

how to live with

ANOTHER



HOW TO LIVE WITH ANOTHER

a story of co-authorship and co-existence

National University of Singapore
Masters of Architecture

Anthea Phua
A0157620J

Supervised by
Dr Lilian Chee



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PREFACE

How to live with another began with an experiment of architectural co-authorship. I am interested in how domestic architecture is co-produced by their occupants. Together with the issue of architectural co-authorship, my thesis delves into how two people, who are not family, might co-exist in a domestic space – specifically the HDB flat -- made for the nuclear family.

abstract

The Singaporean phenomenon of live-in domestic foreign workers (affecting one in five households) highlights outdated domestic spaces designed for heteronormative nuclear families.

By engaging the needs of a household comprising an elderly person and a domestic worker, personalised designs for specific homebodies materialise around the three scales of a domestic space - for use on the human body, as furniture, and as interventions to the architectural fabric of the flat. These interior domestic variations challenge the validity and relevance of standardised housing designs. The thesis' primary strategy is iterative and collaborative — negotiating and materializing desires and needs through a back-and-forth partnership between the architect and the householders. The process reveals the necessity of a more responsive infrastructure; moving beyond housing to instead accommodate.

keywords

HDB, Domesticity, Employer and domestic workers, Equity, Authorship, to Accommodate





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project is about my family, to my family. Never more have I felt blessed than in the presence and embrace of them. They have been gracious, patient and supportive throughout this entire journey as I created various spaces of chaos in our flat.

To Dr Lilian Chee, thank you for not giving up on me when I was close to rock bottom. Thank you for carving out a safe space to explore, challenge and grow. To Zihao Wong, for pushing the project along with your constructive inputs.

To Dr CJ Lim - my former mentor - your passion and generosity of knowledge and time has allowed me to perceive architecture from a crooked angle. The subsequent opening up of another world of endless excitement, beauty and poetics has defined my architectural education.

To (Ian), Annabelle, Yong Chern and Emma - I could not have chosen better company for the last leg of my architectural education.

To Eugene Lua; you've patiently held my hand from before the beginning, and I cannot be more grateful. Here's till the end.

How to live with another is an experiment of architectural co-authorship. Two key issues are explored in my thesis: co-authorship, and co-existence—or living with another. With co-authorship, I look at how domestic architecture can be co-produced by their occupants. To understand co-existence, my project delves into how two people, who are not family, might live with another in a domestic space intended for the nuclear family. My project considers the presence of foreign domestic workers within the HDB flat—they are needed but barely accommodated for in these tight domestic spaces. In Singapore, live-in domestic foreign workers can be found in one in five households.





My investigations are built on my earlier work focusing on the narrative-drawings of people who are not architecturally schooled. I approached my grandmother Mdm Ng Neng aged 88 and her live-in Indonesian helper Asri, aged 35 to explore this. Their drawings showed that there can be other forms of knowing, representing and creating space. Grandmother has drawn from memory the various homes she has lived in—from Xiamen to taking a boat to Singapore. Asri has also drawn the houses she has worked at. They each end their narratives in the drawing of the current flat they occupy. As they live with another, they become co-authors of the flat as well. Within slices of everyday life and domestic interiors, they co-produce iterations of my space, your space and our space.



my space



our space



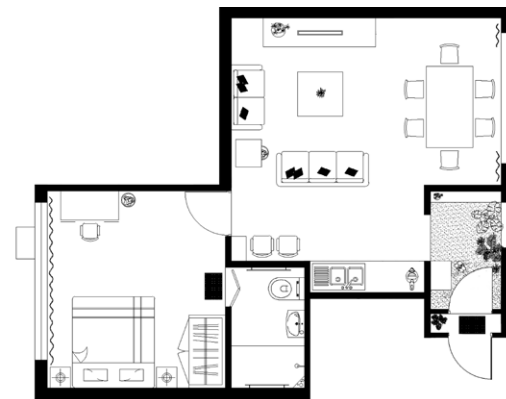
their space



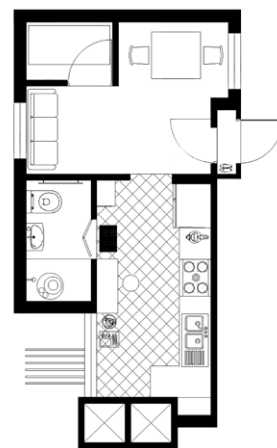
A STUDY OF PATTERNS



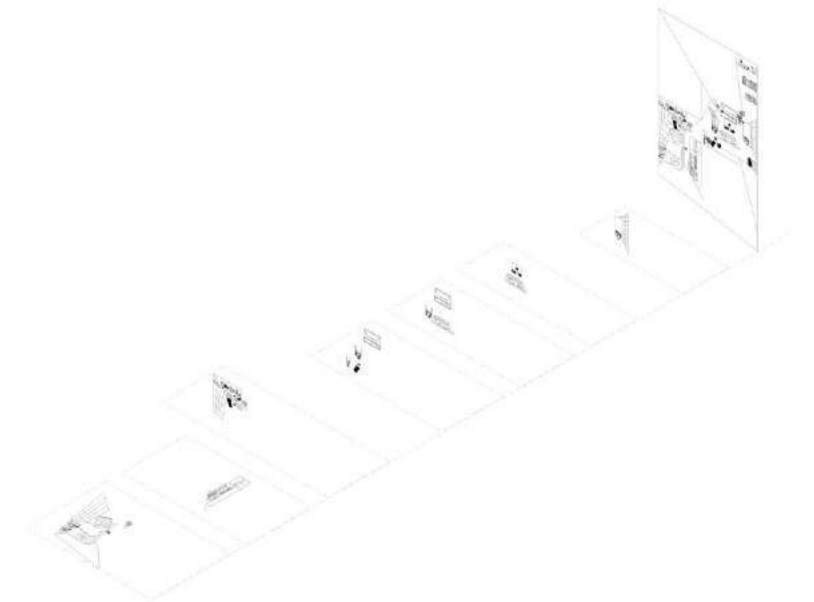
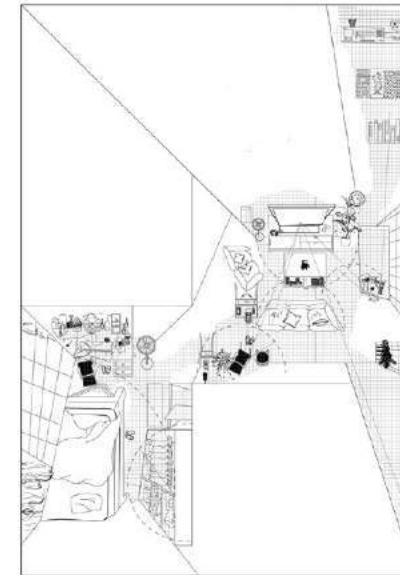
PLAN
five room flat for two



Employer
Grandmother's Flat.

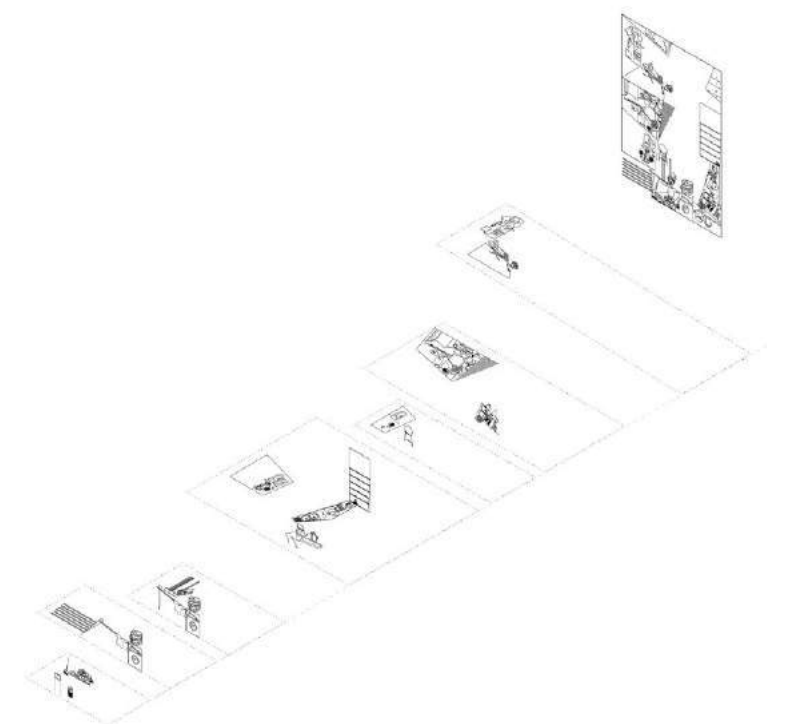
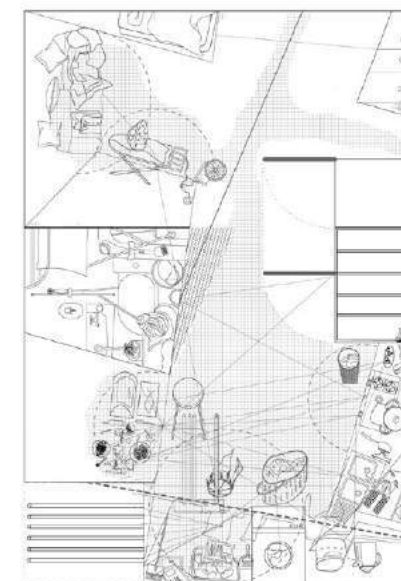


Domestic worker
Asri's Flat.



If I were to redraw the same flat for grandmother and asri, you can see that grandmother lives with a kitchenless room like an apartment hotel. Asri's flat is no longer a flat, the kitchen takes on the largest area.

The possibilities of space is also revealed here - in a significantly smaller area, Domestic workers create opportunities and spaces for them to exist, particularly in functional spaces where they are shoehorned into to do housework. This can be as seen from the amount of overlaps, and in these splices of sections pulled out, we see more situations that unfold.





0530 - 0600
G: asleep
A: asleep



0600 - 0645
G: asleep
A: keep pillows,
wipe surfaces



0600 - 0645
G: asleep
A: prepare water



0645 - 0710
G: bed > toilet > drink water > take tissues
> wear shoes > morning walk
A: sweep floors > wear shoes > morning walk



0815 - 0900
G: shoes > water > toilet > lie down
A: shoes > water > rest



0815 - 0900
G: rest
A: breakfast > check
> prepare and put breakfast on table



0900 - 0930
G: breakfast
A: sweep floors



0930 - 1000
G: put utensils in the sink > shower
> eyedrops > nap
A: sweep floors



1000 - 1100
G: nap
A: clean toilets



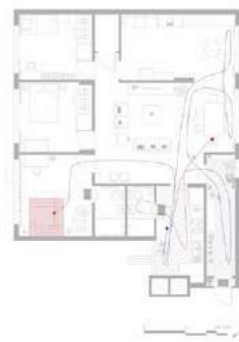
1100 - 1300
G: bed > toilet > water > tv
A: iron clothes



1300 - 1330
G: tv
A: prepare lunch



1330 - 1400
G: lunch
A: lunch



1400 - 1530
G: put utensils in the sink > nap
A: clean windows



1530 - 1600
G: bed > make coffee > find snack
A: clean kitchen / prep for dinner



1600 - 1700
G: watch tv/sew
A: tea break



1700 - 1800
G: watch tv/sew
A: cook dinner



1800 - 1830
G: dinner
A: dinner



1830 - 2030
G: walk around the house, listen to tv
A: clean up > take phone

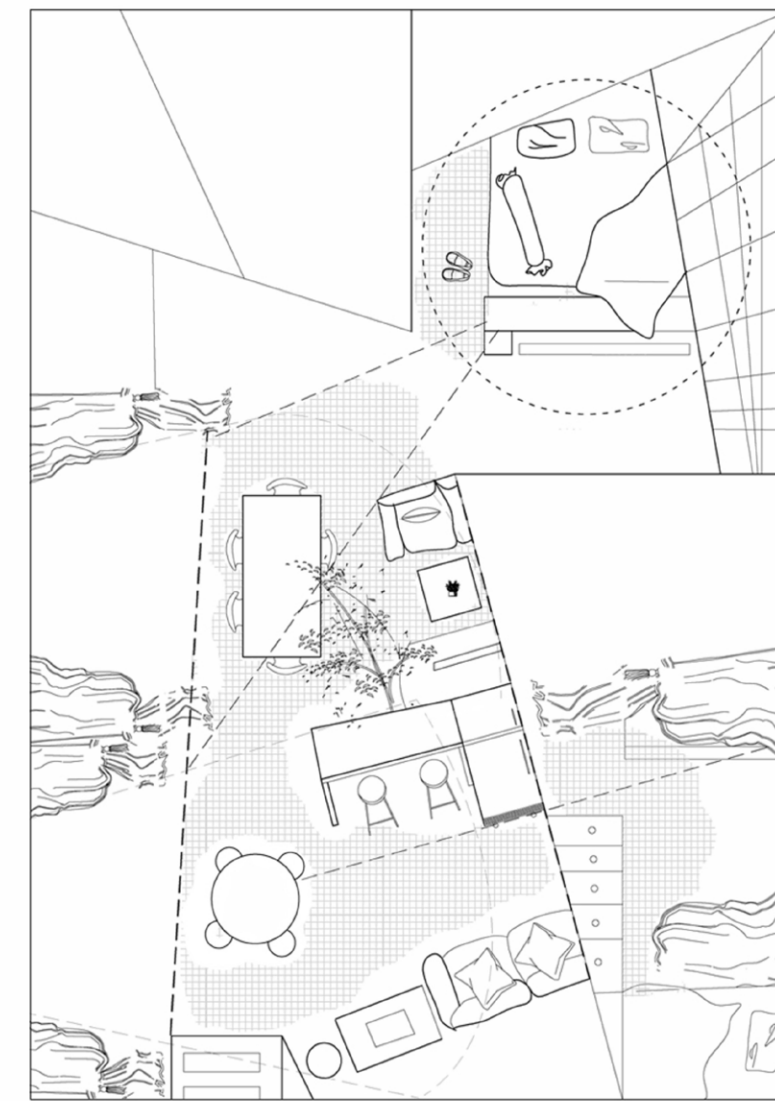
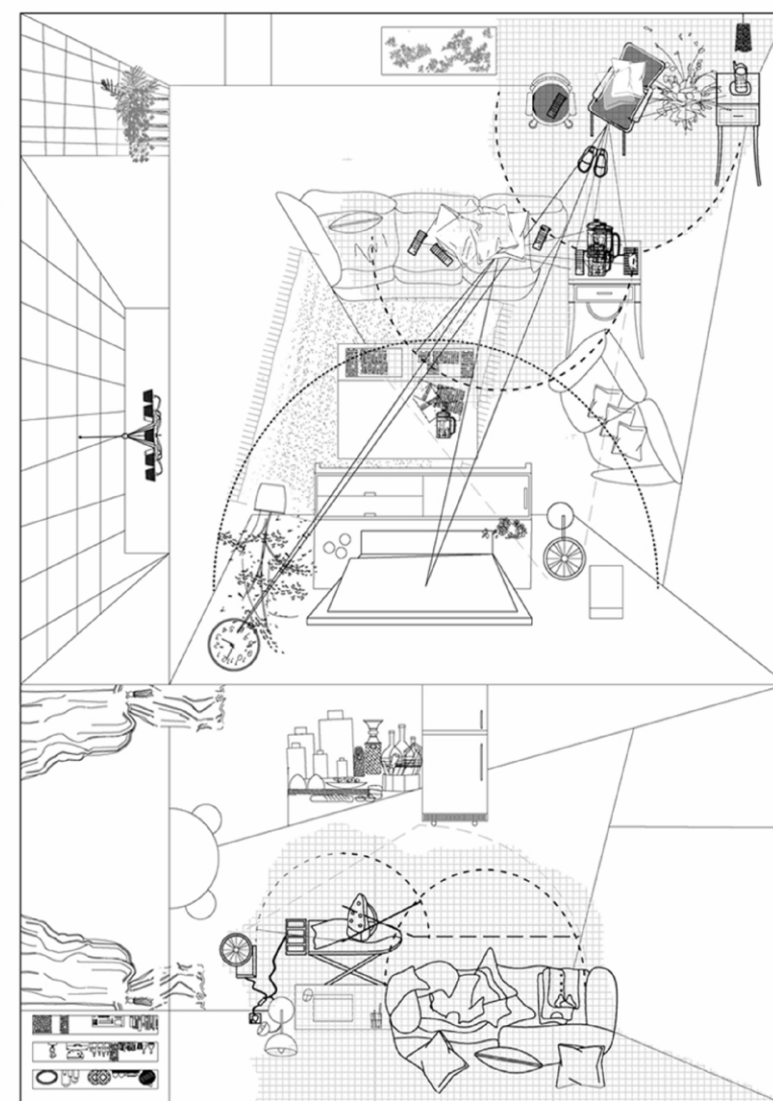
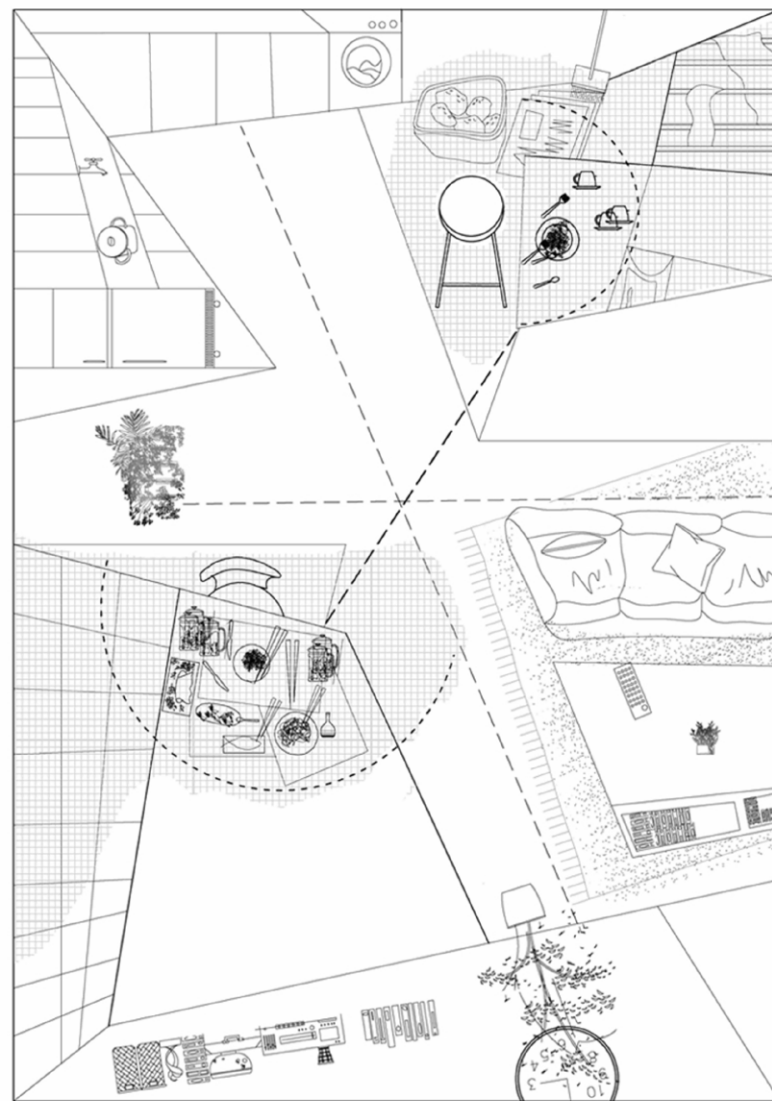
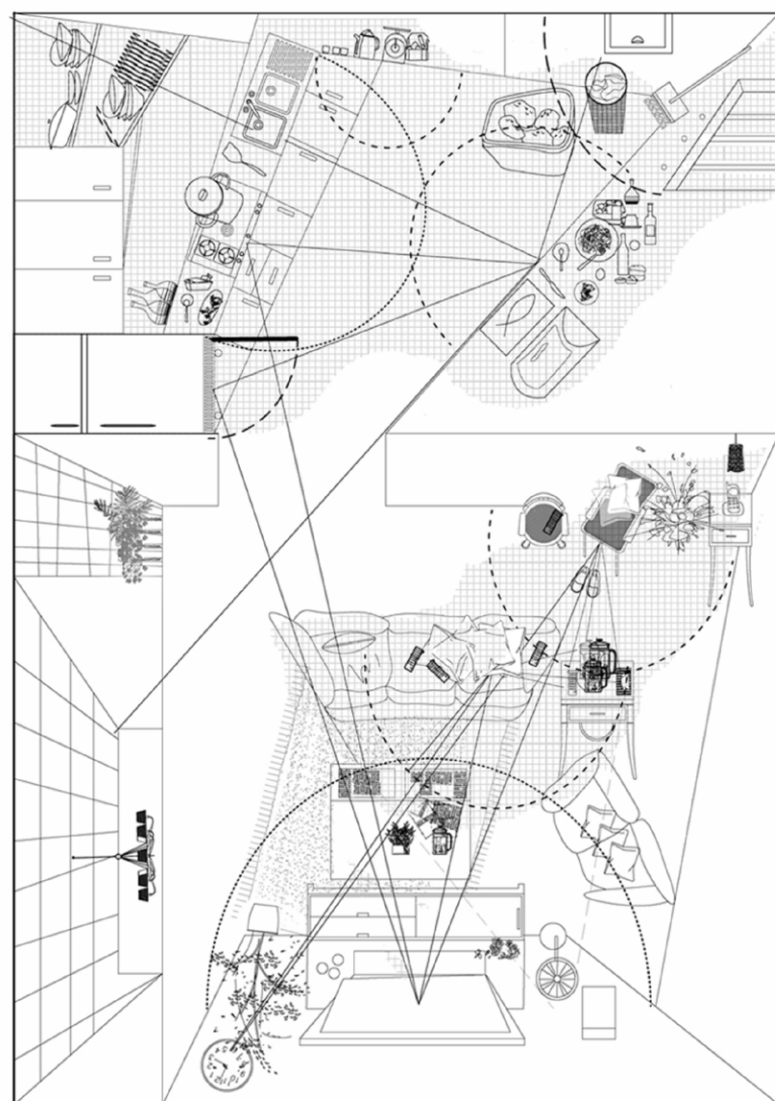


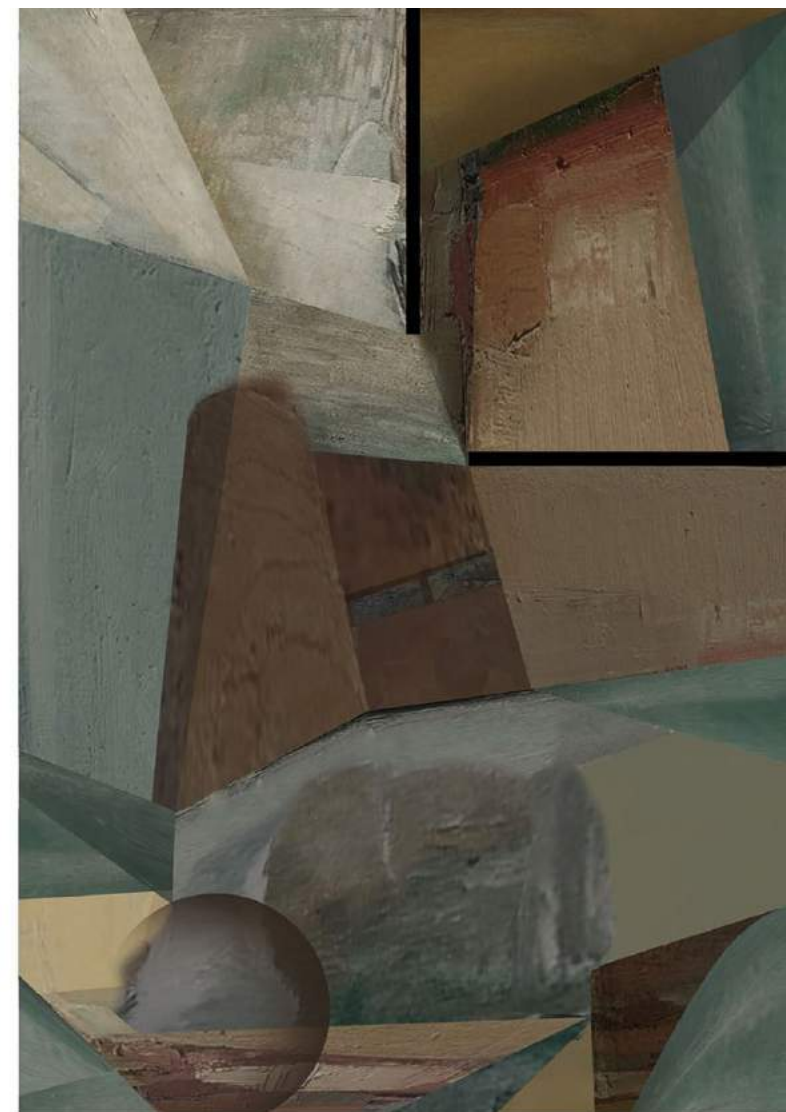
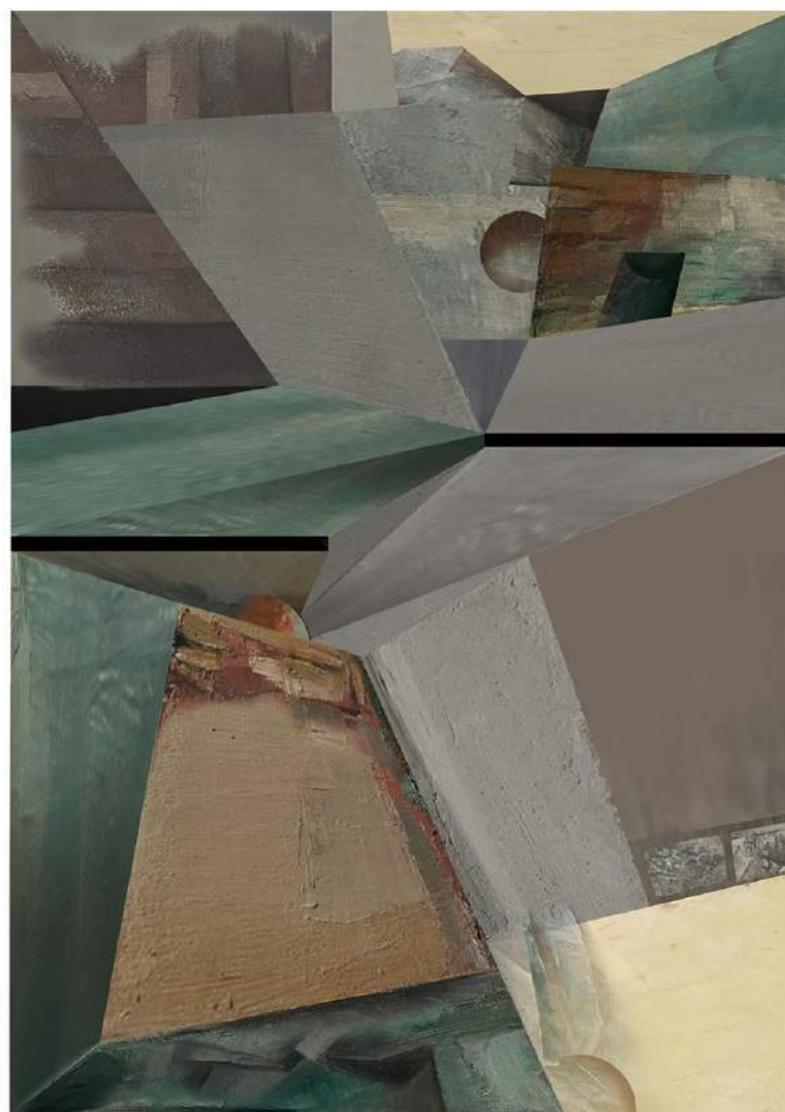
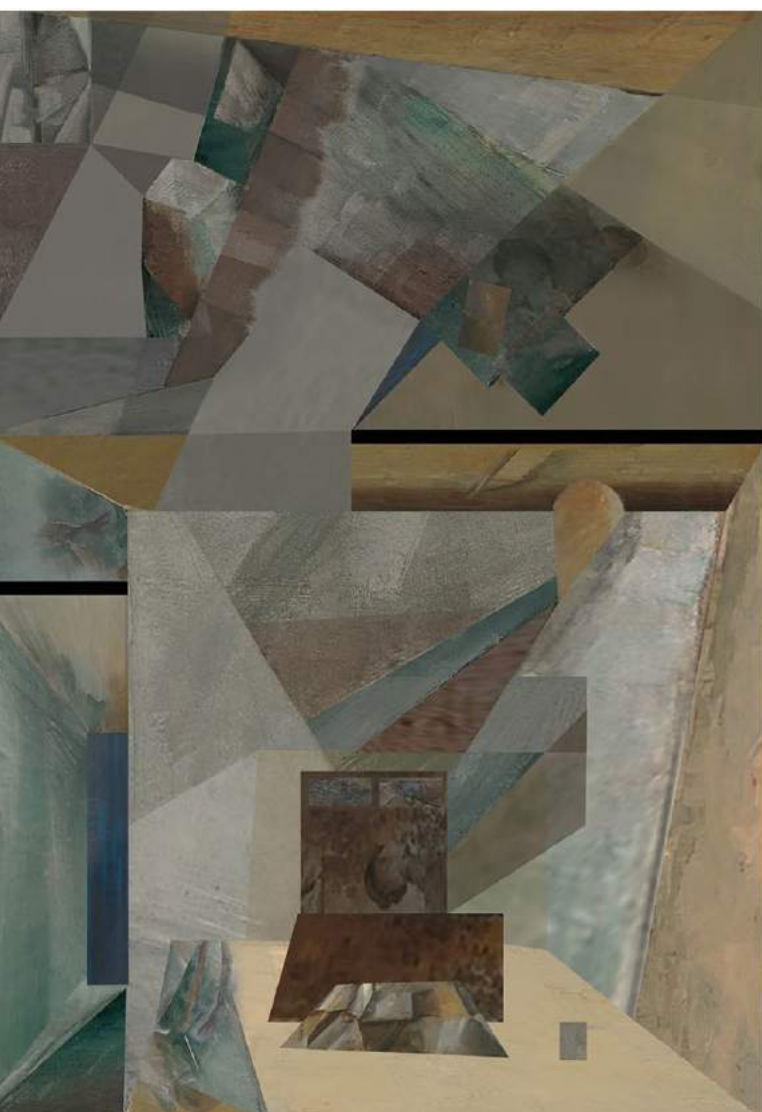
2030 - 1000
G: watch tv
A: video call



1000 - 1030
G: sleep
A: video call > take pillow >
pull out mattress > charge phone > sleep

My drawings show 4 situations of the flat, correlating to how both Grandmother and Asri situate themselves in relation to each other and to the household objects. It became evident that while they have a respectful co-existing relationship, tensions, social hierarchy, and boundaries are present. I think through these unspoken tensions by working through a set of 3 personalised designs for the proximate homebodies of an elderly person and a domestic worker. The designs are conceptualised around the three scales of a domestic space—body, furniture, and architectural fabric of the flat. While negotiating the needs of these two housemates, the production of these contraptions also engaging them as co-authors. My strategy is iterative and collaborative—negotiating and materializing desires and needs through a back-and-forth partnership, at times collapsing and destabilising the hierarchical relationships, between the architect and the householders. The process reveals the necessity for a more responsive infrastructure; moving beyond housing to instead accommodate.

