation>.

<sup>302</sup> Such outputs have included a pop-up community shop for running workshops, a 3D digital design summit with a real project outcome, a series of Pou Kōrero that identify sites of significance in Ngāti Hine, a fort, a basketball court, a street light festival and a project they have become particularly well known for - Kaikohekohe Flag Project, where flags designed by taitamariki are used to express community identity.

<sup>303</sup> Online Etymology Dictionary, “School (N.1),” Online Etymology Dictionary, accessed November 12, 2024, <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=school>.

<sup>304</sup> A concept explored by Illich in Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society* (Harper & row New York, 1971).



2021

Diagramming the three approaches of The Night School to running events.  
Figure 2.7: Tessa Forde, *The Night School Organisational Approaches*, 2021, graphic.

opportunities for CPD learning in architecture are passive and based on the “banking” model of education—where an expert imparts their knowledge through lectures, online webinars, and conferences like in:situ—which is known to not be an effective way to learn.<sup>305</sup> It seems that when students leave school, they enter a discipline with a collective memory loss about how to teach and learn.

By contrast, the notion of school in my practice is interpreted through its ancient origins of dreaming and discussing in your free time, a liberated and dialogical space to imagine and perform other ways of being and knowing, other possible futures. If, as architecture educator Tony Ward has argued, education “is one of the main vehicles for the reproduction of the dominant value system,” then by the same logic it could also be a vehicle for the reproduction of alternative value systems, ones that resist the canonisation of “particular forms of culture and knowledge... over others,” by academic institutions.<sup>306</sup> School can be an emancipatory place;<sup>307</sup> it can reveal structures of oppression and empower those marginalised by them;<sup>308</sup> it can create non-hierarchical dynamics where expertise is collaboratively discovered instead of held by a single person;<sup>309</sup> and it can be a practice that is learned across life, in the streets, through radical systems of learning and exchange.<sup>310</sup> While school is not exempt from problematic associations—it can have deeply entrenched power dynamics, it can socialise students into toxic hierarchies and behaviours, and it can be ruthlessly competitive—my practice seeks to recuperate the best qualities of school and foreground them within the Disciplinary Gathering space. Qualities like the collegiality and proliferation of student gatherings, naivety and openness, spaces of challenging and reimagining, performance, and how schools act like virtual reality spaces for ‘real’ life, position school as a critical and constructive framework for architecture re-organisation.

School-making is one of the key parts of the methodological enquiry of this research. School-making is the process of creating spaces and settings for the sharing of knowledge and practices. The School-maker is not necessarily a teacher, but finds the physical Ground for knowledge sharing, curates content, makes decisions about time, adapts spaces of knowledge-sharing over time through action and reflection, and might (but not necessarily) facilitate conversations and activities. My first significant experience with School-making came through co-organising the Free School of Architecture (FSA) in Los Angeles in 2018. I attended the inaugural session of FSA in 2017, drawn to its log line of “The Free School of Architecture explores the edge of Architectural Education”, but quickly became disillusioned with its failure to deliver on its promises of a radically reimagined educational setting.<sup>311</sup> At the halfway point the student body asked the founder to step down and self-organised the remaining three weeks of the program, taking ownership of the school to deconstruct its hierarchies and re-imagine it for the following year. Myself and three other School-makers—Karina Andreeva, Lili Carr, and Elisha Cohen—re-founded FSA and for the next year re-imagined its structure and content. As School-makers we had to collectively decide the school’s foundational content; find the physical Ground to deliver the school—treating the city as a classroom; organise the ten hours a day, six days a week timetable; set some community guidelines for how sessions should run; and establish the infrastructures necessary to legitimise or safeguard the school for tax and insurance purposes. The task of the School-maker is to think about, or make space to collectively think about, language, hierarchies, and the relational dynamics of learning.

<sup>305</sup> Banking is a concept discussed by Paulo Freire to critique the existing education system in Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1972).

<sup>306</sup> Ward, “Biculturalism and Community,” 90-91.

<sup>307</sup> bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>308</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

<sup>309</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, trans. Christine Lukman, vol. 1 (Stanford University Press Stanford, CA, 1991).

<sup>310</sup> Illich, *Deschooling Society*.

<sup>311</sup> For an elaboration on the origins of FSA, please refer to: Tessa Forde, “Starting a Free School of Architecture,” *Charrette* 6, no. 1 (2020).

School-making requires openness and empathy in imagining these kinds of spaces in which people can learn and in which people can feel comfortable sharing their own knowledge. The learnings from the School-making practice of FSA influenced the initiation of The Night School (TNS). TNS was the first key vehicle for the enquiry of the research and the application of my practice. With TNS, I wanted to develop a knowledge sharing platform for conversation, play, experimentation, and embodied practice of alternative architecture methodologies. TNS proposed a Disciplinary Gathering space for the ongoing learning of architecture accessible to everyone, for gaining skills that feel important in the face of the challenges that architects face, and one that could be adaptive to issues of the present and imagine and perform new modes of practice for the future. The learning environments of TNS would look for a retrospective learning or a “re-skilling” of different ways of knowing and being in architecture.<sup>312</sup> Spaces like this, with the “freedom to explore ideas” that are typically limited to the academy<sup>313</sup> open up the practice of architecture to the public, who are otherwise “excluded from architectural production as being grouped as ‘non-expert’”.<sup>314</sup>

These are the original tenets of The Night School:



Figures 2.1-2.6: Tessa Forde, *The Night School Tenets*, 2021, graphic.

<sup>312</sup> Sam Jacob and Danielle Hewitt use the term “re-skilling” in outlining the key motivations behind the Architecture Associations Night School in London. Sam Jacob and Danielle Hewitt, “Night School: About,” Night School, accessed June 12, 2021, <http://nightschool.aaschool.ac.uk/about/>.

<sup>313</sup> Jane Anderson and Colin Priest, “The Live Education of an Architect: John Hejduk and Oxford Brookes Year One Live Projects,” *Journal for Education in the Built Environment* 7, no. 2 (2012): 59.

<sup>314</sup> Andrea Ricketts, “Participation in Place-Making: Enhancing the Wellbeing of Marginalised Communities in Aotearoa” (Masters of Architecture Victoria University of Wellington, 2008), 17.



The Night School's initial physical Ground was Objectspace Gallery. They received a small grant from Te Kaunihera o Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland Council) and commissioned me to run five events at the beginning of 2022. Objectspace made some Ground upon which TNS could emerge, with an existing infrastructure of hospitality sponsorship, audience for marketing the events, and equipment for hosting the events. The grant money enabled me to reimburse collaborators and buy materials for TNS which would become part of an event-making suite.

The Night School took three main approaches to finding and curating content for sessions. The first was to take the 'radical' methodologies of other architects and artists and replicate them through workshops; the second was to invite emerging architects with experimental practices to develop these into a workshop format; and the third was to collaborate with others to design and deliver workshops that would encapsulate practice overlaps or respond to particular opportunities. The workshops that took place at Objectspace were #place-it-102, a town planning community engagement exercise designed by James Rojas; #potato-puppets-106, a puppetry workshop designed by Amelie Jakubek; #who-wants-to-be-an-architect-115, a gameshow, edutainment collaboration with Critspace; #alive-a-library-118, a writing-as-architecture collaboration with Bypass Journal and Gabi Maffey; and #mind-game-122, a workshop based on the psychoanalysis game by Madelon Vreisendorp.

The original intention for TNS was that I would live-test these methodologies to decide their suitability for an online generator of workshop-based resources for architecture practice and education. I wanted to upskill myself, to feel more capable in the face of difficult challenges and my motivation for this was also sparked by a sense of longing for past moments of radicality, the images of architecture practices from when The Ground seemed more solid, "a yearning for the nostalgic form".<sup>315</sup> I took a practical approach to reckoning with my tendencies toward anachronism—the realities of these radical acts would be revealed in their replication. I would lift the veil of nostalgia to see what lay underneath. What I revealed, at least for myself, is that a toolkit is most useful in its development for the people who make it. My experiences talking to practitioners about their work, discussing how to replicate and modify for a different context, sharing ideas and reflections about their work and my own, had much more profound impacts on my approach, and on my own learning, than when I replicated work directly from online resources (which felt a little groundless). I learned as many useful skills in being a School-maker, in making Ground, as I did in the workshops themselves. The School-maker, in this sense, collaborates with people and ideas directly to form novel relationships and can use the context of a school—which has connotations of a noble endeavour (especially a free one)—to make these kinds of connections with knowledge holders.

<sup>315</sup> Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life*.

Each of the Night School sessions was a workshop where the methodology in question would be performed by the attendees thus involving them directly in an active skill-making process. This also had the effect of encouraging a deeper engagement in the process of the theorisation of the practices of the collaborators like Huang, Yu, and Maffey. Imagining and then architecting a setting in which someone else might enact their methods and processes generated a clarity of thinking around methodology that would be more difficult to achieve in a more conventional format like a lecture. Using existing methodologies and approaches and partnering with others was also a way to *just start somewhere* with TNS and relieve the challenging task of generating novel content and forms. While the workshops needed to be adapted to accommodate the context and physical Ground on which they occurred, having these existing foundations meant being able to focus on the admin work and run more events, more frequently. Like FSA, I could present a tasting platter of methodologies, while working through an enquiry of discovering my own. I could also copy and test communication styles and organisational techniques, developing them across different workshops and creating methodological overlaps. School-making doesn't have to be a complex, formalised process, it can simply be gathering to share knowledge of some kind, with the School-maker taking care to think about how this gathering forms.

While TNS sessions were being run in person on The Ground of Objectspace, I was also School-making on the digital Ground, through organising the Architecture Beyond Capitalism School (ABC). #abc-2022-126 and #abc-2023-234 were online schools that I helped coordinate with the Academia Working Group of The Architecture Lobby in 2022 and 2023. Collaborating with the Academia Working Group is an example of my practice where I took an opportunity to be involved with something was not a specific initiative of the research, but that could act as a vehicle for its enquiry, developing and informing my findings. For #abc-2022-126, TNS partnered with two online contributors to run versions of their workshops in person in Tāmaki Makaurau. The value of these gathering spaces is really in these collaborative connections. My collaboration with Gustavo Garcia through #free-studio-132 produced an online workshop and an in-person workshop that were both enriched by our dialogue and ideating. Other workshop contributors to ABC 2022 similarly reflected that the core benefit for them was the connections the organisers made for them across different interest areas. We partnered session contributors with overlapping ideas and invited them to run their workshops collaboratively. ABC presented a School-making practice with a radically different spatial context, supporting the development of skills in online organising, experimenting with digital pedagogies, and connected the research to a much more expansive global network.

School-making through The Night School and ABC was critical to the methodological enquiry, because it started to create the pre-conditions for other actions of the research to emerge. Through TNS I made meaningful connections with other practitioners, and I began to gather around me a collection of people interested in architectural change-making, and in learning new methodologies of practice. This approach to Ground-making encompassed making connections, friends, community, and shifting the emphasis for change (and architecture) away from the individual. I was able to reveal other ways of being and knowing that could contribute to a different kind of discipline through active participation and collective building.

Ground-making is about making spaces in which communities can gather and interact and consciously design how they relate to each other and be together. School-making starts by thinking about how knowledge sharing spaces can be designed and positing school as a model for Disciplinary Gathering that extends beyond the academy and into life. The skills that emerge as useful for Ground-making from School-making are the techniques needed to make convivial spaces of sharing and being together, the organising skills of finding physical Ground and resources, a capacity to collaborate and make connections, and an embracing of knowledges found in expected and unexpected places. The School-maker facilitates or gently corrals people in these knowledge sharing spaces; they find space for gathering; curate content, topics, activities, and experiences; they are adaptable and responsive to the space and what happens in it; they embrace not-knowing and vulnerability; and they take things slow, meeting people where they are. School-making embraces sharing skills for the future, but critically it designs spaces that can experiment with and enact ways of being and knowing that make different futures feel possible.

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Disciplinary Gathering spaces are where The Ground is felt most acutely. It is through gathering, discussing, sharing, and collaborating that what The Ground is now, what is missing, how it feels, and who is there can be revealed. What my traverse across The Ground revealed to me was that many of the problems within architecture arise from antiquated societal hierarchies, the fetishisation of the enigmatic individual, and buildings as capital. What this traverse through the history of architecture in Aotearoa reveals is that thinking about how architects gather—around what Sites, what Ritual Forms they embrace, what organisational structures they deploy, and their schools and how they learn together—reinforces that individual exceptionalism in the discipline was an incorrect framing, that architecture has always been about gathering, and that more conscious engagement with this gathering is a starting point for gathering differently and around different things, for a different future. Understanding architecture as a history of gathering reveals that architecture workers gain agency through gathering, connecting to shared Ground, and organising on that Ground. How groups organise themselves in relation to The Ground, to consciously make or shift it, provides some insight into what tools, methods, and tactics I could carry through to my own practice.

The examples of Disciplinary Gathering above often emulate the structural systems of the institutions they are trying to change, are forced to compete for limited resources, and struggle to collectivise in order to generate more shared momentum. The practices that vision the future of architecture through embodied alternatives are disparate, and are not mainstream practice, even if they have ways of infiltrating mainstream practice. They make new Ground, but it can be island-like and the physical grounds on which they connect (like *Making Ways* for example) are similarly temporal. Making Ground where varied practices and people can interact, and in their overlaps, collaborations, and contradictions, create new things, new ways of being that hint at other possible futures, became one of the key, albeit ambitious, aims of my practice. That these practices and gathering spaces from my research exist, and have made Ground, made the ambitions of this research feel possible. More generative spaces of Disciplinary Gathering which exist outside of commercial practice and the profession, have been and should be the space within which the discipline of architecture can be experimented with, theorised, and defined according to what is needed now and into the future. This space, like architecture more broadly, should be non-exclusive and open to those who don't practise commercially, use their architecture training in other disciplinary spaces, or are simply interested in architecture and the making of shared meaning in the environment. It should also be inclusive of other beings, of ecologies, and of tangible and intangible forces that shape the environment.

School-making was a first, playful, and generous approach to making this type of space. The best qualities of 'school' could be brought to the Disciplinary Gathering space to allow for gathering, experimenting, and sharing, but also revealed a need for additional ways to make Ground and make change. Meaningful, lasting change that works at the root of the problem rather than its surface manifestations, often requires some disruption, often originating at the edges of the profession or from outside the discipline all together. Drastic change on The Ground sometimes requires *Undisciplined Gathering*, a little bit of trouble. The next chapter will discuss approaches of alterity in architecture and how architecture workers might exercise the agency they gain by gathering to connect to The Ground.

## The Night School: Place-it!

February 15, 2022

James Rojas (Workshop Designer)

Tessa Forde (Workshop facilitator)

Public event guests

Objectspace Gallery, Tāmaki Makaurau, Aotearoa

Generate architectural and town planning ideas through the representation of childhood memories using toys.

### Context

This workshop was based on the practice of James Rojas—an urban planner from California who runs workshops like this across the US as part of town planning projects. Rojas' practice, called *Place It!*, aims to engage “people in urban planning, transportation, design, landscape, and neighbourhood change through their hands and senses so that they can be creative and expansive in their thinking” and thus provide critical input into the shaping of cities and neighbourhoods.<sup>1</sup> Rojas hopes to make the planning process more open and empower everyone to see themselves as urban planners, inasmuch as “every inhabitant has a relationship with the city, and uses it in some way”.<sup>2</sup>

In *Place It!* workshops, Rojas uses toys, miscellaneous items, and core childhood memories as democratising forces and as avenues for participants to express their deeply held values in a discipline that is often difficult to penetrate and heavy with technical language. The toys act as a tool for translation between the ideas of the community, their core values, and the spatialisation of those ideas. The workshops also demonstrate how something simple and intimate, like a childhood memory, can start to shape how people understand those around them and the role this understanding plays in their ability to build things together. The origins of the ideas for the workshop—in Rojas' childhood constructing worlds from found objects—are deeply personal, and the workshops are often deeply personal too, because “cities are deeply personal”.<sup>3</sup>

I met Rojas in 2017 at the Free School of Architecture (FSA) when he hosted us on a sensory walk around the neighbourhood of Boyle Heights, followed by a *Place It!* workshop. Rojas returned to FSA in 2018, and during my time living in Los Angeles, I participated in several of his workshops and sensory walks. A particularly memorable one posited Boyle Heights as the most biodiverse neighbourhood in LA, and perhaps in the country, with residents planting their front yards and berms with diverse species used for food, medicine, and so on from their home countries across Latin America. Rojas is unwaveringly generous, sincere, and committed to empowering citizens in all contexts through the planning process.

The methodologies of *Place It!* seemed an apt setting through which to launch The Night School. It is at once a tangible tool for community engagement that other architecture workers and students can deploy in their own practices, and a way to better understand the values, contexts, and motivations of the types of people likely to attend my events.



Figure 2.8: Tessa Forde, *Place-it! at Objectspace*, 2022, photograph.

<sup>1</sup> “About and services,” PLACE IT!, accessed September 04, 2024, [https://www.placeit.org/about\\_and\\_services.html](https://www.placeit.org/about_and_services.html).

<sup>2</sup> “Case Study: Place It! de James Rojas,” HUMAN CITIES, accessed September 04, 2024, <https://humancities.eu/casestudies/place-it-de-james-rojas/>.

<sup>3</sup> James Rojas and John Kamp, *Dream play build: hands-on community engagement for enduring spaces and places* (Island Press, 2022), xi.

## Description of Event

*The Night School Launch: Place-it!* was hosted at Objectspace during the exhibition *Toro Whakaara*—an exploration of the tensions that exist between human experience and the built environment. I collected “squitter” toys<sup>4</sup> from neighbours, local community groups, and op shops around Beach Haven, Glenfield, and Northcote in preparation for this event. Each TNS workshop starts with the karakia *Whakataka te Hau*, to establish a shared sentiment for the event, which is followed by my pepeha.<sup>5</sup> For this event, I offered an introduction to TNS, running through the key tenets—the what, the why, the who, and the when—before introducing Rojas, the workshop more broadly, and asking participants to recall a fun, joyous, or special childhood memory, and spend five minutes using the toys in front of them to build it on their sheet of coloured paper.

Narrow trestle tables created intimacy among attendees; they were seated close to each other and had to negotiate each other’s bodies to take toys from the piles. After five minutes, they shared their memories, some embodying them through performance and inviting other attendees to participate in that performance. I wove my content around the activity of the workshop. This was to create a more dynamic sequence of events, shifting through different modes of interacting and working to keep the workshop lively; to foreground the practice of Rojas; and to avoid biasing attendees’ ideas or approaches. Following the initial activity, I presented a kind of ‘manifesto’ about architecture in Aotearoa, explaining more about my practice and my motivating factors for starting The Night School.



Figure 2.9: Tessa Forde, *Place-it!* attendee proposition for a future city, 2022, photograph.

The second part of the workshop asked each table to split into groups of three or four and to use their memories as inspiration to build a future collective vision for the city of Tāmaki Makaurau. Participants embraced this task and began to build their city visions. Each subgroup was then invited to share their vision, which included transport, green spaces and trees, tall buildings, and places for children. Their childhood memories, or those of others, drove the narratives of each reimagined city. I then returned to the work of James Rojas to contextualise the workshop and present it as a tool that can be replicated in their own practices, if not directly, at least in principle. I followed this up with a series of questions about common values that emerged and how the city does or doesn’t reflect these values. Participants discussed their disillusionment with the city, their nostalgia for their childhood experiences of it, and debated where the “city” is—in the CBD or in the suburbs.

Running this workshop was the first moment of reckoning with the role of ‘facilitator’ and the sometimes-uncomfortable dynamic it creates between myself and the attendees. As a facilitator, I am ‘all-knowing’ about the events of the workshop, and I actively withhold or release this information as I choose. This creates a power dynamic, so the role of facilitator is one of a guide but can also create a barrier to deeper engagement and connection. Similarly, I am able to remain in my ‘performance’ as the facilitator, avoiding some of the discomfort that can come from quite personal tasks, separate from the attendees who may experience more profound moments of connection through their vulnerability. What I also reflected on through this event and others from TNS was how my role as facilitator, as opposed to ‘expert,’ can be freeing in a workshop context. As Pablo Helguera reflects, “the expertise of the artist lies, like Freire’s, in being a non-expert, a provider of frameworks on which experiences can form and sometimes be directed and channelled to generate new insights around a particular issue.” Particularly because

<sup>4</sup> Squitter (noun), as defined by Peter and Kevin Forde (Father and Uncle respectively when they were children), is multiple random items, typically unidentifiable at a glance, that have little recognisable use or value and are often strewn or cluttering a space, drawer or cupboard. Many of the toys collected were otherwise headed for landfill. I have reflected on a redefined Squitter in ‘Chapter Four: Love and [re] Organising’.

<sup>5</sup> I reflected after this initial workshop the need to make time at all workshops for introductions or pepeha.

the ‘expert’ in these methodology-borrowing workshops is not in the room, attendees are able to explore and share knowledge around the ‘expertise,’ with me providing the frameworks. Testing and discovering what frameworks are most conducive to generating new insights and supporting connection-making is what constituted the development of my practice. These are discussed in ‘Chapter 4: Love and [re]Organising’.

This workshop encouraged attendees to return to their earliest grounds to derive what is most important to them. These shared moments of vulnerability, and in some cases longing for feelings of the past, present an opportunity to explore how these feelings can be captured and expressed in the city and in shared environments. TNS posits different practices that might have value in architectural practice. *Place-It!* is a tool to empower all people to see themselves as active agents in the built environment, and it uses personal experience to create a shared language for discussing the city. This tool is also effective in generating bonds between attendees, which is critical in a practice of ground-making. There is a beauty in the discussion of childhood memories—they are pure and instinctive; they are not about what a person thinks is right or what they want now, but about experiences and associated feelings. It is in these feelings, and in moments of honesty, vulnerability, play, and child-like joy, that we find answers for our shared environments and answers for how to be together better.



Figures 2.10-2.12: Tessa Forde, *Place-it! squitter* arranged into memories and urban visions, 2022, photograph.

“About and Services.” PLACE IT!, accessed September 04, 2024, [https://www.placeit.org/about\\_and\\_services.html](https://www.placeit.org/about_and_services.html).

Rojas, James, and John Kamp. *Dream Play Build: Hands-on Community Engagement for Enduring Spaces and Places*. Island Press, 2022.

“Case Study: Place It! De James Rojas.” HUMAN CITIES, accessed September 04, 2024, <https://humancities.eu/casestudies/place-it-de-james-rojas/>.

## How to! Place-it

### Tools

- Coloured sheets of paper
- A generous collection of small toys, fake flowers, ribbons, wooden blocks and other squitter



Figure 2.13: Tessa Forde, *Place-it! arrangements*, 2022, photograph.

### Deployment

Step One: Take a coloured sheet of paper to use as your base.

Step Two: build an early, joyful childhood memory using the materials in front of you.

Step Three: Share this memory with your partner/s.

Step Four: Deconstruct your memory.

Step Five: Join forces with your partner/s (up to 4 people) to build a vision for the city of Auckland using the materials on a single sheet of paper, inspired by your childhood memories.

Step Six: Share your group's collective vision with other groups.

### Context

This workshop is based on the practice of James Rojas – an Urban planner from California who runs workshops like this, and others, across the US as part of town planning projects. Rojas aims to understand how to change the planning process and make it more open so that everyone can become an actor in the planning of the urban environment. For him, everyone is an urban planner inasmuch as every inhabitant has a relationship with the city, and uses it in some way.

The toys in this workshop become a democratising force in a discipline often difficult to penetrate, heavy in technical language and skillsets. The toys act as a tool for translation – between the ideas of the community, their core values, and the spatialisation of those ideas. And it also speaks to how something so simple, and yet intimate and revealing, like a childhood memory can start to shape how we understand the people around us, and the role this understanding has in our ability to build things together.

## The Night School: Feminist Potato Puppet Theatre

April 6, 2022

Amelie Jakubek (Workshop Designer)

Tessa Forde (Workshop facilitator)

Public event guests

Objectspace Office, Tāmaki Makaurau, Aotearoa

Creating a setting in which new roles can be performed in order to address a complex question through empathising with others.



Figure 2.14: Tessa Forde, *Feminist Potato Puppets*, 2022, photograph.

### Context

This workshop is based on the practice of Amelie Jakubek—an artist with a social art practice spanning installations, events, films, painting, and performances.<sup>1</sup> Jakubek says that, in some way, much of her work remains “invisible” in that it partially takes place in the social sphere or because it is theoretical, organisational, or narrative in nature.<sup>2</sup> At the time of this event she was living in Cairo and researching the methods of self-organised activist groups, and how these methods can be made more available and transferable. She is interested not in the individual conception of activist methodologies—particularly historically, when they are often tied to problematic figures with complicated stories—but how those methods were used, and how they were born from collective movements. The Feminist Potato Puppet Theatre was a workshop designed by Jakubek that uses role-playing as an active process to define and redefine an imaginary world.

The puppet theatre is a site familiar to us as children—puppeteering is a way for children to practice relationships and to explore complex social situations. Puppets are alternative beings, alter egos, able to overcome physical and other boundaries in a way that people can't in their own bodies. In this way, the puppet provides an alter ego through which to engage in debate, alter oppressive behaviour, and shift the attention from an individual's existing capacity and examine their own, and their collective, agency. Jakubek claims that by “scaling down a common scenario” and “using puppets as representations of fictional and real desires and behaviors” the theatre can encourage “undisciplined behaviour” and transcend conventional responses to questions and challenges.<sup>3</sup>

The core research question in the conceptualisation of the Feminist Potato Puppet Theatre was: How can we develop collective agency to change institutions and formats that oppress us collectively?

The first time it was enacted was for the Bauhaus Centenary Festival School Fundamental: *Parliament of Schools* which I attended as a presenter with the co-organisers of the Free School of Architecture in 2019. Jakubek situated the theatre of the puppets in the Bauhaus in the 1930s, challenging participants to imagine conversations for the future of the institute. An interest in the workshop, the availability of the workshop materials on Jakubek's website, and my ability to reach out to Jakubek and learn from her reflections on the workshop made it a fertile ground from which to host a TNS gathering.



Figure 2.15: Tessa Forde, *Attendees Present their Feminist Potato Puppets*, 2022, photograph.

<sup>1</sup> “Amelie Jakubek Jaydn Hubrecht,” Amelie Jakubek, accessed September 04, 2024, <https://amelie-jakubek.de/>.

<sup>2</sup> Personal Communication.

<sup>3</sup> “Feminist Potato Puppet Theatre,” Amelie Jakubek, 2019, accessed March 01, 2023, <https://amelie-jakubek.de/potato-puppet-theatre.html>.

## Description of Event

The workshop opened with the karakia *Whakataka te Hau* and my pepeha. I also invited each person in the room to introduce themselves, asking them to provide their name and some of the different roles they play in their life. I introduced myself as a sister, a daughter, and an architectural educator. The point of this question was to move beyond self-definition as a job title and encourage the attendees to think of their various roles in life as *performative*. I contextualised the Night School and elaborated on the practice of Jakubek and her theoretical positioning of the workshop through an Amelie potato puppet, so that she could be present in the room. I then introduced “Oshmina,” who would act as the moderator for the event. She was a prim and proper puppet, self-identifying as “strict,” who would manage time and also observe any health and safety issues around the use of hot glue guns, drills, and craft knives. Her friends call her “Osh.”

The workshop involved three parts: the creation of a potato puppet using potatoes of varying sizes, twine, fabric, beans, pins, markers, glue, and whatever other crafts were provided, taking inspiration from a series of prompts titled “fates” and “destinies”; the building out of the participant’s potato character through a character sheet that called for detailed descriptions of who they were, some of their fears and aspirations, their relationships, etc.; and the third was the performance of some kind of scenario through the potato puppet. Each participant

chose an “identity,” among which were identities like: “I am a recent immigrant who came to Aotearoa to study. I have adapted to the cultural differences quite well, but sometimes I deeply question the origins of these cultural beliefs”; “I am chronically lonely”; “I am a widow, and my son no longer speaks to me.” They then constructed the puppet using the material supplies.



Figure 2.16: Tessa Forde, *Attendees Create their Feminist Potato Puppets*, 2022, photograph.

The idea was that the “identity” would help each participant imagine a character different from themselves, but through which they could project their own deeply held beliefs and those they believed others held. The identity slips encouraged a chance encounter with an imaginary person each participant hadn’t expected to meet. The imaginary person was “fleshed out” through the creation of the puppet and influenced by the shape of the potatoes, the tools and supplies available, and the character development sheets, which asked questions about the character’s background, wishes, secrets, and key demographic information. When the characters were ready, the participant pulled a “fate” from the pile, such as

“involve your puppet body strongly. Let your puppet body dance or do something with their body drastically,” or “request that others share their saddest memory.” These could be at odds with a puppet’s identity, challenging the participant to be creative in interpreting the tension between who their character was and what fate they were required to play out through the scenario. Participants were asked to break into smaller groups and perform the scenario through their puppets.

In this workshop the scenario was:

*As citizens of Aotearoa, you have been randomly chosen by the New Zealand Government to join a working group to conceive of a revolutionary future for this country. You have virtually unlimited funds and total freedom to do this in any way or anywhere that you wish. Much like jury service, you cannot opt out of this. You will be compensated for your time.*

Due to Oshmina failing to be strict in moderating time, attendees spent a lot of time building puppets, leaving little time to build out the characters of the puppets. This might have contributed to the performance of the scenario being somewhat surface-level and quite cynical, with many attendees choosing characters that were self-serving. The scenario was too far-reaching and

perhaps too unrealistic, and most groups concluded with visions of absolute individual freedom funded by cryptocurrency. In some ways, while puppetry can reveal certain vulnerabilities, it can also reflect the kinds of assumptions people make about what they see as important for others. However, as one participant said, it is both rare and fun to play the “villain,” and also easier than playing a person with flaws. One group reflected on how their conversation changed when a puppet revealed that he wished his parents would speak to each other. This was his “fate,” but the vulnerability of the puppet’s revelation allowed the group to take more seriously the constructed person existing behind each puppet. I believe that, with more time to develop these characters to have more nuanced and complex desires, fears, and stories, more moments of radical empathy might occur. One participant also reflected that a “stage,” or some capacity to hide their real face and body, may have allowed for a less inhibited performance of their puppet and character. The excess time spent making was partly an underestimate of how much time the workshop needed, but it was also because making is fun. The pride and pleasure participants took in making a potato puppet were clearly evident, and one participant reflected on how important “play” felt to them as an adult, serving as both an outlet and a distraction from the pressures of their life otherwise.

The crux of this event was about exploring alternative ways of relating to each other, solving problems, and revealing other modes of engaging in the types of conversations that need to happen around making buildings. The practice of architecture involves the projection and manifestation of values into our shared environments and often the imagining of the values, fears, hopes, and stories of “users” or clients. Puppetry and role-playing are ways that children learn and practise social norms and scenarios. For adults, it can provide a similar function, particularly as it creates avenues for revealing beliefs and truths that can be expressed through an “other” rather than from the self, and it creates a scenario in which a person can empathise with a character different from themselves as they embody them through the puppet. The act of making the puppet, sharing tools, and seeing how others choose to work is a creative process that bonds the group in the first instance, allowing for more fruitful conversation through the role-playing. It is relatively accessible to most people, as the medium of the potato as a working material is generally universally unfamiliar, making it a democratising tool. The Feminist Potato Puppet Theatre poses a methodology of character development and role-play that challenges how architects typically project onto and imagine the lives of their clients, pointing to a possible tool for revealing vulnerabilities, empathising with others, and performing possible scenarios.

At this event, I connected for the first time with Maxine Goon, who was in attendance and who would later become a collaborator. This was an instance where the gathering space brought forward the kinds of people who have aligned practices and ideals and created opportunities for further connection.

“Amelie Jakubek Jaydn Hubrecht.” Amelie Jakubek, accessed September 04, 2024, <https://amelie-jakubek.de/>.

“Feminist Potato Puppet Theatre.” Amelie Jakubek, 2019, accessed March 01, 2023, <https://amelie-jakubek.de/potato-puppet-theatre.html>.



Figure 2.17: Tessa Forde, *Attendees Assemble their Feminist Potato Puppets*, 2022, photograph.

## How to! Feminist Potato Puppet Theatre



Figure 2.18: Tessa Forde, *Potato puppets perform a scenario*, 2022, photograph.

### Tools

- A collection of varying sized potatoes
- A spool of thick twine
- Scissors and other cutting tools. Sharp wooden skewers. Hot glue gun and craft glue. A battery powered drill.
- Miscellaneous decorating materials - scrap fabric, googly eyes, scrap paper, coloured markers etc.
- A character information sheet and a choice of identities, fates and scenarios.

### Deployment

Step One: Take an identity from the identity pile.

Step Two: Using the materials in front of you and the exemplar puppet, build a potato puppet.

Step Three: Develop the character of the puppet using the character sheet.

Step Four: Choose a fate from the fate pile for your puppet.

Step Five: Join forces with your partner/s. Introduce your puppet.

Step Six: Choose a scenario from the scenario pile and act out this scenario as a group. You must incorporate your fate into this role play.

### Context

This workshop is based on the practice of Amelie Jakubek<sup>1</sup> – an artist with a social art practice spanning installations, events, films, painting, and performances. The Feminist Potato Puppet Theatre is a way to playfully explore formats of debate in order to reflect and alter hierarchies of knowledge production/appropriation/reception.

The puppet theatre is a site familiar to us as children – puppeteering is a way for children to practice relationships and to explore complex social situations. Puppets are alternative beings, alter egos, able to overcome physical and other boundaries in a way that we can't in our own bodies.

The core research question in the conceptualisation of the Feminist Potato Puppet Theatre was: How can we develop collective agency to change institutions and formats that oppress us collectively?

Why is it called the "feminist Potato Puppet Theatre" you might ask? Well because the theatre is a space in which we imagine another future, or another world and that future or world must be feminist, and indigenised and anti-capitalist.



# A Feminist Potato Puppet Theatre

*A workshop designed by Amelie Jakubek*

With this sheet you can think about roleplay and developing your puppet's character. Please feel free to skip all categories you don't consider important to your puppet's persona.

## Intro:

Some thoughts and the invisible rules of role playing

1) Role-playing is an interactive process of defining and re-defining the state, properties and contents of an imaginary ... world.

2) The power to define the game world is allocated to participants of the game. The participants recognise the existence of this power hierarchy.

3) Player-participants define the game world through personified character constructs, conforming to the state, properties and contents of the game world.

4) Typically the decisive power to define the decisions made by a free-willed character construct is given to the player of the character.

5) The decisive defining power that is not restricted by character constructs is often given to people participating in game master [\*mistress] roles.

6) The defining process is often governed by a quantitative game ruleset.

iv) The information regarding the state of the game world is often disseminated hierarchically, in a fashion corresponding with the power structure of the game.

There are infinite ways of dividing the power to define in role-playing games. The ways of doing the division begin from the dictatorial and omnipotent game master[\*mistress], ending in a completely collective system lacking any ultimate authority.

Just as a spectator enjoys a tragic experience brought to her by actors on the stage, a role-player enjoys creating one for herself.

The exogenous goals are not restricted to entertainment – the normative claim of fun being the only purpose of role-play is simply erroneous.

Montola, Markus, 2009, "The Invisible Rules of Role-Playing. The Social Framework of Role-Playing Process." In: Richard Bartle et. al, The International Journal of Role-Playing, Issue 1, p. 22 - 36, online: [www.journalofroleplaying.org](http://www.journalofroleplaying.org)

April 2022

An adapted version of the potato puppet character sheet designed by Amelie Jakubek used to build out the personality and history of each puppet. The original character sheet can be found on Jakubek's website: <https://amelie-jakubek.de/potato-puppet-theatre.html>

*Adaptation with permission from Jakubek.*

Figures 2.19-2.22: Amelie Jakubek and Tessa Forde, *Potato Character Sheets*, 2022, graphic.



# The Name of your Puppet:

You can think in the following categories, but you can also approach your character differently.

Answer as many or as few as you would like.

- 1) Pronouns:
- 2) Where does the puppet come from?
- 3) Nickname:
- 4) Do they like their nickname?
- 5) Age:
- 6) Place of Birth:
- 7) Cultural Identity:
- 8) Religion:
- 9) Describe the area in which they live now:
- 10) Is this their ideal home and location?
- 11) If not, what would they prefer?
- 12) Current occupation:
- 13) Education:
- 14) Sexuality/Gender:
- 15) Any children?
- 16) Describe their relationship with their children (if any):
- 17) General vocabulary or speech pattern (e.g. educated, precise, pretentious, average, childish, vulgar...):
- 18) Mannerisms/demeanor: Cool/confident, volatile/moody, nervous/fidgety/shy, other?
- 19) Typical Posture: Stiff and rigid, slumped and defeated, slouchy, careless, relaxed, upright, other?
- 20) Gestures: Doesn't gesture much, deliberate and controlled, wild, jerky, fluid?
- 21) Common Gestures (e.g. nail biting, hair patting, clenched fists, hands in pockets etc.):



Think about what could be very specific to your character.

You can think in the following categories, but you can also approach your character differently.

Answer as many or as few as you would like.

22) Finances: (prudent/cautious, average with some debt, lives paycheck to paycheck, criminal activity etc.)

23) Describe any personal habits, are any of these addictions?

#### SKILLS/TALENTS

24) What are they good at?

25) Any hobbies?

#### THE PAST:

26) What was their childhood like?

27) Earliest Memory?

28) Saddest Memory?

29) Significant past jobs:

30) Major accidents/traumas?

31) How are they still affected/if at all?

32) Relationship to parents:

33) Any siblings? Relationship?

#### RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHERS

34) Who is their best friend?

35) How do they feel about authority?

36) Anyone how challenges them?

37) Anyone who angers them?

38) Anyone who asks for help?

39) Who is the most important person in their life?

40) Who is their biggest influence?

41) Are they dependent on anyone, or does anyone depend on them?

#### MENTAL ATTITUDE/PERSONAL BELIEFS:

42) Any psychological challenges? (e.g phobias, depression, paranoia, narcissism)

43) Are they an optimist or a pessimist?

44) Most comfortable when ... (alone, with friends, drinking etc.):

45) Most uncomfortable when ... (in a crowd, alone, public speaking, etc.):



**Example Fates:**

I own a fish and chip shop in a suburban neighbourhood.

I am afraid that everything I say is too complicated.

My partner just left me, because they think I am working too much.

I am an recent immigrant, who came to Aotearoa to study. I have adapted to the cultural differences quite well, but sometimes I deeply question the origins of these cultural beliefs.

I have accompanied my boss, whom I secretly think doesn't have much integrity, but I am afraid to criticise them.

I spent seven years in prison and I am only just getting used to being back in society.

I strongly believe in architecture's power to transform the world.

I have a crush on someone in my group

I have four children and I have taken time off for this.

I am a dairy farmer and I am worried about policy change in the farming sector.

I am my mother.

I am a widow and my son no longer speaks to me.

I am the director of the foundation that provided the funding for this event.

I have early onset Alzheimer's but it is in its very early stage.

**Example Identities:**

Tell your earliest memory as if it is super important.

You want others to accept your nickname, and often people don't.

Request others to share their saddest memory.

Bring up Children or other themes regarding reproduction.

Refer to your puppet's educational background to make a point.

Involve your Puppet body strongly. Let your puppet body dance or do something with their body drastically.

Bring up capitalism more than once.

Convince someone to refer to you as their best friend.

Share your greatest Wish.

Quote/sing your favorite song, and refer to why you did it.

Relate the current situation to your childhood.

Try to turn the situation to an informal situation.

Involve your relationship to religion.

Disagree with most things in conversation.

## The Night School: Who Wants to be an Architect

April 13, 2022

Shan Yu, Cindy Huang (Workshop Designers and Facilitators)  
Tessa Forde (Workshop Collaborator)  
Public Event Guests

Objectspace Office, Tāmaki Makaurau, Aotearoa

Showcase the “edutainment” practice of Crit Space through a live event / gameshow that crowdsourced quiz answers from social media.



Figure 2.23: Crit Space, Crit Space Logo, 2020, logo. Courtesy of Crit Space.

### Context

*Who Wants to Be an Architect?* was a game show that brought together practitioners (ranging from recent graduates to ‘professionals’) and architecture students to quiz them on their ‘knowledge’ of architecture. Mixed teams competed with each other to answer questions and complete activities related to the architecture field, all for an “ultimate mystery prize”.<sup>1</sup>

This event was the first collaborative event for The Night School, where I provided the venue, some funding for resources, and facilitation support for other emerging practitioners to run a workshop. The aim was to foster relationships and collegiality with aligned thinkers. This workshop was designed and facilitated by the founders of @crit.space—Shan Yu and Cindy Huang. I had learned of Crit Space through a mentor of mine who was supervising Yu’s thesis. Yu was exploring the physical and conceptual site of the architecture school at the University of Auckland, and how both might be challenged and reimaged through activism and occupation. Part of this project involved Crit Space, a collaboration with Huang. Crit Space uses Instagram and YouTube as platforms to make architecture “more digestible for the public” and to create a space to discuss architecture and showcase the work of their peers.<sup>2</sup> They disseminated this discourse in an “edu-tainment format on YouTube” to an audience of fellow students and high schoolers interested in studying architecture.<sup>3</sup>



Figure 2.24: Crit Space, *Who Wants to be an Architect* Event Poster, 2022, digital poster. Courtesy of Crit Space.

Crit Space adopts a bottom-up approach to making architecture feel approachable and relatable to younger audiences, who have a different relationship to and expectation of media. I was interested to see how they might adapt their work, which typically revolves around bite-sized digital content, into a live workshop/event format. This shift required an embodied example of their practice (rather than an explanation) that included audience participation and encouraged a theorisation of their work. Translating a process into something others must actively partake in involves critically assessing each part of that process and how it is related to and understood. While this kind of theorisation can occur in lecture formats, the workshop/event-based and embodied format proved to be a richer medium for deeper thinking.

As they approached the transition from architecture school to working life, Yu and Huang were contemplating how this space of edu-tainment could exist beyond the academy, and how they might bring the skills and networks it had afforded them into their commercial and professional practices. The Night School offered them a setting to test this transition.

<sup>1</sup> “The Night School #2: Who Wants to Be an Architect,” Objectspace, 2022, accessed September 04, 2024, <https://www.objectspace.org.nz/events/the-night-school-2-who-wants-to-be-an-architect/>.

<sup>2</sup> “Hey everyone!,” crit.space, 2020, accessed September 04, 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/p/B9JlpdrBudh/?hl=en>.

<sup>3</sup> “The Night School #2: Who Wants to Be an Architect.”

“CRIT SPACE,” Youtube Account, accessed September 04, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/@CRITSPACE>.

## Description of Event

Yu and Huang decided to create a live edu-tainment gameshow event called *Who Wants to Be an Architect?* and quiz two teams of audience members on their knowledge of architectural clichés and pop culture. The answers to these questions were not objective facts but were obtained by popular vote in polls on the Crit Space Instagram in the weeks prior. Rather than a player answering with what they know or think to be true, they had to answer with what they expected others would choose, thus making the answers uncontestable.

When the audience arrived, eight people volunteered to form two teams, each consisting of at least one graduate, one student, and one practitioner. One team was called “The Who,” and the other “Purple Bow Tie,” the latter’s namesake being the purple bow tie circling the collar of the black dress shirt Yu was wearing as a quirky and charismatic host. It was a Jeopardy-style game, with different questions and categories worth different points. The Who dominated from the start; their team was weighted with graduates, while Purple Bow Tie’s members included an artist and an architect freshly arrived from Australia. Their quick and significant lead was reduced during a dramatic and dizzying game of “pin the glasses on Corbusier,” where one of Purple Bow Tie’s players stumbled aimlessly before planting the glasses square on. The game went back and forth, with heckling from the audience, culminating in a tiebreaker finish—The Who with 7400 points to Purple Bow Tie’s 7200, with 400 points left to play for.

The last task was to “draw the plan from this video of a nice apartment.” This part of the event was suitably tense. After the first viewing, the voting was inconclusive; the sketch plans were surprisingly different, and Yu had lost the actual plan. Following a re-watch, the audience voted unanimously for The Who, much to the protest of one team member from Purple Bow Tie. He demanded to see the plan, and with audience support, Yu found a version online. In a triumph of the underdogs, the audience vote shifted unanimously to team Purple Bow Tie.

*Who Wants to Be an Architect?* proved to be extremely entertaining. It had it all: controversy, humour, and an unexpected underdog, come-from-behind finish. The use of crowdsourced quiz answers encouraged the team members and the audience to reflect on their shared experiences within the architecture discipline, while also challenging their own preconceptions and assumptions about those experiences. It also revealed generational gaps, given that the demographic following Crit Space is largely made up of architecture students and recent graduates. The event encouraged the audience and quiz teams to think critically about their architectural knowledge and what they hold to be true.

While this event allowed the audience to participate in the game through applause, heckling, and occasional voting, most architecture events—or indeed, most consumption of architectural media—remain passive, positioning the audience as observers of a spectacle rather than active participants in its complex rituals. As early as 1967, Debord critiqued modernism as a vehicle for the receding of life and “all that was directly lived” into representation.<sup>4</sup> Society has transitioned from communities that design and participate in shared collective carnivals and ritual celebrations to a place where those rituals are presented as entertainment for passive consumption.<sup>5</sup> This shift has been exacerbated by the rapid development and proliferation of social media. Many daily experiences are now mediated through a handful of online spaces, owned by contemporary tech oligarchs. Yu and Huang’s work of navigating this slippery arena—imbuing it with pedagogy and leveraging



Figure 2.25: Tessa Forde, *Who Wants to be an Architect* hosts, teams, and audience, 2022, photograph.



Figure 2.26: Tessa Forde, *Pin the glasses on Le Corbusier*, 2022, photograph.

<sup>4</sup> Guy Debord, *The society of the spectacle*, trans. Ken Knabb (PM Press, 2024), 2.

<sup>5</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his world*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (MIT Press, 1968).

its potential—raises questions about how this space, this portal where we are “on the verge of losing our bodies... this place of the great melting,” our “arms all full of the sapphires of the instant,” begins to shape the physical world, our architecture, and the ground.<sup>6</sup>

Locating their practice in the physical world, in place, and together also begins to reveal the value and other potentials of this approach, as well as the kinds of skill sets they might carry into commercial practice. Huang and Yu are skilled camera operators, have an instinct for graphic design and attention-grabbing visuals, and possess experience in social media management and productive collaborations. Fundamentally, these comprise a toolkit of communication skills critical to any commercial practice, which, in the right nurturing context, could help shift the imagination of architectural practice more broadly, making it more “digestible for the public”.<sup>7</sup> Crit Space’s core positioning is that architecture should experiment with alternative forms of media (versus its dominant still image/building-focused media engagement) and use these to increase public knowledge and spatial literacy. The tool they tested through TNS was to ‘gamify’ architecture, making it entertaining. This was also a tongue-in-cheek approach designed to draw attention to how architecture is currently portrayed in the ‘edutainment’ space—predominantly through reality TV that centres on buildings as products to be exploited and capitalised on, rather than on the process of architecture, what it can do, and the shared meaning its symbols and ideas can create.

In the context of architectural event-making in Aotearoa, where the usual entertainer/audience dichotomy remains fixed in the ‘lecturer/panel’ and ‘enraptured crowd’ format, this event, with its blurring of participation, chaos, and laughter, felt wholly unconventional. It embodied the beginnings of collective joy and offered another mode of being together.



Left: Figure 2.27: Tessa Forde, Team Purple Bow Tie contemplate their next answer, 2022, photograph.



Right: Figure 2.28: Tessa Forde, Team Purple Bow Tie celebrate their win jubilantly, 2022, photograph.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*. Translated by Hélène Iswolsky. MIT Press, 1968.

“Crit Space.” Youtube Account, accessed September 04, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/@CRITSPACE>.

“Hey Everyone!” crit.space, 2020, accessed September 04, 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/p/B9JlprBudh/?hl=en>.

Debord, Guy. *The Society of the Spectacle*. Translated by Ken Knabb. PM Press, 2024.

Lockwood, Patricia. *No One Is Talking About This*. Penguin, 2022.

“The Night School #2: Who Wants to Be an Architect.” Objectspace, 2022, accessed September 04, 2024, <https://www.objectspace.org.nz/events/the-night-school-2-who-wants-to-be-an-architect/>.

<sup>6</sup> Patricia Lockwood, *No one is talking about this* (Penguin, 2022), 12.

<sup>7</sup> crit.space, “Hey everyone!”

## The Night School: Alive a Library

April 20, 2022

Gabi Maffey and Bypass Journal members (Workshop Designers and Facilitators)

Tessa Forde (Workshop Collaborator)

Public Event Guests

Objectspace Office, Tāmaki Makaurau, Aotearoa

Understand writing as an architectural practice through the individual and collaborative curation of poetry from decommissioned library books.

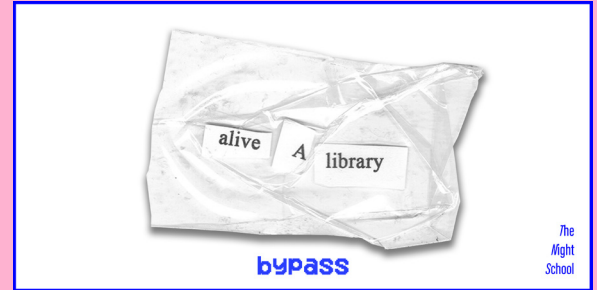


Figure 2.29: Bypass Journal, *Alive a Library* event poster, 2022, digital poster.

### Context

The second collaborative event in The Night School/Objectspace event series was *Alive: A Library* with Gabi Maffey and *Bypass Journal*. I had discovered Maffey's work through a podcast series she had been producing as part of her Architecture Master's thesis. Entitled *This Ain't Auckland, This Ain't Architecture*, the podcast told the history of Karangahape Road and invited guests to share their stories about the spaces, places, events, and feelings that captured it for them. It was critical, thoroughly researched, intelligent, and funny.<sup>1</sup> Maffey was investigating a number of socially engaged and practice-based research projects that traversed modes of making through an architectural lens. A key aspect of her work was performativity—how everyday people shape their environment and, in doing so, make architecture. Maffey's interest in assemblage and poetry provided the starting point for the workshop. At the time, she had just joined the editing team of *Bypass Journal*, a collection of “young architecture hopefuls” who established a non-profit journal to explore “alternative modes of thought about the practice, discipline, and agency of architecture”.<sup>2</sup> The event at Objectspace was seen as an opportunity to explore both her own practice and provide a platform for *Bypass Journal*.

### Description of Event

*Alive: A Library* was a writing workshop where attendees reassembled old words from shredded books that had been de-shelved at the Auckland Library. The workshop demonstrated assemblage as a tool for ideating and making—positing that writing is making, and thus, writing is architecture. Maffey hoped to create an environment where young people could “express their personal voice in architecture,” fuse “studio making practices with writing,” and play and “relax in a studio environment where there are no grades.”<sup>3</sup>

*Alive: A Library* began with an introduction from Maffey, including a karakia, pepeha, and a short video about *Bypass Journal* and her own practice. Attendees were then invited to gather around individual or shared poetry-making modules, which consisted of pieces of a Bunnings plastic DIY garden house, with tape wrapped sticky-side up. The brief was for each attendee to make a poem from the shredded text of discontinued library books, based on what had happened to them that day. They were then instructed to take a sheet of paper, summarise the key ideas of the poem, and tape it onto the other side of the frame. Attendees clustered on the floor, which gave the session the feel of being in a ‘school’—a return to the ‘mat.’



Figure 2.30: Tessa Forde, Maffey presents *Alive a Library*, 2022, photograph.

<sup>1</sup> *This 'aint Auckland.*, podcast audio, 2021, <https://podcasts.apple.com/nz/podcast/this-aint-auckland/id1586575757>.

<sup>2</sup> “About,” *Bypass Journal*, 2023, accessed July 03, 2024, <https://bypassjournal.com/Info>.

<sup>3</sup> “The Night School #3: Alive a Library,” Objectspace, 2022, accessed September 04, 2024, <https://www.objectspace.org.nz/events/the-night-school-3-alive-a-library/>.

Once attendees had written a poem (or two), Maffey presented her manifesto through a semi-interactive slideshow. She defended two elements of her practice: first, the idea that writing and architecture can be assemblages—that we can spark the creative process through the act of piecing together existing elements in new ways; and second, that writing is making, and writing is architecture. The latter is a key part of Maffey’s practice, and of architecture practice in general. It is only through storytelling—the stories we tell ourselves and those we share collectively—that meaning is discovered and made around shared environments.



Figure 2.31: Tessa Forde, *Alive a Library attendees assemble poetry*, 2022, photograph.

The next task invited participants to rotate the frame and interrogate how the backsides of the poems—the unchosen words revealed by their double-sidedness—could also make a poem. Binh Minh Ha, one of the founding members of *Bypass Journal*, then spoke about the journal’s mission and how others could contribute. She introduced the final task: building a collective structure using the garden house modules. The assemblage poetry became part of a larger assemblage—a chaotic tower. Conventionally, this might be seen as the most architectural act of the workshop—the collective building of a structure—but it was the relationships between the assembled parts that mattered: whose poetry was next to whose, and what new stories this created, rather than the form the structure took. The structure itself was ad hoc, and its meaning lay in its process, its poetry, the stories told and shared, and the accessibility of the creative process to everyone in the room. In this sense, the workshop format enabled Maffey to bring more bodies into her practice—more books for the library. Her final thesis project was a one-woman show (inevitably dependent on a collection of co-conspirators, of course), and while *This Ain’t Auckland, This Ain’t Architecture* hosted several guests, it was mostly Maffey waxing lyrical about the history of Karangahape Road, about what it means to listen your way through a city and engage with its skin.

Audre Lorde described poetry as “a vital necessity” to the existence of women,<sup>4</sup> “not only a dream and a vision” but the “skeleton architecture of our lives”.<sup>5</sup> She also described it as the most economical art form, requiring the least labour and materials, and which “can be done between shifts, in the hospital pantry, on the subway, and on scraps of surplus paper”.<sup>6</sup> In this way, poetry becomes a small interruption to the day-to-day—an act of defiance, a matriarchal moment of love and beauty in an otherwise patriarchal world. Gathering people together to assemble poetry, to empower them in their belief that they can write, can make, and can use that writing to better understand or reshape their environment, becomes a collective act of resistance, of shared trouble.



Figure 2.32: Tessa Forde, *A return to the mat*, 2022, photograph.

Maffey’s workshop offered participants the chance to create a piece of writing from the shredded pages of discontinued library books. These fragments, ripped and stuck to tape stretched between the frames of a Bunnings greenhouse (readily available materials, reused and reused), moved around the room, were edited, and found new life when read in reverse. The process of writing became collaborative, connected, and curated. As Maffey says, “one book can’t make a library.” This posits a way forward for architecture too: collaborative, connected, curated. If architecture is the arrangement of materials in space with consideration given to social, political, and historical contexts, then writing, too, is architecture.

<sup>4</sup> Audre Lorde, *Sister outsider: essays and speeches* (Crossing Press, 2012), 26.

<sup>5</sup> Lorde, *Sister outsider: essays and speeches*, 27.

<sup>6</sup> Lorde, *Sister outsider: essays and speeches*, 109.

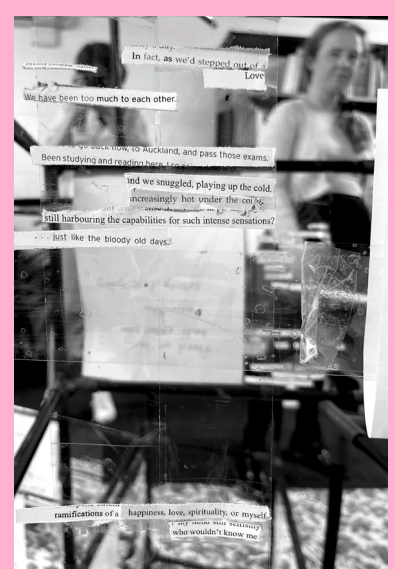
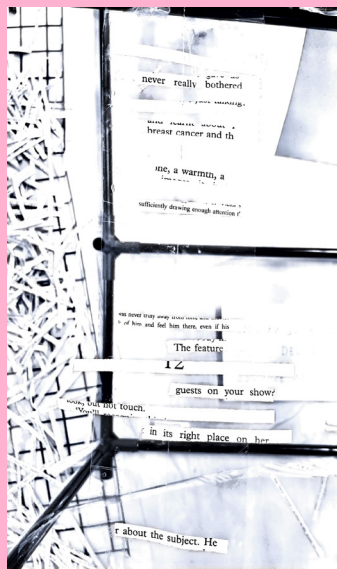
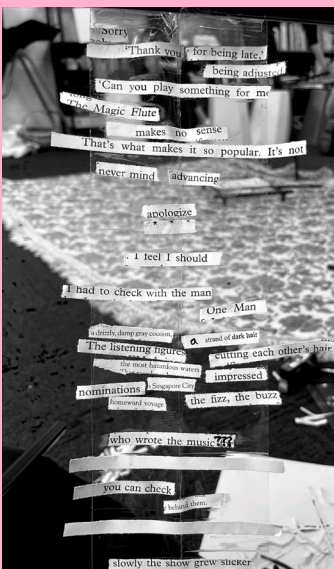
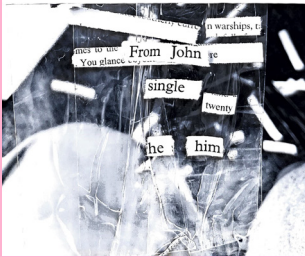
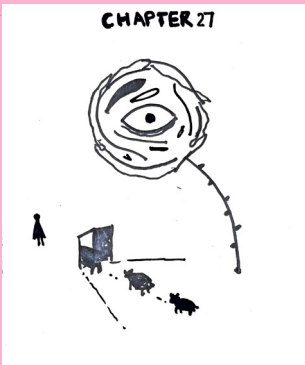


Top left: Figure 2.33: Tessa Forde, *Alive a Library* attendees assemble their poetry assemblages, 2022, photograph.



Below: Figures 2.35-2.40: *Alive a Library* attendees, *Assorted poetry assemblages*, 2022, digital scans of workshop poetry.

Top Right: Figure 2.34: Tessa Forde, *Bypass Journal* editor Binh Minh Ha presents, 2022, photograph.



“About.” *Bypass Journal*, 2023, accessed July 03, 2024, <https://bypassjournal.com/Info>.

Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Crossing Press, 2012.

“The Night School #3: *Alive a Library*.” *Objectspace*, 2022, accessed September 04, 2024, <https://www.objectspace.org.nz/events/the-night-school-3-alive-a-library/>.

*This 'Aint Auckland*. Podcast audio. 2021. <https://podcasts.apple.com/nz/podcast/this-aint-auckland/id1586575757>.

## How to! Alive A Library

### Tools

- A collection of shredded writing
- Thick clear tape and scissors to cut it
- A frame of some kind to stretch the tape around



Figure 2.41: Tessa Forde, *An assembled poem*, 2022, photograph.

### Deployment

Step One: Think about your day.

Step Two: Use the shredded text to build a poem on the sticky side of the tape that relates to how your day is going.

Step Three: Join forces with a second person. Read the other's poem and choose a line you particularly resonate with. Note - this line can come from the front or the back of their tape.

Step Four: Write this line on another piece of paper/card and write one additional line in response.

Step Five: Collaboratively build your two pieces of paper/card into a small structure.

### Context

Alive a Library was a writing workshop designed and facilitated by Bypass Journal where attendees reassembled old words from shredded books that have been de-shelved.

Why design a writing workshop where no one actually writes anything? What gets said in a place where nothing is new, and where people pick at scraps of books and stick them on bits of tape?

Alive a Library facilitates a space for young people to;

- +Express their personal voice in architecture.
- +Fuse their studio making practices with writing. Because writing is making.
- +Play, and relax in a studio environment where there are no grades.
- +Relax, because here nothing matters, which means you can!

Bypass Journal are an independent youth-lead publication from Tamaki Makaurau, Aotearoa. This event was facilitated by Bypass member Gabi Maffey as part of The Night School.

Architect-ish poet Gabi Maffey lives, works, and podcasts from Tamaki Makaurau, Aotearoa.

## The Night School: MIND-GAME

April 27, 2022

Madelon Vriesendorp (Workshop Designer)

Tessa Forde (Workshop facilitator)

Public event guests

Objectspace Office, Tāmaki Makaurau, Aotearoa

Deeply considering the individual and collective meaning we each hold around visual symbols, and how these affect the way we perceive the world, and the psyche of others.

### Context

*MIND-GAME* is a concept by the artist Madelon Vriesendorp, a prolific painter, illustrator, and co-founder of the architecture practice OMA. Described as a “home analysis kit,” the game consists of a stage on which players arrange a series of symbolic objects to create a scene, before other players psychoanalyse the scene and the process the player went through to arrange it.<sup>1</sup> The symbolic objects are a mix of easily recognisable items—such as a foot (which often gets placed in the doorway of the room), a female torso, a wall painting, a set of dice, a snake, a dog, a man, a fish, and so on—and more abstract objects open to interpretation, like a building-like structure, a coloured egg, and a bean. Not all the objects have to be used; in fact, the objects that are excluded are often as much up for discussion as those that are included. The arranger decides whose analysis was the most resonant for them, and then each player takes a turn. The winner of the most analyses is the overall winner.

The game is designed to reveal “our deeper consciousness, our true nature, and the characteristics we take such care to hide behind our self-styled identity,” testing our ability to respond to critical analysis and, in turn, interpret and critically analyse others.<sup>2</sup> It challenges players to expose themselves and react positively to critical interpretation. Through this process, players begin to recognise the symbolic references and psychological structures they have in common, uncovering what is meaningful in the constantly changing theatre of the human mind. *MIND-GAME* can be played with “lovers, family and friends, or among a wider circle of acquaintances, strangers, even mortal enemies”.<sup>3</sup>

The appeal of this workshop for The Night School was its adaptability for replication across various platforms and its exploration of how material arrangements and objects create shared meaning. It also allowed me to engage in craft, learning a new skill in hand-built pottery to create the components of the game.

### Description of Event

The event began with *Whakataka te Hau* and my pepeha, followed by The Night School introduction and a description of the game rules. Attendees were invited to introduce themselves with the prompt, “What do you like to do with your time?” They then formed groups of four and began gameplay.



Figure 2.42: Tessa Forde, *MIND-GAME arrangement*, 2022, photograph.



Figure 2.43: Tessa Forde, *MIND-GAME attendees psychoanalyse a game arrangement*, 2022, photograph.

<sup>1</sup> “The Mind Game,” Nieuwe Instituut, 2020, accessed April 12, 2024, <https://nieuweinstituut.nl/en/events/mind-game>.

<sup>2</sup> *The world of Madelon Vriesendorp: paintings/postcards/objects/games*, ed. Stephan Trüby Shumon Basar (AA Publications, 2008), 206.

<sup>3</sup> *The world of Madelon Vriesendorp: paintings/postcards/objects/games*, 206.

The attendees approached the game earnestly, taking its tasks and analysis seriously. Each group developed a distinct style of analysis. They observed that some of their conversations were very deep, with many participants reflecting that they were in a contemplative phase of life (e.g., starting their thesis year). They also noted that the analysis became more considered as the game progressed, suggesting that more than one round could be fruitful. Certain objects took on meanings that carried over between rounds, with their significance shaped by their relationships to other objects. Some items were deemed ‘controversial’, while others were never used. The ‘bean’ became a controversial item for one group, while another group noted they never used the ‘man’. Objects like the ‘man’, the ‘fish’, and the ‘snake’, which were often seen as aggressive, became taboo through their associations. As the game progressed, players became less ‘conservative’, starting to manipulate the game board and expand the boundaries of the game into the surrounding space. They noticed that they built on each other’s ideas in a way that felt ‘almost competitive’, resulting in schemes that became increasingly ‘radical’.



Figure 2.44: Tessa Forde, *MIND-GAME attendees debate the significance of the torso*, 2022, photograph.

The set of objects developed by Vriesendorp, used to make arrangements, are intended to be common symbols by which a person might associate personal meaning, or assumed collective meaning. The game is intended to challenge these preconceived notions of meaning around common symbols, and to explore how shared meaning can develop through a process of identifying symbols with ideas, and the debate that might occur around it. As discussed with attendees, each group starts to establish collective meanings for the symbols and their arrangements through the process of analysis, which therefore changes how each successive person engages with the objects. Likewise, the players were much more likely to push the boundaries of instruction as the game progressed, manipulating not just the arrangement of objects but the ‘board’ itself. The value of this workshop, to other workshops and to architecture, lies in this idea of how collective meaning is made and what circumstances encourage it. The more ideas that emerge around each symbol and arrangement, the more creativity or ‘disobedient thinking’<sup>4</sup> is likely to occur, and the more the group realises that the ‘rules’ of the game are only enforced by their own personal and collective compliance, and are effectively arbitrary. The repetition of an activity within a group, including discussion and analysis around the effects of that activity, allows for this incremental ‘rebellion’ or boundary-pushing.

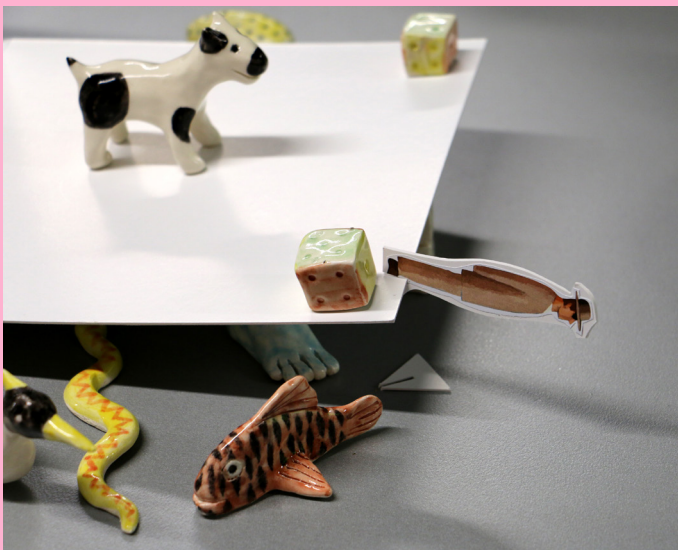
Figure 2.45: Tessa Forde, *Ceramic MIND-GAME symbols*, 2022, photograph.



This suggests the possibility of using symbols more particular to the group in attendance. For an architecture project, this could include the kinds of elements expected to be considered in the environment within which buildings exist—for example, cars, trees, benches, playthings, lights, and so on. This aligns this workshop with Rojas’ workshop; however, while Rojas centres personal experience and meaning, Vriesendorp decentres this in favour of idea interpretation independent of the author. The image in architecture—its signs and symbols, and often its conceptual origin—is given significant primacy in architectural and other media. And yet, each person has their own story to derive from that image. The architect’s story is both an interesting footnote and simultaneously irrelevant to how architecture (as building or built space) is understood, used, and storied.

<sup>4</sup> Welby Ings, “Undisciplined thinking: disobedience and the nature of design,” in *Postdisciplinary knowledge* (Routledge, 2019).

