

PhD Colloquium

Book of Abstracts

20-21 NOV. 2025

**Reimagining the Existing:
Interdisciplinary perspectives on design, heritage, and
sustainable transformation through past, present and
future**

Henry van de Velde research group, Faculty of Design Sciences, University of Antwerp
ArcK research group, University of Hasselt, Civic Policy and Design and TRACE research lines



Reimagining the Existing: Interdisciplinary perspectives on design, heritage, and sustainable transformation through past, present and future

The HvdV and ARCK research groups are jointly organising a two-day PhD colloquium aimed at exchanging ideas, sharing approaches, and learning from each other's expertise. The colloquium will take place in Antwerp on November 20 and Hasselt on November 21.

The upcoming PhD colloquium reflections on approaches, both in design practice and theoretical research, that support future generations in engaging with the existing built, social and ecological environment and heritage, while also enabling innovation, the development of new paradigms, and the integration of evolving lifestyles as well as social and ecological concerns. This theme encapsulates both groups' commitment to innovative design methodologies, heritage conservation, and sustainable practices. It emphasises integrating historical research, design theory, design research, and practical applications to address contemporary challenges in public and open spaces, architecture and interiors.

We aim to discuss different approaches that explore how design and research can critically engage with existing buildings, spaces, landscapes and cultural narratives to address contemporary societal challenges, support sustainable transitions, and foster inclusive futures.

This colloquium invites PhD candidates from both research groups to share their perspectives and approaches on the theme, fostering open discussion and mutual exchange.

Organising team:

From UAntwerp:
Sara Eloy
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Oswald Devisch
Koenraad Van Cleempoele

9:30 Opening at Old Library Paardenmarkt S.N.001, Antwerp

9:45 Panel 1 - Historical Narratives and Mapping Practices

Violeta Tsenova
Steffie de Geatano
Zeynep Selvi
Debate

11:15 Coffee break

11:45 Panel 2 - Design, Technology and Sustainability

Ester Vandamme
Aaron Van Acker
Zena Ndiaye
Debate

13:15 Lunch

14:15 Panel 3 - Co-creation and Participatory Design (1)

Ilke Kerkhofs
Josymar Rodriguez Alfonzo
Asli Kolbas
Malinde Valee
Debate

16:15 Coffee break

16:45 Panel 4 - Design, Authorship and Sustainability

Elien Vissers-Similon
Colm mac Aoidh
Jiaming Ye
York Bing Oh
Debate

19:15 Dinner in the city



At "Het Poortgebouw", Begijnhof Hasselt

10:00 Workshop A

From Clothes to Costume:
Embodying Human and Non-Human
Others.
Instructor: Nikolas Kanavaris
Room: Living Lab Limburg

10:00 Workshop B

Curating research: from
knowledge building to public
engagement.
Instructor: Bart Tritsmans
Room: Kapitelzaal

13:00 Lunch

14:00 Building visit

15:00 Panel 5 - Co-creation and Participatory Design (2)

Nathan De Feyter
Leen Vansteenkiste
Louise Mazet
Debate

16:30 Coffee break

17:00 Panel 6 - Values, Ethics and Sustainability

Chioma Fears
Ilse Lindenbergh
Chris Bessemans
Debate

18:30 Closing session



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University
of Antwerp



Cruel Optimism in Participatory Design Artefacts. A case of working with heritage in neighbourhood redevelopment.

Participatory Design (PD) has begun explicating the progressivist rhetoric of transition design and designers' practical engagement in it. Prendeville and Kohtala (2023) demonstrate how design rhetoric might depoliticise its subject and create opportunities for assimilation within capitalists values.

Moreover, present-day attachments to regenerative futures might reproduce neoliberal forms of subjectivity and hope (Lindström et al., 2024). This historicising of design practice has coincided with PD's theoretical and methodological turn to history and memory studies (see for instance: Kambunga et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2024; Tsenova et al., 2024; Zuljevic et al., 2022) as one of the responses to designing for the pluriverse (Escobar, 2018). However, it is crucial to keep engaging with the ways in which historical narratives become used and represented in design artefacts given their coming-into-being through the interplay between actors and their agendas.

This paper investigates one aspect of this broader phenomenon - how the interventions designers make in participatory processes may succumb to neoliberal logics by reinforcing the fantasy of a "good life". Using Lauren Berlant's "cruel optimism" (2011), the paper provides a textual analysis of four podcasts produced during a participatory-coded heritage and design project in a UK neighbourhood that faces major redevelopment. The goal of the podcasts was to ignite a feeling of pride in the history of the area and be the first step towards equipping residents with skills to engage in the upcoming redevelopment. By investigating the aesthetic of how the lives of four historical figures were used as a mirror to present day experiences of the neighbourhood, the paper demonstrates how participation in constructing the podcast is sidelined, how the "skills" to engage in the development processes rest on capitalist logic, and how the idea of a hopeful future is "felt" as inevitable. The paper concludes with ideations for how PD might instead use historical narratives and past practices as active design resources to challenge dominant, linear views of progress.

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Commons and Mines: Misusing the Legend to Re-Enchant with Post-Industrial (Sub)Surface Landscapes.

This presentation traces the Campine's genealogy of soil and commoners, mines and miners, to ask what futuring possibilities emerge when we re-enchant our ways of approaching the (sub)surface landscape through the art-led redesign of geological maps. In 1919 Weber argued that capitalist modernity disenchanted the world through rationalization, stripping it of mystery. In the Campine coal industry, geological prospecting in the search for coal shaped imaginaries of the underground, undoing heathland naturecultures, leaving little unknown to the scientific gaze—or so it seemed.