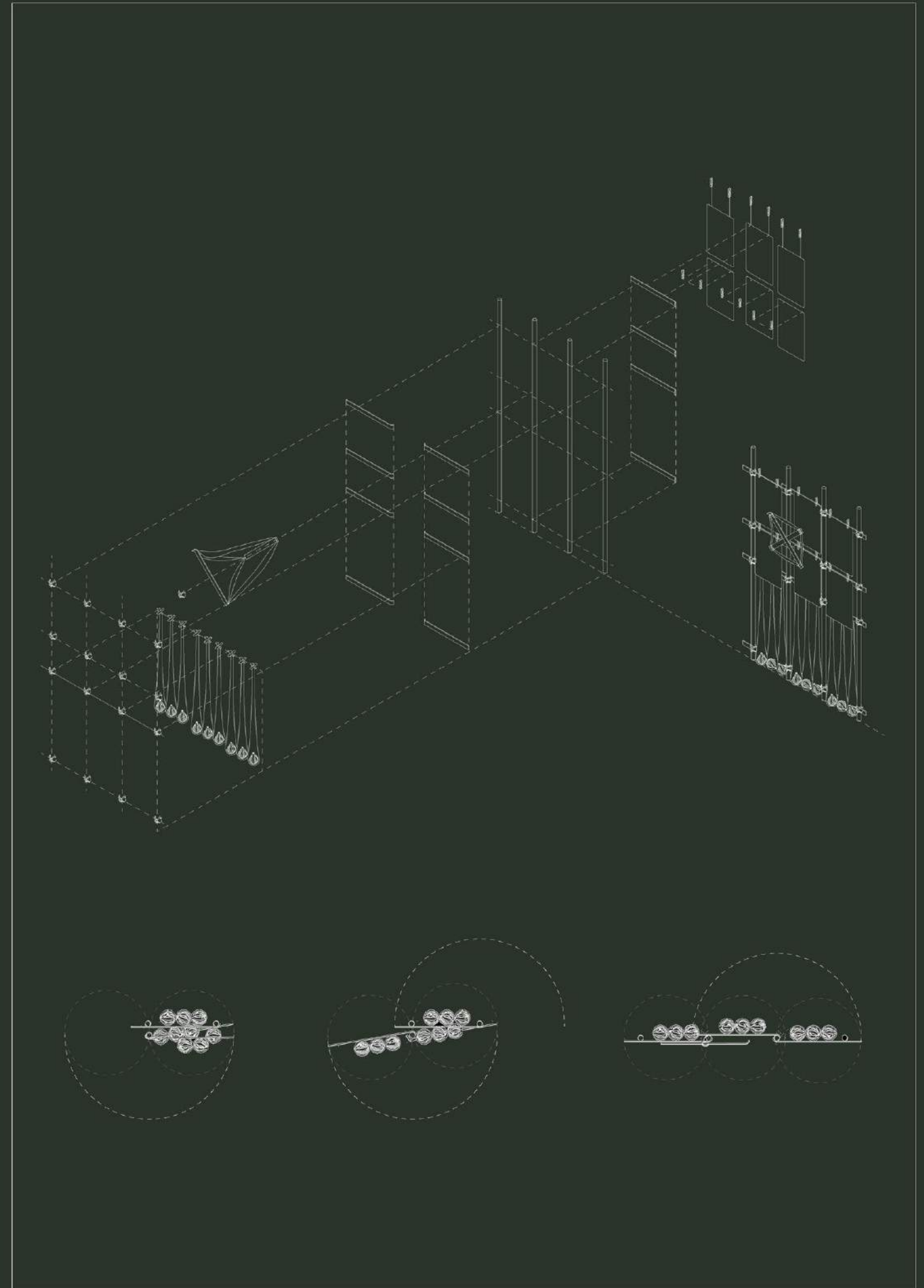




HOW TO LIVE

WITH ANOTHER







Bamboo poles, back scatchers, food stockings, produce (onions, potatoes, herbs), plastic bags

Privacy in the household for two is often invaded. Vision crosses threshold and boundaries and invades private space. The kitchen is the space of domestic workers—this is a space for rest, even when they are not working on household chores.

Smoke Screen is designed to create individual spaces, promoting respect for privacy and fulfilling individual needs.

A transformable multi-functioning screen: Asri stuffs a variety of food into the stockings, and the form of the screen changes as the stockings morph to the form of whatever is stored in it—lemongrass, pandan leaves, plastic bags. She then replaces the exercise wheel with a food cover, which becomes the trigger mechanism that unfolds the screen when the string is pulled.

Two spaces; two purposes: On one side, Asri is able to experiment freely with an activity she loves—cooking up nutritious meals for both of them. On the other side, an exercise wheel constructed from backscratchers and food stockings prompts Grandmother to work at her stiff joints.

A nook filled with light: During her spare time when the kitchen is not used, Asri pushes a small table by the window and hangs the device on the ceiling hooks. Light streams into her privileged window, and the screen creates a soft shielded nook in the dark space. She can see people entering the kitchen, but not the other way around because of the glaring light. Both shield and nook encourages iterative experimentations.

CHAPTER ONE

SMOKE SCREEN

dual space

privacy

individual



making
located in a servant, concealed space



In use
creates dual space with dual purpose

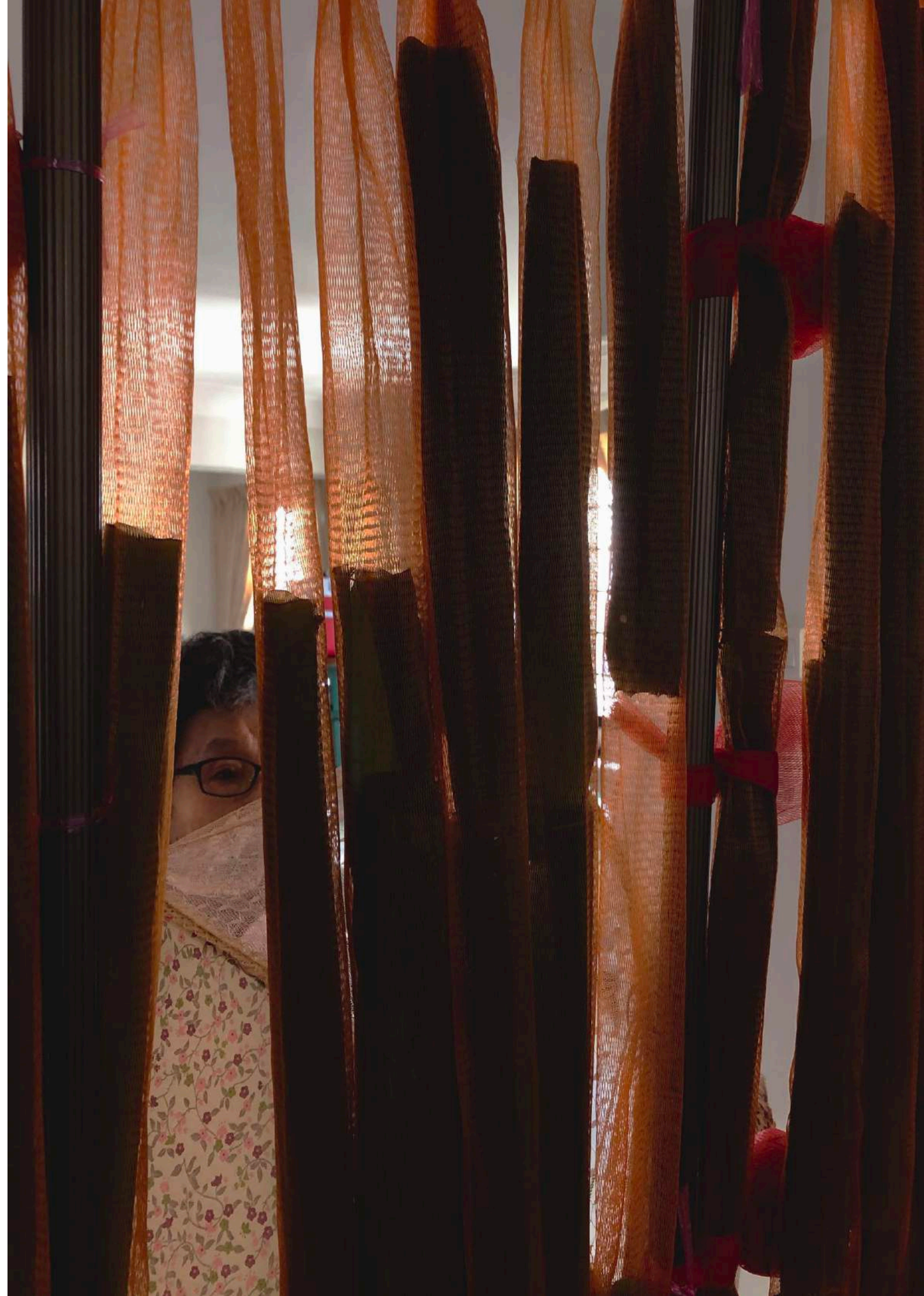


kept
Screen creates a new volume of private space within the kitchen for Asri;
a nook filled with light



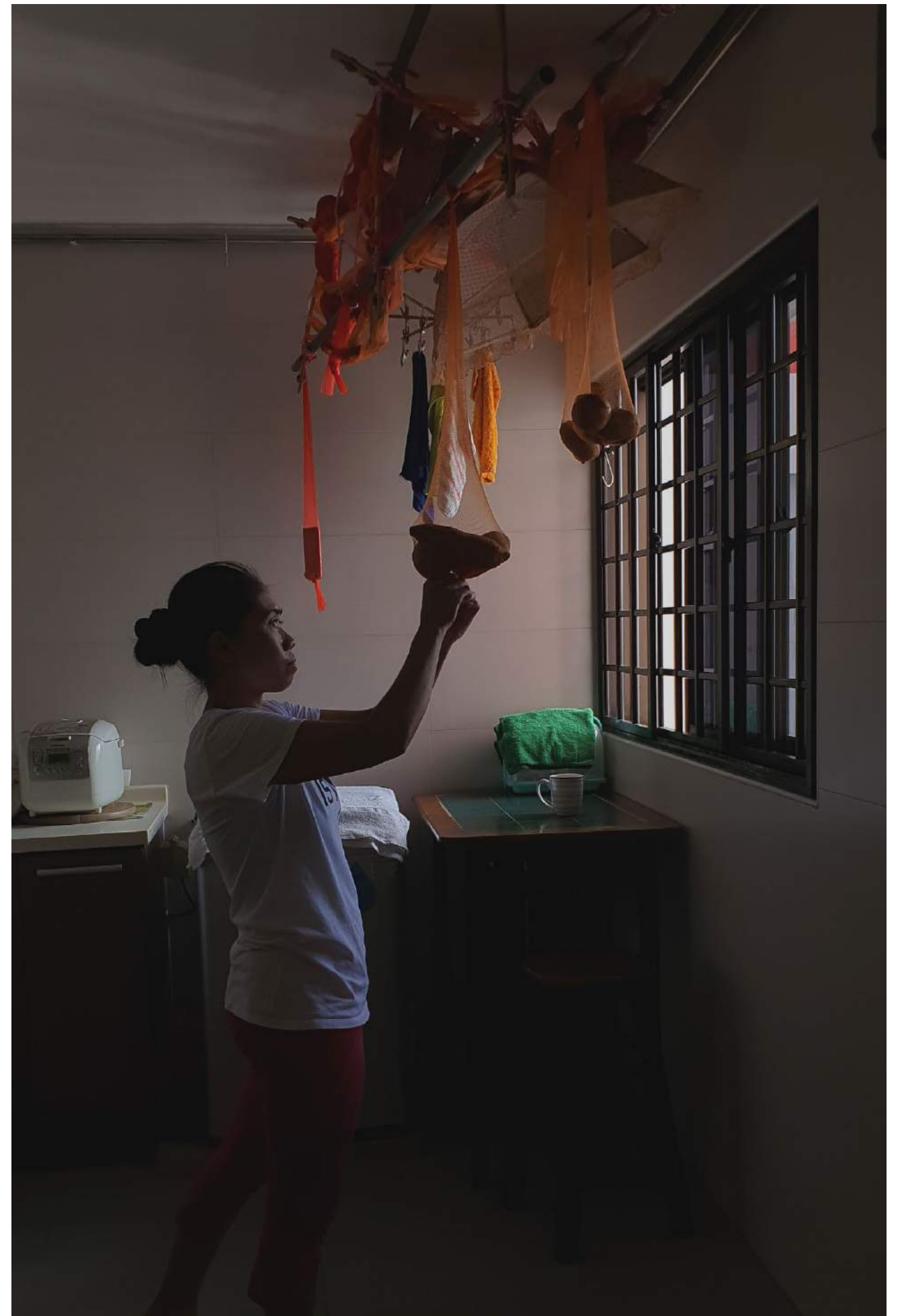


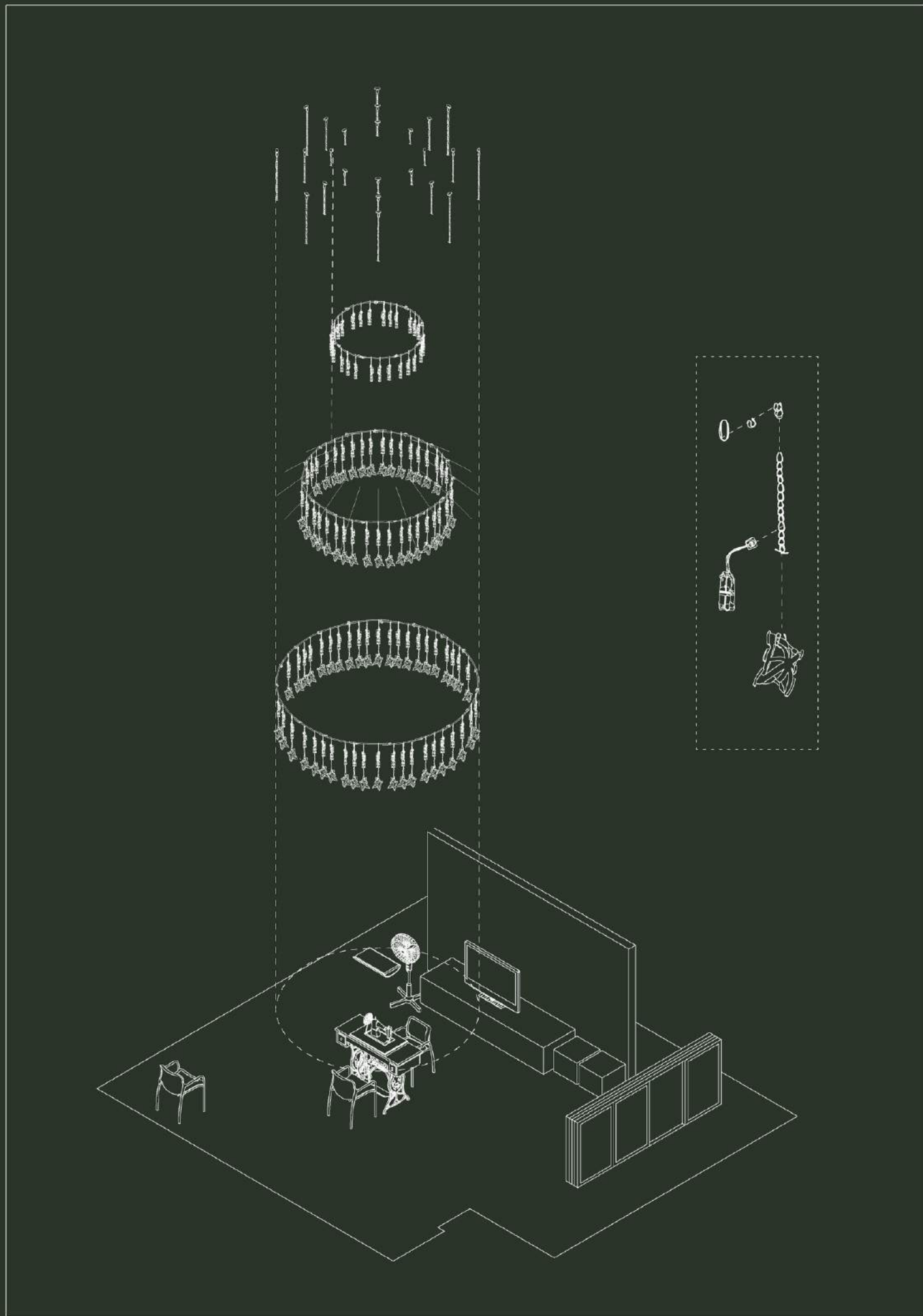














Used tea bags of various tones , cane, rubber hands, origami module

The sewing machine is now central of the flat. Above it, three rings of cane from which teabags are hung to dry form a chandelier, perfuming the space and colouring the space hues of amber.

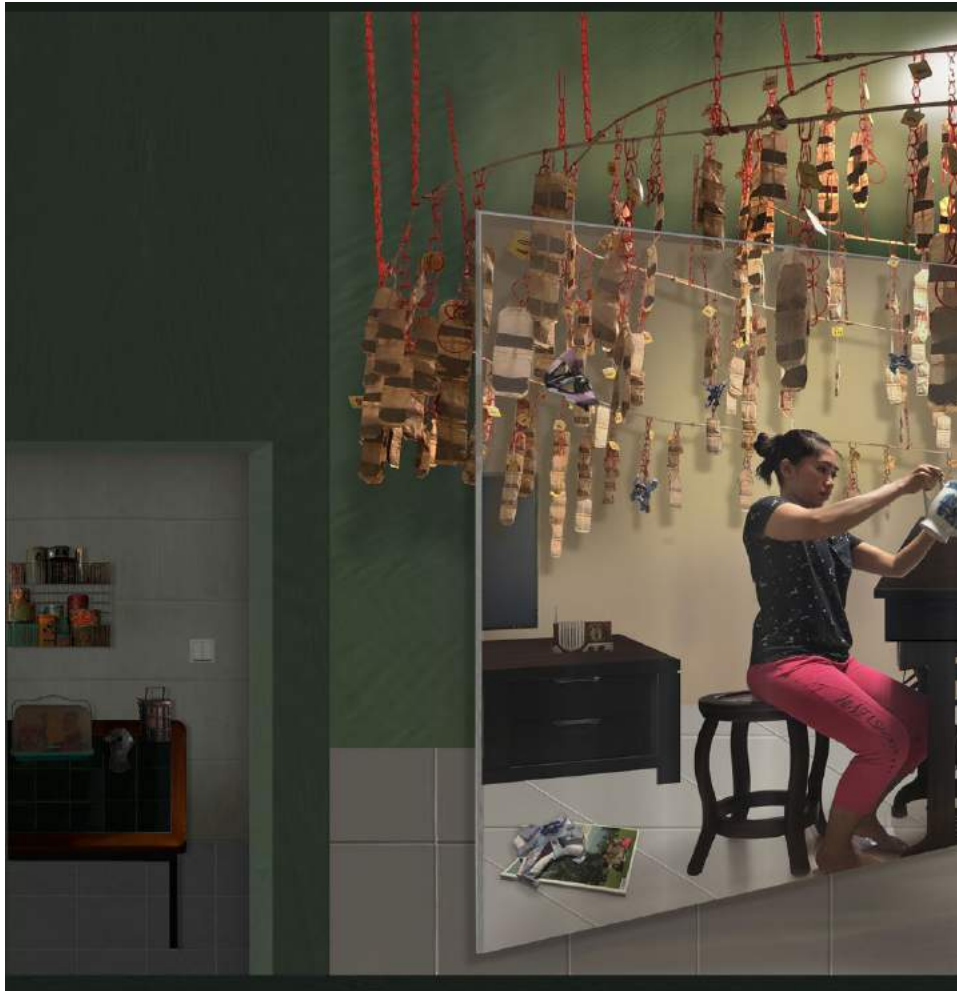
Each time they share tea, the sewing table is closed to become a flat surface. Teabags are hung onto the chandelier, with an origami module folded by Asri hung at the end to absorb the tea stains/ drips. When the chandelier eventually drops with the weight of the teabags, obscuring the view of the television/ sinks below their heights, it becomes an indicator for the quilt making to begin.

A makers space in a flat to bring two people together - the material of teabags as a manifestation of time and kinship becomes the very building material that constructs the space. Each time they share tea, the quilt expands.

Now they come together in a central part of the house, actually sharing the common space (Asri could only watch from afar previously, now she cohabits the central space under the excuse that she is making a dress for grandmothe). The sewing table shapes the living space by bringing two people together.

CHAPTER TWO

TEA PARTY FOR TWO



making
through tea parties



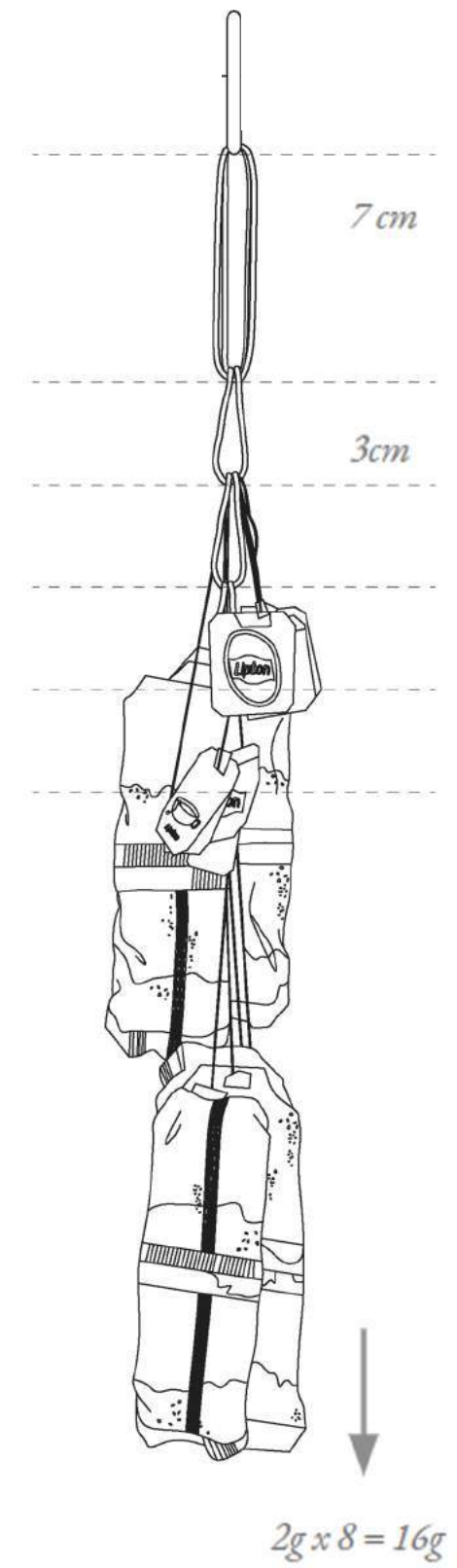
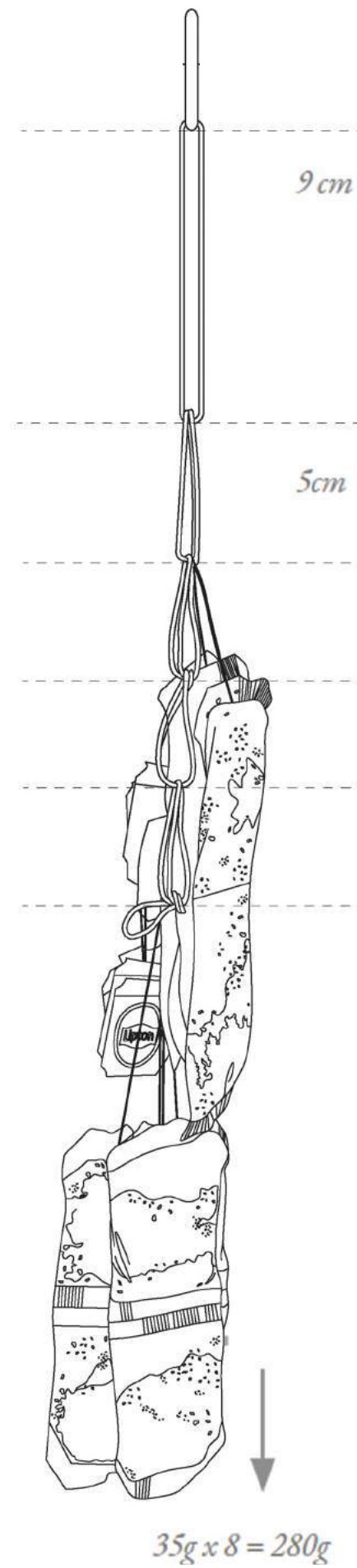
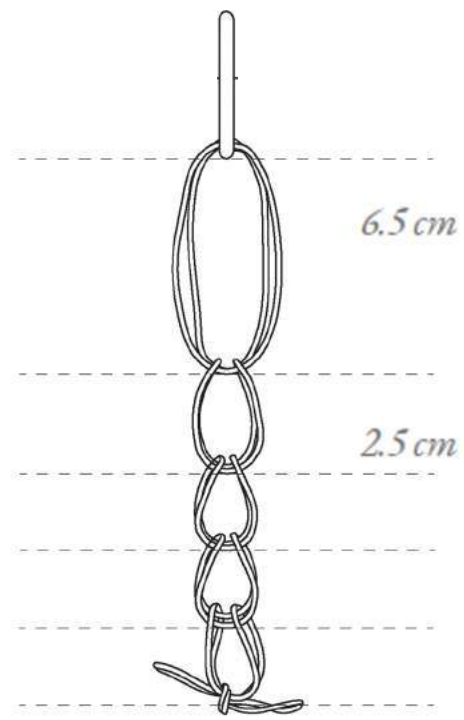
In use
with the lift of the sewing machine lid, makerspace created