The progression into non-conformity—in that the last arrangements of each group were the most unusual, the most extreme, and the most likely to break the rules and adjust the structure of the room itself—reveals a potential tactic for generating boundary-pushing among participants. It also operates as a way for people to be more vulnerable, to feel more connected, and to experience less fear. This is another ground-making tactic that emerges from these workshops and my practice, leveraging the slow repetition of activities to foster connectivity and security among attendees. The Night School, as a soft and playful set of workshops, allows for other types of behaviour and connections to emerge through repeated making and ideating. Thus, it starts to make space on the ground for other things to exist and emerge from shared knowledge and relationships.



Left: Figure 2.46: Tessa Forde, *MIND-GAME* attendees propose increasingly radical arrangements, 2022, photograph.

Ings, Welby. "Undisciplined Thinking: Disobedience and the Nature of Design." In *Postdisciplinary Knowledge*, 48-65: Routledge, 2019.

"The Mind Game." Nieuwe Instituut, 2020, accessed April 12, 2024, <https://nieuweinstituut.nl/en/events/mind-game>.

*The World of Madelon Vriesendorp: Paintings/Postcards/Objects/Games*. Edited by Stephan Trüby Shumon Basar. AA Publications, 2008.

Left: Figure 2.47: Tessa Forde, *MIND-GAME* attendees unpack the game box, 2022, photograph.

## How to! MIND-GAME

## Tools

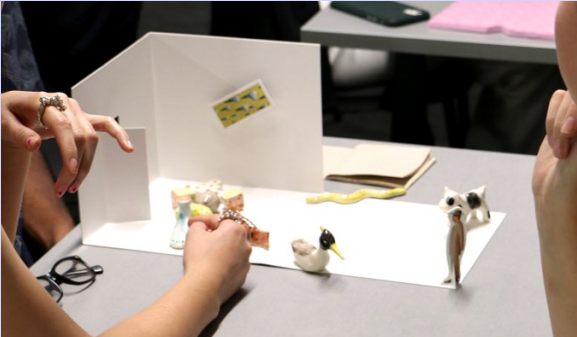


Figure 2.49: Tessa Forde, *MIND-GAME objects curated for analysis*, 2022, photograph.

- A collection of objects with recognisable forms
- A 'Room' to arrange them in

## Deployment

Step One: Open up the game and set up the wall.

Step Two: The first player chooses a set of objects – from just one to all of them – and places them anyhow anywhere on the board (in or outside the wall). While this happens, everyone else studies every move.

Step Three: When this 'set' is complete, the person sitting on the right analyses it by using their personal analytic powers or views. Everyone else can voice their opinions too. The player gets the last word in rejecting or accepting the judgements expressed.

Step Four: Now the person the right has to build a set and so on. The player whose interpretations are most widely accepted is the winner. The player whose set was most mystifying will be a close second.

## Context

MIND-GAME is a concept by the Artist Madelon Vriesendorp, a prolific painter, illustrator and co-founder of the architecture practice OMA.

This 'game' reveals to us our deeper consciousness, our true nature, and the characteristics we take such care to hide behind our self-styled identity. It tests our ability to expose ourselves and to react in a positive way to critical interpretation and analysis.

This can be done with lovers, family and friends, or among a wider circle of acquaintances, strangers, even mortal enemies. You might find out as much about yourself as you do about them and your relationship with them, you might have more or less in common than you previously thought.

Attendees organise a series of small items in an arrangement of their choice, which reveals something about the mindset of the maker, to be discussed by the group. In this way we can start to recognise the symbolic references and psychological structures we all share, finding what is meaningful in the constantly changing theatre of the human mind.

## ABC School 2022: STUDIO

July 18-23, 2022

Jessica Garcia Fritz, Valerie Lechene, Peggy Deamer, Andrea Dietz, Tessa Forde, Natalie Osbourne, Palmyra Geraki, Jean Baker (Organisers)  
Workshop Facilitators  
Public Attendees

Online: Zoom, lu.ma

Build on the work of the 2021 Architecture Beyond Capitalism School (ABC) to gather people from all over the world to discuss studio educational practices within architecture schools, and how they are considering the relationship of architecture to capitalism.

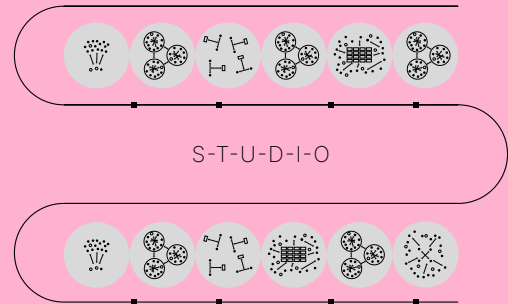


Figure 2.50: ABC School, ABC 2022 Studio Graphic, 2022, logo. Courtesy of the Academia Working Group.

### Context

The organisers from the ABC School began meeting soon after the 2021 school to plan for 2022. The next iteration was to feature a new theme and new speakers. I was introduced to the group in early 2022 and decided to join to develop my experience in organising schools and expand my practice into a global, digital space. However, the significant workload of organising the 2021 school, the high attrition rate of attendees, and the lack of funds for the next iteration meant the school required a reimagined format. Instead of inviting speakers and managing the content and delivery from the top down—which had been very effective in the first iteration—the group decided to issue an open call, inviting interested parties to submit topics of their choice to workshop. Participation would be free, and the form of any given submission was completely open to the presenter.

The theme for 2022 was *Studio Educational Practices*. Studio, described as “the pedagogical setting in which most of an architecture student’s and teacher’s time and resources are focused,” was considered fertile ground where organising skills and action for change could “become foundational in architectural practice and posit other roles for the architect beyond the ‘designer’”.<sup>1</sup> ABC School 2022 asked: “How do we understand studio to support and encourage activist organization? How might design be taught in ways that do not perpetuate and reproduce capitalist exploitation?”<sup>2</sup>

### Description of Happening

The value of being involved in the conceptualisation of ABC 2022 lay in the further development of organisational skills. These both leveraged and built on the skills I had acquired through my online co-organisation of the in-person Free School of Architecture and my in-person organisation of The Night School. The organising systems of The Architecture Lobby meetings have been honed over years of practice and utilise activist and organiser tools to keep the administrative load heterarchical,<sup>3</sup> while supporting generative, open, and inclusive discussion.

The Academia Working Group (AWG) met every 10 days or so, alternating between Thursday and Sunday. This meant the meetings were consistent but could accommodate different availabilities, were not as intense as weekly meetings, yet were more frequent than fortnightly ones. These meetings were announced internally to the AWG through a shared forwarding email and to the Lobby as a whole via the platform Mobilize, to which all Lobby members are subscribed. The openness of these meetings often resulted in new or changing attendance, so each meeting began with introductions. Typically, everyone would have their camera on, turning

<sup>1</sup> “S-T-U-D-I-O,” Architecture Beyond Capitalism School, 2022, accessed November 04, 2024, <https://abc.architecture-lobby.org/architecture-beyond-capitalism-2022>.

<sup>2</sup> “S-T-U-D-I-O.”

<sup>3</sup> Warren S McCulloch, “A heterarchy of values determined by the topology of nervous nets,” *The bulletin of mathematical biophysics* 7 (1945).

it off if they needed to step away from the call. Each meeting had two facilitators tasked with writing the agenda, sending out meeting invites, and chairing the discussion. These facilitators were staggered, so that at each meeting, one facilitator had organised the previous meeting, while the other would organise the next. The facilitators were responsible for keeping the meeting on track and on time, and for calling on a note taker to take comprehensive minutes. Meetings were always 90 minutes long—non-negotiable—as each person’s time was considered valuable and to be respected. All documents were shared and editable by everyone via Google Drive and Docs. Tasks were discussed at the meetings, and members would volunteer to take them on. Typically, tasks were completed, but if they could not be, members were expected to communicate this via email. Conversation was managed using the ‘stack,’ whereby an attendee wanting to speak would type ‘stack’ into the chat and would be called upon in order.<sup>4</sup>

ABC 2022 aimed to step even further back from the idea of a ‘School’ and was framed as a ‘workshop,’ inviting anyone interested to propose a session related to studio and education. It encouraged interactive sessions with active audience participation (to simulate a studio environment, albeit over Zoom) and sought to explore architecture education in relation to capitalism. All copy was written collaboratively in editable Google Docs and promoted to past participants of The School, on e-flux, through The Lobby, and via the ABC School website and social media.

We received just under 20 applications and paired organisers with 3–4 facilitators to further develop their proposals and coordinate scheduling, readings, copy, and other requirements. Where proposals overlapped, we suggested that facilitators connect and co-organise their sessions. Facilitators were encouraged to treat each session as an opportunity for active and shared discussion, collaboration, and production. Lectures and panel discussions were actively discouraged. Lu.ma, an online community gathering tool, was the platform for the event. Within Lu.ma, it was possible to schedule events, create a library of resources, and manage the roles of each subscribed user. One of the most challenging aspects of the school was coordinating a schedule that accommodated the multitude of time zones for facilitators, organisers, and participants. The school was held over one week and hosted more than 20 sessions.

I was paired with two workshop facilitators. I had also proposed that The Night School replicate particular sessions of the school, experimenting with the transition between online and in-person organising. The workshops I was allocated related to this proposal—considering which sessions might be best suited to both formats and to replication. These were *#communities-after-collapse* with Sadia Mounata and *#FREE-STUDIO* with Gustavo Garcia. The connections made through the organisation of the school are one of its most powerful aspects. I feel deeply connected to the women on the organising team, even though I have met few of them in person. These relationships have been further developed through the writing and editing of a book together—*The Organiser’s Guide to Architecture Education*, published by Routledge in 2024. Likewise, I still keep in touch with Garcia, enjoying the intimate process of sharing ideas and shaping them into something tangible. Other organisers and facilitators expressed similar sentiments: the value of the school lay in their connection to shared ideas and practices, and in working out how to communicate these collaboratively. The capacity to connect people globally around shared interests makes the workload of the school feel worthwhile. What seems critical are the connections made through collaboration and the production of something shared. This is where ABC School 2022 differed from a typical conference. Connections are made at conferences, but not with the same level of intimacy implied by working together.

ABC School 2022 ran for one week, from the 18th to the 23rd of July. Sessions ranged from a design workshop about strategies for encouraging students to think more critically about labour and labourers in architectural production in South America; a panel discussion featuring over 15 members from Dark Matter University; a Miro-based workshop that invited attendees to reimagine course syllabi as a creative space of compromise and agreement between teachers and students, challenging conventional academic constructs; to tactics for foregrounding the personal lives, stories, and experiences of students, and celebrating these in their design

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<sup>4</sup> #the-stack-XX

projects. The organisational work continued: keeping Lu.ma up to date with content, managing Miro boards and Zoom recordings (with some facilitators opting not to be recorded, some choosing recordings shared only with attendees, and others allowing recordings to be publicly shared), and communicating with registrants.

While we had over 400 people sign up for the school, there were typically 10 to 20 attendees at each session. This usually worked well for the kinds of interactive workshops we had asked for and developed with facilitators. The more intimate settings meant that, over the week, a collective audience was built. People attended repeated sessions, fostering a sense of familiarity and solidarity among attendees. Many of these were other facilitators, who were both hosting their own sessions and attending those of others. For me, this was reflective of the issue of 'buy-in' to these free events. The development and facilitation of a workshop represented an investment for a facilitator—one they wanted to see a return on, both by attending others' sessions and by forming connections that could be continued and strengthened across workshops. One facilitator described this as "getting out more than what [she] put in."

The Closing Plenary had originally been designed to synthesise objectives and action points requested from each facilitator and open these up for discussion regarding the future of architecture education. However, the outcome of this request was mostly large conceptual ideas—difficult to grasp and challenging to clearly connect to the workshops' activities. Instead, attendees, comprising a larger mix of facilitators and registrants, were invited to take broad topics drawn from the week and explore these through a working document. The discussion unfolded dynamically across this document, which was constantly being edited, with suggested edits and comments; through live discussion on Zoom, which was being minuted at the bottom of the document; and via the Zoom chat. The liveliness of the session—the debates, ideas, disagreements, and reflections—emphasised the value of the community established over the course of the week. The intimacy of the smaller sessions generated a feeling that people wanted to return to, fostering an environment where they felt comfortable exploring their ideas, challenging others, and sharing in a convivial space. Reflecting on the conclusions drawn from ABC 2021 regarding content and form, for ABC 2022, the School itself and the space it creates (its form) *is* the work.

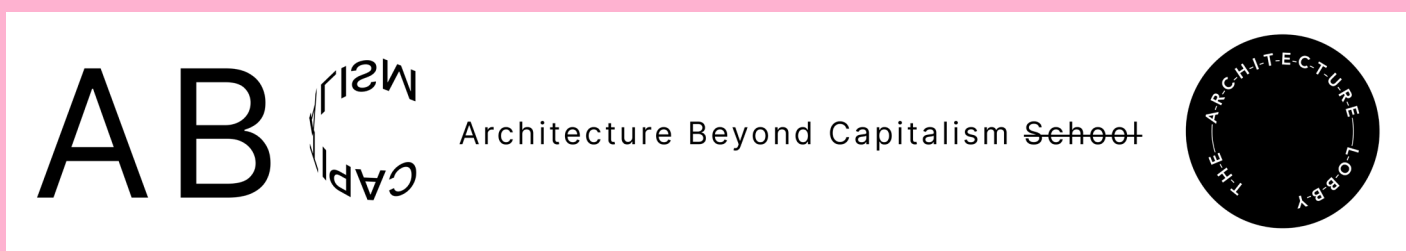
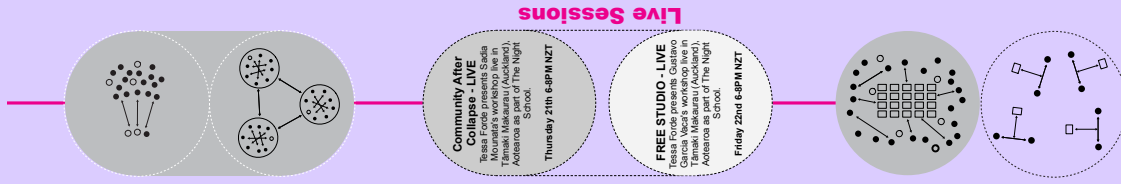


Figure 2.51: ABC School, ABC School logo, 2022, logo. Courtesy of the Academia Working Group.

McCulloch, Warren S. "A Heterarchy of Values Determined by the Topology of Nervous Nets." *The bulletin of mathematical biophysics* 7 (1945): 89-93.

"S-T-U-D-I-O." Architecture Beyond Capitalism School, 2022, accessed November 04, 2024, <https://abc.architecture-lobby.org/architecture-beyond-capitalism-2022>.



USA Eastern Time (GMT-4)	SUNDAY July 17	MONDAY July 18	TUESDAY July 19	WEDNESDAY July 20	THURSDAY July 21	FRIDAY July 22	SATURDAY July 23	
8:00:00								
9:00:00								
10:00:00		<b>Opening Plenary</b> An introduction to ABC 2022 hosted by the organizing committee. Monday 18th 10-11AM ET	<b>On Pedagogical Transparency</b> Britt Evensole, Lori Brown, Amber Barbach, Kaitlyn Vaughan, and Amanda Viles present a workshop evaluating the efficacy and consequences of teaching methods. Tuesday 19th 9-11AM ET	<b>Software, Skills, Licenses, Dependencies</b> Katie Pugh, Sara Moutata, and Rocio Tuiñan present a panel discussion on the complexities of architecture practice in the past decades, and the possibilities and potentials of dependencies in these digital times. Wednesday 20th 9-11AM ET	<b>Engaging Communities in the Design Studio: Considerations for Accountability from Five Case Studies</b> Ipek Tureli facilitates a panel discussion on how to engage with and be engaged as a context for fostering relationships with envisioned communities. Thursday 21st 11-11PM ET	<b>Decentre-Deconstruct-Design (?)</b> Monica Tuiñan, Rocio Tuiñan, and Rocio Tuiñan present a workshop on collective critical thinking in order to assess architectural curricula, and engage in and production beyond conventional capitalist contracts. Time: Friday 22nd 9-11AM	<b>Together We Dream</b> Jack Ben and Alex Ozaeri present a workshop on how to engage with and be engaged as a context for fostering relationships with envisioned communities. Self where participants must design, draw, detail their utopian biography. Saturday 23rd 9-11AM	
11:00:00								
12:00:00								
13:00:00		<b>Online Collaboration Technologies and their Implications for Post-Pandemic Studio Learning and Teaching Practices</b> Manjiv Adikavath presents an examination of online collaborative software in architecture education and what they can offer architecture pedagogy. Monday 18th 1-3PM	<b>Crafting an Institution for Free Education: A San Diego Case Study</b> Miguel Ceballos and Ipek Tureli present an opportunity to explore collaborative methods of designing an institution of higher education to support new pedagogical models for architectural education. Tuesday 19th 1-3PM ET	<b>"Ours to hack and to own": Open-source Strategies and the Pedagogy of Potential</b> Will Thomson, Lara Mezall, Sake Kuzjo, Mari Moura present a workshop questioning the centrality of design software and studio education. Monday 18th 3-5PM ET	<b>Rethinking Property Relations: Politicizing Site Analysis</b> Manuel Shweitzberg Camilo, Juliana Maum, and Sara Moutata present a workshop on how to engage with and be engaged as a context for fostering relationships with envisioned communities. Thursday 21st 1-3PM ET	<b>Community After Collapse - LIVE</b> Sara Moutata presents a study of complex, interconnected, and dynamic systems through a community mapping workshop. Thursday 21st 6-8PM NZT		
14:00:00								
15:00:00		<b>'Production Studies' Perspectives on Remaking Studio</b> Will Thomson, Lara Mezall, Sake Kuzjo, Mari Moura present a workshop questioning the centrality of design software and studio education. Monday 18th 3-5PM ET	<b>Student Organizing Across Syllabi and Project Briefs</b> Federico Garcia Lammers presents a workshop on how to engage with and be engaged as a context for fostering relationships with envisioned communities. Tuesday 19th 5-7PM ET		<b>Questioning the Nature of Status in Architecture</b> Tony Van Raaij and Daniela Silva invite participants to consider the power structures of architecture school and transmitted from there to the profession. Thursday 21st 4-6PM ET	<b>Seeing, Hearing, Eating, Drawing, and All of the Above</b> Tommy Ying presents a workshop that will explore how to engage with and be engaged as a context for fostering relationships with envisioned communities, picture books, and artifacts in order to understand how design ways of inquiry, embodied, and embodied ideologies. Friday 22nd 6-8PM NZT		
16:00:00								
17:00:00		<b>Collectivized Pedagogy</b> Quilin Riemo discusses practices different teaching groups that are part of the Dark Matter pedagogy. Participants will be invited to create new collectivized pedagogical models and share them with the group. Monday 18th 5-7PM ET						
18:00:00								
19:00:00								
20:00:00								
21:00:00								
22:00:00								
23:00:00								
0:00:00		<b>Hui Te Ao - Frontloading Indigenous Knowledge and Regenerative Practices</b> Kaitlyn Vaughan and Amanda Viles open up a workshop on how to engage with and be engaged as a context for fostering relationships with envisioned communities. Architecture school designed around an indigenous curriculum. Sunday 17th 11PM-1AM ET	<b>FREE STUDIO: Liberation as Praxis</b> Federico Garcia Lammers presents a workshop on how to engage with and be engaged as a context for fostering relationships with envisioned communities. Architecture school designed around a multiplicity of approaches. Tuesday 19th 5-7PM ET				<b>Closing Plenary</b> A concluding session hosted by the ABC organizing committee. Saturday 23rd 4-6PM ET	

T - A - L - S - T - U - D - I - O

**A-B-C---S-C-H-O-O-L**  
**2022 Schedule**

Figure 2.52: ABC School, ABC 2022 Schedule, 2022, graphic. Courtesy of the Academia Working Group.

## TNS / ABC School: Community After Collapse

July 21, 2022

Sadia Mounata (Workshop Designer and Facilitator)

Tessa Forde (Workshop Facilitator)

Public Event Guests

Brightside AUT, Tāmaki Makaurau, Aotearoa / Online: Zoom, Miro

Using a series of activities to assess the value of our skill sets and positioning as architects in the face of complex challenges.



Figure 2.53: Tessa Forde, *Community After Collapse mapping*, 2022, photograph.

### Context

The Night School collaborated with two facilitators from the Architecture Beyond Capitalism School in 2022 to explore the live realisation of their online workshops.

One of these facilitators was Sadia Mounata, a researcher and speculative designer practising alternative realities through different approaches and scales—from detail to speculative world-building—that can generate innovations and projections for future wellbeing in the face of converging crises and wicked problems. She founded ALT-TOPIA, where she collaborates with professionals from different parts of the world.<sup>1</sup> Her projects primarily focus on designing for an inclusive future. Mounata grew up in Bangladesh and became interested in the idea of communities after collapse due to some of the precarities of life in her home country and the severe flooding that occurs there. In many cases, these floods cannot be separated from the geopolitical relationships with Nepal and India. The flow of water between these countries means that what happens to the land and rivers in India and Nepal—based on political decisions, such as how meltwater is managed from the Himalayas—can have drastic implications for Bangladesh.

The plan for Mounata's event was to host an online workshop with 5–6 participants. Each participant would choose a community they were part of that they perceived to be on the verge of collapse or vulnerable to climatic, environmental, political, social, or technological threats or dissonance. They would then answer WHAT, WHO, WHERE, and HOW questions in a diagram to explore what actions they could take as architects to support these communities.



Figure 2.54: Tessa Forde, *Community After Collapse attendees share their findings*, 2022, photograph.

### Description of Happening

The in-person session took place at Brightside AUT in July 2022, while the ABC School was running online. Attendance was low for this event—it was a cold winter night—with only seven attendees, a mix of students and members of the public. I introduced The Night School, the ABC School, Sadia Mounata, and the workshop. The first part of the event was to establish the 'WHO'—choosing a community that the attendees believed to be on the edge of collapse. I then asked them to power map that community using either the relational web or influence grid models. Most participants chose communities that were large and difficult to encompass—for example, “the entirety of the Pacific nations” and “the people of Haiti.” This revealed a need to emphasise that the community should ideally be one they are part of and thus familiar with. I found that there was a tendency to rush into the solution space rather than sitting with and fully working through each question. The WHO was already being answered with the WHATs and HOWs, rather than focusing on unpacking who the community constitutes and how they might feel, behave, and think.

<sup>1</sup> “Conjecture and Speculation,” ALT-TOPIA, accessed July 04, 2024, <https://www.alt-topia.com/>.

We moved through the questions. One group worked on the Pacific nations and Starbucks, while the other focused on Haiti and a surf club in one attendee's local town that needed rebuilding and was reckoning with coastal erosion. The HOWs conceived by the attendees were largely speculative and intangible, such as posing undercover boss-style infiltration for Starbucks. There was also a tendency to overlook the particular skills architects might bring to these communities, or what architects might lack. I largely see this as my failure to correctly communicate the task, to fully understand the task myself in the moment, and to provide the tools and conceptual framing necessary to undertake it. This revealed a flaw in the methodology borrowing approach: the tool either needs to be well understood to be adopted and utilised, or it must be adapted with personal experience and ideas from other tools brought into its use in context. Likewise, the success of this technique depends on a strategy easy to mimic, OR a generative collaboration in which the methodology is discussed and developed collaboratively.

The diversity of experience within the group made for an interesting feedback session as each group shared their communities and approaches. One solution the first group posed was creating latte protest art, which started to approach a more tangible and immediate action. The intent of the workshop is to reveal both the potential and inadequacies of architectural practice in addressing challenges faced by communities. If there is nothing we can do as architects in the face of these challenges, this highlights what is missing from our training as we exist and work within these communities. For example, in the in-person workshop, addressing Starbucks might reveal that architects lack organising skills to communicate about the union, or it might highlight that we already have communication skills that could be used to make a poster about the union as a first step.

I reflect critically on this event in my own practice as a facilitator, as it revealed the need to take more time to plan, establish, and evaluate the 'purpose' of workshops of this kind. This process should be collaborative and carefully considered, especially when working with explicitly serious themes.<sup>2</sup>



Figure 2.55: Tessa Forde, *Community After Collapse attendees consider their role as architects in precarious situations*, 2022, photograph.

"Conjecture and Speculation." ALT-TOPIA, accessed July 04, 2024, <https://www.alt-topia.com/>.  
"The Night School: Community after Collapse." lu.ma ABC School 2022, 2022, accessed December 06, 2024, <https://lu.ma/xca7yfdf>.

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<sup>2</sup> "The Night School: Community After Collapse," lu.ma ABC School 2022, 2022, accessed December 06, 2024, <https://lu.ma/xca7yfdf>.

## TNS / ABC School: FREE STUDIO

July 22, 2022

Gustavo Garcia (Workshop Designer and Facilitator)

Tessa Forde (Workshop Facilitator)

Public Event Guests

Brightside AUT, Tāmaki Makaurau, Aotearoa / Online: Zoom, Miro

Imagining a space of liberation through drawing and music. Testing the replication of an online workshop into an in-person format.



Figure 2.56: Tessa Forde, *FREE STUDIO* attendees share their drawings, 2022, photograph.

### Context

The Night School collaborated with two facilitators from the Architecture Beyond Capitalism School in 2022 to explore the live realisation of their online workshops.

One of the workshops was with Gustavo Garcia Vaca, a multimedia artist and writer based in Los Angeles, California, who “explores the realms of possibility found in the experiences of the universe” and draws on a wide range of influences, from Japanese calligraphy to techno and Latin American music.<sup>1</sup> Garcia Vaca proposed a workshop called *FREE STUDIO - Liberation as Practice*, which envisioned the academic design studio as “an interdisciplinary space that elevates freedom of creative endeavor” and explored the concept of liberation through a series of individual and collaborative creative exercises.<sup>2</sup> Garcia Vaca posited that “opening up new ways of thinking [both from within and from without ourselves] can potentially lead to material changes in our bodies and our environment” and that *FREE STUDIO* would allow “the flow of ideas from our pasts/heritages/cultures, from our tenuous yet precious present, and from the future selves that we are becoming.”<sup>3</sup>

I met with Garcia Vaca on several zoom calls prior to both events to coordinate the online session and to imagine its realisation in person. He was motivated to collaborate, and to workshop the workshop together, incorporating concepts and songs from Aotearoa.

### Description of Happening

In the online workshop, I began with a land acknowledgment and pepeha, a karakia, and an introduction to the workshop concept and Garcia Vaca. At each online ABC event, the event coordinator was responsible for introducing a series of ‘community guidelines’ for Zoom dialogue, including conversation etiquette and the ‘stack.’ In this session, each person was invited to introduce themselves in the chat and then gather materials from around them to draw, write, or make with.

The first exercise was to draw, write, dance, or move to *Journey in Satchidananda* by Alice Coltrane. We came back together, and each person shared what they had created and how they felt during the exercise. Garcia Vaca then gave a lecture about some of the conceptual ideas behind the workshop, which included several quotes about freedom from different artists. This led to a discussion about what freedom, liberation, and abolition meant to each person. One participant reflected that freedom was not about trying to ‘break free’ but about remembering the people who came before us and moving through life for them. Another participant cited choice as a key aspect of freedom—something they felt was not reflected in their architectural education. Another said that freedom



Figure 2.57: Tessa Forde, *FREE STUDIO* attendees work across three large tables, 2022, photograph.

<sup>1</sup> “Profile & CV,” chamanvision, accessed April 15, 2024, <http://www.chamanvision.com/site/About.html>.

<sup>2</sup> “The Night School: FREE STUDIO,” lu.ma ABC School 2022, 2022, accessed April 15, 2024, <https://lu.ma/9tjxjz0n>.

<sup>3</sup> Forde, “The Night School: FREE STUDIO.”

was about ‘knowing your truth’ and holding it carefully. The next exercise was to imagine a free space or studio while listening to music. This could be a physical space, a speculative curriculum, or specific conditions under which a FREE STUDIO might take place. While doing this, *A Love Supreme* by John Coltrane and *Caravan* by Tito Puente played in the background. Although this wasn’t explicitly required, when we returned to share, it was evident that the styles and ideas of the participants were beginning to influence each other, with familiar motifs and conceptual threads about freedom emerging. The final task was to explicitly use others’ ideas to continue developing your own while *Image* by Jeff Mills and *Six-Eight (Instrumental)* by Fat Freddy’s Drop played in the background. When we returned to share, the ‘groupthink’ had altered people’s drawings, and the work became increasingly connected, even through Zoom, where the capacity to discuss or see others’ work outside the sharing time is limited.



Figure 2.58: Tessa Forde, *FREE STUDIO* attendees ‘de-face the starchitect’, 2022, photograph.

The online setting seemed to break down the dynamic between participant and facilitator. Both Garcia Vaca and I felt ‘liberated’ to participate in each task. There was no physical positioning in the room to suggest we were somehow different from others. The camera—often a barrier in in-person workshops—became a tool for connection, a gateway into each participant’s home, implying a different kind of intimacy. We wrapped up the session.

The format for the in-person event was the same, but I added an introduction to *The Night School* and curated a playlist of protest songs from Aotearoa, playing it during downtime to keep the atmosphere upbeat. More than 20 attendees crowded around three long tables placed end-to-end in an arc around a central mat space. These tables were covered in brown craft paper and a range of materials from previous events: paper, card, toys, ribbon, scissors, glue, beads, skewers, and so on. While most people drew during the first song, there was a mix of responses and styles—some cut things out, and others wrote poems. Contrary to the online session, this setting provided more opportunity for conversation, shifting the focus from the music to being with the music together. One participant noted that, as a result, his hand seemed to act on its own while he engaged with the people around him.

After this, I presented Garcia Vaca’s lecture, and we discussed freedom and liberation. Halfway through the discussion, the clock struck seven, and darkness fell over the space like a pumpkin in a fairytale. We decided to leave the lights off for the remainder of the talk. Our faces were lit only by residual streetlights and the yellow glow of *The Night School* slideshow on the TV, like a campfire. Having already collaborated on an exercise and emboldened by the ritualistic feeling of darkness, participants shared their ideas about freedom. One attendee spoke about the history of genocide in his family, how his parents fled violence in Pakistan to come to Aotearoa, and his own reckoning with freedom after retiring in his late 20s—a freedom that felt both challenging and isolating. Another participant reflected on the liberating potential of education and knowledge, although this was rarely their experience in an academic context. An attendee of Chinese ancestry said that freedom, for them, would come when the whakapapa of all people in Aotearoa was respected. The group reflected on the binary nature of freedom—that it is often defined as ‘freedom from’—and wondered, if freedom is always relational, are we ever truly free?

We turned the lights back on and began the exercise about imagining a studio space. Two attendees got up and did a dance to loosen up again and to liberate themselves from the seriousness of the conversation in the dark. While the task hadn’t called for group work, collaborative clusters were naturally forming around the tables. One table decided a free space is a space that is like the body, with organs and blood flow, as a space where there is room to move and be in your body. They collaboratively built that space out of the supplies. Another table started a free drawing session to embody free space—they all drew together—with no expectations or judgement, but working into each other’s drawings. The third table worked more independently building little models. One participant made a boat to represent travelling around

and learning from different places while another made a satirical construction, making a joke of how seriously architects take themselves.

For the final exercise, each table built on others' ideas. The first table decided to return to the body, creating masks and hats to 'de-face the starchitect' and present the shadow self. The central table transitioned from collective drawing to collective material exploration, questioning the disparity between school and industry materials and constructing a shared 3D object. The third group used their disparate models to propose an alternative structure, employing the Feng Shui bagua. However, one member noted that this kept them spatially separate, unlike the central group, whose materials were physically connected.

The atmosphere was joyful. We wrapped up the session with dancing to protest songs while attendees drank soda and trickled out. In a post-session reflection, Garcia Vaca and I considered how the event could extend into a dance party, followed by reflection on that experience.

The convivial setting is partly generated and then supported by the iterative exercises of making and sharing. In this context, the music, the materials, the removal of constraints and pressures also contribute. The participants in the in-person session were the most reserved in the first round of free drawing. It became clear that ideas lubricate ideas. This can even exist through material objects: a sheet of paper cut into a mesh of small triangles in round one of the workshop, becomes a mask in round three, becomes a roof in a latter workshop, becomes a blanket, and so on and so on, the ideas of that thing trapped in its pinkness, its hard edges, its framing of the world in a certain way. It was interesting for me to reflect that this evolution of ideas, this mixing, also occurred in the Zoom space. It happened differently, but in some ways it might have happened quicker. The anonymity of zoom—to draw while no one is watching—can also be liberating, albeit not as collegial or bodily.

This was the first event where I really started to value the potential of fun-making for change-making. It came only after a participant of the online event described FREE STUDIO in the closing plenary of the ABC School as a "circuit breaker", her favourite workshop in an otherwise very critical and serious context. She also cited it as an opportunity to "do something with [her] hands," reflecting perhaps on the need to engage materially as practitioners, even in these online settings. These sessions are important for community building too—a chance to be more ourselves—and to discover skills and ideas you didn't know a community member had. The convivial space—where freedom to explore and play and make is pre-established—allows for greater levels of vulnerability, and so conversations about big concepts like freedom and liberation, become intimate and personal.

The 'rules', or the structure of the workshop, this space of imagining—the free studio—allow us to practise other ways of being ourselves and other ways of making and thinking together. Much like games and rituals, the order behind the supposedly disordered space can liberate us in other aspects of our lives. If we can see that some of the rules of the game are arbitrary within this ritualistic, convivial and open space, then we can assume the same of the rules that oppress us outside of that space. We can be set free.

"The Night School: Free Studio." lu.ma ABC School 2022, 2022, accessed April 15, 2024, <https://lu.ma/Os1rukgr>.

"Profile & Cv." chamanvision, accessed April 15, 2024, <http://www.chamanvision.com/site/About.html>.



Figure 2.59: Tessa Forde, *FREE STUDIO* production, 2022, photograph.



Figure 2.60: Tessa Forde, *FREE STUDIO* attendees share their creations, 2022, photograph.

## How to! FREE STUDIO

## Tools

- Headphones or a speaker
- Drawing/Making tools
- Paper



Figure 2.61: Tessa Forde, *FREE STUDIO outputs*, 2022, photograph.

## Deployment

Step One: Put on Alice Coltraine - *Journey in Satchinanda* and free write/draw/dance for the length of the song.

Step Two: Share your output. Discuss with your partner/s what freedom means to you.

Step Three: Put on John Coltraine - *A Love Supreme* and then Tito Puente - *Caravan* and design a liberated or FREE STUDIO. This could be a physical space, a speculative curriculum, or specific conditions within which a FREE STUDIO might take place.

Step Four: Share your concept with your partner/s.

Step Five: Put on Jeff Mills - *Image* and then Fat Freddy's Drop - *Six-eight (instrumental)*. Inspired by the group sharing continue to develop your FREE STUDIO concepts, incorporating others' ideas and styles into your own.

Step Six: Share your concept.

## Context

The Architecture Beyond Capitalism School1 theme for 2022 was STUDIO , asking: how do we understand studio to support and encourage activist organization? How might design be taught in ways that do not perpetuate and reproduce capitalist exploitation?

The Night School replicated two online workshops as part of the school - running them in person. FREE STUDIO - Liberation as Praxis, designed by Gustavo Garcia Vaca, envisions the academic design studio setting as an interdisciplinary space that elevates freedom of creative endeavour and a multiplicity of approaches.

FREE STUDIO connects the studio with abstract visual art, abolitionist practice, futurism and liberatory music concepts. Opening up new ways of thinking [both from within and from without ourselves] can potentially lead to material changes in our bodies and our environment. FREE STUDIO is liberated from the constraints of grading, administrative systems, client concerns, programmatic limitations and prescribed outcomes. FREE STUDIO allows the flow of ideas from our pasts/ heritages/cultures, from our tenuous yet precious present and from the future selves that we are becoming.

# Chapter Three

## ***Undisciplined***

Developing a Theory of Agency

'Chapter Two—Disciplinary Gathering' discussed how the sites of cultural production for the architecture discipline—where architectural ideas are shared and developed, and where the boundaries of the profession are imagined, defined, and fixed—are more identifiable in a history of gathering spaces formed by like-minded collaborators, than in a chronology of styles or a record of singular efforts carried out by enigmatic individuals. It described a series of types and ways of gathering in architecture in Aotearoa and suggested that it is these gatherings that connect architecture to its Ground and give architecture workers agency. The chapter concluded by identifying 'school' as a key opportunity space for exploring and practising modes of experimentation for change-making in architecture and introduced The Night School (TNS) as a manifestation of this thinking in my practice for this research project. A practice of School-making focuses on reproducing the convivial, generative, and future visionary aspects of 'school' to make a Disciplinary Gathering space for the exploration of other ways of being and knowing in architecture.

This chapter will explore how part of the reason that the history of architecture as a history of gathering is obscured in the architecture canon is related to narratives of change-making based in the work of subversive individuals and their practices—the 'trouble-makers' of architecture who disrupt norms from the margins. I will use this chapter to tell the story of a series of conceptual shifts around the idea of 'change' in my practice, that emerged through the actions of TNS and pre:fab. I will start by prefacing the chapter with a series of reflections on the idea of 'change' and contextualise this against the concept of a 'theory of change': a common term in the nonprofit world that funders often use to encourage organisations to reflect on *how* they expect to have meaningful impact. I will explain why I instead use the term 'theory of agency'. My first theory of agency, and the basis for TNS, was that change was found at the margins of the discipline, in practices that imagine and perform other ways of being and knowing. I will describe some of my discoveries and reflections on both the problems and opportunities of siting change in these 'undisciplined' practices and how it led to the initiation of pre:fab platform. pre:fab was positioned to explore a second theory of agency, in that change was found in even more trouble-some tactics, embodying the role of the 'trickster' to agitate and challenge the profession. Where TNS grew out of a desire to make trouble through convivial gathering around 'radical' practices, pre:fab sought to be more critical, more irritating, operating in direct opposition to institutional powers—an instinctive response to the profession's inertia in the face of planetary crisis. The problems and opportunities of the 'trickster' and this journey of various actions, missteps, and collective efforts revealed a third theory of agency, that change is more regularly the product of organised, collective effort: gatherings of people who collaborate and act in concert to exercise their agency and target systems.

I have argued that connecting to The Ground through gathering is how architects gain agency to impact outcomes in the built environment. Ground-making as a methodological framework that creates the pre-conditions for that gathering to gain and sustain its momentum, *is* my theory of change. Trouble-making is the third practice approach in this framework and proposes that architects can exercise their agency by taking strategic, organised action that engages in political, economic, and social structures. Rather than a centrally motivating methodology, Trouble-making becomes a collaborative practice within an ecosystem of trouble, supported by a practice of Ground-making that cultivates the conditions needed for sustained gathering and action, and a key avenue through which architecture workers can action their agency.

## What is Change, What is a Theory of Agency

Developing a theory of change is a process which requires collectives and organisations to "articulate and interrogate [their] assumptions about how [their] solution will create positive change".<sup>316</sup> It serves as a basis for learning and growth within change-making practices and "serves as a compass, illuminating the desired goals, informing adaptations and identifying

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<sup>316</sup> Design Kit, "Explore Your Theory of Change," Design Kit, accessed May 06, 2025, <https://www.designkit.org/methods/explore-your-theory-of-change.html>.

opportunities for meaningful measurement”.<sup>317</sup> It calls for future visioning, goal and strategy articulation, and consideration of experiences and values that underpin ideas about change. In some ways my practice is one of developing and testing in real time ideas about what might cause change in the architecture discipline. It is about pulling different levers and seeing what might happen.

Nonetheless, there is an unresolved complexity or a persistently open question in my research and beyond around what is meant by ‘change’, what constitutes ‘good’ or ‘correct’ change, and who decides what that is. Some of the most effective campaigning for legislative changes related to the social and built environment happens from well-resourced, well-connected ‘Not-In-My-Back-Yard’ groups who lobby against public developments, infrastructure projects, and changes to built environment legislation. All community members deserve a voice and the capacity to advocate for their shared environments, but regularly these loudest voices are the most well-resourced and well connected and have time to engage in the public consultation system. For example, a group of residents from Herne Bay (one of the wealthiest suburbs in Tāmaki Makaurau) recently lost a legal case with Watercare, the largest water utility in Aotearoa, where the group argued that the temporary occupation of a local park for the construction of the ‘interceptor’, an important infrastructure project for the Tāmaki Makaurau sewage system, would have negative impacts on their mental health.<sup>318</sup> These groups don’t often lose, but either way, significant time and resources are spent accommodating or resisting them. Similarly, even well-meaning groups of architecture workers with a positive and informed vision for the future can institute legislation that has unintended consequences related to the unpredictability of market forces. Urban Auckland, a lobbying group of architects and planners in the early 2000s, took Auckland Council to court over the non-notified approval of a new 36-story apartment tower, described by the group as “future slums”.<sup>319</sup> They were successful in court, and in a landmark ruling that put “greater emphasis on the architecture of new buildings in central Auckland”, new rules around apartment sizes and design aspects were introduced by the council.<sup>320</sup> Rules like ‘no windowless bedrooms’ and ‘20% of the floorplan size as glazing’ were an objective improvement, but the conservative size minimums (1 bedroom: 45m<sup>2</sup>; 2bdm: 70m<sup>2</sup>; 3bdm: 90m<sup>2</sup>), had a profound impact on the construction of apartment complexes in central Tāmaki. Constructing apartments larger than a studio or one bedroom was suddenly unviable for developers,<sup>321</sup> a housing typology sorely missing for many families in Aotearoa.<sup>322</sup> This is revealing of the problems of the construction of our shared environments being so critically connected to private interests, where the capitalist ‘market’ has the ultimate say in built environment outcomes. We do not live in an equitable society under an equitable paradigm, and it can’t be expected that a rigged system will generate equitable outcomes.

This reflects the tension in society more broadly and in this research of the supposed binary between social engineering, and the ‘invisible hand of the market’ proposed by liberalism. Where liberalism pitches the ‘market’ as a way to depoliticise public problems, give people autonomy in their choices, and create emergent and differing communities of people acting in tolerance of each

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<sup>317</sup> The Annie E. Casey Foundation, “Developing a Theory of Change,” The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2022, accessed May 06, 2025, <https://www.aecf.org/resources/theory-of-change>.

<sup>318</sup> Anne Gibson, “Herne Bay Residents’ Fight with Watercare - Claim Loss of Salisbury Reserve Would Affect Their Mental Health,” NZ Herald, 2024, accessed September 12, 2024, <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/business/companies/construction/herne-bay-residents-fight-with-watercare-claim-loss-of-salisbury-reserve-would-affect-their-mental-health/KU5ZHRZBP5CPHKPKZM44JSQOSE/>.

<sup>319</sup> Bernard Orsman, “Thinking Bigger on Apartment Design,” NZ Herald, 2007, accessed September 12, 2024, <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/thinking-bigger-on-apartment-design/BAXOTIGA46VQTL2K2ESURXEKKU/>.

<sup>320</sup> Orsman, “Thinking Bigger on Apartment Design.”

<sup>321</sup> Duncan Greive, “I Lived in a Shoebox Apartment. I’m Glad They’re Coming Back,” The Spinoff, 2024, accessed September 12, 2024, <https://thespinoff.co.nz/society/08-07-2024/i-lived-in-a-shoebox-apartment-im-glad-theyre-coming-back>.

<sup>322</sup> Lynda Simmons provides further commentary on the lack of apartments for families in this review: Simmons, “Re-Imagining Urban Communities.”

other (to put it in ‘progressive’ language), by definition it fails to cater for centuries of oppression and subjugation of people, other beings, and the environment, which inevitably means that not all ‘choices’ are created equal and some people have significantly more and different ‘choices’ than others. To accommodate this, it must (counterintuitively) invent increasingly complex and restrictive bureaucratic processes to function, reflected in what is often called ‘neo-liberalism’: the pushing of liberalist ideas to the extreme within institutions and public systems to protect capitalist profits.<sup>323</sup> Social engineering on the other hand, is the shaping of public opinion, social behaviours, and structuring of social institutions through policy and propaganda with the goal of creating a particular social order. In typical progressive discussion around change-making the market is ‘bad’, and social engineering is ‘good’, but only through the particular vision and ideas of the progressive group. Even if everyone in the world was in agreement with the best way of living and being together, the social engineering of this reality would still be an authoritative force that would preclude *other* ways of knowing, being, and interacting with the world, and preclude innovation in the face of shared challenges. Historian Tom Holland argues that the dominant ways of being and knowing that underpin the western thought framework—almost exclusively founded in Christianity—were born and maintained through social engineering.<sup>324</sup>

I raise this briefly to emphasise that rather than presenting a generic, non-described version of change (for whom, by whom, what for, who knows); or advocating for a specific type of change or world order, I am really talking about ‘agency’ and how it can be exercised. I want to feel like I have more agency in shaping the world around me, I want this for others too, and I especially want to understand how architecture can have a more meaningful and active relationship in the shaping of our shared environments. This is the beginning of my conceptual shift around a theory of change, and why I will call it a ‘theory of agency’. I knew that I wanted things to ‘change’, and when I undertook this research, I located the site of that change in the idea ‘trouble’, a concept that came to have a persistent presence. Trouble was my point of origin—in that I wanted to be a ‘trouble-maker’ in the architecture discipline: active, irritating, controversial, challenging—and is a helpful nomenclature to frame feelings of anxiety and uncertainty about the future: humanity, and all those brilliant others who populate the earth, are *in trouble*.

In her book *Staying with the Trouble*, Donna Haraway sites ‘trouble’ in these spaces of uncertainty, complexity, and messiness.<sup>325</sup> Her ‘trouble’ is more a set of conditions than an action, an acknowledgement that imagining the future (full of unknowns), recognising injustices and committing to work through them, and taking responsibility for the impact of actions on other beings and the environment is difficult and troubling. Her proposed action is to stay with this troubling feeling, to sit in the space of discomfort, remain accountable, resist complacency, and shy away from easy solutions or the reduction of complex systems to simple forms. As discussed in ‘Chapter One—The Ground’, I personally feel troubled by the architecture profession’s slow response to the type of trouble the world is in, and its complicity in perpetuating it. So, for this chapter we are going to explore the trouble, the actions I undertook to both reckon with, enact it, and stay with it and how these actions reframed a theory of agency and Trouble-making.

## The Night School and Undisciplined Practices as a Theory of Agency

If a practice approach of Trouble-making is organised action, targeted at structural systems, then what I am going to call ‘undisciplined’ practices are those approaches adopted by collectives and architecture workers to challenge the norms of the profession. I theorise their modes to contextualise my own methodology exploration in that it is off these models that I built The Night School. I also recognise them here to acknowledge the critical work they do in connecting architects to their Ground and in modelling and experimenting with other ways of practicing, but also to emphasise the importance of gathering and the ecosystem-like nature of change-making

<sup>323</sup> Fisher talks about this in Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*.

<sup>324</sup> Tom Holland, *Dominion: The Making of the Western Mind* (Hachette UK, 2019).

<sup>325</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*.

in which they can co-align to exercise their agency. They depend on collectivism and organising to realise architecture's capacity to Trouble-make and have an impact on the systems that dominate built environment outcomes.

The language used by undisciplined practices and those who theorise them is helpful in describing and defining these varied and overlapping approaches and how they theorise 'change'. For Stead et al., who hosted an exhibition in Melbourne in 2018 entitled *WORKAROUND* to showcase architectural work focused on "producing architectural ideas", with an emphasis on "dissonant or critical ideas", describe "the workaround" as about finding routes around the obstacles of the normative, and that rather than dynamiting through a boulder on a pathway to a better future, a workaround might develop a creative strategy to walk, or climb, or manoeuvre around it.<sup>326</sup> The generosity in what Stead et al. propose is the idea that the subtle pathways around the obstacles of the norm provide practice trajectories on The Ground that might be followed, hardened, made clearer and easier to take the same route. They claim that it is in these pathways that we begin to witness a discipline that is "more diverse, inclusive and equitable and... more empowered financially, socially and environmentally".<sup>327</sup> Many undisciplined practices in Aotearoa serve this expansionary function and adopt similar language: *Making Ways* made ways and looked to how others made different ways for practising architecture; *Making Space* made space and looked to how others made space for women in the discipline; and Hoskins described how Whaihanga was "making space" outside of the areas where the people in power were "standing in their sun".<sup>328</sup> It was about banding together on The Ground outside the shadows of the oppressive systems to capture the sunlight they otherwise obscure.

The aforementioned approach of A+WNZ and of other collectives—of mimicking institutional activities—is another undisciplined approach, one described by feminist scholar Sara Ahmed as "queering", where things, methods, and ideas are used "in ways other than for which they were intended or by those other than for whom they were intended".<sup>329</sup> Ahmed argues that through this approach, practitioners can subvert what it means to be 'used', to 'use' and whose bodies are seen as 'useful' within contemporary society. Architecture historian and educator Bill Menking similarly posits that the adoption of normative tools of architecture in "a contrary fashion", citing Super-Studio as an example, reveal where it is "useless", using absurdity to show "its falsity and its immorality".<sup>330</sup> This type of trouble has overlaps with oppositional trouble, the kind that Awan et al. describe as "irritant", those that directly oppose, challenge, and niggle institutional and professional norms. The early actions of The Group, voting in no confidence in their education; and the pointed establishment of the Women's Institute of Architecture; reflect this kind of oppositional trouble.

Other undisciplined practices use tactics akin to 'nudging'. Nudging, as defined by economist Richard Thaler and legal scholar Cass Sunstein, is a concept from behavioural economics where people are subtly guided towards certain decisions without choice restriction or significant incentivising using small prompts or environmental changes called "choice architecture".<sup>331</sup> Practices like ĀKAU explore, invent, and foreground other modes of being together that can nudge others around them. Nudging practices provide experiment space for alternative legal structures, make social conditions that might suggest new laws or customs, nudge others towards an understanding of why structures and systems need to be undone, and generate prototypes or evidence for policy change. They can act as systems demonstrations to, as architect and historian Manuel Shvartzberg Carrió argues, offer a model "to settler institutions

<sup>326</sup> Naomi Stead, Pia Ednie-Brown, Fleur Watson, and Kate Rhodes, "Exhibiting the Workaround," *Journal of Architectural Education* 73, no. 2 (2019): 193.

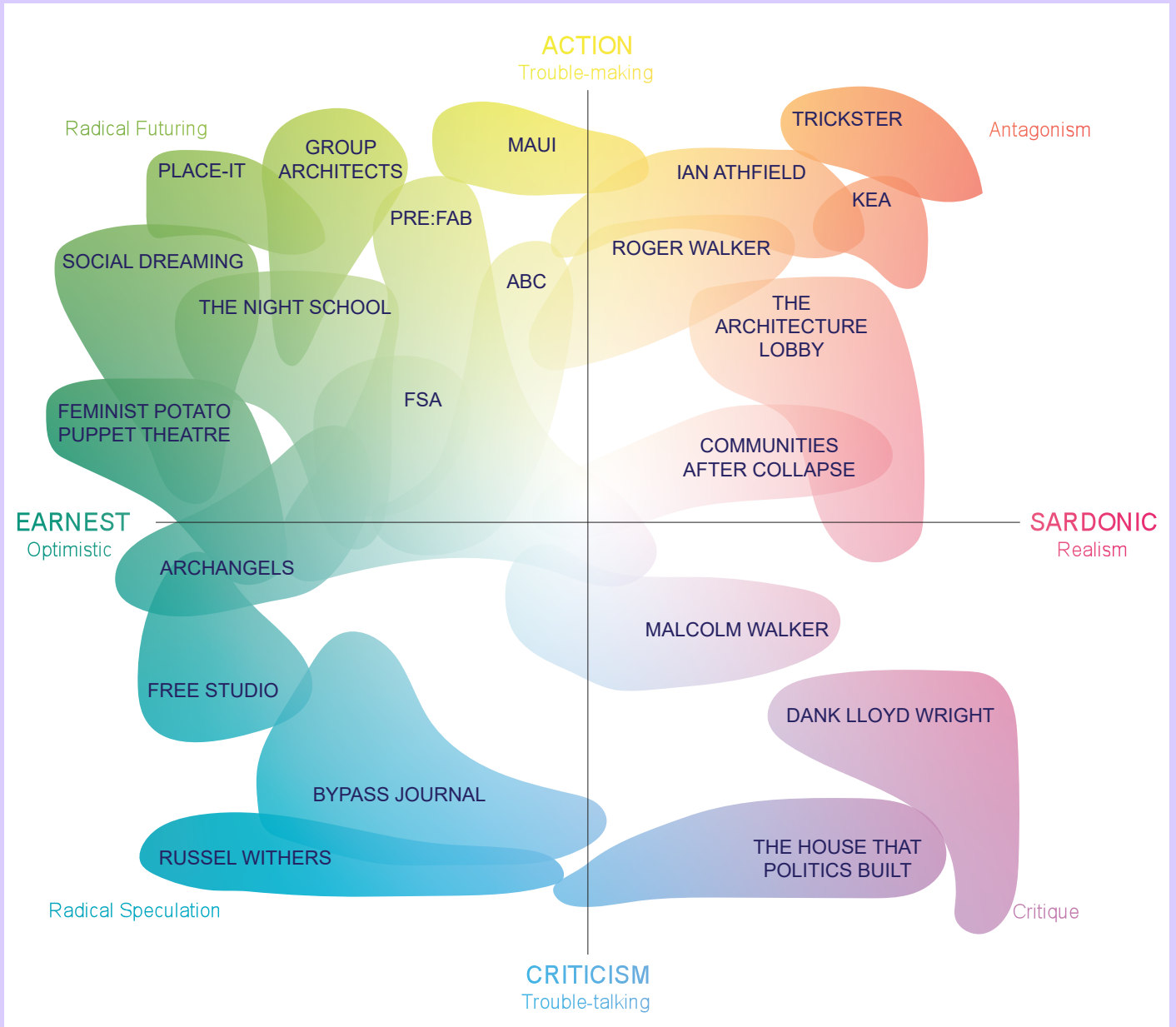
<sup>327</sup> Stead, Ednie-Brown, Watson, and Rhodes, "Exhibiting the Workaround," 193.

<sup>328</sup> Hoskins in Barns, Ward, Hoskins, and Maher, "Relish the Difference," 72.

<sup>329</sup> Sara Ahmed, *What's the Use?* (Duke University Press, 2019), 199.

<sup>330</sup> William Menking, "Superstudio as Super-Office: The Labour of Radical Design," *Architectural Design* 89, no. 4 (2019): 16.

<sup>331</sup> Richard H. Thaler and Cass R. Sunstein, *Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness* (Yale University, 2008).



April 2023

A terrain map of trouble-making in architecture, mapping precedents and collaborators for the research across axes of Earnestness, Sardonicism, Action, and Criticism.

Figure 3.1: Tessa Forde, *A Troubling Diagram*, 2023, graphic.

and architects of what a decolonial architectural academy might look like,” and suggest how the profession, the legal system, social frameworks, and paradigms could shift.<sup>332</sup> These acts can be small, but they point to an alternative future. The more they are practised, the more these other imagined worlds are ritualised, the more habitual they become, the more infinite, the more steadfast, the more they weave into the fabric of everyday life.

My research initially sited change-making in these individualised practices and their undisciplined approaches. The Night School was an attempt to both forefront alternative practices and create one. I felt that if I could showcase other ways of doing architecture, upskill myself and others through interactive workshops, and develop an event making practice, I could influence the priorities of architecture workers and have more personal capacity and agency. While TNS was an invaluable exercise in learning skills, setting up pre-conditions for more sustained gathering, and creating connections with other practitioners. It was also a launching point for realising the limitations of this theory of agency.

## Problems and Opportunities of Undisciplined Practice

Aesthetic gestures of resistance—unconventional drawing, radical spatial experiments, subversive installations—have regularly been valorised as markers of ‘trouble’ in the architecture canon, yet they often remain contained within the boundaries of the profession, while systemic change needs organised, collective, targeted action around the rules and structures that underpin the profession and the built environment more broadly. The dominant narratives of architecture often mislocate change in individual practices and aesthetic experimentation rather than in structural reorganisation. A series of collections of troubling practices have emerged in the past two decades. Examples include: The *Spatial Agency* database that proposes “a much more expansive field of opportunities in which architects and non-architects can operate” through an online archive that describes and conceptually maps close to 100 practices that uncover “a second history of architecture”.<sup>333</sup> This second history is one that centres collaborative approaches over individual exceptionalism, includes transformative intent for making the status quo better and argues that these troubling practices traverse “activism to pedagogy, publications to networking, making stuff to making policy” in the name of empowering others.<sup>334</sup> Beatriz Colomina’s 2015 collective research project, *Radical Pedagogies*, previously a website<sup>335</sup> and now in print as a book, reveals how global examples of radical architectural education from the 1960s and 1970s, were as much practices as they were schools, shaping the discipline through their idea generation around what constituted architecture.<sup>336</sup> And in *Architects after Architecture*, a collection of 40 practices who have used their architecture training in “new and resourceful ways”, Harriss et al suggest that these practices “by redefining the canon, by subverting the exclusive hold over architectural knowledge, and by empowering the public to participate... opened up productive new territories for the expansion of the discipline, and suggested new pathways for reclaiming architecture’s public relevance”.<sup>337</sup> There is a common emphasis that it is *practices* that create change, particularly those challenging the boundaries of the architecture profession.

These collections work to archive the trouble, theorise it, and identify overlaps. Part of their value lies in their act of curation, revealing shared tactics, unexpected connections, and ways of knowing that enable “realisation that they form a formidable proto-movement and momentum

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<sup>332</sup> Manuel Shvartzberg Carrió, “Designing Decolonization? Architecture and Indigenous Development,” *The Routledge Handbook of Indigenous Development* (2022): 408.

<sup>333</sup> Spatial Agency, “Spatial Agency: About,” Spatial Agency, accessed June 13, 2021, <https://www.spatialagency.net/about/>.

<sup>334</sup> Spatial Agency, “Spatial Agency: About.”

<sup>335</sup> “Radical Pedagogies,” Princeton University School of Architecture, 2015, accessed September 29, 2021, <https://radical-pedagogies.com/>.

<sup>336</sup> Beatriz Colomina, Ignacio G Galán, Evangelos Kotsioris, and Anna-Maria Meister, *Radical Pedagogies* (MIT Press, 2022).

<sup>337</sup> Harriss, Hyde, and Marcaccio, “Introduction,” 19.

particular to this point in time”.<sup>338</sup> What is not often explicitly stated however, is how critical their collation is in identifying that these practices are only effective in concert with others and that effective troubling only happens within an ecosystem of interacting forces and actions that go far beyond the boundaries of the architecture profession. The historic narrative of radical and alternative architecture can also suggest that these modes of practice were dominant in architectural discourse, when in reality they were fringe practices and ideologies that have gained some of their notoriety through nostalgia and in their valorisation as change-making practices. The nostalgia for the trouble of past movements can mask the drudgery of the work, the hours of administration and organising required for the trouble, and simultaneously the mechanisms that support it. These databases rarely discuss the economic mechanisms that carried many spaces of architectural experimentation, which are often products of existing wealth (both through money and property ownership) and were also a product of an era where social support systems within democratic, industrialised countries were at their strongest.<sup>339</sup> My desire to be radical, alternative, or troubling in relation to this historic narrative was also an exercise in nostalgia, in what Jameson describes as “nostalgia mode”, a yearning for form that only engages with history at a surface level and romanticises past styles, actions, and aesthetics.<sup>340</sup>

This concept is something discussed by designer and academic Guy Julier in his review of three texts about trouble and design published in 2021 and 2022. The above-described collections of radical architecture represent only a small fraction of the catalogues being released in recent years and Julier criticises how the flurry of publications devoted to design activism present today’s social change in design as some kind of new narrative, isolated from broader social movements and contexts. Missing analysis of history and counter-culture movements across the three texts he analyses, their tendency toward “must” statements, and their proposals for singular shared values, lead Julier to conclude that it is challenging and potentially “inadvisable” to attempt to arrive at “unified principles” for design activism, in part related to the “heterogeneous conditions of political economy” that design activism works “within and against”.<sup>341</sup> Thus, Julier argues, a close examination of these conditions, the “multivector and multiterritorialized processes of late capitalism” and by extension its labour, relationality and the diverse public agencies, institutions, policy, and aspects of the capitalist nation states, is needed if design is to become “a project of fashioning various worlds for a post-capitalist future” like these books suggest.<sup>342</sup> The ultimate conclusion is that to explore the middle space between theoretical analysis and “stuff on the ground”, looking to history, and cooperation with historians “will help to understand what activist designers are up against or where the opportunities lie, opening up to more strategic and durable action”.<sup>343</sup> This is to say that a nostalgic approach to looking at history, the seduction of the narrative of change-making through radical practices of the past, must be accompanied by critical analysis of the contexts and systems by which they form a part. The idea of exploring their methods *through* my practice was equally important, to ‘lift the veil of nostalgia’ and better understand their functional mechanisms and catalysing conditions.

Those practitioners that think about architecture beyond buildings but who don’t engage with the systems that underpin their practice, can risk spreading the existing Ground thinner, or strengthening current oppressive Grounds. Carrió argues that in the context of indigenous development there is a significant disconnect between architecture practice within the professional context (which is part of the “division of labor in a capitalist economy”) and architecture practice as discourse (which seeks to “remake political ecology itself”) encompassing ecological design, and decolonial, feminist, and political ontology approaches, but largely holding itself distinct from

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<sup>338</sup> Harriet Harriss and Daisy Froud, *Radical Pedagogies: Architectural Education & the British Tradition* (RIBA Publications, 2015), 11.

<sup>339</sup> de Graaf, “Architecture Is Now a Tool of Capital.”

<sup>340</sup> Frederick Jameson’s concept of ‘nostalgia mode’ is discussed by Fisher in Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life*, 25.

<sup>341</sup> Guy Julier, “Disobedience as Usual: Why Design Activists Need Historians,” *Journal of Design History* 36, no. 4 (2023): 5.

<sup>342</sup> Julier, “Disobedience as Usual,” 5.

<sup>343</sup> Julier, “Disobedience as Usual,” 5.

conventional practice.<sup>344</sup> In short, he believes the world of discourse is generating ideas that have little to no impact on The Ground of architecture—on commercial practice, buildings, and the lived reality of architectural workers and all those impacted by the making of buildings. Thus, the expanded field of “so-called radical political ecological design practices” risk reaffirming capitalist and colonial eco-social relations.<sup>345</sup> Where Carrió sees a rupture in this dynamic is in practices of decolonial design, collaborative organisations who are staking out anticapitalist and anticolonial disciplinary practices through examining and creating “physical structures for organising resistance” and who rethink “the architecture and construction industries as modes of diplomacy rather than as part of the global capitalist division of labor, which reinscribes colonial relations at every turn”.<sup>346</sup> He offers the Indigenous Design Collaborative as an example, who train young indigenous architects while co-designing and co-developing collaborative projects for tribal communities in Arizona to “put these principles in action”, and where “colonial epistemologies can be broken down in order to enact design as a series of embodied and embedded ‘Indigenous placekeeping’ practices”.<sup>347</sup> Carrió suggests that Ground-making is not just about tools and ideas, but the literal applications of these tools as underground agitations of the very foundations of the profession, and how these actions can deconstruct, and reconstruct new realities. This is not to say that ‘radical’ practices and their collation and theorisation do not have value, are not having meaningful impact on communities, affecting the Ground, but for the kind of systemic change needed to pry the construction of shared environments from the grip of extractive capitalism, it is the acknowledgement of this ecosystem and how it interacts, leverages, is repressed by, attempts to shift systems of power and the lived reality of architecture and other workers in this process that gets to the foundational heart of having more agency.

The Night School was an initial attempt to work within this framework and historical narrative of radical practices, and a launching point for discovering its limitations. I wanted to change where architects were gathering on The Ground by exploring emergent, historical, or less prominent sites of undisciplined gathering. But I became disillusioned with TNS, because there were almost no immediate or tangible outcomes from the actions and events of the school, the profession continued unscathed (of course) and the hyperobjects that underpin it remain incomprehensible. I had imagined my role in making ‘change’ as irritating, outwardly subversive, making pointed critique, writing letters to the editor, and challenging disciplinary decisions and processes. I came to feel that what was needed was a new kind of institution or organisation within which architecture workers and practices could gather (TNS included) and that could take action and engage The Ground at a structural level. And so, when a friend of mine began posting criticism publicly on Instagram about the inaccessibility of Te Kāhui Whaihanga in:situ conference in 2022, I recognised an opportunity to collaborate on some already-stirred trouble, leverage the network and social media presence of TNS to gather others, and revive an old idea I had of shadowing institute events but doing them differently, in order to direct attention to my perceived source of power in the discipline—its largest institutional body. *pre:fab* marked the emergence of a new theory of where architecture workers might find their agency.

Using The Night School’s Instagram, my friend and I issued a call for interest in organising and hosting an alternative, reimagined conference. We proposed screening publicly available videos of the four in:situ keynote talks at another venue, followed by workshops and a shared potluck lunch. It would be free, allowing access to students, young graduates, and precarious workers. It could also be called *pre:fab*—a playful inversion of *in:situ*. A few weeks before the NZIA conference a small group of rabble rousers met in Verona bar on Karangahape Road to strategise.<sup>348</sup> While discussion revolved around frustrations with the Institute—its perceived

<sup>344</sup> Carrió, “Designing Decolonization?” 402.

<sup>345</sup> Carrió, “Designing Decolonization?” 403.

<sup>346</sup> Carrió, “Designing Decolonization?” 410.

<sup>347</sup> Carrió, “Designing Decolonization?” 406.

<sup>348</sup> Verona is one of the places I try to support on the ridgeline, now overrun with up-market eateries and forest green tiles, the gentrification of Ponsonby Road curling its pedicured tendril around the corner. There’s a song about Verona, it’s a staple of the street, historic in some ways, still serving cheap-ish drinks and coffee well into the night.

failures to support students and graduates, and how people failed to see their values reflected in their actions and priorities—there was collective support for several core aims of the group: make it free, ensure there is some way to relate ideas of what is learned to the local context and to our own practices, share food, and have fun. Our undisciplined tactics were a mix of mimicking, irritating/opposing, and leveraging media. We queered the conference format, repurposed the NZIA's visual language, and we made memes criticising the event. Over the course of two weeks, we organised via a large, shared spreadsheet of tasks and a live, work-in-progress, editable #prefab-contract-168 created a space for the interaction of ideas, responsibilities, and values within the group.

#pre:fab-conference-160 in 2022 was a gathering of architectural workers and interested members of the public around international and local ideas, food, a little bit of alterity, and our shared interest in the future of architecture. While it shadowed the in:situ conference, mimicked some of its form and content, it fundamentally projected different values: the free sharing of knowledge and the importance to actively engage it; the need to localise international knowledge together in place; the space that is made when people bring food to share together; and the necessity of platforms for discussion, imagination, and exploration. pre:fab's emergence was the first pointed expression of my practice that dealt with explicit critique of how architects in Aotearoa gather. Where The Night School posed other ways of gathering and practising through playful exploration, pre:fab elected to point directly at the problem and say: this is how we think it should be done differently. Collaborative organising, a make-do approach, and a shared enemy allowed the rapid construction of an event and a team of people ready and willing to action change in architecture in Aotearoa.