The wonder that came with the unknown of the subsurface, that fed myths and stories of folklore, was cast aside. Through the eye of the mine, geologists scoured and probed the subsurface in the search for exploitable riches. Yet within the impenetrabilities and unprofitable risks of the subsurface lies precisely its elusivity and resistance to complete knowability, control and exploitation.

Leveraging this unknowability to reshape the imaginary of the underground, I advance a revision of the subsurface mapping of the mine through a misuse of its legend. By misusing geological legends—historical devices that framed extractive knowledge, and as a potential tool for undoing it—I put forward ways of subverting the epistemologies of prospecting and instead advance non-extractive imaginaries of surface and subsurface landscapes. In this art-led design mapping practice, re-enchantment offers repair with the narratives that have been obscured and ‘undergrounded’ (Yusoff, 2018). Drawing on undergrounded myths and unstable mining wastelands as allies, the proposed mapping practice supports the already present and emergent, commoning ways of relating to the post-industrial landscape: an informal process underway through trespassing, pioneering life and memorialization. These new mapping legends through which to understand the landscape seek to validate different ways of living with the unknowable, resisting extraction and reclaiming land as common ground, making the wastelands commonwaste, yet again.

Atlas of Vernacular Interiors: Towards a Framework for Design Education and Adaptive Reuse

Vernacular architecture has received growing attention for its ecological and material intelligence. However, its interior practices, spatial rituals, and socio-cultural narratives remain critically underexplored, especially in design-oriented disciplines. Research often focuses on construction or form, lacking frameworks that translate domestic vernacular interior knowledge, particularly tacit, communal, and climate responsive strategies, into contemporary interior architecture.

This research is to develop an *Atlas of Vernacular Interiors* by proposing a methodology of reading and translation, approaching domestic vernacular interiors as layered cultural texts open to interpretation and adaptation.

The contribution to this colloquium focuses on the early stage of the project, presenting pilot studies and poster drawings. Through case material from Türkiye, combined with axonometric drawings that map built-in furniture, textiles, and thresholds, the research begins to outline how vernacular interiors can be critically engaged as living resources. The case study analysis results in a series of posters using axonometric drawing to map cultural layers.

Preliminary findings indicate recurring spatial archetypes and shared cultural logics across diverse contexts, showing how tangible and intangible spatial elements, such as built-in features like furniture, material intelligence such as symbols in textiles, and everyday rituals like the seasonal adaptation of space, can be critically identified and reinterpreted as transferable principles for contemporary design and heritage practices.

This research reframes interiors as dynamic carriers of identity, adaptation, and spatial resilience. Its pedagogical model positions the classroom as a living archive, where collective knowledge fosters deeper engagement with vernacular heritage in design education and adaptive reuse.

Adaptable Timber Construction in Europe

As buildings face changing functional demands and environmental pressures, adaptability has become a critical complement to sustainability. As buildings are expected to evolve over time, timber, a renewable and versatile material, offers significant potential. However, its capacity to support long-term transformation remains underexplored.

Current adaptability frameworks are rarely tailored to the specific characteristics of timber construction, revealing a gap in empirical evidence and practical guidance. This paper explores how well existing general adaptability frameworks apply to multi-storey timber buildings, identifying technical challenges that hinder adaptation and evaluating how these frameworks address—or overlook—such barriers.

We conduct a systematic review of timber engineering and architectural literature, analyse 22 adaptability indicators, and apply two established frameworks—DGNB ECO2.1 and Adaptive Capacity DBGC BREEAM MAT7—to five representative timber building systems. Our methodology combines literature synthesis, comparative framework analysis, and targeted case studies to evaluate how adaptability is currently assessed in timber construction.

Findings reveal that while timber structures are often praised for durability, their adaptability is constrained by factors such as acoustics, prefabrication, standardization, structural spans, fire safety, building services, and moisture control. Existing frameworks inadequately address these timber-specific challenges, limiting their usefulness for guiding adaptive design. A more integrated design approach is needed—one that considers adaptability at the whole-building scale and reflects the unique properties of timber.

Extending Building Life Cycles: Mass Timber DfD Strategies for Carbon Reduction and Material Reuse. Bridging the gap between architectural design, circularity and environmental impacts.

There is an urgent need to drastically decarbonize the built environment, challenging architects, designers, and other involved stakeholders to rethink how buildings today are conceived, used, and finally at the end of their life disassembled. Within this context, mass timber buildings (MTBs) offer a promising low-carbon alternative to conventional construction in concrete, brick, and steel. (Passarelli et al., 2025). Yet their long-term environmental value depends less on the material itself than on how it is actually designed for multiple life cycles. This PhD project explores how Design for Disassembly (DforD - upstream methodology) and Design from Disassembly (DfromD - downstream methodology) strategies (Piccardo et al., 2022) can transform MTBs into material banks, extending their service life and enabling meaningful reuse across several generations. Rather than treating buildings as static and finite objects, the research will position them as evolving frameworks, whose capacity to be adapted, dismantled, and reassembled becomes central to their architectural and environmental quality. Hence by engaging with different stakeholders such as architects, engineers, and demolition contractors, the project will investigate how different design decisions—such as structural systems, joinery techniques, and material layering—shape the possibility of future reuse of our buildings. Insights will be tested through various relevant case studies of existing MTBs and further developed through educational design experiments in which architecture students reimagine conventional linear projects (BAU) as circular ones.