kept
in progress - a static object



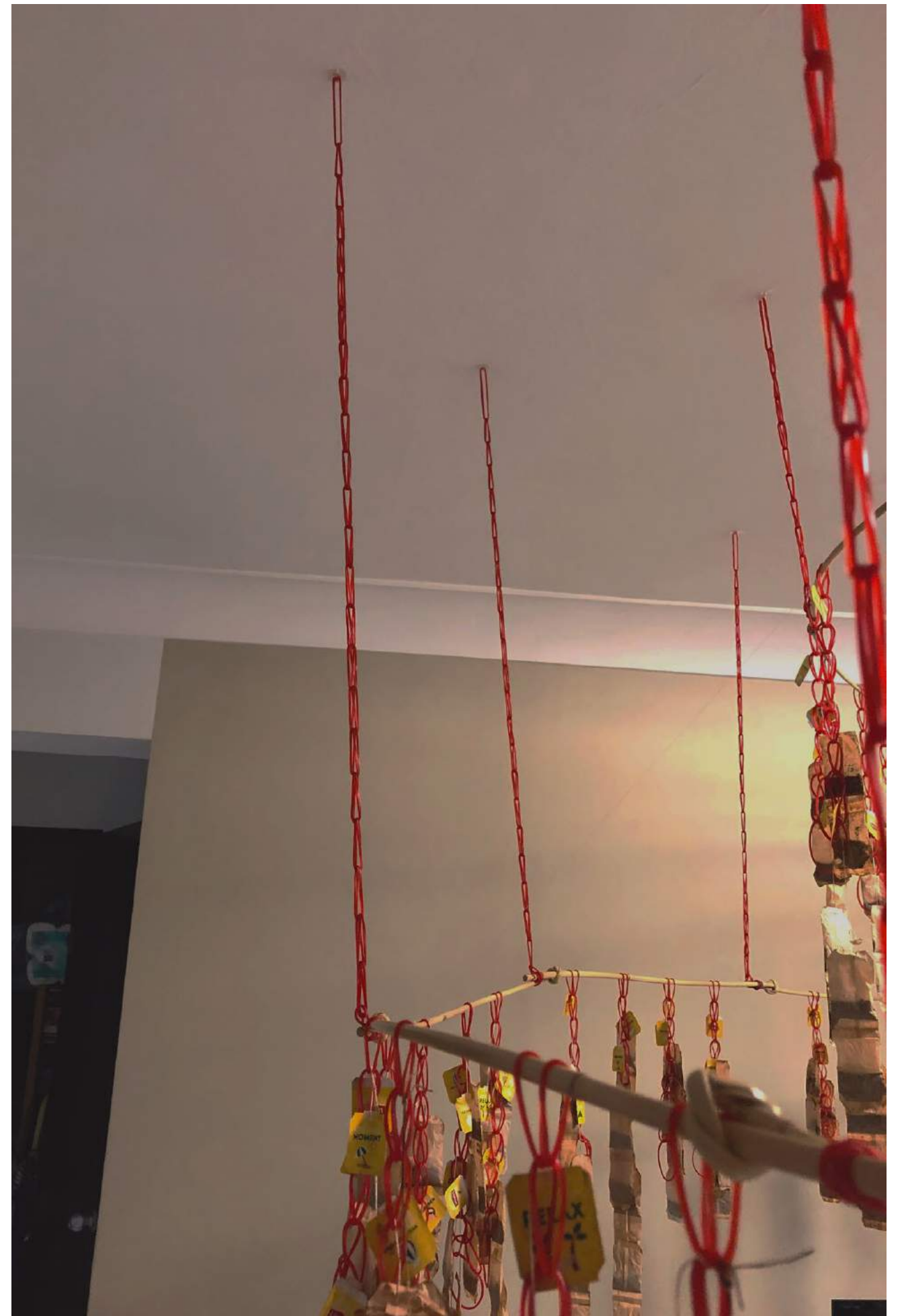




Wet and dried teabags on the elasticity of rubber bands



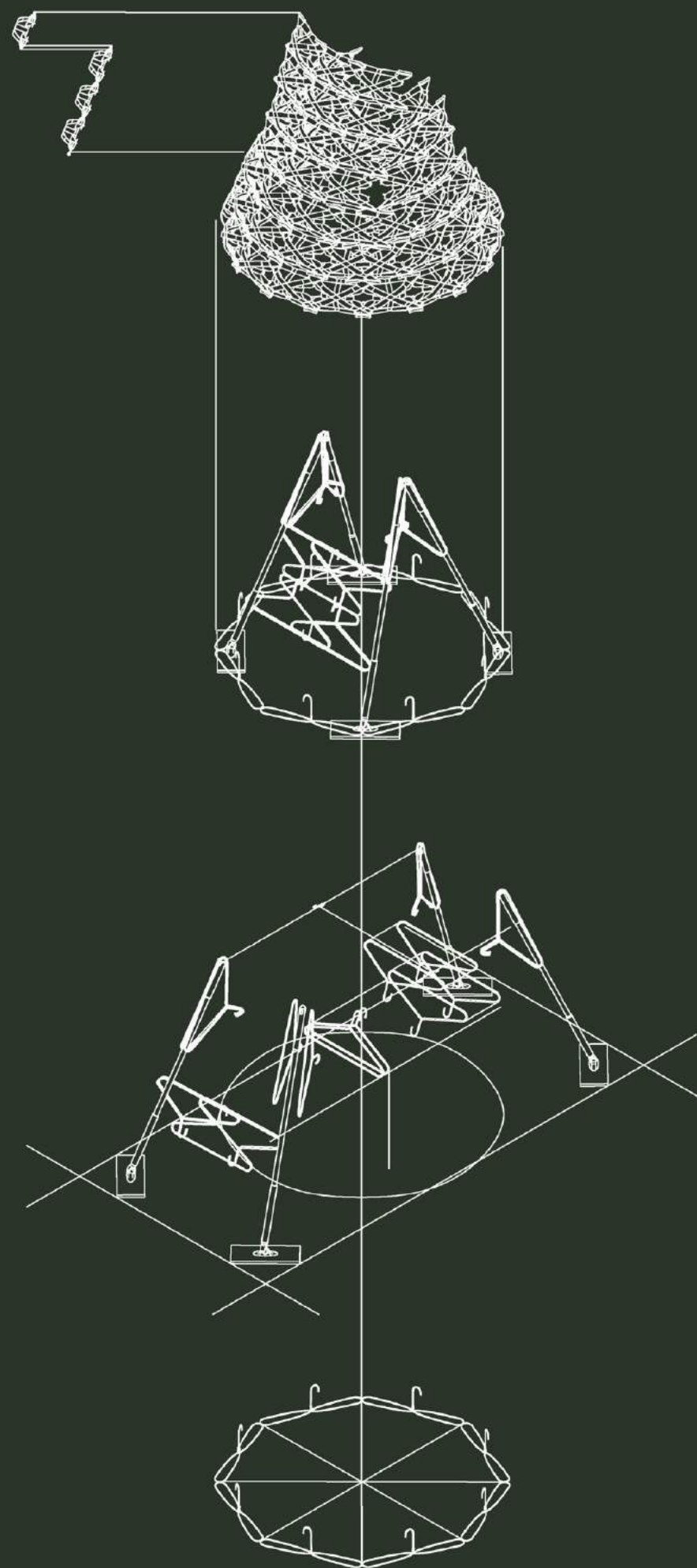














Long Pile Microfiber Chenille bath mats, microfiber mop, cotton string, hangers, origami magazine module

Asri folds a dress of independence for Grandmother during tea time.

This is an enabling device for someone who cannot do cleaning. The walking device is concealed by origami modules that form a skirt around Grandmother's body, resulting in a protective cushion that surrounds her body, which she can easily slip in and out of. The cushioning modules are in fact a variation of folded food waste boxes. Traditionally, these are folded from recycled paper by Grandmother in her free time, which she uses to put bones as she is having her meals. The paper cushions overlap like roof shingles, further reinforced with a coating of tapioca starch mixture.

CHAPTER THREE

THIS IS NOT A WALKER

balance

gift of independence

freedom



making
through tea parties

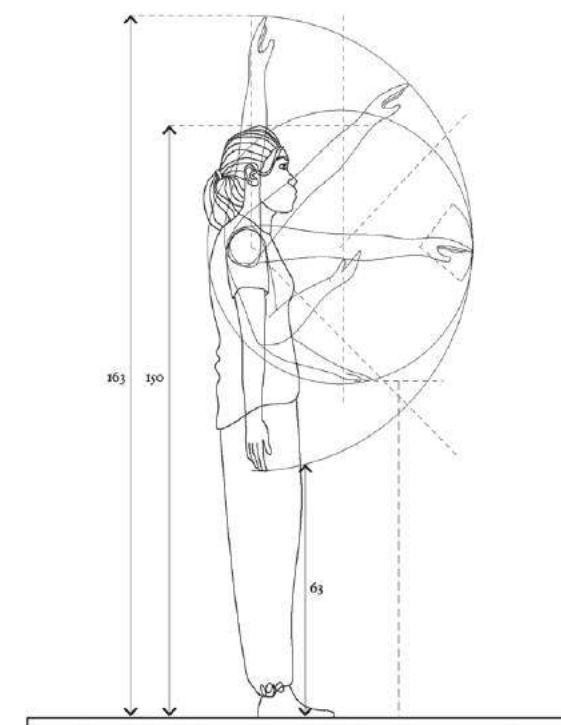
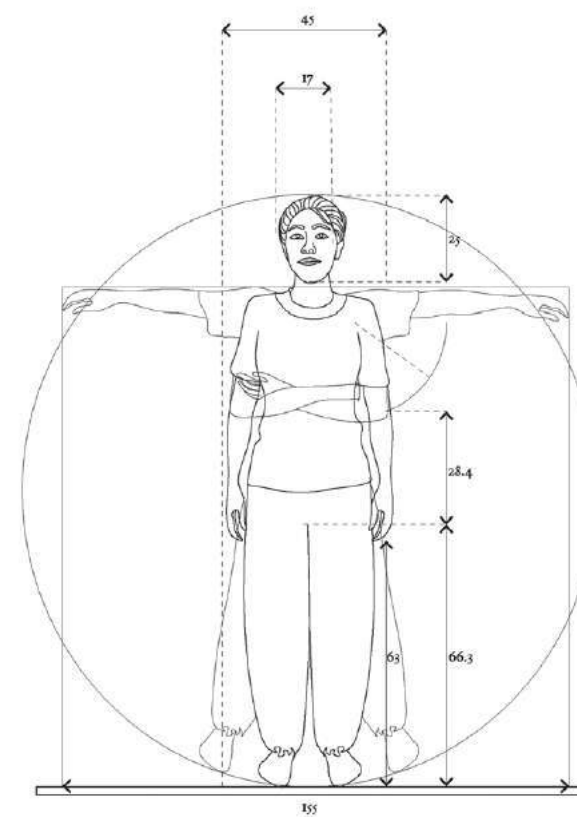
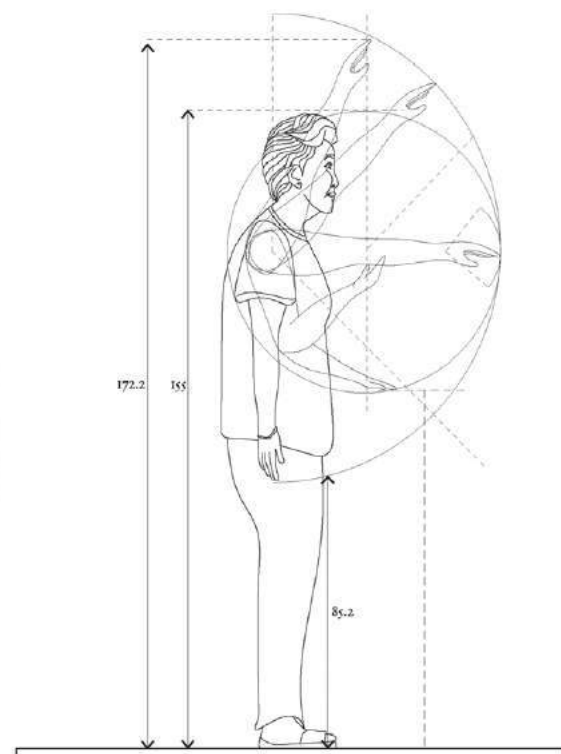
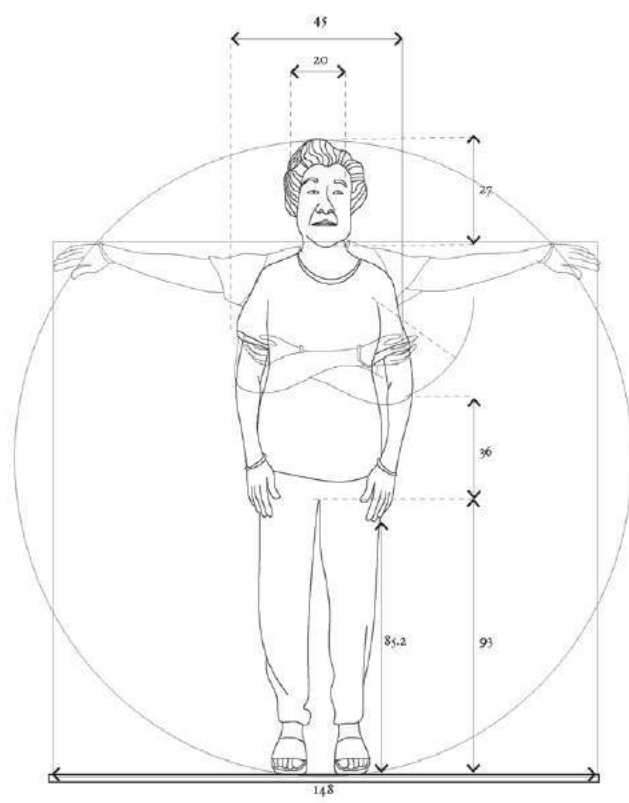


kept
weighted comfort

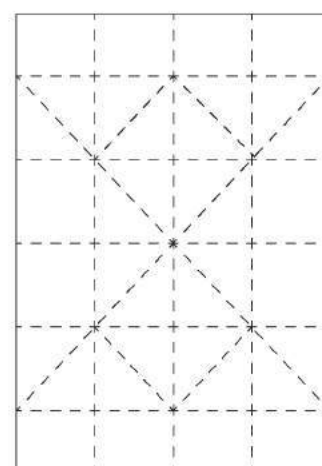
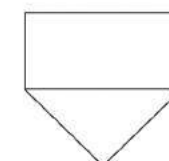
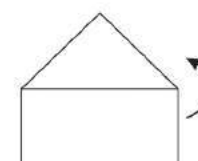
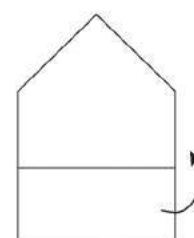
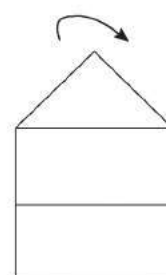
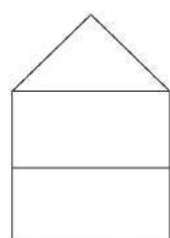
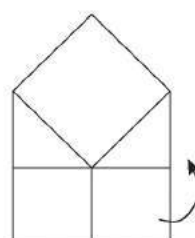
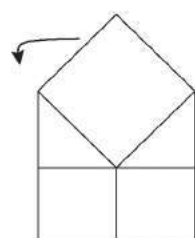
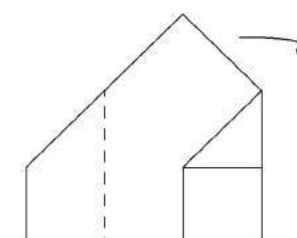
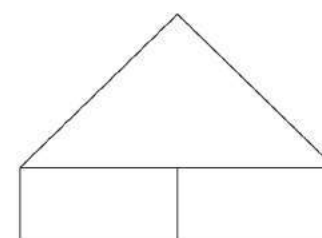
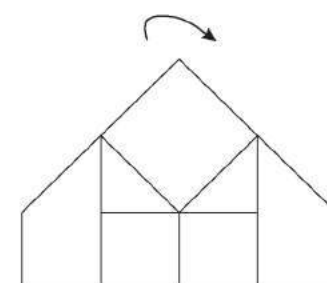
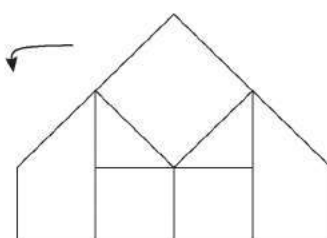
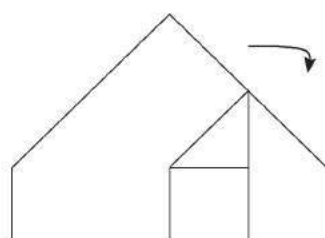
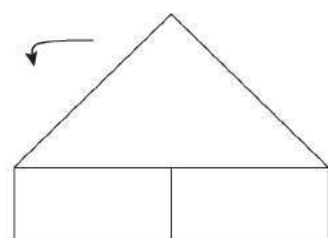
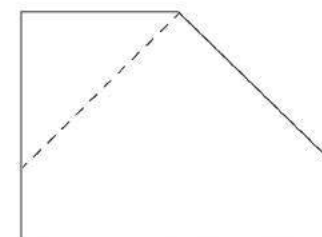
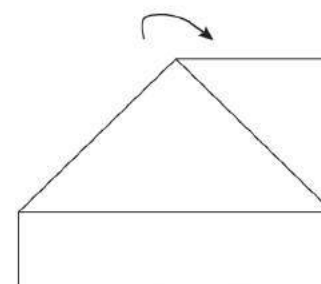
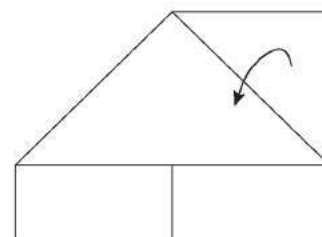
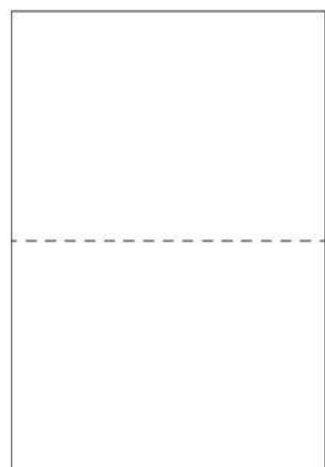


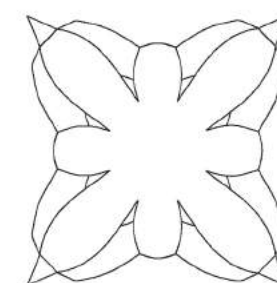
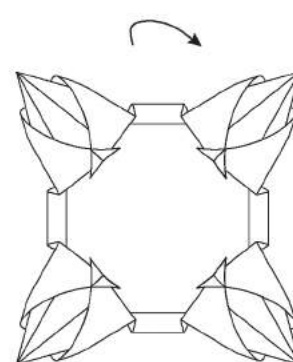
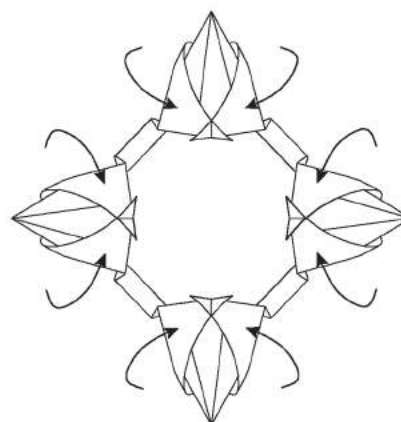
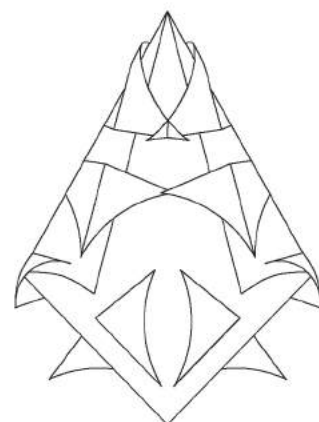
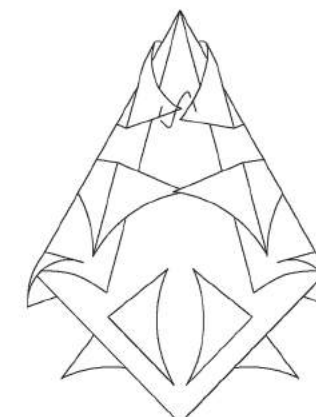
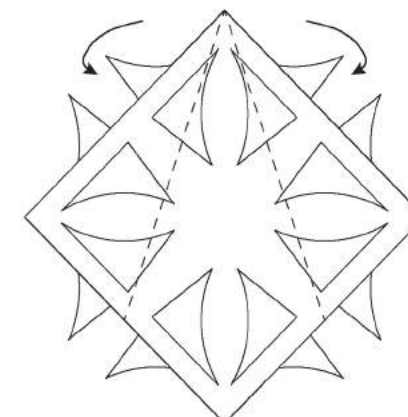
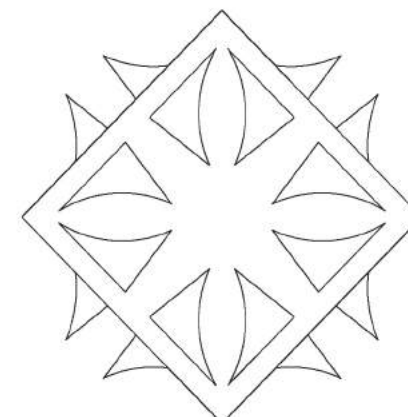
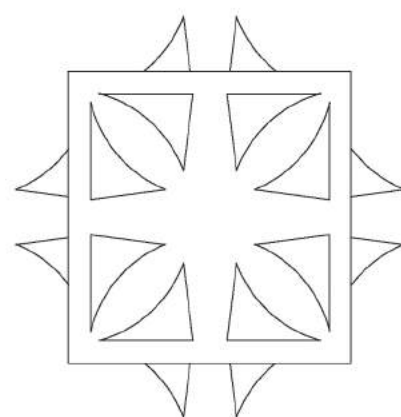
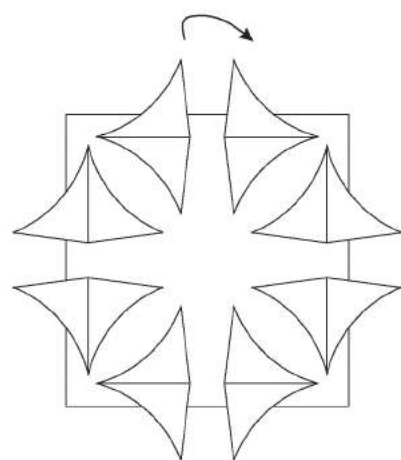
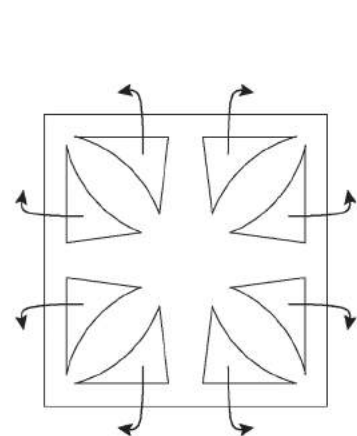
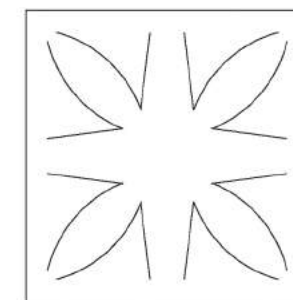
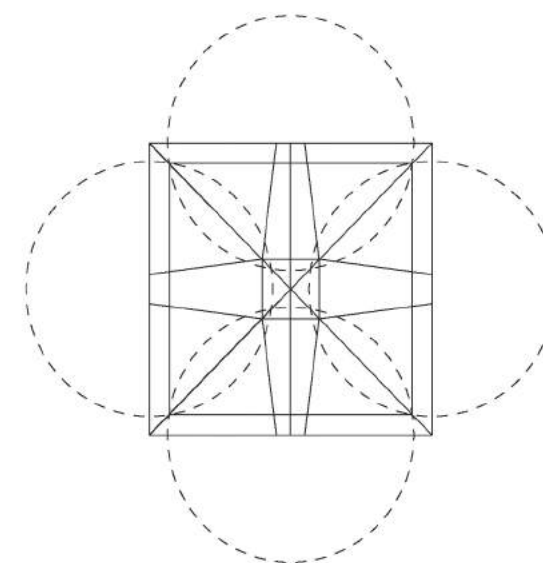
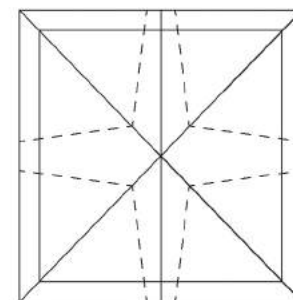
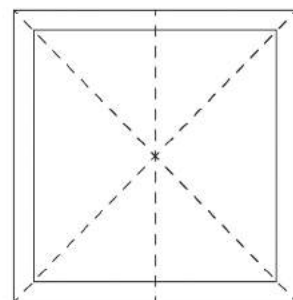
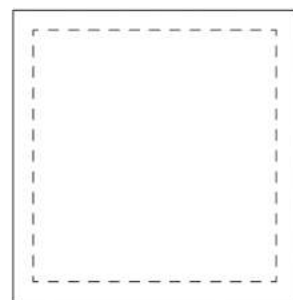
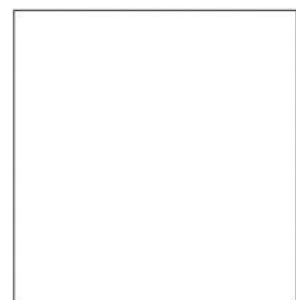
In use
floor cleaned with movement