## pre:fab and The Trickster as a Theory of Agency

pre:fab allowed me to adopt a role in my practice more akin to a 'trickster'. Tricksters represent central figures around which trouble gathers. In mythology and pop culture the trickster, as described by essayist Lewis Hyde, is a "creative idiot, therefore the wise fool, the gray-haired baby, the cross-dresser, the speaker of scared profanities," and they are the "boundary-crosser", disrupting, shifting, or altering the trajectory of a story or of a community.<sup>349</sup> They do this through subversive tricks, challenging societal rules and norms, and by playfully manipulating situations to recreate them in a new form. They can also bring "to the surface a distinction previously hidden from sight," revealing hidden truths and busting taboos.<sup>350</sup> The trickster can be a bit like a witch, as described by Frichot, "inventing and practising rituals to break the stranglehold of norms where they have become oppressive".<sup>351</sup> The trickster is often perceived in a positive light for the way they subvert otherwise unchallenged norms, though sometimes only by the end of a story when the positive consequences of their disruption come to pass. The trickster can validate behaviours otherwise inaccessible, allowing others a similar subversion, and the trickster, or in monarchy tales *the jester*, is often the only figure who can tell the king the truth without being beheaded.

Through pre:fab I came to sense that a more direct and oppositional way of being would enact more obvious change, faster. I had a feeling that some kind of figure of subversion, passionate, charged, and witty, would galvanise architecture workers around a cause. Again, the narrative of change-making supports this hunch. In the dominant narrative of architecture in Aotearoa, there are a few notable figures that are often categorised along the lines of 'tricksters'. Ian Athfield, an "affable maverick", is a prominent figure in the history of architecture in Aotearoa, leading the charge on a revolution of quirky postmodernism in Pōneke from the 1970s onwards.<sup>352</sup> He challenged aesthetic convention and architectural procedure with eclectic houses and public

<sup>349</sup> Lewis Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World: Mischief, Myth, and Art* (Macmillan, 1997), 7.

<sup>350</sup> Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World*, 7.

<sup>351</sup> Frichot, *Dirty Theory: Troubling Architecture*, 80.

<sup>352</sup> "A Sir Ian Athfield House Which Breaks the Rebel Architect's Own Script," Stuff, 2022, accessed February 24, 2023, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/life-style/homed/houses/300433350/a-sir-ian-athfield-house-which-breaks-the-rebel-architects-own-script>.

buildings, some self-built, and his own house and office was an ongoing experiment with building techniques, sprawling down a hillside. It was here that he also expressed his political views—painting “Keep New Zealand Nuclear Free” on the side of one of his turrets in the 1980s.<sup>353</sup> Athfield and fellow Pōneke architect Roger Walker, had a “supposed rivalry”, playing out as competing quirkiness in the hunt for an unconventional architecture, but which was really a fierce friendship as the two “mad architects” of the city.<sup>354</sup> Roger still practises and keeps a blog, reflecting on various issues across the spectrum in the architectural discipline.<sup>355</sup> In architecture, tricksters are often affable characters like these, charismatic, polemical, driven, creating disruption in the discipline through particular antics—from writing, to comics, to experimental projects and practices.

It was on this narrative and type of trouble that pre:fab was initially modelled. The next move of pre:fab after the conference, was to initiate a campaign of #prefab-for-president-180 of Te Kāhui Whaihanga. The purpose of this campaign was manifold: we wanted to continue to challenge the Institute through its own systems and manifestations; we wanted to reveal some of the structural mechanisms of the Institute and how undemocratic the presidential process is; it allowed us to maintain the momentum started by the collective who gathered around the conference; and it provided an avenue through which to explore our own visions for the future. We hosted events like a Pyramid Building Workshop and #pot-lucks-274 to generate content and visuals and worked in shared documents to write a collaborative CV, our vision for the future of the Institute (which was really a vision for the future of pre:fab), and fulfil the other requirements from the Institute for the presidency nomination. However, our “campaign” was fruitless given the presidency is not voted on but chosen by a select committee within the NZIA Board. Our application was specifically rejected based on the rules referring to the president in the singular pronouns of he/she, thus excluding the possibility of a collective taking up the role.

Following our campaign for president, pre:fab was invited to present our vision for the future of the Institute to the Te Kāhui Whaihanga board. The process of pre:fab preparing for and delivering this presentation (see: #prefab-for-presenting-192) was revelatory for the collective in this re-imagined idea of trouble, and for my own practice. In May 2023, pre:fab presented to the board, utilising a #name-badge-ritual-147 (discussed further in love and [re]Organising) and a brief oral presentation to argue that a conceptual shift in the framing of Te Kāhui Whaihanga or any large institution starts with language. We posed a series of couplets that were:

*On one side an earnest reflection of how we believe Te Kāhui Whaihanga is often perceived and/or perceives itself, and on the other, a non-oppositional reframing of that concept; a dramatic shift in perspective that opens up new and different futures for this institution.*<sup>356</sup>

These couplets were:

Authority_____	Guide/Companion
Promotion_____	Cultivation
Protectionism_____	Advocacy
Exceptionalism_____	Value

pre:fab is not alone in calling for a change in conceptual positioning of large institutions. Recent presidential campaigns of overseas institutions by young architects were accompanied by expressions of long-held frustration with those organisations, and by pushback from those

<sup>353</sup> “A Sir Ian Athfield House Which Breaks the Rebel Architect’s Own Script.”

<sup>354</sup> Simon Bradwell Hunt, “Renowned Architect Sir Ian Athfield Dies, Aged 74,” Stuff, 2015, accessed February 22, 2023, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/65111371/renowned-architect-sir-ian-athfield-dies-aged-74>.

<sup>355</sup> Roger Walker, “Rog on Beauty,” Walker Architecture & Design Ltd, accessed June 22, 2024, <https://www.rogerwalker.co.nz/rog-on-beauty/>.

<sup>356</sup> See #prefab-for-presenting-192. We acknowledged that many of the board members likely already shared similar aspirations for Te Kāhui Whaihanga.

## pre:fab: Hi, my Name is John

## Tools



Figure 3.2: Leonard Hobbins, *A neck tie and John name badge in action*, 2023, photograph. Courtesy of Leonard Hobbins.

- Plastic sleeves with a safety pin for name badges
- Name badges that have 'John' and an executive company role
- Name badges that have creative roles like "Interdimensional Liaison Officer", "Cleansing Agent", "Network Server", and are colourful (decorated with glitter glue etc.)
- Neck ties

## Deployment

Step One: Before the meeting, assemble the name badges. A John name badge and a creative role should be in each sleeve, with the creative role hidden.

Step Two: Initiate the meeting. Hand each member a name badge, and invite them to put on a neck tie.

Step Three: A meeting organiser starts a round of introductions: "Hi, my name is John, and I am the Chief Executive Officer".

Step Four: Conduct the first part of the meeting. Encourage all John's to act in accordance with their assigned role.

Step Five: At some point, initiate the meeting shift. Invite all John's to take out their name badges, discover their new role, reintroduce themselves with their role and name of choice.

Step Six: Continue the meeting, with each person adopting their new role in the conversation, recognising a marked shift in tone, hierarchy, and creative capacity.

## Context

The John name badge ritual was designed for pre:fab's campaign for president and its surrounding events. Its key idea is to generate a space of imagining the future that can go beyond normative modes of being and relating.

By exaggerating the rituals of the boardroom, and assigning everyone an arbitrary corporate role, we can understand that the hierarchies and rules of conventional institutions are *constructed* and therefore can be constructed differently. It is both a tool to reveal that what is taken as the norm is really a series of ritual relationships that have been codified and cemented over time, and a way to 'release' us from those rules.

Swapping the name badges to other-worldly roles marks a transition to other-worldly ways of knowing and being, a convivial shared environment where new ritual relationships can be imagined and actioned.

pre:fab have deployed this ritual across several workshops and at the Annual General Meeting of Te Kāhui Whaihangā New Zealand Institute of Architects in 2023.

institutions.<sup>357</sup> RIBA was criticised for its London-centrism, poor spending choices, and the way it is falling back into “defensiveness and bureaucracy” rather than “asserting architecture’s relevance in tackling today’s environmental, social, and cultural crises”.<sup>358</sup> The processes for election, in particular new rules introduced by RIBA which meant that members had to be enrolled before a certain date to vote, were described by the Future Architecture Front as “designed to maintain the status quo of the institute”.<sup>359</sup> These were calls, like pre:fab’s, for these large institutions, with their resources and immense networks, to shift out of this mode of protectionism and business-as-usual and into operating as activist organisations, advocating for policy change and structural reform.

Our experience with this process revealed to us how the organisational structures and rituals within large institutions make difficult the possibility for change or innovation in the way that pre:fab was advocating for. The presidency is elected not through democratic process; the AGM is one of the only times in which all directors gather and thus due to time constraints we were allotted 15 minutes for our presentation; and the board itself is made up of a collection of people who are effectively strangers to each other, located around the country.<sup>360</sup> If the claims of this document are anything to go by—that groups of people tasked with shared cultural production and facing difficult challenges together need to invest and nurture their shared Ground through gathering, and that this process is part of what binds them—then it could be said that the conditions imposed by institutional structures limit their potential for activism and organising. We likewise reflected that our perceived youth and inexperience<sup>361</sup> impacted how our concerns were received. The average age of board members is not tracked by StatsNZ, but the Institute of Directors estimated the average age of their members in 2023 to be 53 years old.<sup>362</sup> It became clear to us that the rigid confines of institutions, their strict rituals (that are often so normalised as to become invisible), and their reliance on the ongoing approval and thus financial support of their membership (in the case of incorporated society NZIA), make it difficult for them to imagine other ways of knowing, being, and doing, let alone action them. A space outside the Institute, one that is not in opposition, one that seeks to expand, make new Ground and gather there, a space like pre:fab, might have more capacity. Reflecting on the presentation, pre:fab explicitly began to construct non-oppositional events, actions, and spaces.

<sup>357</sup> In June 2022 Kimberly Dowdell was elected the American Institute of Architects (AIA) Vice President/2024 President-Elect and has since been elected President. Dowdell is the first Black Woman president and hopes to help the profession envision new possibilities and for architects to “share a profound sense of responsibility for the stewardship of our natural resources.” Victoria L Valentine, “Building History: Kimberly Dowdell Is Aia’s 100th President. First Black Woman to Lead Architecture Organisation Plans to ‘Do More’,” *culture type*, 2024, accessed May 05, 2024, <https://www.culturetype.com/2024/01/14/building-history-kimberly-dowdell-is-aia-s-100th-president-first-black-woman-to-lead-architecture-organization-plans-to-do-more/>. She is also the first millennial to hold this role, representing a younger demographic of architectural workers. Likewise, in a dogged campaign lead by the Future Architects Front (FAF) and culminating in The Just Transition Lobby, in August 2022 Muiwa Oki was elected president-elect of the Royal Institute of British Architects, as the first black president, the youngest ever president at age 31, and the first worker to assume the role. Simeon Shtebunaev et al., “Reclaiming an Architectural Royal Institution: Mapping the Just Transition Lobby’s RIBA Presidential Take-Over,” *City* 28, no. 3-4 (2024).

<sup>358</sup> Will Jennings, “The UK’s RIBA Must Become an “Activist Organization”,” *Architectural Record*, 2022, accessed May 07, 2024, <https://www.architecturalrecord.com/articles/15729-the-uks-riba-must-become-an-activist-organization>.

<sup>359</sup> Will Ing, “RIBA Presidential Election: Rule Change Blocks New Members from Voting,” *Architects Journal*, 2022, accessed May 07, 2024, <https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/riba-presidential-election-rule-change-blocks-new-members-from-voting>.

<sup>360</sup> NZIA, “Our Structure,” Te Kāhui Whaihangā New Zealand Institute of Architecture, accessed October 16, 2024, <https://www.nzia.co.nz/about-us/who-we-are/our-structure/>.

<sup>361</sup> Perceived because the median age of pre:fab members in attendance at the board meeting was 34.5. More than half of our team run their own architecture practices, others hold leadership positions on boards and in local government and architecture practices, and we have multiple degrees in different disciplines.

<sup>362</sup> IOD, “Are Directors Getting Younger?,” Institute of Directors New Zealand, 2023, accessed November 30, 2025, [https://www.iod.org.nz/news/boardroom/boardroom/boardroom-magazine-autumn-2023/are-directors-getting-younger#](https://www.iod.org.nz/news/boardroom/boardroom/boardroom-magazine-autumn-2023/are-directors-getting-younger#/).

This reflection produced an important revelation about conventionally understood trouble-making—that being constantly oppositional and reactionary is limiting and counterproductive in the long term. It can be pleasurable to focus on boundaries, on taking them down, but they have “a habit of proliferating”, and there is great “responsibility in building them up”.<sup>363</sup> To trouble something is to be in constant binary with the thing being troubled. As philosopher Jacques Derrida claims, within this binary dynamic, culture and language creates hierarchy and interdependence.<sup>364</sup> These hierarchies typically have more impact on those doing the troubling, who constantly feel the presence of the things they are troubling and the pressure to be reactive to them, than the other way around. Awan et al reflect that in spite of the “irritant” nature of the troubling practices they catalogue in *Spatial Agency*, the ‘norm’ stays undisturbed.<sup>365</sup> Waghorn agrees, suggesting that the practices featured in *Making Ways*, and the act of hosting it “did not shift the course of mainstream practice in Aotearoa,” but also that once these troubling practices diverge from their binary to professional norms, they also remain unaffected by those norms.<sup>366</sup> While pre:fab was troubling Te Kāhui Whaihanga, I often joked that I was tired of thinking about the Institute so much, when the Institute never thought about me. The tensions can be motivating, but also challenging for a collective, if the things the troubling-making work towards come to pass, what remains? Remaining oppositional means remaining in a space where you are always ‘right’ because the thing you are opposed to is always ‘wrong’.

pre:fab’s campaign for president reflected a desire to be troublesome but also a desire for recognition by the profession. Van Schaik points to this as the “natural history of creative individuals”, gyrating between “experimentation on the margins of their discipline to seeking recognition at its core”.<sup>367</sup> It is within this cycle that we could see both the futility of the oppositional nature of our approach, and its manifestation as aesthetic or performative trouble. As one person commented, “but it looked really good on Instagram”. And thus, I can also reflect on some of the problems with the dominant trickster narrative.

## Problems and Opportunities of Tricksterdom

There are several problems with the idea of the trickster, from how the trickster figure is treated, who gets to play tricks and make trouble, and what other roles the trickster takes in contemporary society. In mythology tricksters are typically portrayed as male even while occasionally subverting or challenging gender roles. Hyde, in *Trickster makes this World*, always refers to the trickster as ‘he’. Most of the noted trickster characters in the dominant narrative of architecture in Aotearoa are pākehā men, which speaks to whose bodies are allowed to make trouble, and whose stories are erased. Those othered by society—like the trickster alpine parrot, the kea for example—are villainised as opposed to celebrated by society, with violent consequence.<sup>368</sup> The trickster is

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<sup>363</sup> Frichot, *Dirty Theory: Troubling Architecture*, 75.

<sup>364</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

<sup>365</sup> Nishat Awan, Jeremy Till, and Tatjana Schneider, *Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture* (Routledge, 2011).

<sup>366</sup> Kathy Waghorn, “Introduction,” in *Making Ways*, ed. Kathy Waghorn and Mike Davis (Auckland: Objectspace, 2020), 20.

<sup>367</sup> van Schaik, “Practice Makes Perfect,” 84.

<sup>368</sup> Kea are an intelligent neophilic parrots native to mountain areas, famous for their curiosity, clever tricks, and thievery. In the late 1860s, due occasional sheep attacks, the government introduced a bounty on their beaks. Over the next 100 years over 150,000 kea were slaughtered until the bounty ended in 1970. Philip Temple, *Book of the Kea* (Hodder Moa Beckett, 1996). Despite being much loved by mountain visitors and protected in 1986, kea are still the victims of targeted violence. In 2008 two shot kea were stapled to a signpost in Arthur’s Pass National Park. “Arthurs Pass Neighbours at Odds,” Stuff, 2009, accessed February 25, 2023, <http://www.stuff.co.nz/the-press/news/national/248668/Arthurs-Pass-neighbours-at-odds>. Kea conservationists claim that a number of kea are found each year, “shot, intentionally injured or poisoned as a result of conflict situations”. Kea Conservation Trust, “Kea-Human Conflict,” Kea Conservation Trust, accessed February 25, 2023, <https://www.keaconservation.co.nz/kea-information/kea-human-conflict/>. The current kea population is somewhere between 1000 and 7000 birds.

antagonistic and often not rewarded for their irritation. In fact, as creative destructors, if they see the positive impacts of their ‘trouble’ immediately it’s not highly destructive, and therefore probably not trickster type behaviour. Similarly, if the environment can adapt to the ‘trouble’ caused by the trickster to metabolise it quickly into a positive experience, it is no longer troubling.

Hyde’s trickster is a creative destructor of the highest order, usually a god, who “in every case... will cross the line”,<sup>369</sup> but the role of the trickster in contemporary society has also changed. Increasingly, trickster figures have come to be represented by devious characters working in service to capital against public interest, often represented in political leadership. There is no more jester, only the king. Journalist and law educator Morgan Godfrey discusses this phenomenon in relation to public knowledge in Aotearoa, pointing to the transition of power figures from punchlines to presidents—the clown-like fools becoming the most powerful men in the world (and vice versa).<sup>370</sup> Former Prime Minister John Key is used as the example of the “chief joker” in Aotearoa with his reputation for “hamming it up” to excuse problematic rhetoric, and to distract from the complexities of the political system.<sup>371</sup> The comedic persona is therefore “irresistible to politicians” as a form of “political cover”, and in many ways foolery—or tricksterdom—becomes the qualifying attribute for leadership because, in the attention economy, “the best way to go viral is to humiliate yourself”.<sup>372</sup> The reason this starts to constitute trickster-like behaviour, is because it becomes a crafted role dictated by acts of deception and unpredictability. The president-fool is able to shapeshift, picking and choosing their positions even if they actively contradict previous positions or their actions. Any resistance to or revealing of the falsities of this new trickster role is met with increasing levels of violence.

For example, In 2021 in Pōneke, a climate protester was arrested and charged with wilful damage for spray-chalking “Fonterra cows send regards” outside the office of the dairy monopoly *Fonterra* while dressed as a cow.<sup>373</sup> Considering peaceful protest is legal in Aotearoa, spray-chalk washes off, and given the lack of consequences and accountability for the widespread environmental destruction caused by intensive dairy farming, the irony was clear.<sup>374</sup> In the eyes of the law, however, the protester/trickster’s destruction of property is seen to be more perverse. In April 2024, in response to the complicity of the United States government in the ongoing genocide in Palestine and the links of universities to the state of Israel, campus protests erupted in universities across the country, and despite being overwhelmingly peaceful, were met with violent response by law enforcement.<sup>375</sup> Outrage regarding damage to campus buildings, including broken vending machines and piles of chairs and umbrellas that were used as blockades,<sup>376</sup> seemed more widespread in the media than outrage over the persistent bombing of Gaza, rendering all universities there unusable and destroying 70% of all housing, in what is termed ‘domicide’.<sup>377</sup> These actions and reactions start to blur the edges of what constitutes

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<sup>369</sup> Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World*.

<sup>370</sup> Morgan Godfrey, “Welcome to the Circus,” in *Public Knowledge*, ed. Emma Johnson, Radical Futures (Freerange Press, 2020).

<sup>371</sup> Godfrey, “Welcome to the Circus,” 60.

<sup>372</sup> Godfrey, “Welcome to the Circus,” 59.

<sup>373</sup> Rewiti Kohere, “Man Dressed as Cow Arrested for Chalk Message to Fonterra,” *The Spinoff*, 2021, accessed February 24, 2023, <https://thespinoff.co.nz/society/01-11-2021/man-arrested-for-chalking-at-an-environmental-protest>.

<sup>374</sup> Ramesh Baskaran, Ross Cullen, and Sergio Colombo, “Estimating Values of Environmental Impacts of Dairy Farming in New Zealand,” *New Zealand Journal of Agricultural Research* 52, no. 4 (2009).

<sup>375</sup> Lois Beckett, “Nearly All Gaza Campus Protests in the US Have Been Peaceful, Study Finds,” *The Guardian*, 2024, accessed June 24, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/article/2024/may/10/peaceful-pro-palestinian-campus-protests>.

<sup>376</sup> “Several People Assaulted During Pro-Palestinian Protest at Csula: University President,” *Channel 4 Los Angeles*, 2024, accessed June 24, 2024, <https://www.nbclosangeles.com/news/local/protestors-damage-building-csula/3435793/>.

<sup>377</sup> Becky Sullivan, “What Is ‘Domicide,’ and Why Has War in Gaza Brought New Attention to the Term?,” *npr*, 2024, accessed June 24, 2024, <https://www.npr.org/2024/02/09/1229625376/domicide-israel-gaza-palestinians>.

tricksterdom. These protesters are treated as if they are the trouble, even when the things they resist have far more violent consequence. This points to a need to develop new types of resistance, new ways of gathering and organising, new and strengthened connections in the ecosystem of trouble, and physical and conceptual the spaces—Ground—to do it.

In this the isolation of the trickster as a lone figure, the enigmatic individual architect of trouble, becomes problematic. The trickster can reveal an uncomfortable truth, disrupt the logics of power, make some Ground for the trouble, but they depend on organisation around their trouble by a broader collective for meaningful change. The Ground made by the trickster is only strengthened by collective buy-in, by gathering. If I return to my definition of architecture taking *parts of the environment (materials) and rearranging them through a collaborative process into new forms*; and that of the trickster who *playfully manipulates a situation with the intention of re-creating it in a new form*; acts of troubling and resistance have clear characteristics of architectural practice. In Aotearoa, Māori mythology has a trickster-like figure known as Māui, who is renowned for his clever and formative antics including fishing up Te Ika-a-Māui, the North Island with a large jaw bone, his foot perched on Te Pātaka o Rākaihautū (Banks Peninsula); leading his brothers in a mission to slow down Tamanuiterā (the sun) for longer days; and extinguishing all the fires in his village, only to return from a foray with the gods, armed with new fire-starting knowledge.<sup>378</sup> These feats earned Māui the trust and respect of his village and community, despite their initial scepticism and disbelief. Māui, in his practice of harnessing technology in innovative ways, physically shaping the natural environment, and challenging other gods (architects), for the betterment of his people becomes an architect in the way he catalysed his community to collaborate around his visions, they participated in his trouble-making. Their collective efforts had significant impact on The Ground, drastically altering the experiences and trajectory of their society. This lens can also extend the practice of architecture to the more-than-human, to trouble-makers like the kea, and the many others that have a stake in architecting our worlds and who deserve more agency in it. Haraway would call this “making oddkin”, in that staying with the trouble requires that we “become-with each other or not at all” and that humans will discover needs and connections with others in “unexpected collaborations”.<sup>379</sup> Again, discovering agency in architecture then is less about these trickster-like figures themselves, and more about gathering and collective momentum, something we have always done, and can do differently, through collaborative imagination and action.

It was the practice of pre:fab that revealed the problems of troubling and the trickster to me, that I can apply back to the Ground of architecture to see it reflected in history and theory. It revealed to me how I wasn't ready to be a radical change-maker, that I needed to make Ground to gather people and imagine together what change might even look like and how a community might participate in the design of themselves. It revealed the existing Ground and its rhizomatic connections, the space between practices and how they interact, and how architecture is a discipline with a history of gathering that could provide critical skillsets for building a future we can all belong to. The practice of this research needed a new methodological framing, and a new theory of how architects gain their agency and where they can apply it. I suggest now that architecture workers might exercise their agency in the muck, the mess, the dirt, starting by looking under, lifting up and revealing, and uncovering what is below the surface of The Ground, analysing the power structures that underpin it. In my practice, ‘troubling’ made way for a broader enquiry of Ground-making that would encapsulate a multitude of ways of practising, from multiple perspectives. Real troubling is not something aesthetic, but an “act of survival”, carried out by those marginalised and oppressed by societal norms, laws, and systems, in an

<sup>378</sup> Grace Wiremu, “Māui and the Giant Fish,” Te Kete Ipurangi, 2016, accessed February 26, 2023, <https://eng.mataurangamaori.tki.org.nz/Support-materials/Te-Reo-Maori/Maori-Myths-Legends-and-Contemporary-Stories/Maui-and-the-giant-fish.>; Grace Wiremu, “How Māui Slowed the Sun,” Te Kete Ipurangi, 2016, accessed February 26, 2023, <https://eng.mataurangamaori.tki.org.nz/Support-materials/Te-Reo-Maori/Maori-Myths-Legends-and-Contemporary-Stories/How-Maui-slowed-the-sun.>; Grace Wiremu, “How Māui Brought Fire to the World,” Te Kete Ipurangi, 2016, accessed February 26, 2023, <https://eng.mataurangamaori.tki.org.nz/Support-materials/Te-Reo-Maori/Maori-Myths-Legends-and-Contemporary-Stories/How-Maui-brought-fire-to-the-world.>

<sup>379</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 4.

attempt to disrupt those systems, and change The Ground beneath them.<sup>380</sup>

In this sense, we ascribe tricksterdom to Athfield and Walker for the wrong reasons. As discussed in ‘Chapter Two—Disciplinary Gathering’, the post-modernism that architects like Athfield and Walker gathered around as the site of their boundary pushing did not shift the Ground in architecture in itself because as a style it is an aesthetic effect explored under the same economic and political conditions of modernism. Walker himself referred to this effect in a recent article, saying that when people tag him as “subversive” they really “just mean unusual”.<sup>381</sup> It was other aspects of Athfield’s work that locate him as a trouble-maker, where he engaged with political protests, and used his buildings as a demonstration for how people could shape their own environments. So this is not to say that some of the work they did wasn’t real change-making, but that the way their work is discussed and the narrative around it, like so much of architecture, focuses on buildings and their images, and the real learnings to be had from figures like Athfield and Walker is in how they catalysed and gathered people around their visions.<sup>382</sup>

The potential of tricksterdom lies in its capacity to draw people to sites of gathering. When not solely focused on the antics of a lone provocateur, and where it resists oppositional thinking and individualism, it can be a powerful tool in this reimagined version of Trouble-making, where architects exercise their agency by taking action towards systemic change.

## Exercising our Agency for Change by Troubling Systems

Through this renewed lens of Trouble-making, we can look again to the history of architecture to find those who, like Māui, catalyse people and collectives around key issues for structural change, and/or challenge dominant conceptual narratives for paradigmatic shifts in knowledge systems. Many of the examples of people and practices discussed under ‘struggle’ in *Disciplinary Gathering* constitute Trouble-making behaviour. Māori prophets, architects, and women leveraged architecture in these “acts of survival and creativity”<sup>383</sup> as a tool against systems of oppression, or in the quest for inclusive policy. In the early twentieth century Te Paea Herangi initiated a series of significant land development schemes and started a new community at Ngaruawahia through the 1920s and 1930s with the goal of economic and social revival following the significant losses occurred in the influenza epidemic of 1918-19, and the illegal land confiscations of Waikato land in the 1860s.<sup>384</sup> For example, the construction of a large carved house, Mahinārangi, on re-purchased confiscated land was intended to look like a meeting house but function as a hospital, reclaiming autonomy for Māori in their own health system in accordance with tikanga and tapu.<sup>385</sup> Through the 1930s, Herangi leveraged state-

<sup>380</sup> Sohel Sarkar, “Sara Ahmed’s Latest Book Is a Queer Take on ‘Use’ and ‘Usefulness,’” *Books are Our Superpower*, July 2 2020, accessed September 29, 2021, <https://baos.pub/book-review-whats-the-use-on-the-uses-of-use-by-sara-ahmed-f9678d87bb92>.

<sup>381</sup> Kiran Dass, “‘I May Have Reacted Too Far’: Architect Roger Walker on His Groundbreaking Buildings,” *The Guardian*, 2024, accessed September 07, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/jun/29/roger-walker-new-zealand-architect>.

<sup>382</sup> A Te Kāhui Whaihanga award for housing in Athfield’s name often goes to large-budget private houses that are conceptually a far cry from Athfield’s self-build ethos, challenging of aesthetic convention, and material exploration. NZIA, “Ian Athfield Award for Housing,” Te Kāhui Whaihanga New Zealand Institute of Architecture, accessed July 02, 2024, <https://nzia.co.nz/awards/named-awards/sir-ian-athfield-award-for-housing/>. A similar effect has happened with the work of The Group. Today the residential work of The Group’s work continues to be referenced and celebrated by the profession in aesthetic terms but is often divorced from their political messages around housing affordability and transformative collective practice. See for example the website of Simon Devitt. Simon Devitt, “Group Architects,” Simon Devitt, 2018, accessed March 01, 2023, <https://simondevitt.com/portfolio/publications/group-architects/>. (Although the book referred to is a full historical account of The Group).

<sup>383</sup> Sarkar, “Sara Ahmed’s Latest Book Is a Queer Take on ‘Use’ and ‘Usefulness.’”

<sup>384</sup> Cox, “Movers and Shakers,” 81.

<sup>385</sup> Cox, “Movers and Shakers,” 81.

backed loans to develop farms and build 15 marae that became part of the round of Poukai gatherings that the Kingitanga carried out annually for community consultation.<sup>386</sup> In this way Herangi used architecture to negotiate and leverage complex legal systems, and to contribute to existing ritual processes for the betterment of Māori in that era, and into the future.

Figures like Bill Wilson and Russell Withers also have Trouble-making qualities, particularly where their practices engaged with systemic issues. Wilson was at the forefront of many of the conversations around the state of architecture education and accessibility to quality housing and was particularly effective in his capacity to rally students, architects, and workers alike around the subjects of his activism, involved not only in The Group, but in the formation and operation of The Architectural Centre in Pōneke, and the Auckland Architecture Association.<sup>387</sup> Withers and Stanish in their work with Archangels Collective worked actively as spatial advocates to support communities against evictions in Ponsonby in the 1960s.<sup>388</sup> Withers was also an outspoken advocate for the community architecture movement posing new futures for architecture through his regular editorial in journal *NZ Architect* in the 1980s *LifeStyles*, defining a model for community architecture, or a “humanistic” approach to architecture, one that would cut “directly across many of the traditional ideas of what constitutes worthwhile architecture by challenging many of the assumptions that our Western material culture has associated with art and science, property and professionalism”.<sup>389</sup> The article was at times scathing, and even went as far as to say that the act of architecture without the “community’s full participation and awareness of the issues at stake” is a “symbolic (and often very real) violence” by the dominant class, that architecture largely represented, against minority views.<sup>390</sup> Withers believed architects should be “change-agents”, and played this out through Archangels Collective in advocacy work and through community-led design processes where a building was just one possible outcome of carefully considered and discussed problems.<sup>391</sup>

Tony Watkins leverages a multitude of vectors through which to undertake his Trouble-making: from fighting in the environment court, to running sustainability workshops, to contributing to policy drafts for the Resource Management Act in the 1990s.<sup>392</sup> His practice reflects an exploration of the boundaries and responsibilities of an architect, which for Watkins is not about buildings but about community-making.<sup>393</sup> Treating the shaping of shared environments as a practice of life, and advocating for this at a policy level makes Watkins’s practice real Trouble-making.<sup>394</sup> Similar policy advocacy has been undertaken by members of the Earth Building Association of

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<sup>386</sup> Cox, “Movers and Shakers,” 81.

<sup>387</sup> Gatley, *Group Architects*.

<sup>388</sup> Withers, “Community Architecture in New Zealand,” 24.

<sup>389</sup> Withers, “Community Architecture in New Zealand,” 28.

<sup>390</sup> Withers, “Community Architecture in New Zealand,” 26.

<sup>391</sup> Withers, “Community Architecture in New Zealand,” 30.

<sup>392</sup> Tony describes himself as a Popular Author, Design Educator, Urban Designer, Vernacular Architect, Maritime Planner, Owner Builder, Tour Guide, Political Activist, Environmental Conservationist, Peaceful Revolutionary, Storyteller, Photographer, Compulsive Traveller, Karaka Bay lover, Noncombatant Sport, Art Connoisseur, Credit Manager, Servant of Piglet, Bush Lawyer, and a Family Archivist. Tony Watkins, “Tony Watkins ~ Vernacular Design,” accessed June 22, 2024, <http://www.tony-watkins.com/>.

<sup>393</sup> Exemplified in his self-built home in Karaka Bay that has been a site of his family life, teaching and experimentation, and world-making through his policy advocacy. Watkins is still writing and pre:fab recently published a selection of his writing on “climate, density, responsibility and regulation from 2022”. Watkins, “16 Questions to Ask Your Architect.”

<sup>394</sup> Watkins also recently won the NZIA John Sutherland Practice Award, which “celebrates excellence of innovation, research and ways of working”. This is institutional recognition that while Watkins is an individual, his practice is collective, it is collaborative and makes Ground for others through his teaching, activism and advocacy across a multitude of spheres. NZIA, “2024 John Sutherland Practice Award Winner: Tony Watkins,” Te Kāhui Whaihanga New Zealand Institute of Architecture, 2024, accessed December 10, 2024, <https://www.nzia.co.nz/awards/john-sutherland-practice-award/2024-john-sutherland-practice-award-winner-tony-watkins/>.

New Zealand (EBANZ) who advocate for “the art and science of earth and natural building”.<sup>395</sup> Architect and co-founder of EBANZ Graeme North chaired the Standards New Zealand Technical Committee who were responsible for the introduction of the NZ Earth Building Standards 1998, the only building standard of its kind in the world, that provides acceptable solutions for the use of earthen materials under the building code.<sup>396</sup> This is Trouble-making behaviour as it discovers a structural avenue through which to enact change for a more generative future. Legislation as a gathering space, more than style or type, has the potential to open more pathways for a vast array of approaches to architecture, and differing conceptual relations between people, materials, and place. Similarly, the work of Māori design professionals in the policy sector, supported by Ngā Aho, lead to the development of the Te Aranga principles, which are “a set of outcome-based principles founded on Māori cultural values and formulated to provide practical guidance for enhancing outcomes for the design environment”.<sup>397</sup> The above examples engage in Trouble-making through varied outlets, from reimagining the conceptual space of architecture, through practice, through emergent forms of media, and through targeted policy advocacy.

Trouble-making can also be about challenging and changing dominant systems of ideas and thought through practices that resist the dominant ontological or epistemological (ways of being and knowing) societal frameworks. Among examples of architecture figures in architecture in Aotearoa, one of the most notable is Rewi Thompson, whose radical conceptual practice played out through buildings, a teaching practice, and in consultation on projects of public significance. In their biography, journalist Jeremy Hansen and architect Jade Kake quote Thompson to express how his work captured his belief that affiliation with land is “spiritual” as opposed to “an understanding that is commercial which pervades a western viewpoint”.<sup>398</sup> This implies a structurally different approach to architecture relative to site, where site—being Aotearoa—is taken “not only as a place but as a culture”.<sup>399</sup> Thompson brought this perspective to every aspect of his practice. In his buildings he “broke the binary that associates Māori with the natural world and Pākehā with the urban”, creating urban forms that were born from Māori narratives.<sup>400</sup> Through his work as an educator he was able to facilitate a generation of architects to engage with Māori design principles and “strive to make places that feel as if they belong”.<sup>401</sup> While he was not “involved in more direct political activism”, his work was fundamentally political and his consultancy work, particularly through his advocacy for incarcerated people, brought a Māori perspective to critical and complex institutional projects.<sup>402</sup> In this his troubling was not aesthetic but “deeply embedded”, and yet because narratives of troubling often focus more on “volume and quality of built work”, he didn’t gain “popular acclaim like his friends and contemporaries Ian Athfield and Roger Walker”.<sup>403</sup> The real trouble-makers, like Māui, often only achieve recognition like this much later, when the ripples of their work and practice are *felt*, and they can be seen, like Thompson, as “active agent[s] in shaping and changing our society”,<sup>404</sup> and advancing “the possibilities of what architecture in Aotearoa could be”.<sup>405</sup>

A contemporary example with a similar focus on policy approach through radical reimagining of how architects relate to materials and site is that of Fleur Palmer, discussed in ‘Chapter Two—

<sup>395</sup> EBANZ, “Earth Building Association of New Zealand,” EBANZ, accessed September 09, 2024, <https://www.earthbuilding.org.nz/about-earth-natural-building-association/>.

<sup>396</sup> Graeme North, “Mud Brick, Cob, and Earth Building Standards,” Graeme North White Papers, accessed September 09, 2024, <https://www.ecodesign.co.nz/about/mud-brick-cob-earth-building-standards.html>.

<sup>397</sup> Paul and Hatton, “In Practice: Te Aranga Design Principles.”

<sup>398</sup> Rewi Thompson quoted in Jeremy Hansen, “Introduction Kōrero Tīmatanga: A Book of Conversations,” ed. Jeremy Hansen and Jade Kake (Massey University Press, 2024), 20.

<sup>399</sup> Rewi Thompson quoted in Hansen, “Introduction Kōrero Tīmatanga: A Book of Conversations,” 20.

<sup>400</sup> Hansen, “Introduction Kōrero Tīmatanga: A Book of Conversations,” 15.

<sup>401</sup> Hansen, “Introduction Kōrero Tīmatanga: A Book of Conversations,” 18.

<sup>402</sup> Jade Kake, “Introduction Kōrero Tīmatanga: Always the Architect,” ed. Jeremy Hansen and Jade Kake (Massey University Press, 2024), 24.

<sup>403</sup> Kake, “Introduction Kōrero Tīmatanga: Always the Architect,” 24.

<sup>404</sup> Kake, “Introduction Kōrero Tīmatanga: Always the Architect,” 25.

<sup>405</sup> Hansen, “Introduction Kōrero Tīmatanga: A Book of Conversations,” 15.

Disciplinary Gathering’, whose practice specifically targets policy related to housing and land ownership as it has impacted Māori. Her project to relocate state houses slated for demolition in Tāmaki Makaurau to develop a papakāinga project in Kaitiāra operated under reimagined modes of re-use, community development, and architecture practice.<sup>406</sup> Palmer proposed and then enacted a radical re-organisation process of houses (literally), materials, ideas about living together, relationships, and the policy underpinning it. Palmer’s practice explores, actions, and depends on a complex network of collaborations between people, place, and policy.

Those who engage in revealing the ecosystem of these Troubling practices can have a similar affect in shifting dominant narratives. Gerald Melling was the editor of *New Zealand Architect* Journal from 1983-1986. During this time the journal was full of critical commentary on architecture, and attempted to really capture the way architects were gathering—featuring regular updates from groups like Women in Architecture and Architects Against Nuclear Arms; updates from the architecture schools; the opinion pieces of Russell Withers, Tony Watkins, and Tony Ward, among others; and passionate letters to the editor that were often the site of heated debate.<sup>407</sup> Melling’s approach aggregated various perspectives of architecture and presented the discipline as a site of critical discourse, intimately connected to politics, culture, and societal systems more broadly. But architecture in Aotearoa at this time “wasn’t quite ready for criticism”, and Melling’s editorial stint ended with a “f... off letter” from an “Institute gentleman”.<sup>408</sup> *NZ Architect* was also sued for defamation related to criticism of architects and architecture<sup>409</sup> and, in spite of protests from architects, the journal was transferred in ownership from the NZIA to AGM, became a magazine, and its contents drastically changed along with The Ground of the media space of architecture in Aotearoa.<sup>410</sup> Melling’s Trouble-making was of the kind that could only be appreciated in value much later, as a gathering space for the trouble, a space since missing on The Ground.

Emergent forms of media work to fill this space. While not based in Aotearoa, Dank Lloyd Wright (DLW),<sup>411</sup> a 100k follower-strong architecture discourse platform run on Instagram by a number of anonymous administrators most likely out of the United States of America, is followed by many students and young architects of architecture and acts as a Disciplinary Gathering site for cultural discourse that is immediately reactive to current events. Their organisational structure—non-hierarchical, anonymous, fuelled by their following, free from any monetary transactions—leverages new technology to create a new type of Ground for architecture discourse. They are structurally different to old media forms in architecture and so examining their methods for change-making and Ground-making in architecture is relevant to my practice. Their content ranges from an absurd number of memes about ants (iykyk), to sincere commentary about current events, to ‘kiss me under the...’ posts of famous architectural landmarks, to calling out exploitative architecture practice and education, and they lean into their often controversial comment section, believing that it is through this open format that “the rotating group of admins, the commenters and the people who message DLW are all feeding a parallel discourse where

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<sup>406</sup> Fleur Palmer, “Developing New Strategies for Māori Housing” (paper presented at the International Indigenous Development Research Conference, Auckland, 2012).

<sup>407</sup> See *NZ Architect*, edited by Gerald Melling, 1983-1986.

<sup>408</sup> John Walsh, “Gerald Melling Remembered,” *Architecture Now*, 2012, accessed September 14, 2024, <https://architecturenow.co.nz/articles/gerald-melling-remembered/#img=0>.

<sup>409</sup> The exact reason for *NZ Architect* being sued is somewhat unclear. Melling in one of his editorials in 1985 says, “Oh, the rigours of advocacy! The last occasion this outrageous notion presented itself cost *NZ Architect* many defamation dollars in voicing its concern”. Gerald Melling, “Editorial,” *NZ Architect*, no. 3 (1985): 2. This editorial is referenced in Christine McCarthy, “... Ponderously Pedantic Pediments Prevail... Good, Clean Fun in a Bad, Dirty World”: *New Zealand Architecture in the 1980s*, *Architectural History Aotearoa* 6 (2009).

<sup>410</sup> McCarthy, “... Ponderously Pedantic Pediments Prevail... Good, Clean Fun in a Bad, Dirty World”: *New Zealand Architecture in the 1980s*, 5.

<sup>411</sup> dank.lloyd.wright, “Dank.Lloyd.Wright.”

the traditional standards of the field can be challenged, ridiculed, or debated more openly.<sup>412</sup> There might be a lot of shitposting, but there is also a lot of critical discourse: commentary on capitalism, labour practices, colonisation, critical history, politics, etc. This has extended to their support of unionisation movements, protests, petitions, and critique of exploitative and violent architecture practice which gives their followers the language to critique the discipline and its broader foundational structures. In a world where education is becoming more and more extremely online, DLW exemplifies a free, open-source, contemporary, accessible school where “critical discourse can be blunt, spontaneous, and rooted in concrete facts while still being conceptually rigorous”.<sup>413</sup> No other platform in architectural media allows for the immediacy, the collectiveness, the opposition and the unfiltered commentary on the discipline, and followers’ experiences of it, all over the globe, all at once. DLW are the contemporary trickster figure in architectural discourse, traversing all types of antagonism and ruthless questioning in the quest for a more just discipline.

These examples, while just a small sample from a history of architecture in Aotearoa, suggest that architectural agency is not confined to the production of buildings, but rather lies acts of resistance and reimagining that directly challenge and impact systems and thought paradigms. They suggest possible ways for architects to exercise their agency, calling for architects to trouble these systems, questioning who they serve, who they exclude, and what possible futures they prevent. They suggest that architecture is a deeply political discipline, and thus Trouble-making, as a practice approach of troubling systems, is key for connecting to The Ground, and for taking action to reconfigure it.

## Problems and Opportunities of Trouble-making

It is critical to note that these practices above are able to exercise their agency and gain their agency through gathering with a broader ecosystem of trouble, much of which exists beyond the boundaries of the discipline. The aesthetic nature of many troubling architecture practices means that changes and impacts to the profession remain surface level, and the structures and logics of power remain unmoved. As Wigley describes in reference to Jencks’ evolutionary diagram: “architecture is implicitly understood to be a form of agitation detached from the everyday landscape with only an indirect or occasional engagement with normative lived space”.<sup>414</sup> Much of the real troubling related to the built environment and regulation around it in Aotearoa take the form of hikoi (walking protests), ahi kā (burning fires of occupation or the long term occupation of land), and legal battles through the Waitangi Tribunal Treaty Claims.<sup>415</sup> In spite of their clear links to the relationality of humans to land, materials, ecologies, and the environment, these instances of spatial troubling are rarely theorised as architecture or included as part of the canon because they directly challenge the codes and structures of the profession. This is also despite how they impact where and what can be built, and how sustained Māori activism—which brought attention to the need for Māori rights and cultural values to be respected in governance and land management—influenced built environment legislation like the Resource Management Act<sup>416</sup> and tools like Te Kaunihera o Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland Council) Te

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<sup>412</sup> James Brillon, “Instagram Account Dank.Lloyd.Wright Aims to “Amplify Narratives That Are Excluded from Architecture’s Official Consensus”,” *Dezeen*, 2022, accessed February 23, 2023, <https://www.dezeen.com/2022/08/30/instagram-dank-lloyd-wright-interview/>.

<sup>413</sup> Brillon, “Instagram Account Dank.Lloyd.Wright.”

<sup>414</sup> Wigley, “The Drawing That Ate Architecture.”

<sup>415</sup> Examples of ahi kā include the Bastion Point Occupation in 1977-78 spanning 506 days, The 1995 Moutoa Gardens protest, and the five-year occupation at Ihumātao that ended in 2020. The Waitangi Tribunal was established in 1975 to provide recommendations on claims raised by Māori regarding breaches of the Te Tiriti o Waitangi, with most claims focused on land issues. “About the Waitangi Tribunal,” Waitangi Tribunal Te Rōpū Whakamana i te Tiriti o Waitangi, accessed March 01, 2023, <https://www.waitangitribunal.govt.nz/about/>.

<sup>416</sup> “Resource Management Act 1991,” ed. Ministry for the Environment (New Zealand: The Parliamentary Counsel Office 2005). <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1991/0069/latest/DLM230265.html>.

Aranga Principles.<sup>417</sup> It is important for architecture workers to engage with these movements, with the ecosystem of trouble beyond the boundaries of the discipline if we expect to exercise our agency in meaningful ways.

This extends beyond Aotearoa and into the expanded ecosystem of trouble, largely led by highly organised groups of people oppressed by the dominant system. The 1960s and 1970s are often referenced as a time of radicality and upheaval in the profession and academy of architecture, though much of this upheaval was related to the Decolonization and Civil Rights movements of the same era or was part of the culture those movements generated.<sup>418</sup> It is regularly these movements, led by organised groups, that drive lasting change, supported, but by no means dependent on, the aesthetic experiments that accompany them by disciplines like architecture who have typically represented and been formed by an elite class. The violent manifestations of the societal systems that Trouble-making tries to address is something that marginalised people “have to live with day in and day out”, while privileged groups can “afford to overlook” it, while they “act as if the entire world were, or should be, as they see it”.<sup>419</sup> If Trouble-making is an act of survival, then its ability to imagine and shape the future thus depends on the capacity of oppressed groups to imagine it, and to what Narayan refers to as “epistemological advantage,” where oppressed individuals are uniquely positioned to gain critical insights into the conditions of their own oppression and those of their oppressors, as they possess knowledge and experience from both perspectives.<sup>420</sup> However, the tendency for oppressed and othered groups to pick up the mantle of the trouble does not suggest that it is somehow an ‘easy’ or even a socially or fiscally viable option. Mike Barns, who used to run a practice called *Oceanic Architecture* in Tāmaki Makaurau in the 1990s and 2000s and worked alongside Rewi Thompson in prison advocacy, discussed how “using architecture as a political tool,” often made it challenging to run a successful commercial practice under the premise of assimilating and sacrificing your ethical positions, or suffering and sacrificing your security.<sup>421</sup> Things have shifted now, visible in the emergence of groups like *Waka Maia*,<sup>422</sup> but only *because* of the Trouble-making and Ground-making of practices and people like Barns, Hoskins, and others making space to imagine and perform other futures.

In a Ground-making practice that hopes to explore equitable gathering for the future of architecture, it is thus important to examine how the labour of Trouble-making is undertaken, by who, and how it is compensated. Much real troubling practice takes the form of reproductive labour—the unpaid work of sustaining daily life—which contributes to local ecologies, economies, and the profession, and yet is frequently low-or-no pay work by mostly women, indigenous groups,

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<sup>417</sup> A more historic example is a significant movement related to housing in Aotearoa was a survey undertaken by the *Māori Women’s Welfare League* in 1952, in response to “always being told that Māori were not given state housing because they didn’t want it”. The league’s first president, Whina Cooper (Te Rarawa), urged as many Māori as possible to make an application for state housing, later organising the survey, “determined to prove the plight of Maori [sic] families in inner-city areas and on the Auckland urban fringe”. The target of this campaign was not the houses themselves and how they manifested physically, but the policy that controlled who had access to them, and the system that otherwise silenced Māori voices. Cox, “Movers and Shakers,” 82.

<sup>418</sup> For more discussion on how these architectural experiments are inseparable from liberation movements and geopolitical struggles of the era, see Felicity D. Scott, *Architecture or Techno-Utopia: Politics after Modernism* (MIT Press, 2007).

<sup>419</sup> Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse*, 17.

<sup>420</sup> Uma Narayan, “The Project of Feminist Epistemology: A Non-Western Feminist on Epistemology,” in *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing*, ed. Alison M Jaggard and Susan R Bordo (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989).

<sup>421</sup> Barns, Ward, Hoskins, and Maher, “Relish the Difference,” 73.

<sup>422</sup> Waka Māia are a collective of Māori architects and “leaders of tomorrow” within the country’s largest architecture firm Jasmax, who are “shaping the organisational culture and values” of the practice and contributing to the “bi-cultural design direction” of the firm and the broader architectural profession. Jasmax, “Cultural Design,” Jasmax, accessed September 05, 2021, <https://www.jasmax.com/process/cultural-design/>.

people of colour, and queer groups.<sup>423</sup> Often when labour is not perceived to be compensated sufficiently, or is voluntary, it is labelled as informal or not considered ‘real’ work, particularly in instances when it “surreptitiously break[s] the status quo”.<sup>424</sup> Architecture historian Huda Tayob discusses that the device of rendering gendered and racialised work as ‘informal’ is a “process of non-recognition”.<sup>425</sup> Of my research into the profession of architecture in Aotearoa, the majority of contemporary, active practitioners troubling the norms of practice identify as women. This isn’t true in accounts of architecture history of Aotearoa, where figures like Ian Athfield and Wilson feature frequently, but that is more a product of how women were excluded from public life<sup>426</sup> and the profession and how its histories have been told.<sup>427</sup>

This reflection is to reiterate that Trouble-making is not an arbitrary stirring of the pot, but often an act of survival targeted at oppressive systems and laws. Many of the examples I have provided target systems and laws for greater community empowerment—to see themselves reflected within decisions made about society at large and to grant them more agency in those decisions. Where these practices are sometimes framed as being individually powerful, it is all these aligned actions in concert, imagining and practicing other ways of being and knowing, that challenge the legitimacy of laws and structures. This starts to get to the heart of the conceptual shift of this research that emerged through reflection on my practice, where different modes of operation achieve different affect, and in concert they make new Ground.

## Practice Approach: Trouble-making

In December of 2022, pre:fab ‘relaunched’ through an immersive, free, open event that constituted an exhibition and the Groupwork ~~xmas party~~. #neural-networking-178 invited young architects to model themselves as public spaces in Tāmaki Makaurau (because we are all already models of the city); treated the venue of Old Folks Association as a map in which guests could geo-locate themselves based on where they live; and launched the ‘Subjective Perspective Generator’, a generative AI tool for producing and iterating on visions of the city. It was a conceptual turning point for pre:fab in which we could posit ourselves as both trouble-makers and an experimental space for imagining the future together.

Trouble-making as a practice approach within Ground-making is how architecture workers exercise their agency. It is direct and targeted engagement with legal, social, financial, and political systems; and/or it is a deep engagement with and practicing of other ontologies and epistemologies (ways of being and knowing) that resist that of the dominant system of capitalism. It depends on gathering and on novel and ancient coalitions. When practising as trouble-makers, pre:fab can be more political, pointed, and critical through specific actions—catalysing people around tangible outcomes—while creating explorative spaces of questioning and challenge through other approaches like ‘School-making. pre:fab’s transition from ‘thinking about the Institute’ to “pre:fabricating a future we can all belong to” was a necessary divergence so that we could create new types of shared work, and experiment with the ways of being

<sup>423</sup> For more analysis on how capitalism (and the forces that resist it) depends on gendered, racialised and migrant labour, see Nancy Fraser, “Contradictions of Capital and Care,” *New Left Review* 100 (2016).

<sup>424</sup> Stead, Ednie-Brown, Watson, and Rhodes, “Exhibiting the Workaround,” 199.

<sup>425</sup> Huda Tayob, “Speaker Session: Capitalism - Black Markets: Somali Malls, Global Capital, Transnational Architectures of Care,” (Youtube: Architecture Beyond Capitalism School, June 29 2021), Lecture Presentation.

<sup>426</sup> When the town hall was constructed in Tāmaki Makaurau it had no women’s toilet. Public toilets have been a contentious site—Māori also subject to exclusion from the public realm and segregation through public facilities. Scott Hamilton, “Did You Know New Zealand’s Public Toilets Were Once Racially Segregated?,” *North and South Magazine*, 2021, accessed February 27, 2023, <https://northandsouth.co.nz/2021/09/13/bathroom-debate-trans-rights/>.

<sup>427</sup> It was not until 2022 that a comprehensive research project into the history of Women in Architecture in Aotearoa was published. Elizabeth Cox, *Making Space: A History of New Zealand Women in Architecture* (Massey University Press, 2022).

together that could influence Trouble-making tactics going forward, without feeling tethered in the binary with Te Kāhui Whaihanga.

To date my practice's and pre:fab's Trouble-making tactics have focused on the disciplinary space. These have included the reimagination of the Architectural services contract as explored in #ddd-170; a submission to the Aotearoa New Zealand Government Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment by The Night School and Groupwork about #licensing-the-future-environment-238, which reimagined architecture licensing and the Architects' Act; a research proposal about public housing for a grant provided by the NZIA called #radical-retrofit-240; #detecting-the-darchive-251 conference which invited attendees and speakers to reveal obscured truths that underpin their practices, making Ground for discourse; and members of pre:fab were part of the founding of Architects Aotearoa for Palestine, a group calling for action from architectural institutions in regards to the genocide and decades of apartheid in Palestine through the legal arm of The Architects Act and code of ethics. This space of Trouble-making demands making Ground through which to collaborate, and then the strategic identification of targeted action. We now see the potential in pre:fab as a space in which we can aggregate across the ecosystem of trouble, to increase our agency and then exercise it within structural systems.



'Chapter Three—Undisciplined' has traversed a narrative of architecture practices in Aotearoa that have worked to disrupt professional and disciplinary boundaries and change The Ground of architecture. This story was told through a personal journey and a developing theory of agency through The Night School's Undisciplined Practice, whose troubling focused on collaborative, explorative gatherings; to pre:fab, whose troubling took a more oppositional and pointed approach akin to a trickster to challenge the main institution of architecture in Aotearoa. This dynamic revealed some of the problems with oppositional troubling approaches, and conventional narratives around radicalism, which largely emphasise aesthetic changes, as opposed to structural or systemic change. A re-framing of Trouble-making and the figure of 'The Trickster' in architecture and pop culture provides a backdrop to recognise that my practice approach of Trouble-making is how architecture workers can exercise their agency and is concerned not with aesthetic manifestations on the surface of The Ground, but in societal, political, social, psychosocial, legal, and economic systems that underpin it. Trouble-making draws value from undisciplined practices and from tricksterdom, suggesting that having agency doesn't lie in individual practices or power, but in organised collectives with aligned values functioning in concert to affect change.

My practice of Ground-making creates the conditions in which Trouble-making can occur. The Night School developed The Ground, the conditions, and the community first for the action of pre:fab to emerge. Going forward it feels like there will be more room for Trouble-making action, because the community infrastructure exists, providing the connective tissue necessary for systems demonstration, and a little trouble in the form of structural, responsive, political action. 'Chapter Four—Love and [re]Organising' will discuss the creation of these infrastructures and skill sets discovered through the course of the research and which have become integral parts of my practice.

## pre:fab: Conference 2022

August 20, 2022

Tessa Forde, Hannah Broatch, Mason Rattray, Sakina Ali, Nick Denton, Vanessa Coxhead, Simon Glaister, Leonard Hobbins (Event Organisers)  
Public Event Guests

Brightside AUT, Tāmaki Makaurau, Aotearoa

Shadow the NZIA's *in:situ* event by providing the content of *in:situ* alongside workshops and lunch for free, for everyone.

### Context

pre:fab platform first emerged around the organisation of a free conference that would act as an alternative to the annual conference of Te Kāhui Whaihanga—*in:situ*. In August 2022, Te Kāhui Whaihanga hosted their first *in:situ* since before the pandemic. The high cost of tickets (\$800 for non-members of the institute) was seen as prohibitively expensive for many architecture workers, prompting a collective to form and provide an alternative. We gathered a few weeks before *in:situ* to discuss the possibility of organising a free event. The event would screen YouTube lectures by the four speakers, followed by workshops to contextualise each lecture within the context of Aotearoa and generate new knowledge. It would be called *pre:fab*—a riff on *in:situ*, but also implying a space for imagining and making things for the future.<sup>1</sup>

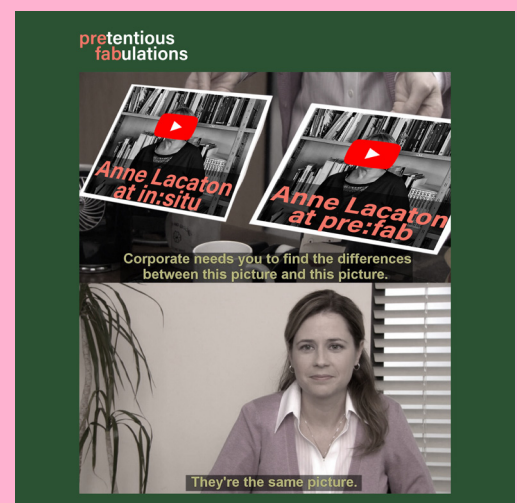
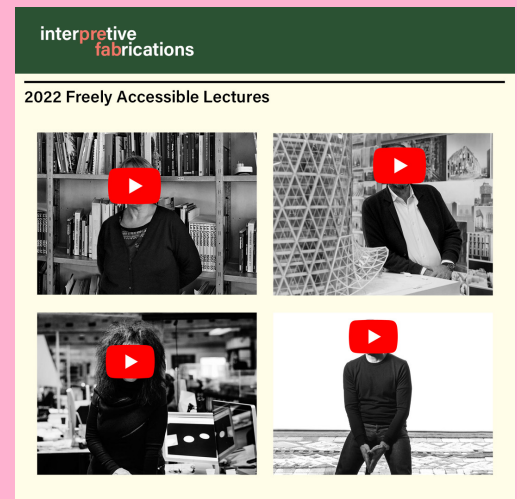
I built a comprehensive spreadsheet of tasks for the collective to organise the event remotely, allocating responsibilities such as sponsorship, venue finding, video sourcing, poster making, social media posts, and workshop design. We also gathered around a #prefab-contract to establish a discourse about our shared values, goals, and responsibilities for organising. It was important to the group that the conference be free, open to anyone, include a shared lunch, and have a closer connection to ideas in and about Aotearoa. Troublemaking discourse about *in:situ*, mostly shared through Instagram, generated hype around the event, and over 100 people registered. pre:fab was the first explicit expression of this research practice, dealing directly with a critique of how architects in Aotearoa gather. While The Night School posed alternative approaches through playful exploration, pre:fab directly addressed the problem, stating: this is how we think it should be done differently. Collaborative organising, a make-do approach, and a shared sense of dissatisfaction enabled the rapid construction of an event and the formation of a team ready to enact change in architecture in Aotearoa. pre:fab conference stood as a collaborative protest against exclusivity in architecture, aiming to model more inclusive, community-focused ways of sharing knowledge and fostering change within the profession.

### Description of Happening

pre:fab conference 2022 started with registrations, the signing of ethics forms, and Flight Coffee. This was the largest Night School event to date, utilising the entirety of the Brightside space and areas around the café. The main gathering space in Brightside was used for displaying the lectures, breakout spaces in the café dining areas hosted workshops, and another breakout space in an adjoining building was set up for lunch. Attendees



Figure 3.3: Leonard Hobbins, *pre:fab* conference introduction 2022, 2022, photograph. Courtesy of Leonard Hobbins.



Figures 3.4-3.5: pre:fab, *pre:fab* conference 2022 promotional material, 2022, graphics. Courtesy of pre:fab.

<sup>1</sup> You can see the pre:fab conference website (which was largely a direct copy of the *in:situ* website) here: “unpretentious confabulating,” The Night School, 2022, accessed December 06, 2024, <https://www.thenightschool-arch.com/prefab>.

brought contributions to a shared lunch, which were labelled for dietary requirements and laid out on several tables in the café seating area. The tables were stacked with supplies, including napkins, tea towels, tongs (borrowed from my parents’ house), card labels, name tags, and more.



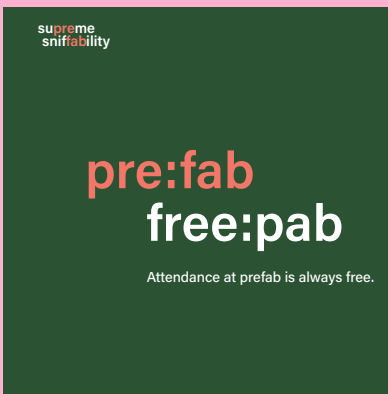
Figure 3.6: Tessa Forde, *pre:fab* conference attendees watch a lecture stream, 2022, photograph.

Once attendees had arrived and grabbed a coffee, we began the introductions for the day. This included a karakia, my pepeha, a brief introduction to The Night School, and a summary of the core ideas behind the conference and the newly formed *pre:fab*.

We screened the four lectures in the same order as *in:situ*, beginning with Lacaton and Vassal. Many of the 60 participants came specifically for this talk, inspired by their sincere and generative approach to architecture. Mario Cucinella was second. Interestingly, while the online lecture was essentially the same talk I had seen at *in:situ*, participants were less convinced by Cucinella than I had been, finding his work to reflect only surface-level engagement with sustainability—more of a sales pitch for what was otherwise a conventional international practice of that scale. I had found Cucinella

charming in person, which may highlight a disconnect between in-person and virtual delivery; the latter creates an additional level of distance from the speaker and leaves their ideas more open to scrutiny. By the time we reached Maltzan and Decq’s lectures, the critical atmosphere of the day—fostered through discussion, workshops, and the sharing of food—led attendees to particularly question the starchitect ideals of these two practices. For Maltzan, I chose a lecture focused on public work rather than private housing projects. For Decq, I opted for a much shorter lecture, which was wise given hers concluded the day. One attendee reflected on feeling liberated to critique these speakers, freed from the constraints of being in their company. While this detachment can be problematic, reducing the human behind the ideas to a concept, it can also be productive, enabling dynamic and revelatory discussion when channelled through the right tools and context.

Figures 3.7-3.8: *pre:fab, pre:fab* conference 2022 promotional material, 2022, graphics. Courtesy of *pre:fab*.



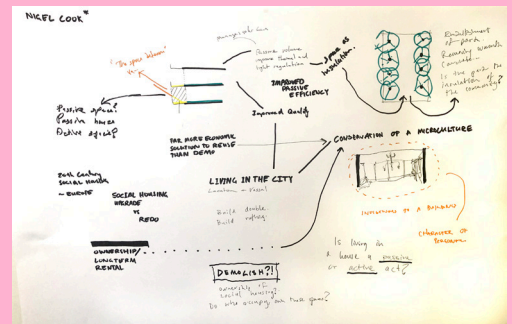
In this case, the tools and context were a series of workshops designed to facilitate dialogue, generate new ideas, and contextualise the knowledge within Tāmaki Makaurau. Following each lecture, attendees could choose between four workshops. The concept of workshoping lecture content aimed to engage the audience in actively applying new knowledge and ideas immediately after each talk. This is a core principle of *pre:fab*: that knowledge is activated through testing and realisation in a new task. The passive nature of most architectural gatherings (lectures, panel discussions) does not provide opportunities for reflection or contextualisation of knowledge among audience members. New connections and relationships are generated through shared collaborative tasks, and it is in these processes that new ways of being together and practising are discovered. These settings—convivial, experimental, and open—also suggest a shift in hierarchy, removing the ‘expert’ and leaving their ideas or ‘expertise’ to be explored, challenged, or celebrated collectively through an unexpected lens provided by the workshops. I prepared three workshop approaches, each with a different lens to examine the content of the talks, while Leonard Hobbins designed the fourth. The workshops, facilitated by *pre:fab* members, were described on posters for attendees to follow.

pre:fab	Early Bird	Late Registration
	Registration Fee Up to and including 19/07/22	Fee From 20/07/22
Architect Member	0	0
Graduate Member	0	0
Affiliated Member	0	0
Student Member	0	0
Non-member	0	0

These were the workshops:

**Ecology of Practice:** Facilitated by Vanessa Coxhead, this workshop asked attendees to form groups of 3–5 people and reflect collectively on the themes of the talk. They considered the ways of working that were discussed, ideas raised, and aesthetic similarities, arranging their reflections into an ecology of practice diagram. This exercise acknowledged that no theory or idea exists in isolation—they are relational to other practices, disciplines, concepts, the environment, and the more-than-human. It invited attendees to think about relationships between the speakers and broader systems and ideas.

This workshop was grounded in Isabelle Stengers’ theory that practices—modes of thinking and acting—are living entities that interact with, adapt, and change based on these interactions. This ‘ecology’ can include other ‘beings’—from humans, to ideas or concepts, to the more-than-human etc. An ‘ecology of practices’ represents the continuous emergence of new practices that stem from old ones and the continuous disappearances of other practices—for better or worse. Defining and visualising the ecology of practices allowed attendees to examine the “terrain” or the habitat in which they are operating, and therefore see the opportunities for new modes of practice, resistance, challenge and collaboration. The ecology of practices for Stengers is a “tool for thinking through what is happening” and that this tool has the capacity to shape the person using it (the attendee) and the shape and reveal affects of the thing it is interrogating (the ideas and knowledges and their relationships explored in the lectures).<sup>2</sup>



Above: Figure 3.9: Tessa Forde, *pre:fab conference attendees discover ecologies of practice*, 2022, photograph.

Figure 3.10: *pre:fab conference attendees, An ecologies of practice diagram*, 2022, drawing.

**\$tarchitects:** This workshop was designed and facilitated by *pre:fab* member Leonard Hobbins. In groups of three, attendees had three minutes to write down the key design methods, practices, and philosophies of the most recent speaker, answering questions such as: How do they approach design problems in their office? What tools and processes do they employ? What are the unifying ideas that guide their practice? After this, the group had three minutes to identify a problem or architectural project familiar to one of the group members. The scale of this project or problem had to be local, close to the group member, and related to their everyday life in some way, as opposed to a problem concerning city-wide or global systems failures, etc.