Aligned with the colloquium theme Reimagining the Existing, this project bridges the gap between building heritage, circularity and sustainability. It asks how MTBs can be designed not solely as functional and aesthetic spaces (design quality) but also as patrimonies of material value for tomorrow (sustainable quality). Hence in doing so, it opens an interesting dialogue between design theory and practice, challenging conventional notions of permanence and material authenticity in architecture.

Finally, the research aims to formulate new design principles that link environmental responsibility with architectural imagination. By envisioning MTBs as structures that can be easily taken apart and given new lives, the project situates design at the heart of sustainable transformation – where reuse becomes a source of design creativity and continuity rather than a constraint.

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(Infra)structure: Tracing the Spatial Agency of Circulation Systems in Building Reuse

Steward Brand's influential aphorism that "all buildings are predictions, and all predictions are wrong." captures a persistent mismatch between architectural intention and social reality. While architects typically cast programmes and spatial configurations into fixed material form, social, economic and technological shifts inevitably reorder their use. This often obstructs reuse, leading to premature demolition, despite the continued serviceability of embodied materials and the potential to meet urban demand through adaptation. The environmental consequences are substantial: in 2023, demolition and construction were responsible for 10% of global greenhouse gas emissions, demonstrating an urgent need for decarbonisation efforts. Although adaptive reuse is widely recognised as a sustainable alternative, current discourse predominantly focuses on a building's superstructure, while often overlooking the spatial agency of its infrastructure. In architecture, infrastructure refers to those systems that allow the use of space and make it permeable to people, goods, media and energy, sustaining not the building itself, but rather its use and ever-changing conditions in time. Among these systems, circulation systems are particularly critical, as they mediate accessibility and connect spaces, determining a building's capacity to accommodate new functions. Since the 1960s architects and theorists such as The Metabolists, John Habraken and Bernard Leupen have examined circulation in adaptable constructions. While these models contribute to our understanding of adaptability in new buildings, they have yet to be meaningfully integrated into discussions on reuse. Yet, circulation systems act as catalysts for change in buildings, shaping usability and driving functional and physical transformations. They often become the most enduring zones by the agency of stable materials and deliberate voids, while organising networks and user groups, ultimately steering social life. Since infrastructure often literally exists infra (below or underneath), it can only be recognised through partial physical evidence, therefore demanding systems thinking and the creation of diagrams to render its structures and behaviours legible. Designed to be passed through rather than inhabited, circulation spaces exemplify the temporal nature of infrastructure, frequently leaving little trace of our engagement with them and lacking a well-defined identity. In anthropological terms, they can be understood as non-lieux i.e. spaces that lack sufficient identity or significance to be considered "places". Despite this placeless character, circulation constitutes the connective tissue of buildings that allows them to change over time. At this stage, I explore methodological approaches and examine how circulation is addressed in existing adaptability theories to develop a framework for analysing reused buildings. I aim to (1) visualise patterns of change in circulation networks; (2) reveal the agency of materials by showing how they stabilise circulation spaces or enable their reconfiguration; and (3) make visible the social settings that circulation fosters, thereby challenging its apparent non-lieu character.

Under the radar: self-organized renovation practices among distressed homeowners in Flanders

While adequate and affordable housing is a fundamental right, quantitative and qualitative scarcity does not guarantee this for low-income quintiles. This study focuses on 'distressed buyers' and 'distressed homeowners' in the Flemish housing market, which has made ownership a focal point in past and current policies. However, at least 4% or 119,000 households, despite their ownership, are confronted with inadequate housing quality and major renovation needs and have little or no possibility to make thorough changes to their housing situation. Self-organized or do-it-yourself renovations might be one of the remaining options for them, but the scale, approach and impact remain completely under the radar in existing quantitative research and datasets. The project therefore aims to apply qualitative research methods through a case study on the Rupel region to uncover the renovation efforts of the distressed homeowners. Given the institutional context in which these informal renovation practices take place, the friction with existing workings and policy initiatives and reciprocal thresholds will be identified. Finally, it will explore how specifically the architect has an enabling role to play, in order to formulate policy recommendations that contribute to a more inclusive housing policy.

Digesting Breakdown: Reimagining the Existing through Sustenance Labour in a Community Kitchen

This contribution proposes (in)digestion as an embodied approach to “reimagining the existing” in fragile contexts, using the El Sinaí Community Kitchen (Caracas, Venezuela) as a situated case. When the kitchen’s back wall collapsed, operations did not stop; instead, space, relations, and practices were reorganised in place—moving cooking outdoors, mobilising kin and neighbourhood know-how, and attending to the soil and rubble as active materials in ongoing transformation. Rather than treating breakdown as an interruption to be overcome, it is framed as a generative moment that renders relational, material, and political dependencies newly visible and workable.

Building from participatory design research conducted with the five women who sustain the kitchen, this research articulates digestion not only as metaphor but as method: a rhythm and ethic for working with what already exists—bodies, stories, recipes, soil, tools, and infrastructures—so that change proceeds from within. Three linked practices structure the work: (1) tracing values in care by convening protected times of pause, reflection, and mutual support; (2) cooking life-stories to surface embodied memory and lived expertise as design resources; and (3) integrating soil into the kitchen’s body through composting, noticing edible ecologies, learning soil health, and recalling earthen-building knowledge. Together, these practices sustain an adaptive, more-than-human commons that reframes heritage as lived, embodied practice.

Theoretically, (in)digestion extends design’s repertoire for sustainable transformation by centring sustenance labour, mutual aid, and attunement to material rhythms; methodologically, it offers a protocol for engaging existing architectures and cultural narratives; politically, it foregrounds inclusive futures that grow through everyday acts of care under uncertainty. The case demonstrates how staying with (in)digestion can strengthen the collective capacity to live and act together when infrastructures falter—reimagining the existing not by rebuilding it, but by digesting it forward.