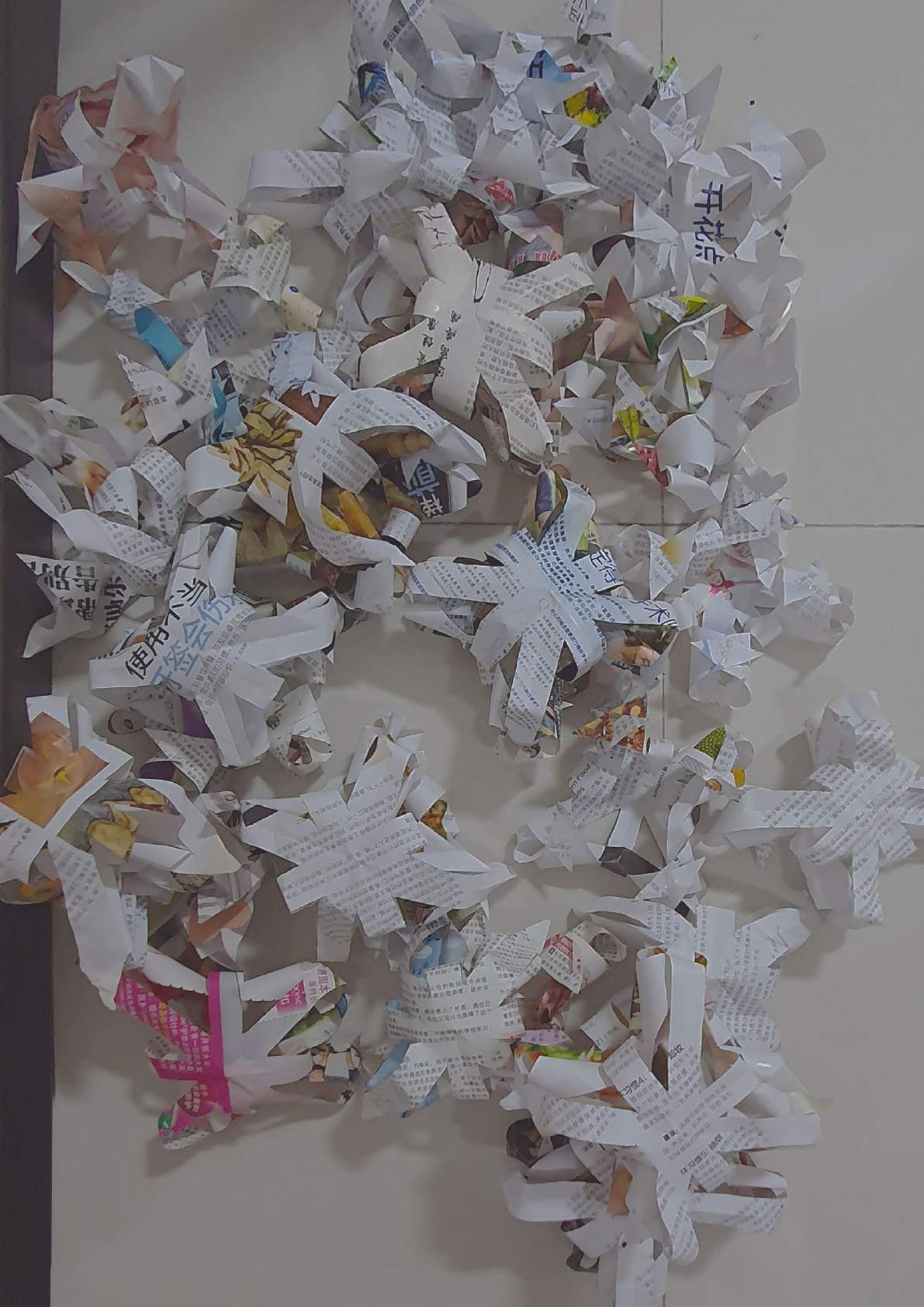




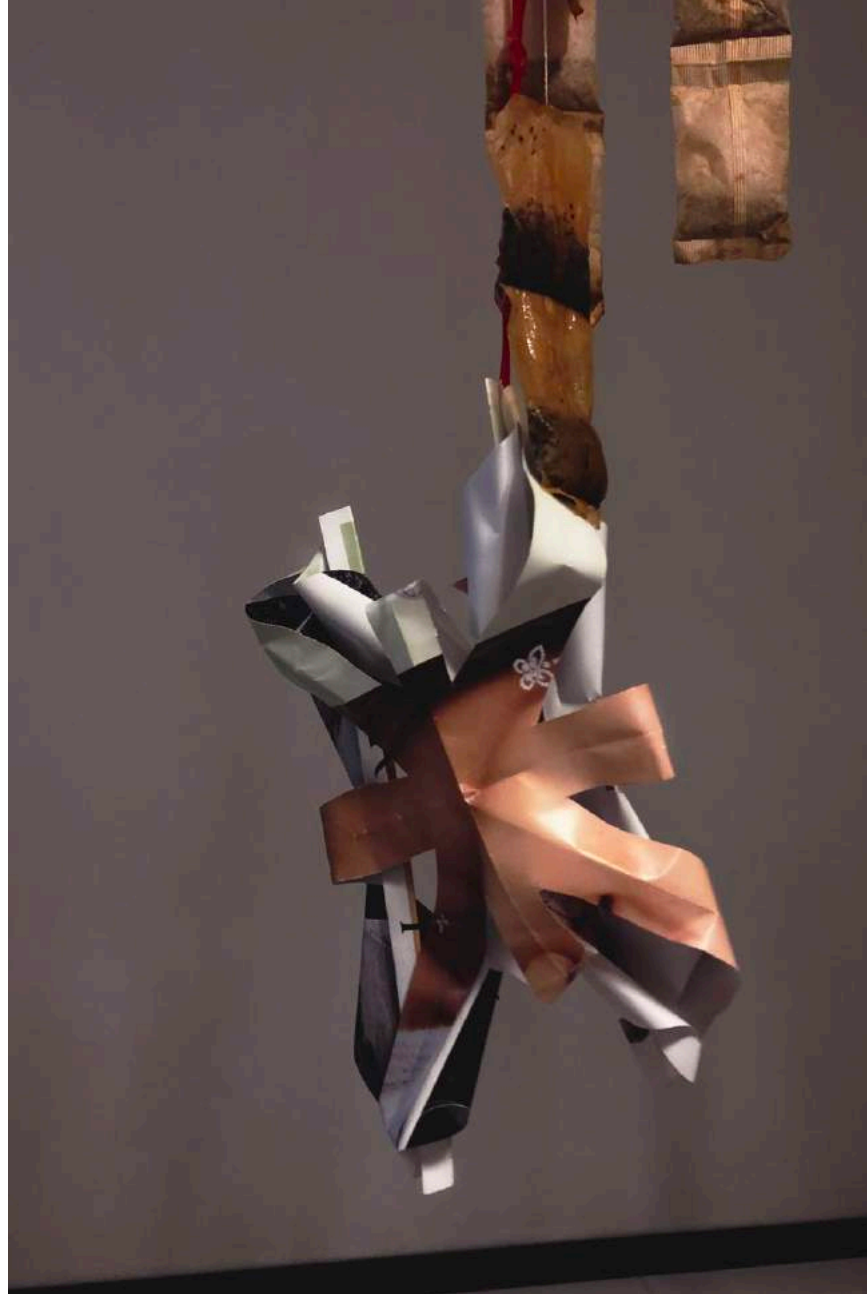












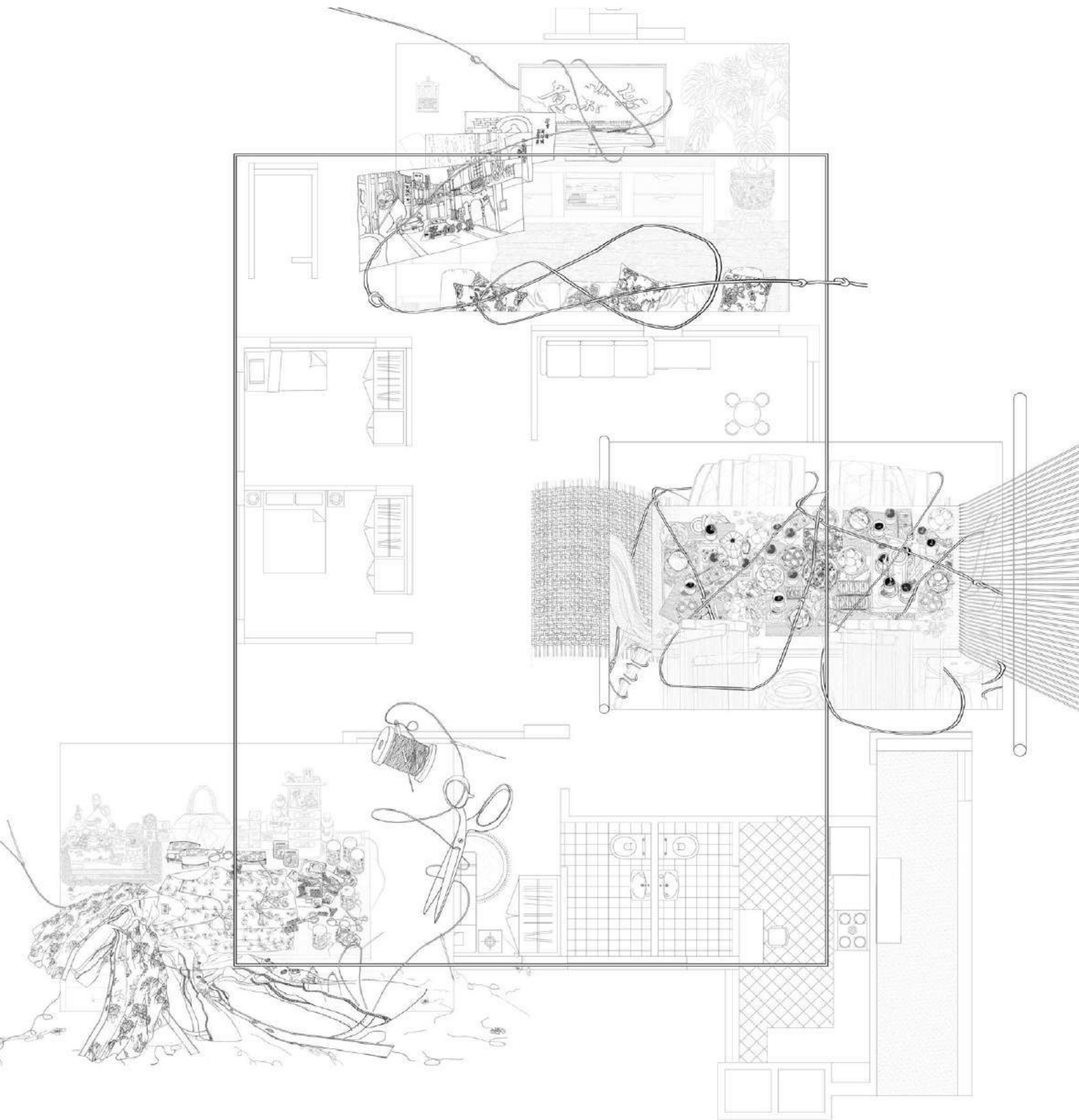


HOW TO LIVE

WITH ANOTHER







STITCHING INBETWEEN A DOMESTIC SPACE

semester 1

Abstract

Home is fabricated as an intimate landscape of privacy, embedded with intangible philosophies and rituals. Yet, following globalisation, Singapore has seen an increasing presence of foreign domestic workers in the household.

This local phenomenon has infringed upon domestic space, producing inbetween spaces of negotiations in the household and calling for a re-situation of domestic space and its gendered overtones. Despite being a contractual relationship, the scope of labour of foreign domestic workers moves beyond physical labour and fulfilment of quantifiable tasks, into moral dimensions of care as they take on the gendered role of provision in the household. This is particularly evident between the relationship of a foreign domestic worker and an elderly person, as interdependency is heightened. Here, dualisms appear in a domestic space - it exists as a public and private space, a place of work and leisure, for self and other.

By drawing parallels with the story of my grandmother and her helper, this thesis examines the intimacy between women - an elderly employer and foreign domestic worker - within the limited confines of an emerging domestic sphere where the notions of public, the private and their intersections are continuously evolving. Specifically, the proposal is an architectural toolkit that seeks to negotiate spaces, relationships and events between both parties. It strives to restructure the geography of a household as these women, and others like them, take on multiple and changing roles in their overlapping domestic sphere.

Domesticity, Gender, Negotiation, Labour, Singapore

For my grandmother and Asri

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This thesis makes a virtue of two fragmented narratives that have collided in the present, offering it as a mirror to the fragmentary nature of domestic modern life. It predicates on the stories and relationship of my grandmother and her helper, Asri - slices of everyday life and domestic interiors that have weaved the canvas for this discourse on domesticity, negotiations and altered spaces, following the addition of the foreign domestic worker in the household.

Intimate stories about the private landscape of home told in a confidential space; where dialogues emerge as understanding and companionship are negotiated. These words and images are uttered directly into your ear, confiding everything from gossip to wisdom.

A phenomena of mutual dependence in a gendered space



A phenomena of mutual dependence in a gendered space

Singapore's history was written on the back of globalisation – she knows the beauty of connectedness and the misery of exclusion. Importing and exporting knowledge, capital and labour, our economic development placed us in the center of the capitalist world-system. Sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein describes this as “when the system gives priority to the endless accumulation of capital (...) and wherein the efficacy of labor is what holds it all together”.¹

At the same time, industrialisation created a rift between living and working space, creating a private – public divide. Walter Benjamin highlights the significance of this development – juxtaposed against the volatility of modernity, home's interior has become ‘the étui of the private individual’ – ‘a second skin’, tattooed with specific routines of everyday life.² Benjamin's sentiments about the gravity of home are echoed by Hannah Arendt, who writes that the private sphere of the house was a ‘necessary condition’ for recovery, such that issues of public and private realms may be negotiated.³

However, labour has made its way back into the domestic sphere, fundamentally altering the dynamics of home.

The import of foreign domestic workers in the 1970s to Singapore was the government's successful attempt to boost industrialisation efforts – the provision of affordable healthcare encouraged more Singaporean women to participate in the workforce.⁴ Currently, one in every five Singaporean households employs a foreign domestic worker.⁵

‘Domesticity’ was originally born out of embedded ideologies that accentuated the diverging rift between male and female spheres, following the separation between work and home in the nineteenth century.⁶ Negotiations of space can be seen through gendered notions such as domestic work and motherhood. For example, home may be perceived by homeowners to be an origin of pride or disgrace in the presence of visitors. When only women become apologetic for any messes in the household, the gendered role of needing to clean up becomes legitimised through this self-automated ritual.⁷

Notions of domesticity are perpetuated with the presence of the domestic worker as she takes over domestic duties of the house. Relationships become more complex as the domestic worker actualizes the invisible tasks of women working within a private space, and there is a constant overlap between work and home, public and private, production and reproduction. Moreover, labour is unique in the domestic realm – it requires a perpetual, uninterrupted presence of the domestic worker that goes beyond quantifiable household chores, into emotional attentiveness traditionally given unconditionally by women.⁸ These relationships lie on a blurry line between intimate and contractual, infringing on the domestic realm with specific functions and conducts attached to it. Operating within domestic grounds of patriarchal norms that construct ideas of home and its gendered practices, both women – employer and employee – have to constantly re-position and re-negotiate their spaces and identity in the household according to novel, unfamiliar roles.

Ultimately, this local phenomenon has brought notions and practices of the public into the private sphere where intersections are elusive and domesticity and gender overlap. Here, it would be apt to lay bare and articulate the complexities in between spaces, relationships and tensions such that we might begin to renegotiate domesticity, its relationships and representations.

¹ Wallerstein, I. (2004). The Modern World-system as a Capitalist World-Economy: Production, Surplus-Value, and Polarization. In Wallerstein, I, World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction (pp. 23-41). Durham, United Kingdom: Duke University Press.

² Benjamin, Walter. Paris Capital of the Nineteenth Century. Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writing. Trans. Edmund Jephcott. New York: Schocken Books, 1986. Print.

³ Arendt, H. (2018). The human condition (D. Allen & M. Canovan, Eds.). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

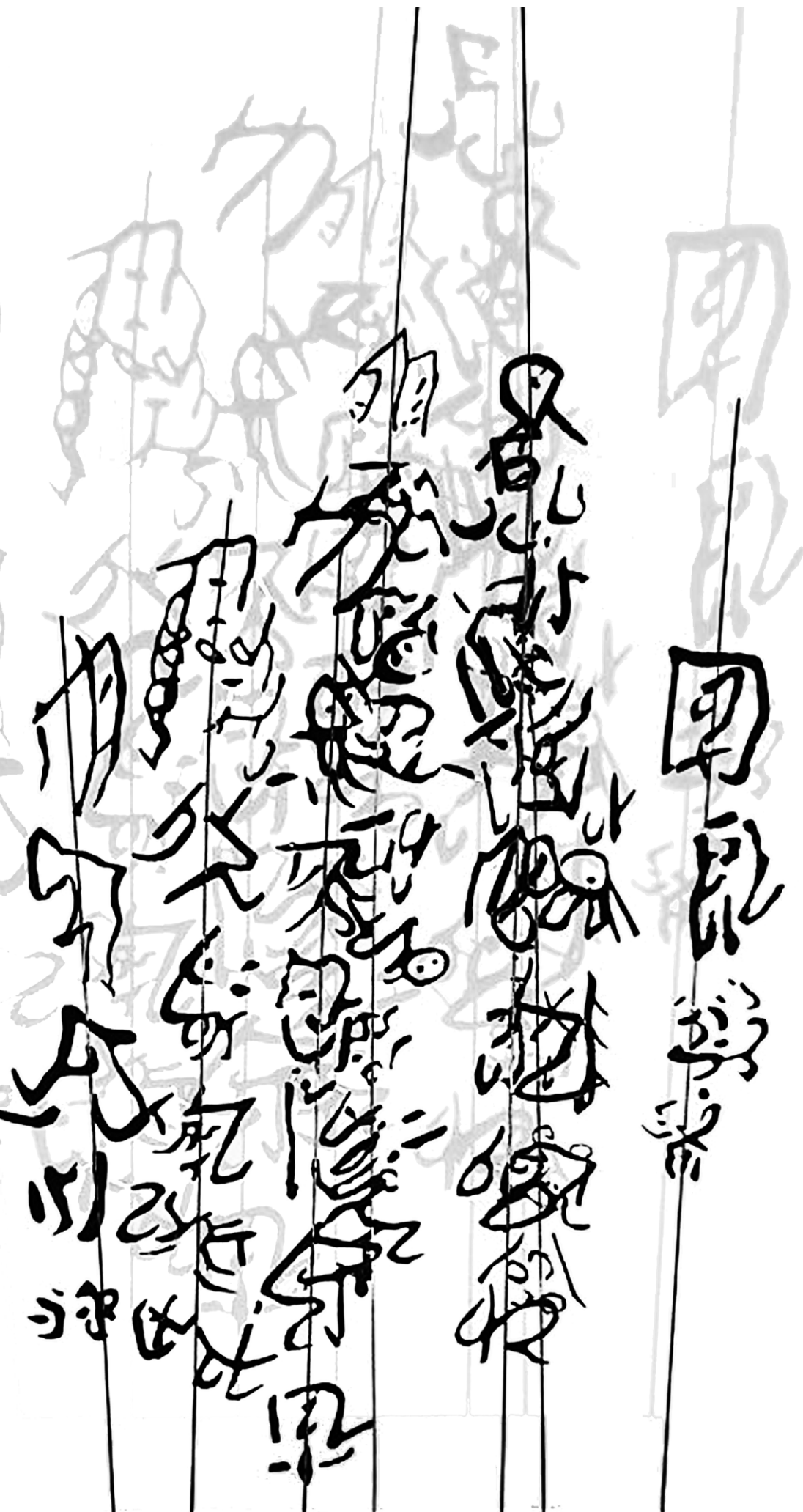
⁴ Yeoh, Brenda SA, and Shirlena Huang. “Transnational Domestic Workers and the Negotiation of Mobility and Work Practices in Singapore's Home-Spaces.” *Mobilities* 5, no. 2 (2010): 219-236

⁵ Awang, N., & Pei Ting, W. (2019, November 03). The Big Read: As maids become a necessity for many families, festering societal issues could come to the fore. Retrieved from <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/maids-foreign-domestic-workers-singapore-necessity-families-12099068>

⁶ Heynen, Hilde, and Gulsum Baydar. Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture. London: Routledge, 2005.

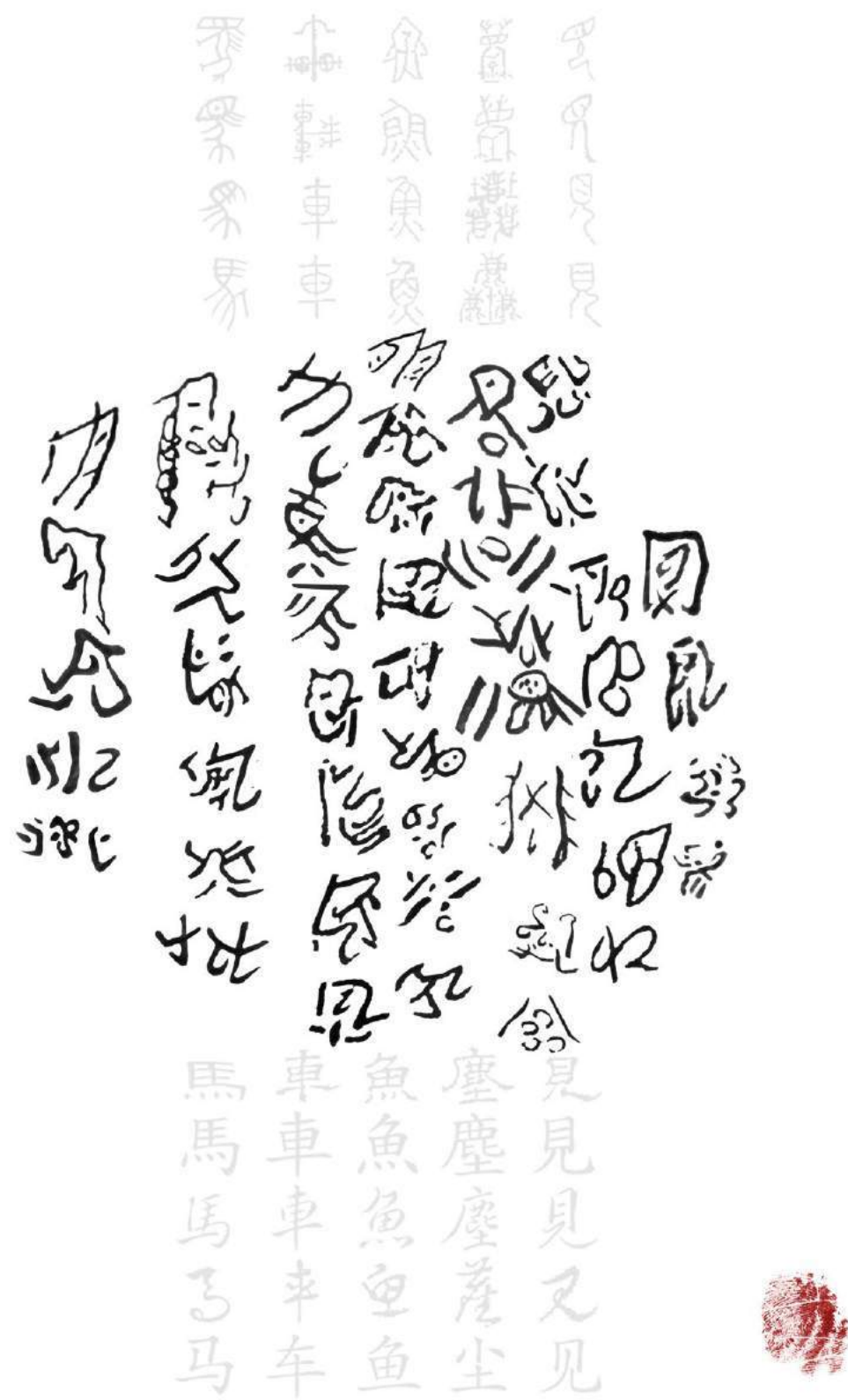
⁷ Warren, C. A. (2010) Pride, shame and stigma in private spaces. *Ethnography*, 11(3), 425-442.

⁸ Yeoh, Brenda SA, and Shirlena Huang. “Transnational Domestic Workers and the Negotiation of Mobility and Work Practices in Singapore's Home-Spaces.” *Mobilities* 5, no. 2 (2010): 219-236



Unschooling Representations

communicating through unschooled drawings



Unschooled Representations: Prelude

My grandmother is illiterate. She holds the paintbrush delicately, and begins to paint spaces from her fragmented memories.

This thesis started with my illiterate grandmother's letter to my late grandfather - her markings resembled ancient Chinese pictograms, raw and visceral.
























































































































































































































The archive began here.

In an attempt to unlearn the Chinese language, I worked with my Grandma to reorganise Chinese pictograms.

To categorise the pictograms in a direct manner, we had four categories: natural - human and animal, plants, natural, and non living; manmade. Characteristics under each categories are as follows:

- (natural) Human and animal - multiple strokes
- (natural) Plants - organic, asymmetrical
- (natural) Non-living - curved lines, multiple parts
- Man-made - symmetrical, straight lines



	NATURAL						MAN-MADE											
Human and Animal	Plants						Non-living											
     	     						     						     					
     	     						     						     					
     	     						     						     					
     	     						     						     					
     	     						     						     					
     	     						     						     					
     	     						     						     					
     	     						     						     					
    	     						     						     					

Unschooling Representations: Experiments

This is a reconstruction of a portrait of my late grandfather, completed in attempt to create and capture a remote subject.

I wanted to capture him in his last stage in life, by the time the dementia regressed.

He was a heavy smoker since his teens, for like 60 + years of his life, yet in the last year he forgot that he smoked. Dementia made him disappear - we saw a shadow of him through our memories of him, but it was clear he was no longer there.

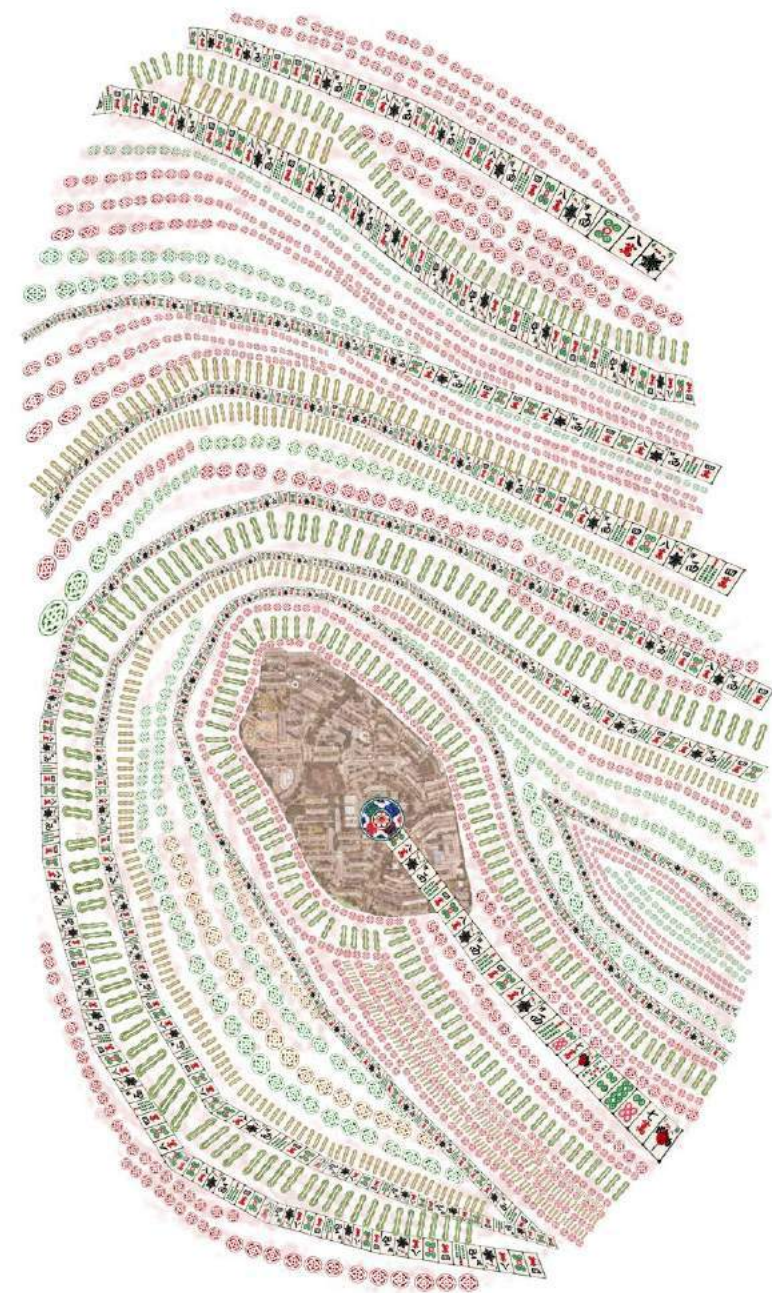
Here, I negotiate my present space with his, representing space through his eyes.



When he had dementia, He also kept wanting to go out, to look for his mother, to go home - home was a kampung no longer there, high-rise flats erected on the same land. He was looking at a modern city but he could only remember his kampung and childhood, not the process of seeing Singapore modernise. He could not orient himself in this foreign landscape.

Like the relocation of the Aborigines in Australia, what he was familiar with (his past) was taken away abruptly to him.