Whoever presented the problem became the CLIENT for that group. A coin would be flipped between the other two group members, and the winner would become the STARCHITECT. The loser of the coin flip would become the CAD MONKEY. Using the design methodologies and philosophies identified in part one and consulting with the CLIENT, the STARCHITECT had to come up with brilliant solutions to the design problem. As the STARCHITECT—whatever they said went; their design intellect was enormous; they were a napkin sketch god. However, they still had obligations to the CLIENT if they wanted to secure the sweetest paycheck. As the CLIENT, it was in their interest to ensure their problems were addressed in the design outcome, to explain the problems in detail to their STARCHITECT, and to remind them of logistical concerns like the budget, fire egress, and laws of physics. As the CAD MONKEY, their job was to deliver the project. They had no say in the design response to the brief; they simply had to use drawing tools to represent what the STARCHITECT described as closely as possible. They were not allowed to present their perspective.



Above: Figure 3.11: Tessa Forde, *pre:fab conference attendees adopt cliché architecture roles in \$tarchitects*, 2022, photograph.

<sup>2</sup> Isabelle Stengers, “Introductory notes on an ecology of practices,” *Cultural Studies Review* 11, no. 1 (2005): 185.

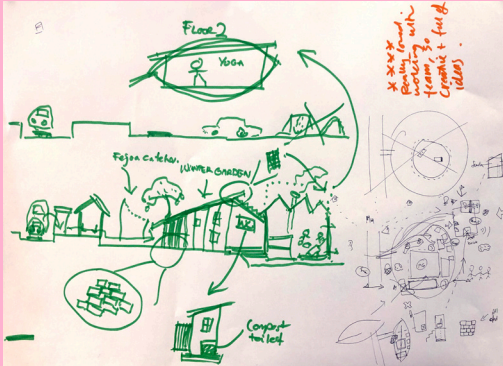


Figure 3.12: pre:fab conference attendees, A *Starchitects* design output, 2022, drawing.

After 10 minutes, the team (except for the CAD MONKEY, of course) presented their work to the rest of the group and reflected on their design approach, how it was represented in the drawings made by the CAD MONKEY, whether or not this was a fruitful working relationship, and whether the CLIENT would hire the STARCHITECT again for a similar project.

The general concept of this workshop was to hold a mirror to the premise of events like *in:situ* and how they proliferate ideas of individual exceptionalism and hierarchy within the architecture discipline. It challenged the assumed expertise of figures within this hierarchy and, through its absurdity, suggested that there might be other ways.

**Meme Me Up Scotty:** This workshop, facilitated by Binh Minh Ha, asked participants to take magazines and other collaging materials and use these to visually represent one or two key aspects of the talk that “interested, challenged, annoyed, or resonated” with them. This was to be accompanied by a key line or word that captured the same idea. The distillation of ideas into images has been taken to extremes in the past fifteen years as the internet has proliferated ‘memes’ like never before. For Metahaven, a research and design studio, memes “play a distinct role in protest,” and they can embody “shared ideas in a community” that have the potential to generate new forms of political organisation and collectivism.<sup>3</sup> This workshop sought to create a visual language for each speaker’s practice through the rapidly digestible format of memes, posters, or collages. Attendees were often sardonic in their approach, pulling out buzzwords and colour palettes and using the activity to generate discussion and critique.



Left: Figure 3.13: Tessa Forde, pre:fab conference attendees make collages, 2022, photograph.



Right: Figures 3.14-3.16: pre:fab conference attendees, Various Meme Me Up Scotty Collage Outputs, 2022, collage.

**Q&A:** Reflecting on the lacklustre Question and Answer sessions of the *in:situ* conference, this workshop, facilitated by Sam Aislabie, was designed to reimagine the Q&A: what they would want to ask each speaker, why, and to speculate on what their answers might be. However, the workshop was short-lived, as attendance in the first round was insufficient to justify running it further, and so it was disbanded for the day.

Another key gathering site at the pre:fab conference was the meals. This was something that *in:situ* and pre:fab held in common. A necessity, yes, in a full day’s programming, but also an act of generosity and manaakitanga. However, pre:fab, without revenue from ticket sales or major sponsors, decided to centre the day around a ‘potluck’ shared lunch, where each attendee was asked to bring a plate to contribute. We hoped this wouldn’t be a barrier to attendance for some people, so it was not mandatory by any means. Pre:fab provided bread sponsored by Florets Bakery and a large salad paid for by Groupwork. Lunch was a time to decompress,

<sup>3</sup> Metahaven, *Can jokes bring down governments?: Memes, design and politics* (Strekla Press, 2014), 20.

discuss ideas in an informal setting, and make connections with other attendees. It was also a setting to foreground reciprocity, where everyone contributed to something shared, organisers and attendees alike. The potluck has become a central conceptual pillar for pre:fab, as well as a regular occurrence.

Following the last lecture and workshop of the day, those left in attendance—a smaller group by then, just under 20 people—gathered around some tables to discuss the future of pre:fab and the future of architecture.

This included reflections on the events of the day, with attendees expressing their feelings about how it went, which overall were positive. They enjoyed the constructive discourse generated by the lectures (even the “bad ones”); they felt that meeting other people was an important part of the day, facilitated by the more intimate setting and workshops. They felt that the emphasis of the day was clearly on learning, as opposed to focusing on the work of the speakers. They thought the workshops were an effective tool for enabling people to “take a stance” and reflected on how having the content chosen by an external organisation (in this case the NZIA) afforded additional criticality, with everything open for critique without worry of offending pre:fab. One attendee, who had also attended *in:situ*, felt pre:fab’s conference was “just as professional” and shared how attending *in:situ* with their boss felt like an “initiation” into a very particular type of work culture, while pre:fab felt “drastically different,” providing the freedom to talk about ideas openly. While the group felt that international reflections are important, particularly in how architecture is practised in Aotearoa, they agreed these reflections need to be balanced and integrated with a local focus.



Above: Figure 3.17: Leonard Hobbins, *pre:fab conference attendees enjoy a shared pot luck lunch, 2022*, photograph. Courtesy of Leonard Hobbins.

There was consensus that events like this need to keep happening, and the group had a number of ideas about how the conference could move forward. We discussed how pre:fab could continue to coattail off *in:situ* or how it could start to alternate biannually, with each second year evolving into a conference format reflecting the values and vision of pre:fab as a collective. This could be spread over several events, better accommodating different schedule demands (from students to graduates to parents), and could involve a mix of in-person and online options, a mix of scales, types of practices, and theories, providing a space for those who don’t typically have a voice.

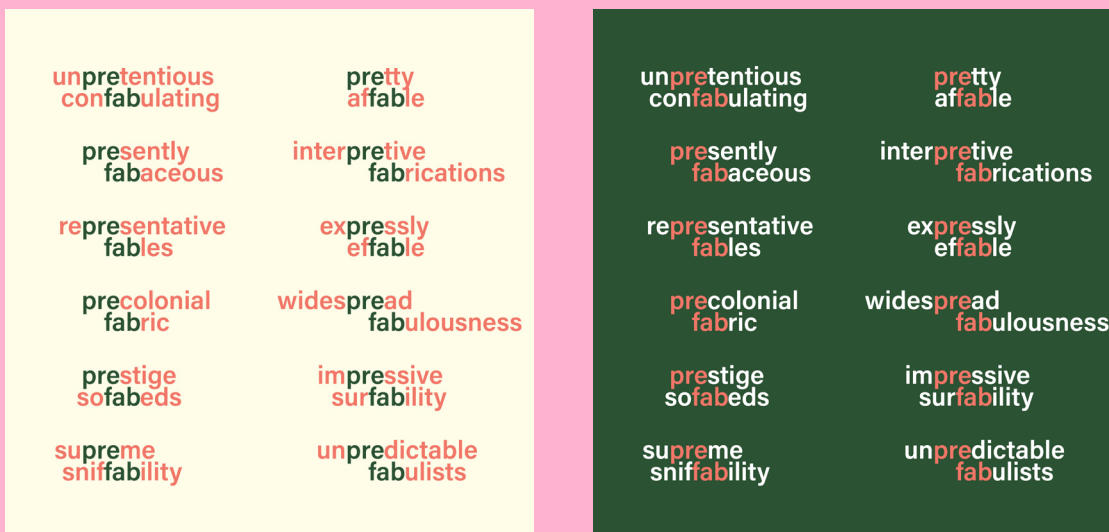
Fundamentally, they decided, events like these, and the institutions that organise them, are about people’s desire for an ongoing community. They reflected on how this is partly why the discipline finds it so difficult to accommodate critique—there is an unwillingness to upset this community. However, they also felt that this unwillingness to challenge or trouble the existing architecture community creates barriers to inclusion in that community, particularly for young people, students, and people of colour. This is exacerbated by a lack of connection between these groups and the institute—for example, attendees reflected on how there is little to no interaction between the NZIA and students on campus. They felt this was partly due to the hierarchical nature of the discipline, with clear distinctions made between the expertise and value of different people—from students to architectural graduates to registered architects. They reflected that the way forward was to start with smaller actions and to be persistent in them, noting that events like pre:fab and The Night School allow for opportunities to talk and imagine new possibilities.

The project of the pre:fab conference was, of course, a project of troubling the NZIA and providing alternative spaces for imagining architecture. However, it was also about building a group of people motivated in this space. From the organisation of the event, the collective of pre:fab was formed, and thus the conversations attendees were calling for could be continued. They had a number of ideas for how this could play out: emphasising ongoing experimentation;

embedding the pre:fab conference in the culture of the community, both within architecture and more broadly; creating a space that feels comfortable and safe, especially for younger architects; recognising the value of persistent protest; being open and transparent about information and flows of capital behind the scenes; and critically, providing a support network to share knowledge, ideas, and resources.

This last point was the most critical and, for the most part, encapsulated all the other priorities for pre:fab. It calls for a shift in emphasis from buildings, competitiveness in practice, and protectionism to research, convivial gatherings, and radical sharing. It also calls for a space where encounters across age and experience are possible without hierarchical dynamics. Attendees thought this should partly be achieved through publication: showcasing the work of recent graduates, publishing and sharing construction details, collating all the staple things needed to start a project, and making these shared and accessible (materials, software, financing strategies, etc.). This included sourcing and sharing information about how to apply for funding for meaningful community action in architecture. The goal of this space would be to infiltrate the commercial sector to create practices that operate more like schools—practices that experiment, emphasise learning, and maintain a “child-like mind” of play and openness.

The schedule had called for drinks at a nearby bar (although pre:fab largely avoids alcohol-centric gatherings). While it seems possible to drink and be merry after a full day of passive listening (as *in:situ* suggests), the social and mental demands of a day of intense thinking, sharing, collaborative making, and workshopping are less conducive to continuing well into the night. And so the day closed, those remaining helped pack down, and the seed of pre:fab was firmly planted.



Figures 3.18-3.19: pre:fab, *pre:fab conference 2022 promotional material wordplay*, 2022, graphics. Courtesy of pre:fab.

Metahaven. *Can Jokes Bring Down Governments?: Memes, Design and Politics*. Strekla Press, 2014.

Stengers, Isabelle. “Introductory Notes on an Ecology of Practices.” *Cultural Studies Review* 11, no. 1 (2005): 183-96.

“Unpretentious Confabulating.” *The Night School*, 2022, accessed December 06, 2024, <https://www.thenightschool-arch.com/prefab>.

Organisational Admin				Communications				Money / Food and Beverage		
Action item	Who?	Done?	Notes:	Action item	Who?	Done?	Notes:	Action item	Who?	Done?
Finalise Contract	TF/SG			Build website	TF	Y	Kaupapa section to be added on completion of contract.	Reach out to Almighty Soda	HB	Y
One sentence commitment to Te Tiriti	ALL			Create Eventbrite	TF	Y	Send to group for edit suggestions	Innocent packaging for cutlery/plates etc	HB	
Sign Contract	ALL			Create Humantix	TF	Y	For additional audience - Eventbrite is primary site	Contact OMG gardens for salad	HB	
Publish contract	TF/SG		By Friday 12/08	Post registration to IG	TF	Y		Contact coffee companies - Flight coffee, Kokako, Supreme as last case	HB	Y
Feed notes into minutes document	TF/			Poster	TF	Y	Send to group	Other Sponsorship possibilities		
				Disseminate Poster	ALL		As required/desired	Make/buy staple food for potluck	TF/SG	
				Consistent IG posting.	TNS/S UPA		Share registration link - repeat this across weeks. TNS IG to do bulk of content posting - others to share to stories and post if desired.	Tessa to apply for some funding from PhD fund	TF	
				Ask Matt Liggins to Share	SG					
				Posters posted physically	TF		TF to pin up at AUT. TF can print for free if anyone else would like to post in their respective spaces.	Things needed on the day: - Cutlery, Plates, Cups, servers, big bowls - Napkins - Way to serve tea and coffee - Basic healthy snacks - fruit etc		
				TNS Newsletter	TF		By 12/08	Boring Oat Milk	HB	
				Comms content to Drive	TF			Florets Sourdough bread	HB	
				Email Anne L	HB		Anne will ask NZIA to make her online talk available to all			
				Email Odile	TF					
				Email Mario	TF					
				Email Michael	TF					
				See if W+A will add it to their socials	VC					
				Email attendees before event	TF					
				Sponsorship Thank you Post	TF/HB					

Figures 3.20-3.21: pre:fab, pre:fab conference 2022 spreadsheet, 2022, graphic. Courtesy of pre:fab.



## Pre:Fab 2022 Contract

### 1. Foregrounding the Local

1.1 The organisers of this event recognise Te Tiriti o Waitangi and He Whakaputanga as the founding documents of Aotearoa and the organisation of this event will be enacted through the lens of partnership, participation and protection.

1.2 This event and its organisers, through the best of its and their ability, will focus on local issues, the local architects and architecture-related workers addressing them, and the local knowledge being generated in that process, here in Aotearoa.

- This is not to say that non-local ("international") knowledge does not have value, but that this knowledge has other platforms and should be contextualised and considered pragmatically in relationship to on-the-ground work and knowledge at a neighbourhood, town, city, community level in Aotearoa.
- The origin event of pre:fab in August 2022 is being put together in a short period of time in a responsive way - reacting to an alternative conference. This origin event therefore does explicitly platform international content, however the programme is designed for this content to be localised, contextualised and actively workshoped by attendees (the investigators). The origin event of pre:fab is a launching pad for the aspirations and clauses outline in this agreement.

### 2. Unpretentious Confabulating

2.1 This event will actively promote, encourage and practise open and accessible dialogue.

2.2 It will acknowledge the capacity of all people to hold and share knowledge and create a safe space for the sharing process to occur.

### 3. Being Seen Through

3.1 All financial information related to the conceptualisation and realisation of the event will be published publicly.

3.2 All relationships leveraged, labour contributed, and support provided in the conceptualisation and realisation of this event will be acknowledged publicly.

3.2 All labour and production practices will be examined against the power structures they exist within and imply.

3.4 The operational structure and logistics of the event organisation, including meeting minutes, active organiser list, and working strategies will be made available on request.

### 4. Collectivity

4.1 This event will encourage collective organising, structuring, thinking, presenting and sharing - recognising the strength and potential of collective knowledge making.

4.2 The power of coming together will not be underestimated. It is only through collective momentum that we will forge a path forward. Relationality is a key concept of this event and will be acknowledged as a critical outcome of any gathering.

4.3 This event will be open and adaptive to feedback and contribution from all those who engage with its organisation and realisation.

### 5. Action

**Commented [1]:** In the spirit of Unpretentious Confabulation, of Pre:Fab, of creative discovery, of radical discursivity, of transformative transparency - of the feeling i can feel here - perhaps this google.doc - with all its (ongoing) suggestions and comments - would make a great founding document?

**Commented [2]:** Something to think about (that i have been thinking about): Contract writing tends to foreground the things we are most anxious about. But the standard physics of creative writing still apply... there is often a lot to get out and get down before it happens, which has the effect of challenging our assumed values structures and rhetorical positions... (which is one of the reasons i think it is such a radical form, and so much more interesting, challenging, creative, and transformative than a manifesto)

**Commented [3]:** Grounded in the local? (whenua / land implied)

**Commented [4]:** grounding the local?

**Commented [5]:** Foregrounding the Local?

Literary effect concept of foregrounding is pretty relevant to this conversation, to prefab, to design and composition, change, to doing things differently, to Te Tiriti, etc

Literary def (from wikipedia cos its late, its good enough, and i cant write for myself anymore): mak( ... [1])

**Commented [6]:** Maybe this is actually its own he( ... [2])

**Commented [7]:** There also needs to a section or( ... [3])

**Commented [8]:** That's good - there are other way( ... [4])

**Commented [9]:** "This even and its organisers ( ... [5])

**Commented [10]:** I was wary of being tokenistic b( ... [6])

**Commented [11]:** I guess you're only tokenistic if( ... [7])

**Commented [12]:** Acknowledge that we will make( ... [8])

**Commented [13]:** i would like to know what "reco( ... [9])

**Commented [14]:** Acknowledge that this specific( ... [10])

**Commented [15]:** Make this first since it has the( ... [11])

**Commented [16]:** I think so. ( ... [12])

**Commented [17]:** As part of this, would it be wor( ... [13])

**Commented [18]:** Yes sounds good, I took some( ... [14])

**Commented [19]:** \_Marked as resolved\_

**Commented [20]:** \_Re-opened\_

**Commented [21]:** I would be cautious of dwelling( ... [15])

**Commented [22]:** specify where?

**Commented [23]:** why do we need to say this st( ... [16])

**Commented [24]:** Do we want to be fully open at( ... [17])

**Commented [25]:** Redact names on request and( ... [18])

**Commented [26]:** Transparency is its own mediu( ... [19])

August 2022

The pre:fab founding contract agreement that acts as a live, editable document that can trace the history of pre:fab's relationships, goals, conceptual positioning, and values. The document can be viewed (and commented on) here: <https://www.thenightschool-arch.com/prefab-kaupapa>

Figures 3.22-3.23: pre:fab, *pre:fab contract*, 2022, graphic. Courtesy of pre:fab.

5.1 This event will collectively build the kind of discipline we want to practise in through active embodiment of those ideals.

- a) This event should provide a space of healthy critique that avoids dwelling in present the failures, and looks for the spaces of opportunity.

5.2 This event should prioritise active participation that goes beyond the passive audience and 'discussion' using workshopping strategies to collaboratively produce tangible outcomes and responses to the content provided by the event.

**6. Messiness!**

6.1 This event accepts that democracy and organising can sometimes get messy and that's ok. All messiness will be resolved through open, caring and managed conversation, seeking mediation if necessary.

6.2 The organisers will recognise that commitment levels may fluctuate over time.

**7. Curating the Messiness**

7.1 Prefab acknowledges an open set of roles. This event defines four key roles and accompanying their responsibilities. While necessarily critical to the organisation and realisation of Prefab, their number and definition is always provisional; subject to change as and when required to both accommodate and reflect the evolution of Prefab: we expect the number to grow; roles are critical to its organn its organisation and realisation:

Commented [27]: Are there any others?

- a) Origin Organiser: a member of the group of organisers who collectively organised the first edition of prefab. Responsibilities include: developing the operating agreement and kaupapa of the event, finding a suitable venue and event supplies and equipment, designing the programme, publicising the event, creating imagery and other marketing tools, feedbacking into collective documents, attending organisational meetings. Origin organisers are expected to be available for consultation or to advise on future iterations of the event.

Commented [28]: This is us. Prefer this massively to 'founder.' (founder feels so patriarchal, colonial). The idea of prefab itself feels emergent too - rather than attributable to one, or several, people

- b) Active Organiser: a member of the group of organisers who are actively and collectively organising the event in the respective year. Responsibilities include: adhering to operating agreement and kaupapa of the event and updating it if required, finding a suitable venue and event supplies and equipment, designing the programme, publicising the event, creating imagery and other marketing tools, feedbacking into collective documents, attending organisational meetings.

- c) Initiator: Invited facilitator of a dialogue or workshop around a concept or practice. They will provide the content to initiate the discussion and activity. Responsibilities include: agreeing to abide by the operating agreement and kaupapa of this event, organising and producing the necessary presentation, tools and documentation to manage a dialogue around their topic or practice of choice.

Commented [29]: Open to suggestions on this term. Prefer it to facilitator. Some people providing content may not want to facilitate a workshop - so that role may be left to an active organiser

Commented [30]: Could be Contributors?

Commented [31]: yeah, i thought contributor as i read it. i think its better/more intuitive

- d) Investigator: An attendee of the event. Responsibilities include: being respectful of all other investigators at the event and their own capacities for knowledge and contribution.

Commented [32]: This is a reference to pedagogy of the oppressed / and I also like it better than 'participant' and 'attendee' as it is more active. Open to alternative though

7.2 Agreement on key issues must be made with a 70/30 consensus among the active organisers. These issues should be discussed intensively with the intention of achieving full consensus.

Commented [33]: i get it. but the following sentence makes it a little redundant. New nouns are just confusing if the dont come with new definitions.

7.3 The operating agreement can be amended at any time by unanimous agreement of all Active Organsiers.if all active organisers agree as other issues and urgencies become

Commented [34]: Yes or full consensus? I have experienced full consensus before, it is slow but very gratifying

## Defining, Demystifying, Disentangling Documentation

September 17, 2022

Maxine Goon, Simon Glaister, Tessa Forde (Workshop Designers and Facilitators)

Public Event Guests

Brightside AUT, Tāmaki Makaurau, Aotearoa

Explore how reimagining the Agreement for Architects Services contract might act as a starting point for reimagining the architecture discipline.

### Context

I met Maxine Goon at The Night School Feminist Potato Puppet workshop. She was beginning her thesis project, which focused on developing a school-within-a-school—one that would operate as a site of learning, sharing, making, and resistance within the context of the “neoliberal university”.<sup>1</sup> It was serendipitous that we would be undertaking our projects in the same year, aligned in many ways, and both motivated to support each other and collaborate through the work.

In July, we decided to pitch an event for Te Kāhui Whaihanga NZIA Tāmaki Makaurau + Te Tai Tokerau Architecture Week, scheduled for September 2022. This week of events and festivities was organised by the Auckland Branch of the NZIA and themed around “indigenous perspectives,” creating opportunities for public dialogue around critical design issues.<sup>2</sup> Goon and I submitted an abstract proposal to run a workshop that would interrogate the contractual agreement between architects and their clients—called the Agreement for Architects’ Services (AAS).

In the same September, Goon initiated her event platform, *Social Dreaming*, running weekly workshops at the University of Auckland architecture school. These workshops designed a series of activities that would scaffold over time. *Social Dreaming* was an exercise in making-do, collaboration, and play, particularly challenging the materiality of architectural learning. The space each week was set up with whatever could be found around the studios—display boards became low tables, old cardboard boxes and salvaged studio scraps made up the bulk of the usable supplies for each activity, and whatever was produced in the weeks prior was fair game for reuse or reimagining. The explicit strategy of scaffolded making and idea production meant that the matter of the workshops—their paraphernalia—had its own life and told its own stories. The workshops were performative, generative, and fun. Goon situated this part of her practice firmly within the educational setting, targeting students and occupying studio space to run these workshops. She/we hoped that with our collaboratively designed workshop for Architecture Week, we might target an alternative demographic of practicing architects, locating the “profession” of architecture as our site of interest. For this, we partnered with Groupwork colleague and pre:fab member Simon Glaister to further develop ideas he had around the potential of contracts as spaces of ritual experimentation.

The workshop aimed to “advocate for more performative, diverse, and subjective methodologies of working,” a principle outlined in Goon’s *Social Dreamers’* developing manifesto.<sup>3</sup> By positing the contract as a space for ritual experimentation, the workshop sought to transform a



Figure 3.24: Tessa Forde, DDDD attendees consult their induction agreements, 2022, photograph.



Figure 3.25: Tessa Forde, DDDD hosts introduce the workshop, 2022, photograph.

<sup>1</sup> Maxine Goon, “Social dreaming: a collaborative pedagogy” (Master of Architecture (Professional) University of Auckland, 2022), 160.

<sup>2</sup> “Architecture Week returns for 2022, with events in both Tāmaki Makaurau and Te Tai Tokerau,” *Architecture Now*, 2022, accessed June 28, 2024, <https://architecturenow.co.nz/articles/architecture-week-returns-for-2022/>.

<sup>3</sup> Goon, “Social dreaming: a collaborative pedagogy,” 155.

conventionally administrative tool into an “experimental, embodied spatialisation of the AAS contract,” imagining a more “critical, equitable, and inclusive architectural profession that also performs more in tune with the social and environmental needs of our society”.<sup>4</sup>

## Description of Happening



Figure 3.26: Tessa Forde, *DDDD attendees workshop the Agreement for Architects' Services*, 2022, photograph.

While in other parts of this research I lay out the ideas to be discussed in advance, to guide the reader through the writing, here I will write about this workshop as the participants experienced it. Thus, its conceptual underpinnings will be revealed as they were on the day, in response to a series of activities designed to support attendee comprehension.

Attendees entered the Brightside space and began the workshop by signing three contracts. Two of these were ethics consent forms that covered the research of myself and Goon. The third was a contract for the workshop, *The Decorative Art of Tomorrow Today—Induction Agreement*, which asked each attendee to agree “to not knowing and to approach knowing only through dialogue with self and other”, “suspend critical thinking, logic and reason where and whenever these faculties would seek to foreclose the creative reimagining of new and different structures of social relations and their attendant categories”, and to “leave irony at the door”, among other clauses designed to form

a ground of heightened possibility for the workshop.<sup>5</sup> Attendees also had to agree to wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for the duration of the workshop. Once they had signed these contracts, they were given their PPE, which consisted of a circle of hose pipe wrapped in caution tape attached to two caution tape straps to wear over their shoulders, and an MDF bulldog clipboard in case they were struck with a dangerous idea and needed to write it down. Attendees entered through the caution tape curtain into the main Brightside space.



Figure 3.27: Tessa Forde, *DDDD attendees crown their monarch*, 2022, photograph.

Goon’s work with Social Dreaming was interested in utilising the physical symbols of public construction sites, prolific in the streets of Tāmaki Makaurau, in novel ways. She describes road cones as “power-objects that dominate and discipline the way people move through cities”.<sup>6</sup> These symbols—typically used as barriers to construction sites, including large plastic cones, cone barrier dividers, and construction fencing—were used for work tables and later as display backdrops. We were no longer restricted from entering the construction site; we were in the construction site, subverting and laying claim to its aesthetic in the otherwise sterile setting of Brightside, thus shifting “the mundane and monotonous perceptions of construction sites to one of dramaturgy and joy”.<sup>7</sup>

Goon, Glaister and I began the workshop with a karakia and briefly introduced the premises of The Night School and Social Dreaming. We then invited the attendees to introduce themselves by sharing their names and one contractual relationship they were a part of (marriages, employer/employee, phone plans, data harvesting agreements, etc.). We then initiated the first activity, which asked the attendees to imagine themselves “as a group of loosely connected palaeolithic hunter-gatherers who have met for a seasonal jubilee”, and to nominate two people to play a

<sup>4</sup> Goon, “Social dreaming: a collaborative pedagogy,” 155.

<sup>5</sup> The Decorative Art of Tomorrow Today Induction Agreement. Simon Glaister with Social Dreaming and The Night School. #dddd-induction

<sup>6</sup> Goon, “Social dreaming: a collaborative pedagogy,” 160.

<sup>7</sup> Goon, “Social dreaming: a collaborative pedagogy,” 160.

game of paper, scissors, rock.<sup>8</sup> Whoever was standing closest to the left of the winner became the ruling monarch of the group. Rather than the winner becoming the monarch, we thought the arbitrary selection reflected the often luck-based nature of hierarchical relationships within any group. The group then had to perform a mini coronation for the new monarch, which in this case involved the handing over of a small leaved branch and some kind of action with a fresh banana peel, that the paper scissors rock winner was brandishing around. With their queen crowned, the group was asked to arrange themselves spatially “in a way that reflects the structure of a feudal society”.<sup>9</sup> The queen stood on a chair overlooking various serfs, farm workers, and one attendee who claimed to be an outcast nomad and stood alone facing the corner. We then asked attendees to arrange themselves spatially in a way that reflects the structure of a Commodity-Mediated, Market-Driven, Individual-Exceptionalist contemporary western Anglo-Saxon Neo-liberal Democracy. The arrangement was somewhat similar, but the group added a large cohort representing the media, reflecting that this structure depends on its proliferation through ideology and symbols.

This short exercise was designed to communicate our key idea that the contract is the present-day analogue of the historical space of ritual experimentation. The social games emulated the way ritual shapes societal structures and how thousands of years of ritual practices have also shaped our current social frameworks. In the context of a Commodity-Mediated, Market-Driven, Individual-Exceptionalist contemporary western Neo-liberal Democracy, we rarely acknowledge these histories. Contemporary anthropological research suggests that this type of interaction is how our current political frameworks were discovered—that it is only through repetition and habitual embodiment that they come to be seen as enduring forms of authority.<sup>10</sup>

We asked the question:

What contracts or contractual-type spaces already exist that we could play with/manipulate to change social relations? How can we change those relationships to achieve radically different outcomes?

For the sake of this workshop, we were interested in how the contract could be used to change social relationships in an unexpected way from within the dynamic between client and architect: a relationship already highly mediated through contracts, briefing documents, and drawing sets. Specifically, we pointed to the Agreement for Architecture Services (AAS) provided by Te Kāhui Whaihanga NZIA. In many ways, this contract constitutes the core function of the Institute. Many practices rely on this contract as the baseline for all their client relationships. From within an NZIA-organised week, we would explore and reimagine the foundation—The Ground—of the architecture profession.

We broke the AAS down into six key sections: Site, Scope of Services, Labour, Rights and Responsibilities, Excluded Parties, and Design. We asked attendees to break into small groups to consider how each of these parts could be written, working from a space of critical and relational reimagining. They then had to form an exquisite corpse contract, with one person from each section represented in a group, to create one large, revised contract. These groups then shared their approaches and performed a shared contract back to the group.

The performance of the contract, as opposed to its reading, adds an additional level of social



Figure 3.28: Tessa Forde, *DDDD attendees perform the architecture process*, 2022, photograph.



Figure 3.29: Tessa Forde, *DDDD attendees perform a contract agreement*, 2022, photograph.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted from the workshop text and slideshow.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted from the workshop text and slideshow.

<sup>10</sup> These ideas are largely based on the book *The Dawn of Everything* by Graeber and Wengrow and are discussed in more detail in ‘Chapter Two: Disciplinary Gathering’, under ‘Contracts’. David Graeber and David Wengrow, *The dawn of everything: a new history of humanity* (Penguin UK, 2021).



Figure 3.30: Tessa Forde, *DDDD attendees enjoy smoko, 2022, photograph.*

After this exercise, and to “comply with the Employment Relations Amendment Act 2018 Section 69ZD: Employees’ entitlement to, and employer’s duty to provide, rest breaks and meal breaks”, we took a minimum 10-minute smoko.<sup>12</sup> A ‘smoko’ is a colloquial term often used on construction sites to describe a short break in the workday where a cigarette might be smoked, a mince pie might be eaten, and some shit might be talked. In the spirit of smoko, we served cans of Monster energy drink and sausage rolls (alongside sparkling water and mandarins—we know where we really stand in the structure of a Commodity-Mediated, Market-Driven, Individual-Exceptionalist contemporary western Neo-liberal Democracy).



Figure 3.31: Tessa Forde, *DDDD attendees engage in schismogenesis, 2022, photograph.*

The next task was for each individual to write a contract between themselves and any real or imagined party. These were diverse, from one attendee writing a contract between themselves and their dog, to one with their calendar diary, and one attendee who posed a contract between themselves and one of the cones. Once they had devised their contract, they had to go around the room and pitch their contract to others in a round of ‘schismogenesis’. Attendees paired up, shared contracts, and decided whether to combine contracts and comprise a new contract together or rewrite their contracts excluding the other person’s ideas. If attendees decided to pair up, they opened their hosepipe suits (joined via hose connectors at the front) and joined to form a larger looped enclosure. During subsequent rounds of schismogenesis, clusters of contracts were combined or rejected, creating larger, virus-like collectives of people aligned to a collaborative contract, or stubborn (or rejected) individuals existing outside of it. While most attendees decided to group up, the attendee with the contract written for his dog was consistently rejected, meaning he remained alone. The participant who wrote a contract with the road cone remained solely connected (contractually and physically) to it, pushing the ends of his hose suit into the top hole of the cone.

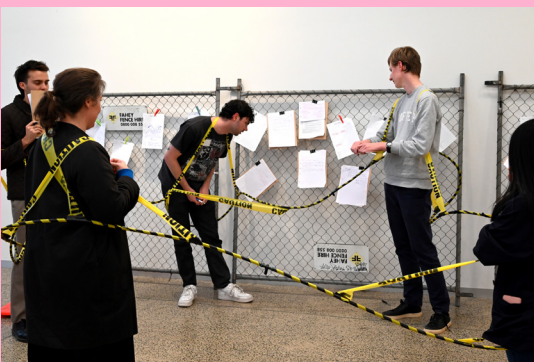


Figure 3.32: Tessa Forde, *DDDD attendees present their shared contract agreements, 2022, photograph.*

Where the hosepipe PPE had initially been a way to demarcate personal space and emphasise individual boundaries, the schismogenesis process called for the physical and conceptual breaking down of the individual into a new relational mode. Collectives of mutual agreements created amorphous blobs of yellow and black, navigating the room in packs, opening and closing to let new ideas in and out. The term schismogenesis, introduced by anthropologist Gregory Bateson in the 1930s, refers to observations of how certain social interactions can compound, leading to increasing differentiation and conflict.<sup>13</sup> The word itself is derived from ancient Greek, meaning ‘the creation of division’. The contract acts as a mitigating force for this kind of

<sup>11</sup> Hélène Frichot, *Dirty theory: troubling architecture* (Germany: Spurbuchverlag, 2019).

<sup>12</sup> Quoted from the workshop text and slideshow.

<sup>13</sup> Gregory Bateson, *Naven: a survey of the problems suggested by a composite picture of the culture of a New Guinea tribe drawn from three points of view*, vol. 21 (Stanford University Press, 1958).

division, fixing social relationships and interactions and outlining consequences for conflict or disagreement. However, fundamental power dynamics exist in all contracts, so their subversion and reimagining are required for them to become tools for new relationality and ways of being together. In this workshop, schismogenesis created compounding interactions to foster connection—implying that this could be a role for contracts as experimental ritual spaces—and recorded and clarified boundaries around compounding divisions..

The final activity of the workshop was for each schismogenesis bubble to draft a final mutual agreement and clip these to the construction fences, now leaning against the wall. Each individual then had the choice to sign their own contract or sign that of another cluster. The attendee who joined in union with the cone also signed the agreement on behalf of the cone.

The key learnings from the workshop emerge from the collaborative relationship between the facilitators. It captured the performativity and aesthetic of material appropriation from Goon's practice, the theoretical positioning of Glaister's, and the organisational structures of The Night School's. The space of collaboration was generative and allowed for novel approaches to knowledge sharing and collective exploration. Without Goon's aesthetic, we wouldn't have had the PPE and construction site 'set'; without Glaister's ideas about contracts, we wouldn't have explored ritual practices and the origins of social relations; and without the skills garnered from running other workshops through TNS, we wouldn't have had a cohesive workshop plan encouraging the kind of free play and performativity that we witnessed. This workshop was also the first that I worked on designed to respond specifically to a professional question, posing a critique to the profession while organised through that same professional body and promoted by it. The advantage of producing work in this event space, which exists outside of commercial practice and the academy, is that the extremes of the question can be explored, and the learnings, skills built, and connections fostered can be applied back into the spaces from which the question emerged.

The event itself only attracted a few practising architects, so many attendees had never seen the AAS before. This means their first exposure came from this place of critical challenge. Ideally, this means that when they enter practice, they are more likely to question these kinds of foundations—the ground—of the profession, particularly this contract, which we argued has become invisible in its ubiquity, despite managing almost all social, economic, and political relations in architecture. This is a key role I see for the architect going forward: to reveal the power structures underpinning our discipline and the built environment more broadly, through research, active subversion of invisible systems, and shared conversations about them in these spaces in-between.

"Architecture Week Returns for 2022, with Events in Both Tāmaki Makaurau and Te Tai Tokerau." *Architecture Now*, 2022, accessed June 28, 2024, <https://architecturenow.co.nz/articles/architecture-week-returns-for-2022/>.

Bateson, Gregory. *Naven: A Survey of the Problems Suggested by a Composite Picture of the Culture of a New Guinea Tribe Drawn from Three Points of View*. Vol. 21: Stanford University Press, 1958.

Frichot, Hélène. *Dirty Theory: Troubling Architecture*. Germany: Spurbuchverlag, 2019.

Goon, Maxine. "Social Dreaming: A Collaborative Pedagogy." Master of Architecture (Professional), University of Auckland, 2022.

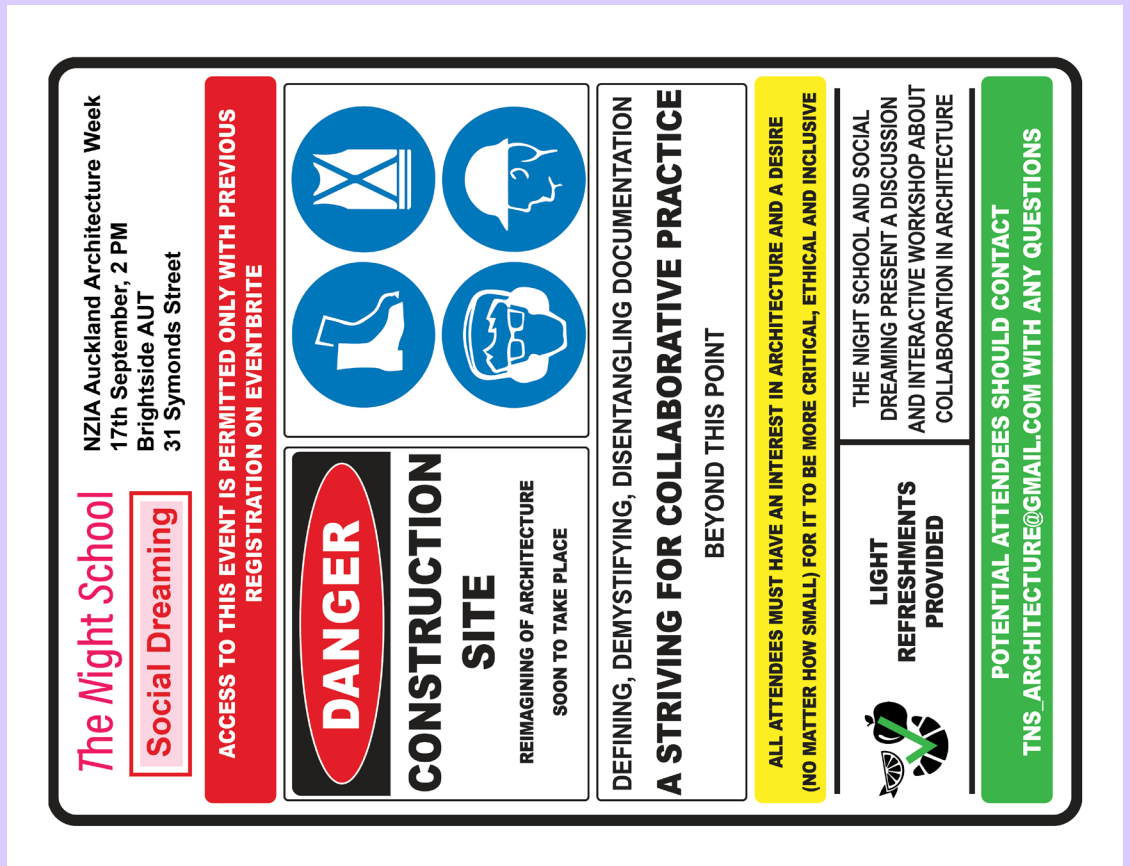
Graeber, David, and David Wengrow. *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity*. Penguin UK, 2021.



Figure 3.33: Tessa Forde, *DDDD attendee unites in a contract agreement with a road cone*, 2022, photograph.



Figure 3.34: Tessa Forde, *DDDD attendees present their contracts for collecting signing*, 2022, photograph.



Figures 3.35-3.36: The Night School and Social Dreaming, DDDD Event Poster, 2022, graphic.

A SECRET POLICE

## Defining, Demystifying, Disentangling Documentation: A Striving for Collaborative Practice

## The Decorative Art of Tomorrow Today Induction Agreement

### Part 1. Access

#### 1.1 Rights

*This agreement is speech act*<sup>1</sup> through which the signatory is admitted to the workshop, thereby attaining the rank and title of 'TDAoTT Journeyperson' for their present and future use without limitation

#### 1.2 Responsibilities

By signing this agreement the Journeyperson accepts the role and responsibilities of TDAoTT Journeyperson outlined herein

#### 1.3 Risks

By signing this agreement the Journeyperson acknowledges the dangers associated with prolonged periods of Paranoid Contractual Activity<sup>2</sup>, including but not limited to: physical and psychological discomfort; inexplicable feelings of depression, joy, self-loathing and euphoria; confusion; disgust; utopian delusions; existential nihilism; meaninglessness; the God complex; the inability to sustain social conventions; schizophrenia; psychosis

### Part 2. Health and Safety

#### 2.1 Physical wellbeing

The Journeyperson agrees to wear the provided PPE at all times unless otherwise instructed by a Host<sup>3</sup>

#### 2.2 Mental Health

The Journeyperson agrees not to know, and to approach knowing only through dialogue with self and other<sup>4</sup>

#### 2.3 Aesthetic quality

The Journeyperson agrees to leave irony at the door - to be as earnest, as radical and as unlikely as possible, while also resisting the grotesque or needlessly absurd<sup>5</sup>

#### 2.4 Social security

The Journeyperson agrees to engage themselves, other Journeypersons and Hosts in the spirit of creative collaboration, directing their attention and energies towards that which could not have been revealed otherwise<sup>6</sup>

#### 2.5 Afterlife

The Journeyperson agrees to believe in the infinite vitality of catastrophic change - that the best of all possible worlds exists and is attainable<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Speech act theory, Austin (1962), and functions of Language, Jakobson (1960)

<sup>2</sup> Koolhaas (1976) Paranoid Critical Method in *Salvador Dali, The Paranoid Critical Method, Le Corbusier, New York*. Lecture. London, AA

<sup>3</sup> In Accordance with The Health and Safety at Work (General Risk and Workplace Management) Regulations 2016

<sup>4</sup> Socrates/Anaximander: non-attachment to received knowledge, individual and collective certainty

<sup>5</sup> Plato Academy: "Let None Who Are Ignorant of Geometry Enter" - Practical tools as a defense against nihilism etc.

<sup>6</sup> Extreme hospitality - creating space for the Strange Stranger

<sup>7</sup> Pascal's Wager - A belief in God reasoned but a cost benefit analysis of contrasting outcomes across infinite time ie finite loss (error, material goods etc) vs an eternity in Hell

October 2022

The Night School, Social Dreaming, and Simon Glaister host a workshop to reimagine the standard contract for architectural services. Attendees were expected to sign this induction agreement.

Figures 3.37-3.38: TNS, Social Dreaming and Simon Glaister, *DDDD Induction Agreement*, 2022, graphic.

<p><b>Part 3. Performance</b></p> <p>3.1 Limitation on Received Knowledge The Journeyperson agrees to disregard all cultural norms, social conventions and historical narratives including Time in as much as it is understood as linear and/or synonymous with progress, evolution, telos etc.</p> <p>3.2 Reason Without Reason The Journeyperson agrees to suspend critical thinking, logic and reason where and whenever these faculties would seek to foreclose the creative reimagining of new and different structures of social relations and their attendant categories</p> <p>3.3 Suspension of Disbelief<sup>8</sup> The Journeyperson understands this workshop is a <b>Reality Producing Fiction</b> in which their participation necessarily entails some deconstruction of the distinction between the so called real and fictional</p>
<p><b>Part 4. Future Commitments</b></p> <p>4.1 Contract as practice - The Journeyperson agrees to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Use and further develop the tools gained in in this workshop in the interrogation, design, negotiation, execution, and enforcement of future contracts with self and others</li> <li>b. The private and public deployment of contracts as a form of social experimentation. That is, to partake in the daily work of invention, accumulation, culling, execution, accounting and enforcement of hubristic rituals of contractual obligation in search of utopia</li> <li>c. The stretching, testing and refitting of intra and interpersonal relationships with real and imagined human and nonhuman others through the sacred space of the contract<sup>9</sup></li> <li>d. Design, inhabit, grow and cherish complex and contrarian ecologies of productive discomfort produced by contractual arrangements for the reciprocal invigoration and stimulation of a constant flux between all parties and the cosmos<sup>10</sup></li> </ul> <p>4.2 Escalation In doing so the Journeyperson will attain the rank and title of 'TDAoTT Jr. Associate' for their future use without limitation</p>

Name:

Signature:

Date

<sup>8</sup> Aristotle: Analysis of theater as collective fiction > collective fiction as means of catharsis and political experimentation

<sup>9</sup> Madeline Gins and Shusaku Arakawa (1987) *Reversible Destiny*.

<sup>10</sup> Russian Biocosmism (circa 1857-1968).

## Modelling Tāmaki: Neural Networking/pre:fab Relaunch

December 15, 2022

Simon Glaister, Leonard Hobbins, Tessa Forde (Event Organisers and Facilitators)

60 odd friends, family, and public event guests

Old Folks Association, Tāmaki Makaurau, Aotearoa

Exhibit a model of Tāmaki Makaurau using the bodies and creations of five emerging architects to create a spatial arrangement of the city. Use generative AI to support the creation of visions for the city by our friends and family.



Figure 3.39: Tessa Forde, *Subjective Perspective Map of Tāmaki Makaurau*, 2022, photograph.

### Context

At the end of 2022, Groupwork hosted our first Christmas party. We saw this as an opportunity to celebrate the year with family, friends, and clients while contributing something to the cultural production of architecture. We also saw it as an opportunity to host the Christmas party as a collaboration with pre:fab, to ‘re-launch’ the platform as a site for experimentation and collective gathering.

The office Christmas party is an annual ritual that is usually exclusive to employees and, depending on the wealth of the company, can range from a nice lunch at a local restaurant to a yacht trip or other excursion. Groupwork sees an opportunity to push the boundaries of this ritual and practice our values: to make it more generative, to open it not just to our network, collaborators, and mentors but to the wider discipline and the public. It is both an act of generosity and a moment of collectivism, realising the vast network of connections within which any practice is located. It is a way to co-opt a ritual—which in many ways has been co-opted by capitalism, in the process of “the conversion of practices and rituals into merely aesthetic objects”<sup>1</sup>—back for different ends. In this spirit, in our communications about the Christmas party, ~~xmas~~ or ~~christmas~~ is regularly crossed out, implying the actualisation of something unexpected.

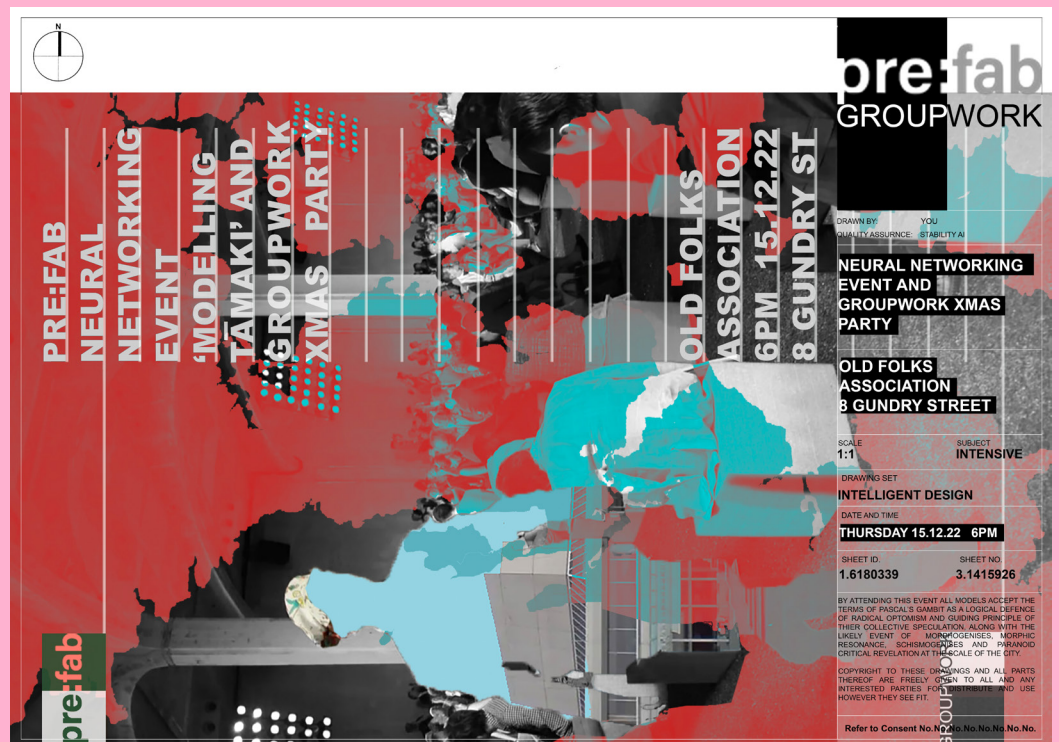


Figure 3.40: Groupwork, *Event invite*, 2022, collage. Courtesy of Groupwork.

<sup>1</sup> Fisher Mark, *Capitalist realism: is there no alternative?*, (Zero Books, 2009), 11.

## Description of Happening

For the Neural Networking Event: ‘Modeling: Tāmaki’, hosted by pre:fab and the Groupwork Christmas party!, Groupwork commissioned a collection of architectural workers to turn themselves into models of Tāmaki Makaurau—public spaces in the city of their choice—because “architecture is ubiquitous, public, accessible, and part of the fabric of our daily lives”.<sup>2</sup>

We hosted the event in the Old Folks Association on Karangahape Road, a cheap venue with a long history and a rough-and-ready aesthetic. The models were spatially arranged in the room based on their real-life locations, from Freyburg Place to the Avondale Markets to the Southern Motorway, creating a large map in which guests could also geolocate themselves. By attending, each person became part of this simulated city “because we are always already all models of Tāmaki Makaurau”.<sup>3</sup>

Alongside this spatial intervention, we also launched a ‘Subjective Perspective Generator’: a generative AI tool that invited guests to submit visions for Tāmaki Makaurau, iterate on them, and print them as polaroids to be added to a large map of the city. We were interested in how this tool makes the design process more accessible, particularly in its capacity for iteration, whereby an output—imagined or unexpected—can be discovered through a series of revised prompts, refined and redefined by the user. Our interest in generative AI lies in its potential “to transform the capabilities of the creative classes from a rare commodity to public infrastructure”.<sup>4</sup>

After the event, Bill McKay, on his regular segment *Urban Issues* on Radio New Zealand, referred to the party, describing how we operate through “a kind of semi-subversive engagement, through guerilla tactics, street theatre”, which is “also fun and engaging and most likely to get noticed”.<sup>5</sup> He compared us to two other events in the same week about “engaging the public in the built environment a bit more”, and suggested that other “lobby groups using more traditional strategies could learn something from [us]”.<sup>6</sup> Groupwork and pre:fab certainly hope to continue working with these other modes of collective gathering around architectural ideas and exploring how they generate connectivity across people, place, and disciplines.



Figure 3.41: Leonard Hobbins, *Subjective Perspectives*, 2022, photograph. Courtesy of Leonard Hobbins.

Mark, Fisher. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*. Zero Books, 2009.

“Pre:Fab Relaunch Party.” pre:fab, 2023, accessed September 29, 2024, <https://www.pre-fab.xyz/catalogue#:~:text=pre%3Afab%20Re%2Dlaunch%20Party>.

“Urbanism and Better Initiatives in Public Engagement: Interview with Kathryn Ryan.” Nine to Noon, RadioNZ, 2022, accessed July 15, 2024, <https://www.mz.co.nz/national/programmes/ninetoon/audio/2018871801/urbanism-and-better-initiatives-in-public-engagement>.

<sup>2</sup> “pre:fab relaunch party,” pre:fab, 2023, accessed September 29, 2024, <https://www.pre-fab.xyz/catalogue#:~:text=pre%3Afab%20Re%2Dlaunch%20Party>.

<sup>3</sup> pre:fab, “pre:fab relaunch party.”

<sup>4</sup> pre:fab, “pre:fab relaunch party.”

<sup>5</sup> “Urbanism and better initiatives in public engagement: interview with Kathryn Ryan,” Nine to Noon, RadioNZ, 2022, accessed July 15, 2024, <https://www.mz.co.nz/national/programmes/ninetoon/audio/2018871801/urbanism-and-better-initiatives-in-public-engagement>.

<sup>6</sup> “Urbanism and better initiatives in public engagement: interview with Kathryn Ryan.”

## pre:fab: pre:fab for president!

January-March, 2023

pre:fab  
Public event guests

Various locations in Tāmaki Makaurau, Aotearoa

Initiate a campaign for the presidency of Te Kāhui Whaihanga in order to platform pre:fab's ideas about the future of architecture in Aotearoa, and reveal some of the intricacies of the rituals and processes related to the institute.

### Context

After the #prefab-conference in 2022, we were looking for further opportunities to engage in architectural discourse and dialogue with Te Kāhui Whaihanga. Inspired by similar movements overseas, pre:fab's campaign and nomination for president occurred against a backdrop of shifting tides in institutional representation in other nation-states. In June 2022, Kimberly Dowdell was elected Vice President/2024 President-Elect of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) and has since been elected President. Dowdell is the first Black woman to hold this position and hopes to help the profession envision new possibilities and for architects to "share a profound sense of responsibility for the stewardship of our natural resources".<sup>1</sup> Likewise, in a dogged campaign led by the Future Architects Front (FAF) and culminating in The Just Transition Lobby, Muiyiwa Oki was elected president-elect of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) in August 2022.<sup>2</sup> This campaign was not without its hurdles. Oki is the first Black president, the youngest ever president at age 31, and the first worker to assume the role. This campaign was not without its hurdles. Alleging "bad timing", RIBA announced a rule change to restrict presidential voting to members who had registered a minimum of 10 days before the official notice of the election, just as a tidal wave of new, younger members joined RIBA to vote for Oki.<sup>3</sup> FAF described this move as "an outrageous lack of transparency".<sup>4</sup> In spite of this, Oki prevailed. His calls for "a fundamental shift", promising advocacy for students, workers, and faster innovation and change, clearly struck a chord with RIBA membership—even those registered before the cutoff.<sup>5</sup>

pre:fab's campaign for president, however, was not particularly exhaustive because, despite being a descendant of the RIBA,<sup>6</sup> the process for deciding the Te Kāhui Whaihanga presidency is markedly different. In Aotearoa, architectural leadership is gatekept by a nominations committee—a small group of Te Kāhui Whaihanga board members who have the final say on the president.<sup>7</sup> There is no campaigning, no voting, no democracy.



Figure 3.42: Leonard Hobbins, *Pyramid Building Workshop*, 2023, photograph. Courtesy of Leonard Hobbins.

<sup>1</sup> "Building history: Kimberly Dowdell is AIA's 100th president. First black woman to lead architecture organisation plans to 'do more'," *culture type*, 2024, accessed May 05, 2024, <https://www.culturetype.com/2024/01/14/building-history-kimberly-dowdell-is-aias-100th-president-first-black-woman-to-lead-architecture-organization-plans-to-do-more/>.

<sup>2</sup> Simeon Shtebunaev et al., "Reclaiming an architectural royal institution: mapping the Just Transition Lobby's RIBA presidential take-over," *City* 28, no. 3-4 (2024/07/03 2024), <https://doi.org/10.1080/13604813.2024.2336340>, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13604813.2024.2336340>.

<sup>3</sup> "RIBA presidential election: rule change blocks new members from voting," *Architects Journal*, 2022, accessed May 07, 2024, <https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/riba-presidential-election-rule-change-blocks-new-members-from-voting>.

<sup>4</sup> Ing, "RIBA presidential election: rule change blocks new members from voting."

<sup>5</sup> "'All architects need to be agents of change': Muiyiwa Oki takes office as RIBA's youngest and first-ever Black President," *Architect*, 2023, accessed June 03, 2024, <https://architect.com/news/article/150364284/all-architects-need-to-be-agents-of-change-muiyiwa-oki-takes-office-as-riba-s-youngest-and-first-ever-black-president>.

<sup>6</sup> More about the history of Te Kāhui Whaihanga is discussed in 'Chapter Two: Disciplinary Gathering'.

<sup>7</sup> This is a relatively new system, previously, the current president would nominate the next president elect, and so on.

The requirements for submitting a presidential nomination are as follows:

- The applicant must be an architect, academic, retired, or graduate member of Te Kāhui Whaihanga.
- The application must be seconded by six Te Kāhui Whaihanga members (architect, academic, retired, or graduate members); or the current president.
- Optional submission of a statement of relevant biographical information not exceeding 250 words.
- Compulsory submission of a questionnaire quantifying their self-assessed experience and knowledge, from 1 to 5, in governance and confidence in undertaking the responsibilities of the president.<sup>8</sup>



Figure 3.43: Groupwork, 'Advert' for presidency campaign event, 2022, collage. Courtesy of Groupwork.

## Description of Happening

pre:fab announced its campaign on Instagram on the 24th of January 2023 and hosted a subsequent *Pyramid Building Workshop* to contribute to a collaboratively developed positioning statement.<sup>9</sup> In this workshop, pre:fab members gathered with the interested public to speculate on the future of Te Kāhui Whaihanga and, more broadly, to imagine the form of interactions between individuals, collectives, and institutions over time. Strategies of Bentoism and multi-level marketing schemes were deployed in conceptual exercises exploring ritual, belonging, and futuring, and a series of campaign materials expressing our collective findings were produced, including slogans and sticker designs. Tasks such as producing a Bento Diagram for the current and projected future self, a larger Bento for the Institute presented as a sales pitch to the group, and imagining Te Kāhui Whaihanga as a pyramid scheme (which proved not particularly challenging) generated concepts and slogans that fed into the campaign proposal. A transition during the workshop—from corporate buzzwords and financial modelling to a more creative and convivial space of ritual experimentation played out through the #john-ritual—made room

<sup>8</sup> The expected areas of experience and knowledge include: leadership and strategy; cultural competency and awareness; financial performance; risk and assurance; technology/IT and governance; board experience; commercial experience; communications, media and/or advocacy; knowledge and experience with institute programmes; industry knowledge and relationships; and personal attributes of: integrity (ethics); influencer and negotiator; critical and innovative thinker; leader.

<sup>9</sup> "pre:fab is running for president of the NZIA!," pre:fab.platform, 2023, accessed September 04, 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CnyHhOAP5LU/>.

for a broader discussion about pre:fab's aspirations for its own organisational future and that of the Institute, which are largely interchangeable. pre:fab is an open question about the affect, character, and purpose of institutions now, and what form these disciplinary gathering spaces could take in the future. All the slogans and stickers drawn during the workshop were later combined and made into pre:fab's pizza logo, the central motif of this campaign. The pizza is presented as a symbol of collective ingredients, an anything-goes food, and is representative of the transformation of the site of architectural gathering from Italian neoclassicism to overtime pizzas in corporate offices.

Following the workshop, pre:fab worked across a collection of shared documents to complete the nomination form and submit a comprehensive CV that captured their collective experience.

In February 2023, pre:fab submitted their nomination for president of the Te Kāhui Whaihangā New Zealand Institute of Architects, the final act of their (not particularly exhaustive) campaign. The intent of this process was manifold:

- It was a mechanism for pre:fab to come together around a shared vision for the future of shared spaces, architecture, architects, architectural institutions, and public engagement in Aotearoa;
- To present an earnest vision of change to the Institute from a demographically only co-optedly represented on their Board,<sup>10</sup> with the full intention of delivering it should our nomination prove successful;
- And to discover and reveal procedural and structural realities behind the largest institution representing architecture in Aotearoa.

pre:fab's campaign was not successful on the basis of rules implying that the president can only be elected as an individual. However, we were invited to attend an in-person #board-meeting with the Te Kāhui Whaihangā.

pre:fab is not alone in calling for a change in the conceptual positioning of large institutions. The aforementioned presidential campaigns of overseas institutions were accompanied by expressions of long-held frustration with those organisations. RIBA was criticised for its London-centricism, poor spending choices, and the way it is falling back into "defensiveness and bureaucracy" rather than "asserting architecture's relevance in tackling today's environmental, social, and cultural crises".<sup>11</sup> These were calls, like pre:fab's, for these large institutions, with their resources and immense networks, to operate as activist organisations for the things that matter, for now and for the future. The real value of the presidential campaign process was The Ground it made for pre:fab members and others to gather around future visions of architecture, and then

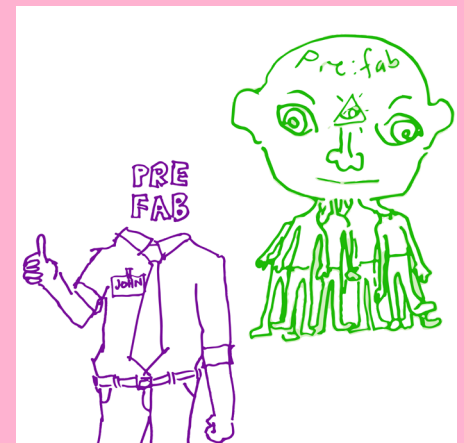
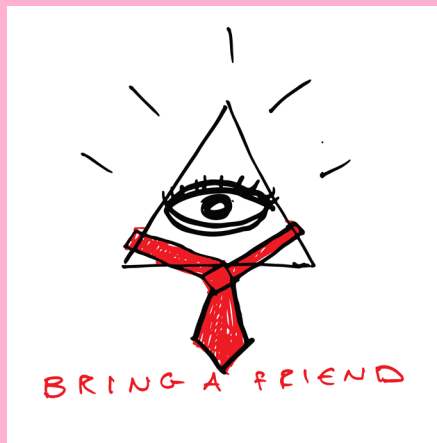
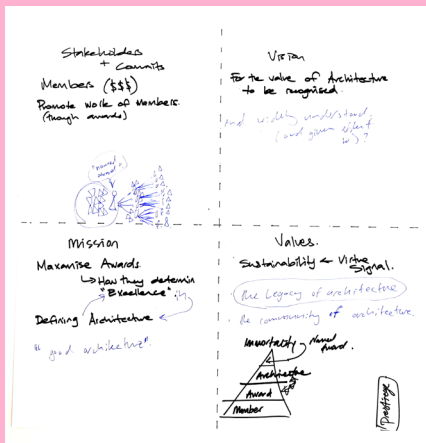


Figure 3.44: pre:fab, pre:fab pizza logo produced from stickers made during the Pyramid Building Workshop, 2023, logo. Courtesy of pre:fab.

<sup>10</sup> The only "graduate" member of the current board is co-optedly represented from Emerge, the institute's team that focuses on the needs of graduate members (those members who graduated less than 8 years prior). "Our structure," Te Kāhui Whaihangā New Zealand Institute of Architecture, accessed October 16, 2024, <https://www.nzia.co.nz/about-us/who-we-are/our-structure/>. Graduate members make up more than 25% of the institute's membership. "Become a graduate member," Te Kāhui Whaihangā New Zealand Institute of Architecture, accessed October 16, 2024, <https://www.nzia.co.nz/join-the-nzia/types-of-individual-membership/graduate-membership/>.

<sup>11</sup> "The UK's RIBA must become an "activist organization," Architectural Record, 2022, accessed May 07, 2024, <https://www.architecturalrecord.com/articles/15729-the-uks-riba-must-become-an-activist-organization>.

to synthesise those visions into a tangible proposal. It re-focused pre:fab on a particular goal and gave us something to organise around and work towards. It acted as a further opportunity for developing deeper connections within the group, to learn more about institutional processes, and to better understand each other and our shared and differing motivations for architecture.



Figures 3.45-3.47: pre:fab, bents and workshop outputs, 2023, drawings. Courtesy of pre:fab.

- “Riba Presidential Election: Rule Change Blocks New Members from Voting.” *Architects Journal*, 2022, accessed May 07, 2024, <https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/riba-presidential-election-rule-change-blocks-new-members-from-voting>.
- “The UK’s Riba Must Become an “Activist Organization”.” *Architectural Record*, 2022, accessed May 07, 2024, <https://www.architecturalrecord.com/articles/15729-the-uks-riba-must-become-an-activist-organization>.
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## pre:fab for President; TKW Nomination Form Supporting Information

### Section 1: 250 Word Biographical Statement

Pre:fab was first contractually assembled in August 2022 by the organising members of a pirate architecture conference, a series of free lectures and workshops organised collaboratively in response to a perceived lack of access to disciplinary discourse. The Pre:fab organisation was then officially launched in December 2022 as an interdisciplinary network of alternative practices and practitioners working within the field of 'future environments'.

Pre:fab has three key aims that would inform the focus of their term as President: To promote, build and support alternative practice, and through this help to create a sustainable and enduring culture of alternative practice in Aotearoa New Zealand; To broaden the scope, volume, and diversity of architectural discourse, and through this improve the quality, relevance, and agency of our collective speculation, i.e. the field; And to make architectural and para-architectural knowledge, skills, professional development and licensing more accessible.

Pre:fab is the obvious choice for President of Te Kāhui Whaihanga (TKW), having over 90 years of experience in the expanded field of architecture practice, past and current involvement with over 30 architecture organisations locally and abroad, more than 15 degrees from institutions of higher learning, as well as the ability to operate in many times and places at once. Pre:fab has intimate knowledge about vast swathes of architecture's past, operates across fleeting and innumerable moments of practice and dialogue in the present, and lays out a collective vision for future belonging.

### Section 1: The Future Vision for Pre:Fab - Three Core Strategic Goals

#### TOOLS:

- Establish a network of expanded resource sharing (CAD details, financing support, grant information, material and space resourcing, salary data etc.), content generation, publication and research. This will have a particular focus on alternative business and development models, and regenerative design thinking.

#### SCHOOL:

- Run a CPD programme for Continued Personal Development.
- Establish a mentorship network to support a self-directed education programme for architectural practitioners backed by the NZRAB CPD Framework.
- Establish a mentorship programme to support future designers in self-led education towards Licence Building Practitionership (LBP).
- Combine the above objectives into a complete alternative education and licensing pathway into the architectural service industry.

#### POOL:

- Establish and maintain a noticeboard of community, collective action, and public good projects in need of architectural design services.
- Establish a network of practices and practitioners interested in contributing to this type of project.
- Develop the above objectives into a redistributive system for funnelling architectural expertise and profits from commercial practice into community-based work in which participating practices bid for projects and fees subsidised by the network.

### Section 2: Vision for the TKW, Intended areas of Focus.

For a livable and prosperous future we will need to radically reimagine our society and the systems and structures that sustain it. This vision for TKW is defined by an emerging generation of practitioners who will live through the consequences of inaction, whose current and future families deserve a just future. In this vein, institutions must radically reimagine how they operate, the work they do, and the commitment of themselves and their members to building a better world together.

TKW has made some great initial steps towards this - in particular with Te Kawanata o Rata, proposing a new sustainability budget of \$150,000 for 2023, the initiation of the Diversity Agenda, adding a practice award and most recently awarding this to A+WNZ, and incorporating increasing numbers of CPD events related to these issues. But this action is not urgent enough, is not political enough, and still largely defines architecture within a paradigm of delivering buildings for capital - buildings whose ultimate purpose is to increase the wealth of property owners, construction companies, and manufacturers. Architecture has become a service industry to the supply chain. Recent weather events only stress the need for better built environment advocacy and outcomes.