Reimagining Existing Energy Systems: Material, Affective, and Ritualistic Prototyping in Participatory Worldbuilding

This abstract details the Live Project methodology as a comprehensive approach to "Reimagining the Existing," integrating rigorous design research, practical prototyping, and deep affective analysis to foster sustainable transitions and inclusive futures. The project uses material process and temporary spatial interventions (1:1) focused on green energy principles, such as a solar oven, dehydrator, and water heater, as vehicles for community engagement and intergenerational dialogue.

The design process begins by subjecting chosen energy artifacts to the Implosion Method, analysing them across 14 dimensions (including Material, Context, and Mythological). This essential historical research unveils the object's hidden political, social, and economic tissues, transforming the everyday object into a starting point for innovation.

The methodology incorporates the Temporal Emotional Landscape Map (TELM) and the five-step mapping protocol to systematically gather affective data during participatory design and resident interviews. This process charts how community feelings—such as frustration over systemic barriers or hope for change—act as invisible scaffolding that underpins collective action.

The resulting prototypes are framed as "Solar Rituals" and are designed as playfully educative events. These ritualistic interventions, co-created with high school students who serve as co-interviewers and cultural informants, leverage storytelling and curiosity into the often daunting, technical energy subjects, to support future generations in critically engaging with their built and social environment, as well as ecological transitions. By synthesising deep material history, emotional intelligence, and hands-on 1:1 making, the project demonstrates a paradigm for addressing contemporary societal challenges and fostering emotionally sustainable transformations.

(Re)Imagining space through the mimetic object

The city is enclosed by the pattern of its buildings, just as the interior is enclosed by the rhythm of its walls. Yet these enclosures are never empty containers; they carry the traces of time and the lives that unfolded within them. Built environments, at both urban and interior scales, are lived narratives that connect past and future through spatial experience. Interacting with them is therefore never neutral, but an act of interpretation: an opportunity to imagine the past and shape the future. When 'mimesis' is approached as a reflection of subjective perception rather than an imitation of reality, one could approach the 'imagining' of the existing as a sensitive act, exploring the argument of Pallasmaa (2011) that imagination and empathy are inherently connected.

To support this proposal, this paper analyses student work from the research seminar Genius Loci (UHasselt). Framed as a laboratory of practice, the seminar allows experimentation beyond the constraints of professional contexts, while still engaging with design methods that resonate with practice. The exercise focuses on architectural nodes that integrate old and new, merging technical and aesthetic aspects through both theoretical reflection and hands-on exploration. Models and drawings are used in diverse strategies, serving as mimetic instruments that prioritise subjective experience, memory, and sensory understanding over precise documentation. By reconstructing fragments from recollection, students reveal hidden narratives and cultivate an expressive approach to spatial interpretation, following Adorno's notion of mimesis as an act of unveiling.

Mimesis is approached as a mode of dialogue, encouraging expressiveness in shaping place, whether at the scale of an interior, a building, or an urban fragment. This pedagogical and methodological approach provides a foundation for thoughtful architectural reimagination across scales of the built environment, showing how sensitivity, empathy, and memory can guide design that preserves the existing while opening imaginative futures.

Mapping the impact of diffusion models on traditional design processes: empirical validation of professional design firms.

As image-driven generative artificial intelligence techniques, such as diffusion models, grow in popularity and are technologically more accessible and democratised than ever, it begs the question whether these techniques are just a new tool in the architect or interior designer's repertoire, or whether these techniques could be a catalyst to radically disrupt traditional design methods and workflows. We conducted empirical research with professional design firms – spanning both architecture and interior architecture, small and medium sized firms, with and without prior experience on generative artificial intelligence. Our methodology includes personalised workshops to introduce diffusion models to the firms, along with interviews and cataloguing design artefacts to visually map the firms' design processes both before and after the introduction of the new techniques. As each firm applied the techniques into one or more of their projects in practice, the collected research data allows us to empirically validate whether the diffusion models were integrated into or extended beyond their traditional design processes, and why (not).

Reimagining the Existing: Adaptive Reuse as Weak Authorship

This presentation examines the parallels between authorship in literature and adaptive reuse in architecture, positioning both as creative practices grounded in transformation. Drawing on Roland Barthes's conception of the text as a polysemic, multi-dimensional space, it argues that writing represents a spatial practice that shares key concerns with architectural design. Both disciplines negotiate the tension between individual agency and collective authorship, between innovation and the reuse of existing materials. Barthes's dismantling of the "Author-God" of modernity resonates with the concept of 'weak authorship' – an understanding of authorship as a product of cultural networks rather than a solitary exercise in originality and intellectual ownership.

Through the lens of weak authorship, adaptive reuse can be read as an architectural form of intertextuality, one that acknowledges the influence of existing structures and histories while generating new spatial and social meanings. Reuse, in both writing and building, involves the reinterpretation of prior forms within new contexts, enabling creative engagement with heritage, material, and memory. This transdisciplinary overlap is examined through the case study of a series of experimental workshops organised within the framework of the Adapt, Reuse project. Inviting participants from different backgrounds to engage with adaptive reuse in a collective setting, these practical workshops actively investigated the extent to which reciprocal 'borrowing' or transposing of terms and strategies between architecture and literature would allow participants to explore, reframe, and ultimately redefine concepts such as creativity, originality and authorship through embodied, co-creative acts of adaptation and reuse.