This is a songline for him. Instead of being made of a cultural network of stories, this is a cartography for dementia, made of mahjong tiles, something he remembered how to play in spite of his dementia. These mahjong tiles are superimposed on his fingerprint, his identity. In the center is an aerial view of his last home in a neighbourhood in Clementi.



Attempts at translating remote spaces continued with other migrants’ unschooled representations of space
- a book of poems and a biography.

The second subject of translation is poems from *House A* by Jennifer S Cheng⁹, an examination of immigrant home-making exploring how the body is inscribed with a cosmology of home written in three parts:

- 1) Letters to Mao
- 2) House A: Geometry B
- 3) How to Build an American Home



⁹ Cheng, J. S. (2016). *House A*. Oakland, CA: Omnidawn Publishing.

Part 1: Letters to Mao

“my mother who gave us history lessons steeped in a pale, languorous liquid: we sleep where our home is, and we build a home where we sleep.

Slumbering habits of migratory birds... some birds, feeling their bones weighed down by air, migrate not by sky but by swimming, their wings waving down the sea as if buoyed by its girth. Other birds are wanderers, their migratory curvatures charted like flowering seeds across the globe.

For if the world, drowsy, were to be washed in a sheen, perhaps we would all have some intuitive knowledge of the immigrant body. And we do at times, conscious of the ins and outs of how history holds us, or the ways we negotiate the space outside our bodies, noticing where and how we do not cohere. Stitched across my sleeping bag and thin silver lines the contour map which you may very well call belonging and unveil our game since it resembles the ocean zone the migratory movements for the spreading of constellations across a dark chart I like to align it from pretended is enveloping me for if the world drowsy were to be washed in machine perhaps it would all have some intuitive knowledge of the immigrant body and we do at times conscious of the ins and outs of how history holds us or the ways we negotiate the space outside our bodies you noticing where and tile we do not come here what after all is the body no the windblown trees at the edge of the cliff are going to fall into the speed so we must tie them down attach them to buoys so they may float indeterminately and stories my family kept reading at that time laundering was a punishment and we were instructed to pity the immigrant the foreigner the stranger but what if the absence of a point of but not something to be lamented but a structural foundation on which to build a house we filled with water yes this is my family name yes there is a haze between the child at the west and the child who identifies that the sea.

Part 2: House A: Geometry B

a dream is slightly off center if this rock is where we place our heel to pivot
In sleep a dream spreads until it is a sea of points and none of reference

if we could construct, say, a physical manifestation of an interior state.

where in the space, we take these angles, fill it with air, and watch it hang from the ceiling.

bird. shell. dry hibiscus.

anthropology of house
A is for the space between two slopes
the weathering of the roof against outside weather
angle is the particular incline to reflect a particular view
As in
here is the baseline
here is the position along which you travel

weather
the shape of the atmosphere
the side from which the wind is blowing

extracts
house body architecture

Part 3: How to Build an American Home

To prevent an invasion of overhead winds, I placed my child heart near the skin of the floor and wafted in a condensation of history. I drew up neat boundaries of here and there, we and they, and held my arms open to the walls.

A lungful of door hinge, thumbprint of the window seam. A house is steeped in spoonfuls of patterns, ghosts, leaves. Children of immigrants gather bits of wire, thread, a safety pin; they arrange them like a blueprint, not knowing why or how they know the shape.

The first time I learned how we all inhabit an acoustic architecture of space, it was sound traveling across a landscape, contouring objects, carving between them, bringing forth a movement of bodies through space. You could stand inside a metal sculpture of a whale, close your eyes; or you could walk in an underground tunnel toward a concrete echo. The house is an arrangement of objects with which we move through the world. In this way we become familiar with a system of echolocation. Children of immigrants take their houses wherever they go, its sounds patter and shake like a drawerful of dishes, cups, utensils.



*Stitched across my sleeping bag and thin silver lines the
contour map which you may very well call belonging and
unveil our game since it resembles the ocean zone the mi-
gratory movements for the spreading of constellations
across a dark chart... we must tie them down attach them
to buoys so they may float indeterminately.*

Part 1: Letters to Mao



*where in the space, we take these angles,
fill it with air, and watch it hang from
the ceiling.*

bird. shell. dry hibiscus.

Part 2: House A; Geometry B



*Children of immigrants gather bits
of wire, thread, a safety pin; they arrange them like a blueprint, not knowing
why or how they know the shape.*

Part 3: How to Build an American Home



*where in the space, we take these angles,
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Part 1: Letters to Mao

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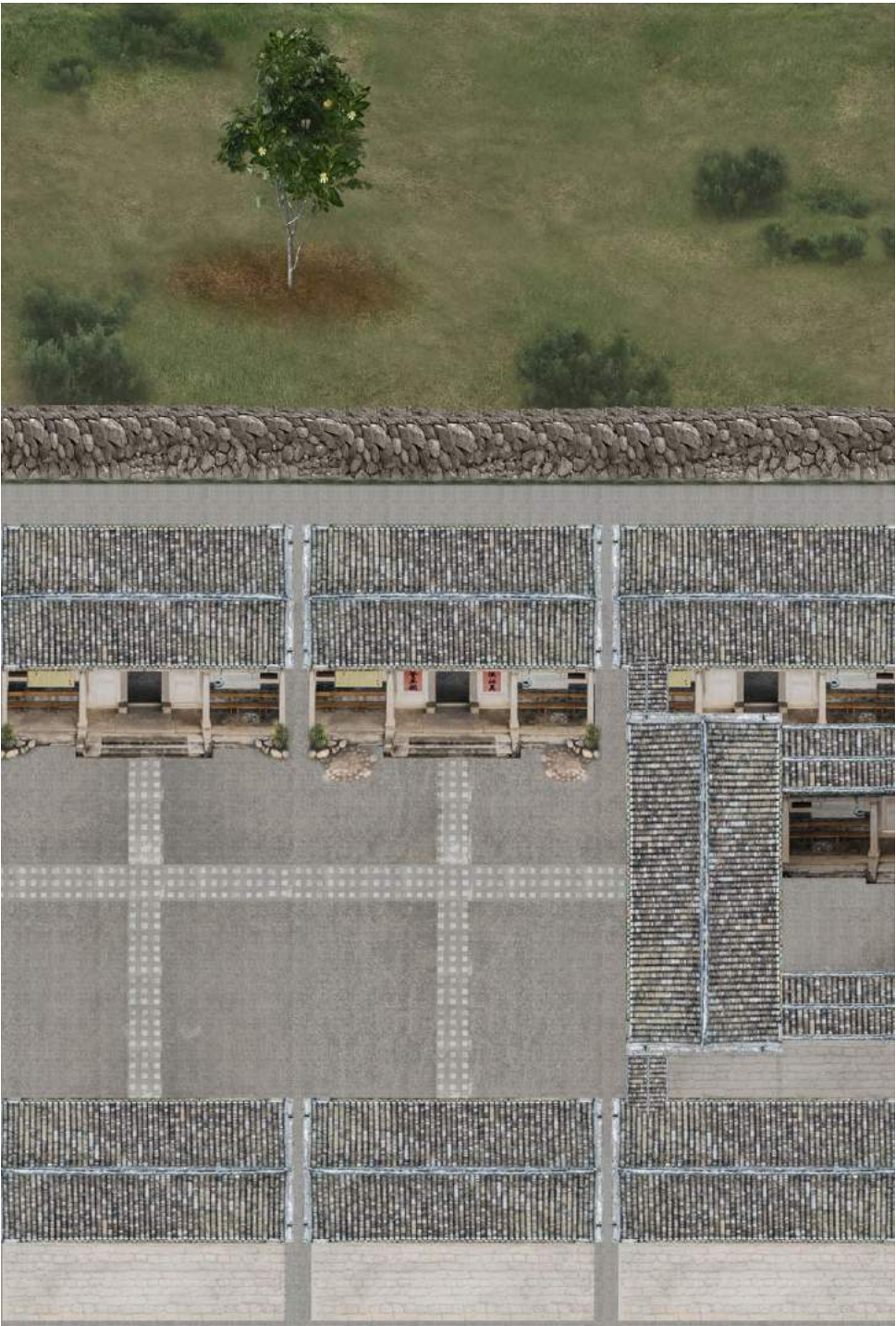
Part 3: How to Build an American Home

The third subject of translation is a biographical narrative – Suchou yao’s *On Brittle Ground*,¹⁰ a story of a migrant’s journey back to his home. In particular, three scenes were extracted.:

- 1) Ancestral home with guava tree
- 2) Converted to sandal factory
- 3) Nursery

Here, the translations were to reveal this duality and transformation in a space over time, also illustrating the lapse between memory and space.

¹⁰ Yao, S. (2017). *On brittle ground: My China journey*. Petaling Jaya, Selangor: Strategic Information and Research Development Centre.



Ancestral Home (1950s), Dabu, China

When Grandfather built his house in the 1930s, it was logical to stick to the traditional form and to fit his sons’ and their families’ needs around it. Its size and solidity gave it a showy grandeur in a village of ramshackle huts and mud brick houses. Soon after we left, some villagers moved in. First Aunt was given two rooms in the western wing where she and her children lived for many years. In the 1980s, as part of the reform, some of the properties were released back to the family.

Next to our house, outside the western wall, was a small field. A patch of stubby grass where nothing grew except for a few shrubs and a guava tree. The guava stood no more than two metres tall: a wild and straggly thing, its top was bare of leaves. To this field prisoners were brought after ‘struggle sessions’, made to kneel down under the tree, and shot in the back. After the first killings the guava’s branches began to sprout. In the spring after Land Reform came to the village, it started to bear fruit, Greedily soaking up the blood, the tree had taken on an luxuriant new life, That was how the villagers saw it. Grandmother’s view was less prosaic. It was the dead souls that nourish the tree, she said.

The old execution ground was just over the western wall through the double door that has now been removed. From the factory I walk the few steps through the archway. The ground of stumpy grass and the guava tree that I remember is no longer there Dear immigrant, the anthropologist begins, as if this were a language where I am falling, where I am always falling asleep.”



Ancestral Home partly transformed to sandal factory (2010s), Dabu, China

Inside the house I am shocked by the clutter and chaos. The hallway is a shamble of furniture, farm tools and bicycles; piles of bricks and sand cover the courtyard. I walk through the door to the eastern wing where we used to live. The rooms and hallways are boarded up by a maze of partitions.

...a small factory making plastic sandals takes up much of the western wing. In one room, the machines cut up the patterned soles and holes are punched into them for the straps. In the adjacent room, the agile fingers of young women working at breathtaking speed assemble the sandals; once finished, the hundreds and thousands of pairs in red, yellow and purple are stacked in a corner like tired, resting flamingos waiting to take flight.

I walk towards a group of women sitting next to a pile of flattened cardboard and help to assemble them into boxes.

...The house is now being put to a different use, and to accommodate a worthy enterprise that brings wealth and prosperity to the village. Grandmother in her grave would have approved.

Guava Tree transformed to a mud building that houses the Crèche (2010s), Dabu, China

The old execution ground was just over the western wall through the double door that has now been removed. From the factory I walk the few steps through the archway. The ground of stumpy grass and the guava tree that I remember is no longer there – a small mud brown building now stands in its place. The building houses the crèche run by the factory for its working mothers. .. I suppose the place is a fitting irony. It is right that a house devoted to the care of the young should sit on the ground once of blood and death. The killing ground is truly and forever gone – except for what lies beneath the earth and in the subterranean depths of memory.

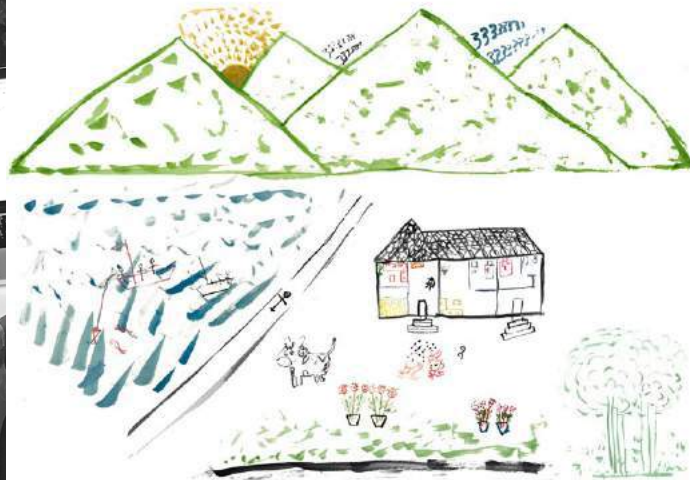
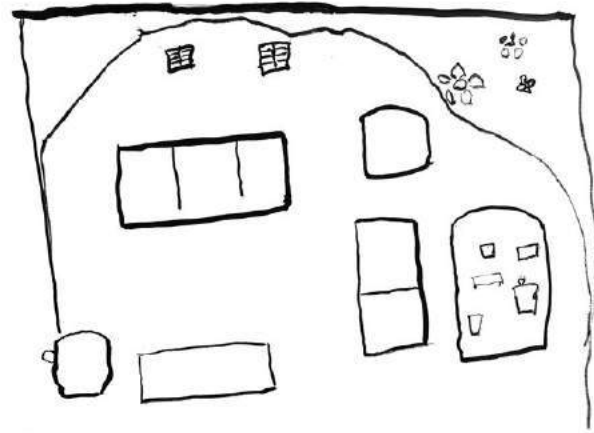
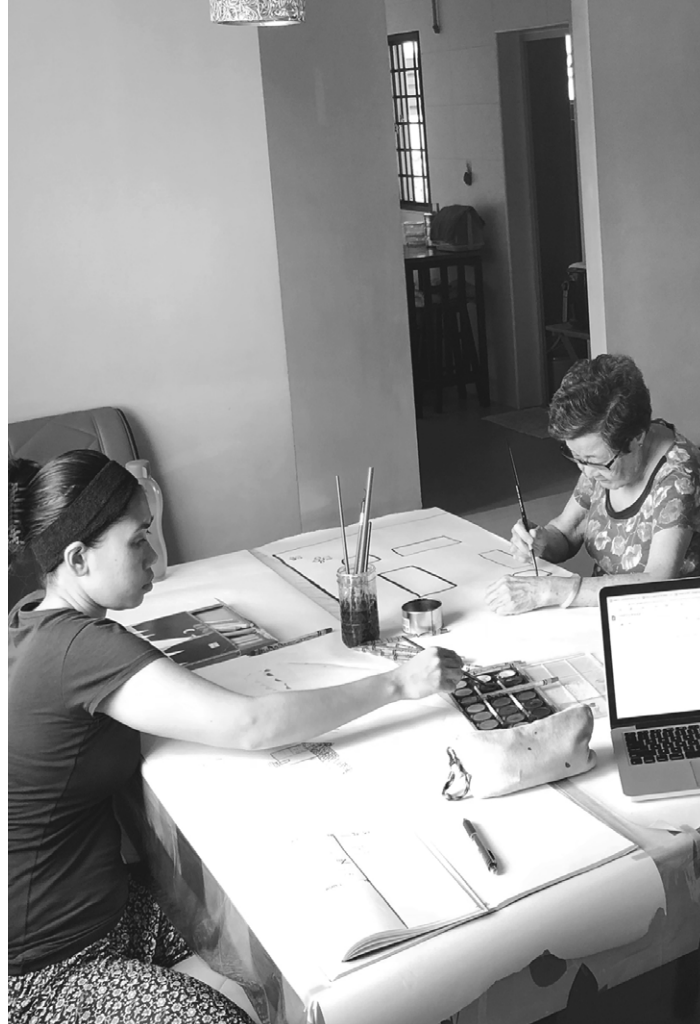
In the crèche the children are having their afternoon snack of cake and flavoured milk. They sit on the straw mat-covered floor, waiting to be served. ... Thus we slowly take our steps, divided by the years and all the things that separate our lives, and walk hand in hand, feeling each other’s firm grasp for reassurance, to the next room for the concert.

My interest in the communication and recollection of remote and intimate spaces grew after creating these preliminary representations of remote space.

Thus, I embarked on a journey with my grandmother to curate her unschooled representations of home.

Through writing - marks or words - memory is made architectural. The reconstruction of these nonextant spaces and all that they encompass allow memory to become eligible to the reader. This translation of space from memories also results in the communication of shape shifted memories.

Coincidentally, her position constitutes that of a migrant's. Sharing a tenuous relationship with space, space is fragmented and places move - migrants retain the ability to look past physical spaces, to rituals and actions that assemble it.



“Please draw your house.”

15 August 2020

Note: Grandma is aware of orientation. She is sitting back-faced to the living room as she draws, yet she places the subsequent spaces realistically in space. Eg she started with the thick line border (walls of her kitchen) and placed objects in relation to that - the sofa is parallel to that wall, in the middle of the paper.

Note: Unlike Grandma, Asri is not working with any boundaries. Her scenes are placed in spaces across the paper, then she goes back after to draw the background/ relationships between the objects.

I'm trying not to look over obviously as I type and record these - I know that Grandma will try to catch my eye and say again that she cannot know this and does not know what to draw She is beginning to draw something else!!

Grandma does not draw with known conventions.

She always draws a boundary first.

Where is she? why that line? Where is her image? What is she thinking about?

She is drawing to tell me about certain spaces.

Will she draw herself in the picture later on?

Asri (her helper) jumped on it immediately. She began with the background - sun peeking from behind some mountains. Then she continued with a flat drawing - the outline of a house with a thatched roof. She details the roof, then starts on the space inside - the plan within the house. She begins to colour in the background - painting the mountains green, and paints small blue strokes for the water. Two black lines separate the water and house, and there is a figure between the lines.

Grandma is very hesitant, and keeps saying she doesn't know how to draw. I ask her to walk around the house

In the water, Asri paints a red boat with human stick figures in it. She draws some flowers in flowerpots in the foreground, and some trees as well. She draws grass beneath the flowerpots, and a black line underneath. She goes back to detail the mountains - short green strokes - and the sun a bright yellow.

and just draw anything that comes to mind. = She draws 2 thick perpendicular bold lines around the paper I provided. She keeps asking for me to draw something to let her copy. Then she sits restlessly in her chair and looks around her house for 10 minutes. minutes. She keeps trying to look across to see what Asri is drawing, so I place a box in front of her to block her view.

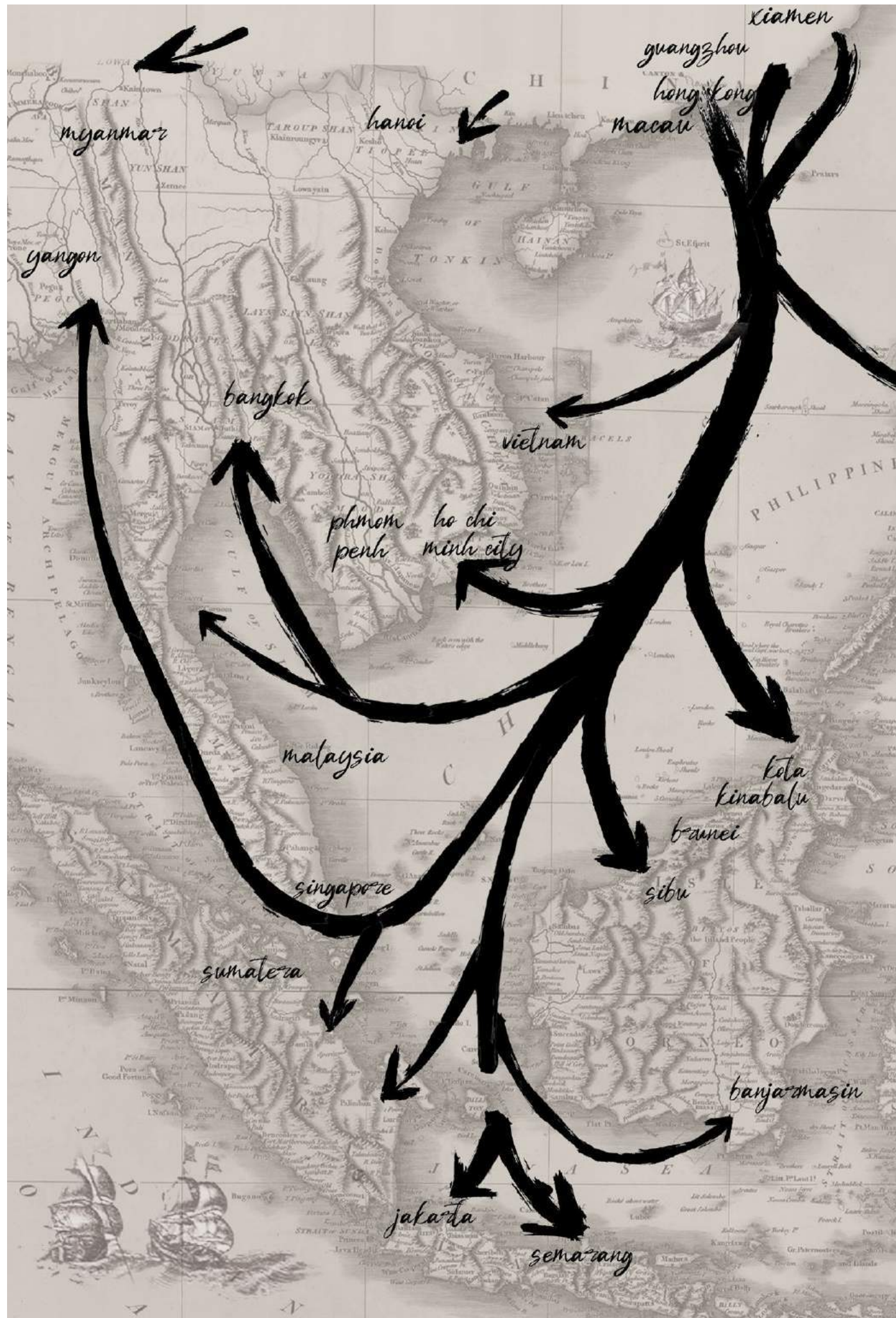
I try to give a prompt without instructing her what to do - start with her favourite space. She picks the sofa and draws a rectangle in the middle of the paper. (The sofa is in the middle of the living room) Then she stops for another 5 minutes and insists that she cannot draw.

Where is the TV in this space? She drew another box, at the edge of the paper (the TV is flushed against a wall) . She draws the chair she sits in. Then stops again and says she doesn't know what to draw.

What's near your chair? She draws the vase of flowers. Same cycle: she needs a prompt.

Where do you like to put your cup? She gets up and gets her big cup from the table, heads to the kitchen and gets a smaller cup (which would be easier to copy on paper, i guess - easier scale). She then draws a cup (in elevation), the same scale as the object, beside the TV (although she doesn't place items there).

Grandma draws another large rectangle and some little squares (another room, with its objects?). She turns around to look at her living room, and goes back to detail the sofa - 3 segments for the long sofa, and 2 for the shorter sofa section. She draws another perpendicular vertical line, closing the boundary. Then she draws a crooked line, an arch at the top of the paper, and draws some windows. (She is facing some windows) (Perhaps the arch is a boundary between the wall and floor?) She puts down her brush and gets up from her chair to get some water. When she comes back, she stares at the paper, brows furrowed and mutters things to herself. She picks up the brush again, and draws something beside the flower.



Tale of two strangers: Grandmother's story

My interest in the communication and recollection of remote and intimate spaces grew after creating these preliminary representations of remote space.

Thus, I embarked on a journey with my grandmother to curate her unschooled representations of home.

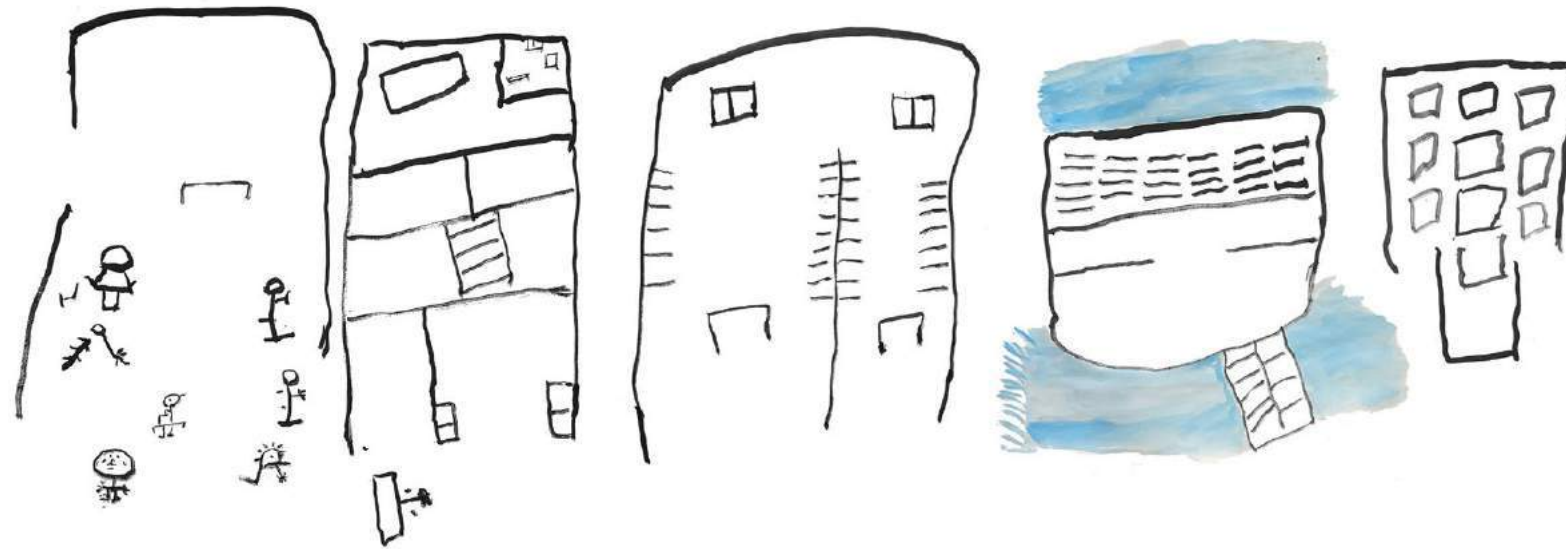
Through writing - marks or words - memory is made architectural. The reconstruction of these nonextant spaces and all that they encompass allow memory to become eligible to the reader. This translation of space from memories also results in the communication of shape shifted memories.

Coincidentally, her position constitutes that of a migrant's. Like many Chinese immigrants from port provinces in the early 1990s, her father emigrated from Xiamen, China to British Malaya for job prospects. Together with her mother and brother, Grandmother followed him here.