We propose that TKW be radically restructured into a series of overlapping task forces, each committed to redefining the purpose, scope, and responsibilities of architectural practice in Aotearoa. Similar changes to equivalent international institutes (RIBA members nominating Muiyiwa Oki as their president, significant changes to the AACA competencies that will greatly impact the teaching and practicing of architecture in Aotearoa etc) point to the relevancy of this kind of reimagining. TKW can represent an exciting, progressive, future-thinking organisation. The presidency role would be managed by the pre:fab collective through a heterarchical structure with decisions made and the workload shared amongst the collective.

February 2023

pre:fab's application for president of Te Kāhui Whaihanga NZIA in 2023 including strategic goals, vision, a reimagining of the structure of the institute, a comprehensive CV representing our more than 90 years of experience, and the required self-assessment form.

Figures 3.48-3.55: pre:fab, *pre:fab for president application*, 2023, document. Courtesy of pre:fab.

## pre:fab for President; TKW Nomination Form Supporting Information

### Section 2: Vision for TKW, Intended areas of Focus. (Cont.)

Our proposed task forces are:

#### Kaitiakitanga

- Advocate, support, and enable the discipline to adopt an earth-centric attitude to practice, promoting an ideal of practices that contribute to reversing climate change, and honour biodiversity, mauri, and the more-than-human.

#### Kaupapa Māori

- Holding the institute and its membership to account to the values of Te Kawanata o Rata and Te Tiriti, particularly through the provision of structures enabling members to build and share the ways in which they are honouring the agreement in a supportive and generative environment.
- Establish additional funding for Ngā Aho directed initiatives and programmes and strengthen the role of the Ngā Aho representative within the Board to manage this independent budget.
- Ensuring the task forces are developed within and operate through an indigenised lens.

#### Accessibility

- Work with the RAB to develop alternative pathways towards registration for Māori and Pacifica, and for other types of architectural workers - including part-time workers, academics, historians etc.
- Establish mentor networks, connect with primary and secondary school providers to create spatial literacy programmes, work with tertiary students more directly in their vision for the future of the profession. Establish a 'pathways to practice' initiative to better connect students to the profession.
- Strengthen support networks for LGBTQI+ practitioners.
- Implement pre:fab SCHOOL.

#### New Models

- Support architectural workers including part-time workers and their rights within practice including promoting a culture of salary transparency.
- Develop tools, resources, and support for emerging business, Māori and Pacifica lead business, and alternative practice and business models.
- Research, develop and promote alternative development models and lobby for regulatory and policy changes required to best enable them.
- Implement pre:fab POOL.

#### Mahi Kotahitanga:

- Advocate for the importance of architectural expertise in local and national government, including the reestablishment of the Government Architecture Office, a Ministry of Green Works, and alternative procurement methods from govt agencies to support meaningful procurement of Māori and Pacifica practitioners in tendering for and winning civic projects.
- Examine the structure and functions of TKW and propose strategies to make the institute more open and democratic such as an open membership database and demographics, voting and term limits for key representative roles, and publishing of board, council, and executive meeting minutes.
- Report on the different and changing values, concerns, and aspirations of the field through in-depth surveying of existing and emerging practitioners, academics, teachers, and students.
- Continue to guide, support and protect professional practice through the provision of administrative materials including contracts, ethical frameworks, business management recommendations. Work through these resources to ensure they are aligned to the core vision of the restructured TKW and the objectives of the task forces.

#### Agency

- Use publishing and social media platforms to highlight a broader spectrum of architectural thinking, away from architecture as object (particularly houses) and towards architecture as a social good.
- Promote and support local community action groups, including hosting tailored workshops or events to develop relevant skills.
- Set up an architecture and future environments equivalent to the Science Media Centre to lobby for and improve the quality of journalism and reporting within this space.
- Implement pre:fab TOOL.

#### Expanded Field

- Transform In:situ into a think tank that creatively and actively explores the future of architecture in Aotearoa.
- Support innovative practitioners and programmes actively reimagining how we engage with and think about architecture, and/or redeploying architectural knowledge in new and different ways/contexts.

## pre:fab for President; TKW Nomination Form Supporting Information

### Section 3: CV

#### pre:fab (they/them):

pre:fab collective is made up of the following members:

John (she/her), John (he/him), John (he/him), John (he/him),  
John (he/him), John (she/her) John (he/him), John (she/they), John (she/her).

To read more about pre:fab's kaupapa, please refer to our [operating agreement](#).

#### Licensure

Registered Architect (2021-); Licensed Building Practitioner Level 1 (2017-)

#### Education

BAS<sup>8</sup>, MArch(Prof)<sup>8</sup>, BAD, BFA, BSc, BE, ME, NDAT, New Zealand Certificate in Te Reo Level 4

In progress: BAS, PhD

#### Educational Institutional Affiliations

University of Auckland<sup>5</sup>; Victoria University of Wellington<sup>2</sup>; Unitec Institute of Technology<sup>2</sup>; Auckland University of Technology<sup>2</sup>; Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology University, Ahmedabad<sup>2</sup>; Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology; Rose School Università di Pavia; University of Canterbury; Te Wānanga o Aotearoa; Wintec; VIA University, Denmark

#### Volunteer Organisation and Memberships

Architecture & Civil Engineering Association Treasurer (2018); Architecture + Women NZ Networks Leader (2020-2022); Co-chair and Trustee of Te Pūtahi (2022-); Executive Team Member at SANNZ (2021-); Member of SUPA (2020-); Member of The Architecture Lobby and Academia Working Group (2020-, 2023-)<sup>2</sup>; Member of The Conversation Club, Melbourne (2014-2018); Member of The Flog Working Group, Melbourne (2014-2018); NZIA Auckland Branch Committee Member (2018-2019); NZIA Wellington Branch Committee Member (2013-2017); Victoria University Student Rep for SANNZ (2013-2017)

#### Awards

FIANZ Community Scholarship Recipient (2021); Finalist in the Student Design Awards (2015); Hays NAWIC Excellence Award (2016); Highly Commended in the Student Design Awards (2015)<sup>2</sup>; Highly Commended Warren Trust Prize for Architectural Writing (2020); Hunter Douglas Archiprix Award (2017); RIBA Presidents Medal Commendation (2016); Runner up City Art Rooms Emerging Artist Award (2008) Shortlisted in the AAA Visionary Architecture Awards (2016); UoA Graduate Scholar (2016); Vernon Brown Memorial Award (2014); Wallace Awards Finalist (2008/9); Winner AAA Visionary Architecture Awards - Open conceptual (2018); Winner of the Student Design Awards (2016); Winner of the Warren Trust Prize for Architectural Writing (2015); CNZ Grant Recipient (2008)

#### Work Experience

Architect & Architectural Graduate at Studio Pacific Architecture (2016-2022); Architectural Designer at Pattersons (2019-); Architectural Designer at BOS Architects (2013-2017); Architectural Designer at Sangath; Architectural Drafter at GHDWoodhead creativespaces (2021-); Architectural Graduate at Crosson Architects (2018-2020); Architectural Graduate at James Fenton Architect (2020-2021); Architectural Graduate at Milieu: Architecture + Design (2020); Architectural Graduate at Moller Architects (2021-); Architectural Graduate at Sills van Boheman Architects (2022-); Architectural Graduate at Watgunlow Architects (2021-2022); Architectural Job Captain at Adamson Associates (2019-2020); Co-Organiser of The Architecture Beyond Capitalism School (2022-); Co-Organiser of The Free School of Architecture (2018); Construction Engineer Hawkins Construction (2011-2012); Director of Groupwork (2022-)<sup>3</sup>; Exhibition - The Restaurant At The End of The Universe World, New Zealand Pavillion Venice (2016)<sup>2</sup>; Exhibition Contributor - Scaffolding at Centre for Architecture, NYC (2017)<sup>2</sup>; Exhibition Contributor - Making Ways (2019)<sup>2</sup>; Fabrication Technician at NZ Aerosports (2017-2018); Founder of Hatch Workshop (2016-)<sup>2</sup>; Founder of Klay store (2013-); Founder of Leonard Hobbins Design (2014-); Founder of Loose Threads (2022-); Founder of The Night School (2022-); Freelance Expert (2020-); Freelance Graphic Designer (2009-2015); Gallery Manager at Bartley + Company Art (2012-2017); Geotechnical Engineer KGA Geotechnical Ltd (2012-2013); Head of Publications Committee at Auckland Girls Grammar (2018-2019); Installation technician TAPE Melbourne (2011); Installation technician Venice Biennale (2009, 2016); Junior Architect at LOC Architects (2017-2019); Junior Architect at Salt Mine Design Build (2018-2019); Lecturer at AUT (2021-)<sup>2</sup>; Library Assistant at VUW (2013-2015); Lifeguard (2013-2014); Parametric Design Tutor RMIT (2014); Planetarium Presenter at Carter Observatory (2011-2013); Planning Department Intern at Hastings District Council (2015-2016); Principal Urban Design at Auckland Council (2022-); Production Manager Auckland Council Festival of the Arts (2011); Programme Coordinator/Acting Director at The Physics Room (2004-2011); Research Assistant at Industrial Research, Photonics Group (2010-2012); Researcher Assistant and Technician at OML (2017-2018); Research Assistant VUW (2013-2016, 2016)<sup>2</sup>; Set Designer Avatar 2 & 3 (2019-2020); Studio assistant to Judy Miller (2010-); Swim Coach Northcote Swimming Club (2011-2015); Tailoring Assistant at payneTailors (2020-2021); Tutor at Unitec (2014-2015); Tutor at UoA (2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2023)<sup>4</sup>; Tutor at VUW (2014-2021, 2015-, 2020)<sup>3</sup>; Writer at ArchDaily (2017)

**Te Kāhui  
Whaihanga  
New Zealand  
Institute of  
Architects**



**NOMINATION FOR PRESIDENT ELECT**

**The President Elect will serve a one-year term and then be appointed as the President for a two-year term.**

I, pre:fab Collective (represented by eligible members)  
(full name of architect, academic, retired or graduate member)

nominate pre:fab Collective (represented by eligible members)  
(full name of architect, academic or graduate member nominee)

for the position of **President Elect**

**The nomination for President Elect must be supported by the President OR six Architect, Academic, Retired or Graduate members and agreed by the nominee.**

**PRESIDENT:** (full name of architect, academic or graduate member)

---

**OR/**

**Seconder (1):** (full name of architect, academic, retired or graduate member)

Caroline Robertson

**Seconder (2):** (full name of architect, academic, retired or graduate member)

Kyle De Mello

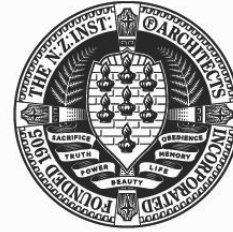
**Seconder (3):** (full name of architect, academic, retired or graduate member)

Vanessa Coxhead

**Seconder (4):** (full name of architect, academic, retired or graduate member)

Nick Denton

Te Kāhui  
Whaihanga  
New Zealand  
Institute of  
Architects



**Secondor (5):** (full name of architect, academic, retired or graduate member)

Isaac Sweetapple

**Secondor (6):** (full name of architect, academic, retired or graduate member)

Dominic Glamuzina

**Signature of Nominee:** (full name of architect, academic or graduate member)

pre:fab collective

Digitally signed by pre:fab collective  
Date: 2023.03.17 15:03:01 +13'00'

**NOMINEES MUST INCLUDE:**

Nominations may be accompanied by a statement of relevant biographical information not exceeding 250 words.

– biographical statement is completed and attached

**Skills and Experience**

The skills and attributes required of the President can be broadly categorised as follows:

- governance skills (that is, skills directly relevant to performing the Board's key functions)
- industry skills (that is, skills relevant to the industry or sector in which the Institute predominantly operates)
- personal attributes or qualities that are generally considered desirable to be an effective President and Chair of the Board.

**Rating**

5 Exceptional – exceptional experience and/or advanced knowledge

4 Very good – very good experience and/or knowledge

3 Good – good experience and/or knowledge

2 Emerging – limited experience and/or knowledge

1 Novice good – very limited experience and/or knowledge

## Te Kāhui Whaihanga New Zealand Institute of Architects



Using the above rating scale, please rate your level of experience and knowledge in the following areas:

### Governance

#### **Leadership and Strategy**

*Ability to think strategically and identify and critically assess strategic opportunities and threats and develop effective strategies for the Institute.*

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>

#### **Cultural competency and awareness**

*Knowledge and experience Te Tiriti o Waitangi, Te Ao Māori, and Te Reo Māori. This would also include knowledge and understanding of the Institute and Ngā Aho, partnership agreement, Te Kawenta o Rata.*

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

#### **Financial performance**

*Experience in accounting and/or finance and the ability to:*

- analyse key financial statements
- critically assess financial viability and performance
- contribute to strategic financial planning
- oversee budgets and the efficient use of resources

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

#### **Risk and assurance**

*Ability to identify key risks in a wide range of areas including the profession, construction industry, legal and regulatory compliance, and monitor risk and compliance management frameworks and systems.*

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

#### **Technology/IT and governance**

*Knowledge and experience in the strategic use and governance of information management and technology.*

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>

**Te Kāhui  
Whaihanga  
New Zealand  
Institute of  
Architects**



**Board experience**

*Current and/or prior Board experience, including Chair roles.*

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Commercial experience**

*A broad range of commercial business experience.*

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>

**Communications, Media and/or Advocacy**

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>

**Industry & Relationships**

**Knowledge and Experience with Institute programmes**

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>

**Industry knowledge and relationships**

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Personal attributes**

**Integrity (ethics)**

*A commitment to:*

- understanding and fulfilling the duties and responsibilities of President and Board Chair
- putting the Institute's interests before any personal interests
- being transparent and declaring any activities or conduct that might be a potential conflict
- maintaining Board confidentiality

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>

**Influencer and negotiator**

*The ability to negotiate outcomes and influence others to agree with those outcomes, including an ability to gain broad stakeholder support for the Board's decisions*

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Te Kāhui Whaihanga New Zealand Institute of Architects



### Critical and innovative thinker

The ability to critically analyse complex and detailed information, readily understand key issues, and develop innovative approaches and solutions to problems.

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>

### Leader

Leadership skills including the ability to:

- appropriately represent the Institute
- set appropriate Board and Institute culture
- make and take responsibility for decisions and actions

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>

Please include any other relevant information in the box below:

This application is unorthodox in that it suggests that a collective would assume the role of the Te Kāhui Whaihanga Presidency. The presidency role would be managed by the pre:fab collective through a heterarchical structure with decisions made and the workload shared amongst the collective. Our membership representatives are John , John , John , John (student member, graduate membership pending) and John (student member).

Please EMAIL to:

Ali Ruggles, Member Coordinator at [aruggles@nzia.co.nz](mailto:aruggles@nzia.co.nz) and Teena Hale Pennington at [thalepennington@nzia.co.nz](mailto:thalepennington@nzia.co.nz) NO LATER THAN 10 February 2023.

On **Wednesday 31.05.2023 at 10:25 AM** *pre:fab* members met with Te Kāhui Whaihanga Board members at their annual in-person meeting in advance of the institute's AGM later that day. *pre:fab* was invited to develop ideas already shared with the board in their presidential nomination application and advise the institute on how it can remain relevant to both the profession and all those who call Aotearoa home. All current and incoming board members were in attendance including the incumbent President Elect Huia Reriti and CEO Teena Hale Pennington.

**Mihi** [0.5min] [John]

E ngā mana,  
E ngā reo,  
E ngā karangatanga maha,  
Ko tēnei taku mihi ki ngā mana whenua o ngā rohe nei  
Ka mihi hoki au ki ngā tohu o ngā rohe nei  
Nō reira Tēnā koutou, Tēnā koutou, Tēnā koutou katoa.

[0.5] **Thankyou > pre:fab Self Introduction** [1min] [John]

We welcome this opportunity to discuss the future of Te Kāhui Whaihanga. We are excited to explore new and different ways for this institution to continue its mission to support, develop and advocate for the profession, practice and presence of Architecture in Aotearoa with the President, Board and Chief Executive.

We come with great respect and optimism for the potential of this institution and the profession it represents. Thankyou for the radical generosity you have shown by inviting us here today.

*pre:fab* began in 2022 as a free alternative to the in:situ conference held by Te Kāhui Whaihanga that year. Its mission was to highlight perceived inequities in access to both the professional community and expert discourse, and to connect global content with local issues. *pre:fab* has since grown into a multi-modal platform for architectural advocacy, collective intelligence and knowledge sharing, alternative practice, discourse and publication.

*We are pre:fab.*

[1.5] **Acknowledgements > Thanks > Endorsement** [1min] [John]

We want to take this opportunity to thank everyone who nominated us, and all those who contributed to our campaign and encouraged us to participate in the Presidential nomination process for Te Kāhui Whaihanga.

We are proud of our campaign for the presidency, and its optimistic contribution to the evolution of Te Kāhui Whaihanga and what this institute means, not only to its members, but to Aotearoa. In the spirit of this aspiration, *pre:fab* hereby rescinds its presidential

May 2023

*pre:fab* presents their vision of the future of architecture and its institutions to the board of Te Kāhui Whaihanga, New Zealand Institute of Architects.

Figures 3.56-3.61: *pre:fab*, *pre:fab presents to the board script*, 2023, document. Courtesy of *pre:fab*.

<p>campaign for the incoming term, and formally endorses Huia Reriti for President of Te Kāhui Whaihanga.</p> <p>We hope that our presence and presentation here today demonstrates the optimism and sincerity of this endorsement, and our aspiration to assist the current and future president, board, and executive of Te Kāhui Whaihanga as they move to reshape this institution for the benefit of all in Aotearoa.</p>	
<p><b>[2] Ritual Johns</b> [0.5min + badges + intros(&lt;10)]   [John]</p>	
<p>We now invite you to join us in a ritual we have developed for pre:fab gatherings.</p> <p>Please share these name badges amongst the group. <b>[Simon to hand out John name badges]</b></p> <p>This ritual has been instrumental in helping us build the pre:fab community and vision, and for this reason we believe it will be equally constructive here. We hope that by the end of this meeting you will see why and agree. <b>[pre:fab put on badges]</b></p> <p>If you have not already put on your name badge please do so now.</p> <p>The meeting will begin with a round of introductions. Please introduce yourself with your name and a brief reflection about pre:fab's nomination application. <b>[pre:fab members to begin]  </b></p>	
<p><b>[12.5] Description of presentation</b> [1min] [John]</p>	
<p>Tēnā tātou e ngā John.</p> <p>Thank you for those reflections, and for joining us in this conversation.</p> <p>That we are here today reflects your thoughtful consideration of our nomination application. We now want to learn as much as possible from your collective insight and experience.</p> <p>To open this kōrero, we will now give a brief presentation. The straightforward purpose of this presentation is to help us reaffirm why we are all here, and to provide fertile ground for what we hope is the beginning of an enduring conversation.</p> <p>We will do this through introducing a series of couplets for consideration. On one side an earnest reflection of how we believe Te Kāhui Whaihanga is often perceived and/or perceives itself, and on the other, a non-oppositional reframing of that concept; a dramatic shift in perspective that opens up new and different futures for this institution.</p> <p>We also acknowledge that many board members may already share these or similar aspirations for Te Kāhui Whaihanga, and are already working towards their realisation.</p>	
<p><b>[13.5] Conceptual Couplets</b> [4&lt;min&lt;5]</p>	
<p><b>Authority</b> [John] [timed at 1.5min]</p>	<p><b>Guide/Companion</b></p>

It is natural that a professional institute might come to see itself as an authority: of what constitutes legitimate knowledge within that profession; who can use it: and how it is deployed. However, this self-image is often accompanied by a set of unintended qualities that colour how it is perceived and perceives the world; Over time authorities tend to become centralised, hierarchical, controlling, didactic, and inflexible.

Alternatively, the image of a “Guide” or “Companion” immediately brings to mind qualities like movement, growth, collaboration, intimacy and adaptation that resist authoritarian tendencies, while still invoking a unique responsibility to the people and spaces they serve.

At their worst, authorities can be competitive, histrionic, monopolistic, moralising, and contemptuous. In contrast, guides try to be encouraging, generous, accessible, questioning, and wise.

These ideas reimagine Te Kāhui Whaihanga as a guide for all those who call Aotearoa home, whose role is to catalyse and develop architectural knowledge and spatial agency where and whenever it is needed. And to support professionals and non professionals alike on their journey to better understand and contribute to our present and future environment.

*[An example of this could be supporting earth building education in school and university curricula; direct and enduring engagement with local and national government through formal advisory and engagement roles; or increased transparency in, and self knowledge of, institutional practice and the professional community.]*

<b>Promotion</b> [John]	<b>Cultivation</b>
-------------------------	--------------------

“Promotion” is also a natural role for a professional institution to take on. But its frequent use in Te Kāhui Whaihanga materials calls attention to other qualities that are often bundled up inside it, like scarcity, prestige, individualism, and reification, along with acquisitional and transactional attitudes.

In a constantly evolving space like architecture these qualities can become accidental proxies for measurement, and finally undeclared aspects of the goal. Pursued for their own sake these qualities lead to narcissism, extraction, and dishonesty.

However, “Promotion” at its best is just one small aspect of “Cultivation” in the context of *culture* defined as shared values, common knowledge and collective resources.

Cultivation makes the best objectives of promotion explicit—like care, partnership, education, tenderness, growth and nurture—and extends its ambition to include community, collective development and shared prosperity.

*[This could be fostering communities of alternative and expanded field practices, and educating client communities about the skills and value they can bring to public life; or structured and strategic support of journalism and public debate in the future environment—something similar to the Media Science Centre]*

<b>Protectionism</b> [John]	<b>Advocacy</b>
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[1.5min] Te Kāhui Whaihanga’s recent response to MBIE’s proposed review of architectural licensing highlights a more challenging aspect of its role as bastion of the profession.

Protectionism is the natural first response to a perceived threat, but it is rarely the best one—especially when that response is broadly unanimous and reactionary. More creative and courageous leadership is required.

That the profession of architecture persists without an obvious monopoly over its expertise, or easy agreement over its purpose, is a miracle and a wonder; Architecture is, and will always be a question. Recourse to fixed criteria can only lead to irrelevance as others find new ways to meet changing circumstances.

Protectionism tends to be defensive, nostalgic, fearful, brittle, intransigent, myopic, self-serving, undermining, and violent.

“Advocacy” refocuses our attention on *purpose* without defining it. On advocating for the self through advocating for others. On seeking out ways that architectural knowledge and agency can be useful and accessible to all, thereby increasing its reach and value.

Where “Protectionism” is obsessed with boundaries, “advocacy” has a strong centre and a weak periphery. “Advocacy” is curious, empathetic, centred, futuristic, liberatory, courageous, purposeful, supportive, and validating.

*[Advocacy means taking courageous, progressive and futuristic positions in support of local, national and global issues related to architecture and the future environment, even when and especially if this challenges modes of thinking and behaving in the profession.]*

<b>Exceptionalism</b> [John]	<b>Value</b>
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“Architectural exceptionalism” sees architecture and its supporting practices as essential, unique, superior and entitled.

Over the past 30 years, this conceit has reduced architecture to a commodity and isolated it from its own expanded field, ironically reducing its social, political and economic value.

By allowing ourselves to be seduced by exceptionalism we miss out on seeing—and benefiting from—the underlying reality that architecture is a part of the rhizomatic ecology of diverse actors that comprise this planet and all that inhabit it. From communities, to landscapes, to complex ecological systems, to the intangible realms of history, spirit and culture, we can become a far more relational and relevant discipline, working ‘for and with’, rather than conceptually ‘apart and above’.

Architectural thinking is not special, but it does have value. Architecture as value is welcoming, relational, meaningful, and ecological.

*[Architecture as value means understanding and communicating when and how architectural knowledge is useful and how it needs to adapt to be so. It means refocusing our attention away from capital based metrics, and towards soft skills and process, and less object oriented forms of appreciation and assessment. It means building ‘with’ communities and ‘in’ public.]*

<b>[18] Conclusion</b> [1.25min] [John]
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By sharing these couplets we hope to present Te Kāhui Whaihanga with a compass or tool kit to help inspire and guide its continued evolution; To expand the attitudes and perspectives that have underpinned its historical successes and development to include

those it will require to remain vital, relevant, and valuable; And to demonstrate how aspects of its existing role and image can be reimaged to better face new and different challenges.

Guidance, Companionship, Cultivation, Advocacy and Value are foundational to pre:fab. These concepts are at the centre of everything we do, including our presidential nomination application. They are a priori commitments we make and remake before we act and through this shape those actions.

We are conscious of our naivety regarding the daily challenges faced by this institution, its board and executive, so have chosen to share these concepts with you now in place of more direct or specific claims about, or ideas for, Te Kāhui Whaihanga.

[19] **Reverse Johns** [1min] [John]

In the spirit of this shift in perspective illustrated by these couplets, we would like to invite everyone to now flip the card in their name tags, revealing their new role in the dialogue moving forward. [Await card flips]

This is a ritual act, and the space that we now inhabit is a ritual space of collective imagination and discovery.

We would like to invite all of the board members to reflect on our presentation. How do these couplets resonate with your experience of the profession, with the time spent and knowledge gained on this board, and how do you imagine they could be developed in Te Kāhui Whaihanga's future?

We invite you to take the rākau in the spirit of your new roles and the ritual space of speculation they open up; We will now stop talking.

[20] **Dialogue** [9.5min (could be up to 12min) or whatever is left less 0.5 min]

General:

- Remember Board member John responses
- Bring the couplets in: Will be on visuals
- Someone as facilitator: do we need this?
- Monitor how things are going and redirect conversation as required: Nick?
- Create/use prompts as necessary: Team

Detail to refer to:

- Public Education around architecture
  - Science Media Center as a precedent
  - Support earth building in schools and universities
  - Support carbon and life-cycle analysis education as above
- How to frame what 'awards' mean
  - Awards as grants etc
- Being more political and politically engaged - having some non-negotiables
  - Taking positions on local/national/global issues relating to architecture
- Support for regional practices? + provide a similar framework for alternative practices
  - Alternative practice network
  - Cultivation these services and education of clients about their value
- Acknowledging other ways of practising claiming these are architectural practice
  - Expanded field: Support innovative practitioners and programmes actively

- reimagining how we engage with and think about architecture,
- And those redeploying architectural knowledge in new and different ways/contexts.
- R&D what we said in our nomination app etc.
- Rethink in:situ
- Release club
- Transparency
  - Who are we
    - Data survey on where architects come from, where they end up, how and why they take those trajectories, how to open up the pipeline
    - Remuneration surveys / salary transparency
  - Stop prioritising Directors/Principles/Owners
  - Democratic/transparent practices
- Publishing - books, journals, a focus on the practice of architecture rather than its objects - Making Space a great start into this.
- ...

[29.5] **Close** [0.5 min] [John]

[Adlib as required]

We would like to again thank the board for their invitation to attend the meeting today, and for their contributions and insight in our discussions. Moving forward, pre:fab's intention is to continue operating independently as an advocate for architectural discourse and alternative practice, and as a collective events and publication label as was our original purpose.

We welcome further engagement with Te Kāhui Whaihanga.



## Chapter Four

# *Love and [re]Organising*

Tools and Tactics for Sustained Gathering

In 'Chapter One—The Ground', The Ground was described as *a conceptual idea space where ideas, knowledges, thoughts, and feelings interact, overlap, aggregate, and repel*. It is where the products and ideas produced by the academy and the profession and all the spaces around and between and over and under them, interact and repel and exist not in a binary and its in-between, but as an interconnected array that is also interconnected to everything in existence. Ground-making was described as the overarching practice encompassing Traversing the Ground, School-making, Trouble-making, Creating Community Infrastructures and the tactics and methods that they consist of. Ground-making engages with The Ground, attempts to reveal it, cares for it, tries to understand, and ultimately change it.

'Chapter Two—Disciplinary Gathering': argued that a process of Ground-making is activated through gathering. Ideas cluster and draw people around them in gatherings that reinforce, create anew, expand or resist those ideas. Sometimes these gatherings become formalised, and sometimes they act as fleeting moments in time, and sometimes they remain boundary-less but powerful, influencing other gathering sites around them. A particularly significant gathering site was identified in the space of 'school', in the low-stakes, reality-testing space of knowledge sharing, and an approach of School-making was introduced as a key mode of enquiry in my practice of Ground-making, playing out through FSA, TNS and ABC School.

'Chapter Three—Undisciplined': looked to those practises who 'trouble' Disciplinary Gathering sites, challenge their form, content and boundaries, but fundamentally concluded with redefining Trouble-making as a practice of change-making at the structural level of The Ground for survival—in the systems and laws of society that control social behaviours, flows of money and materials, and impose a particular way of seeing and being in the world.

This chapter, 'love and [re]Organising', describes in more detail the tools and methods of my practice that necessarily underpin School-making and Trouble-making, and that make collective action possible. It will discuss how exercising shared agency requires principles of *organising*, and for the capacity of that organising to last it needs to feel good, it depends on *love*. This is about ensuring gatherings are not fleeting moments of connection and energy but become strong communities with agency and collective momentum. Strategies for learning organising skills, learning how to gather, and how to collaboratively participate in the design of communities and gathering spaces constitutes the fourth practice approach: 'Creating Community Infrastructures'. Where previous chapters have foregrounded theoretical discussion as a platform for reflecting on my practice and each practice approach, this chapter mostly describes and reflects on the actions and outputs of my practice, suggesting a series of areas of focus for creating the pre-conditions for sustained gathering. In this it is more discursive, reflective, and explorative. I will first discuss architecture as an organisational practice and why organising is such a critical framework for my practice and for conversations around change-making. I will then talk about why organising needs love and deep care, and discuss some of the particular sites where the interplay of love and Organising has played out, from radical administration, to rituals and contracts, to the physical Grounds and stuff of the research, and finally to a personal reflection on what I am organising towards and how I hope to apply the learnings from this research and its gathering sites into commercial practice. In short, this chapter centres the discussion around my practice and its skill sets, the insights revealed, some of the core tactics deployed, how they contribute to a methodology of Ground-making, and what they might suggest for granting more agency to architecture workers in other Disciplinary Gathering spaces in architecture in Aotearoa.

## Architecture as an Organisational Practice

My practice of Ground-making, of connecting and mobilising people and materials in space through collaborative acts to make and reveal the conceptual and real space of the discipline of architecture, generated a series of skill sets that look a lot like *organising*. Organising is strategic, collective action toward targeted and sustained changes—a particular end.<sup>428</sup> The

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<sup>428</sup> Day et al., *The Organizer's Guide to Architecture Education*.

process of my practice, bringing people together to explore and discover the Ground, taught me how to organise and revealed Ground-making as a different kind of organising: an organising of a space in which organising can occur, an organising for the particular social structures and collegiality that allow more strategic action to take place. I am here going to define organising, discuss why it is important for architecture workers wanting to connect to The Ground and exercise their agency, and provide key examples of organising in architecture practice that I have encountered during my research.

If we return to the definition of architecture as a re-organisational practice, we can posit that architects have always used organisational skill sets. When designing a building, architecture workers organise materials and ideas, negotiating complex conceptual, historical, regulatory, and political information to produce something tangible, but they also coordinate with different people and disciplines, from clients to users to plumbing engineers to waste consultants to builders. All this coordination demands strategies for communicating, collaborating, and organising. Buildings aren't going to 'save' the world, but the skillsets architecture workers have developed in order to make them—critically analysing complex inputs across diverse spheres to produce a tangible outcome, understanding bureaucratic and legislative systems and how they manifest physically, acting as an agent between the state (codes) and clients (people and environments), collaborative techniques developed to manage multiple disciplines and types of knowledge across a project, and the capacity to envision something which does not yet exist and create a set of 'instructions' to deliver it—and the 'location' of architecture workers and architecture within the means of production—as interlocutors between communities and the places they inhabit, people and bureaucracies, and the built environment and the supply chain—could position architects as key organisers for change in how we imagine, construct, and relate to our shared environments. Observations presented in this chapter, revealed through my practice, point to possible tactics and strategies for how architecture as a discipline can make Ground to reorganise itself.

While architecture workers have always used organising skillsets, they aren't always *organising*. This distinction is important for understanding where and how these skills could be applied. Organising is strategic, collective gathering for change. It builds community and collective momentum towards a goal. Organising is important because it strategises around how particular actions contribute to a broader vision or mission. In this it gives value to all tactics, no matter their size, influence, or effect, and sees the 'failures' of any particular tactic as *tactical*—an opportunity for learning, adaptation, and re-organising. In the face of grand, incomprehensible challenges, the stuff of hyperobjects,<sup>429</sup> organising presents a multiplicity of approaches and perspectives, all of which can be strategically deployed in differing, and sometimes even opposing, contexts. Organising necessarily requires collaboration, compromise across values and ideas, systems and structures that enable that collaboration, and a willingness to try and test a multitude of actions. If there is any hope for the architecture discipline to shift its priorities collectively and call for its importance in the construction of society (both physically and conceptually), it will need organising across scales—from small collectives, to major institutes, to commercial practices, and to the critical bindings between them.

It also is key to understand why organising is important and how it differs from activism, to understand a practice of Ground-making and why the final practice approach: Creating Community Infrastructures, is so critical. Ground-making is an organisational practice encompassing several tactics and approaches. For example, Trouble-making is simply a particular tactic which can be deployed by an organised collective if it appears to be the most effective approach to a challenge. Activism is typically a visible manifestation of organising—like a protest—and takes the form of “consciousness raising”.<sup>430</sup> While this can make it a useful tactic, it often doesn't confront or attempt to shift societal power structures, even if it intends to, or believes it is. In some cases, it can be harmful to organising causes—it is a distraction from the real work, a

<sup>429</sup> Morton, “Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World.”

<sup>430</sup> Grace Halio, “Activism Vs. Organizing and the Politics of Accountability,” Washington Square News, 2017, accessed February 16, 2023, <https://nyunews.com/2017/04/06/activism-vs-organizing-and-the-politics-of-accountability/>.

surge of momentary solidarity that dissipates into a feeling of ‘having done something’ when nothing has changed.<sup>431</sup>

Activist has become a murky term for anyone who “advocates for change”, without a particular *how*, or *why* and, as writer and activist Astra Taylor argues, many versions of contemporary activism “risk emphasizing the self over the collective” in a way that runs oppositional to the very definition of organising.<sup>432</sup> While it is these manifestations of organising that remain visible—actions like protests and occupations that are largely associated with activism—much of the work of organising remains invisible and tacit. Taylor points to the transition to a dominance of activism over organising as part of what might have alienated people from the tacit processes and practices of organising. Organising skill sets of the period of the 1960s to the 1980s—where a myriad of social movements produced structural change—were rooted in organising models developed over generations and learned by a kind of “osmosis”.<sup>433</sup> However, by the time ‘activism’ began to take hold as the dominant label for social movements from the 1990s onwards, those within these movements often no longer had connections to organisational roots. As Taylor says:

*No one has a parent in the Party, trade unions are in terminal decline, and the protracted struggle of the civil rights movement, which has so much to teach us, has been reduced to a series of iconic images and feel-good history highlights.*<sup>434</sup>

The nostalgia elicited by these “feel-good” highlights obscures the real work of organising. Organising becomes understood as a series of images and so, as an ‘activist’, if you can also make images that have the same aesthetic—crowds of people occupying streets, big posters with emotive slogans, someone with a megaphone, social media overwhelmed by black squares<sup>435</sup>—the result of generating real change must be the same... right? These actions still require some level of organising, but the organising taking place behind these blips of activism is often fleeting, with the aesthetic action as the goal rather than a long-term strategy. People want to feel connected to a movement, to others, and to ideas they believe in, to find “a circle of men and women with whom [they] could hold hands in a ring dance”,<sup>436</sup> but this proliferation of the radical aesthetic overshadows collective potential, obscures real organising work and in the process means the tacit knowledge and processes of organising are lost. This leaves today’s organisers and aspiring organisers not only having to reinvent the wheel to reclaim organising principles but also re-inventing the wheel for a completely new type of cart. The kinds of systems against which organisers are working now resemble less the social democratic model of capitalism of the 1960s to 1980s, than they do the primitive accumulation of feudalism (the historical process of privatising common lands and resources). This has been dubbed “technofeudalism”, where much of the world’s money is not made from labour, but from consumption itself, putting an enormous deal of power into the hands of a few tech oligarchs who have created a system where they control access to public and private spaces and resources

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<sup>431</sup> Astra Taylor, “Against Activism,” *The Baffler*, 2016, accessed July 06, 2024, <https://thebaffler.com/salvos/against-activism>.

<sup>432</sup> Taylor, “Against Activism.”

<sup>433</sup> Taylor, “Against Activism.”

<sup>434</sup> Taylor, “Against Activism.”

<sup>435</sup> During the Black Lives Matter movement of 2020, Instagram users posted black squares to their profiles to flood the site in a display of solidarity. The effect of which was, ironically, to make organising more difficult during that time, by pushing down “valuable information for Black Lives Matter (BLM) protestors”. Mariah Wellman, “Black Squares for Black Lives? Performative Allyship as Credibility Maintenance for Social Media Influencers on Instagram,” *Social Media + Society* 8 (2022): 1.

<sup>436</sup> In his novel *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, Milan Kundera uses the image of the ring dance as a symbol of nostalgic longing within complex political contexts. Characters yearn for connectedness irrespective of the location, ideology or source of that connectedness. Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (Penguin Books, 1984).

that society relies on—information, online marketplaces, and social platforms.<sup>437</sup> Users of these services (almost everyone) end up ‘renting’ from these companies, rather than owning the resources, and contributing to their profits. This is a new type of dependency where value is extracted from the public by controlling digital spaces, and the public pays with money, attention, production (the content these spaces depend on), and personal data. Strikes, protests, and organising tactics of the past worked under a social-democratic model of capitalism, but they seem to be much less effective, and/or met with increasingly violent response, in the current economic and political system.<sup>438</sup>

In this challenging context I posit then, that before organising can happen in architecture, Ground needs to be made to imagine a future, look to the past only after lifting its veil of nostalgia, learn organising processes, and invent new organising processes that can generate that future, and respond to and confront systems and structures of the present. Political theorist Richard Gilman-Opalsky and educator and organiser Stevphen Shukaitis, frame these types of spaces through a lens of “riotous epistemology” and understand them as sites in which to generate “possible and desirable preludes to new revolutionary forms”.<sup>439</sup> Riotous epistemology is defined as “the exploration of the kinds of “knowledge” and “knowledge production” carried out in unconventional practices and activities, in atypical locations of criticism and human understanding, and in the non-textual spaces in which expressions of disaffection and hope can be communicated in disruptive and moving ways”.<sup>440</sup> Gilman-Opalsky argues that the knowledge of everyday people is revealed and discovered through processes of upheaval, and that uprising is a kind of thinking: a “philosophy from below”.<sup>441</sup> He positions their work in the context of “revolutionary alternatives to revolution”, looking for new forms of action, and ways to resist existing logics.<sup>442</sup> Creating spaces where this kind of dynamic can occur requires a level of organising, of bringing people together around collective frustrations, visions, and hopes and creating mechanisms that can communicate these and then connect or collect them into strategic approaches. There is an acceptance in the work of Gilman-Opalsky and Shukaitis that these spaces can do “only so much,” that most of the time the actions are “fleeting interruptions or hiatuses” and that they aren’t particularly disruptive or transformative, but that they always aspire to be, that the little things can feel large, while the big things still feel wholly inadequate.<sup>443</sup>

A “prelude to [a] revolutionary form”, is similar in concept to the posited need to make The Ground upon which things can happen. It is the space before change—a recognition that change rarely happens in one fell swoop, but through small accumulating actions that shift perception and habit, the aggregation of which through organising and Trouble-making, is what generates structural and lasting change. Many of the examples of Ground-making discussed in ‘Chapter Two—Disciplinary Gathering’ and ‘Chapter Three—Undisciplined’ act as these revolutionary preludes, and I am here going to provide a few more that I have personally encountered through traversing The Ground, and through my own practice. These are practices that I see as explicitly organisational, and capture some of the “philosophy from below” of Gilman-Opalsky and Shukaitis.

The Architecture Lobby (TAL) provides a first precedent through the Academia Working Group (AWG) and ABC School, both important vehicles for the enquiry of my practice. TAL target policy change and systemic structures. They have a strong practice of trouble-making through their ambitions to unionise architecture workers and through their research and actions towards a Green New Deal. But they also have a very robust set of organising strategies which has

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<sup>437</sup> This concept is explored in: Yanis Varoufakis, *Technofeudalism: What Killed Capitalism* (Melville House, 2024).

<sup>438</sup> de Graaf, “Architecture Is Now a Tool of Capital.”

<sup>439</sup> Richard Gilman-Opalsky and Stevphen Shukaitis, *Riotous Epistemology: Imaginary Power, Art, and Insurrection* (Minor Compositions, 2019), 5.

<sup>440</sup> Gilman-Opalsky and Shukaitis, *Riotous Epistemology*, 2.

<sup>441</sup> Gilman-Opalsky and Shukaitis, *Riotous Epistemology*, 3.

<sup>442</sup> Gilman-Opalsky and Shukaitis, *Riotous Epistemology*, 4.

<sup>443</sup> Gilman-Opalsky and Shukaitis, *Riotous Epistemology*, 4.

taught me about organisational relationships and workflows that don't require authority figures to function, and about long-term collective action and what kinds of administrative labour it encompasses. The specifics of these will be discussed later in this chapter. An #abc-2023-234 session facilitated by the Green New Deal Working Group (GNDWG), explored how justice needs to be foregrounded in the “inevitable” approaching built environment transition.<sup>444</sup> GNDWG discussed the concept of a just transition, and how to organise towards it. Their argument was that the first step in all organising is to *talk*. Through talking, problems and limitations of architecture practice can be revealed and visions for the future to transition to can be discussed and imagined. Unionisation and a specific focus on employment contract provisions were presented as two further sites of possibility for organising for structural change. TAL are explicitly organisational, and leverage tools like #the-stack-237, found and developed for collective gathering and action.

There were three other sessions during #abc-2023-234—which focused on organising for future belonging—that stood out as organisational practices for architecture and leveraged particular but differing approaches. The first session was *Architecture in the Plasticene—Milliken and the AIA* by Martin Weiner, a New York based architect, who was pursuing a research project to reveal how big companies draw designers into unwitting complicity with their environmental and resource exploitation, all the while projecting a facade of sustainability.<sup>445</sup> Weiner was focused on the flooring manufacturer *Milliken*, particularly their synthetic carpet product which is ubiquitous across the US and made from petrochemicals; debunking their claims of carbon neutrality (which is mostly through purchasing credits from Verra, whose offsets have been found to be mostly “worthless”<sup>446</sup>); and recyclability (most never gets recycled). Weiner was critical of how the American Institute of Architects (AIA) partnered with Milliken for their Committee of the Environment, calling this partnership part of a process of “uncritically amplifying the marketing copy of corporate polluters”.<sup>447</sup> He also pointed to the Alliance to End Plastic Waste as a key example of the type of organising amongst petrol chemical companies and downstream supply chain consumer companies. The Alliance, whose founding members include ExxonMobil, Shell and PepsiCo, foreground local, small scale, ground-up community groups and ‘clean ups’—a kind of coerced free labour which hands responsibility of plastic waste to the consumer—all the while lobbying as a political block to prevent regulation around plastic production.<sup>448</sup> Weiner’s organising approach is one of organising and re-organising information to reveal power structures and systems below the surface of The Ground that subjugate architects in relation to the supply chain. It is a process of education through critical analysis of relationships between people, materials, and those in positions of financial and political power.

The second session was *Environmental Retrofit: An Academic Journey* with Chitra Vishwanath, an architect and teacher in Bangalore, India, and was about using architecture practice and teaching to discover different approaches in local communities that can then be used as evidence to change legislation at scale.<sup>449</sup> Vishwanath’s architecture practice, biome Environmental, understand architectural projects as “test bed[s]” for action and utilise earth building technology, developments of local ecologies, re-use of waste (from e-waste to demolition debris), and

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<sup>444</sup> The Architecture Lobby, “Organizing Architectural Labor for a Just Transition,” The Architecture Lobby, 2023, accessed September 22, 2024, <https://architecture-lobby.org/event/organizing-architectural-labor-for-a-just-transition/>.

<sup>445</sup> Martin Weiner, “Architecture in the Plasticene - Milliken and the Aia,” (Public Lecture Online), lu.ma ABC School 2023, 2023, accessed September 22, 2024, <https://lu.ma/ycnjqd1z>.

<sup>446</sup> Patrick Greenfield, “Revealed: More Than 90% of Rainforest Carbon Offsets by Biggest Certifier Are Worthless, Analysis Shows,” The Guardian, 2023, accessed September 22, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/jan/18/revealed-forest-carbon-offsets-biggest-provider-worthless-verra-aoe>.

<sup>447</sup> Weiner, “Architecture in the Plasticene - Milliken and the Aia.”

<sup>448</sup> Thalia Bofiliou, John Willis, and Neil Guessous, “Alliance to End Plastic Waste: Barely Credible,” Planet Tracker, 2022, accessed September 21, 2024, <https://planet-tracker.org/reports/alliance-to-end-plastic-waste-barely-credible/>.

<sup>449</sup> Chitra Vishwanath, “Environmental Retrofit: An Academic Journey,” (Public Lecture Online), lu.ma ABC School 2023, 2023, accessed September 22, 2024, <https://lu.ma/38rs90hf>.

embrace a tyranny of small decisions to create a complete schema for the city and for architecture practice.<sup>450</sup> This is evidenced from the scale of her own house, which has a closed looped system including rain water collection, solar, grey water collection, and a terrace to grow rice, beans, avocado and lime; to local schools constructed by hand-made earth bricks; to advocating for these types of systems with local councils. This advocacy has resulted in policy change in her city, her architecture practice and its outcomes providing evidence for other ways of being and knowing. Her teaching practice encourages students to “embrace the ‘small’ and [explore] their immediate environment”, discovering economies, relationships, places, and connections in their neighbourhoods to explore how their knowledge as architects can reveal and breathe life into the spaces they inhabit.<sup>451</sup> Vishwanath’s approach to organising is to use architectural projects as localised experiments that become systems demonstrations for other ways of relating and participating in local ecologies.<sup>452</sup>

The third session was with architect Sanjeev Shankar entitled *Nurturing Equal Value for All*, whose research-based studio uses his “training in architecture, design and science to merge traditional knowledge with contemporary patterns to nurture positive socio-economic-ecological impact”.<sup>453</sup> After what he described as fairly conventional training in architecture, Shankar returned to India to walk.<sup>454</sup> Literally. He walked barefoot for two years and has since spent many years walking between remote indigenous communities to understand and amplify their knowledges, sciences, and relational systems. In concert with many others, he is finding, researching, imagining, and creating gathering spaces where walking barefoot (shaping The Ground and letting The Ground shape you) is seen as a valid form of architecture practice and a deep science. This idea is akin to design theorist Anne-Marie Willis’ concept of ‘the double movement of ontological design’, where “we design our world, and our world designs us back”.<sup>455</sup> From 2013 to 2017 his research focused particularly on Living Root Bridges, suspension-based bridges grown in the Himalayan jungle by Khasi tribes over a time period of 15-30 years and that last several centuries.<sup>456</sup> In 2022 this work resulted in Living Root Bridges achieving UNESCO status, granting them “Outstanding Universal Value”, for their presence a pinnacle of “human-plant interaction”, their involvement of entire communities in an “inter-generational growth process,” and how they respond to a “critical need for connectivity in an extreme environment”.<sup>457</sup> The discussion session with Shankar was particularly profound for me, and was a significant part of my personal process of re-organising my relational understanding of the world. Shankar works with deeply embedded collective approaches that re-organise the conceptual and physical Ground based on “collective and planned cooperation” with plant and animal systems, science, and knowledge systems, and imagined people of the future.<sup>458</sup>

A further inspiration for organising practices that I have encountered include a talk by civil activist Immi Kaur who spoke of a transition from “filling time with good activity” to strategising around “what we need now”, which plays out through Civic Square—a collection of architects in Birmingham, United Kingdom who want to practise “radically differently”, by “demonstrating

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<sup>450</sup> biome Environmental, “About Us,” biome Environmental, accessed September 22, 2024, <https://www.biome-solutions.com/about-us/>.

<sup>451</sup> Vishwanath, “Environmental Retrofit.”

<sup>452</sup> More information about some of the strategies used by biome can be found here: Chitra K Vishwanath, “Degrowth: A Perspective from Bengaluru, South India,” in *Housing for Degrowth*, ed. Anitra Nelson and François Schneider (Routledge, 2018).

<sup>453</sup> Sanjeev Shankar, “Nurturing Equal Value for All,” (Public Lecture Online), lu.ma ABC School 2023, 2023, accessed September 22, 2024, <https://luma.com/9tjxjz0n.2024>.

<sup>454</sup> Shankar, “Nurturing Equal Value for All.”

<sup>455</sup> This concept is discussed in Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse*, 28. 28

<sup>456</sup> Sanjeev Shankar, “Living Root Bridges: State of Knowledge, Fundamental Research and Future Application” (paper presented at the Proc. of 2015 IABSE Conf.—Structural Engineering: Providing Solutions to Global Challenges, 2015).

<sup>457</sup> “Jingkieng Jri: Living Root Bridge Cultural Landscapes,” unesco, 2022, accessed September 22, 2024, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/6606/>.

<sup>458</sup> Shankar, “Living Root Bridges: State of Knowledge, Fundamental Research and Future Application.”

neighbourhood-scale civic infrastructure for social, ecological, economic, and climate transition”.<sup>459</sup> This plays out through large scale interventions like their annual gathering “Retrofit Reimagined” and through regular neighbourhood events that include repair clubs; sessions about buildings materials (e.g. timber shingles, straw, clay, and natural paints); sessions about regenerative construction; and everything from crochet classes, book talks, lessons about soil and water quality, and so on. Civic Square actively call what they do ‘organising’ and many of these offerings are expressly architectural and concern empowering locals with the skills and agency to co-create their own neighbourhoods by “democratising access to the spaces, tools, resources and infrastructure that neighbourhoods need to co-lead the social, ecological, economic and climate transition of the 21st century”.<sup>460</sup>

These examples offer ideas and tactics for approaches to organising in differing contexts. I make Ground between them through my practice, through identifying them here and through initiatives like the ABC School. To recognise them as part of an interconnected system of organising gives them more agency. This what I offer and emphasise with a practice of Ground-making that aims to make space for gathering, to make organising feel possible. It shouldn’t only feel *possible* though, to sustain lasting feelings of togetherness and action, organising should also feel *good*. Organising practices can appear pragmatic, formulaic even, and serious. It may be part of the reason why activism is more seductive—activism looks like the feeling of passion, togetherness, action, the charged pheromones of large gatherings.<sup>461</sup> Janet Thomson says in her essay about *Women in Architecture* that “Dreams need action to turn them into reality, and action needs skill, energy and resources... Dreams need practical solutions for everyday requirements, and new ways of operating”.<sup>462</sup> In short, dreams need organising. Imaginings of the future should be hopeful, a reflection of shared ideas, feelings, and humanity. A question that emerged from Weiner’s talk was, *how can we organise like a petrochemical company?* Another question that emerges in response is, *how do we organise like Vishwanath and Shankar?* Who have the smallest fraction of capital resources of a petrochemical company but so much of all the other resources, the heart, hope, knowledge, and interconnectedness of people, place, and everything around them. And so, I discovered through my practice, that the thing that makes The Ground feel more solid, more conducive to on-going collective gathering, action, and organising, is *love*.

## Love as an Architecture Practice

As much as organising skills offer a pathway forward for a re-imagined architecture discipline; as much as radical action is needed now for shared challenges like global warming; and that for that action practical skills will be needed, hard skills that create capabilities and preparedness; as much as a deeper and more nuanced connection to local ecologies and local Ground is needed for climate resilience; what is needed to underpin all of this is *love*.

Love represents practical acceptance, patience, care, and a commitment to uncovering the underlying connection—The Ground—between seemingly opposing things. As well as pragmatic skills and resources, what is needed for Ground-making, and then for action on that Ground, are systems, support structures, rituals and ways of being together that start from a place of love

<sup>459</sup> For more information see: Civic Square, “Demonstrating Neighbourhood-Scale Civic Infrastructure for Social, Ecological, Economic, and Climate Transition.,” Civic Square, accessed September 22, 2024, <https://civicsquare.cc/>. and Imi Kaur’s lecture as part of the *Productive Disruptive Conference* in 2023: Immi Kaur, “Civic Square: Neighbourhood Scale Civic and Social Infrastructure for Climate, Social and Ecological Transition,” (Recorded Public Lecture), aae Productive Disruptive Conference, 2023, accessed June 04, 2024, <https://cardiff.cloud.panopto.eu/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=f3ca4bef-f299-4123-bdf4-b03f00c85c3f>.

<sup>460</sup> Civic Square, “About,” Civic Square, accessed May 23, 2025, <https://civicsquare.cc/about/>.

<sup>461</sup> Christian Borch discusses how atmospheric effects in large crowds influence collective emotions, behaviours, and social dynamics. Christian Borch, “The Politics of Atmospheres: Architecture, Power, and the Senses,” in *Architectural Atmospheres: On the Experience and Politics of Architecture*, ed. Christian Borch (Birkhäuser Verlag, 2014).

<sup>462</sup> Thomson, “Janet Thomson: A Personal Response.”

and respect and foster the kind of collectivity that must be present to handle change and difficult times, as well as to be adaptable, creative and able to effectively share knowledge and resources. Organising, re-organising, action for change needs to *feel good*. The skillsets discovered through the practices of The Night School, pre:fab and other actions of the practice, are all about how to come together, how to communicate differently, how to experiment in social situations, how to be vulnerable and open, how to know and to not know. They didn't always work, they aren't some kind of panacea for the vast challenges ahead, but they are small, everyday actions that gather people and test other ways; they are "preludes to new revolutionary forms".<sup>463</sup> The kind of interruption, or sudden change understood by the term "revolution" remains an aspiration in this work, but its focus is in challenging "everywhere every day," and in doing "only so much".<sup>464</sup> Moments of fleeting interruptions and hiatuses to the dominant modes of knowing and being can be powerful ways to bring people together and sustain the momentum of a collective. The actions taken necessarily suggest further actions, make space for other actions to emerge, and be discovered, to relate, to be, and the more populated The Ground is, the more it expands, or the more layered and richer it becomes.

I am going to briefly describe what types of love I am referring to, suggesting possible avenues through which to understand love and its application in organising spaces, from interconnectedness and relationality to personal insights from a journey of decoloniality, to people of the future.

Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble*, provides a potential framework for thinking about what kind of love, and what kind of relationships. The world is messy and tangled and full of troubled spaces of complexity, ambiguity, intensity, uncanniness, and injustice. The more you commit to staying in these troubled spaces, the more discomfort can be experienced, the more troubled you might feel, but also the more generative and radical your approaches to reckoning with that discomfort might become. For troubled spaces to be generative and to make new ground, Haraway argues that there is a need to "think together anew across differences," and make "oddkin", forming novel relationships with other beings and critters through a form of love rooted in care, responsibility, and recognition of interconnectedness.<sup>465</sup> This kind of relationality suggests a mode of love in which human beings identify their same-ness with everything that exists, not in a modernist way (which flattens everything and presents same-ness as an absence of difference), but in a way that recognises difference, and untangles it from superiority. As I noted in my notebook in what felt like a profound revelation following Sanjeev's ABC talk, standing barefoot on the grass, and looking at the moon: Humans = Sand.

This kind of love is about relationships. I recall when I was a child, a sense of alive-ness in the things around me. Everything seemed to have feeling, pain, appreciation, joy. The shape of something denoted some kind of personality, whether it was bulbous or angular, soft, or sharp. An instinct to identify with the other, no matter the form of the other, to love the other, dissipated, or was actively discouraged over time. It is only now that I feel the need to return to this kind of love, when considering my responsibility as a person in the universe relating infinitely to everything else in the universe, and as an architect, from a discipline charged with the material re-organisation of the world. Of course, this is the type of knowledge and conceptual positioning that indigenous communities have built and maintained for millennia, deeply engaging with "cosmologies that enmesh people into complex relationships between themselves and *all relations*".<sup>466</sup> As Métis anthropologist Zoe Todd argues, the "ontological turn" towards relationality most prominently discussed by a collection of mostly white, Europe and North America-based thinkers, rarely acknowledges the indigenous foundations of these ideas, while the "euro-western academy" elevates those who talk about indigenous ideas, over people

<sup>463</sup> Gilman-Opalsky and Shukaitis, *Riotous Epistemology*, 5.

<sup>464</sup> Gilman-Opalsky and Shukaitis, *Riotous Epistemology*, 4.

<sup>465</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 7.

<sup>466</sup> Italics from the text. Zoe Todd, "An Indigenous Feminist's Take on the Ontological Turn: 'Ontology' Is Just Another Word for Colonialism," *Journal of historical sociology* 29, no. 1 (2016).

who are indigenous.<sup>467</sup>

Reckoning with relationality and my own material positioning has been a necessary, albeit slow process of the decolonisation of my own worldview. I am going to discuss this briefly because it is also a process of love, and deep discomfort, and a process that can enrich a practice of Ground-making. The concept of decolonisation is explored globally, but because this research practice took place in Aotearoa, processes of decolonisation are inseparable from the founding documents of the country, He Whakaputanga and the partnership contract of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Te Tiriti o Waitangi provides a kind of blueprint for ways of being in Aotearoa, and the rising prominence of Māori language and cosmologies in culture in Aotearoa, in what has been dubbed a second wave of the Māori renaissance,<sup>468</sup> also presents Pākehā and Tauīwi—Tangata Tiriti—opportunity to learn and go through their own processes of decolonisation of the self, without demanding more emotional labour from Māori. Those working in architecture and other material re-organising practices, have a responsibility to those materials, and to The Grounds they emerge from, to engage deeply with questions of belonging and relationality—captured in the concepts of Whakapapa and Mauri.

Mauri is often referred to as “life essence”, the vitality of everything, but to understand mauri is “to have a sense of the elemental forces or energy that bring into being all life forms, both animate and inanimate, and an understanding of that which makes them unique”.<sup>469</sup> Whakapapa can be understood by breaking the word up into its core components:

whaka: to cause something to happen, to cause to be<sup>470</sup>

papa: Something flat and hard. A surface. Also refers to the land, The Ground, the earth god Papatūānuku<sup>471</sup>

Whakapapa: To make layers. To trace genealogy, a line of descent from the beginning of the universe to the present moment, to make a foundation, to make the layers of The Ground, to make something come to being.

In Te Ao Māori to whakapapa to a place is to trace your lineage to that place—to understand yourself as one of the layers of that ground, your ancestors layered there with you. This thinking can extend to materials, other beings, and things tangible and intangible, especially in architecture. To communicate whakapapa, the ‘pepeha’ is used as a tool to express relationships to other people, places, and things. Educator Keri Opai discusses how pepeha are offered in the context of hui (meetings) and other settings, as a way to “make connections” within that space to other people and places.<sup>472</sup> It is about establishing a sense of belonging, to “know one’s place in the larger scheme of things”.<sup>473</sup> For Māori, pepeha traverses maunga (mountain), awa/moana (river/sea), iwi (tribal affiliation), hapū (tribal community), marae (hapū gathering place), tūpuna

<sup>467</sup> Todd, “An Indigenous Feminist’s Take on the Ontological Turn: ‘Ontology’ Is Just Another Word for Colonialism.”

<sup>468</sup> Charlotte Graham-McLay, “Indigenous Renaissance: Māori Hope Matariki Holiday Will Help Cement Status of Local Knowledge,” *The Guardian*, 2023, accessed September 22, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jul/14/indigenous-renaissance-maori-hope-matariki-holiday-will-help-cement-status-of-local-knowledge>.

<sup>469</sup> Fiona Cram et al., “Traditional Knowledge and Decision Making: Māori Involvement in Aquaculture and Biotechnology” (paper presented at the Proceedings of the Traditional Knowledge Conference (2008) Te Tatau Pounamu: The Greenstone Door Auckland: Te Pae o te Maramatanga, 2010).

<sup>470</sup> Te AKA Māori Dictionary, “Whaka-,” Te AKA Māori Dictionary, accessed May 12, 2024, <https://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keywords=whaka>.

<sup>471</sup> Te AKA Māori Dictionary, “Papa,” Te AKA Māori Dictionary, accessed May 12, 2024, <https://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keywords=papa>.

<sup>472</sup> Keri Opai, “Pepeha for Non-Māori,” *E Tangata*, 2022, accessed July 05, 2024, <https://e-tangata.co.nz/reflections/pepeha-for-non-maori/#comments>.

<sup>473</sup> Opai, “Pepeha for Non-Māori.”

(ancestors), and the self, tracing the flow of wai (water) and is thus code for “Māori people are part of the natural environment and water cycle”.<sup>474</sup> There is no word for pepeha in English. It is an organising of a conceptual environment, an organising of relationality, of your body connected to infinite bodies (water, landscape, spirit, human, animal, insect, air, microbiome, and so on).

If we look to the definition of architecture posited in #definitions-32:

*Most of the work of architecture is to take parts of the environment (materials) and re-arrange them into new forms in a way that directly changes something in that environment, and through this act, or through a rearrangement of ideas related to those materials, changes our shared and personal understanding of it.*

we can start to understand the pepeha as an architectural act. It is a way to organise yourself in relation to The Ground and to others, a way of announcing, changing, solidifying your personal relationship to The Ground. For Pākehā and tauīwi the process of creating a pepeha is also a tool for reckoning with our own relationality, with where we whakapapa to, how we arrived in Aotearoa, and by what means. This process can cause discomfort and be profound. Journalist Emile Donovan suggests that leaning into this discomfort will likely reveal other things that might need to be done, other ways that discomfort can be actioned.<sup>475</sup> Many Māori feel uncomfortable with Pākehā identifying connections to Maunga and Awa and so starting with learning about the why and tikanga (protocol) of pepeha can foster a deeper understanding of Te Ao Māori. It is a way to organise yourself and honour personal and shared connectivity, it is an act of love.

The love in Ground-making spaces should also extend to people of the future. The way global economies are structured assumes that the people of the future will be more prosperous, wealthier, healthier, and better prepared to handle mounting debt, and the potentially devastating consequences of today’s decisions (like the pushing back of the terms of the Paris Agreements). Even though visions of the future, and how they manifest in cultural production feel out of reach, the capacity for governments to burden the people of that unimaginable future seems limitless. Through actions in the present, those in the future should be thought of with the same type of care and responsibility extended to those in the present. In his novel *Ministry for the Future*, Kim Stanley Robinson presents a future world in which the United Nations, in 2023, had established a Ministry tasked with protecting and defending the interests of people of the future.<sup>476</sup> It is both a harrowing and hopeful novel that largely argues that change starts with renewed economic systems. Something to organise towards.

A call for renewed types of love in Disciplinary Gathering spaces that make The Ground, is not a suggestion that these spaces, and this work of organising and imagining will feel easy. What it does suggest, is that spaces in which people feel loved, respected, and cared for, are spaces they return to despite experiences of discomfort, or because they can confront their discomfort and uncertainties among people who care about them, and who they care about. Difficult conversations, differences of opinion, unexpected events, shared grief are all inevitable, but if love is factored into the design of organising systems and social structures of a group, that group is more likely to weather, or be strengthened by adversity. Escobar discusses how feminist perspectives emerging from examples of activist collectives and alternative societal models reveal that what is needed for “a politics for another civilization”, one that resists patriarchal culture defined by “actions and emotions that value competition, war, hierarchies, power, growth, procreation, the domination of others, and the appropriation of resources”, is a “biology of love” that recognises love and emotion as “important elements of knowledge and of all of life”.<sup>477</sup>

<sup>474</sup> Opai, “Pepeha for Non-Māori.”

<sup>475</sup> Emile Donovan, “The Anatomy of a Pepeha,” RadioNZ, 2024, accessed July 20, 2024, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/programmes/the-detail/story/2018858864/the-anatomy-of-a-pepeha>.

<sup>476</sup> Kim Stanley Robinson, *The Ministry for the Future* (United States: Orbit Books, 2020).

<sup>477</sup> Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse*, 38-39.

Everything is beautiful and sometimes (mostly) it hurts.<sup>478</sup>

It is critical here to clarify that a call for love in Ground-making practices, is not what Garcia and Frankowski describe as “an abstract call for making kin with one another” or a “substitute for real actions in their psychological and spatial manifestations”.<sup>479</sup> love exists in these contexts not to create spaces that allow us to escape our responsibility to collective action, but to make the space feel good to sustain concrete, structural collective action. This is particularly critical in the process of Ground-making, which occurs even before organising can begin, to make the space for learning and discovery of organising and social systems. As an example, conceiving of and advocating for radical built environment policies that reverse centuries of oppressive colonial policy through a sustained, organised campaign, should feel good. I liken it to Unanga scholar Eve Tuck and educator Wayne K. Yang’s idea of “decolonization is not a metaphor”, in that decolonisation is not about symbolic acts of ‘kinship’ but about a real, legal process that requires the concrete and material undoing of colonial structures.<sup>480</sup> The binding of The Ground with love is a metaphor, but what it works towards is not: imagining the future, and making what’s missing possible through concrete, collective action.

I will now tell the story of this practice and what I have learned, insights, and what has been most valuable in trying to make a space for the type of architecture I want to practise in. This too is an act of love, a kind of blueprint for pre:fab and my practice going forward, not to imply that these are universally successful, but instead to suggest that they can act as reminders of things that worked and things to hold onto—the roots of the practice.

## Practice Approach: Creating Community Infrastructures

Making spaces where sharing and learning happen, keep happening, and feel good comes from fostering a sense of belonging, a connection The Ground. The root of belonging is in having deep respect and love for the people and places you hope to belong to.<sup>481</sup> The process of establishing these roots in this practice meant setting up some (mostly invisible) organisational principles that create the conditions for ideas and practices to emerge and interact on their own. These are *Community Infrastructures*, and they are dependent on both love and organising.

### Radical Administration

In *Creating Community Infrastructures* and caring for them like an attentive gardener, at some point I realised that being radical is actually just a lot of admin work. Radical Administration! (Duuuude). I felt it when organising the Free School, I felt it when coordinating The Night School events, I felt it when slipping into the highly organised river of The Architecture Lobby activity, and I felt it when setting up the organisational structures that support pre:fab’s ongoing heterarchical existence.<sup>482</sup> Administration is a thick strata layer that both makes The Ground and

<sup>478</sup> In *Slaughterhouse-Five* Kurt Vonnegut uses the phrase “everything was beautiful and nothing hurt” as an ironic statement about life, death, and human suffering, capturing a longing for an ideal world free of pain, violence, and hardship—in stark contrast to the brutal realities of war and trauma that the novel explores. Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five, or the Children’s Crusade* (United States: Delacorte, 1969).