Analysing the processes and outcomes of these workshops reveals that literary practices of adaptive reuse offer a productive model for rethinking authorship in architecture, repositioning it as an ongoing process of negotiation that supports sustainable, inclusive, and contextually grounded approaches to reimagining the existing.

From Scoping Review to Potential Interview Insight: Exploring Interdisciplinarity, Sustainability, and the Study of Existing Interiors in 3D Digital Assessment of Spatial Perception

The built environment influences occupants' satisfaction and well-being through the way they perceive space. When architectural solutions fail to meet the stakeholders' needs, dissatisfaction can arise, potentially leading to costly and time-consuming reconstruction. Addressing how indoor environments can better satisfy users is a social challenge. Therefore, the study aims to develop a methodology for digitally assessing users' spatial perception of interior architecture, ensuring practical application during the design process to promote user-centric architectural design.

The current research phase of the scoping review mainly focuses on mapping and analysing the methods, measurement approaches, and digital tools used to study the space perception of interior architecture elements. This analysis will help to identify existing methods for digitally assessing users' spatial perceptions of interior spaces. A total of 55 papers were selected through a title-abstract screening of 7365 papers and a full-text screening of 284 papers following the scoping review protocol. This protocol was published in OSF, and the Covidence software was used in the screening process. Data extraction is now being conducted with NVivo to identify the experimental designs, the interior architecture elements examined, the types of perceptions or emotions studied, and the 3D digital technologies applied.

Due to the fact that the scoping review is still under development, several themes have been selected that closely align with the PhD colloquium theme, namely interdisciplinarity, sustainability, and existing versus new construction. Preliminary analysis of papers' screening indicates that a large majority of 3D digital-based experiments focus on existing interior environments rather than new constructions, suggesting that digital tools are increasingly used not only for new design visualisation but also for re-examining the spatial experience of existing spaces. Meanwhile, the authorship of the papers shows strong interdisciplinarity, bridging architecture, psychology, and computer science, which reflects an emerging interest in exploring spatial perception through the complementarity of knowledge coming from both design and human-centered scientific perspectives supported by advanced technologies. In the ongoing data extraction, sustainability is included as a criteria, with a particular focus on how ecological sustainability and social sustainability aspects are addressed in the studies. Ecological sustainability is considered through topics such as thermal and acoustic comfort, daylighting, and behaviour that has impacts on ecological aspects, while social sustainability is assessed through studies with vulnerable groups, spaces that promote social cohesion, stress, ergonomics, safety, and accessibility.

Based on the results of the scoping review, the next steps of the research will be conducting interviews with interior architects and digital technology experts. The findings of the scoping review regarding the range of spatial perception assessment methods and the role of digital tools will inform the design of the interview questions.

Design approaches and strategies in the realm of the urban interior

The design research seeks to identify and explore design (and non-design) approaches, techniques, and strategies in activating (interior) atmospheres or conditions that enable, facilitate or encourage social interactions, cultural happenings and new relational perceptions in the urban realm. The investigation situates itself in the intersection between the interior and the urban, in the socio-cultural occurrences that take place in the realm of 'urban interior'.

"The idea of urban interior challenges an assumption that interior design necessarily has to take place inside buildings and shifts the focus to a relational condition - here the 'and' between the urban and interior as a question of designing and making the relation."¹ The writings of Susie Attiwill on urban interior and Mark Pimlott on public interior serve at this point as the theoretical foundation to understand and identify this crossing and merging of the two realms. The question of how to "inhabit the urban"² with changing ideas on interiority and the recognition of the emerging contemporary modes of social engagement motivate this investigation.

It is imperative to seek out past and contemporary projects, practices, initiatives and approaches (inside/outside the design discipline and interdisciplinary) that engage in the domain of 'urban interior' as case studies. The design "activation" can be in the form of installation, intervention, objects and furniture which are artistic, designed and/or grassroots.

Another critical part of the trajectory is the formulation the approaches and methods of the design research itself. In this early stage, I refer to two books, namely Research for designers: A guide to methods and practice (by Gjoko Muratovski) and Research methods for interior design: Applying interiority (by Dana E. Vaux and David Wang). By "Applying interiority", the subtitle refers to the emphasis on conducting "research with the potential to inform design"³. It is one of the objectives of this design research to translate the "findings" into a series of actions which can be in form of design exercises in the university design studios, actual site-specific design experiments which can be collaborative and participative in nature and/or exhibition(s) of projects and studies that exemplify the objectives of this research.

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Reimagining the Existing: Mapping as Transformative Practice

For this PhD colloquium, I want to examine how participatory mapping can become a critical tool for reimagining existing urban fabrics through the intertwined lenses of design, heritage, and inclusive urban transformation. Situated in the Ten Eekhovelei in Antwerp, a street marked by social diversity, speculative redevelopment, and the looming effects of gentrification, the research investigates how community-led mapping can mediate between the lived present, the inherited past, and the projected futures. The study originates from a design-driven Participatory Action Research (PAR). Through collaborative workshops, house visits, and visual co-production, residents, researchers, and community partners created the Ten Eekhovelei Buurtatlas, a counter cartographic archive of everyday practices, domestic adaptations and local narratives. This atlas challenges official planning documents and reframes heritage not as a static artefact but as a living, evolving relationship between people and space.

In this process, mapping transcends its conventional role as a representational device and becomes a performative and emancipatory practice. Drawing on Bordeleau and Bresler's (2010) notion of mapping as an active constructor of spatial reality, Nishat Awan's (2017) concept of "mapping otherwise," and De Feyter, Vanoutrive, and De Walsche's (2025) argument for rethinking visual language in architectural representation, the paper positions mapping as an act of world making, where drawing, storytelling, and design merge to articulate situated forms of knowledge. These collective mappings re-inscribe overlooked values such as neighbourly reciprocity, flexible domesticity, and micro spatial resilience, offering an alternative framework for sustainable urban transformation that is rooted in social continuity rather than erasure.