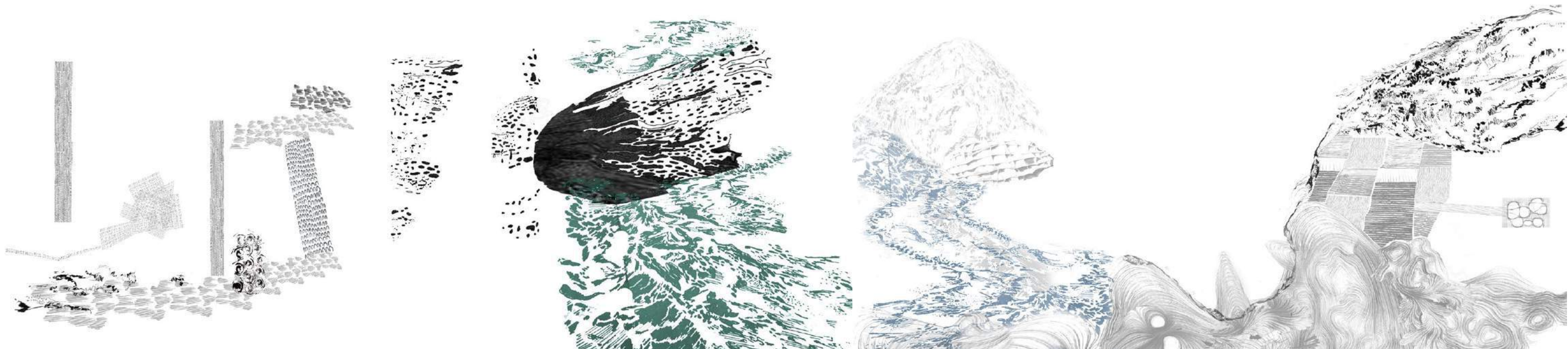
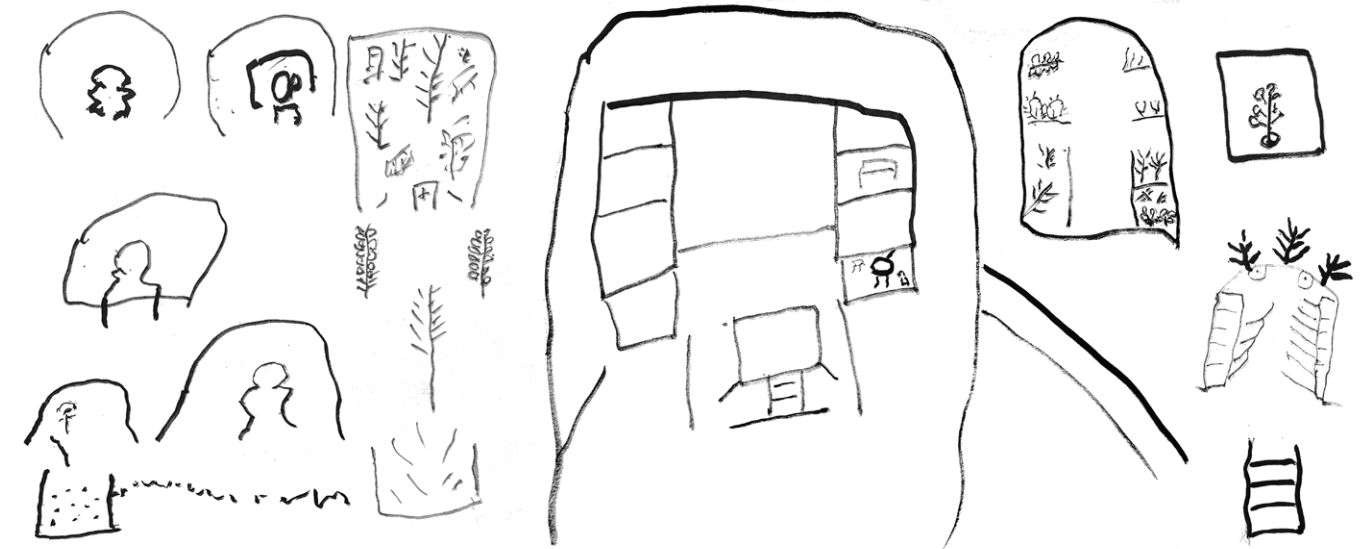
Sharing a tenuous relationship with space, space is fragmented and places move - migrants retain the ability to look past physical spaces, to rituals and actions that assemble it.

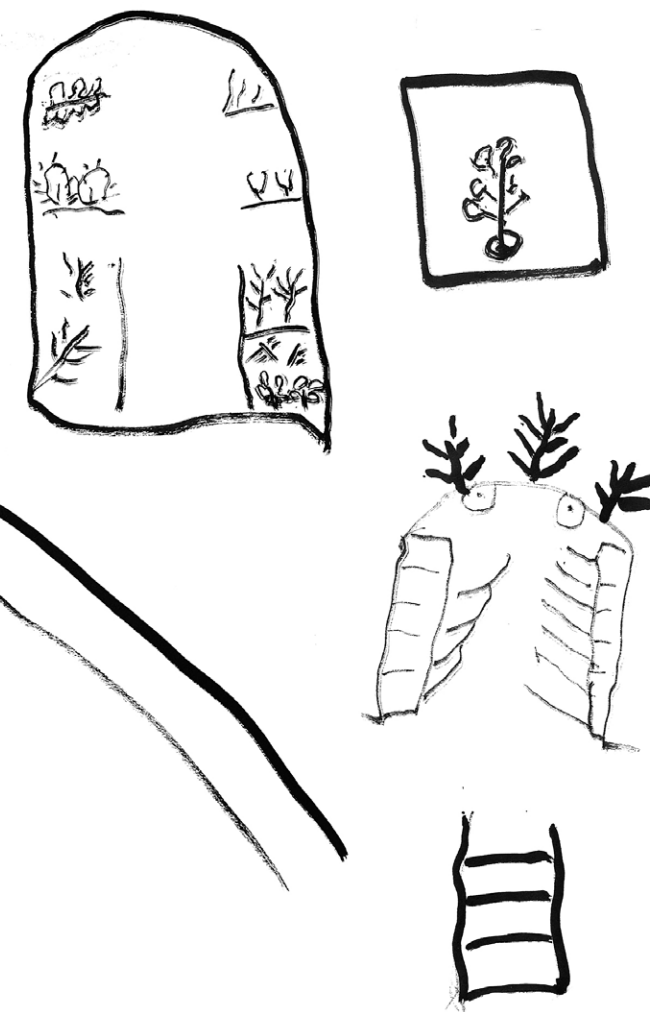
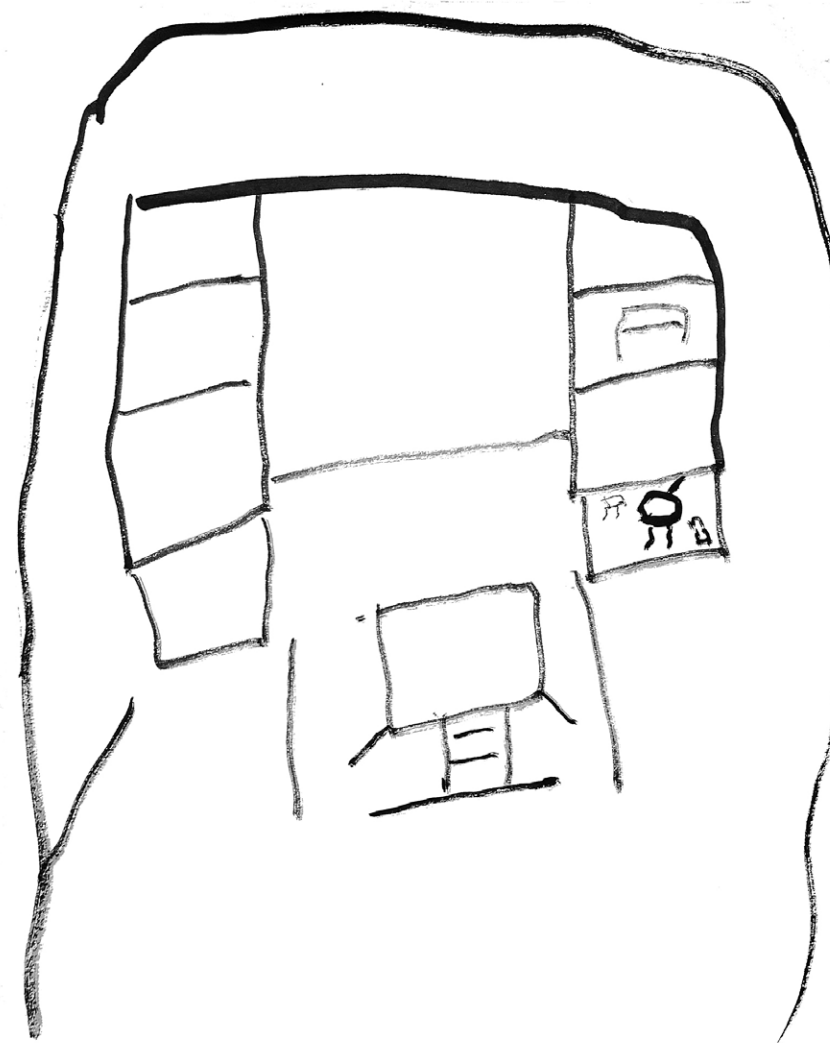


Video: <https://youtu.be/lc23Uy6WEp8>



Video: <https://youtu.be/GIJyvAZqsVc>





(In Xiamen)

We climbed up the mountain to chop firewood, and sold them in another village by going from house to house.

I had to walk sideways like a crab with the wood, because the path was very narrow.

We had to cross a river to get to the village to sell wood. The rocks were very slippery because of algae so we had to be careful not to fall in.

Some villagers tried to cheat us of wood - we used a weighing balance, and some people would try to say that the wood we chopped was less than it actually is, by tipping the scales.

Lived at the bottom of a very very big mountain.

My grandparents built the house - three families stayed in it. There were seven rooms - some for cooking, some for sleeping. I shared a room with my mother and brother.

My father moved to Singapore when I was six.

Once, one relative thought that my mother stole their pig. He proceeded to hit her as she was breastfeeding my brother. She tried to run away and ask for help, but nobody wanted to get involved.

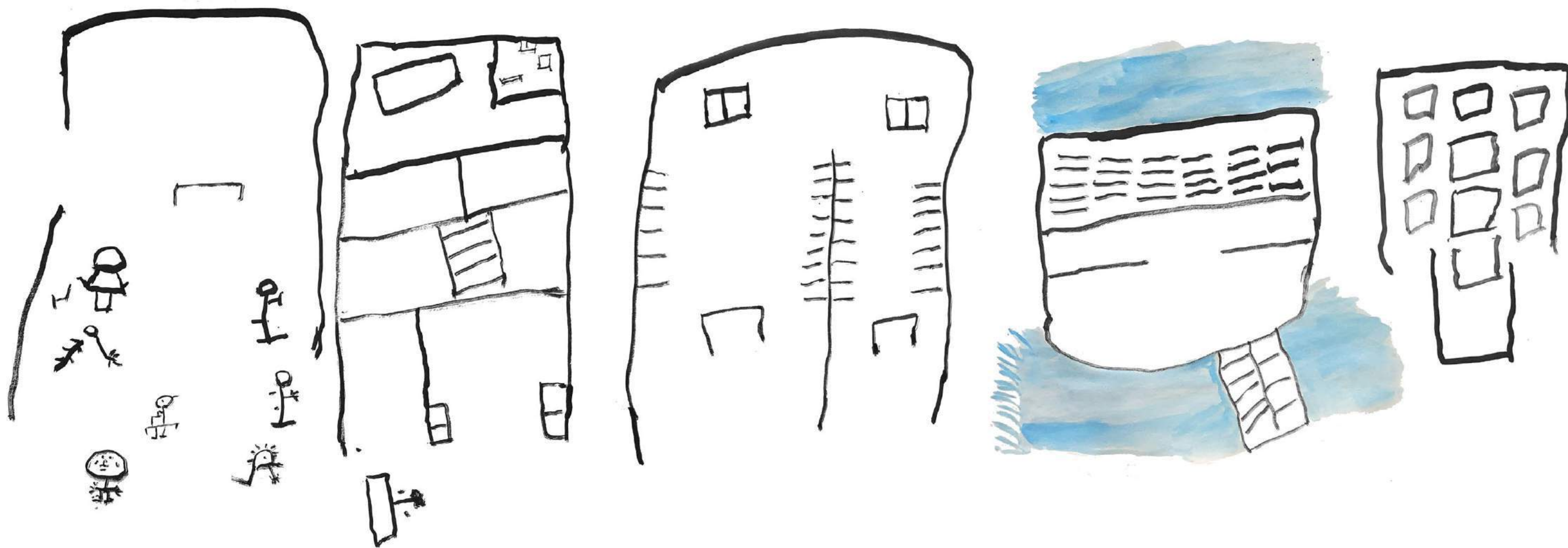
It was very unsanitary.

I had to walk along bottom of the mountain to reach the farm.

I helped out on the farm - we grew some crops for food. I had to walk a distance to collect cow dung for fertilizer with my mom. Once, I fell and got it all over me.

When I was ten years old, I helped feed cows for food. I didn't get paid, but they would give me a bowl of potatoes.





I started to mend burlap sacks as a job. It was a good job and my boss liked me because I was very focused and did not socialise. I worked there for 6 years, till I was 20.

*My family rented a room in a shophouse in Joochiat.
At the bottom of the shophouse, the owners rented it for businesses such as burlap sacks shops and a fruit vendor.
The fruit vendor teased me because I did not know what was durian. He passed some to me. I smelt it, threw it back at him and ran away. He laughed at me!*

It was just a large room, split into two - for males and females. My younger brother could stay with my mother and I because families could stay together.

We waited and stayed in a hotel for about a week because no one knew when the boat was available.

So long as we had enough to eat, everything else was okay.

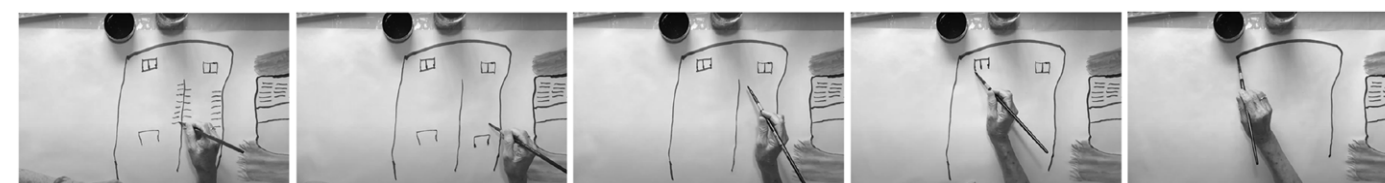
We were on the boat for seven days and nights.

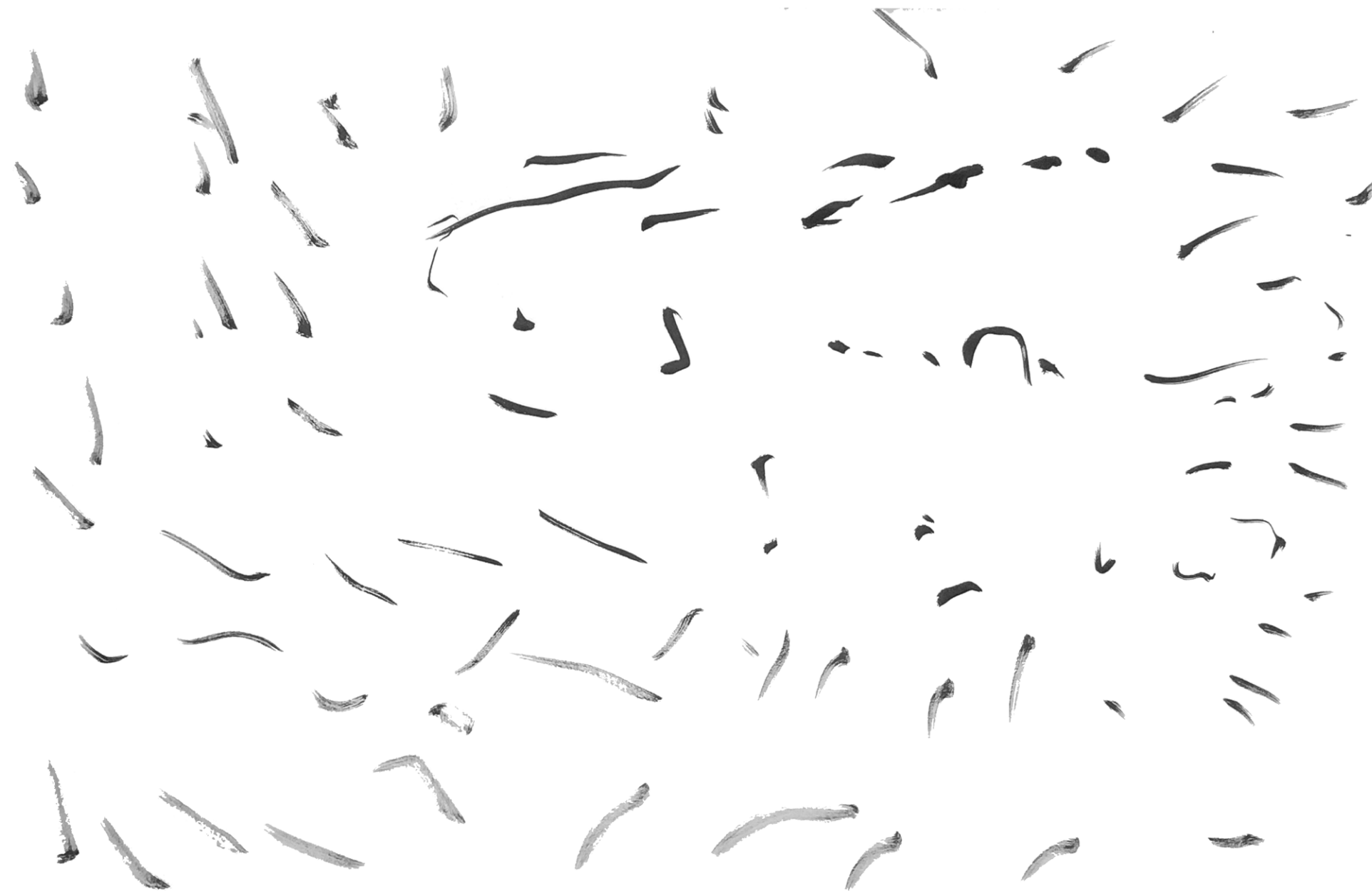
*When I peeped over the side of the boat,
the sea was deep green.*

*It was runoured that if someone fell sick and died,
they would just throw the body overboard.*

All I brought was a bag of clothes.

We only knew that the boat had docked when other people began moving and packing.





Video: <https://youtu.be/7QIGCJ3oP5U>

“

My boss collected spoilt burlap sacks from vendors, pig farmers, and brought them back. I would help to mend and patch them.

*Ten by ten, roll and tie;
ten by ten, roll and tie.*

They were broken, so I mended them. There was a neighbour who dealt with selling metal, he recommended me for the job. I went to my boss' house, I earned about \$20 something a month.

There was another colleague who left after getting married, another one who was not serious, kept laughing and talking to everybody. I was very quiet. I never looked up at anything or anyone.

Some people didn't stay long, some girls kept chatting with customers - the boss did not like that. I came from China at 14, started working two month later, until I was 20 years old when I got married. I worked the longest.

”





Someone introduced our parents - both sides agreed on the marriage. Both families met once, they sent a ring to our house, then we took engagement photos. I sold the ring when we didn't have money.

First son died when he was 2, when they moved to the kampung.



Video: <https://youtu.be/ypNGf6PG9nk>

He was on tube feeding, then he could not talk. His tongue started to protrude out and change colour to purple. He could not talk. I asked him 'what's wrong?' but he could not reply. So I called your dad and he rushed over. And I remember you went to find a nurse who was your neighbour to bring over. The ambulance came with the doctor but it was too late.

Are you satisfied with your place now?
Yes, very satisfied. Feel happy because its comfortable, can see very far. And its very big.

Initially from the hall to dining area, there were 4 steps down. But father-in-law said its not good for feng shui - so we asked the contractor to change it to 3 steps.

Grandpa would buy chicken wings for birthday celebrations.

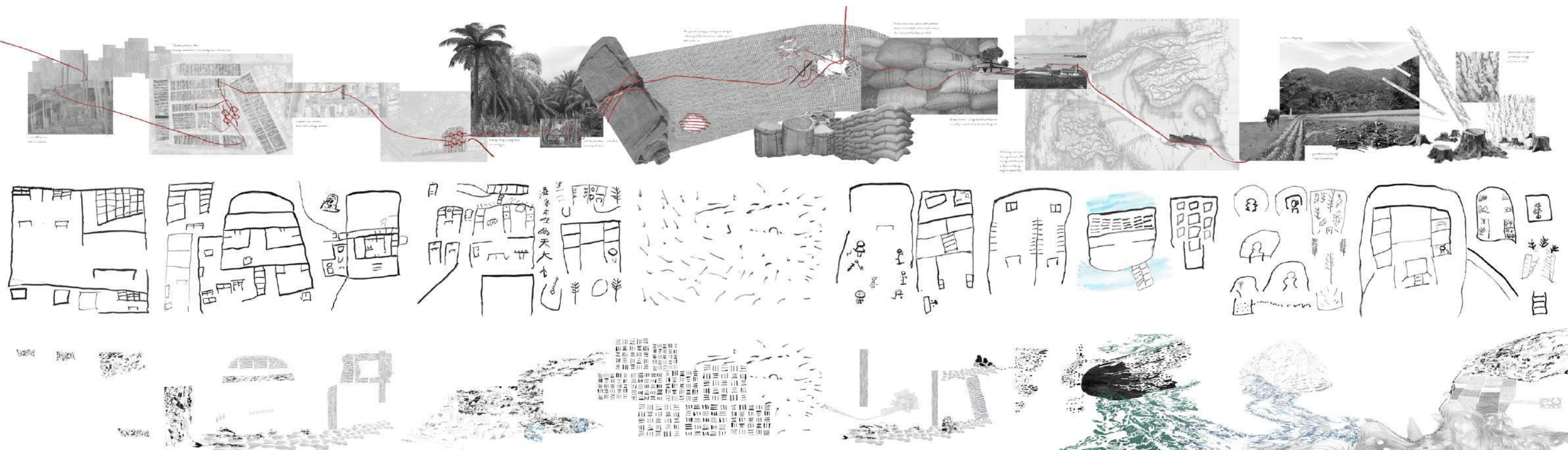
One time, an old relative came to borrow money from grandfather. He owned a farm that raises pigs, but ran out of money to buy feed for the pigs. Your grandpa lent him some money. Later, he struck 4d and he bought a lot of food for our family - bought duck, chicken, meat, etc.



Video: https://youtu.be/df_lAsLpcpA

We normally wake up at 3 to 4am. I would make him a drink, then he would cycle to nearby road where his friend will fetch him, bring him to wholesaler who sells produce. Everyday he did that then when he will go to the terrace houses to sell.

Once, this guy used a very big knife, knocked your grandpa's head. It was still dark, dim lighting. He tried to crawl up, but the guy put the knife blade up in the ground, so grandpa stumbled, and slashed both arms. His friend found him, brought him to his pickup, seeked help from the families. They all rushed down to see him. Your grandpa's brother drove him to the clinic, and the helpers used cloth to crap around his hands. In the clinic, they washed his wounds but it was so but they couldn't sew them because they were in too bad condition.



5 of 6 of Grandma's children were interviewed individually, regarding the three houses they lived in together with grandma - the kampung, Asia Garden apartment, and Peminpin terrace house. They were asked to describe each of the houses and their memories linked to the space.

After, they were given the same setup as grandma - a horizontal scroll and black paint - and asked to draw the three houses as they wished.

The results were interesting - memories were strongly linked to age in relation to space, and gender. A collage of all three houses was then created - an amalgamation of memories and representation of spaces.



Tale of two strangers: Grandmother's story
unschooled representations, translated

Xiamen: stranded

The place I sleep is stuck in a well. The seven other rooms are beneath me, obscured from view. The common area lifts me, above and into the yard, closer to the sky. Home is here, out of the house and free of people. I can peek over the brim momentarily, but I am still stuck.

One day, there was a flood; gushing waters carrying me out of the well, out of the world I knew. My eyes adjust to the unfolding scenes slowly; (seventy years later, it is still adapting).



Hotel: disoriented

I am in a labyrinth, a space dictated by repeating walls and doors.

There is no relief, no visible living space. (Unlike complex systems that lurk beneath planes.)

Between cells - up, down, left, right - a path carved out by the ebb and flow of vertical planes. The intersection is a ridge, a junction, a fork that garners agency. To turn the corner or make do.

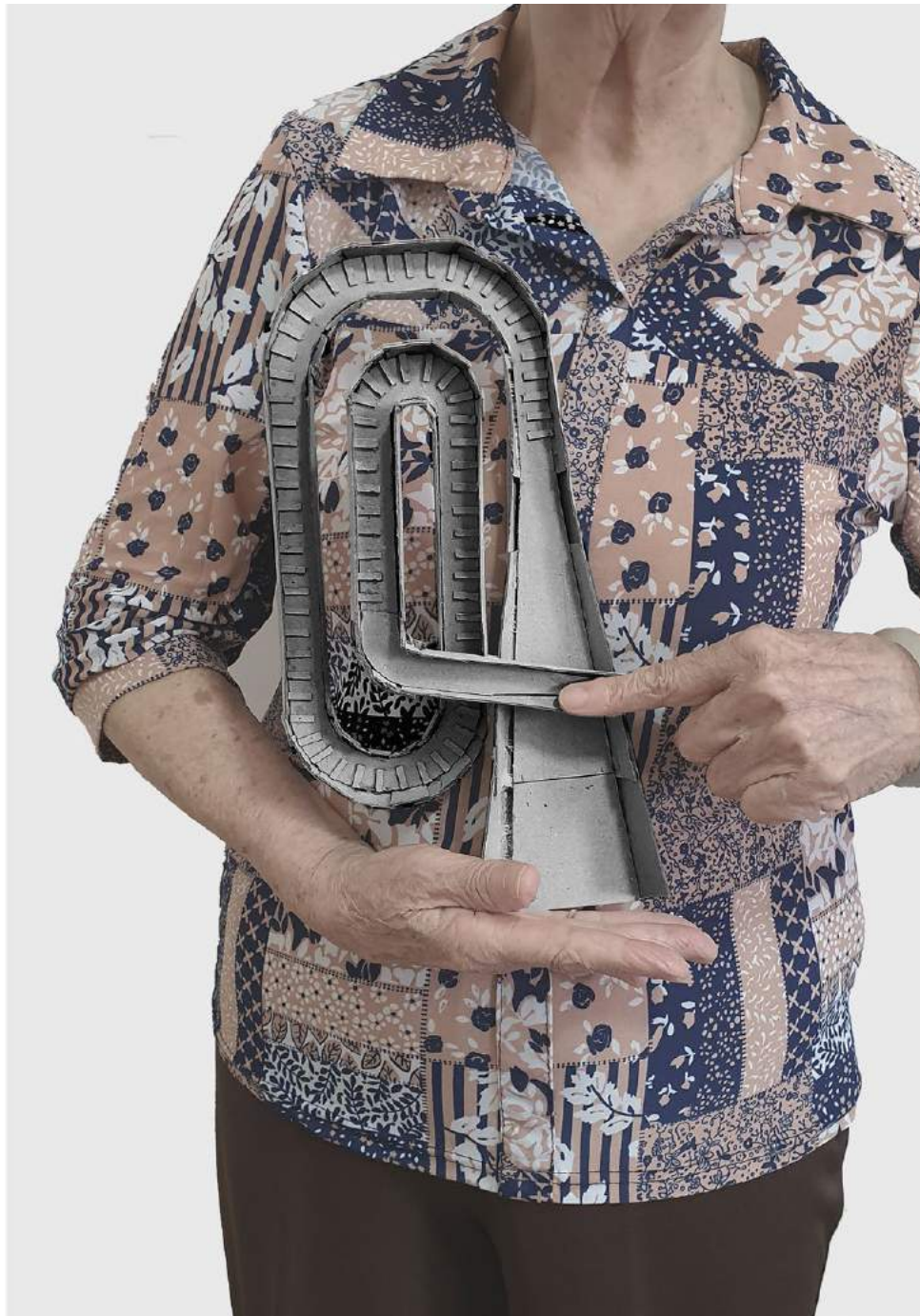
Around the corner, a stream of amber overflows on the marble floor, leading to a balmy narrow space with a singular panoramic opening. Its breadth glowed softly as dawn bounced off the white walls, colouring the volume a golden hue.



Quarantine: *dazed*

Disoriented after seven days and nights in the middle of nowhere, we were sucked into a washing machine one by one. This is a tube where time stopped. Rows upon rows of rectangles lined the neverending wall like soldiers. The air is stale as I follow the walls in a straight line, not seeing any edges or ends. Time was fuzzy in the heat and humidity; day and night melded into each other and into the hard surfaces that surrounded us.

Suddenly, I'm extruded out from the shadows and the sun blinds me. I am told that I am sanitised, free from foreign germs.