<sup>479</sup> Cruz Garcia and Nathalie Frankowski, “Un-Making Architecture: An Anti-Racist Architecture Manifesto,” WAI Architecture Think Tank LAW, accessed October 16, 2024, <https://waithinktank.com/Anti-Racist-Manifesto>.

<sup>480</sup> Eve Tuck and Wayne K. Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor” *Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012).

<sup>481</sup> Tony Watkins says how best hope for the future is to fall in love again with the place to which we belong. A favourite quote of mine from Tony Watkin’s book: *Piglet the Great of Karaka Bay*. Tony Watkins, *Piglet the Great of Karaka Bay* (Balasoglou Books, 2003).

<sup>482</sup> First attributed to neuropsychologist Warren S. McCulloch, a heterarchy is an organisational system in which any member of a group can lead or be led by others, depending on the situation. Leadership shifts based on the problem at hand and the skills needed, so no single person holds permanent dominance over others. Warren S McCulloch, “A Heterarchy of Values Determined by the Topology of Nervous Nets,” *The Bulletin of Mathematical Biophysics* 7 (1945).

supports it. It is more tangible than The Ground. You can touch it and do it. You can make lists and spreadsheets, and send emails, and ask for things, and demand things, and occupy space and be stealthy or overt.

Taylor notes that organising is often “tedious work that entails creating infrastructure and institutions, finding points of vulnerability and leverage in the situation you want to transform, and convincing atomized individuals to recognize that they are on the same team (and to behave like it).”<sup>483</sup> The nostalgia for the image of organising, as discussed above, usually does not extend to the realities of making those images real, or to making them conducive to real structural change. No one is particularly nostalgic for the admin work. In this practice of Ground-making, the Radical Administrator shoulders the bulk of this tedious work. It is a tactic for making gathering spaces that feel both organised and yet organic. The administrative work remains invisible in the first instance, inviting others into the feeling of the space, and is then distributed, encouraging shared contribution and learning.

I find kinship in the role of Radical Administrator with many “alternative” practitioners trying to make Ground for their future-imagining practices in architecture and beyond. Some of the language they use denotes the kinds of administrative work needed to happen for these practices to develop. Stead et al framed their 2018 exhibition in Melbourne of practices of this type through the idea of “the workaround”, which they describe as a process of finding creative routes around and through obstacles of the norm, and how these creative trajectories create routes through the loopholes for others to follow too.<sup>484</sup> Waghorn describes a similar tactic in her analysis of hers and Nina Patel’s practice HOOPLA of “plying stealthy masquerades” as a way to “borrow authority” through the embodiment of symbols, roles and ways of being that exist within bureaucratic and normative contexts as a way to legitimise experimental practice modes where the outcome is unpredictable, or intentionally fuzzy.<sup>485</sup> This is a negotiation of administrative processes by stealth and by strategic imitation for a variety of ends, and suggests a way of moving through these spaces so that others don’t have to.

In her doctoral thesis, Mel Dodd theorises a similar role in “The Enabler”. The Enabler represents the “common ground” between other roles she embodies (The Activist, The Entrepreneur); is a modest yet familiar persona that captures a practice of the everyday; and critically is focused on “getting things done”, “making progress easier” and helping “a group of people understand their common objectives” in order to make a plan to achieve them.<sup>486</sup> The Radical Administrator similarly works across necessary administrative tasks to prepare an event, designs the interactive systems between collective members and attendees, and facilitates conversation and actions. Dodd points to this as a role typically embodied in the design process, that architects regularly act as intermediaries between people, their environment, and regulatory bodies, but that the role of the enabler “goes far beyond an architectural definition of project administration and into one of custodian or curator of the public realm”.<sup>487</sup> As with The Enabler, the Radical Administrator is acting for a different end than a conventional commercial architecture project, in that ways of gathering are a site for experimentation; the ‘client’ is a tangle of people, ecologies, ideas, and happenings; and morphing through different personas is necessary to relate to the different contexts and people within administrative processes. In this sense, it is really this administrative work of Creating Community Infrastructures (through a lens of love and organising) that is foundational for making The Ground.

I have identified three key types of administration that the Radical Administrator engages. These are event-based admin: specific tasks required to deliver an action or event; structural admin: generating procedural structures to manage relationships within a collective and sustain its ongoing existence; and network admin: managing relationships with people, organisations, and

<sup>483</sup> Taylor, “Against Activism.”

<sup>484</sup> Stead, Ednie-Brown, Watson, and Rhodes, “Exhibiting the Workaround,” 193.

<sup>485</sup> Waghorn, “The Practice of Feeling for Place: A Compendium for an Expanded Architecture.”

<sup>486</sup> Dodd, “Between the Lived and the Built,” 73.

<sup>487</sup> Dodd, “Between the Lived and the Built,” 73.

others beyond the boundary of the collective to utilise these connections and create opportunities for collaboration.

My practice first developed event-based admin through the organisation of the Free School of Architecture 2017/2018, organising via regular zoom calls, collaborative google docs, and a huge scheduling spreadsheet. This necessarily required network admin—in finding venues, collaborators, funding, and for opportunities for promotion—later applied in The Night School partnered with Objectspace to host its first five events. Objectspace were positioned as Radical Administrator Ground-makers for The Night School, taking on the administrative lift by providing space, publicity, facilitation, and a small grant to compensate collaborators and pay for materials. TNS was a practice of developing collaborative relationships—working with Maffey and Shan and Huang—and refining event facilitation rituals: opening and closing each event with a karakia, ensuring everyone has the opportunity to introduce themselves, and clearly contextualising each event against the broader aims of TNS. These actions develop micro community infrastructures that put participants at ease by indicating that the space is open for discussion, sharing, and expressions of their identities through making and talking.

These skills filtered into my involvement with organising the ABC School, and with the launch of pre:fab.

Coordinating over 50 sessions in many time zones across #abc-2022-126 and #abc-2023-234 required deep familiarity with remote organising, aided by tools like large spreadsheets and other shared documents, utilised by FSA. Collaborative processes honed through TNS supported further fruitful and convivial collaborations like with Gustavo Garcia for his ABC workshop #free-studio-132. The radical administrator in these instances conceives of every possible eventuality of an event and strategises around how to accommodate for it in the present. For this, the spreadsheet is a key tool. For example, the #prefab-conference-2022-spreadsheet-166 of categorised tasks and event requirements served as a neutral organisational platform within which the pre:fab team could identify critical tasks and assign themselves to it, either synchronously during a meeting, or asynchronously when it suited them. The spreadsheet makes the administrative tasks of an event visible; it is like opening the bonnet of an old car to reveal the engine and its mechanics. Event-based admin makes gathering possible by distributing labour, nurturing collaborations, and opening organising practices up to a wider audience.

The second key mode of Radical Administration is structural admin, which includes setting up frameworks for communication and archiving, tactics for conversations and decision-making, and ritual processes that manage group hierarchies and gatherings. In organising ABC, the Academia Working Group's systems for hosting online conversations (as discussed in #abc-2022-126—use of #the-stack-237, rotating coordinators etc) supports robust and fair dialogue, the agenda and minute documents are easily copyable, all files from previous years like copy and graphics are available in the shared google drive, and the web platforms utilised by the school like mobilize and lu.ma are free and accessible and present a range of uses in terms of communication and coordination. The community guidelines of the group that are presented during ABC school and through The Lobby, are also upheld by members over time, creating a respectful and trusting working environment. The regularity of meetings also means that members who are not able to attend every session can drop in from time to time and find opportunities to contribute, either conceptually or tangibly. The digital space as an organising setting also 'flattens' hierarchical dynamics where positions of status become harder to communicate over zoom, and thus in the same zoom call, a former head of school from an Ivy league college in the US, has the same physical representation, and the same responsibilities and opportunities to contribute, as a student studying at a small-town architecture school.

These tools and ethos shaped pre:fab's approach: trying to create a space where no one appeared to be at the helm, making organising visible and so tasks could be taken rather than assigned, and the online communication space can traverse pragmatism and pleasure, in that it is used for practical organising, and for keeping in touch. pre:fab utilises the google suite, with open and accessible shared folders and documents, has a google group for shared emails, and uses discord for communication and asynchronous organising, with conversation channels that range from specific projects underway, to a shared library, to a place to post opportunities, to a

channel for pictures of buildings called #buildings-xoxo. Structural admin involves collectively establishing these systems.

Network admin, as part of a Ground-traversing practice, is about making connections to people, practices, opportunities, and other beings and ideas that exist outside the boundaries of the collective. It is a useful starting point for engaging others in administrative work, inviting them into the radical admin and can look like finding venues, sponsors, promotional opportunities, or contributors for events. Personal connections have allowed free access to spaces for pre:fab (to be discussed later in this chapter). When organising the pre:fab conference, one team member had connections to several companies who were willing to donate napkins, cutlery, coffee, and oat milk.

There are challenges that arise within the role of the Radical Administrator. The first is money, and the second (related) is the fair distribution of the administrative work. The complexity of money in the conversation about administration work extends far beyond the reaches of my practice. Administration work is so often gendered, undervalued against other types of work even within the context of the work it is serving, and is often undervalued in non-profit or other organising work due to its invisibility. When organising the Free School of Architecture in 2017/18, we intentionally shifted the language of the 'roles' within the school to imagine different hierarchies. Removing the titles of 'teacher' and 'student'; and instead hosting 'participants' (some of whom ran sessions), 'invited collaborators', and 'co-organisers'; was central to the idea that *everyone* was voluntarily in attendance, and everyone was extracting some value from that attendance. Participants learned from each other, the invited collaborators became participants and benefitted from sharing their practices with a large group of diverse disciplines and backgrounds; and us co-organisers chose to be there from the start, benefitting significantly from the connections made and the lessons learned in the process. Of course, in a dream scenario, everyone would be paid for their time, but deciding on who should be paid over others (and who should pay, for those people to be paid) was a significant layer of complexity, and an impossibility given our lack of funds, and had the potential to reinstate the very hierarchical dynamics we were trying to reimagine. In 2020, architect and educator Lynda Simmons wrote a short opinion piece about the state of architectural education in Aotearoa and more broadly, referencing FSA as an example of a new educational program and noting in a footnote that there was "debate to be had here around using unpaid tutors to deliver such courses but, perhaps, for another time".<sup>488</sup> Obviously there is missed nuance in this call for a debate, but it struck me that the concern here was more for non-existent tutors and their unpaid labour, and not for the thousands of hours of unpaid administrative labour that go in to making things like FSA happen (the kind of labour that Simmons, as co-founder of *Architecture + Women NZ*, is no doubt very familiar with!).

The Radical Administrator thus often needs to be strategic with money, leverage resource opportunities, and re-think typical economic relationships to initiate The Ground-making process. The scholarship I was awarded to undertake this research was not enough to live on, but it did mean I was being paid for my time to develop the practices of The Night School and pre:fab. pre:fab in particular became increasingly collaborative, with most of its output collectively designed, written, organised, and actuated. By taking on much of this layer of administrative work myself, in what was becoming a much more dynamic shared collective, was a way to leverage the resources that university provides—given that some of my time was 'paid'—and create The Ground of pre:fab for others to enjoy thus relieving some of the cumbersome back work required to sustain a collective. pre:fab took root through the process of organising the first #prefab-conference-160 in 2022, and the administrative work following the conference (organising meetings, setting up emails and contact platforms, posting about gatherings on social media, doing the base writing for shared documents etc) acted as the care for that root, allowing it to grow.

<sup>488</sup> Lynda Simmons, "Opinion: The Education of Architects," *Architecture Now*, 2020, accessed June 11, 2024, <https://architecturenz.co.nz/articles/opinion-the-education-of-architects/>.

A key reflection on the organisation of FSA in 2018 was that one reason it was unable to continue, or become more participant lead, was the difficulty of letting go of the administrative work.<sup>489</sup> So much of that work had become tacit and tangled in personal networks and deep email threads that it felt impossible to release. The Radical administrator, while a useful role for Ground-making and establishing community infrastructures, at some point must be able to disconnect from those tasks. Where administration can often be seen as neutral, the work has political dimensions that generate hierarchies within a collective and can foster feelings of resentment or disillusionment. Love is equitable, and so an imbalance in responsibility, creates a lop-sided trajectory that can impact sustained momentum, as knowledge pools in one place. Sharing the administration work is a starting point for disrupting hierarchical dynamics (in any organisation or collective, of any scale), and it ensures that a collective is resilient beyond the involvement of any individual, as the knowledge of shared systems and ways to do things is held by everyone.

Not only is it more equitable to share the administration work, but it also acts as a binder for a collective. Anthropologist Joseph Henrich has observed the value of ritual to collectives and their survival—both literally and figuratively.<sup>490</sup> He argues that when traditional tribal groups were suffering hardships or facing divisions, they would often consult a ritual specialist who would advise a series of collective actions to take, usually to appease a higher power and ask for relief. Henrich's position is that these actions could relieve internal tensions, or even see an improvement in the community's overall wellbeing, not because of a higher power, but because the act of having to relate to each other, work together, and organise the ritual provides an external focus point that goes beyond the particular issues at hand, meaning community members catalyse around a shared goal, rather than a shared problem. In this way, a collective is bonded less by the manifestations of their organising, and more by the organising itself. The organising of the pre:fab conference in 2022 was the impetus for the creation of pre:fab, its Ground, but the conference itself was not nearly as profound as the gathering and organising around its shared vision. In this we can understand that participation in Radical Administrative processes *is* Ground-making, and a critical aspect to Creating Community Infrastructures that sustain a collective.

## Rituals and Contracts

Radical administration is part of a complex mesh of processes and actions that reveal the importance of ritual acts in Ground-making, in that it is through ritual that relationships between people, people and places, people and materials, are formed, fixed, organised, re-organised, re-formed, imagined, and re-imagined. There are many forms of rituals, and infinite examples: most experience of daily life is through ritual and performance, from brushing your teeth to receiving a degree in a graduation ceremony. Ritual can be understood as formalised, symbolic actions to communicate meaning (often performed in ceremonial contexts for religious or communal purposes); they can be structured, repetitive actions that create a sense of control (like daily routines and habits); and they can be organised social performances that establish and maintain social orders, mark significant events, or integrate individuals into a broader social environment. Rituals construct relationality—manifesting relationships with other people, beings (both tangible and intangible), things, and/or ideas—and create a physical action or performance that represents those relationships. There is usually a desired output to that performance, whether it be a feeling (joy or fear for example), an outcome (the end to a drought), a formalised connection (marriage), or a new, rearranged or strengthened social hierarchy (coronation, induction, promotion). The everyday nature of rituals, and the dominant western culture's tendency to make its own rituals the 'norm' and legally ratify them, render many invisible, and supposedly 'just the way things are'. I am going to discuss some ideas about ritual practices in relation to performance and participation, the conscious engagement with rituals in my practice, some examples of rituals that have been deployed by pre:fab and others, and how pre:fab have explored the contract as a site of ritual experimentation.

<sup>489</sup> Forde, "Starting a Free School of Architecture."

<sup>490</sup> Joseph Henrich, *The Secret of Our Success: How Culture Is Driving Human Evolution, Domesticating Our Species, and Making Us Smarter* (Princeton University Press, 2016).

In his theorisation of Socially Engaged Art (SEA), artist and performer Pablo Helguera discusses performance, starting from Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of the 'carnavalesque' or the space where roles can be subverted and where "social hierarchies are temporarily broken through satire, celebration and chaos".<sup>491</sup> He makes a careful distinction between the participatory ritual practices of the carnivalesque and performance as entertainment. One is about active participation in the structural design of communities, and other is about spectacle. In the 1960s, philosopher Guy Debord observed that authentic social life had been replaced by its representation; the *image* of life, through its performance, had become more dominant than life itself. The spectacle, the "visual excess produced by mass-media technologies" was not just this vast collection of images, but had permeated societal consciousness to become a worldview, "an objective reality".<sup>492</sup> Debord's position implied that a paradigm of being entertained, of watching, as opposed to participating, had become the dominant way of being, and the dominant way of being together. This was long before the visual excess of Instagram, Tik-Tok, YouTube, streaming platforms, and the 24 hour news cycle, where attention, as writer Marie Solis suggests, is now one of the world's most valuable commodities.<sup>493</sup> The vast replication of ideas, images, and signs existing in these contemporary shared spaces detaches them even further from reality, they become their own reality, and thus 'participation' in observing and making these representations is also detached from reality and becomes a simulation.<sup>494</sup> As Fisher claims, in this paradigm, heightened considerably since the 1960s, even acts of radicality are an aesthetic, a spectacle.<sup>495</sup> For my practice, a conscious engagement with rituals was a way to experiment with resisting the trap of the spectacle, the simulation. Participation needed to feel *real*, active, and that it was constructing relationships and realities. Helguera argues that for this "a certain aspect of play in SEA" should be retained, to remain aware of, or challenge social interactions, creating opportunities to upset "existing social values" and creating room for reflection and "escaping the merely hedonistic experience of spectacle".<sup>496</sup> In this way, ritual spaces can operate as experimental spaces for reflection on and reconfiguration of normative ways of behaving and relating, and demand participation as opposed to observation.

Love and organising come together profoundly through the form of rituals and ritual experimentation in the way that they tell stories, make meaning, and organise relational dynamics. TNS and pre:fab experimented with the development of shared rituals that bond a group and the subversion of often invisible rituals that generate hierarchy and relationships in the Disciplinary Gathering space to reveal them as tools that construct reality and particular ways of being together. Organising practices of the kind used by the Academia Working Group are also ritual acts, and through their experimentation with hierarchy challenge conventional ritual relationships. TNS and pre:fab gatherings encourage active participation through workshops and through ritual-making. The ritual is not about a performance for a spectator (though I personally find it very difficult to separate my experience of the ritual from how I think it will appear in images for others), but about a shared experience in which everyone participates. This has been explored through aforementioned ritualistic practices like opening and closing events with a *karakia*, sharing food together, and hosting a round of introductions with a novel question prompt. It has also been explored more intentionally and explicitly through ritual design and ritual workshops. When pre:fab met with the Te Kāhui Whaihanga board following our unsuccessful bid for president—#prefab-for-presenting-192—we deployed a ritual form designed to challenge the hierarchies generated by board room rituals—one of those dominant ritual spaces that become invisible in their ubiquity. Institutions often use rituals to strengthen and affirm their hierarchies, and to exert and hold onto their power. These rituals have become embedded in legal constructs that 'legitimise' organisations.

<sup>491</sup> Pablo Helguera, "Education for Socially Engaged Art: A Materials and Techniques Handbook," (New York: Jorge Pinto Books, 2011), 67.

<sup>492</sup> Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 2.

<sup>493</sup> Marie Solis, "One Weird Trick for Destroying the Digital Economy," *The Nation*, 2020, accessed July 20, 2024, <https://www.thenation.com/article/culture/qa-tim-hwang-subprime-attention-crisis/>.

<sup>494</sup> Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*.

<sup>495</sup> Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*.

<sup>496</sup> Helguera, "Education for Socially Engaged Art," 70.

During the #name-badge-ritual-147, each attendee is handed a name badge. These have a title: a conventional company role, from chief executive officer to chief financial officer, to chief technology officer to receptionist; and a name, all of which are “John”. The pre:fab team are also “Johns”, each with the role of “Presenting Facilitator”. We invite every John to introduce themselves and their role, and to embody that role and that character for the duration of the presentation. Following our presentation or introductory activity we invite attendees to flip the card in their name badges. The back side of the name badge is hidden, and the process of flipping the card and reinserting it reveals a glittery, colourful new role for each person, such as “Interdimensional Liaison Officer”, “Cleansing Agent”, “Network Server”, and “Transcendence Arbiter”, while all of the pre:fab members have names starting with “PF” like “Prismatic Futurologist”, “Paradigm Flicker”, “Party Finder”, and “Poignant Flamingo”. PF is pre:fab, but it is also Political Fictions, Precolonial Fabrics, Poignant Fables, and so on, riffing off the flexible use of “SF” by Donna Haraway, which encompasses “Speculative Fiction”, “Situated Feminisms”, and “String Figures”.<sup>497</sup> Each attendee is then invited to introduce themselves with whichever name they wanted and their new role, with the expectation that they will embody this role going forward in the discussion.

pre:fab’s use of name badges ritualises the transition they mark in our workshops, changing the dynamic of the space to be more convivial and challenging attendees to consider the role they play in shared dialogue and the performance that this role implies. The name badges are a ritual in themselves, but they are also a tool used to make visible ritual practices that are otherwise invisible in their ubiquity and cultural dominance. A board meeting is a complex, legally ratified ritual, which generates and fixes hierarchies and power dynamics in an organisation. An attendee’s role within a board meeting implies when they can speak, what kinds of things they can say, and who they are superior or subordinate to. By initiating our workshops with an exaggerated version of this ritual, where every attendee has a defined (yet randomly assigned) executive role, and where everyone is named ‘John’, the setting of the board meeting itself is brought into focus, its hierarchies, absurdities, and power dynamics revealed and challenged. The name ‘John’ is used because it is a common Pākehā male name particularly in the generation of men who dominate boards and executive positions in companies.<sup>498</sup> In the United States, Bloomberg tracked the number of S&P CEOs to note that 2023 was the first year that women outranked men named John.<sup>499</sup> A New York Times study had looked at this and included other categories in 2018 like government, courts and so on (there were more senators across both parties named John than there were women).<sup>500</sup> It is also used to describe the “average hypothetical man” in its use in “John Doe”.<sup>501</sup> It implies a generic anonymity, an invisibility, a dissolving of diverse knowledges and experiences into the ‘norm’, the culturally dominant. Much like a board meeting itself.

The shift then of role within the meeting to these other strange and arbitrary titles suggests that experimentation with ritual spaces that define how to gather and be together may also create

<sup>497</sup> pre:fab, “Te Kāhui Whaihanga NZIA Board Meeting,” pre:fab, 2023, accessed July 02, 2024, <https://www.pre-fab.xyz/catalogue#:~:text=in%20such%20places.,Te%20K%C4%81hui%20Whaihanga%20NZIA%20Board%20Meeting,-MAY%202023>.

<sup>498</sup> As of December 31, 2023, Men made up 69% of governance and leadership positions in NZX listed companies in Aotearoa. NZX, *Gender Diversity Statistics*, New Zealand’s Exchange: Te Paehoko O Aotearoa (2023), <https://www.nzx.com/regulation/nzregco/diversity-statistics>. John was the most popular name in Aotearoa from 1910-1955, held a top 5 position until 1967, and has waned in popularity since 1970, coming in at 112th place in 2023. *Baby Name Popularity over Time*, Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa New Zealand Government (Department of Internal Affairs, 2024), <https://catalogue.data.govt.nz/dataset/baby-name-popularity-over-time>.

<sup>499</sup> Anna Fleck, “Women Ceos Vs. James and John,” statista, 2024, accessed December 2, 2025, <https://www.statista.com/chart/31812/number-of-s-p-500-ceos-be-gender-or-first-name/>.

<sup>500</sup> Claire Cain Miller, Kevin Quealy, and Margot Sanger-Katz, “The Top Jobs Where Women Are Outnumbered by Men Named John,” *The New York Times*, 2018, accessed December 2, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/04/24/upshot/women-and-men-named-john.html>.

<sup>501</sup> Merriam-Webster, “John Doe,” Merriam-Webster, accessed November 12, 2024, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/John%20Doe>.

a space in which other ways of gathering and being together could be invented and practised. Through small acts of ritual subversion, the outcome and feeling of a meeting may also shift. The subversion of rituals becomes part of a Ground-making practice through the metaphor of the scientific laboratory. Rituals, and their subversion, create tools through which to see things otherwise impossible to see.

pre:fab have tried to embed ritual practices into other conventional forms of Disciplinary Gathering. For example, during pre:fab's #detecting-the-darchive-251 conference, presenters flanked each end of the room and had three minutes to present their darkefacts. When fake applause sounded, everyone in the room turned 180 degrees on their rolley chairs to face the next speaker, who had 20 seconds to prepare to speak. Everyone in the room was active in the spatial ritual of the talks and was made conscious of that through movement and sounds. It was a subversion of the conference format and the speaker/audience dynamic, denying the audience passivity and demanding active involvement in a collective experience. There were also more than 20 speakers: from architecture students, to practitioners, to the President of the NZIA; valuing knowledge across and outside the discipline, challenging typical hierarchies of conferences. All the content of these talks was explored through workshops in which the speakers participated alongside attendees and organisers, which in some ways de-authored the expertise in the room, and left ideas up for grabs. Activities in the workshops like poetry and embroidery introduced different knowledge types to architectural thinking, allowing space for vulnerability, and de-centring conventional modes of architectural production to democratise and open conversation.

For the same event, pre:fab team member Leonard Hobbins ran a workshop about exploring the corporate grindset rituals of architecture offices, gathering attendees around a water cooler to air their work-life grievances and release them through a series of ritual acts. In a similar workshop organised for ABC School in 2023, Hobbins asked attendees to “imagine interacting with one another outside of hegemonic narratives”.<sup>502</sup> Where rituals in architecture are often referred to in the context of “spirituality, cultist and alternative lifestyles, expressions and appropriations of indigeneity”, rituals in this workshop were understood as “small acts we undertake each day, and how these may contribute to our capacity to organize, and relate to each other”.<sup>503</sup> For pre:fab, demystifying the ritual space as the very underpinning of the construction of shared realities is the first step in shifting The Ground of those shared realities. A farewell event and pre:fab vision session in 2024, #pasta-making-268, gathered pre:fab members around a gingham tablecloth (of Italian neo-classicism), to envision the future of pre:fab and then to hand-make pasta together in paddling pools. In these spaces, in what Helguera calls “tentative locations”: where social roles can be inverted; where meanings and interpretations within a discipline are conflated, cancelled out, or connected in progressive ways; where a complication of readings can allow the discovery of new questions; in spaces that can be confusing and demand vulnerability, pre:fab finds meaning.<sup>504</sup>

A significant event of ritual exploration for my practice was #dddd-170, a collaborative event between The Night School, Social Dreaming with Maxine Goon, and Simon Glaister that we ran during the NZIA Auckland Branch Architecture Week in 2022. #dddd-170 asked attendees to perform a series of tasks meant to illuminate a position on rituals and contracts and their relationship to the construction of architecture. Much of the workshop theory was built around the discussion that framed “contracts” in ‘Chapter Two—Disciplinary Gathering’—that ritual interaction is how current political frameworks were discovered and that it is only through repetition and habitual embodiment that they have come to be seen as enduring forms of authority. During the #dddd-170 Workshop, we asked participants to arrange themselves spatially in a series of social constructions (loosely connected palaeolithic hunter gatherers who have met for a seasonal jubilee; a feudal society; and a Commodity-Mediated, Market-Driven,

<sup>502</sup> “Demotic Ritual Practices: What Do You Reckon?,” The Architecture Lobby, 2023, accessed September 16, 2024, <https://architecture-lobby.org/event/demotic-ritual-practices-what-do-you-reckon/>.

<sup>503</sup> “Demotic Ritual Practices.”

<sup>504</sup> Helguera, “Education for Socially Engaged Art,” 71.

Individual-Exceptionalist contemporary western Anglo-Saxon Neo-liberal Democracy) to chart in a metaphorical way the trajectory from palaeolithic ritual experimentation to King Charles and Elon Musk. The contract, as the present-day manifestation of this ritual experimentation, where social relations are fixed and re-fixed was posited as an experimental space, a way to create new ritual, new ways of relating, being, and working. Through a series of ritual exercises, the Agreement for Architects Services was examined, re-configured, and performed.

pre:fab's exploration of the contract also extends to its founding document #prefab-contract-168—a live contract between the organisers of the first conference that stipulates our responsibilities in organising the event, and our responsibilities beyond the event. In the formation of pre:fab, the contract was a way to understand the motivations of its incumbent members and to capture the dialogue around its original impetus. The contract was a shared google doc that was fully editable and hence it could be written into by anyone, and once the bulk of the text was written, each member switched to suggesting mode so we could track the changes to the document. The contract remains live and can be commented on by anyone on the internet.<sup>505</sup> This dialogical space captures the multiplicity of the origin organisers, their different understandings of ideas, words, phrases, and visions. It makes that multiplicity visible and ongoing, recognising that ideas will also shift over time. The idea too was that the contract should be returned to, continue to be edited by pre:fab members, and reflected on by others. A record for the active shifting of ideology and relationality of members emerges through the pre:fab contract and is evidenced in its actions. While there aren't necessarily consequences for breaching the contract, it acts as something to point to as a shared collective agreement when difficult decisions need to be made, and something to return to, edit, readjust, and it acts as a gathering space in itself, where we can express our values through a concrete relational system.

Rem Koolhaas wrote delirious New York as a “retroactive” manifesto, because he observed that “the fatal weakness of manifestos is their inherent lack of evidence”.<sup>506</sup> The newness of Koolhaas' ideas in Delirious New York—what manifested—is in the extraction of order from the chaos of the urban growth of Manhattan, as a celebration of the unplanned, to present a novel way of understanding and appreciating urban environments that thrive on complexity and contradiction. Manhattan existed as a mountain of evidence, without a manifesto to claim an urban logic, or lack of a logic that allowed the city to develop and be so dynamic. The use of the contract in my practice and in the work of pre:fab is a way to reckon with the ‘lack of evidence’ associated with manifestos and mission statements, which for the most part, are an expression of values that exist independent of actions and reality. The contract, rather than outline values, instead outlines and ratifies relational dynamics between parties which are discussed and agreed upon, and describes outcomes, actions, and behaviours to which those parties can be held to account.

In architecture in Aotearoa, we can see this difference in two ‘manifestos’. The first, *Architects Declare*, is part of a global movement calling on architects to declare their commitment to initiate a paradigm shift in behaviour, with the goal of designing “buildings, cities and infrastructures as indivisible components of a larger, constantly regenerating and self-sustaining system”.<sup>507</sup> Nearly 150 architecture practices have signed the open letter, but there is no mechanism through which they prove their commitment to this goal, or evidence their commitment through their actions. *The Diversity Agenda*, is a programme working towards diversity and inclusion in the architecture and engineering disciplines which has a manifesto type accord, but also requires signatories to report on their progress towards the aims of the accord, and invites signatories to an annual summit where they share and successes and challenges.<sup>508</sup> In their gathering

<sup>505</sup> No stranger has intentionally left a comment, but someone did once, either accidentally or as a test of their ‘powers’, leave an anonymous blank comment and then deleted it.

<sup>506</sup> Koolhaas, *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan*, 9.

<sup>507</sup> “Aotearoa NZ Architects Declare Climate & Biodiversity Emergency,” Aotearoa New Zealand Architects Declare, accessed September 15, 2024, <http://www.architectsdeclare.nz/>.

<sup>508</sup> The Diversity Agenda, “About Us.,” The Diversity Agenda, accessed September 15, 2024, <https://diversityagenda.org/about-us/>.

around a manifesto that functions more like a contractual agreement, and involves the gathering around and sharing of knowledge and practices, they make progress with equity measures among their signatories.<sup>509</sup> All the same, both of these examples have the effect of ‘cleansing’ capitalist labour practices. The economic function of architecture and engineering practices remains the same, while appearing to be more inclusive, more ‘sustainable’. The Accord and Diversity Agenda behave like brands—symbolic representations of values—as opposed to real, tangible things and actions, and thus participation in them is about aesthetic appearance, an illusion, an example of sociologist Jean Baudrillard’s concept of simulation.<sup>510</sup>

It is therefore important to think about how experimentations with ritual and contracts can be applied back into commercial practice where the economic functions of the discipline are most present, to engage more deeply with systems and power structures. The Ground made by pre:fab and TNS is a boundaryless space of free play, the results of which can be assessed, mediated, and adapted to opportunities in commercial practice. These are channelled to Groupwork, in this case through how we draft our Agreement for Architecture Services (AAS). We use this contract between us and the client to express what we believe architecture to be (“a reality producing fiction that projects new and alternative methods for the interrogation and satisfaction of hypothesised needs and desires” among other definitions) and what we believe our responsibilities are as designers (our first is to the site and the environment, the second is to the cultural production of the discipline of architecture, and the third is to the client).<sup>511</sup> The client agrees to these definitions, and to the hierarchies of responsibilities. The contract also stipulates that at least 15% of the revenue from the fee is diverted back into research or community development work. To date this revenue has been used to pay for resources for pre:fab, and to pay ourselves for the time spent on research for pre:fab projects, and for research into earthen material technology.

Groupwork also leverages other opportunities to re-organise conventional ritual within the commercial sphere. For example, our Christmas parties #neural-networking-178 and #prefab-mud-mixer-258 are events that invite our families, friends, clients, mentors, collaborators, pre:fab, and the interested public to participate in an activity that contributes something to the architectural field. #neural-networking-178 in 2022 launched a generative AI tool for aggregating people’s visions about the places they belong to and commissioned five architects to contribute to a room-scale spatial model of Tāmaki Makaurau, while #prefab-mud-mixer-258 in 2023 taught guests how to make light-weight earth bricks around a vegan hot dog BBQ. Our Christmas parties posit: imagine if every architecture practice used their Christmas party to contribute some kind of cultural production to the discipline of architecture while celebrating and having fun!

One thing that drew a pre:fab member to pre:fab, was that they felt that pre:fab was “mingling with purpose” as opposed to other Ground-making spaces in Aotearoa that centred largely only on gathering and usually gathering around alcohol. Ritual spaces of architectural gathering have leant on these ways of being together where socialising with drinking, celebrating the image of architecture (awards), and being ‘seen’—being part of the spectacle—take priority over discourse and social reconfigurations. Mingling with purpose is about creating the feeling that the Disciplinary Gathering, the fun-making, has some function other than just making fun. Our approach to this is to gather around *actions* rather than *values*. Values and values statements are often made up of singular concepts or words that have different meanings to different people based in their endlessly differing life experiences. Actions, however, are tangible and concrete and people can understand and see their values reflected in them. For example, pre:fab could claim to align to values of “sustainability” and “community” (particularly fraught and oft-used but rarely defined values) and mingle around them, OR we could host a #prefab-mud-mixer-258

<sup>509</sup> In 2024 The Diversity Agenda reported that their signatories has decreased the pay equity gap between people in the same position from 5.6% to 0.4%. The Diversity Agenda, *Insights 2024* (The Diversity Agenda, 2024), [https://diversityagenda.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Diversity\\_Agenda\\_2024\\_insights.pdf](https://diversityagenda.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Diversity_Agenda_2024_insights.pdf).

<sup>510</sup> Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*.

<sup>511</sup> Groupwork, “Agreement for Architectural Services,” (Groupwork, 2023), Internal Document.

and invite people to work with a regenerative material, learn a new skill, meet people, and share knowledge and food.

Some of the core pre:fab ritual staples include shared #pot-lucks-274 lunches (at all scales of events, from afternoon teas with 5 attendees to our conference of 70), and one that I have advocated for intensely, which is the immediate collective processing and application of new knowledge. Copious studies evidence that knowledge is learned best through doing,<sup>512</sup> and attending a talk about the housing crisis (for example), is a way to feel better about the problem, but like the dynamic of activism to organising, is mostly about education and visibility, and not about organising for structural change. NZIA's in:situ conference, the impetus for pre:fab, is the perfect example: it is architecture's largest Disciplinary Gathering site with over 1000 attendees, and there is no discussion, no ideating, no ruminating on how the ideas of the speakers might have relevance in Aotearoa, beyond a crowd-sourced brief Q&A.<sup>513</sup> This is part of what makes it so challenging for the institute to meet complex challenges through their CPD delivery: their ways of gathering are rarely conducive to developing the intimate and trusting relationships needed for organising. At the first #prefab-conference-160, a series of workshops followed the playing of each talk. Knowledge was processed collectively through different epistemological approaches, and its application considered. This tactic was deployed again at #detecting-the-darchive-251, this time with the speakers themselves present and participating. Processing new knowledge together forges bonds, connects people to The Ground, generates ideas, and can point to possible pathways forward through collaboration.

Mingling with purpose implies that just because a gathering is fun, or feels good, doesn't mean that it is always easy or will preclude feelings of discomfort. It is about Community Infrastructure and ritual frameworks that factor difficult things into gathering spaces and hold them present to deal with them better collectively. At pre:fab events, we share food, and we also share knowledge, worries, frustrations, vulnerability and our feelings and visions for the future. Ritual experimentation, through events and gatherings and through contracts, presented pre:fab, TNS, and Groupwork with an opportunity to develop new types of relationality between people and people, people and places, people and materials, and between other tangible and intangible forces that shape shared reality.

## Workshops

I want to elaborate briefly on workshops beyond the discussion of rituals because while a variety of tactics have been discussed throughout this document, workshops as particular tactic and/or methodology has been dominant through the practice as a principle exploration of 'being together' under the various platforms of the research. I leaned heavily on the workshop as a site of experimentation, a place in which ritual and ritual subversion can be fore-fronted, and where there is an kind of underlying element of discomfort: in that workshops can create space of ambiguity where behavioural norms can be shifted at any time, where there is an expectation to participate not only in the performance of the workshop but in its idea and content generation which nudges participants into certain ways of being, doing, and knowing.

The workshop was deployed in all TNS events, and in many pre:fab events, including some potluck gatherings, the conferences, and ideating sessions. For TNS, the workshop as a methodology allowed me to explore a facilitatory practice for Ground-making, and it made space for attendees to, as educators Rikke Ørngreen and Karin Levinsen suggest of the power of

<sup>512</sup> Some seminal texts on theories of learning through doing, the importance of the action and reflection process, experiential learning, and situated learning include John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (Kappa Delta Pi, 1938).; Donald A Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (Routledge, 2017).; David A Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (FT press, 2014).; and Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Cambridge university press, 1991).

<sup>513</sup> Tessa Forde, "In:Situ Report 2024: Imagining Alternative Gatherings," pre:fab, 2024, accessed July 02, 2024, <https://www.pre-fab.xyz/catalogue#:~:text=in%3Asitu,-2024%20Review,-FEBRUARY%202024>.

workshops, “acquire new knowledge, perform creative problem-solving, or innovate”.<sup>514</sup> In many ways, the workshop space resembles a classroom: a virtual reality space in which scenarios and roles can be performed, but without the hierarchical dynamics of the classroom, with the teacher as the presumed expert. Many of the workshops engaged in challenging this hierarchy explicitly through enacting other people’s workshops, or workshopping content just presented, taking ‘expert’ out of the room, leaving only the knowledge behind. The playful experimentation with social dynamics through tools like potato puppets, games and toys against a backdrop of serious challenges and power structures are part of Daniela Rosner et al’s call “for a more engaged understanding of design workshops that take seriously the ways these events selectively animate (and resist) social alignments”.<sup>515</sup> The ‘rules’, or the structure of the workshops, this space of imagining, allowed attendees to practise other ways of being themselves and other ways of making and thinking together. Much like games and rituals, the order behind the supposedly disordered space can liberate the attendees in other aspects of their lives. If they can see that some of the rules of the game are arbitrary within this ritualistic, convivial, and open space, then they can assume the same of the rules that feel oppressive to them outside of that space. Artist and educator Jake Thomas Watts has described this environment as a “paragogy,” where attendees “co-create and share unlearning practices.”<sup>516</sup> The form of the workshop gives shape to “what it means to study in collaborative settings”.<sup>517</sup>

A particular workshop form I found to be effective was the repetition of an activity with slight variation, as utilised in #mind-game-122, #free-studio-132, and #dddd-170, among others. Attendees would build on the ideas and work of others to reveal novel approaches and encourage incremental boundary pushing. A kind of group-think is created, as attendees re-use, re-apply, compost ideas from previous rounds to produce unexpected outcomes and ideas. Another workshop technique I deployed was to deny the right of an attendee to explain something that they had made. The origin idea of something in design can limit the capacity of others to project on it their own experience and understanding. In the absence of origin ideas, objects and concepts are liberated to become sites of shared authorship and knowledge. All involved become potential ‘makers’ of a thing, as they interpret it in relation to other things and create new affects through which to view the world.

The Night School was interested in collaborative workshop making. The negotiated sharing of the workshop space with other practitioners meant devising ways of working together. The ethics application process in this instance provided a useful framework for considering how this negotiation might occur. The ethics application process asks for ‘information sheets’ and ‘consent forms’ which act as tools for transparency between a researcher and others involved in conducting or participating in the research. These sheets were also a kind of contract—the collaborators had to sign their consent to contribute to the project and understand clearly through this process the expectations placed on them. I found that working with others to develop their practice theory into a workshop format rather than a lecture (for example), engaged them in deeper consideration or theorisation of their practice, given they had to envision how workshop attendees would embody it. Huang and Yu for example, had to shift their practice from behind the screen (in its role of edutainment), and imagine how to engage an audience as participants and not remote spectators. Their gameshow, #who-wants-to-be-an-architect-115, featured a variety of layers of participation, from the crowd-sourcing of data from Instagram, to the participation of attendees as gameshow players. Attendees, fully immersed in a practice of edutainment, have a much more profound relationship to that practice than they would if its ideas were presented in a talk. In this, the workshop becomes a useful and generative tool for theorising practice, and

<sup>514</sup> Rikke Ørngreen and Karin Levensen, “Workshops as a Research Methodology,” *Electronic Journal of E-learning* 15, no. 1 (2017): 71.

<sup>515</sup> Daniela K Rosner et al., “Out of Time, out of Place: Reflections on Design Workshops as a Research Method” (paper presented at the Proceedings of the 19th ACM Conference on Computer-Supported Cooperative Work & Social Computing, 2016), 1131.

<sup>516</sup> Jake Thomas Watts, “Portfolio: Workshops: Investigating and Developing Participatory Environments for Artistic Learning” (Doctorate of Philosophy University of Edinburgh, 2018), 5.

<sup>517</sup> Watts, “Portfolio,” 5.

for creating dynamic and participatory events that resist the spectacle.

There is however something authoritarian about the workshop methodology that says: ‘be together better this way.’ It is a kind of application of social engineering—micro social engineering—which can overly pre-determine outcomes. While each workshop in my practice explored a different directive, the overarching form was that I was the facilitator with a plan for the workshop, which was rarely shared explicitly with attendees. There is an inherent power imbalance in the knowing and not knowing expected by the workshop, and in participation: I could observe without taking part. There was rarely any dissent within the workshops, (creating safe, playful, revelatory, and fun experiences was always the intention of each instance), and when there was, it was usually part of the performance of the workshop and added to its experience,<sup>518</sup> but the workshop format can preclude opportunities for spontaneity and improvisation that responds to things that happen.

The authoritarian role is in many ways necessary for workshops, particularly in the context of attendees who are not familiar with each other. Someone must guide and facilitate, keep to time, realise the workshop vision. But there are also ways to experiment around this, develop other hierarchies for exploring knowledge together, structural systems that can be established to rotate leadership and contribution. Once these are decided and known by the group, the authority can come from the ritual space and the roles within it, rather than from a single person or vision. When I first joined The Academia Working Group to organise ABC, I was astounded by the organising system, which rotated through facilitators, minute takers, and other roles; all tasks were undertaken voluntarily; the conversation was managed through a system called ‘the stack’; and access to all shared resources was immediately provided. The authority in the gathering came from these structural and ritual systems, knowledge was produced and shared through these systems, and The Ground had already been made for emergent production and manifestations, not dependent on any person.

A key thing that I observe for the future of pre:fab and other gathering spaces in architecture is the need to open out and allow for more ways of ‘being together’ to emerge. pre:fab, to continue and to create and provide value, needs to be able to see the values of its members represented through different forms. pre:fab needs to be a new type of gathering space, to support new futures. The workshop is just one tool for being together, which can be deployed as needed. The need now is to find other tools, other instruments that reveal and make The Ground, and allow these to exist collectively. As with actions on The Ground, the experience of more ways to be together, particularly if they emerge from the personal experiences of the members of the collective, creates a generative space for more to be imagined, practised, and discovered. The collective is only made richer and more generative by this multitude.

## Play

Accompanying love, being together should be *fun* and encourage convivial scenarios that might use play as a strategy for testing different social structures and creating atmospheres amongst which people feel open to vulnerability and deeper connection. Gilman-Opalsky suggests that the “fragmentary and cumulative powers” of “counter-professional” actions, in the drawing together of art and politics through rebellious acts are incomprehensible to the professional world, and thus become “capital’s nonsense”.<sup>519</sup> For the future of pre:fab a starting point for grappling with intimidating, difficult and difficult-to-understand challenges might be to make

<sup>518</sup> For example, in the #ddd-170, in response to the brief to create a performance related to how their group chose to reimagine the architecture contract, one group decided to reject the contract and the exercise completely, finding themselves in opposition to the premise of the workshop which sought to reimagine the AADS and posited the contract as a space for ritual experimentation. Their performance involved a simultaneous reading of a contract and then a collective rejection of it, some screwing it up, all of them throwing them on The Ground and walking off stage. This performance was only heightened by how then a minute or two later the group returned to ‘tidy up,’ collecting everything they had dropped—analogue with the idea of the ‘social contract’ and the responsibility they felt to the group and to the space.

<sup>519</sup> Gilman-Opalsky and Shukaitis, *Riotous Epistemology*, 4.

them feel performative, a bit silly, to reveal them as societal constructions. Again, this is not to dismiss the often violent realities of those challenges, but to reveal them for what they are—things that humans have made that could be made differently—and make The Ground on which to make them differently. And so fun-making for change-making is another core tactic within love and [re]-organising that plays out across different spheres of the practice.

Dodd discusses that in her work with muf architecture/art<sup>520</sup> they observed that children tend to have the crispest spatial intelligence, a capacity to understand and engage their surroundings that they learn through play.<sup>521</sup> The playful workshops of TNS presented an opportunity to leverage play to reverse-engineer this with adults—encouraging attendees of TNS events to overcome their biases through strange, ridiculous, sometimes uncomfortable, uninhibited fun. #potato-puppets-106 workshop used puppetry, a form of play familiar to children, for exploring and experimenting with social relationships in the context of a more serious question related to the future of the built environment. The practice of architecture involves the projection and manifestation of values into our shared environments, and often the imagining of the values, fears, hopes, and stories of ‘users’ or clients. Puppetry, as a tool to learn and practise social norms, can be used by adults to create scenarios in which a person can empathise with a character different from themselves. The act of making the puppets is a creative process that encourages collaboration and makes The Ground for more fruitful conversation through the roleplaying. It is also a silly activity, where participants laugh about potato shapes, outfit choices, and character quirks imposed through a chance-based system.

Many of the initial TNS workshops had these moments of joyful release. #who-wants-to-be-an-architect-115 leveraged ‘edutainment’ to turn architectural knowledge into a participatory spectator sport, and through a series of fortunate events the gameshow finished with a nail-biting rise-of-the-underdog finish in which the audience was heavily invested and cheered jubilantly for. I observed that attendees and players of #mind-game-122 became increasingly experimental with how they approached the game, as they built on the creative approaches of others and recognised the arbitrary nature of its ‘rules’. At the Escuela de Arquitectura y Diseño in Valparaíso Chile, students travel to Ciudad Abierta weekly to play sports including volleyball, soccer, yoga, Mapuche games, juggling, boot camp, and capoeira and part of their graded Cultura del Cuerpo course.<sup>522</sup> On some special occasions older students invent games for the younger students to play in the dunes. These activities, surrounded by poetry readings and poetic acts, are about occupying space with the body, but also about using the rules of games to liberate the students from the ‘rules of life’. Engaging in different social relationships through game-playing can change how people interact outside the game, and how the students approach collaborative design tasks.

Psychology scholar Nicole Harré proposes that these kinds of games, moments of convivial gathering, should be situated within an overarching game—“the infinite game”.<sup>523</sup> The infinite game is a collective play space in which people work “together on creative solutions”, where “both big, powerful players and small, discrete players” work in their spheres of influence “experimenting, adapting, and negotiating new practices; and the policies, laws and technological innovations that help hold these practices in place”, and igniting a creative capacity in each other in order to “promote human and ecological flourishing”.<sup>524</sup> Harré likens the infinite game space to a game of beach cricket—a ubiquitous summer activity in Aotearoa. Where a finite game of cricket is competitive and about the excellent performances of individuals and one team over the other with the ultimate goal of ‘winning’; an infinite game of beach cricket is about shared joy and experience, where a skilled player hits the ball so their nephew can catch it, and

<sup>520</sup> muf architecture/art, “Disclosure,” muf architecture/art, accessed November 29, 2024, <http://muf.co.uk/disclosure/>.

<sup>521</sup> Dodd, “Between the Lived and the Built.”

<sup>522</sup> e[ad], “Cultura Del Cuerpo,” e[ad], accessed June 06, 2024, <https://www.ead.pucv.cl/experiencia/cultura-del-cuerpo/>.

<sup>523</sup> Nikki Harré, *The Infinite Game: How to Live Well Together* (Auckland University Press, 2018).

<sup>524</sup> Harré, *The Infinite Game: How to Live Well Together*, 12.

everyone can erupt in wholesome applause. The end game is not to win, but to make fun for the collective, to involve and meet everyone where they are. Harré argues that there is a place for finite games in society, but that they don't create the kind of space—The Ground—necessary for collective, long-term visioning and action. The Night School events, pre:fab workshops and potlucks operate from an infinite game perspective and use play explicitly to make The Ground and make experiences of shared joy.

The space of fun and free play among adults, and the resulting vulnerability and connection-making that often occurred in TNS and pre:fab workshops doesn't happen without careful curation. Many TNS events, like #free-studio-132 for example, would be several hours long, building up through a series of activities to a space of free expression.<sup>525</sup> A similar approach is taken by urban planner and community organiser James Rojas, whose practice #place-it-102 was deployed for The Night School launch event, and who initiates his workshops by asking attendees to create a childhood memory from a series of toys. Discussing a childhood memory makes everyone in the room immediately more relatable and creates a far more profound space within which to discuss the following part of the workshop, which is shared visions for urban spaces. In the workshop, imagining an urban future was only strengthened by the recognition of our own Grounds—the core memories and feelings we hold about place and our lives. In this way, the Ground-making within the workshops holds the future central, considering what these kinds of connections might create beyond the end of the workshop, and involve and meet everyone where they are.

Fun-making for change-making is a critical practice in making The Ground. It was key in building the collective momentum of TNS and then pre:fab and creating lasting connections that made those spaces feel good. Playing together necessarily demands complex collaborations and negotiation of social relationships and interaction. It is about love, of course, but it is also about organising, about the gentle corralling of people into places of free-play, experimentation, vulnerability, and imagining the future.

## Under Pressure

Leaning into spaces of fun-making and play can be difficult. While undertaking this research, and in my life more broadly, I felt under constant pressure to be more radical, more political, more urgent. These feelings can be productive in the first instance—they are what motivated me to build off from The Night School into pre:fab, and what pre:fab leveraged to rally others around what felt like productive action and agency. The challenges facing architects and the planet are *urgent*, but 'urgency' as a motivator works to incite others into action with fear, and this can be counterproductive and unsustainable. Urgency is an aesthetic similar to activism that overlooks the sometimes boring administrative work of organising. It is reactive instead of responsive, in opposition to something that can preclude more networked and expansive thinking, and it can be an immense distraction.

Urgency is also a product of individualism. *I have to act now. I have to do something.* The pressure on the individual to be the hero is part of the monomyth of pop culture (perpetuated by very organised large corporations and fossil fuel companies!<sup>526</sup>) that there is a chosen one, and they will defeat the evil (one).<sup>527</sup> It creates, as Joshua Drummond describes, "the fantasy

<sup>525</sup> This need for corralling adults gently toward the fun was apparent in the #free-studio-132 workshop. The workshop was a slow build-up of tasks that became looser and more collaborative over time, and through this attendees became more honest, more experimental in their approaches, and more referential, building on the ideas of others. Ideas seem to become authorless, floating in space for free development.

<sup>526</sup> The narrative of individual responsibility around plastic use and recycling is regularly pushed by large plastic producer companies to depoliticise the production of plastic and divert attention to individual consumption. Silvia Ravazzani and Carmen Daniela Maier, "The Framing of Plastic Pollution Responsibility: Comparing Corporate Versus Environmental Movement Discursive Evaluations," *Corporate Communications: An International Journal* 27, no. 4 (2022).

<sup>527</sup> Joshua Drummond, "The Fantasy of Having Agency," Webworm, 2024, accessed September 20, 2024, <https://www.webworm.co/p/fantasyofagency>.

of having agency”, when really, being a ‘hero’ is mostly just “illegal”.<sup>528</sup> Urgency can depoliticise critical issues by centring them on the individual, and in this it destabilises The Ground needed for organising. In *Parable of the Sower* by Octavia Butler, a speculative fiction novel about a global warming-addled earth, there is a central heroic figure in the protagonist, but she learns quickly in the novel that fear and urgency as a strategy is ineffective in gathering people for change. Her father tells her: “It’s better to teach people than to scare them, Lauren. If you scare them and nothing happens, they lose their fear, and you lose some of your authority with them. It’s harder to scare them a second time, harder to teach them, harder to win back their trust. Best to begin by teaching.”<sup>529</sup> Lauren eventually uses knowledge sharing and collective organising (albeit around some rather cult-like mantras like “God is change”), to generate a movement for a more relational, generative relationship between people and the earth.<sup>530</sup>

I observed that groups like The Architecture Lobby and pre:fab can work much more quickly and with effect once they have some solid Ground on which to gather, and once they have established—collectively systems for conversation, distribution of work, types of hierarchies and heterarchies, and have methods for dealing with conflict or unexpected challenges. The establishment of these systems, full of deep trust and love, takes *time*. It often feels that that time isn’t there, but when faced with urgent challenges, the time spent on the connective tissue, The Ground, is an investment. Sometimes pre:fab gathers just to be together. These gatherings are important, we bond as a group, we talk about our lives, we might make some plans (even if they aren’t concrete) and we nurture the garden we share, our overlapping roots. This creates a space of slowness, care, experimentation, talking, dreaming, eating and drinking, cooking together (#pasta-making-268); which in a way is an act of resistance to the systems that tells us that those things are a ‘waste’ of time. In these spaces we can put aside our feelings of anxiety and uncertainty OR, more importantly, we can reckon with them collectively with people we trust, in a way that better prepares us for urgent action. We can’t only gather like this, and we don’t. We mix and mingle with purpose and make workshops and government submissions and conferences and earth bricks and so on. We make Ground for gathering together around a different future.

## Squitter

Squitter (noun), as defined by Peter and Kevin Forde (my father and uncle respectively), is multiple random items typically unidentifiable at a glance that have ambiguous function and are often strewn or cluttering a space, drawer, or cupboard. As a child, squitter had negative connotations, it was something that needed attention, needed to be sorted out: “what is all this *squitter*?!” But as an adult, and for this practice, squitter became something filled with opportunity, possibility: it is stuff that is not-yet ‘waste’, stuff without owner or author, the stuff of making. TNS and pre:fab have several boxes of squitter that make up the material ‘stuff’ of the research. Some of it was sourced from opshops, from neighbour’s living rooms through a community Facebook group, from discarded models at the university, from shops, and from long-hoarded material supplies from architecture school still kicking around in boxes at my parent’s house. How this squitter was made and sourced, how it was respected and re-used became an integral part of each workshop as a source of idea generation.

The material sourcing was a process of ‘making-do’ with what was available and seeing used materials as squitter—as the stuff of possibility. I observed that often in workshops participants would gravitate towards the used squitter: paper cut out into some form, drawn on, punctured or folded. They would scaffold their own ideas onto these objects, collaborate with a world-making stranger, and generate something new. The squitter took on its own life, told its own stories. In it you could feel the thinking, the touch, the decisions, the imagination of other people and places. Squitter too has Mauri, this feeling exists in all things, a life essence, a “material vitality”.<sup>531</sup> The

<sup>528</sup> Drummond, “The Fantasy of Having Agency.”

<sup>529</sup> Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (Four Walls Eight Windows, 1993), 66.

<sup>530</sup> Butler, *Parable of the Sower*.

<sup>531</sup> Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Duke University Press, 2020).

objects become the stuff of ritual, a way to gather with people unknown to you, a way to gather with the squitter.

This played out inside of workshops like #free-studio-132, across workshops from #potato-puppets-106 to the #prefab-conference-160, and through collaborations. In #dddd-170, Goon introduced her make-do material aesthetic<sup>532</sup> to the workshop which involved sourcing (and then returning!) miscellaneous construction site squitter. Three chin-link site barrier fences, that had been propped up against a wall for months near the architecture school, became tables and then display boards, bringing the squitter of the city into the workshop. Goon's own event series *Social Dreaming*, leveraged the re-use of squitter explicitly, breaking a collaborative design process down into conceptual parts that were delivered weekly over 5 workshops, and asking participants to build off the materials of other participants from the previous week, and discouraging scaffolding from their own. The tasks became increasingly collaborative, both with the people present each week, and with the ideas and materials of the weeks prior.

I have always self-identified as 'a bit of a hoarder'. Through my practice I have developed a more sensitive perspective on this tendency. In reality it is a tenderness towards material objects, a recognition that they form part of complex processes, grown and made and touched by people in places I can't comprehend, many of those processes oppressive or violent. To honour the squitter is to honour those complex processes, their places and people. It is one step towards a more engaged architecture practice that considers more sensitively, and more politically, the whakapapa of materials in material re-organising.

## Space and the Vibe of the Thing

I started this research during the COVID19 pandemic in 2020. Given it is about gathering and being together it made the early actions of my practice difficult. Everyone's Grounds had turned inward, demarcated by the edges of bubbles and cotton masks while many shared public gathering spaces were inaccessible. I was fortunate in that these bubbles and masks and closed borders eventually allowed for many versions of safe gatherings that were not possible in other parts of the world. I was able to access physical places and run workshops and bring people together in a way that, given the context of the pandemic, felt poignant and important. Rituals are spatial and often rooted in a physical place, developing and cementing relationships between people, ideas, and spaces. How a space *feels*, the kinds of associations that can be made to the furniture and materials and so on all have implications and tell stories about what the space is for, who belongs, and how they should behave. This is, of course, a fundamental question for the architect. Architecture is not just about shaping form around ritual but considering how different existing spatial forms can generate different outcomes.

In my ethics application, I considered access to the places where I would host events part of an ethical question: the venues should be close to public transport routes and be as accessible as possible to many types of bodies. The gatherings of my practice have taken place across numerous sites and spaces. It started with FSA, where a lack of a fixed venue meant treating "architectural offices, my house, bars and cafes, galleries, neighbourhood walking tours, and public parks" as classrooms.<sup>533</sup> This attitude of make-do has extended through to The Night School and pre:fab. I have been strategic and creative with place, committed to finding free venues and utilising public spaces in novel ways.

TNS and pre:fab have predominantly occupied five physical grounds. The first is the storage space of the squitter in my allocated desk at AUT.<sup>534</sup> This was not really a space for Ground-making. Beyond its inaccessibility through many layers of swipe card access, it is a space of

<sup>532</sup> Goon, "Social Dreaming: A Collaborative Pedagogy," 78.

<sup>533</sup> Forde, "Starting a Free School of Architecture."

<sup>534</sup> I would like to here apologise to my fellow office colleagues who had to deal with the squitter too, spread across three or four desks at any given time, often occupying large sections of the floor, in how I treated the workspace as a studio I didn't have.

carpet and acoustic ceiling tiles, mechanical ventilation controlled in some far-off place (always too cold), fixed windows and reflected natural light off surrounding buildings. In the winter there would be one sliver of sunlight for thirty minutes, cutting a small arc across the grey floor. The building features prominently in the manifesto film by Jasmax about architecture and its connection to nature.<sup>535</sup> From this context, I wanted to find and use spaces that had other connotations, that other people would feel like they belonged to, and that met the practical and conceptual requirements of my research. The first Ground for TNS, as discussed previously, was Objectspace. The launch event was hosted amongst an exhibition about hostile architecture that, despite the theme, was colourful and lively and acted as a powerful backdrop for my critique on the state of architecture in Aotearoa. It was a collection of evidence of diverse ways of practising and seeing the world. Following the launch event TNS moved upstairs to the office space of Objectspace. Equally designed by architects, and carpet tiled, windowless, fluorescent-lit, and dependent on mechanical ventilation, the vibe of the space needed to be factored into the event design. The squitter of the workshops—the colourful arrays of materials that imply the possibility of making—and the arrangement of the space into tables for talking and tables for making contributed to a vibe more conducive to playfulness and creativity. Music in the making time cut through potential awkwardness. Maffey, in #alive-a-library-118, considered the vibe of the space most profoundly, using large floor mats, wrapping the fluorescent lights in pink cellophane, and stacking chairs and other unwanted furniture out of sight. The workstations for the workshop—which were pieces of a Bunnings plastic DIY garden shed, with pieces of tape wrapped around the modules, sticky-side up—were placed on the floor mats and on desks, creating clusters. Boxes full of cut out lines from discontinued library books were spread around. She had created a space for a different kind of gathering.

Maffey's engagement with a more carefully curated 'vibe' brought into clearer focus the importance to 'design' the spaces of my practice and played out across future workshops and in the activation of my practice's other Grounds. The second space that became critical to TNS and pre:fab was colloquially called 'Brightside'. Brightside is a personal wellbeing organisation for AUT staff and students, and they regularly use a gallery type space behind one of the cafes at AUT. I noticed that this space was rarely used after hours and contacted Brightside to ask if I could run workshops there in the evenings and on the weekends. The space features a large curtain that weaves through the room and can be used to create different sized and shaped spaces; a large screen; chairs, tables, armchairs, and beanbags; white boards; and standing desks. The larger room has Mojo Cafe in a central box, above which is an informal lounging space, and around which are tables and chairs of different types for studying and dining. There is a sink, rubbish bins, and toilets. In short, it is incredibly well resourced, and incredibly conducive to different configurations and uses. Every event hosted at Brightside, from #prefab-conference-160, to #free-studio-132, to #ddd-170, used the curtain and furniture in different configurations to generate different types of conversation and gatherings. #detecting-the-darchive-251 experimented with this most explicitly, displaying an exhibition of objects—Darkefacts—collected on a long table against the wall with their associated abstracts; the 3minute darkefact presentations flanking each end of the room; four workshops of different types; a dancing session; a shared lunch between at least 50 people; and a final collective conversation. To pull this off required organising and spatial imagination, leveraging what was there, and imagining novel uses or applications for each space. This reiterates the importance of architects in imaging the physical Ground on which people gather, and how this affects the conceptual Ground and its cultural production, not just in spaces yet to be built, but in those that already exist.

The fourth physical Ground, and unofficial home of pre:fab, is the West End Rowing Club's (WERC) facilities in Opoututeka (Coxs Bay). In 2020 WERC purchased the clubhouse, which was built first in the 1920s, and extended in the late 1960s, for \$1 from the Hauraki Kayak Club under the agreement that they would restore the building and continue its use for watersports.<sup>536</sup> Groupwork was commissioned by the Club to design a colour scheme, a new balustrade

<sup>535</sup> Jasmax, "The Jasmax Manifesto," Jasmax, accessed September 20, 2024, <https://jasmax.com/manifesto>.

<sup>536</sup> Personal Communication with the treasurer of WERC.

that would be building code compliant, and speculate on an affordable interior renovation. In exchange for this work, we could use the building for events. The space is rough and ready, and with the classic feel of an old sport club,<sup>537</sup> a vibe akin to an RSA,<sup>538</sup> or other shared gathering space of this type. There are wooden floors with decades of usage, a big old piece of carpet, old chairs with faded pastel coverings, photos of WERC members from the late 19th Century and early 20th Century, a pokey kitchen with brown glass teacups, hanging fluorescent lights from an unlined ceiling with exposed wooden trusses, and a big deck that overlooks the bay. As far as vibes go, this is the kind of space that people associate with gathering to engage in and think about sport. It is the kind of space that recalls the industrious learning environments of school camps and scout halls, Christmas functions for sports teams, fundraising quizzes, Friday-after-work fish and chips and beer. In this it has a kind of masculine quality, nostalgic, but it is also non-exclusive, a little bit low-brow, familiar, and it feels public and shared in its roughness and readiness. It is built on stilts over the water, tucked back into large Pōhutukawa, giving it the feeling of a treehouse, the clandestine qualities of a kid's hideout, or a shed in the garden, where conspiratorial ideas and activities might take place and emerge into the world at any time.

pre:fab have used the WERC clubhouse for all number of purposes, casual gatherings or #pot-lucks-274, visioning sessions, and our #prefab-mud-mixer-258 which turned the public grass berm out front into an earth-brick making factory. It is the place for me where pre:fab feels most grounded, ironic in some senses, given the building grounds itself in a tidal landscape, constantly changing. This is another useful metaphor or revelation for The Ground. The ocean is also a Ground, and you can be tethered, grounded, even through constant motion, change, and adaptation. The Grounding is in the vibe of the place, and in the people who gather there.

The final physical Ground of my practice is the digital ground—the internet. I claim this as a physical ground, because despite its apparent intangibility, untetheredness, it has profound physical manifestations and material re-organisations. While invisible in daily use, the internet requires an intricate and vast network of physical spaces across land, sea, and space, including: data centres—massive climate-controlled warehouses full of servers; storage systems and networking equipment; undersea cables that stretch vast distances between continents carrying most of the world's internet traffic; satellites<sup>539</sup> and satellite Ground stations; supercomputers; Network Operation Centres that monitor large-scale networks; Internet of Things Hubs which host devices connected to the internet, communicating with each other; cell towers and other cellular infrastructure; and of course, all of the places where the materials for these physical things are mined, manufactured, and disposed of.<sup>540</sup> I include these to recognise the physical impact of digital work, which can feel so immaterial.

<sup>537</sup> Spaces like sports clubs can also have political dimensions. For example, Rugby League in Aotearoa developed out of the exclusion of working-class people from the Rugby Union. It is a sport that has deep histories and connections to unionised workers and the Labour Party and the physical characteristics of sports clubs can be reflective of those connections. More about the social and political history of rugby league is covered in Ryan Bodman, *Rugby League in New Zealand: A People's History* (Bridget Williams Books, 2023).

<sup>538</sup> An RSA is a club room for the gatherings of the Returned Servicemen's Association which was established in Aotearoa in 1916 to support those returning from World War One. There are 182 local RSAs around the country, and they are often old buildings that serve cheap fish and chips, host local events, and act as spaces for remembrance—often observing daily moments of silence and hosting ceremonies for related anniversaries. Membership is open to anyone. "About the RSA," RSA, accessed November 29, 2024, <https://www.rsa.org.nz/about>.

<sup>539</sup> On the day of writing this in September 2024 there were 10787 objects orbiting the earth. Of these, 6958 were owned by Starlink, the aerospace company of Elon Musk—a new kind of colonisation manifesting from tech-feudalism. "Orbiting Now," Orbiting Now, accessed September 20, 2024, <https://orbit.ing-now.com/>.

<sup>540</sup> Texts that explore the physical manifestations of the internet include Benjamin H Bratton, *The Stack: On Software and Sovereignty* (MIT press, 2016). and Shannon Mattern, *Code and Clay, Data and Dirt: Five Thousand Years of Urban Media* (University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

The digital Ground can be fertile for the emergence of different strategies for organising and reconfigured hierarchies, as evidenced through my work with ABC, FSA, and The Academia Working Group more broadly. Through the pandemic the internet generated a new kind of commons, where talks and lectures from institutions around the world were suddenly accessible and it felt like everyone, all at once, was extremely online. pre:fab uses the google suite for content production and editing, and a platform called *discord* for gathering and organising. A discord server is a “virtual community” where collectives can set up various ‘channels’ for different topics or events, with varying levels of privacy.<sup>541</sup> Each channel also has its own ‘voice channel’ for virtual meetings with sounds and video. Discord is much more familiar to the younger members of pre:fab, but in any case, it provides a gathering site to generate ongoing discussion, organise events, share resources like in our ‘library’ and ‘field’ channels, and aggregate around ideas and projects.