In this case, the impact of mapping is evaluated not by the maps themselves but by what they enable: new forms of critical consciousness and community agency. Following Paulo Freire's (2017) pedagogy of conscientização, the project reveals how participatory mapping can activate residents' capacity to read and transform their own environment. The Buurtatlas later became a catalyst for creative expression, a neighbourhood puppet theatre that translated spatial stories into performative acts, allowing residents to voice their experiences in accessible and affective ways. Through this reappropriation, mapping evolved from a research instrument into a shared cultural practice, sustaining the memory of the street while envisioning its possible futures.

By reimagining mapping as a method of co-creation, this research contributes to broader debates on heritage and sustainability. It challenges the instrumental logic of urban renewal that privileges physical redevelopment over social repair, arguing instead for a relational and care-based approach to transformation. Mapping, understood as an iterative and interdisciplinary practice, becomes a means to bridge temporalities, connecting past uses and meanings, present negotiations and speculative futures.

Ultimately, Reimagining the Existing through participatory mapping reveals that the most sustainable transformations arise not from erasing what exists but from reactivating the latent knowledge embedded within it. This research thus proposes mapping as both a design tool and a heritage practice, one capable of cultivating spatial justice, collective memory, and ecological sensitivity in the evolving city.

Reimagining the Existing: Interdisciplinary perspectives on design, heritage, and sustainable transformation through past, present and future

How can spatial planners and designers reimagine the role of soil in spatial planning and design processes of large-scale infrastructural projects? Soils—vital to life on Earth—face rapid degradation due to human mistreatment, such as erosion, compaction, pollution, and overexploitation [1]. Soils are, therefore, an urgent matter of care [4]. Especially, since they are crucial partners in climate adaptation [2]. If soils are healthy, they decrease the risk of floods and droughts by absorbing water, host a pool of biological diversity, and filter drinking water [2]. Nevertheless, soils are one of Earth's least understood and most neglected environments [3]. In large-scale infrastructure design projects, these living environments are too often treated as static resources or technical parameters quantified in cubic meters to be (re)moved during soil works—disrupting centuries of soil life in a matter of minutes.

With a case study in the complex road transition Noord-Zuid Limburg (NZL), this research investigates a fragmented infrastructural landscape in transition in which soil practices shape the history (productive landscape), the present (current paved infrastructure), and the future (construction of underground tunnels) of the project. As soils are set to become both vital and vulnerable participants in shaping the future landscapes of NZL, this research introduces two nomadic practices [5]—within the field of Participatory Design—that enable participatory designers to reimagine soil's role in the design process in more caring and dynamic ways. The nomadic practice of walking-in-soil involves on-site observatory walks that explore situated soil practices and relationalities between humans and soils. The nomadic practice of working-in-soil explores these discovered soil practices and relationalities in-depth through participatory design workshops—such as digging out plants on expropriated plots of NZL prior to demolition—to engage with the site's existing soils and reimagine their future role within the project.

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Constellating Regional Living Labs across Participatory Design Scales.

My research group very recently inaugurated a new Living Lab space at the old Beguinage of Hasselt. My research focuses on how this space can serve as a hub with regional spokes that bridge scales relevant to participatory design. The Living Lab methodology aims to create environments that foster co-creative public open innovation through collaboration among different stakeholders. In this space, we showcase and bring together various ongoing research projects in the region, while also inviting the Hasselt locals and policymakers to engage with their own desires for this central place in the city. In fact, the beguinage used to be a Medieval community living space for religious celibate women, which I conceptualize as a lived queer-feminist utopia. Taking with us this fascinating past means that we work in process-oriented ways and stay attuned to power dynamics that arise in participation.

In parallel, I am part of a participatory design trajectory for the Einstein Telescope. This is a large underground observatory to sense and measure gravitational waves that might be built in the tri-country area of Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands. Such a project will impact the region in numerous ways, from landscape to housing, tourism, and international collaborations. Therefore, we are establishing regional Living Labs in the Euregion Meuse-Rhine as a means to mediate between the uncertainty and dreams that the Telescope's perspective generates. These labs are part of the aforementioned 'spokes' that relate back to the Hasselt beguinage space.

These different Living Labs form a constellation, a pattern of points that are connected even though they are far apart. Besides this geographical scale, the constellation also bridges temporal scales. While each site is inextricably connected to pasts, presents and futures, the beguinage especially highlights the past, the Living Lab methodology is primarily rooted in the present 'real-life' context and the Einstein Telescope symbolizes the uncertainty and possibilities of the future. Finally, these Living Labs also bridge epistemological scales, as each Living Lab fosters local knowledges while relating back to global concepts.

Othered Emotions in Participatory Design: Repurposing Deconsecrated Church Buildings in Belgium

Participatory design (PD) is positioned as a democratic practice aimed at redistributing design agency by involving people directly in shaping the environments and systems that affect them.

It has been engaged in the past years in socio-ecological transitions, such as greening or repurposing of built environments. However, the uncomfortable, difficult, or “disruptive” emotional expressions (grief, loss, fear) that come with these transitions are frequently othered in participatory processes. Othering refers to the intentional/unintentional avoidance or exclusion of certain emotions, seen as irrational or obstructive in specific contexts. Emotions that do not fit dominant narratives are then made invisible or illegitimate. Our central research questions explore (1) how emotions are othered in participatory processes and (2) how othered emotions can be meaningfully included in socio-ecological transitions. These questions will be dealt with via a case study on the repurposing of church buildings for ecological and social reasons.