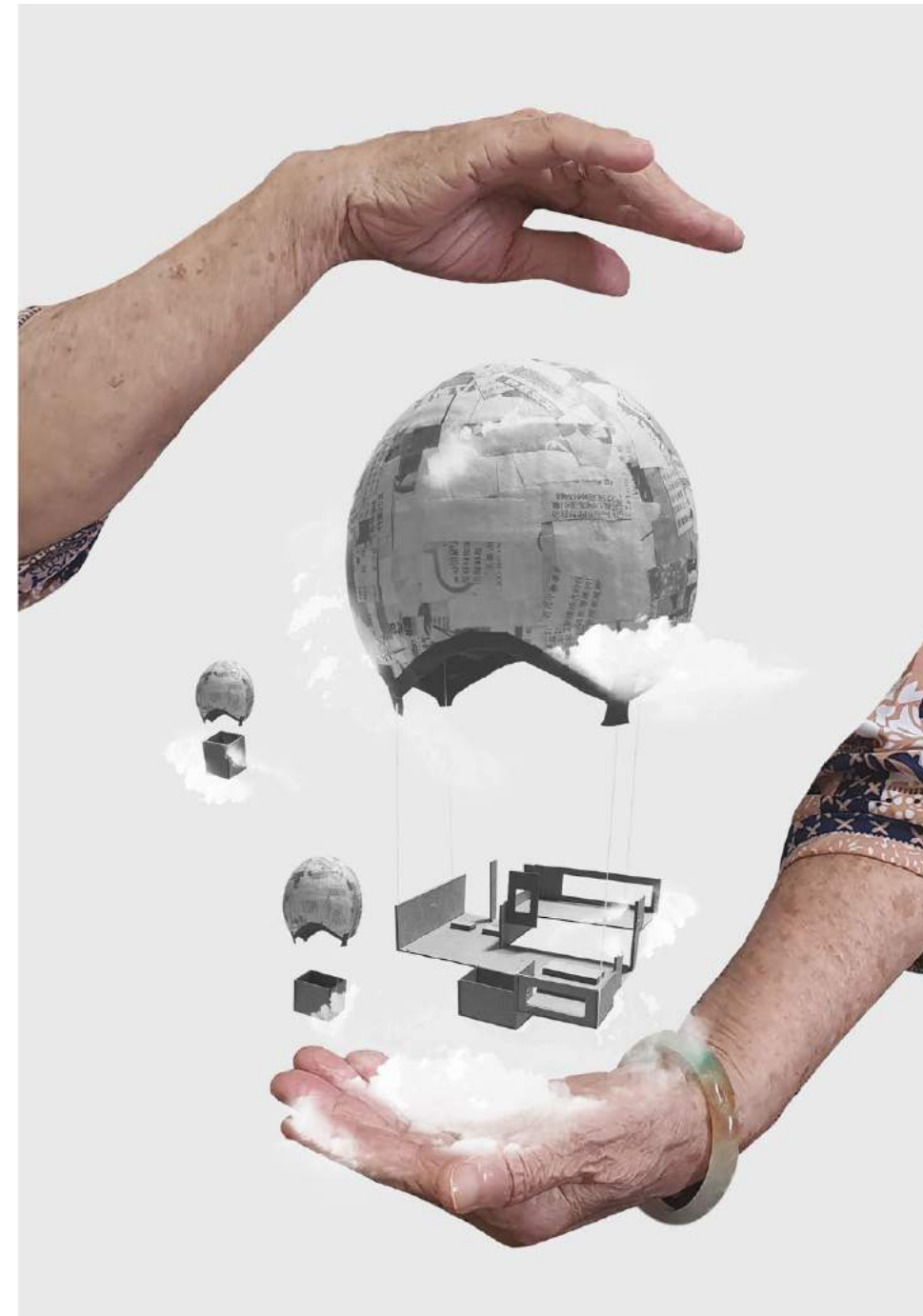


HDB: *lofty, ample*

This is a home.

In the background, rooms retreat one by one, drifting lazily away from the spaciouly lit area.

Daybreak finds its place in the warm presence in a large space as light thaws at the walls. Windows stretch the lengths of the room and dissolve at the edges as light trickles in. Boundaries are moulded by views from below - scenes unfolding gently as the sleepy neighbourhood wakes up.



Tale of two strangers: Asri's story

Asri's story is regaled with household objects familiar to her.

A series of household objects of different scales and forms was collated, and she was able to walk around the house to grab anything she wanted to use in the recreation of the houses.

Here, she showed the the series of homes she has lived at, from her home in Indonesia, to the 5 houses that she has lived and worked in Singapore.

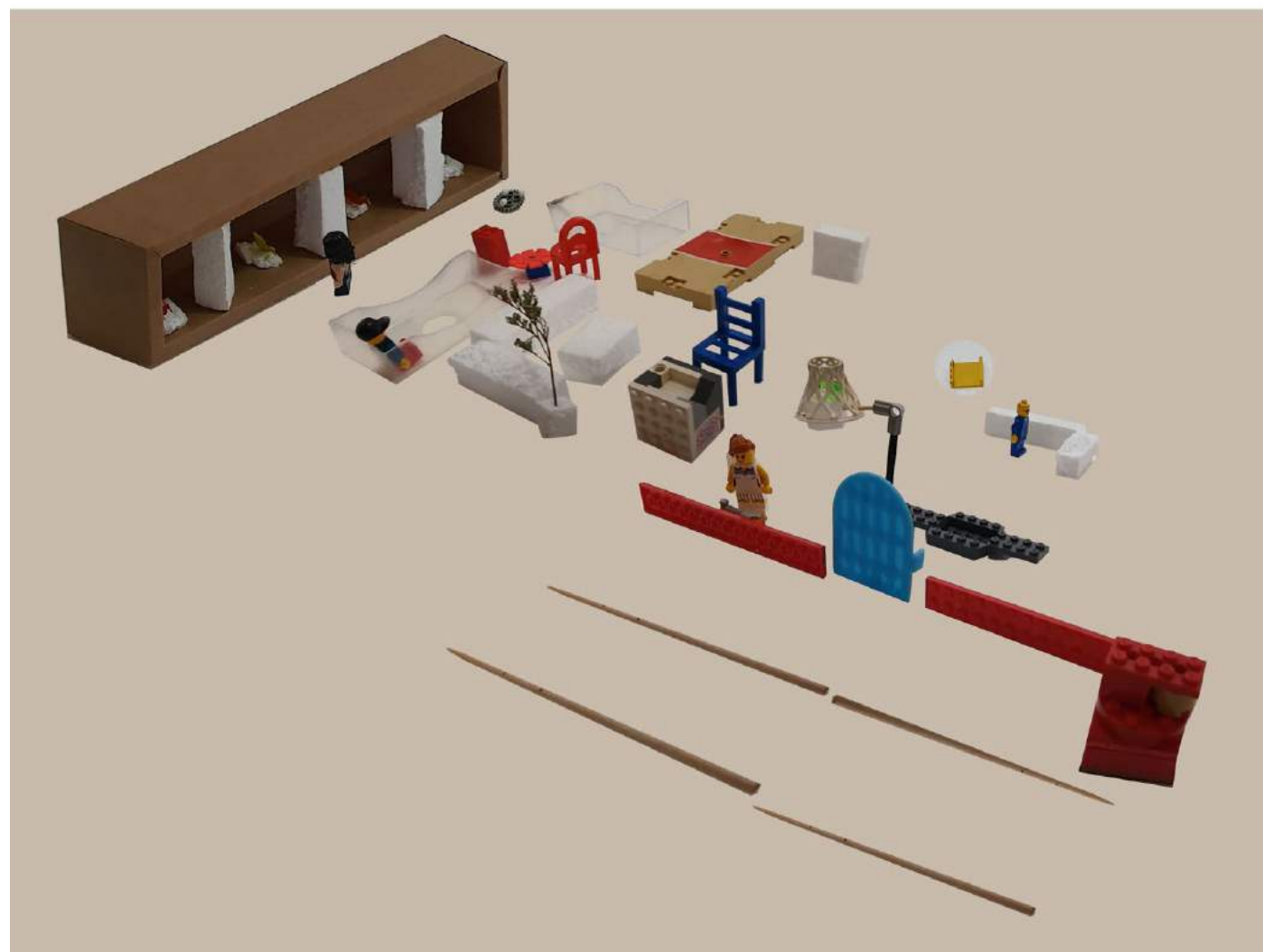
This unschooled representation of space is built from familiar household objects. The significance lies in the moving and positioning of things, with their proximities and heights to show her perception of space.





We have 3 rooms, 1 kitchen, 1 toilet, living room, chickens outside and one yellow bird inside.

My favourite part of the house is the chickens - we had so many, like 50? I had a favourite - it was a black chicken. I would shampoo my favourite chickens.

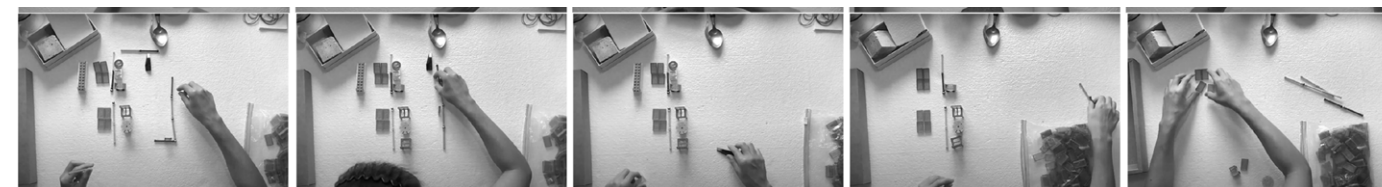


Every Hari Raya, we would change the colours of the walls to green.

My husband is always in the kitchen - he likes to cook.

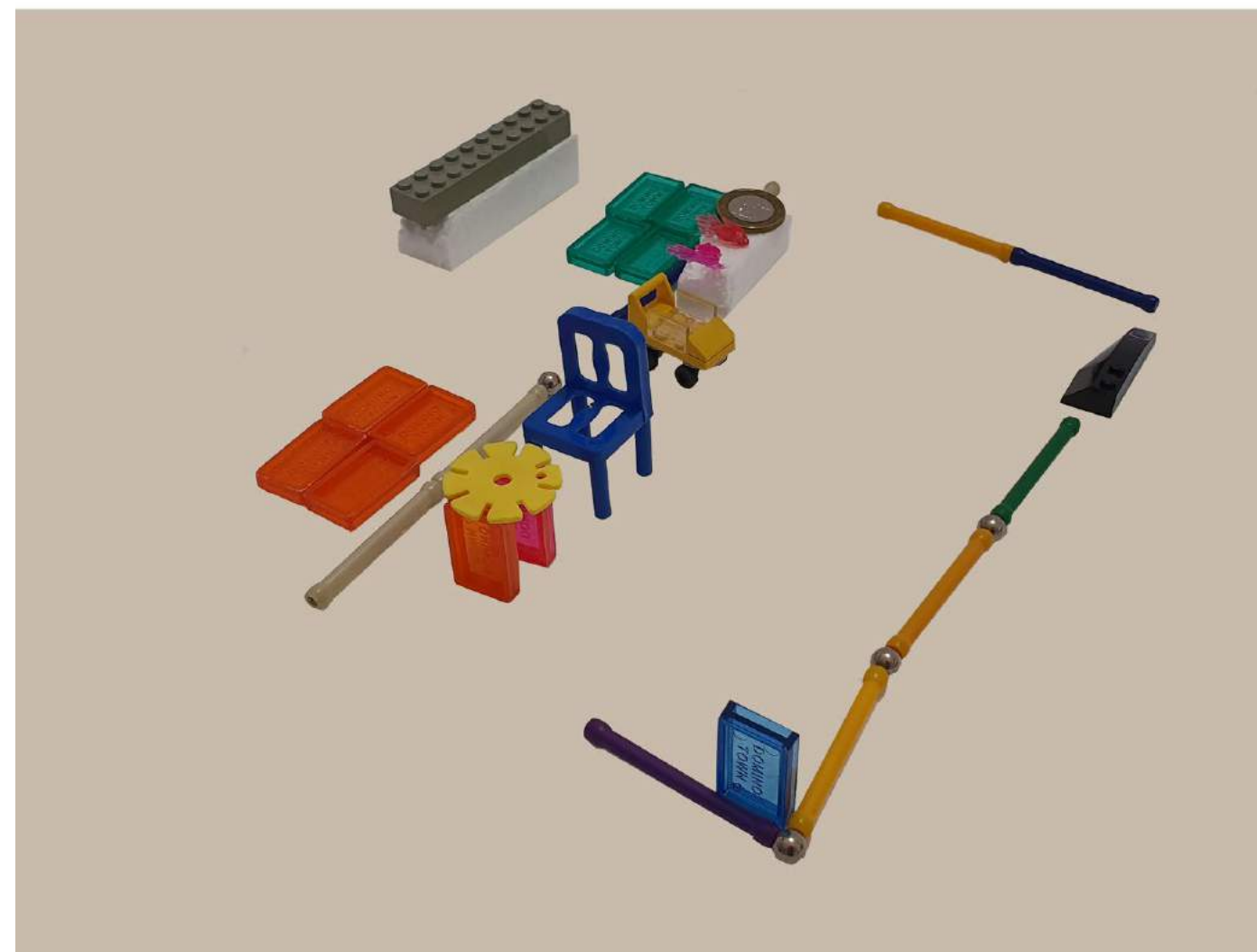
The girl (her daughter) likes to play bicycle outside.

The boy (her son) likes to stay in the room and play with the tablet.



I worked in the first house for 6 years. It was just me and one grandma. 2 bed, kitchen + small living room

Very long rooms
It was a very small house, only 2 people. There were 2 beds in one room, grandma's and mine. She laid on the best of the time. Once a day i will help her sit up and bring her in front of the tv for 2 hours.



I was not uncomfortable because no employer there. No restrictions so I could talk to my family anytime.

I could not speak Chinese but could talk through (body gestures) and I learnt some phrases like 'jiabhuey' (do you want to eat?)

I cooked for her. I normally stayed outside the room because it was abit smelly. I helped her bathe and change diapers 2 to 3 times a day.

Her daughter only came once a month to pay. And she will come if I call and tell her that there is no more medicine. The grandmother died 5 years 8 months in, then I worked for the daughter for 3 months till the contract ended.

(were you scared when she died?) No (were you sad?) Abit only, because we did not talk much.

I worked in the second house for 2 years. I had to take care of 2 children. We always went on holiday - India, Thailand, Italy, Hong Kong.

It was a condo, there was toys everywhere. 4 bedroom, 3 toilet, 1 kitchen, living room - on the 23rd storey.

Mam is from hong kong, then the sir is Italian.

I had to take care of the children, not really clean the house. The important thing is to clean the toys everyday. I don't really need to cook - every lunch order, dinner sometimes. I only cooked once or twice a week.

*Sir always working outside -
only comes back once a month.*

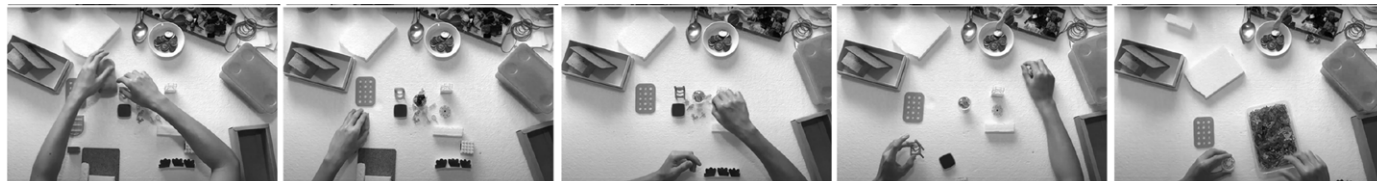


Mam didnt work, we always went out. Every day. We went to the playground, the playground in the malls. We went to suntec 5 times a week, then the beach on weekends. We meet her friend at Suntec City, from 9am to 3/4pm. Her friend also had 2 kids and 1 maid.

*Saturday and Sunday we will o to the beach to sun tan.
Children will play in the sand, we hace to take care of them.*

They play in the front room, I read the chinese story books. Mam would play with the phone, watch TV (stayed in her room, sometimes she would come out).

I dont want to continue cos I'm tired - have to finish the contract - went back (to Indonesia) for 2 weeks then come back to spore to continue working.



I went back (to Indonesia) for 2 months, then came back, had to stay with agent for 3 days to wait for the next employer.

*It was a condo. 5 people sleep in 1 room.
3 bedroom (1 for her, 2 for children, 2 girls, about
10+ and 20+), living room (5 of us), 2 toilets.*

We put our luggage in the living room.

It was a condo. 5 people sleep in 1 room. 3 bedroom (1 for her, 2 for children, 2 girls, about 10+ and 20+), living room (5 of us), 2 toilets.

We put our luggage in the living room.

Husband comes back at 2 am at night.



Agent work in the room, sometimes check maid, take maid from batam - sentosa, pasir panjang.

If she's home, we sit in the kitchen and read and study - cannot use phone at all. Can talk to each other, but not too loud.

Her own helper will cook, we clean the house together. Living room just piano, table, tv - not alot of things.





*I stayed in the third house for only 3 months, because it was too big.. it was in hollang, with four levels.
5 ppl in the house - 2 guys, one married, one hasn't married. Everyone worked except mam who cooked.*



Mam spoke malay, cannot speak english. So we could talk.

*First floor have karaoke room, billiard, office, storeroom, my room (basement)
Second floor - living room, kitchen, behind the living room have a garden
Third floor - bedroom and swimming pool
Fourth floor - mam room .*

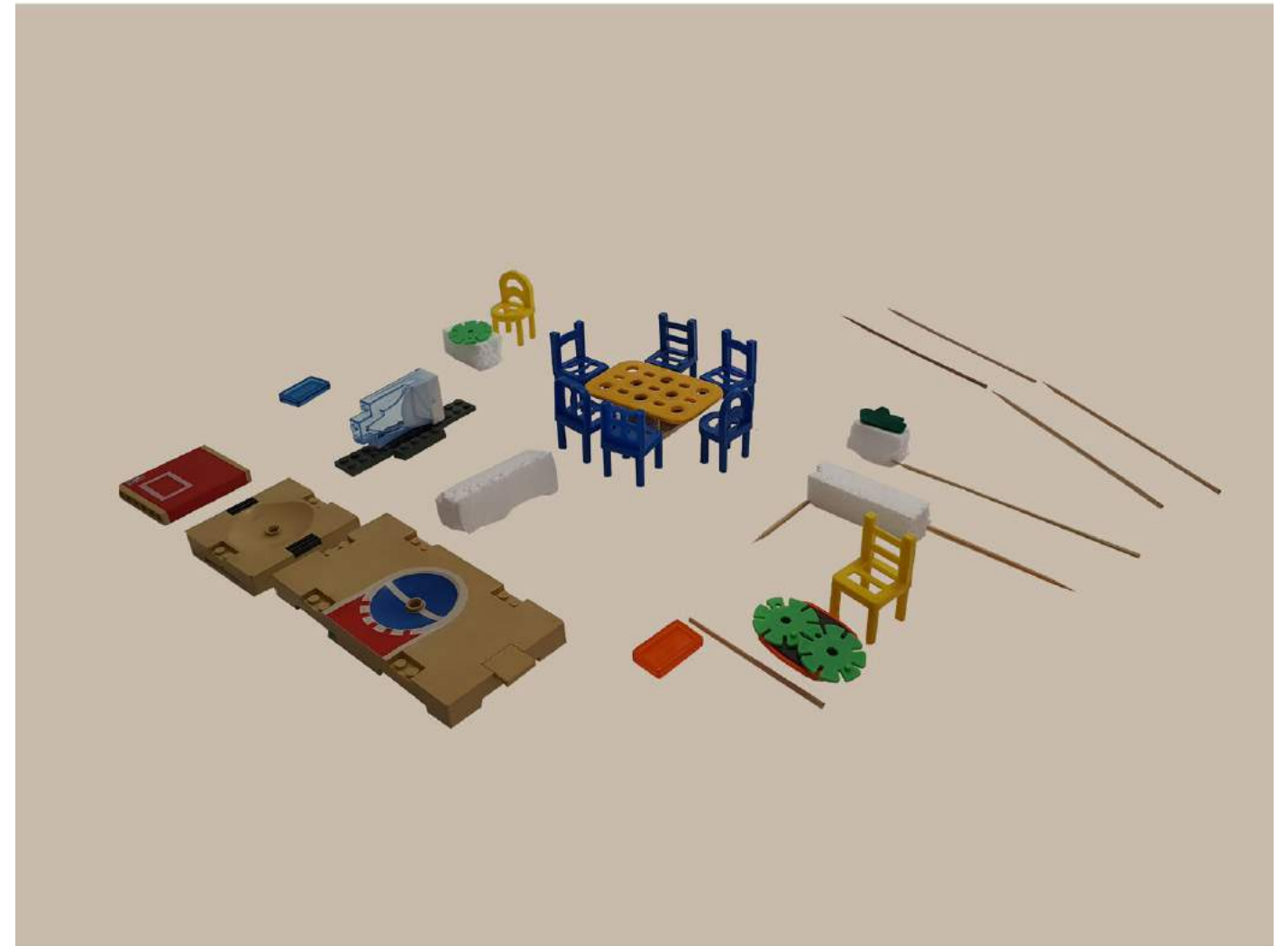
There was a lift inside

*Nice but i was very tired - the house was very big
She doesn't want two helpers - if two then will be ok.
5 cars, i have to clean once a week and vacuum inside*

They asked me to clean everything everyday.



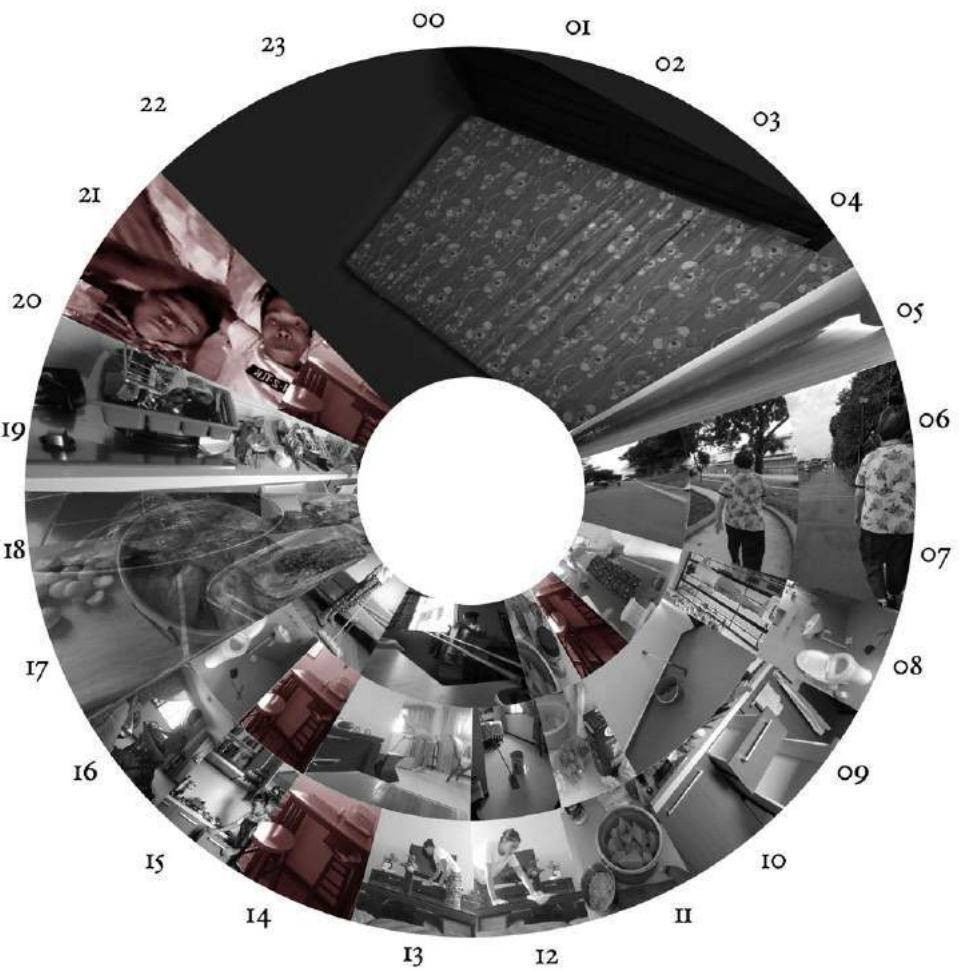
*This is the fourth house. Wake up 6, mop, sweep
Popo wake up, we exercise - after coming back, continue to*



*Wake up 6, mop, sweep.
Popo wake up, we exercise - after coming back, continue to mop
Popo shower, i wash both toilets, find something to do - window/ clean kitchen/ fan
Cook lunch for both of us
Sweep the floor again
Prepare something for dinner
Cook
Dapao
Shower
Call
Sleep at 10*

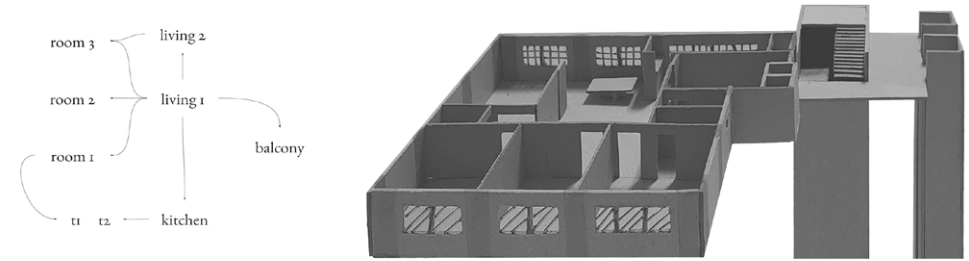
Asri also offered to represent the house through a media amiliar to her - these are pictures that she took throughout three days that describe her routine. And as she was telling me about it, she always mentioned the time in relation to her activity.

In particular, because she sleeps in the same room as my grandmother, the place in the house she spends most her time is in the kitchen at the table - that's where she sits as she takes her breaks, and where she calls home every night.



Tale of two strangers: Asri's story
 unschooled representations, translated

This a translation of her representation of space - the kitchen is wrapped around the circumference of the space, taking up the most prominent and largest surface area. This is the model of the actual home.



Tale of two strangers: Asri's story
unschooled representations, translated

Indonesia Home: *free boundaries*

I made my home with my chickens and my sewing machine. This is home, with my family. We each have our own spaces with their implied boundaries. Indoors and outdoors blended in and out, space was easy and flexible - every hari raya, we would change the colour of the walls.

11 years ago, I left home by helping to make another home.



One Room Flat: *routines begin*

There is a smell in the bedroom that I can escape from at my table, behind the wall. Freedom is away from sight, away from prying eyes. There is only one body in the same space, in a bed, in a wheelchair, whose care is in my hands.

6 years; everyday - Gestures, breakfast, lunch, dinner. I put her in the wheelchair and take the same path, past the walls to the bright screen in the corner.



4 storey house: claustrophobic

Three months. Four levels. Five cars. One swimming pool.

Here, multiple objects of multiple textures are cramped in the house, I cannot see the walls. I am confronted with various surfaces at different scales and heights, trying to catch my breath but the floors just go on without me.

Four levels. Five cars. One Swimming pool. Zero space.