Digital spaces of anonymity, or of what *feel/s* like anonymity, can profoundly affect conversations. If the right conditions are created, attendees in a workshop can be more vulnerable, and share more personal things because those on the other side of the call can seem abstract. However other online spaces can have the opposite effect, where people feel empowered to insult, argue, and undermine when anonymous. I also noted that in online spaces much more work had to be done to create the kinds of conditions for collaborative work. The organisers of the first online ABC School in 2021 reflect that many attendees while likely “not interested” in the oft criticised pedagogical strategy of ‘banking’—where students are containers for the knowledge of the teacher—it was still “deeply entrenched” and it was still what they “most preferred” during the School because it allows for avoiding the discomfort of working with other people, especially strangers.<sup>542</sup> The attendance of the lecture-based sessions drew hundreds of attendees, while those that were framed as collaborative workshops, especially in 2022 and 2023, had hundreds of people register, but only 5-20 in attendance.

Writer and art critic Lana Lopesi discusses how online spaces create a very particular public sphere that can offer “transnational populations, a chance to be a collective again.”<sup>543</sup> She contextualises the concept of a neighbourhood—“a context within which people can produce, reproduce, interpret and perform cultures in meaningful ways” thus fundamentally relational—against that of the online environment where the relational “relies on common ground, shared experiences and shared ideologies”.<sup>544</sup> The internet is, in this way, posited as a new type of commons, a place for public discourse and resource sharing that many young people, and those who feel that their voices are silenced by mainstream discussion, use as a tool readily available to them to amplify their experiences. The digital space is by no means a suggested main gathering site for organising, but it is one tool which can be leveraged and experimented with in the process of discovering different ways to be together, and one that emerges as somehow reactive to the gradual loss of shared public, physical spaces. One of the most profound problems in change-making in architecture is western society’s relationship to the physical Ground: the commodification, financialisation, and privatisation of land. Without a drastic shift in both the conceptual understanding of land and the physical Ground, and then a legislative shift that reflects it, almost all Ground-making and change-making remains surface level and aesthetic. Imagining different uses for shared spaces and creating shared digital spaces to amplify other ways of knowing and doing is a small way to shift this conceptual understanding, and to create new types of commons.

Within the spaces discussed above, the physical Grounds of my practice, I have made new spaces, new architectures around different types of gathering. These spaces have a physical feeling, they are about the arrangement of furniture and materials in a room to produce a certain

<sup>541</sup> “Group Chat That’s All Fun and Games,” Discord, accessed September 20, 2024, <https://discord.com/>.

<sup>542</sup> Frank Burrige et al., “Beyond Capitalism? Organizing Architecture Education,” *Journal of Architectural Education* 76, no. 2 (2022).

<sup>543</sup> Lana Lopesi, “Making a Table: Moana Publics Online,” in *Public Knowledge*, ed. Emma Johnson, Radical Futures (Freerange Press, 2020), 50.

<sup>544</sup> Lopesi, “Making a Table: Moana Publics Online,” 52.

affect, but they are also about unregulated zones of experimentation, conceptual Ground-making spaces to test ideas and ways of gathering. They are a space in which to discover new modes of the commons, and strategies and tools for keeping the generation of the commons alive.

## Mixing

If we return to imagining The Ground as land—as a vast field of interconnected flora and fauna—The Ground is, or should be, a wild place. Its logics are not immediately clear, and on it you can sense the closeness of your own mortality, the spookiness, the changeability. And yet wildness is organised. Wildness has underlying organisational principles that make it fundamentally regenerative and self-sustaining. Things exist in opposition and collaboration, and adaptation and evolution account for radical Ground shifts. The conceptual Ground is a wild place that, like our physical environment, has been trimmed and gated and tilled, and infested with monocultures. Some of the biggest culprits of this taming, tilling, and gating are the institutional bodies that regulate disciplinary boundaries. Some of these are necessary—they are about public safety, they are the 1m tall barrier, with openings no bigger than a baby's head, at the edge of an otherwise invisible cliff edge, and the ambulance at the bottom—but regularly they also act to uphold violent and oppressive systems and exclude people who aren't adequately supported by those systems.

Imagining new ways of gathering requires a practice of mixing: of allowing different types of thinking and practice to interact and overlap, experimenting with different relationships and collaborations. The current state of The Ground makes this difficult. pre:fab have observed that the kinds of diverse ideas and practices described in this thesis regularly become “atomized” into “singular practices, often just one or two people, working on niche, seemingly unique, non-fungible problems in conceptual isolation”.<sup>545</sup> These pockets of wildness on The Ground, sometimes self-sustaining, but often wilting as quickly as they bloom, have to compete for resources and attention through dwindling grant programs, or function through their connection with larger institutions like the academy or by exploiting themselves through “energy, time, ... and motivation”; the labour and resources that contribute to the economy and yet are not recognised by capitalism.<sup>546</sup> The relationship of these practices to the physical Ground and its material resources, infiltrates understandings of the conceptual Ground, which can be perceived as similarly finite, individualist and competitive, rather than something that constantly regenerates and does so through the aggregation and interaction of ideas, and through processes of sharing.

FSA, TNS, and ABC School all created Ground on which to gather and explore the interaction of ideas and practices within and from outside of architecture. *Making Ways* had a similar function, gathering architects with divergent practices to perform and enact their practices with others and through different event forms like live interviews. These gatherings function to release the “cognitive capital embedded in successful creative practice” to disseminate it “for the benefit of the practitioners themselves and for the profession as well”.<sup>547</sup> Mixing should invite diverse practices to engage with each other and then be considered for their overlaps or oppositions. pre:fab's #detecting-the-darchive-251 is a good precedent for this in that it brought together people from architecture—from students to practitioners to meme pages—and it invited other disciplines—a web designer, a writer, a worker at the Pōneke city council, a meme page—to speculate on the theme. Their talks were then workshoped through four distinct approaches. Pushing this mixing further is an ambition for pre:fab going forward. The idea is not to try to capture or boundary what might be considered architecture, but to aggregate different people, practices, and approaches who are imagining and enacting different futures. For the ABC School, session facilitators were paired with each other and with an organiser to stimulate collaboration and create novel relations across diverse topics.

<sup>545</sup> pre:fab, “Notes on pre:fab: Episode 1- Alternative Practice R0<1,” pre:fab, 2024, accessed October 16, 2024, [https://www.pre-fab.xyz/\\_files/ugd/36ee86\\_4e224bbf6e3447b2a0da928aadd977ea.pdf](https://www.pre-fab.xyz/_files/ugd/36ee86_4e224bbf6e3447b2a0da928aadd977ea.pdf).

<sup>546</sup> pre:fab, “Notes on pre:fab.”

<sup>547</sup> Leon Van Schaik discusses this effect as a core ambition for the practice-based research program in architecture at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. van Schaik, “Practice Makes Perfect,” 82.

pre:fab acts as an umbrella under which practices and people can aggregate and interact in novel configurations through a multitude of ways—from workshops to the discord, to the publication of things through our website and Instagram, to the conference, to potlucks. pre:fab is a producer of content, and an audience for that content and the content of others. It is about trying to create some kind of ever-strengthening connective tissue—Ground—between disparate practices that otherwise operate independently or disappear into the ether.

Finding ways for these multitudes of ideas, people, and practices to exist simultaneously on The Ground, and being able to hold multiple ways of knowing and being to be true, is part of the experimental space of pre:fab. In this, there is a necessity to resist dominance of one thing over others, while being cognisant of how the dominant ‘truth’ or ‘way of knowing’ is so often invisible. The Ground-making of my practice, as explored through *Traversing the Ground*, *School-making*, *Trouble-making*, and *Creating Community Infrastructures*, acts as the kind of foundational framework that can support the conditions through which more radical collective arrangements and relations might be possible. For example, the idea of “heterarchies”, first introduced by neuropsychologist Warren McCulloch, poses a system of organising in which any actor in a collective can lead or be led by others dependent on the circumstances at play, what formation based on the problem at hand and the skillsets required to attend to it is most appropriate, and therefore no one person maintains permanent dominance over another.<sup>548</sup> There are no leaders in pre:fab, only projects that happen through shared work and administration, the roles in which regularly shift and adapt and are taken by different people. This kind of way of relating and sharing responsibility can provide the conduits for better knowledge transferral, more equitable workloads, and the capacity through which new members can be supported in their relationship to pre:fab and its activities. Fundamentally it is about making fertile Ground for existing and emerging forms of practice, knowing, and being, supporting them in their theorisation and their connectivity to other things, and revealing them through gathering on The Ground.

## In Practice

My commercial practice with Hobbins and Glaister, Groupwork, provides a platform for starting to play out some of these ideas and test them in reality. This is part of moving the work out of a conceptual space and beyond commentary. Groupwork was founded “with a vision of collaborative working arrangements” and to take a “redistributive approach redeploing the experience and resources gained through full fee work to support our own non-profit projects, research and pro-bono or reduced fee services for public good”.<sup>549</sup> Groupwork is not a well-resourced practice, but we experiment with several tools through which to reimagine architecture practice. As discussed, the contract between architect and client is a starting point for where some of this experimentation takes shape. In this document the architect can outline the particular values that are important to them in relation to reorganising literal materials and conceptual understandings of the environment, and what responsibilities they have, not just to the client, but to the land (beyond that defined by property boundaries), ecologies, other humans, other living beings—who rarely have a voice in such contracts—to broader societal contracts such as Te Tiriti o Waitangi, to the conceptual space of architecture (The Ground), and so on. This can apply to all scales of project—whether it be for a private house, or on a large public project. In this we posit every project as a testing Ground for other ways of practising and relating to the world and shifting The Ground.

Groupwork uses a redistributive funding model included in our contract to channel income to pre:fab projects and research. The bulk of this research has been into natural building materials, which we see as an avenue through which to engage in new modes of practice and outcomes for built projects and to forge relationships with materials, place, and people. Natural building materials and processes are ancient and ubiquitous and yet have largely been sidelined for more ‘durable’ products, easier to industrialise. Reconnecting with these materials and processes encourages relational thinking. Our experimentation with lightweight earth panels

<sup>548</sup> McCulloch, “A Heterarchy of Values.”

<sup>549</sup> “About,” Groupwork, 2023, accessed May 18, 2025, <https://www.groupwork.co.nz/group/about>.

and bricks extends to creating social gathering spaces like the #prefab-mud-mixer-258, and to collaborations with EBANZ and others through their annual conference and their Innovation Committee. We believe natural building materials can generate more intimate relationships for people with place, and that they allow architects to design for and consider the 'hole' that their building makes in a much more tangible way.

We have further ambitions—to operate as a cooperative, to examine the supply chain ramifications of all our projects, to continue working with natural building materials in innovative ways, to work more intimately at a neighbourhood scale, to develop co-housing models and medium density housing schemes that radically re-imagine concepts of ownership co-living, publish all our research and findings for free, and so on. The point, of course, of this whole thesis, is that Groupwork cannot make meaningful change alone, and so pre:fab is not just an audience for these new modes of practice, but a network of collaborators, a shared space of experimentation and imagining, a new institution to connect across people, practice, and place. We need to gather with others, to share what we have learned, learn from them, and be together. The tactics and strategies discussed in this chapter are just a small step towards what this space could be, exploring these skill sets, the insights revealed, some of the core tactics deployed, how they contribute to a methodology of Ground-making, and what they might suggest for change-making in other Disciplinary Gathering spaces in architecture in Aotearoa. I believe the future of the discipline is in these gathering spaces and how they can be mobilised.

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This chapter 'love and [re]Organising discusses how my practice of Ground-making has created spaces that enable organising, and that depend on organising principles grounded in collaboration, long-term visioning, strategic action, and on love and deep care for each other and for everything beyond. The key practice approach discussed is Creating Community Infrastructures—which means establishing the physical, conceptual, and social systems that define and sustain a collective. Creating Community Infrastructures makes Ground because it generates a foundational space necessary for organising, and it fosters an environment where hopes, ideas, frustrations, and knowledge can converge, and visions of the future can be enacted. I foreground some of the key methods that emerged from my practice that Create Community Infrastructures and constitute an overarching methodology of Ground-making.

In discussing Radical Administration I highlight how administrative work, while often invisible and undervalued, is foundational for Ground-making and for 'radicality', creating the conditions for ideas to emerge and tangible things to happen within collective practices, and encompasses establishing organisational structures, managing logistics, and creating and maintaining relationships. The Radical Administrator thus invents systems that make collective spaces feel both organised and organic, works with digital and physical tools for collaborative production, and finds ways to balance administrative responsibility to ensure collective momentum and equity. Sharing administrative responsibility and designing together the rituals it warrants is part of Ground-making, serving as binding forces that emphasise the relational and communal aspects of organising and fosters trust, care, and interconnectedness. I elaborate on the importance of Rituals and Contracts in Ground-making, pointing to how rituals are actions that construct and formalise relationships—between people, places, materials, and ideas—through symbolic, repetitive, or structured practices, and that through this they can also be deployed as platforms of experimentation to challenge and reimagine normative behaviours, reveal and subvert power dynamics, and reconfigure relational dynamics. I propose that this can play out through participatory acts undertaken by collectives that create meaning and tell stories, and through contracts, a contemporary manifestation of ritual practice that regularly defines relational dynamics across all aspects of society. The design of ritual spaces and how they are 'formalised' within the contract is a core part of Creating Community Infrastructures, making gathering a conscious exercise in deciding how to relate to each other and the world.

A ritual form that was explored prolifically through the research was Workshops, and I describe their role as sites for experimentation, participation, and relational exploration, that also allow for the questioning of behavioural norms and for ambiguity and discomfort. The active engagement required from attendees resists passivity and spectacle, while shared authorship, collaborative problem-solving, and an emphasis on knowledge sharing makes the workshop an invaluable tool for Ground-making. They are however just one tool, and one way of being together with limitations like their potentially authoritative structure and the bias positioning of the facilitator. I discuss how Play can be a tool to test social structures, create atmospheres of openness, challenge intimidating societal constructions (thus revealing them as human-made and therefore changeable), and can allow for engaging with difficult topics in a way to make them feel less overwhelming. Play is a way to resist feelings of being Under Pressure to act urgently and motivate collective action through fear, rather emphasising the importance of meaningful connections that feel good and make other futures feel possible to action.

Explorations of relationships between people are not possible without also considering relationality to things and physical spaces. The materiality of my practice and some reflections on relating to material things is discussed in Squitter, where ‘stuff’ becomes a medium for creativity and connection. The reuse of squitter in workshops became a ritualistic act, connecting participants to the material, its origins, and those who have touched it and made it before them. A deep respect for squitter involves recognising the complex, often oppressive processes through which materials are grown, made, and circulated; and recognising the vitality of the material in itself. This is framed as a critical conceptual positioning for architects who are tasked with the reorganisation of materials in a profound and visible way. How the Physical Grounds of the research are related to and designed is also an architect’s key role and so under Space and the Vibe of the Thing I reflect on the places of gathering of my practice and their associations, from a large gallery and cafe space within the university, to a rough and ready rowing club, to the digital spaces that allowed for much of the shared cultural production of my practice. Where physical commons for collective gathering feel increasingly precarious, digital tools like Discord offer possibility for leveraging digital spaces for new forms of organising and community-building, but only in conjunction with real human connection, rituals, and gathering—all of which call for Ground-making, which I discuss as a possible methodology for the creation and sustaining of the commons.

Finally, Mixing returns to The Ground as a place that needs to be wild and self-organising, reflecting on the challenges and opportunities of creating spaces for diverse ideas, practices, and people to interact, sustain, and evolve. New forms of gathering need the capacity to work both intimately with local knowledge, and across rhizomatic networks of interaction and sharing. The role of The Ground-maker thus extends to being a care-taker of this rhizomatic network by and inviting diverse perspectives, composting outdated systems to fertilize emerging ones, and ensuring the soil of The Ground remains fertile and resilient against external pressures.

Through describing these tactics together, we can see that they compost and combine to constitute a practice of making Ground on which to gather and for exploring diverse ways of knowing, being together, and of architecture practice. It also provides a proposed framework for starting new types of institutions. It suggests that imagining and building a future to belong to starts with gathering, and that this gathering can be based on different ideals, arranged through different rituals, imagined with different social relationships, and strengthened through collective action. pre:fab is a platform for imagining and building these new gatherings aiming to create resilient, interconnected systems that sustain diverse ideas, resist oppressive structures, and foster transformative ways of being and knowing.

The  
Night  
School

# Out-of-Shot Zone

If you do not wish to be photographed,  
please locate yourself in this area.



A Platform for  
Architectural  
Exploration in  
Aotearoa

Figure 4.1: Tessa Forde,  
*Out of Shot Zone*, 2022,  
graphic.

## ABC School 2023: Future Belonging

September 16-30, 2023

Renzo Dagnino, Will Martin, Simon Glaister, Tessa Forde, Franny Levitz, Andrea Dietz, Tony Van Raat, Martin Weiner, Peggy Deamer (Organisers)  
Workshop Facilitators  
Public Attendees

Online: Zoom and lu.ma

Inviting people and practices from all over the world to share their approaches to organising in architecture through the lens of 'Future Belonging'.

### Context

After a period of disconnect that followed ABC 2022, the group began meeting again, this time with additional participants who attended the school. The organising cohort was changing with each iteration, shifting the focus of the school with new ideas and positioning. This new group started with two seemingly opposing camps: those who believed in long-term visioning with aspirational ideas that assume capitalism is not a rule that must be accepted for eternity, and those who took a realist approach, wanting to stay in the here and now and focus on working within capitalist structures as architects and academics. The debate was robust and generative, and, over time, the lines began to blur as the notion that long-term thinking would render short-term action impossible weakened in its resolve. The group eventually decided that the framework for the school should open the space for a multitude of approaches, putting out an open call through the lens of *Future Belonging*. The hope was that this would capture a range of liberatory practices across architecture and education—practices that look forward and speculate, and those that action structural changes in the here and now.

The school would run in September 2023, over two weeks instead of one, to reduce its intensity and better accommodate time zones outside of North America. Alongside the school, we wanted to launch the concept of the ABC Hub. The idea of the Hub was to create an online, ever-present companion to the school—a way to develop a rhizomatic web of practices and people working towards similar ends: a future we can all belong to. ABC Hub would be a repository of “collectives, content, tools, resources, tactics, and applications for reimagining architecture practice and pedagogy”.<sup>1</sup> We hoped the Hub would be open-source, editable, and dynamic, generating an active community of “change-makers in architecture” who would be provided the space to share tools and resources to continue or start actioning this work.<sup>2</sup> The demands to build this with a small team and no funding proved complex, and it remains an aspiration for the Academia Working Group (AWG).

### Description of Happening

In June we launched the school, calling for participants and contributors “to answer the complex problem of how to capture, share, redeploy, and evolve liberatory practices across different scales, contexts and cultures from around the world”.<sup>3</sup> The school would be free, supportive, and open to everyone, including students, practitioners, constructors, educators, and “anyone interested in or passionate about affecting change”.<sup>4</sup> Hoping to learn from the experiences of others meeting the challenges of our era and foster space for those just starting out, we invited

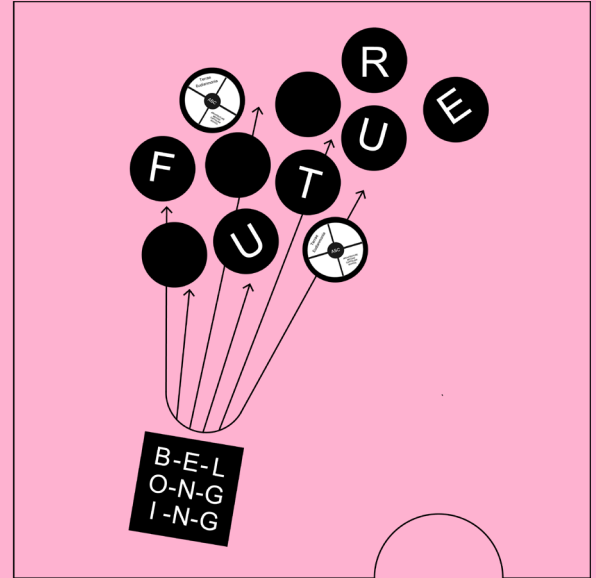


Figure 4.2: ABC School, ABC School logo 2023, 2023, logo. Courtesy of the Academia Working Group.

<sup>1</sup> “F-U-T-U-R-E B-E-L-O-N-G-I-N-G,” Architecture Beyond Capitalism School, 2023, accessed November 04, 2024, <https://abc.architecture-lobby.org/architecture-beyond-capitalism-2023>.

<sup>2</sup> “F-U-T-U-R-E B-E-L-O-N-G-I-N-G.”

<sup>3</sup> “F-U-T-U-R-E B-E-L-O-N-G-I-N-G.”

<sup>4</sup> “F-U-T-U-R-E B-E-L-O-N-G-I-N-G.”

submissions and sessions from collectives and individuals developing organisational techniques for leveraging influence and trying to affect change in spatial production. We recognised that organising can be messy, polished or unpolished, and that it was in the act of gathering that we might be able to develop works in progress or learn from long-existing projects.

The forms of participation and contribution were diversified from previous years, in part to generate a broader range of content and resources for the Hub. We called for “proposals for poster/paper presentations, discussion groups, forums, workshops, activities, collective action, tutorials, open mics, etc. deliverable online”.<sup>5</sup> As in previous years, we also put out a call for organising support, which several people responded to, and they were invited to join our organisational calls. Likewise, we included in the call that we aimed to encourage collaborative opportunities between contributors and participants through the organisation of the school. This process required Google Docs and folders for incumbent facilitators; a comprehensive spreadsheet that captured the results of the Google form submissions and could sort through the more than 300 applicants, each with different capacities for involvement; systems for onboarding attendees and contacting them; and careful tracking of availability and time zones, managed across scheduling spreadsheets.

We received a range of diverse responses for participation, from discussions about unionising architecture; to architecture’s responsiveness in times of crisis—the Türkiye-Syria earthquake as an example; to a discussion of alternative practices in the Global South; to environmental retrofit practices in Bangalore, India. As with the previous year, we partnered organisers with facilitators based on time zones and paired some facilitators to encourage collaboration and make connections across time and space. In arranging the schedule, we tried to balance planned content with more ‘free spaces’ for discussion and contemplation about architecture and practice, including sessions just to gather and talk about the school and create spaces for attendees to engage with the Hub.

Akin to the previous year, the application rate was high, while the turnout was low. This can make for intimate events with space to develop more profound conversations but is also a reflection of the difficulty of committing to free events and the waning engagement with online events as the pandemic transitioned around that time. The sessions for 2023, being much more general than those focused on Studio in 2022, had a more expansive focus on changing material conditions and relationships through systemic and policy shifts, particularly those that reflected the schedule’s bent towards the Global South.

There was a much higher university student attendance this year, and in the closing plenary, one student made a comment about how they expected the space to operate in the same way their lectures do—in that an ‘expert’ talks and they passively listen—whereas they were surprised by ABC in that their voices were considered equal. They felt they had a voice and were seen, reflecting that the conversations were ones they felt they should be having but weren’t in architecture school.

Having attended one ABC and then organised two, I had some clearer reflections after this third iteration. The first is how, when immersed in spaces like these (TNS, pre:fab, ABC, even Huri Te Ao and what types of knowledge it centres), it is easy to forget that the conversations they generate are generally not the norm. I would venture out into more ‘mainstream’ architecture gatherings and think—why haven’t we talked about the relationship of this thing to capitalism yet? Who is going to bring up relationality? This was particularly notable for me in 2023 while ABC School took place over the same weeks as the annual Festival of Architecture in Aotearoa. Likewise, the breaking down of hierarchies in these gathering spaces—in the case of ABC, where a student can end up on a Zoom call, often with only a few other people, with incredible thinkers and practitioners, and be seen as valuable to them and to others—is also radical and something to be celebrated.

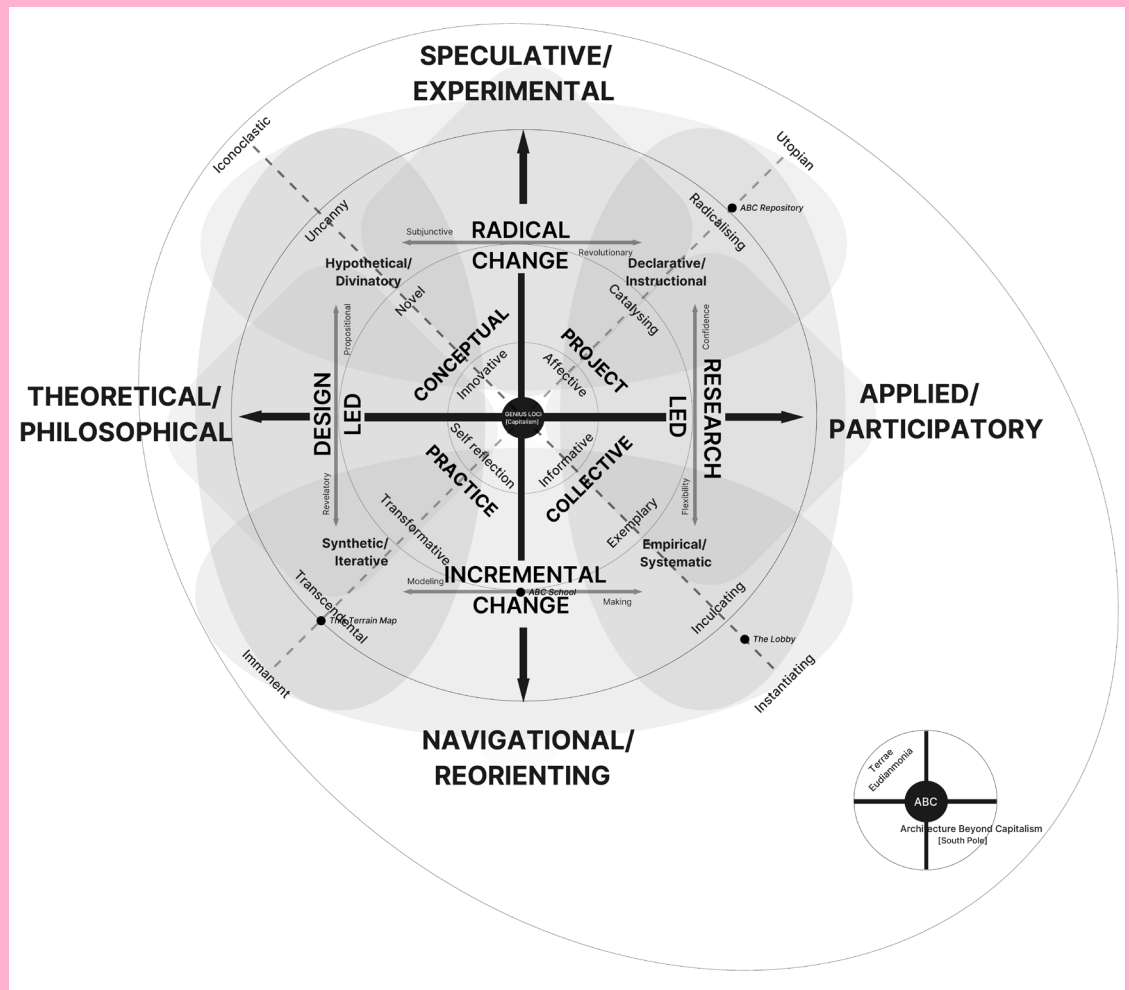
This year, particularly, was profound in changing my own conceptual thinking about architecture.

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<sup>5</sup> “F-U-T-U-R-E B-E-L-O-N-G-I-N-G.”

No doubt it had been compounding through the practice, but the sessions, truly capturing this idea of *Future Belonging* and exploring organising and liberatory practices from all over the world, fast-tracked a conceptual shift. Through ABC, I was able to be in a small online space and talk so intimately with people living, breathing, and actioning true systems change—actual architecture beyond capitalism. For a brief moment, ABC, and spaces like it, are able to provide and make possible these connections, this radical intimacy, and these profound conversations and connections.

The question, of course, is how to sustain these spaces. Maintain the rhizome, care for the gardens they make. The organisational systems of the Architecture Lobby and AWG point to some of the pragmatic modes of maintenance. Where in other settings I have experienced the tension of the time it takes to upskill someone to join an organisational group vs the time taken to just do the thing yourself, the structure of AWG and the trust the group holds in new and current members means that the learning of administrative tasks takes place through the function of the meetings and shared facilitation. Individuals are trusted in their capacities to undertake design and other similar tasks. But it is the love and care embedded in the actioning of events like this, and the work they represent—and critically, the in-person, deeply connected-to-people-and-place work of those who run sessions in ABC School—that will sustain it into a future we can all belong to.



“F-U-T-U-R-E B-E-LO-N-G-I-N-G.” Architecture Beyond Capitalism School, 2023, accessed November 04, 2024, <https://abc.architecture-lobby.org/architecture-beyond-capitalism-2023>.

Figure 4.3: ABC School, *ABC School Future Belonging Terrain Map*, 2023, diagram. Courtesy of the Academia Working Group.

## Academia Working Group: The Stack

The Stack is a conversations management tool used by The Architecture Lobby and The Academia Working Group to maintain flow, equitable conversation, and negotiate the difficulties of meeting online.

### 28 Organizing

#### Stack

“Stacking” is an online conversation tool that can be used to maintain flow, avoid interruptions, and allow everyone in a call to have their say. TAL uses this technique across the organization including in working groups, public-facing online events, and for the Architecture Beyond Capitalism School.

The principles of stacking are as follows:

- A facilitator initiates a topic of conversation per an agenda.
- If a participant would like to speak they type “stack” in the chat.
- The order in which participants are called on is directly correlated to the order in which they appear in the stack.
- The facilitator should manage the stack and then calling on people sequentially.
- If a participant is asked a direct question, or has a direct answer to a question posed by another participant, they can type “direct response” into the meeting chat and it supersedes the current stack.
- Other comments in the chat should be kept to a minimum.

In some situations, particularly in larger group settings, organizers may choose to use a “progressive stack,” a technique used to forefront the voices of marginalized groups. Popularized during the Occupy movement, meetings that use the progressive stack typically invite people from non-dominant groups (including women, queer folks, people of color, and very young or older people) to move up the stack. The purpose behind the technique is to counter what is perceived as a flaw in typical democratic conversation where the majority group voices are heard more prominently than minority or non-dominant groups.

This is an excerpt from Day, Kirsten, Peggy Deamer, Andrea Dietz, Tessa Forde, Jessica Garcia Fritz, Palmyra Geraki, and Valérie Lechêne. *The organizer's guide to architecture education*. Taylor & Francis, 2024. Courtesy of the authors.

Figure 4.4: TOGAE Authors, *The Stack*, 2024, graphic. Courtesy of the authors.

**MBIE Occupational regulation reforms in the building and construction sector:*****Licensing In The Future Environment***

**Executive summary:** *We argue that all those working to design the built environment are architects, and that this title should be regulated in a new way by a single authority.*

*Levelling up through this new scheme is based on project complexity and associated risk (much like the existing LBP scheme), but also on a project's scale and function as these factors pertain to its present and future economic, social, and cultural significance and environmental impact through an accompanying non-technical 'Future Environments Endorsement Framework' (FEE) that supports and validates the relevant competencies.*

*Alternative pathways for acquiring the competencies required at each licensing level that recognise the wide variety of perspectives, values, experience, and specialist skills of people seeking licensing are proposed with the aim of increasing accessibility to the industry and diversifying what constitutes legitimate content in the discussion and practice of architecture.*

**Premise 1:** The logic of this submission relies on the fact that, despite any differences between Registered Architects and LBPs, there is no necessary justification for two competing licencing schemes; that the current system is the outcome of an arbitrary historical process; and that it could be redesigned for improved safety, clarity, quality and accessibility, AND to protect and ensure the best possible Future Environment for all.

**Premise 2:** We believe that the knowledge and skills necessary to design and build the best Future Environment for all should be available to all; *that these skills exceed the technical expertise required to deliver safe, durable and high performing buildings and spaces*; that this knowledge is held by the diverse perspectives, histories, theories, spatial design and construction practices of all communities who call Aotearoa New Zealand home; that each of these discourses are equally legitimate; and that their aggregate development and reciprocal effect constitutes (by definition) the field of Architecture here and now.

**Our Reasoning:** While the existence of two overlapping licensing regimes can be confusing, the historical development that has led to this outcome is understandable: the far reaching content and onerous demands of traditional architectural education, training, and NZRAB registration place this accreditation beyond the reach of many who might like to also provide

April 2023

Groupwork submits a proposal to the MBIE Occupational regulation reforms in the building and construction sector call for submissions to argue for an expanded imagining of the title 'architect' and a renewed system for how it is recognised and regulated.

Figure 4.5-4.12: Groupwork, *Licensing the Future Environment*, 2023, document. Courtesy of Groupwork.

some subset of its commercial services, and who, based on their experience may already possess the technical skills to do so.

As stated on the LBP [website](#) “The LBP scheme was launched in November 2007 [...] to encourage competent building practitioners to build homes right the first time. The scheme also gives consumers the necessary information to make informed decisions about the competence of building practitioners they may engage”. Through the introduction of licensing levels and a focus on matching project complexity and associated risk with the appropriate technical regulatory, building science, documentation and contract administration expertise - rather than also on the history, theory, design practice, speculation, criticism, research and codes of ethics (ie. non-technical discourse) that underwrites the architectural profession - the LBP scheme makes design licensing more accessible to a wider and more diverse constituency.

Arguments for the status quo (i.e the continued simultaneous existence of two competing licensing schemes) are typically provided by registered architects and/or their representative body Te Kahui Whaihanga/New Zealand Institute of Architects. Under the current schemes registered architects retain the exclusive use of the protected title ‘Architect’, and perceive themselves as having the most to lose through any liberalisation or restructuring of the existing licensing regime.

Such arguments [see attached suggested response for members document distributed by TKW] are reducible to 1) observing the importance of non-technical design practice, history, theory, research, criticism, codes of conduct, contract administration, risk management, and stakeholder consultation in traditional architectural training required for registration vs the lesser focus on this material and related competencies within the LBP licensing scheme, and/or 2) an unsupported claim that most/all medium to large scale complex and/or culturally important projects are undertaken by registered architects.

With regards argument type 1, it seems intuitively true that the importance of the built environment and the complexity of its design extends beyond its technical performance and reliability and that non-technical competencies are required by designers to address this. With regards argument type 2, it is our analysis that, given the potential for the technical equivalence of registered architects and Design Class 3 licenced building practitioners, if true, this claim is the result of a historical process rather than any necessary or essential difference in capability, ie: the historic capital (prestige and presence) of the architectural profession; the aggregate difference in the sociodemographics and personal networks of registered architects vs LBPs; and that there has not yet been enough time for an alternative service provider to develop the culture, aggregate skills, recognition, and network to compete with the incumbent etc.

On the other hand, the most compelling arguments in favour of the LBP scheme and critical of the NZRAB/architectural registration process highlight the advantages of licensing levels that match project complexity/risk with the appropriate technical regulatory, building science, documentation and contract administration expertise, as opposed to the 'one stop shop' of architectural registration that fails to recognise the wide ranging scope of the professional services undertaken by architects and the resulting difference in their experience and skills - that not all registered architects are alike.

**Our Proposal:** Based on the argued presence of high utility and conceptually robust positive attributes of each licensing scheme not included in the other, we propose to combine them into a new scheme regulated in a new way by a new singular authority.

We chose to retain the protected title of 'Architect' and 'Registered Architect Level <#>', and add an additional protected title, 'Future Environment Specialist', for the exclusive use of Registered Architect Level 5 and Expanded Field Practitioners (see below) to recognise the importance of both this highest level professional and non-building architectural knowledge worker to the design and protection of the future environment of Aotearoa New Zealand.

#### **The Future Environments Licensing Scheme**

##### **Registered Architect Expanded Field:**

- *Requires Future Environments endorsement level 3 and reapproval from the Licensing Authority every X years based on evidence of continuing significant contributions to the field.*
- Research, academia, publication, teaching, consultation.
- Not licensed to complete building work.

**Intention:** To recognise the expertise provided by architects who aren't providing a professional service in the building sector market place, but whose research, teaching, and theorisation of the discipline contribute to public perception, understanding, agency in, and confidence in the architectural field and its services.

**Equivalency includes:** Educators, researchers, consultants, facilitators and content producers with postgraduate degrees or equivalent experience currently working in the Expanded Field of Architecture and Future Environments.

##### **Registered Architect Level 1:**

- Single detached residential dwellings and renovations

**Intention:** To recognise the low level of risk associated with this building class and make the ability to design personal built environments more accessible to more diverse constituencies; To ensure competent building practitioners build homes right the first time;

To provide confidence in the building industry by increasing the credibility of those undertaking this level of design work.

**Equivalency includes:** Current LBP Design Class 1

**Future Environments Endorsement Level 1:**

Evidence of a minimum level of engagement with the professional responsibilities, environmental performance, impacts and sustainable design practices of single family dwellings, small scale multi-residential structures, and other simple structures and their associated supply chains.

**Equivalency includes:** DipArchTech; X points CPD in relevant subject matter

**Registered Architect Level 2:**

- *Requires Future Environments Endorsement level 1*
- Single detached residential dwellings and renovations with added complexity of the facade system.
- Multi-residential projects of less than 5 dwellings and 10m in height.
- Agricultural/industrial utility projects and simple non-residential buildings of less 500m<sup>2</sup> and 10m in height

**Intention:** To recognise the increasing importance of the environmental performance of the built and future environment and its supply chain, and to support/promote a culture of engagement in these issues. (Future Environments Endorsement Level 1); To recognise the importance of relevant technical competencies required to mitigate the risk associated with the design of more complex buildings involving more stakeholders; To provide confidence in the building industry by increasing the credibility of those undertaking this level of design work.

**Equivalency includes:** Current LBP Design Class 2 + FEE Lv1

**Future Environments endorsement Level 2:**

Evidence competencies required to manage the professional responsibilities and social, cultural and environmental impacts of the design process and outcomes across projects that engage and/or affect a wider variety of stakeholders who may not be directly involved in the design and/or consultation process.

**Equivalency includes:** Undergraduate tertiary qualifications (BArch, BAS or equivalent, Wānanga qualification etc.) or specialist competencies developed through work experience in a specialised area in combination with X points CPD in relevant subject matter.

**Registered Architect Level 3:**

- *Requires Future Environments endorsement level 2*
- Multi-residential projects of more than 5 dwellings and less than 15m in height.
- Commercial and mixed-use development projects including complex facade and structurally engineered non-residential buildings less than 15m in height

**Intention:** To recognise the specialist competencies required to manage the professional responsibilities, social, cultural and environmental impacts of the design process and outcomes across projects that engage and/or affect a wider variety of stakeholders who may not be directly involved in the design and/or consultation process (Future Environments Endorsement Level 2); To recognise the importance of relevant technical competencies required to mitigate the risk associated with the design of more complex

buildings involving more stakeholders; To provide confidence in the building industry by increasing the credibility of those undertaking this level of design work.

**Equivalency includes:** Current LBP Design Class 2 + FEE Lvl2

**Registered Architect Level 4:**

- *Requires Future Environments Endorsement Level 2*
- Multi-unit residential, commercial, or public buildings greater than 15m in height
- Excluding civic projects and buildings that could service more than X people at one time or Y people on any given day.

**Intention:** To recognise the additional technical building science, documentation, regulatory, contract management, stakeholder engagement, and professional responsibility based competencies required to mitigate the risks associated with buildings of this increased scale and complexity; To provide confidence in the building industry by increasing the credibility of those undertaking this level of design work.

**Equivalency includes:** Current LBP Design Class 3 + FEE Lvl2

**Future Environments Endorsement level 3:**

Evidence the specialist competencies required to manage the social, cultural and environmental significance of the design process and outcomes across projects of a scale that impact collective identity and both provide and consume significant social, cultural and economic resources affecting a wide variety of stakeholders.

**Equivalency includes:** Equivalent to postgraduate tertiary qualifications (MArch, MArch Prof or equivalent Wānanga qualification etc.), and/or recognition of specialist competencies developed through work experience in specialised areas.

**Future Environment Specialist [Registered Architect Level 5]**

- *Requires Future Environments endorsement level 3*
- Any building project of civic importance or that could service more than X people at any time or Y people on any given day.

**Intention:** To recognise the specialist competencies required to manage the professional responsibilities, social, cultural and environmental significance of the design process and outcomes across projects of a scale that impact collective identity and both provide and consume significant social, cultural and economic resources for a wide variety of stakeholders (Future Environments Endorsement Level 3); To provide confidence in the building industry by increasing the credibility of those undertaking this level of design work.

**Equivalency includes:** Current Registered Architect; LBP Design Class 3 + FEE Lvl3

**Notes:**

1. Stated height, area, and capacity specifications are for illustration purposes only and will require extensive research and consultation with relevant experts and affected stakeholders to determine.
2. Future Environments Endorsements are a parallel pathway to the Registered Architect licensing levels and accessible to anyone at any time - ie. we imagine some Registered Architect licence holders at all levels also holding the Future Environments Endorsement Lv3.
3. We believe such a Future Environment Endorsement framework will create a marketplace of providers competing in this space, each delivering different but equally recognised content, thereby increasing the diversity of non-technical

knowledge and expertise recognised by the profession and public, AND encourage licence holders to continue to build and diversify their competencies by obtaining multiple FEEs in specialised areas at any given level.

4. Such a scheme could also provide regional authorities with the ability to further restrict certain combinations of project type and location to particular licence and/or endorsement levels/specialisations through the Resource Consent process thereby ensuring adequate protections for significant projects and environments.
5. Licensing and titles at equivalent levels are conferred and a transitional period of X years provided for those requiring a given Future Environments Endorsement Level to obtain it.

**Our Hopes And Intentions:** The intention behind proposing this new licensing platform is to leverage the resources and benefits of each existing regime to generate a new system that recognises the value of technical expertise across all levels of building work AND acknowledges the value of a rigorous ethical code and deeper understanding of the cultural, social, historical and environmental impacts of the design process and its outcomes on communities and collective identity. The Registered Architects framework has a robust set of competencies and performance criteria developed by the [NSCA](#) that provide a blueprint for the endorsement framework we propose.

The Future Environments Endorsement framework ensures the value of a tertiary education system, but also provides for the possibility of alternative pathways to that same and/or equivalent knowledge and anticipates the emergence of new providers of this expertise - either within an academic context or provided by industry bodies - and an opportunity for self-directed and supervised independent learning. Where tertiary education is unrealistic or inaccessible, these alternate pathways create greater opportunities and accessibility of the design discipline and ensure the value of this expertise to the market. The competencies required for each level progression will need to be evidenced to the licensing board.

The building licence categories are organised in five levels, and introduce an extra licence category, 'Registered Architect Expanded Field', that acknowledges research and teaching as recognised modes of architectural practice and considers them valid within the professional context. Registered Architect Expanded Field is the only licensing class that sits independent from the level structure, and hence is not required for progression. It recognises that architectural work not directly related to built outcomes contributes to public perception, understanding, agency and confidence in the architectural field and its services.

Licensing categories 1 through 5 form an incremental licensing system where progression is based on both technical proficiency and non-technical expertise pertaining to the economic, cultural and social significance of the built environment and the history, theory and criticism of the design practices and processes that produce it including stakeholder/community engagement and environmental impact.

The proposed licensing levels make the ability to design personal built environments more accessible to more diverse constituencies, provide confidence in the building industry by increasing the credibility of those undertaking various levels of design work, and through the Future Environments Endorsement scheme, ensure that the increasing importance of the environmental performance of the built and future environment and supply chain is recognised in practice, and that specialist competencies required to understand and manage the social, cultural and environmental impact of the design process and outcomes are guaranteed for projects that impact collective identity and provide significant social, cultural and economic resources for a wide variety of stakeholders.

Aspirationally we anticipate this new licensing scheme to: clarify the roles and responsibilities of design professionals for the public; increase confidence in the delivery of built environment projects; emphasise the importance of appropriate professional expertise at all project scales; increase access to and diversity of the built environment profession; generate the emergence of alternative, innovative educational pathways into architectural service industry that also recognise the wide variety in experience and specialist skills within the profession; encourage learning of and attendance to cultural outcomes throughout the life of an architectural practitioner; increase opportunities for self-learning, publishing, research and discourse; diversify what content constitutes as relevant in the discussion and practice of architecture; embed the new NSCA performance criteria into current, existing practice within the profession, not just future practice via the academy; increase professional competency across the industry in order to ensure the industry is able to meet regulatory obligations related to safety, climate change and performance; and create a future environment that is more ethical, sustainable, beautiful and inclusive.

Submitted by:

**The Night School and Groupwork, in collaboration with pre:fab.**

**The Night School** is a platform for the sharing, performance and testing of experimental practices in architecture and other spatial disciplines.

*The Night School tests the methodologies of alternative architecture practitioners and educators in the hope of sharing and forging new pathways within the discipline and building the collective momentum needed to imagine and perform new worlds. TNS creates the*

*space for continued exploration of what architecture practice is and could be, beyond the confines of the academy.*

**Groupwork** is an emerging architecture, theory and research practice based in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland and Whiritoa Aotearoa experimenting with how architecture is practised, who for, and how the architect's tools can be redeployed for a more aspirational, equitable, collective future.

*Groupwork's research projects include exploring the intersection of generative AI with architecture and built environments, and experiments in earth building technology.*

**pre:fab** is a platform for collective reimagining, resource and knowledge sharing, and experimentation in Architecture.

*Sitting at the intersection of event producer, publisher, (non-profit) practice, practice/practitioner network, facilitator/educator, creator/curator and political lobby; pre:fab hopes to develop as a spatial agency advocacy group, with a particular focus on younger members of our industry, alternative practices, community engagement, public discourse, disciplinary development, and original content.*

## F. Gordon Wilson Fellowship for Public Housing Grant Application

### 1. Who We Are

pre:fab is a collaborator, educator, researcher, producer, promoter, publisher and (not-for-profit) practice; a collective of collectives; a framework to aggregate, cultivate and support alternative practices in Aotearoa New Zealand; a space to create and share resources, make stuff, produce research, be the audience for that stuff and that research, and generally create a collaborative, generative and convivial space for new and different modes of architectural practice. pre:fab is Future Belonging.

### 2. Stated Purpose

pre:fab will investigate the opportunities and challenges of *Radical Retrofit* of existing residential building stock as a public housing strategy in inner-city and satellite-centre suburbs in Tāmaki Makaurau. This strategy can be summarised as converting existing single family houses in residential suburbs into multi-occupancy shared living developments through alterations and small scale additions to the existing buildings or site rather than demolishing and rebuilding.

*Radical Retrofit*, in contrast to a design and construction culture all too ready to replace the old with the new, takes a light touch approach to new housing supply by imagining new ways our existing housing stock can be modified to accommodate a range of denser cohousing type scenarios, ownership and development models in otherwise low occupancy areas. These modifications could range from fully state supplied social housing, to state support for self-organised community projects that both increase density and lean into existing services, infrastructure, and local economies.

Supplementing new medium to high density ground-up development particularly in areas where this is not allowed, *Radical Retrofit* proposes a public housing solution that recognises the physical capacity of existing buildings to house people in a more resilient, healthy way, making these places more available, more diverse, and more connected, while preserving the architectural heritage of the existing urban environment. pre:fab would explore the multifaceted opportunities of *Radical Retrofit* through a mixed methods approach of empirical, sited, community-engaged and design-based research. Pakuranga and Ponsonby are good illustrations of the broad range of suburbs suitable for radical retrofit—low density satellite centres located close transport links with well developed local economies, services, and character.

Ongoing research and innovation into private and public housing supply through ground-up development, new construction practices, and limited profit controlled housing markets etc. is already taking place, and will continue to do so. As outlined in the below table, *Radical Retrofit* is a supplementary solution that supports these conventional public housing strategies by directly connecting public housing design with critical social, environmental, and economic issues using

August 2023

pre:fab's shortlisted submission to Te Kahui Whaihanga NZIA's F G Wilson Fellowship—a public housing research grant—proposing the retrofit of clusters of existing family dwellings in order to explore how inner-city neighbourhoods can be made denser with minimal intervention.

Figure 4.13-4.17: pre:fab, *Radical Retrofit*, 2023, document. Courtesy of pre:fab.

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architectural technologies and knowhow; Epochal challenges including limited resources, ageing populations, climate change, urban sprawl, spatial inequality, social dissolution, land banking, and profit driven development are all brought into sharp focus by *Radical Retrofit* which offers architectural practice a rare opportunity to respond to each:

Epochal challenges	Radical retrofit response	Architectural technologies of the response
Limited resources	Minimal intervention	Concept; detail; demo plan; procurement
Ageing population	Intergenerational	Program; site/plans; sections; elevations
Climate change	Climate resilience	Location plan; services; specification; LCA;
Ongoing sprawl	Density	Nonsite, master plan; site plan; land use
Spatial inequality	Diversity	Noli plan; client communities; site section
Social dissolution	Community	Codesign; ground plan; perspectives
Profit incentive	Controlled markets and state supported self organised development	Client; engagement; contracts; titles; fee

pre:fab anticipates growing demand for public housing as population, land value, and inflation increase while western globalised economies unsupported by extractive mining industries continue to stagnate. pre:fab has also noticed an emerging interest in cohousing across Aotearoa uniting a diverse range of ages, backgrounds, and experience. These observations are connected, but our experience leads us to believe that this interest is the aggregate expression of latent and widespread desires for more collective, more connected, and more intimate living arrangements that exceed simple financial causes.

As well as dedicated new social housing in otherwise low-density, highly sought after areas connected to public services, *Radical Retrofit* proposes a housing supply model that provides both social and subsidised housing together in cohousing type development scenarios to a newly emerging demographic increasingly excluded from secure long term housing options but not eligible for government support. As all aspiring cohousing communities discover, self-funded, ground-up, alternative ownership development is both challenging and risky. pre:fab sees the opportunity for this research to speculate on and evaluate how the policy innovations, regulatory changes, cultural practices, theoretical knowledge, and practical knowhow required to deliver and support the provision of traditional social housing through *Radical Retrofit* might also enable self-organised cohousing communities to undertake their own collective housing projects—both with or without

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government support—with more certainty and less risk, thereby making new forms of collective living more accessible, more diverse, and more numerous.

Further consideration of ongoing innovation in ownership models, lending instruments, public/private partnership through land trusts and circular development funds, limited profit development, controlled housing markets, and complimentary taxation policy etc. means research around *Radical Retrofit* provides rich opportunity for prototyping new models of building, adapting, and living together, that integrates social housing with other present and future forms of state support, with the potential to radically alter our relationship to land, property, housing, design and construction, space, community, and each other.

### 3. Project Outputs

pre:fab understands *Radical Retrofit* as the intersection of three participatory design challenges each of which require potential public housing communities, existing neighbourhoods, managing agencies and regulating authorities to collaborate for success. These are:

- land acquisition and regulatory reform
- spatial design, demolition and construction
- cultural practices and support systems

We will tackle each of these challenges in parallel through a series of public events alongside literature reviews, case studies, consultation, and design research. Public events will consist of participatory workshops designed to share knowledge about the opportunities and challenges of *Radical Retrofit*, speculate on the nature of its realisation in specific contexts, and develop strategies and collectively imagined design propositions to support successful delivery, all leading to **a final case study by design** at one or more real world locations in Tāmaki Makaurau. These events will include participants representative of the five interest groups affected by our proposal:

- Regulatory/institutional community
- Local neighbourhood
- Existing social housing community / engaging Kāinga Ora or City Mission
- Diversification of social housing community (those not currently eligible for social housing but on the edge, without access to secure, affordable, long-term housing)
- Anyone interested in living a community like this, or invested in state-supported projects of this type

The concluding outputs of this project may include:

- A speculative design proposition for one or more real sites in Tāmaki Makaurau providing a case study in *Radical Retrofit*, that reflects the cumulative outputs of the research and engagement workshops;

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- in situ live action role playing or other performance-based or participatory workshops designed to speculate on the realities of life within and around the proposed case study;
- a kit of parts/flexible design concepts—including material specification, assemblies, and standardised auxiliary buildings—for *Radical Retrofit* public housing projects;
- catalysing of self organised communities interested in pursuing cohousing through *Radical Retrofit*; toolkits outlining existing legislation and future policy—including land acquisition, lands trust, and circular funds—for enabling both public and private radical retrofit suburban development; the design of new complimentary ownership and lending instruments;
- a visual road map illustrating the potential effects of *Radical Retrofit* housing development on cultural practices, local economies, and the built environment with time.

This study will necessarily include consultation and collaboration with government agencies, and other professional organisations and will take maximum advantage of the existing relationships of Te Kāhui Whaihanga to enable this through introduction and support.

**4. Programme**

December	Interest launch event/announcement/workshop (research team alignment) hui
December/January	Site research and selection
February	Design of Monthly community events begin - located near to the site/s
March	Community events begin - monthly through to August. 5 events supplemented by public education and speculation opportunities.
March-August	Data collection and workshops.
September/October	Concluding events and presentation

**5. Budget**

Community Events	\$4-6k inc materials and travel
Time	\$14-16k or 400-460hrs@\$35/hr
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$20k</b>

**6. Team**

This submission has been made by the [pre:fab collective](#).

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pre:fab is a platform for collective reimagining, resource and knowledge sharing, and experimentation in Architecture in Aotearoa. pre:fab has ten core organising members and a broader membership who attends events and contributes to the pre:fab field. It is likely that the contributors to this project may change over the course of the programme based on time and availability. We have experience with this collaborative working environment and have systems in place for managing it.

For this proposal we have submission organisers, research team and research advisors. The submission organisers will maintain accountability to realising the research and its outputs over the course of the programme. The research team have collectively developed the proposal and will contribute to the research to varying levels of involvement. The research advisors are pre:fab members who are likely to advise or contribute to the research project if selected but who have taken an advisory as opposed to an active part in the submission process.

**Submission Organisers:** [Tessa Forde](#)

[Simon Glaister](#)

[Leonard Hobbins](#)

**Research Team:** [Sakina Ali](#)

[Joseph Bjelic-Webster](#)

[Vanessa Coxhead](#)

[Nick Denton](#)

[Tessa Forde](#)

[Simon Glaister](#)

[Leonard Hobbins](#)

**Research Advisors:** [Hannah Broatch](#)

[Mason Rattray](#)

[Isaac Sweetapple](#)

See attached researcher bios, CV, and portfolio.

## pre:fab: [detecting] the Darchive



Figure 4.18: Tessa Forde, *Darchive Attendees listen to a quickfire presentation*, 2023, photograph.

## Context

There is a tendency in architectural discourse to focus on the outcome of a project and its core conceptual origin—the big idea. There is often limited discussion of the people doing things around that big idea: the interconnected web of ideas that exists across time, practice, people, and place—the talking, thinking, making, negotiating, relating, growing, and learning. Much of the stuff of our built environment is ‘invisible’ in architecture media and conversation: ‘invisible’ stakeholders, ‘invisible’ influences, ‘invisible’ collaborators and consultants, ‘invisible’ creatures, ideas, spirits, and psyches. The pre:fab conference 2023 hoped to bring some of these invisible things to the fore, attempting to ensure “that the sealed cognitive capital embedded in successful creative practice is released and disseminated for the benefit of the practitioners themselves and for the profession as well”.<sup>1</sup> This quote refers to the design research program at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, but the principle is the same—creating opportunities to reveal and understand our individual and collective practices in order to cultivate an understanding of, and fertile Ground for, the discipline of architecture in Aotearoa as it is now, as it has been, and as it is moving into the future.



Figure 4.19: pre:fab, *[detecting] the Darchive promotion image*, 2023, graphic. Courtesy of pre:fab.

Explicitly resisting, shadowing, and critiquing Te Kāhui Whaihanga was a catalyst for the formation of pre:fab, yet to remain in opposition is to be forever tied to the thing you think must change. pre:fab aimed to create its annual conference for 2023 as a critical departure from this mode of opposition, existing in space as another node in a complex network of disciplinary gathering sites—not against, but cultivating what we think is important in architecture. We had several in-person meetups and online Discord calls to theorise what the event might be, taking into account feedback from last year and the cross-section of practices and ideas within the pre:fab community. By this point, pre:fab had several hundred Instagram followers and an active network of about 30 people on Discord. All pre:fab meetups included the sharing of food and drink, often elaborate potluck lunches, sometimes afternoon tea and kombucha. pre:fab was trying to feel like a gathering of friends, a place you want to be, a ground you want to share, and we sought to similarly capture these feelings in a larger form through the conference.

The conference was to be one day, a Saturday, free, open, and accessible to all, and was to focus specifically on the idea of the “darchive”. In one conceptualising session, pre:fab members expressed their frustrations with the invisibility of architectural knowledge in Aotearoa’s past—that so little seems to be documented—and that, especially since the removal of the architecture library at the University of Auckland, access to that knowledge is increasingly limited. The darchive was an idea of revealing the archive of architecture in Aotearoa, but with the implication that the things to be revealed are what sit below the surface: the *dark matter*<sup>2</sup> of architectural

<sup>1</sup> Leon van Schaik, “Practice makes perfect,” *The Architectural Review* 234, no. 1400 (Oct) (2013): 82.

<sup>2</sup> “Architectural Dark Matter: that parallel universe of unofficial, off-narrative, ineffable, banal, idiosyncratic, subjective, irrational, nonsensical and/or otherwise private, personal, secret, hidden, concealed, unacceptable, inglorious etc. material that ultimately determines the qualities, discourse, outcomes, qualia, and aggregate effects of individual and collective creative practice—our actions and interactions—yet somehow remains outside of it... Unobserved, Undiscussed, Undocumented,

November 18, 2023

pre:fab  
Public event guests

Brightside AUT, Tāmaki Makaurau, Aotearoa

A one day free conference in which the ‘dark matter’ of architecture is revealed through quick fire presentations, participatory workshops, and conversations around a shared lunch.

practice—“the undeclared, undiscussed, unacknowledged, uninspected, or otherwise hidden people, objects, spaces, events, and ideas that have had an enduring effect on our individual or collective imagination, and through that, our creative practices and built environment”.<sup>3</sup>

We made a list of nearly 100 people in the discipline and beyond who we were interested in approaching to invite them to produce *darkefacts*. We wanted to prioritise darchive practitioners—those who weren’t giving lectures at Objectspace or being profiled by Architecture Now, whose names aren’t on the doors of award-winning offices (though they might be on the drawings), and whose practices largely remain unexamined in architecture’s collective memory, all the while shifting things from the margins. The conference would be “free, open to anyone, and attempt to reveal the darchive through a combination of quickfire presentations, participatory workshops, and shared conversation over a potluck lunch”.<sup>4</sup> We also called for contributions to the darchive from anyone interested, asking for a 300-word written description of their own ‘architectural dark matter’ and a physical representation.



Figure 4.20: Tessa Forde, *Darkefacts and their abstracts*, 2023, photograph.

Again, the copy, the marketing, the format of the event, the sponsorship, the ideas for who should be involved and how it should run were managed collaboratively through Discord, shared editable Google Docs, and a large shared spreadsheet. This year, we opened the conference up for donations with ticket purchases, called again for contributions to a shared lunch, sourced sponsorship for book vouchers for darchive presenters and coffee, and shared in the organisation of four workshops to follow the rounds of speakers. We built a website and advertised the event through the Architecture + Women NZ Newsletter and the NZIA bulletin, proving that while the architecture discipline might be sensitive, it also has a short memory. We also confirmed with the NZRAB that the event could provide up to 60 Continuing Professional Development points for attendees.

## Description of Happening

We received around 25 darkefacts, with 20 people presenting. Darkefacts came from students, recent graduates, established practitioners, the president of the NZIA, the architecture meme page *Dank Lloyd Wright*, a web designer, a council worker, and others. They were displayed along a long table covered with a red-and-white gingham tablecloth, with their abstracts pasted above. Brightside was arranged into an exhibition room for the darkefacts where the presentations would take place, an area for food and lunch, a welcome desk to manage registration, and four breakout zones for the workshops.

The day began with coffee, registration, and food processing before we welcomed attendees with a mihi and a statement acknowledging architecture’s complicity in systems of violence, particularly in the context of the genocide in Palestine. The intent was to affirm that, because we can gather safely—with hope, agency, and the capacity for collective change—we must gather and use our knowledge of built environment systems “for collective liberation, and to prefabricate a future we can all be a part of.”<sup>5</sup>



Figure 4.21: Tessa Forde, *Darkefacts and their abstracts*, 2023, photograph.

Underneath, AND all around us.” “[detecting] the darchive,” pre:fab, 2023, accessed October 01, 2024, <https://www.pre-fab.xyz/conference-2023>.

<sup>3</sup> pre:fab, “[detecting] the darchive.”

<sup>4</sup> pre:fab, “[detecting] the darchive.”

<sup>5</sup> Detecting the Darchive Welcome Statement. Courtesy of pre:fab.



Figure 4.22: Tessa Forde, *Darchive attendees dance to open the conference*, 2023, photograph.

At this point, the room was mostly empty aside from the darkefact table and 80 stacked wheely chairs. This was because the welcome activity involved dancing to people’s favorite songs and, when the music stopped, sharing one thing you are really good at with another person. Attendees wrote this on a post-it note and stuck it to the room’s window for reference later in the day. This activity, inspired by a workshop by Rhiannon White (discussed in ‘Chapter Four: Love and Re-organising’), aimed to collect and emphasize the group’s shared assets for potential collective action. It also sought to create a fun, convivial atmosphere to start the day and encourage attendees to move their bodies and consider themselves as active agents in the space.

The darkefact presentations took place over three rounds throughout the day, followed by workshops. After dancing, attendees were asked to unpack all the wheely chairs and take a seat. A microphone was set up at each end of the room, and a screen was positioned in the middle, opposite the darkefact table. Presenters had three minutes to discuss their darkefact at one microphone before a bell sounded with fake applause, leaving 20 seconds for the audience to roll their chairs to face the other end of the room for the next speaker. This setup actively engaged the audience in the performance of the presentations. The rapid-fire presentations focused attention on the collective of ideas rather than the individuals presenting. Each round featured six to eight speakers, and the audience was encouraged to reflect on what this collection of darkefacts revealed about architecture—identifying threads running through the multiplicity of approaches, inspirations, secrets, and dark underpinnings of the discipline. I reflect too on how the abundance of speakers shifted the focus away from the individual and towards shared experiences. The incredibly diverse range of darkefacts, reflecting varied interpretations of the brief—from a condom, to a whiskey glass (symbolizing the drink around which lobbyists and politicians gather to make decisions about the built environment), to a piggy bank of procrastination, to a fragment of Italian green marble from the Seagram Building’s plaza’s south bench, to a piece of basalt from Maungawhau/Mt Eden—revealed the richness and potential in better understanding our practices and The Ground beneath the practice of architecture.



Figure 4.23: Tessa Forde, *Darchive attendees share their assets*, 2023, photograph.

and potential in better understanding our practices and The Ground beneath the practice of architecture.



Figures 4.24-4.25: Tessa Forde, *Darchive presenters share their darkefacts*, 2023, photograph.

The workshops provided a space to tease out these reflections through novel modes of thinking, processing, and producing architectural ideas. As in previous iterations, they centered on immediately processing new knowledge collectively, contextualizing it against personal and shared experiences, and generating content in response. Presenters also participated in the workshops, positioning all ideas as open for exploration and generating literal dialogue between presenters and attendees. Each workshop had an independent designer and facilitator. They were:

**Pizza Palar:** Simon Glaister hosted this workshop “to draw out connections between the darchive and personal experiences within our shared environment” and locate them on a large pizza terrain map featuring axes such as “Fertilise/Scale—Grown/Metabolise” and “Practice/Deliver—Project/Discovery”, which grew over the course of the day as attendees related their local insights and experiences of the city of Tāmaki Makaurau to that which was revealed from the darchive..<sup>6</sup>

**OOO Drawing and Poetry:** Oliver Brockie looked to the matter of memory and how “memory spaces/objects are the corners of subconscious thought that inform our creative practices, control our imaginations, and to which our personal, moral compasses adhere”.<sup>7</sup> He invited attendees to construct a ‘blind drawing’ to spatialise unsurfaced memory spaces and then to construct a ‘blind poem’ using found text to elucidate those memories, creating “a new collective imagined environment of space and language that describes a collective, creative subconscious”.<sup>8</sup>

**The Fabric of Reality:** Sakina Ali invited attendees to “pull together and process the many threads of the darchive” through an embroidery workshop that mixed conventional embroidery materials with those of architectural model-making to generate collage images based on impressions of the darkefacts.<sup>9</sup>

**Agua Oasis:** Leonard Hobbins created a space for ritual experimentation using typical workplace furniture like “a water cooler, mobile seating, plastic potted plants, bean bags, and polyester cushions...combined with camping equipment into a ‘Survivor-style tribal council’ setting”.<sup>10</sup> This was used to run through a series of activities designed to create collective meaning while examining habitual behaviours and objects of personal importance that influence experiences of the workplace.

The day was broken up by morning and afternoon teas and by lunch, a huge spread of shared food around which everyone gathered. Finally, at the end of the day, we reconvened to broadly reflect on the day and discuss the future of pre:fab. This session was the least organised of the day—as organisers, we were collectively exhausted, hadn’t expected that of the more than 60 attendees close to 40 would still be there at 4 pm, and only then did we realise we had never explained who pre:fab was and why we were hosting the event. Nonetheless, we facilitated a loose discussion in which anyone was invited to share their thoughts.

There was some discussion about how the art world has a culture of sharing and how architecture as a discipline could reflect on how to replicate this or differ from it. There was also a conversation about the tension and difference between action and ‘hanging out’, and one attendee commented on how while it was nice to see a lot of people coming together for wellbeing and to feel better, the question remained: do those people want to see change, and how can they mobilise? We tried to position pre:fab in response to this as a place where people can go to feel supported in their action, and that it currently acts as a kind of holding place—a precursor to action. Attendees requested more small-scale events more frequently—a kind of events calendar—but also acknowledged the reflection that while many people want this, few are willing to organise it themselves. Many attendees talked about longing for a platform for physically making, which feels lacking in



Figures 4.26–4.29: Tessa Forde, [detecting] the Darchive workshops 2023, photograph.

<sup>6</sup> “Pizza palar,” pre:fab, 2023, accessed July 02, 2024, <https://www.pre-fab.xyz/catalogue#:~:text=of%20Biobuild.-,Pizza%20Palar,-November%202023>.

<sup>7</sup> “OOO drawing and poetry,” pre:fab, 2023, accessed July 02, 2024, <https://www.pre-fab.xyz/catalogue#:~:text=OOO%20Drawing%20and%20Poetry>.

<sup>8</sup> pre:fab, “OOO drawing and poetry.”