Reimagining the Existing Exhibitions: Sustainable Scenography in Museums

In search for sustainable development, museums have recently been showing a great willingness to adapt and improve their practices towards more sustainable methods. Of growing concern is the huge waste pile that stems from their practices, more specifically the production of temporary exhibitions. Although circularity is an interesting concept for limiting the negative environmental impact, it is scarcely researched for temporary exhibition design. As such, an in-depth inventory and analysis of ongoing practices could expose opportunities for implementing circular design strategies in the scenography of temporary exhibitions. In this transdisciplinary study, qualitative data is collected through explorative, multiperspective research, which includes surveys, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and case studies. This will lead to a better understanding of the potential impact and insight into possible applications of circular design. This presentation will show the results of the first data analysis, collected through an electronic survey sent out to over 700 museums in Flanders, Brussels and the Netherlands.

Ethics first. Moral understanding as a (prison) design guide.

After modernism's failure and postmodernist critiques, mainstream architecture turned away from ethics. Over the last decades, ethical concerns and awareness resurfaced but, surprisingly, the ethical underpinnings of design and architects' ethical responsibility has remained underrepresented in architectural theory, practice, and education. Instead of understanding architectural ethics in a pragmatic or applied ethical sense or to confront the manifold ethical demands with scepticism, we should acknowledge that the essence of the architectural design practice relies on deliberations about what objectively matters and how to correspondingly design, i.e. on moral deliberation and moral choice. This implies that architects bear the responsibility to question the ethical foundations of their designs and the design briefs they respond to.

By way of illustrating how ethical reflection and moral understanding can inform design deliberations, this talk focuses on prison design. While the importance of prison design on well-being, rehabilitation and reintegration has been gaining acknowledgement over the past years, the ethical underpinnings of prison design remain underrepresented in architectural theory. This talk explains how we can make sense of the practice of punishment as a moral and symbolic practice while recognising concerns about its moral justification. The paper suggests that, in order to morally justify the practice of punishment and to hold on to its intelligibility, we need a concept of detention that is radically oriented at rehabilitation. To conclude on the level of design consequences, the Belgian case of the twenty-first-century detention houses serve as an illustration of a possible design response.

Workshops

Instructor: Nikolas Kanavaris, PhD candidate, Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellow, REWORLDING Doctoral Network

Workshop A - From Clothes to Costume: Embodying Human and Non-Human Others

Duration: 2,5 hours

Introduction

It is very common in the office that, when colleagues attend a workshop, conference, or even a public lecture with peers, in the afternoon, one can notice subtle shifts in their attire. Adjustments are made in anticipation of a setting they have mentally framed. These shifts often spark joking comments, compliments, or questions about purchases, but they also provoke deeper questions: What if they arrived in casual clothes? What does this “extra effort” in appearance offer or conceal?

This workshop asserts that clothing and appearance are central, yet often overlooked, dimensions in action research and socially engaging processes. We propose a costume approach. In social events where active interaction is expected or required, everyone crafts a concrete image of themselves. From municipal officers in suits to green activists or eccentric design agencies, clothing prefigures social position (Goffman, 1959). By recognizing clothing as costume through which participants perform social roles (Schechner, 1988), we can destabilize normative identities and interrogate embedded power dynamics. Preferring “costume” over “clothes” highlights that costuming practices are conscious acts of appearance: what (Hann, 2017) calls “showing dressing.” If we think that social practices (PAR, dissemination, PhD workshops etc) as “everyday theatres” (Foverskov, 2022), where participants perform social roles under others’ observation, then clothing is not a mere backdrop: it is a performative act of appearance. In this frame, costume becomes an active agent in meaning-making, a liminal practice (Turner, 1982) mediating relations, negotiations, and conflicts.

Critical Costume literature supports that costume is not a mere bodily representation, or a symptom of fashion, but it has agency on how people perform, perceive, and experience (Lindgren & Lotker, 2023; Pantouvaki et al., 2021; Østergaard, 2024). Hann supports that costume has the unique characteristic to operate as an “independent mediator” (Hann, 2017), while being in a “tandem unity of movement, identity and design” (Hann, 2017) with the wearer. This proximate, haptic, and agential relation of costume with the wearer destabilizes human centrality. From this perspective, costume as a non-human entity takes voice through the bodily actions (Usanga et al., 2024). Costume orients and aligns (Light, 2024) the body with its materialities, enabling role-playing and embodiment with more-than-human entities. If “costumes’ substances perform” (Pantouvaki et al., 2020), then researchers can shape affective encounters with “what else might be emotionally and relationally possible”(Light & Catlow, 2025).

WORKSHOP A

The goal of this workshop is to engage design participants in a reflective, embodied exploration of costume materialities and practices. Participants will craft costume elements, perform simple acts before the group, consider the restrictive or emancipatory effects of costume in performing, explore embodying other perspectives (human or non-human), and experience the affective relations costume establishes with co-performers and non-human entities. Specific Workshop Objectives are:

- To surface and critique the implicit norms of appearance and costume, and how they shape power dynamics.
- To experiment with costume-based interventions (making, performing, swapping) that enable new forms of presence for marginalized humans and non-human entities.
- To produce prototype artifacts/plans to integrate costume practices into participants' research/practice.
- To build a community (or network) of designers/researchers interested in costuming as method.

Format, methods, techniques

The workshop builds on several disciplines, from scenography to theatre theory and practice. First, it is grounded on the discourse on Expanded Scenography (McKinney & Palmer, 2017) and Costume Scenographics (Hann, 2023). Set and costume are not perceived as backdrop for action, but instead they actively alter how places and bodies are experienced and perceived. This literature also builds on Postdramatic theatre theory, which does not prioritize text and speech as the core of performance making (Barbieri 2012b: 149). In terms of practice, it draws on the theatre techniques of Tadeusz Kantor's bio-objects (Witts, 2010), as agents that lead actors in performing and Jacques Lecoq's physical theatre and mimetic methods (Lecoq et al., 2001), particularly the L.E.M. program in which materials guide actors' corporeality. More specifically, the focus on costume grounds on (Barbieri, 2013) dress performance practice and (Østergaard, 2018) community costume practice. An important reference is the project MASK, in which the designers of masks were also the performers. They shifted roles throughout the process {Pantouvaki, Sofia, 2024}, creating an interplay between the material artifact (object), the sensorial experience (self), and the visual effect (spectator). These references supported the design of a costume-based method where crafting and performing became inseparable practices of engagement and connection.

Participants will engage in creative upcycling of discarded books (or in general paper) collected from the Department of Architecture of UHasselt or UAntwerpen, to design costume-like objects. Books/Paper are chosen because they are an easy material to handle, light and flexible, providing wider connotation to the practice of reading and writing; costuming with recycled paper materials carries connections to the wider non-human ecosystem from which paper is produced. These objects will become the medium for performance, first individually, and then in group. The workshop will host between 8 and 12 participants (preferably an even number so that they can make pairs). This size ensures intimacy, allows each participant sufficient physical and material space to engage closely with making and performing, supports pairing/group work, and ensures that materials and time can be distributed fairly.

WORKSHOP A

The workshop will take place in person and attempts to create a safe space for playful experimentation. Participants will be instructed to wear casual, loose black clothes to be comfortable while doing body warm-up exercises. These exercises will be used as icebreakers rather than formal introductions (who is who, affiliations) to encourage participants to move beyond fixed roles and rigid self-identifications. Exercises will be introduced only moments before they begin, to generate anticipation, support improvisation, and engage participants directly in decision-making. The process will be documented through photos, videos, and personal notes, and will conclude with a roundtable discussion.

Schedule

Time	Activity
0:00-0:15	Welcome & icebreaker: body warm-up exercises. Body balance using books/papers. Attempt to wear, balance, smell, stand on/through different parts of the body.
0:15-1:15	Breakout session A: Participants are going to craft a costume element with which they will perform. The elements can be inspired by the research topic of the participants (condition, non-human element, concept, geography, etc). They perform the 1st minute of life of their costume element.
1:15-1:30	Birthmoment, 1 minute improvisation in a circle.
1:30-2:00	Breakout session B: body warm-up exercises. Body balance using the costume element. Attempt to wear, balance, smell, and stand on/through different parts of the body. Swap costume elements while moving in space.
1:50-2:30	Roundtable reflection. A: application in each participants' research. B: reflection on the method, proposals for the future, evaluation

WORKSHOP A

Positioning of the Workshop

The workshop emerges from the “Change the Script” scenography workshop series, developed by the author in collaboration with the Goethe-Institut’s program Common Waste–Common Libraries in Southeastern Europe. The project was funded by Goethe-Institut offices in Croatia, Athens, and Bulgaria, and supported by the “Culture Moves” mobility program, to be implemented in Zagreb, Athens, and Sofia. Furthermore, it was theorized through the Marie-Curie doctoral network REWORLDING as a method for expanding participation and inclusivity among human and non-human others, particularly in designing sustainable and eco-social transitions. Finally, the workshop has been refined during the workshop “Social Engagement In Design Research & Education: What & How?” organized by UAntwerpen, UHasselt, and KU Leuven faculties of architecture; the critical adjustment focused on exploring power dynamics in the prospect of co-existence through “Community Service Learning” and “Participatory Action Research” and preparing the workshop for the PDC 2026 conference.

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Workshops

Instructor: Bart Tritsmans, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Design Sciences, University of Antwerp

Workshop B - Curating research: from knowledge building to public engagement

Duration: 3 hours

Target group: Academic researchers in architecture, interior architecture, design, urban planning, heritage studies, etc.

Goal: Explore how academic research can be translated into exhibitions and public outreach

Description

In this workshop, we will explore how insights from academic research can be translated into the format of an exhibition. Our shared experience as academics and curators will help to reflect on the possibilities and limitations that researchers face when transposing academic research into an exhibition (or another form of public outreach). The workshop focuses on the points of contact between academic research and current debates in society, on translating an academic narrative into an exhibition concept, and on making academic research accessible to a wider audience.

Three central questions about the link between research and exhibitions structure this workshop: How can an exhibition serve as a catalyst for linking academic debates to themes and challenges in contemporary society? How can an exhibition be used to translate academic insights and narratives into a spatial and multisensory experience? And how can an exhibition form a bridge between academic research and a wider audience?

After providing the participants with inspiring examples, and discussing formats such as physical exhibitions, digital platforms and participatory installations, we will delve in the central questions. In groups of two or three, participants will experiment with narrative techniques, curatorial strategies and participatory formats in order to develop a sketch for an exhibition concept, to come up with ideas for potential partners (museums, cultural centers, municipalities), and finally to reflect on how public engagement can enrich research impact.

Timeframe

10:00: Introduction and short presentation of research topics
10:15: Overview of inspiring cases + What does/can/should a curator do?
11:15: Group work (2-3 people) to develop an exhibition concept
12:15: Presentations and discussion
13:00: End of the workshop