<sup>9</sup> “The fabric of reality,” pre:fab, 2023, accessed July 02, 2024, <https://www.pre-fab.xyz/catalogue#:~:text=The%20Fabric%20of%20Reality>.

<sup>10</sup> “Agua oasis,” pre:fab, 2023, accessed July 02, 2024, <https://www.pre-fab.xyz/catalogue#:~:text=Detecting%20The%20Darchive.-,Agua%20Oasis,-NOVEMBER%202023>.

Top left: Figure 4.30: Tessa Forde, *Darchive shared pot luck lunch*, 2023, photograph.

Top middle: Figure 4.31: Tessa Forde, *Pizza Palar terrain map*, 2023, photograph.

Top right: Figure 4.32: Tessa Forde, *Darchive presenter presents their Darkefact*, 2023, photograph.

practice, and about wanting to generate some kind of framework for physical productivity that has a non-capitalist accountability structure. We also discussed the challenges of accountability, noting that at some point, we have to be able to depend on people to do what they say they'll do, or communicate when they can't, if we want to make meaningful change. This requires constructing this holding place to establish spaces of trust and collaboration. All of these were critical reflections on how to gather and make more ground together for pre:fab.

Detecting the Darchive positioned the dark matter of pre:fab members as a starting point for revealing The Ground. Collectively, we unearthed those things most formative, most true, most hidden in the architecture discipline, to imagine other places and other ways of gathering. Detecting the Darchive, free, open, collaborative, and experimental, is an action through which we projected our values, imagined, shared, and practised a different mode of gathering, making The Ground of pre:fab a little more solid and interconnected



Bottom left: Figure 4.33: Tessa Forde, *Memory matters poetry workshop*, 2023, photograph.

Bottom middle: Figure 4.34: Tessa Forde, *Pizza Palar workshop attendees contemplate the pizza palar terrain*, 2023, photograph.

Bottom right: Figure 4.35: Tessa Forde, *Agua Oasis attendees gather around the water cooler*, 2023, photograph.

"Agua Oasis." pre:fab, 2023, accessed July 02, 2024, <https://www.pre-fab.xyz/catalogue#:~:text=Detecting%5D%20The%20Darchive.-.Agua%20Oasis.-NOVEMBER%202023.>

"[Detecting] the Darchive." pre:fab, 2023, accessed October 01, 2024, <https://www.pre-fab.xyz/conference-2023.>

"The Fabric of Reality." pre:fab, 2023, accessed July 02, 2024, <https://www.pre-fab.xyz/catalogue#:~:text=The%20Fabric%20of%20Reality.>

"Ooc Drawing and Poetry." pre:fab, 2023, accessed July 02, 2024, <https://www.pre-fab.xyz/catalogue#:~:text=OOC%20Drawing%20and%20Poetry.>

"Pizza Palar." pre:fab, 2023, accessed July 02, 2024, <https://www.pre-fab.xyz/catalogue#:~:text=of%20Biobuild.-.Pizza%20Palar.-November%202023.>

van Schaik, Leon. "Practice Makes Perfect." *The Architectural Review* 234, no. 1400 (Oct) (2013): 82-85.

Key for using this document:		Empty Who Cell = no one allocated Initial with slash (eg TF/) = TF doing it and looking for others Green cell = task completed Orange cell = task outstanding Red border = more urgent tasks										
Conference Date		18th November										
Organisational Admin				Communications				Communications				
Action item	Who?	Done?	Notes/Deadline:	Action item	Who?	Done?	Notes:	Action item	Who?	Done?	Notes:	
Feedback into concept document 230820 Darchiv...	ALL	DONE ?	can we move on from here once the leads copy is complete as this will have established the extent of the concept for the purposes of the promoting conference?	Develop Graphic Suite Graphics Content	SK	WIP		A+W		DONE		
Devise a new Contract / amend old contract (Consider Trust Deed?) A7 Contract pre-fab 2022 Co...	ALL	DONE	Will develop old contract	Build website	LH	DONE	landing page with copy is urgent; same domain as pre:fab site; possible separte page set for conference; corner link	TNS Newsletter	TF	DONE		
One sentence commitment to Te Tiriti A8 Te Tiriti Com...	ALL		Throwback from last year - new organising members could do this again.	Email invites to presenters and workshop hosts	ALL?	DONE	invite teeam to fill out emails on invitees list	AAA Newsletter/IG				
Confirm Programme, Structure, Requirements from Participants A9 Programme, ...	ALL	DONE		Create Eventbrite		DONE	As soon as copy and graphics are complete?	NZIA Bulletin + NZIA Auckland Branch		DONE		
Confirm who is being invited to present, who is being invited to run a workshop A10 Invitees	ALL	DONE		Create Humantix		DONE	As soon as copy and graphics are complete?	Architecture Now	SG	DONE		
Develop Copy As Below				Instagram Strategy and Posts Graphics Content	LH	WIP		UoA				
Draft overall concept text / press release A12 Press Rele...	ALL	DONE		Design Poster Graphics Content	LH	DONE		Unitec	JB	DONE		
Call for participants A13 Call for Part...	SG+	DONE	15th September, maybe this is the same as A12?	Disseminate Poster (Physical pinup at universities)	JBW+	DONE	lets do this before 16th October	AUT				
Draft email to invited participants A14 Email to Inv...	SG+	DONE	in A12	Release initial Press Release		DONE	where does this go? See below	Pre-event reminder: - How to find it - Bring pens/notebooks - BYO water bottle - Keep cup - Reminder Shared food - There will be plates/serving utensils				
Draft emial to potential workshop hosts?	SG+	DONE	in A12	Apply to make the event have CPD points	SG	DONE		Post event publishing strategy - Zme for each set of presenters? collate darkefacts by some kind of theme and publish pamhlets for each collection? A pamphlet format that could be used across darkefacts and workshop content + anything else? How is represented on the website? Writing for a follow-up email?				
Decide on circulation of money - do we give vouchers to speaking participants? Vouchers to workshop facilitators?	ALL	DONE	SG: i think so, maybe \$120-250 to workshopers and \$20? book voucher to speakers?	Matt Liggins		DONE		Comms needed: - Contact people who have submitted darkefact form - Send out info for submitting darchive abstract (create new form) - Pot luck reminder (IG post and humantix email) - Thank humantix donors for their contribution				

Figures 4.36-4.37: pre:fab, *Detecting the Darchive spreadsheet*, 2023, graphic. Courtesy of pre:fab.

Money / Food and Beverage				Venue / On the Day				Content			
Action item	Who?	Done?	Notes:	Action item	Who?	Done?	Notes:	Action item	Who?	Done?	Notes:
Look at potential sponsorship options	SG HB LH (+Van essa)	WIP	Resene; Warren Trust; Simplicity Living, SAS/Gordon Haris, Lamplight Books, Reece, some coffee place etc <a href="#">Student Congress Sponsorship One Page</a>	Confirm access to Brightside/WZ	TF	DONE	TF still has weekend access to WZ as of August, would need to confirm use of the space on that date.	Develop system for participation submissions (drive folders etc)	SG	DONE	
Drinks - last year we got some Almighty Soda			Sheldon - Almighty Soda might not be an option	Brainstorm alternative/preferred venues - consider exhibition lasting beyond one day <a href="#">M7 Venue Brain...</a>	ALL	N/A	Aftermatch venue: Mezze, Wine Cellar, or Verona?	Decide on deadline for participation	ALL	DONE	
Innocent packaging (or equivalent) for cutlery/plates etc			We already have 1000+ napkins	Make a plan for furniture (etc) requirements - eg model tables. Where to source, design layout			Brightside well equipped with chairs/tables etc. Need to confirm use of screen.	Decide on exhibition layout - eg print all abstracts to accompany models		WIP	
Contact coffee companies - Flight coffee, Kokako, Supreme as last case				TF built a loooong table while at AKL uni used for this purpose - TF to ask after this.				Finalise workshop activities for the programme		WIP	
Boring Oat Milk				Check wifi for non AUT people on a Saturday - go after hours				We need one pre:fab support person per activity - Allocate		WIP	Activity for remaining. Maybe two pre:fab teams members per?
Make/buy staple food for potluck - Pomona Deli	GW			Pick up any food and beverage				Activity 1 - SK embroidery workshop		WIP	
Florets Sourdough bread	SG		Pick up	Pick up any food and beverage				Activity 2 - LH Rituals workshop		WIP	
				Troubleshoot tech set up - screens, laptops, speakers. Test set up in days before.				Activity 3 - SG Map workshop		WIP	
Things needed on the day: - Cutlery, Plates, Cups, servers, big bowls - Napkins - Way to serve tea and coffee - Basic healthy snacks - fruit etc				Arrive Early to set up space.			Misc. - Consent forms/registration - Yellow square badges for organisers - Name stickers - Out of Shot Zone Set up - Posters to help wayfinding - Door stops - Extension Leads	Activity 4 - Speed Dating?			
Shopping List: - Mandarins - Misc teas - plant based GF milk				Oversee food/beverage set up making sure clean/tidy at all times				Source Materials for Activities. Organisers of each to advise			
				Organise Photographer / Camera for photos				Create slideshow/intro presentation <a href="#">Graphics Content</a>			
				Document Workshop outputs				Decide on format for the opening activity	ALL		
				Organise aftermatch venue				Decide on format for the closing discussion	ALL		
								Contact all speaking contributors to arrange time on the day that they would like to speak			
								Contact all darchive contributors to arrange on-the-day logistics			

## pre:fab xmas mud mixer

December 3, 2023

Groupwork, pre:fab, Biobuild/Alan Drayton (hosts)  
Friends, family, clients, mentors  
Public event guests

Westend Rowing Club, Opoututeka (Coxs Bay), Tāmaki Makaurau,  
Aotearoa

Host a Christmas Party for Groupwork/pre:fab and invite everyone  
to make lightweight mud bricks.



Figure 4.38: Simon Glaister, *Clay-based wall panel samples*, 2024, photograph. Courtesy of Simon Glaister.

### Context

The Groupwork/pre:fab christmas party for 2023 presented another opportunity to give back to our community of clients, friends, families, and the public. Throughout the year, Groupwork had been learning and experimenting with natural building techniques, particularly through the development of a clay-based wall lining panel that could (aspirationally) compete with GIB board.<sup>1</sup> We had been working on this with earth-building expert Alan Drayton of Biobuild,<sup>2</sup> and learning more about natural building through the Earth Building Association New Zealand's annual conferences. This year we wanted to share an afternoon of lightweight earth-brick making in the city centre of Tāmaki Makaurau.

### Description of Happening

We hosted the event at the West End Rowing Club clubhouse in Opoututeka, Coxs Bay. There is a patch of grass out front, which we assumed to be public land. We liked the idea of activating a public, inner-city space with an activity often associated with rural properties and self-builds. We traded a box of beers with a billboard company in Albany for two large decommissioned billboards to use as tarpaulins, borrowed a concrete mixer, buckets, a mixing drill, and a trailer from Drayton, a paper shredder from my dad's office, built two brick moulds from plywood, sourced 20 kg of hemp hurd and a large amount of pure pre-soaked clay (also from Drayton), and bought 40 paper bags from the supermarket so participants could decorate them with potato stamps and take home their brick in a party bag.

Attendees were invited to bring their old bank statements, love letters, failed projects, emails from clients, and similar materials to shred for making paper pulp. They were encouraged to wear their oldest clothes, use the drill to mix the soaked clay into smooth clay cream, and get their feet dirty mixing clay, hemp hurd, paper pulp, and water until the mixture was ready for the brick moulds. We set up a station for making potato stamps to decorate party bags and assembling brick carriers from plywood and twine. A BBQ was available for cooking vegan sausages and grilling vegetables, and a paddling pool filled with ice kept drinks cool. Another paddling pool served as a clean-off station. Many children attended the event and had a blast mixing mud, cleaning off, and getting dirty all over again. pre:fab aims to make all its events kid-friendly.



Figure 4.39: pre:fab, *Event poster*, 2024, graphic. Courtesy of pre:fab.

<sup>1</sup> Fletcher construction have an effective monopoly on wall linings in Aotearoa, and their product GIB (gypsum board), while 'natural', can become toxic when sent to landfill. "Turning potentially poisonous plasterboard waste into gardening treasure," Stuff, 2023, accessed October 02, 2024, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/environment/climate-news/132202240/turning-potentially-poisonous-plasterboard-waste-into-gardening-treasure>.

<sup>2</sup> "Healthy building for people and the environment," BioBuild, accessed October 02, 2024, <https://www.biobuild.co.nz/>.

Left: Figure 4.40: Oliver Ray-Chaudhuri, *pre:fab mud mixer set up in a public reserve, 2024*, photograph. Courtesy of Oliver Ray-Chaudhuri.

Right: Figure 4.41: Leonard Hobbins, *People mix mud with their feet, 2024*, photograph. Courtesy of Leonard Hobbins.

The pretext of it being a party implies a low-stakes environment in which people expect to relax and have fun. In spite of other uses of the word ‘party’, it doesn’t imply something political or troubling. But the subtext is that Groupwork and pre:fab are expressing our values through action. We advocate for a future where natural building materials become mainstream—not just for rural self-builds but for public buildings, apartment blocks, commercial spaces, and beyond—and so we bring natural buildings to public space and people in the city. By creating a space for collaborative learning, we enable participants to engage with new skills, uncover and share knowledge, physically enact these ideas, and build connections across people, places, and materials. This inclusive environment welcomes everyone—from NZIA board members to our friends and their children, students, the pre:fab community, and members of the public, some of whom paused their weekend walks to discover what we were doing.

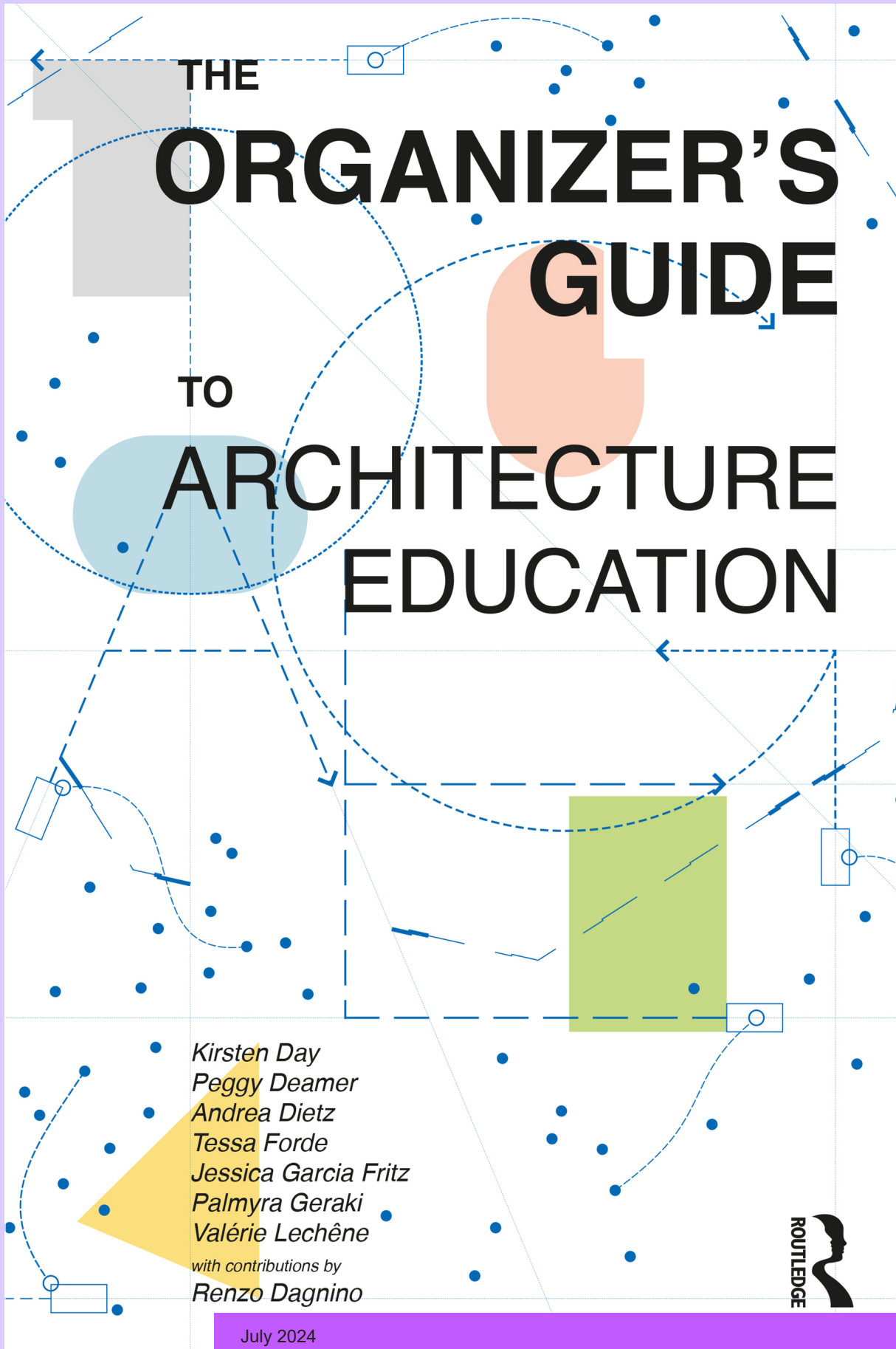


Left: Figure 4.42: Event attendees, *potato stamps used to decorate take-home brick party bags, 2024*, photograph of stamps.

Right: Figure 4.43: Oliver Ray-Chaudhuri, *Using old billboard canvases to mix mud, 2024*, photograph. Courtesy of Oliver Ray-Chaudhuri.

“Healthy Building for People and the Environment.” BioBuild, accessed October 02, 2024, <https://www.biobuild.co.nz/>.

“Turning Potentially Poisonous Plasterboard Waste into Gardening Treasure.” Stuff, 2023, accessed October 02, 2024, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/environment/climate-news/132202240/turning-potentially-poisonous-plasterboard-waste-into-gardening-treasure>.



July 2024  
 A co-authored book about organising education. At once an experimentation in writing together, and a starting point for gathering to change the discipline.  
 Figure 4.44: TOGAE Authors, TOGAE Cover, 2024, graphic. Courtesy of the authors.

## Annual General Gathering

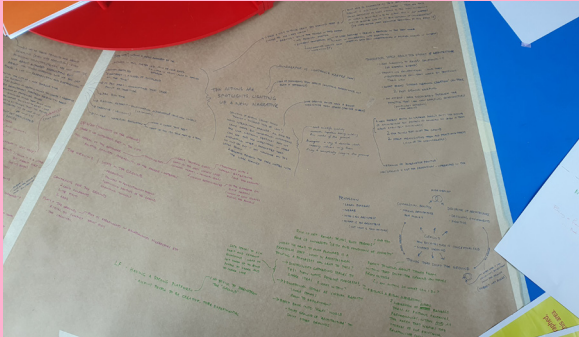


Figure 4.45: Tessa Forde, *Notes from the AGG*, 2023, photograph.

December 11, 2023

Tessa Forde (Event Facilitator)  
Invited Event Attendees

AUT City Campus WG Building Level 11, Tāmaki Makaurau,  
Aotearoa

Foster collaborative conversations with mentors to understand  
the critical actions, ideas, and contributions of my practice.

## Context

This was one of the final events of my practice before I shifted fully into the final phase of writing and theorizing. The work over the previous two years had been deeply collaborative and immersed in the discipline of architecture, so it seemed logical to embrace this collegiality and devise a mode to generate collaborative conversations around the theory and writing. A final workshop, which invited mentors from the discipline to reflect on and discuss the work, also encouraged me to distill my practice to its most critical actions and contributions.

One of the most significant personal transitions that occurred through enacting my practice was a shift from trouble-making to a more expansive concept of ground-making, rooted in love and organizing. While this transition had begun prior to the workshop, the process of designing and realizing it reinforced this shift. I wanted the workshop to capture this transition and provide a space to reflect on the different ‘feelings’ and affects of my practice, as well as the kinds of ground it makes. To do this, the workshop itself would encapsulate two exaggerated ways of gathering: the first, a boardroom setting with its ritual practices; the second, a more informal, playful gathering akin to those explored by *The Night School* and *pre:fab*. By embodying these two approaches, the workshop became a reflection of my practice, incorporating ritual subversion, diverse types of gathering, and the design and realization of two distinct ‘architectural’ spaces.

**Description of Happening** The first half of the workshop was staged in a boardroom setting. The room was arranged with a monitor at the center, tables in a U-shape around it, and office chairs positioned neatly at each station. The space was primarily lit by fluorescent lighting, reinforcing the corporate aesthetic. Each table setting included a clipboard, a tie, and a #John-ritual name badge, ensuring every participant fully inhabited their assigned roles. I assumed the role of the CEO of the ‘company,’ while each John was designated an executive position. To set the tone, I introduced myself, stating that I “bring a wealth of knowledge about the extremely complex undertakings of this organisation, as well as expertise in holding meetings, strategising, looking at numbers, and doing things with those numbers.” My opening address included the standard corporate acknowledgments: gratitude for everyone’s contributions to the company, recognition of significant milestones, reflections on the ever-evolving market landscape, challenges overcome, lessons learned, and the announcement of our “unprecedented customer satisfaction.” I also humorously credited my assistant, ChatGPT, for drafting that portion of my speech. The culmination of my address was the unveiling of the company’s new name. I framed it as one that I hoped would perfectly encapsulate “our feelings about the future—socially, environmentally, and especially politically.”

**Finding**  
**Unconventional and**  
**Uplifting**  
**Understandings in the**  
**Urban**  
**Condition**  
**Klub**

From there, I presented the key ideas of my practice using a framework drawn from economic language, structured around four pillars: Market (competition), Performance, Assets, and Growth. Market (competition) focused on the precedents of my practice—many of which are discussed in Chapter 2: *Disciplinary Gathering*—and those operating in similar ways or occupying comparable corners of the ‘market’; Performance outlined the achievements of the past two years, including the workshops of *The Night School*, the formation of *pre:fab* and its actions, as well as my involvement with *TAL* and *ABC School*; Assets highlighted the skills, insights, and resources accumulated through these endeavors, framing them as tangible and intangible gains resulting from my practice; and Growth posed the critical questions of *why* and *what’s next*, leading to the conclusion that all of these efforts reveal:

*a need for the architect to leverage their skillset to reveal systemic and relational truths through the process of making architecture. Collective ritual can be used to expose power systems and exploitation within the supply chain that the discipline is in service to; see the architectural process as a virtual reality space in which alternative ways of relating can be explored and discovered; point to historical, social and political systemic structures that influence the boundaries of what constitutes “site,” the process of making buildings, and the social hierarchies they determine; create opportunities for ontological shift, whereby relationality is forefronted and we can examine both the fraught journey of the materials that surround us and identify with them as kin; and utilise gathering processes for sharing, teaching and learning new and better ways of being together, creating meaning in place, and discovering new affects through which to understand the world.<sup>1</sup>*

Attendees were then invited to pair up and use the four framings—Market (competition), Performance, Assets, and Growth—to discuss the practice through a mindmap provided on their clipboards. However, they resisted the language and framework of the boardroom, rejecting concepts like competition and individuality, questioning conventional measurements of success, and critiquing the inherent limitations of *trouble* as a practice—describing it as an “inspiral” that becomes increasingly less effective over time. They also challenged the notion of growth, pointing out its problematic implication that “things are always up, no matter what”.<sup>2</sup> In the boardroom space, attendees were defensive; they didn’t fully ‘perform’ their assigned roles as Johns. Instead, they actively resisted the framework at every turn, offering their own alternatives to the four pillars.

Following the shared reflections, I argued that the boardroom framework—and by extension, the broader systemic settings that dominate public knowledge and our collective imagination—are not conducive to the type of thinking and radical collaboration envisioned in my practice. These frameworks are inadequate in addressing the extraordinary challenges we face. To explore alternative approaches, we needed to transition into a new kind of setting with a different framework. Attendees were invited to remove their badges, discover their new roles on the back of the name cards, and move into “*an alternative conceptual space*” called #the-room, where we would continue the remainder of the workshop.<sup>3</sup>

#the-room was a demarcated space within the classroom, invisible to the boardroom but present all along, enclosed by portable exhibition walls. This space was lighter—lit by sunlight—colorful, and filled with the matter and *squitter* of my practice, collated into a live archive. Attendees could sit on stools, benches, or the floor. Every surface served as a canvas for writing or drawing. I reintroduced myself, reframing my role as *‘the caretaker’*. In this new role, I brought “a commitment to learning how to gather better, to be together, and to share spaces where knowledge can be made collectively ... I am also good at cryptic crosswords, organising events, and playing games with toddlers”.<sup>4</sup> I then presented my *‘caretaker’s address’*, speculating

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<sup>1</sup> CEO Address that I presented for the workshop.

<sup>2</sup> Attendee contributions.

<sup>3</sup> Caretaker Address that I presented for the workshop.

<sup>4</sup> Caretaker Address that I presented for the workshop.

broadly on the trajectory of my practice and the shift from trouble-maker to caretaker (which has since become ground-maker/gardener). In this new framing, I reimagined the four pillars: Market became Ground—a fuzzy, non-competitive, boundaryless, convivial environment, a space for discovering what is needed for life to flourish; Performance became Actions—where we learn how to be together and develop skills through doing; Assets became Tools—the things we use to build and dismantle, our shared resources; and Growth became Roles and Responsibilities—a space to speculate on and inhabit the possibilities of what an architect is and what our responsibilities are to every complex being and thing on The Ground.

In this space attendees were invited to speculate anew on the practice. I wrote notes on the floor and walls of the room as they reflected on things like: whose rituals; how architecture is a set of social systems or the formal studies of social systems; the problematics of the word 'care'; associations of exclusion with the idea of a groundskeeper; how gardening may be a powerful metaphor for this research when thinking about things that happen under the ground and seeds that lie dormant and grow years later; how dissent is managed by the caretaker, and how oppositional ideas can exist together; awards as the central manifestation of peer respect and where the critic is the most visible; how trouble can also be an act of care; not embodying one role but oscillating between many; getting lost in the fuzzy middle between radicality and institutionalism; and how to think about success, succession, evolution and walking away.

## This is not a Ground, This is a Floorplate

December 11, 2023 to January 12, 2024

Tessa Forde (Room curator)  
Friends, family, mentors etc

AUT City Campus WG Building Level 11, Tāmaki Makaurau,  
Aotearoa

Exhibit a physical manifestation of the work and my practice.  
Capture all the output. Invite those I have worked with, friends,  
family etc into the space to reflect and contribute to The Ground.

### Context

'The room' emerged from the design of the ritual subversion for #the-archive-workshop. It was intended as a space to capture the outcomes, feelings, and affects of my practice—a manifestation of The Ground. It became a place where I could reflect and explore my practice, inviting friends, family, colleagues, and collaborators to spend time with me there. From those conversations, I drew theories, ideas, and language, which then filled the room—both literally and figuratively—as I wrote across all surfaces, uncovering threads, making connections, and shaping ground. Over a few weeks, more than 30 people visited the space to talk and reflect on the work, and from those exchanges, I wrote nearly 10,000 words of speculative thoughts and ideas. For the first time, I felt truly connected to my practice and to what it had revealed and created.

### Description of Happening

These conversations became the foundation for writing the thesis. The room acted as both a conclusionary point and a beginning—a transitional node between practice and theory, and a physical ground for gathering, even if only momentarily. I will briefly outline some of the key reflections from these discussions, generalised and discursive, much like they were in the room. We talked about how the work is grounded—in *pre:fab*, in people, and in connections. We questioned: Why should these gathering spaces exist? How do we move beyond the holding patterns of corporate practice? Why are so many of the questions I have about architecture unanswered by those around me? Why have I spent years drawing window sill details I've never seen in real life? We reflected on the room itself, located on level 11 of AUT's WG building, observing, "This is not a ground; this is a floorplate," and considered how the conceptual ground includes the physical ground. What, then, is the physical ground of this research? Its space? Its final gesture? We discussed whether there might be roles beyond that of the caretaker, but noted that 'shape-shifting' seems archetypal of neoliberal logics—ungrounded, where the CEO becomes the Prime Minister. We also talked about scientific thinking, acknowledging that we cannot fully understand the impact we have on super-complex systems and that we will repeatedly encounter hard power structures. Yet, the practice remains one of pulling different levers and observing their effects—so, we concluded, keep pulling levers. We reflected on the materiality of digital spaces, on satellites and data centres, on the physical realities of radiation, and on what these immaterial forces do to our bodies and to The Ground.

We talked a lot about The Ground. About lasers and LIDAR scanners, scientific equipment, lenses and affects, gardens and permaculture. We thought about fragility and stability on The Ground, and what makes it feel more present, more solid. We talked about shared meaning as The Ground that action emerges from, and how while things are easy to understand in reference to organising, love and meaning and care, and softness have to come through too—the less tangible social mechanisms that underpin it all. We reflected that having a strong platform allows people to be experimental, to be creative. We wrote poems. We asked: What grounds us?



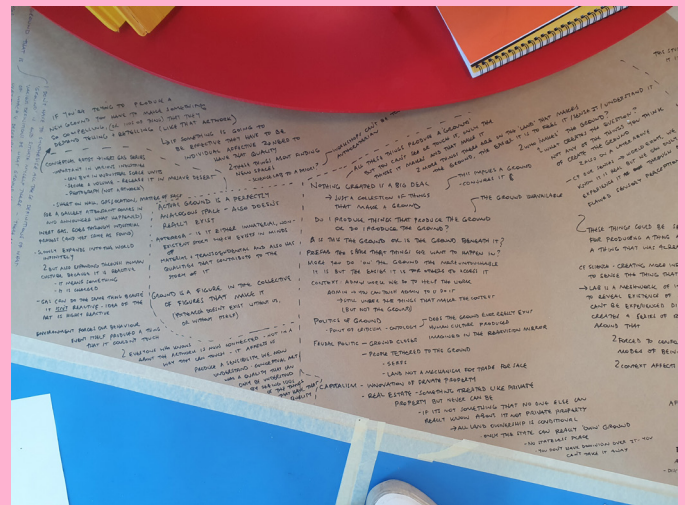
Figure 4.46: Tessa Forde, *The room*, 2023, photograph.



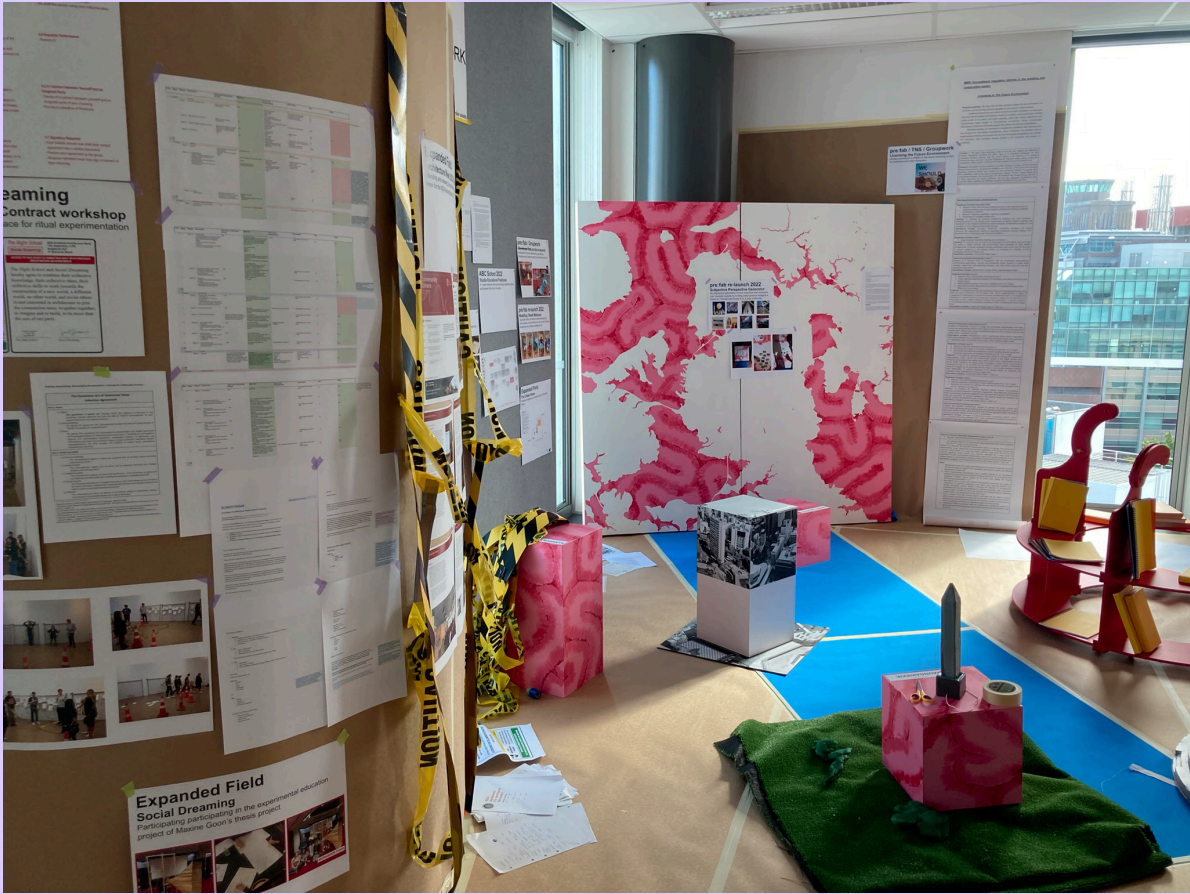
Figure 4.47: Tessa Forde, *The room*, 2023, photograph.

What centres us? What tapu spaces create for us a deep feeling of connection? How do rituals make a place more than a place? How do we find a shared ground for pre:fab? We figured that the practice was really an answer to trying to make architecture “not suck.” We talked about the finding of community through disciplinarity, through pre:fab and shared interests, and tried to project a kind of pre:fab fanfic where the pre:fab HQ becomes a shared site for alternative practices. We asked how we engage people, how you convince people to want to make change, and speculated that pre:fab events are at least a good start, because your friends will be there.

We thought about pre:fab—how it makes space for people to come together to think about ways of doing architecture beyond what is facilitated in a standard construction contract, how it produces and links architecture to advocacy, how it asks questions and pulls practices together into a field that is cognisant and reflective of our values, building more than just spaces. We questioned the nature of workshops and suggested that they might be a little authoritarian. We talked about how to let new things, ways of being, and ways of being together emerge from pre:fab, from the garden, from troubling and agitating, hanging out, pulling levers, and staying in the creative, unpredictable, sometimes uncomfortable, experimental spaces where we might discover new things together.



Figures 4.48-4.49: Tessa Forde, *The room*, 2023, photograph.





Figures 4.50-4.53: Leonard Hobbins, *The room*, 2023, photographs. Courtesy of Leonard Hobbins.

## pre:fab: pasta-making

February 18, 2024

pre:fab (Event hosts)  
Friends and Family  
Public event guests

Westend Rowing Club, Opoututeka (Coxs Bay), Tāmaki Makaurau, Aotearoa

Gather to envision the future of pre:fab and engage in a collective joy ritual involving collective pasta making (and eating).

### Context

Before moving to Valparaíso, Chile, I wanted to mark the transition for pre:fab with an event that would serve as both a visioning session and a collective joy ritual. This event would provide one last opportunity to solidify the ground created by my practice and keep it alive for others. I also aimed to share this ground with my friends, family, and the children in my life, extending beyond pre:fab and architecture more explicitly. To achieve this, we organised a day that began with discussions about pre:fab's conceptual positioning and future and concluded with a communal activity: making pasta together to share over dinner.

### Description of Happening

The day began with a collective discussion about a future project that pre:fab members plan to launch publicly in early 2025. Following this icebreaker, we hosted a vision workshop with attendees to explore conceptual framings for pre:fab, gain insight into how those present understood its purpose, and discuss how they wanted to see it evolve. Inspired by Madelon Vriesendorp's game *Critical Pursuit*, attendees formed groups of 4–5 and were tasked with interpreting pre:fab by creating drawings or assembling other matter from the squitter on the table. Once separated from their authors, these ritual objects and symbols were arranged and reinterpreted through several rounds of analysis in a collective attempt to uncover the meaning, purpose, and future of pre:fab. The workshop culminated in the creation of a final 'diagram' that captured the totality of the conversations, which was then shared with the wider group.

The afternoon transitioned into a collective joy ritual: pre:fab members wielded their rolling pins (1m-long pieces of dowelling) to create Westmere's longest-ever pasta—a 12m tagliatelle noodle—mixed in large paddling pools and enjoyed with BYO tomato passata sauce and potluck sides. Frichot references the “dirt” of domestic tasks, drawing on Michèle Le Doeuff, who “deliberates at length on the choice that is made between domestic duties and philosophising”.<sup>1</sup> In this case we were philosophising in the kitchen while the dishes piled up—making pasta, making mess, making ideas together. The collective act of creating something together and then sharing it, particularly food, is a critical mode of gathering for Ground-making. It is a process that requires organisation, collaboration, care, slowing down, and love. We ate together around a gingham tablecloth and watched the sunset over the bay.

Frichot, Hélène. *Dirty Theory: Troubling Architecture*. Germany: Spurbuchverlag, 2019.

<sup>1</sup> Hélène Frichot, *Dirty theory: troubling architecture* (Germany: Spurbuchverlag, 2019), 75.



Figure 4.54: Leonard Hobbins, *pre:fab members envision pre:fab's future*, 2024, photograph. Courtesy of Leonard Hobbins.

Figure 4.55: Tessa Forde, *Attendees knead pasta together*, 2024, photograph.



Figure 4.56: Kate Brown, *West Auckland's longest ever noodle*, 2024, photograph. Courtesy of Kate Brown.

Conclusion

***Architecting Other  
Ways to Be [Together]***

This research developed out of a frustration with the lack of agency architecture workers have in affecting outcomes in the construction of shared environments. Seemingly untouchable and incomprehensible hyperobject forces—financial systems, the global supply chain, global warming—left me with a sense of being ‘untethered’, without a place to put my ideas, without sense of where I could take action on my frustration, and without a clear or graspable future. I undertook a practice oriented research project to explore possible strategies, tactics, and tools for building agency for the architecture discipline, and creating the kind of conceptual and material environment in which I would want to practice.

My hypothesis emerged *through* my practice, through reflection on the things I did and made; the gatherings I attended and initiated; and their relationships to other things, ideas, people, and practices that constitute the conceptual space of the architecture discipline. My argument is that architects have more agency in affecting the built environment and its systems if they are connected to and actively engaging this conceptual space—The Ground—and they do this by *gathering*. Gatherings that exist outside and between professional, commercial, academic, and even disciplinary boundaries where ideas can interact, connect architects to each other, to place, to the material realities of their work, and allow for experimentation and knowledge sharing that can enrich practice and the discipline. If these gatherings are abundant, organised, and full of love and care, they could unite architecture workers, arming them with knowledge, tools, and collective momentum to exercise their agency and advocate within political, economic, and social structural systems. This thesis theorises my practice—a methodological enquiry into Ground-making—and offers a practice framework that I believe could support this affect. My practice involves creating the pre-conditions that could allow for an architecture discipline with more agency to emerge, by creating gatherings and testing the relationships and rituals that build and sustain them over time.

‘Chapter One—The Ground’ presented my theory of The Ground as a vast, complex, dynamic conceptual idea space which is constantly being made and re-made. I described how a lack of agency in affecting The Ground allows external forces to have a significantly bigger impact in shaping our shared environments than the architecture discipline. By theorising The Ground, I could posit that this conceptual space is a starting point for reconnecting architecture workers to the relational nature of their work and in understanding their own practices in concert with others and to complex systems. If architecture workers have more agency when they are connected to and actively engaging The Ground, I suggest that fostering this connection starts with gathering.

‘Chapter Two—Disciplinary Gathering’ argued that the history of architecture has always been a history of gathering and applied this theory as a lens through which to reinterpret the history of architecture in Aotearoa. I explored how gatherings are not just organised groups of people, but also magnetic forces on The Ground, ideas that draw people around them and manifest physically in things like aesthetic style and in the rituals that form to sustain gathering around them. These affects, discovered through practice act as a starting point for new modes of gathering that support the rediscovery the agency of architecture workers to imagine and shape other futures, and the pre-conditions that might make reconnecting to The Ground and sustaining these gatherings possible. I observed that school-like spaces for the free sharing of knowledge and performance of other realities are particularly fertile for engaging and making The Ground.

‘Chapter Three—Undisciplined’ traced a methodological journey in my research related to the emergence and actions of pre:fab platform, positing that significant change in architecture emerges from an ecosystem of ‘trouble’ rather than through the actions of individualised people and practices. I reflected on my attempts to showcase ‘alternative’ practices and create one through The Night School, and the initiation of pre:fab as an oppositional reaction to perceived institutional failures. These reflections revealed key insights into collaborative action and a theory about agency, moving from a focus on individual radicalism to collective action. The chapter explored how and where architecture can exercise its agency, in forming coalitions and targeting systemic structures.

'Chapter Four—Love and [re]Organising' posits that the architecture skillset already has allegiances with organising and thus architecture workers can leverage this skillset to create the types of gatherings that can be sustained and through which they can exercise their agency. I reflect that for organised spaces to garner collective momentum they also depend on love and deep care and in the design and realisation of infrastructures and rituals that develop and support communities. I looked to examples from my practice—like workshops, thinking about physical spaces, foregrounding play, using contracts as a ritual practice, and so on—for tools that can create pre-conditions for convivial gathering.

A methodological framework of Ground-making—consisting of four key practice approaches—offers a practice model that could have the affect of connecting architecture to The Ground and building agency for the discipline. This framework suggests a need for a varied and multi-scalar approach and depends on an ecosystem of other Ground-makers acting through their own methodologies and practices. This framework, the result of a theorisation of my practice, constitutes my contribution to knowledge.

**Ground-making:**

A methodological framework for gathering to create the conditions needed for architecture workers to have agency in the construction of our shared environments.

**Traversing the Ground** involves examining the discipline of architecture across all its complex facets, from reading theorists, to joining organisations, to watching lectures, to looking at legal regulation, to attending talks and town hall meetings, and to getting a little dirty by looking at meme pages and magazines and reality TV. It requires an examination of architecture's relationships to extractive economies, to the processes and flows of materials that shape our shared spaces, to other species, to ecosystems, and to systems of oppression. It is a process of keeping practice open, adaptable, and responsive to new discoveries and in relation to things happening in other gathering spaces in the architecture discipline. It is about being out in the world with others and taking seriously their instincts and observations about the built environment. It is sometimes uncomfortable, ambiguous, and daunting. Traversing the Ground invites staying with these feelings of discomfort, following them where they lead, and recognising them as indexes of broader systems of power and influence. It can be engaged by anyone at any time and always has the potential to be revealing and enriching.

**School-making** is a practice of making speculative, non-competitive spaces where not-knowing is as important as knowing. School-making cultivates physical and conceptual environments that are low-stakes, flexible, explorative, and specifically focused on knowledge sharing and experimentation. It makes spaces that are safe, fun, playful, and convivial—the kind of space in which people want to gather and learn. It is about finding venues, providing shared resources, thinking about content, designing ways of interacting and relating to one another, and challenging hierarchies and sites of expertise. It is about imagining and performing other ways of being and knowing, other possible futures. School-making fosters important connections and conversations—fertile Ground—upon which other types of gathering and action can occur.

**Trouble-making** is how architects can exercise their agency to affect outcomes in the built environment. It is about collective, organised action that targets oppressive systemic structures through reimagined policy, legislation, financial models, and thought paradigms. It depends on a complex ecosystem of diverse actors generating collective momentum towards a particular goal through different means. These include practices and people who imagine and perform other ways of being and knowing, and whose ideas gain momentum through gathering. Trouble-making is visionary, not reactionary, and requires relational thinking.

**Creating Community Infrastructures** is the design and implementation of the rituals, administrative structures, and community agreements that build and sustain gatherings for collective momentum. Their establishment requires organising skillsets and a foundation of love that allows for opportunities to be vulnerable and reckon with feelings of discomfort that prepare collectives for difficult challenges. It can include thinking about how roles and responsibilities are organised, what processes frame relationships and gatherings, how equity and accessibility

shape the collective, what consideration for other beings and intangible things are factored into the collective, and how the spaces of gathering can be inclusive and supportive. Creating Community Infrastructures makes the actions and tools that act as everyday steps to make The Ground for revolutionary shifts in how architecture (and life) could be practised. I posit that these approaches, in concert, and in concert with other actors with their own approaches and Ground-making theories and methodologies, offer the architecture discipline a first small step in connecting to The Ground and reclaiming its agency. I invite architecture workers to join me in these convivial spaces beyond the boundaries of their academies, professional organisations, workplaces, and companies, where we can imagine the future together, and build what's missing.

I also posit that this framework can be applied to the process of designing and delivering buildings and other shared, constructed places. A wider Traverse of The Ground, far beyond site boundaries, into examining the supply chain, legislative structures, ecosystems, deep histories, could enrich both the conceptual grounding of a built project, and the potential connections between architecture worker and client, people and place, people and materials, and so on; and reveal realities otherwise obscured. More intimate community engagement processes based in convivial spaces for knowledge sharing and upskilling can empower communities in their own knowledge and skill pools, produce spaces that can connect projects to broader networks, and enhance a sense of belonging among those who live there and increase their investment in the outcomes in their shared spaces. Examining more critically the legislative systems that effect a project, and exploring opportunity for leveraging building processes as opportunities for systems demonstration is a tangible way in which architecture workers could exercise their agency and impact built environment outcomes. This process could also give communities themselves more agency in how they can contribute to the construction of their shared environments. The process of making buildings can also be a process of making communities, leveraging what should be an intimate and collaborative process to create bonds, introduce or reinforce shared rituals, and design and realise the relational community infrastructures that support sustained gatherings, alongside physical infrastructures. Thus, I suggest that architecture could claim its role as a reorganising practice, leveraging the project of designing shared environments to relate to, reveal, and design relationships between people and materials, people and place, people and people, and reveal and redesign how those relationships are intimately connected to systems and structures of power. Finally, the role of the architect, through traversing The Ground, School-making, Trouble-making, and Creating Community Infrastructures, becomes a role of architecting other ways to be [together].

The hyperobject forces that determine our built environment and how we work make it feel like these practices are impossible, and that I am naïve for suggesting their uptake. But these are already approaches being undertaken by architecture workers all over the world, and the more we can connect around this work, the more agency we will have to foreground it and see its benefits realised in built space. Just because the majority of architecture projects are delivered in a particular way now, doesn't mean they have to be. My practice explores and offers actions and tools that are small, everyday steps that make The Ground for revolutionary shifts in how architecture (and life) could be practised. The gathering spaces of my research generate a flexible, dialogical, and convivial space for gathering around and sharing ideas for the cultural production of architecture and to imagine other ways of knowing, being, and doing. This space allows knowledge sharing outside of competitive professional frameworks, connects diverse practices and allows them to interact, and generates ideas and evidence for things that can be deployed back into the commercial, professional, and academic spheres.

Ground-making and the theories presented here largely remain theories that I expect will be part of an ongoing project of my life's work. The research has opened more questions for me than it has answered. Theorising this practice is a first step in presenting it for conversation, scrutiny, and other interactions on The Ground. There are many possible next steps. More experimentation and analysis of my practice and the spaces Ground-making produces and how they interface with the academy, commercial practice, capitalist economies, and the lived realities of architecture labour is where theories move beyond speculation. Closer examination of some of the tools, rituals, and methods of gathering of various institutions and collectives I have referenced, and how these shaped both the groups themselves and the discipline of

architecture would deepen my argument for architecture as a history of gathering and reveal more explicitly how they make and shift The Ground. To initiate a shift on The Ground to allow for other ways of being and knowing, and other possible futures, new gathering sites—new institutions—are needed. More engagement with social and institutional theory would provide a stronger conceptual framing for pre:fab and the other collectives in which I practice going forward and would support (or contradict) the institutional models I have proposed. My personal interests lie in continued exploration of concepts of relationality, how architecture can be used as a re-organisational practice to re-organise materials and relationships, reconnecting communities with the places in which they belong.

## Success[ion]

In setting out to ‘make change’ in the architecture discipline, I set myself up with the difficult task of then having to decide if I’ve done it. What is the measure of success for this research? Can the change on The Ground be felt or seen? Of course, most change happens either so suddenly and violently it can’t be ignored, or so incrementally it is difficult to feel like it is happening at all and can often only be seen in retrospect, years later. The changes needed in the architecture discipline will likely only happen in this slow way, with Ground-makers doing the hard work, sharing and imagining together, and practising their values. I hope that the space my practice makes contributes to that, and that I can continue to care for it, nurture it, plant things, and fertilise other things.

We have plans for pre:fab to grow and connect and form this wider generative space. Many of these plans are discussed in the submissions we made through #prefab-for-president-180. It is important for pre:fab that we are imagining the future that we can belong to, actioning towards that, and building what’s missing. This necessarily goes far beyond the boundaries of architecture, and expanding into these less defined disciplinary spaces is a next step. Success implies a desired end point, a stopping. I think I prefer succession. Succession implies a continuity, an inheritance from all those Ground-makers who came before us, and an implication around what we want to pass on. It asks the questions: What Ground can we make for the future and its inhabitants? How can we make things feel more solid for them, more connected?

The biggest change made in this research feels personal. I have radically shifted my understanding of myself in relation to the world. I have a deeper connection with materials and place. I recognise myself not as an individual somehow charged with change-making alone, but a spec connected to infinite specs that make up the universe, and that I have a responsibility to feel those connections and respect them deeply. In this I feel grounded. I feel grounded in the people I live, think, make, organise with, and love, and I feel grounded in the places and ways that we gather. We have made a lot of stuff: ideas, squitter, earth bricks, pasta, schools, spreadsheets, darkefacts, drawings, parties, workshops, puppets, poems and so on; and all this stuff, also makes Ground for others to find and action their agency, too.

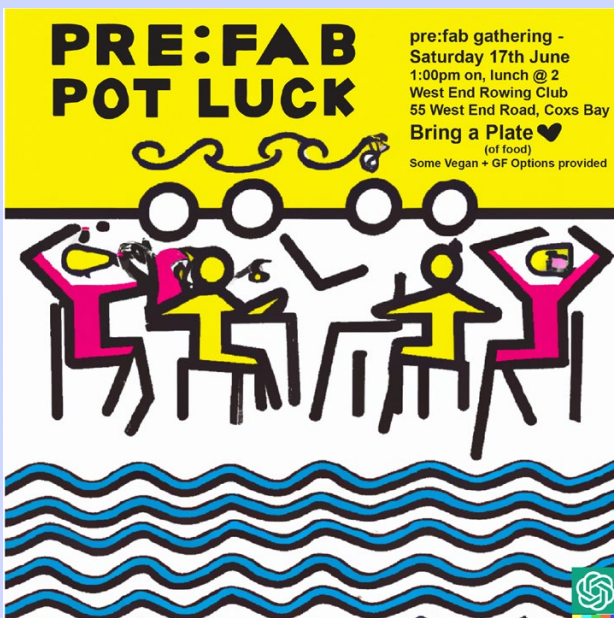
I present a final summary of some things I feel I have contributed to The Ground: the idea of the history of architecture as a history of gathering; that shared, convivial, non-competitive space of knowledge sharing and strategising are the types of gathering spaces needed to connect to The Ground build agency; the idea that particular kinds of trouble-making which directly engage legal, political, and socioeconomic structures have an outsized effect on the discipline of architecture, and may be available to practitioners; that organisational skill sets within the architecture discipline can be re-deployed as organising skill sets for exercising our agency; why this organising needs love and deep care, grounded in relational thinking and respect for all things; and a collection of tools based in the things I have learned from practice that others may also find useful, and that may offer a starting point for building new sites of gathering and communities. Critically I feel that my most profound contribution is that I spent three years generating, nurturing, strengthening, and tending The Ground to offer something back to the discipline, and thus my contribution to knowledge is both the theory that emerges from this space, and the space itself, with all its collaborators and practices, a nebulous cloud of stuff, a garden wild with possibility.

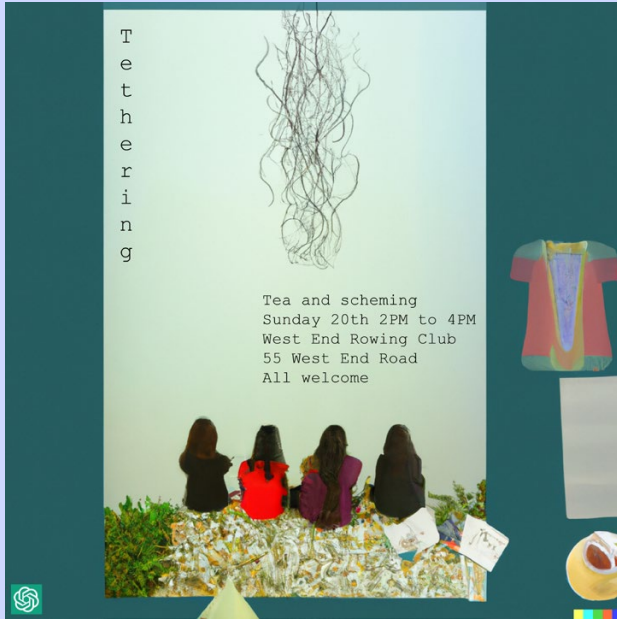
### pre:fab: Pot Lucks

#### Tools

- Plates of food from home
- Cutlery, plates, cups etc.
- Good yarns
- Love!

Figure 5.1-5.11: pre:fab,  
*Various pot luck invitations,*  
 2022-2024, graphic.  
 Courtesy of pre:fab.





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# *Appendix*



Figure 6.1: AUT Ethics Committee, *Ethics Approval*, 2022, document.



## Consent Form

**Project title:** *Troubling Architecture: Borrowing, Sharing and Testing Alternative Modes of Architecture Practice and Pedagogy in Aotearoa*

**Project Supervisor:** *Dr. Kathy Waghorn*

**Researcher:** *Tessa Forde*

- I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 03 March 2022.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- I understand that photos and video will be taken during the event.
- I understand that my work, image and voice will be identifiable in the documentation.
- I understand that any of my work, ideas or contributions to the event remain my intellectual property and my authorship will be acknowledged and cited if included in any publication.
- I understand that once I have agreed to have photos, video taken during the event, and have the event reflected on for the sake of the research, the copyright for these outputs will be held by Tessa Forde.
- I understand that my practice and the outputs of the event may be included in the discussion component of Tessa Forde’s doctoral exegesis.
- I recognise that participation in *The Night School* also entails the optional development and inclusion of my practice and workshop design in an online database of alternative approaches to architecture.
- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- I understand that if I withdraw from the project then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.
- I agree to take part in this research.
- I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes  No
- I agree to being identified by name in any documentation featuring my work, image, or voice: Yes  No

Participant’s signature: .....

Participant’s name: .....

Date:

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on the 9<sup>th</sup> of March 2022 AUTEC Reference number 22/30.**

*Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.*

Figure 6.2: Tessa Forde, *Ethics Co-facilitator Consent Form*, 2022, document.



AUT

TE WĀNANGA ARONUI  
O TĀMAKI MAKĀU RAU

## Participant Information Sheet

Co-facilitator Information Sheet.

### Date Information Sheet Produced:

03 March 2022

### Project Title

Troubling Architecture: Borrowing, Sharing and Testing Alternative Modes of Architecture Practice and Pedagogy in Aotearoa

### An Invitation

Tēnā Koe, ko Tessa Forde ahau. I am an architectural designer and educator from Tāmaki Makaurau, Auckland and am currently undertaking doctoral research at AUT's Huri te Ao, School of Future Environments.

I am writing to ask if you would like to be involved in the development of an event or workshop based on your own work or practice as part of *The Night School* – a platform for exploring and expanding architectural thinking.

*The Night School*, in this stage of the research, will be running weekly at Objectspace Gallery, during the month of April 2022, and then intermittently thereafter at a variety of locations.

### What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of this research is for myself to explore, reflect on and define a practice of challenging and troubling the architecture discipline through borrowing, sharing, testing and performing alternative modes of architecture practice and teaching. If we accept design and design thinking as invaluable tools for approaching the challenges facing humanity, surfacing, exploring and practicing more ethical and sustainable ways of living and acting becomes critical. *The Night School* acts as a platform for this action.

The recording and documenting of the event through photography and videography will be used to contextualise *The Night School*, your own practice and contribution (fully credited) and general reflection of the key themes, discussion points and outputs of the event, within a broader understanding of the architecture discipline.

### How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

Your work or practice has been identified as existing outside of conventional boundaries of understanding architecture which are usually the design of buildings for money.

### How do I agree to participate in this research?

After reading all the information, and after a conversation with myself in person or online, to where you fully understand the intentions of the research and *The Night School* and what is being asked of you, you can sign the consent form below and send it to me by email or deliver a hard copy in person. Your participation in this research is voluntary (it's your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage you nor disadvantage you. You are able to withdraw at any time. If you choose to withdraw you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to be continued to be used. However, once the findings have been produced or published, removal of your data may not be possible.

### What will happen in this research?

You are being invited to develop an event/workshop/performance (independently or in collaboration of myself) that will be hosted at Objectspace Gallery. This will be a public event, but attendance can be restricted through a registration process. The event should be inclusive, create a safe space for all attendants and attend to some facet of your practice. You can be experimental in how the event is designed as long as the proposed activity is ethical. We will discuss the Kaupapa of the research prior to the event. The intention of *The Night School* is to create a non-hierarchical space for mutual learning and unlearning, recognising that all attendees have knowledge to share. It is hoped that your practice may be able to benefit from the opportunity to share key ideas, work or actions.

Using the documentation of the event and my own recollections, notes will be taken in the days following the event, reflecting on my own observations of its general themes, concepts, and actions in relation to broader theories and ideas about architecture. These may be used in discussion about *The Night School* and my own practice in academic

Figure 6.3: Tessa Forde, *Ethics Co-facilitator Information Sheet Page 1*, 2022, document.

publication and presentations, including my own doctoral exegesis. The photographs may also be used to promote and market future events or end up on social media or websites related to *The Night School*. I will offer you a copy of the photographs and video for your own records.

A long term intention of this research is to develop the content of *The Night School* into an online repository of information and workshops that allow the dissemination of its knowledge and ideas to extend beyond the event in time. In a later stage of the research, you will have the option to work with me to develop your event into a format suitable for this online collection. This will be a separate process and you do not have to make a decision about this now. Your decision will not impact your event and involvement for this stage of the research.

The role of the public in these events will be as active participants, however they are not the main subjects of the research. It will be clearly communicated to attendees that they may be documented in their involvement, and measures will be in place for them to opt out of this documentation.

**What are the discomforts and risks?**

You may feel that you will say or do something that you do not wish to have recorded or documented. You may feel uncomfortable if you decide not to consent to having your participation filmed or photographed.

**How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?**

As you will be identifiable in the research, if you have any reservations about being filmed or photographed I will respect your right to make decisions around this. Your decision around being documented will not compromise the outcome of your event and will not cause any personal consequences. I am happy and open to discussing any concerns around this and to accommodate your requirements.

You will be given the opportunity to review any photographic or video footage of yourself and your workshop prior to publication.

**What are the benefits?**

The benefits to the broader community are the hosting of free, engaging events that consider new ways to think about architecture in Aotearoa, which will hopefully illuminate more pathways for emerging and current practitioners to practicing differently. You will have the opportunity to platform and perform your practice and hopefully gain new knowledge or perspectives from the attendees of the event. You will have access to a potential network of people and resources to support your practice. A fund of up to \$250 is available to cover required material costs, as well as access to a previously arranged venue with hospitality, and administration and facilitation support from myself.

My benefits are the content for *The Night School* and its subsequent actions that will feed into my doctoral research.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

For the sake of the research document your name can be kept confidential if you wish. You may be identifiable in photographic and other visual documentation used in the exegesis, thus wavering your confidentiality. You will be protected by having the opportunity to review any documentation related to you or your event prior to publication.

If you wish to attend other events you will be considered an 'attendee' at those events and may be photographed or documented in that context. You will go through a separate consenting process and be able to occupy an 'out-of-shot' zone in these instances if you do not wish to be photographed.

**What are the costs of participating in this research?**

There will be no financial costs to you as a participant.

**Who has funded this research?**

Objectspace Gallery is providing the venue, hospitality and \$1500 in funding to cover expenses for these events. They are not involved in the design or actuation of the research. Events not held at Objectspace will be self-funded or supplemented by funding from AUT. My research is funded by an AUT scholarship and through self-funding.

**What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?**

To participate in the Objectspace events in April you have two weeks to respond with your involvement. If you would like to be involved at a later date you can defer the decision for a maximum of three months.

**Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?**

You will receive a one page summary of any documentation or writing about your event or work prior to publication.

The exegesis will be made publicly available online as a PDF and it can be emailed to you upon publication.

You will be able to subscribe to an e-newsletter for information and updates about future events and actions if you wish.

**What do I do if I have concerns about this research?**

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, *Kathy Waghorn, Kathy.waghorn@aut.ac.nz*

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEC, *ethics@aut.ac.nz*, (+649) 921 9999 ext 6038.

**Whom do I contact for further information about this research?**

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

**Researcher Contact Details:**

Tessa Forde – AUT PhD Candidate

*Tessa.forde@autuni.ac.nz*

**Project Supervisor Contact Details:**

*Kathy Waghorn, Kathy.waghorn@aut.ac.nz*

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 09 March 2022, AUTEK Reference number 22/30.



## Consent Form

*Project title:* **Troubling Architecture: Borrowing, Sharing and Testing Alternative Modes of Architecture Practice and Pedagogy in Aotearoa**

*Project Supervisor:* **Dr. Kathy Waghorn**

*Researcher:* **Tessa Forde**

- I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 03 March 2022.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- I understand that photos and video may be taken during the event.
- I understand that the key themes, discussion points and outputs of the event may be reflected upon in Tessa Forde's doctoral exegesis or for other publications.
- I understand that my image and voice will be identifiable in the documentation.
- I understand that I will not be identified by name in any resulting output.
- I understand that the photographs and videos of the event may be used in Tessa Forde's doctoral exegesis, other publications, to promote future events through social media or websites related to *The Night School*, and supplied to the co-facilitator of the event for their own records.
- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- I agree to take part in this research.
- I wish to sign up to an email newsletter to receive information about future events:    Yes     No

Participant's signature: .....

Participant's name: .....

Date:

Participant's contact information (for optional e-newsletter): .....

Contact information will not be used for any other purpose.

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on the 9<sup>th</sup> of March 2022 AUTEC Reference number 22/30.**

*Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.*

Figure 6.6: Tessa Forde, *Ethics Event Attendee Consent Form*, 2022, document.

**AUT**TE WĀNANGA ARONUI  
O TĀMAKI MAKĀU RAU

## Participant Information Sheet

Event Attendee Information Sheet.

### Date Information Sheet Produced:

03 March 2022

### Project Title

Troubling Architecture: Borrowing, Sharing and Testing Alternative Modes of Architecture Practice and Pedagogy in Aotearoa

### Kia ora and Welcome!

Tēnā Koe, ko Tessa Forde ahau. I am an architectural designer and educator from Tāmaki Makaurau, Auckland and am currently undertaking doctoral research at AUT's Huri te Ao, School of Future Environments.

As part of this *Night School* event some documenting is required – including photography and videography.

### What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of this research is for myself to explore, reflect on and define a practice of challenging and troubling the architecture discipline through borrowing, sharing, testing and performing alternative strategies of architecture practice and teaching. If we accept design and design thinking as valuable tools for approaching the challenges facing humanity, surfacing, exploring and sharing more ethical and sustainable ways of living and acting becomes critical. *The Night School* acts as a platform for this action.

The recording and documenting of the event through photography and videography will be used to contextualise *The Night School* and its content and outcomes within a broader understanding of the architecture discipline.

### How do I agree to participate in this research?

This is a free, public event. By signing the consent form, you consent to being documented. Your participation in this research is voluntary (it's your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage you nor disadvantage you. You are able to leave at any time. If you wish to maintain your privacy you can be left out of all documentation. Please stand in the signposted 'out-of-shot' zone and raise any concerns with myself.

### What will happen in this research?

This is a free event exploring an alternative mode of architecture practice with a participating practitioner. These events and *The Night School* form part of a broader practice that will be reflected on by myself in the research.

Using the documentation of the event and my own recollections, notes will be taken in the days following the event, reflecting on my own observations of its general themes, concepts, and actions in relation to broader theories and ideas about architecture. These may be used in discussion about *The Night School* and my own practice in academic publication and presentations, including my own doctoral exegesis. The photographs and other documentation may also be used to promote and market future events or end up on social media or websites related to *The Night School*. This documentation will be offered to the co-facilitator of the event for their own records.

It is important to note that you are not the main focus of the research, so your behaviour will not be studied in any depth, though general reflection of the key themes, discussion points and outputs of the events may be included in future publication. You will not be identified by name in any instance. My research is interested in my own position in the process of running *The Night School* and how events like this, and providing a platform for conversation, might shape or shift it.

### What are the discomforts and risks?

You may feel that you will say or do something that you do not wish to have recorded or documented. You may feel uncomfortable if you decide not to consent to having your participation filmed or photographed.

### How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

If you have any reservations about being filmed, photographed or documented in other manners I will respect your right to make decisions around this. Your decision around being documented will not cause any personal

Figure 6.7: Tessa Forde, *Ethics Event Attendee Information Sheet Page 1*, 2022, document.

consequences. I am happy and open to discussing any concerns around this and to accommodate your requirements.

**What are the benefits?**

The benefits are access to free, engaging events that consider new ways to think about architecture in Aotearoa, which will hopefully illuminate more pathways for emerging and current practitioners to practicing differently.

My benefits are the content for *The Night School* and its subsequent actions that will feed into my doctoral research.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

For the purposes of the research, you may be photographed or videoed. You may be identifiable in the documentation, thus waiving your confidentiality. You will be able to occupy an 'out-of-shot' zone if you wish for your privacy and confidentiality to be protected.

**What are the costs of participating in this research?**

There will be no costs to you as an attendee.

**Who has funded this research?**

Some research funding from AUT has contributed funding to this event.

**What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?**

You can decide to participate in the event by registering, attending and signing the consent form. You can leave at any time.

**Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?**

The exegesis will be made publicly available online as a PDF.

You will be able to subscribe to an e-newsletter for information and updates about future events and actions if you wish.

**What do I do if I have concerns about this research?**

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, *Charles Walker: charles.walker@aut.ac.nz*

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEK, *ethics@aut.ac.nz*, (+649) 921 9999 ext 6038.

**Whom do I contact for further information about this research?**

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

**Researcher Contact Details:**

Tessa Forde – AUT PhD candidate.

*Tessa.forde@autuni.ac.nz*

**Project Supervisor Contact Details:**

*Charles Walker: charles.walker@aut.ac.nz*

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 09 March 2022, AUTEK Reference number 22/30.

This participant information sheet and associated consent form was provided to every attendee of each event hosted by The Night School and co-hosted by The Night School and pre:fab platform. These were public events and the attendees were not the subjects of the research. The practice of hosting, and the associated learnings, emergent ideas, and observations were the subject.