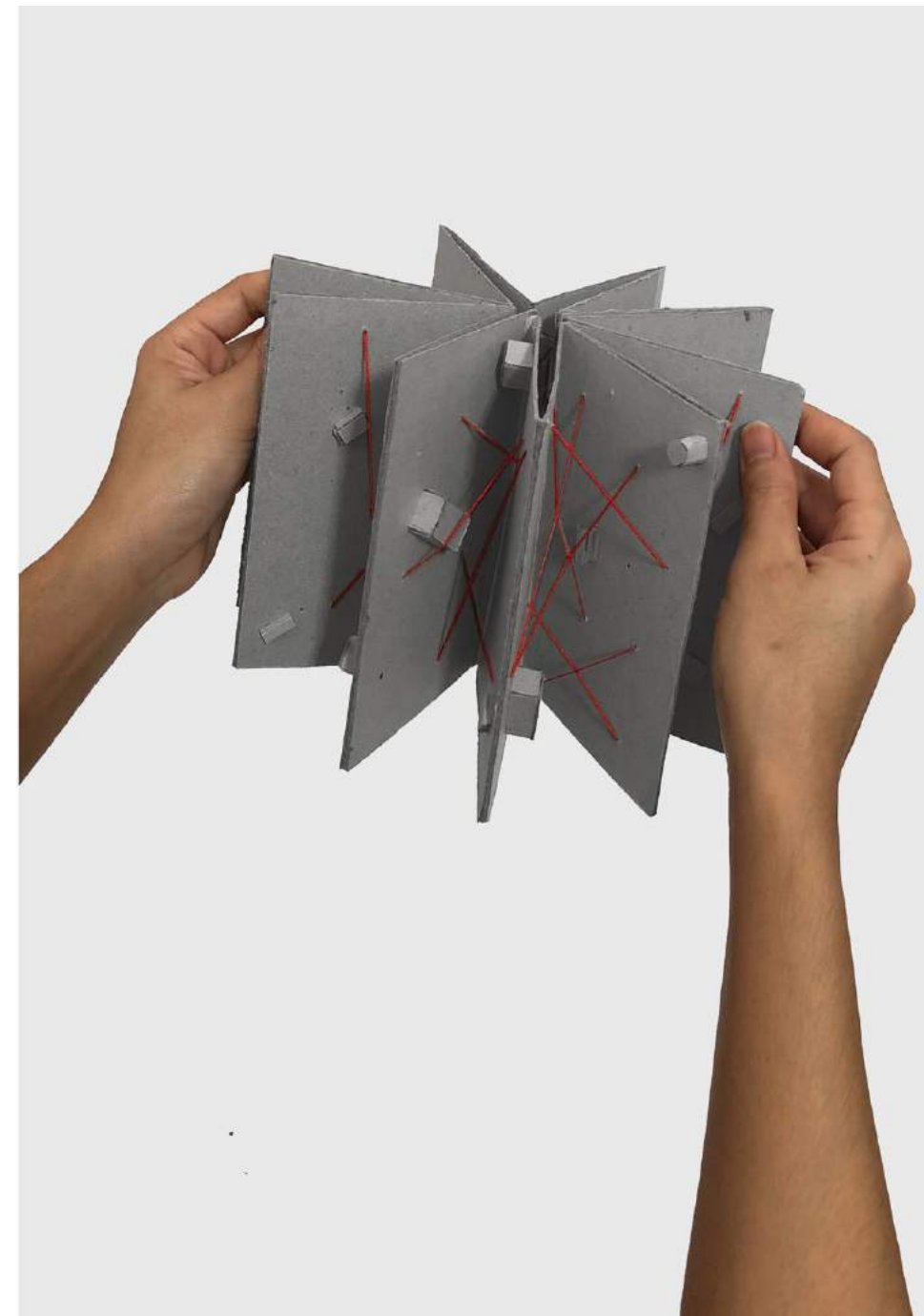


HDB: keeping occupied

Two occupy a house meant for more.

This is a treasure map. Everyday, I find something new to do, or discover new spaces to clean. Time is best occupied. The kitchen is my laboratory where I am free to experiment with food before setting it on the dining table.

Dusk arrives at my green table, my nook in the kitchen, which links me back to home through my screen.



Tale of two strangers: An invisible red thread

Before Asri, Grandmother had 6 helpers in less than half a year, not because of unreasonable standards but because it was a bad fit – most of whom took advantage of her, and my grandmother who has been bullied her whole life did not know better. Here, two migrants coexist across generations, their journeys converge in one household. It is a strange relationship of mutual respect and co-dependence of two strangers.

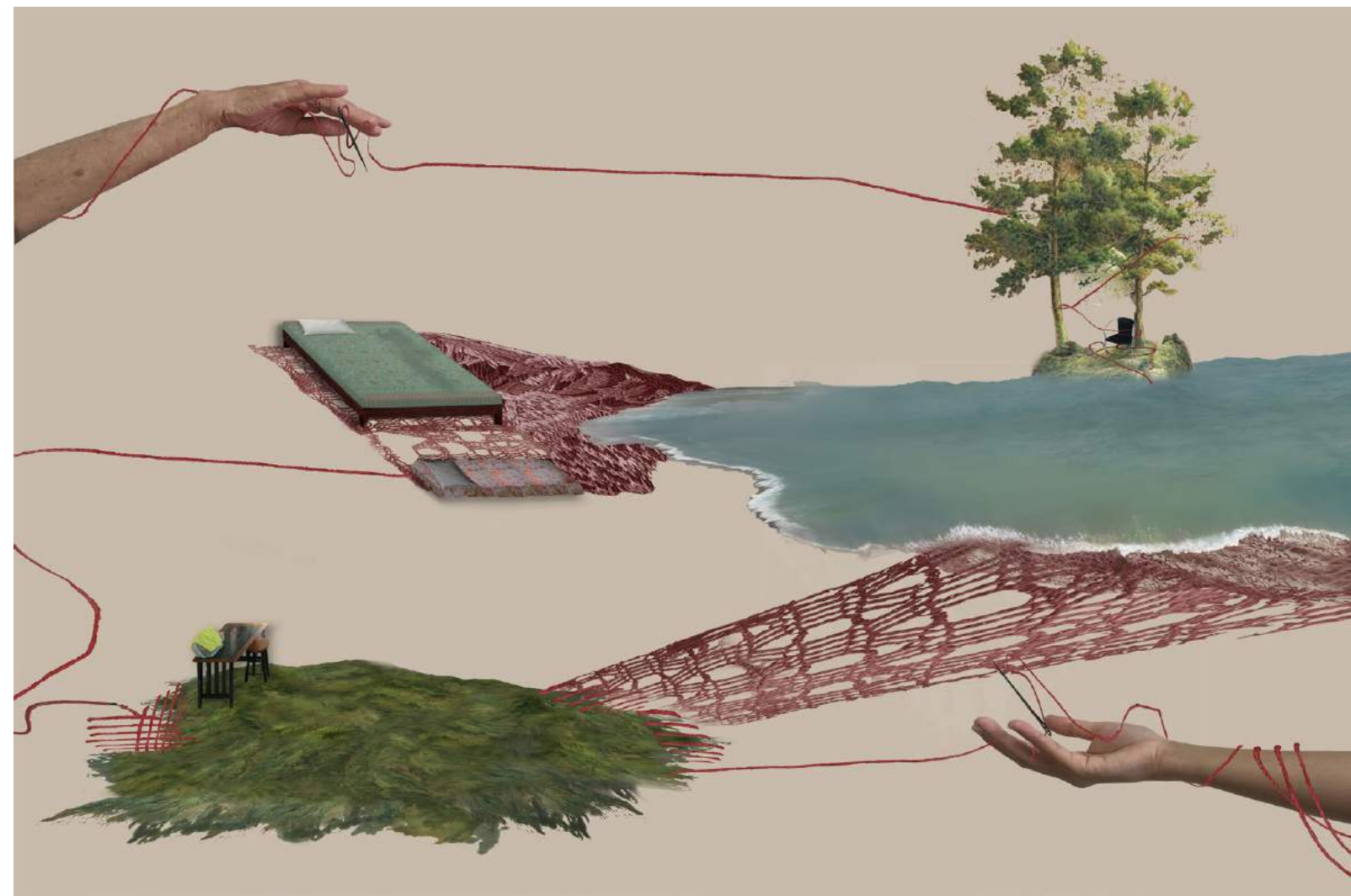
看不见的红线连接到那些谁是有缘，尽管时间，地点和环境线程可以拉长或出差错，但从来没有断。

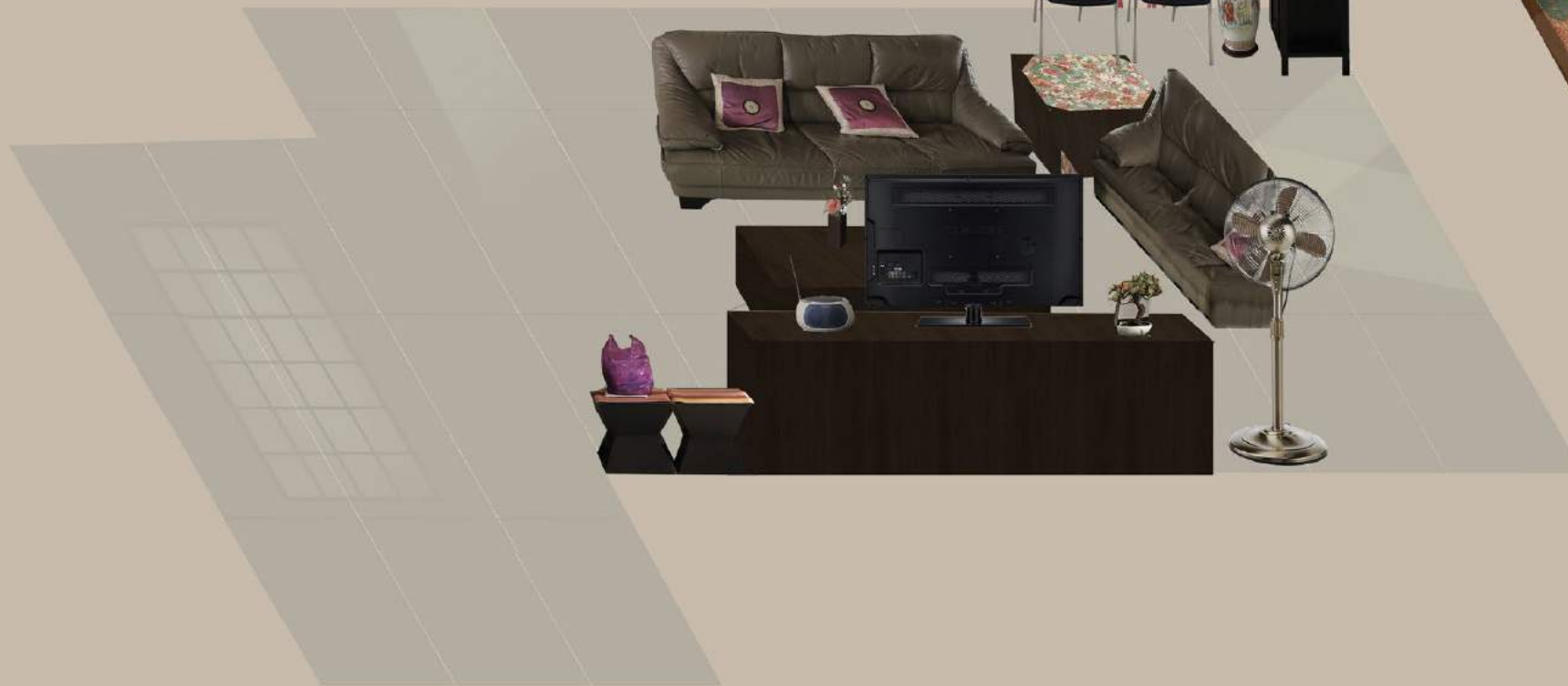
There is an ancient chinese proverb that says “An invisible red thread connects those who are destined to meet, regardless of time, place, or circumstance. The thread may stretch or tangle, but will never break.”

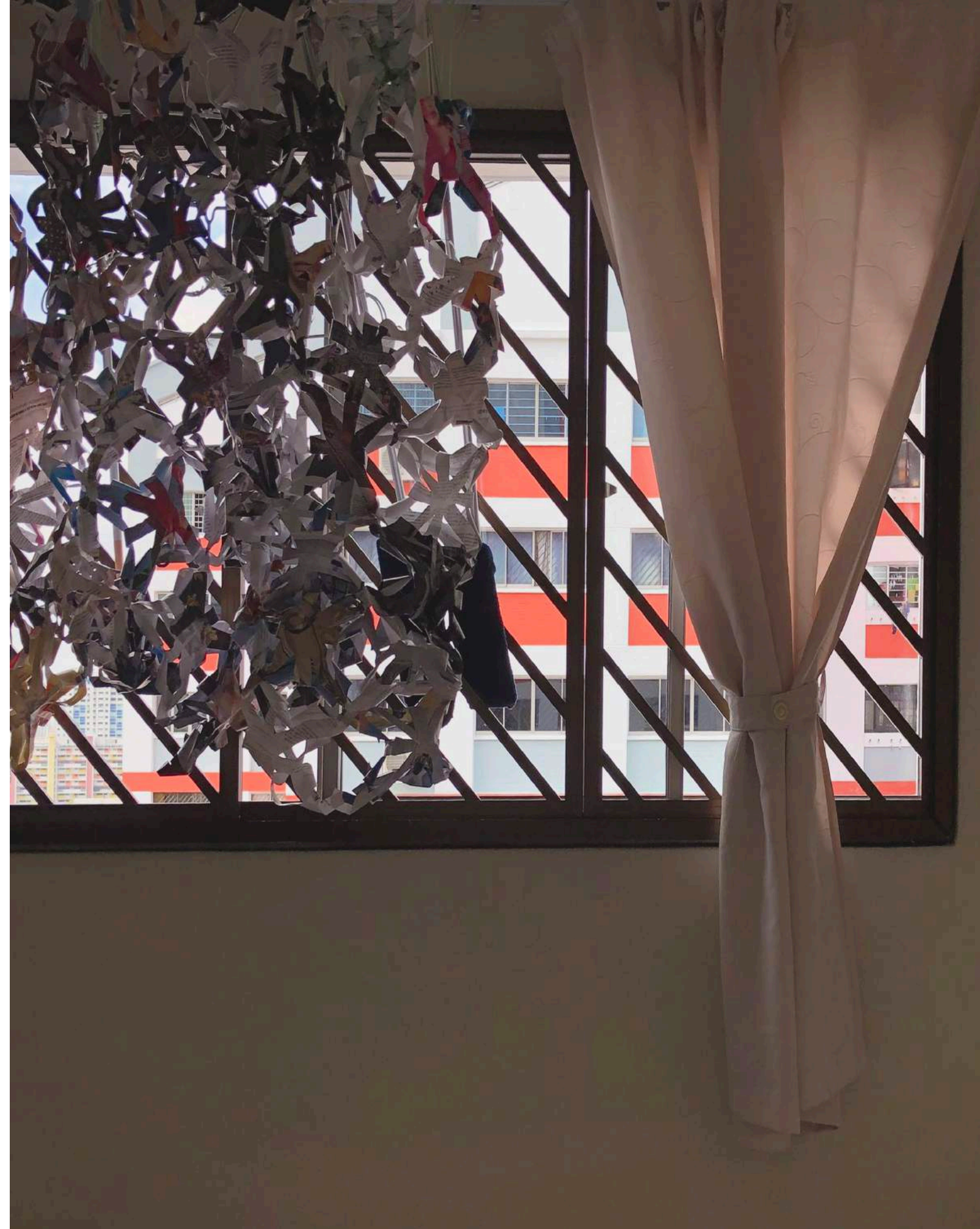
They stitch a home together, with the red thread connecting them. A landscape of their home takes form; spaces weaved together by routines and household objects.

Tale of Two Strangers

An invisible red thread







PROCESS



Before dawn

The first to wake, she stands up, lifts the mattress and tiptoes out of the room. She heads to the kitchen to turn on the light and washes up in the attached toilet.

Under the glow of the moonlight and the diffused light from the kitchen, housework begins. She walks three rounds around the house - opening the windows, sweeping the floors and wiping down surfaces - each journey beginning and ending in the kitchen.

After making a hot cup of milo, she assembles her living room, adding and subtracting to turn the couch into a coffee table and the coffee table into a couch.

Baring unexposed surfaces for use, the coffeetable and couch exchange functions to obey unsaid social rules.

In her living room of 30 to 45 mins, she sits down and mentally prepares herself for the dawning day.

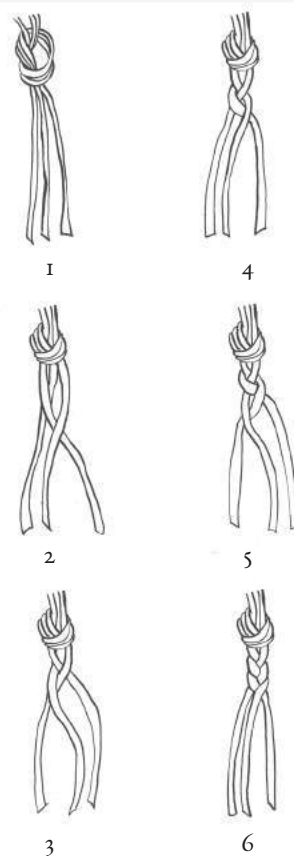
These actions happen quietly so that the silence and dimness in the house does not break.



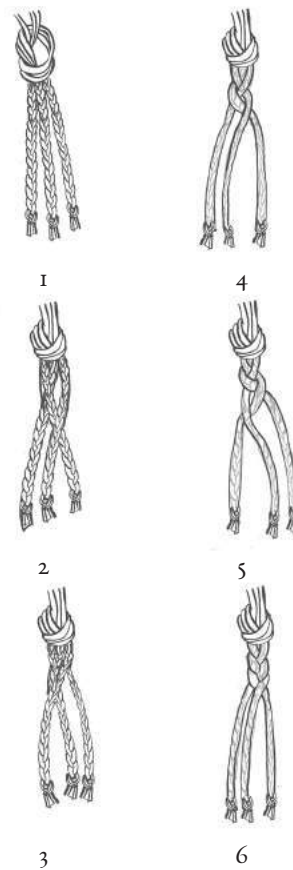


raffia string

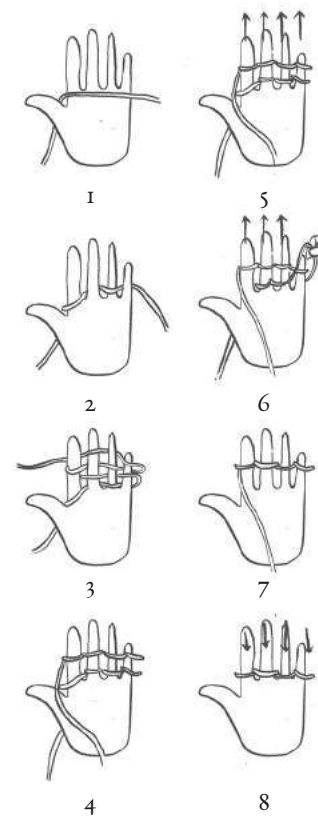
plait



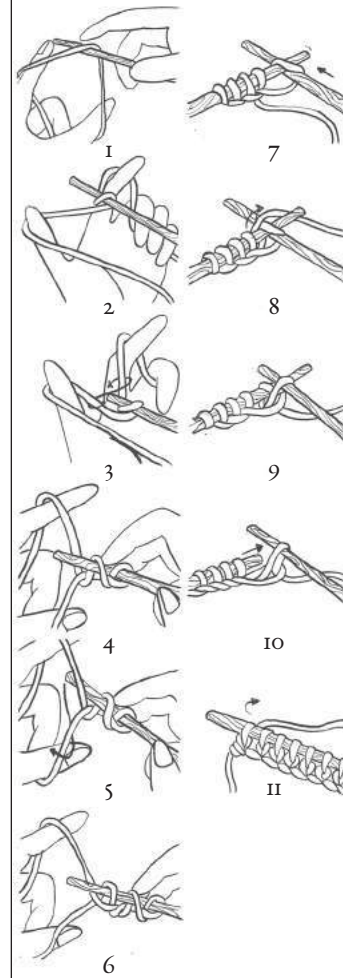
double plait



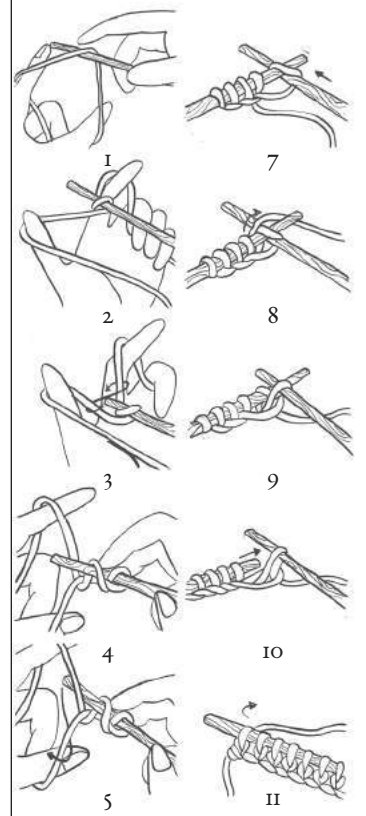
finger knit



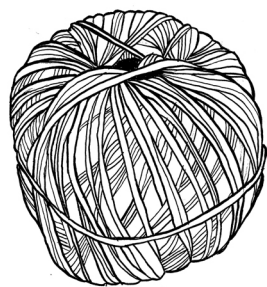
chopsticks knit



chopsticks knit and purl

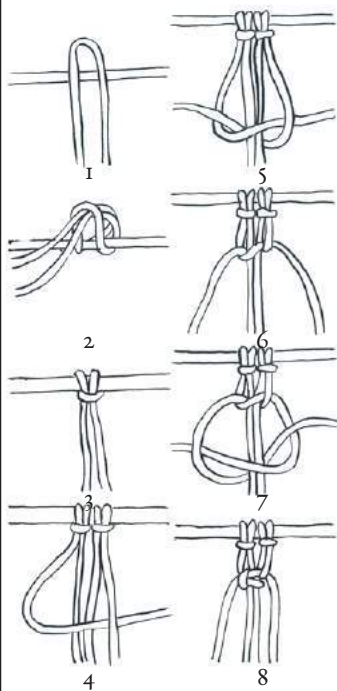


homemade

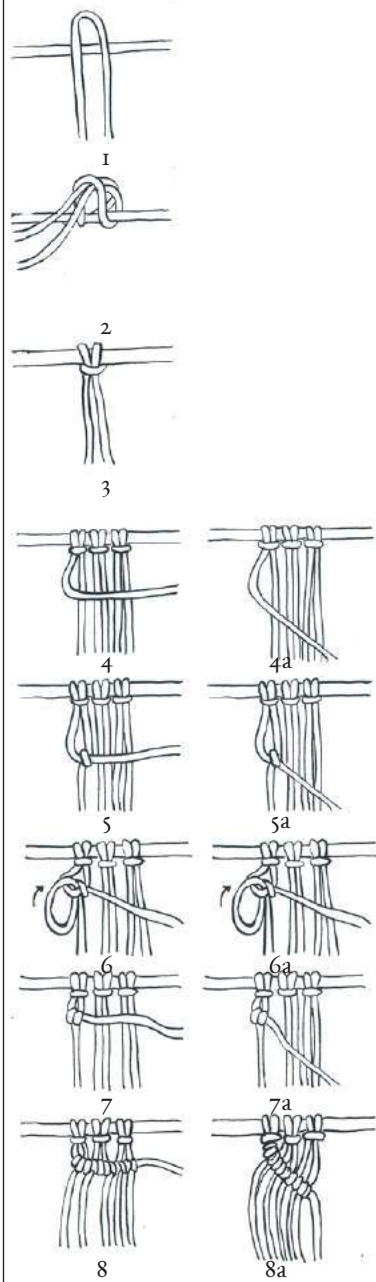


raffia string

spiral stitch knot



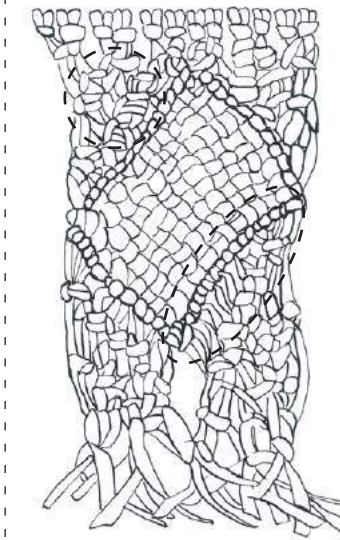
clove hitch knot



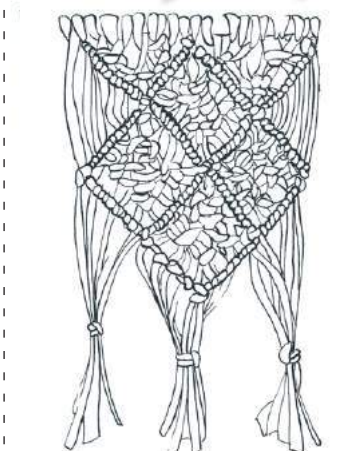
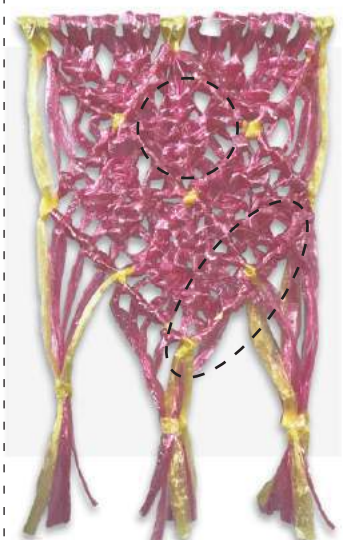
variations



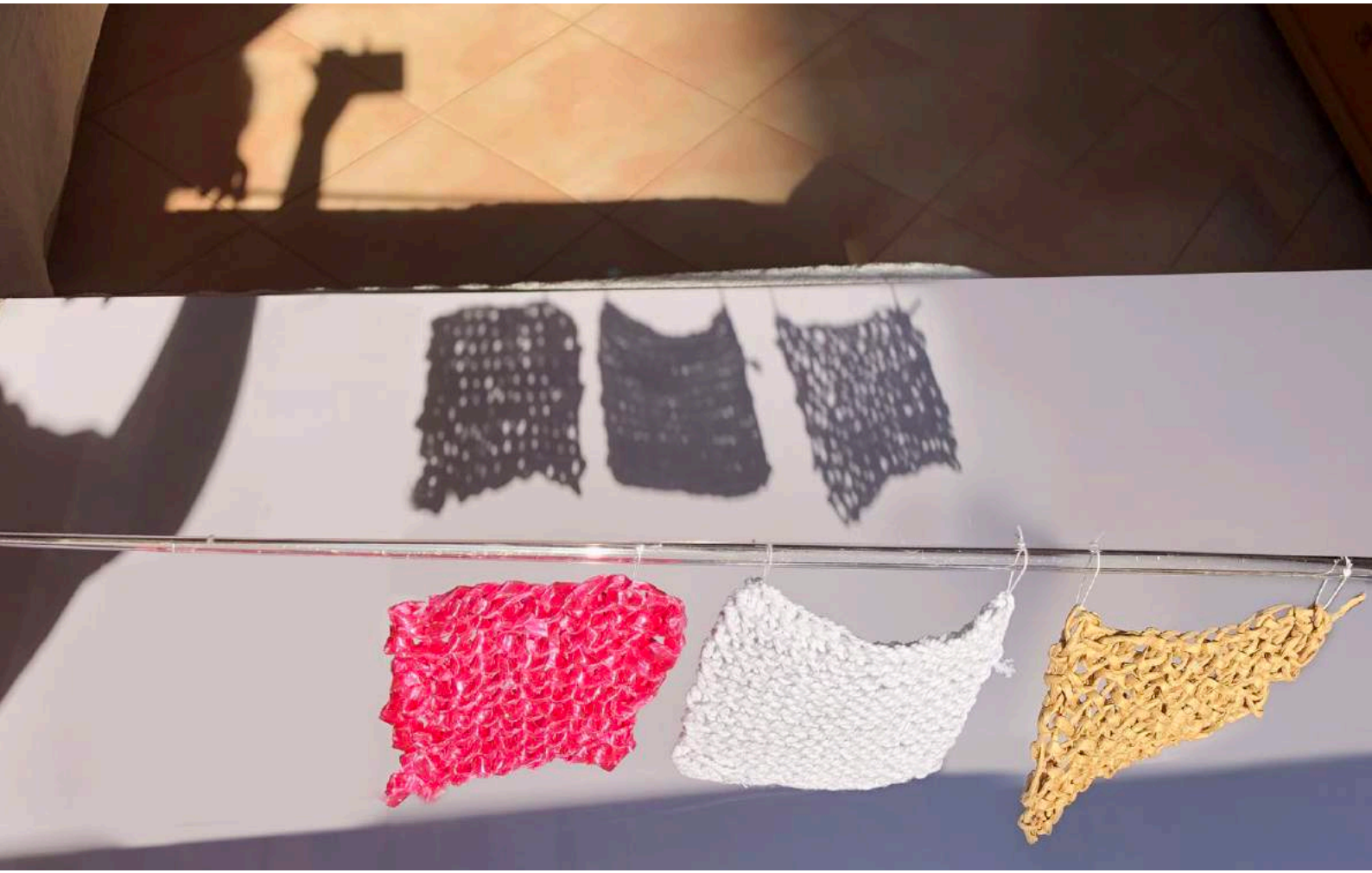
variations



variations



homemade



raffia string



jute string



cotton string



\$0.50 - 1 / 30m

moderate comfort
moderate assembly

noisy before knitted (compressed)
most durable



\$2.50 - 3.50 / 30m

least comfortable
moderate assembly



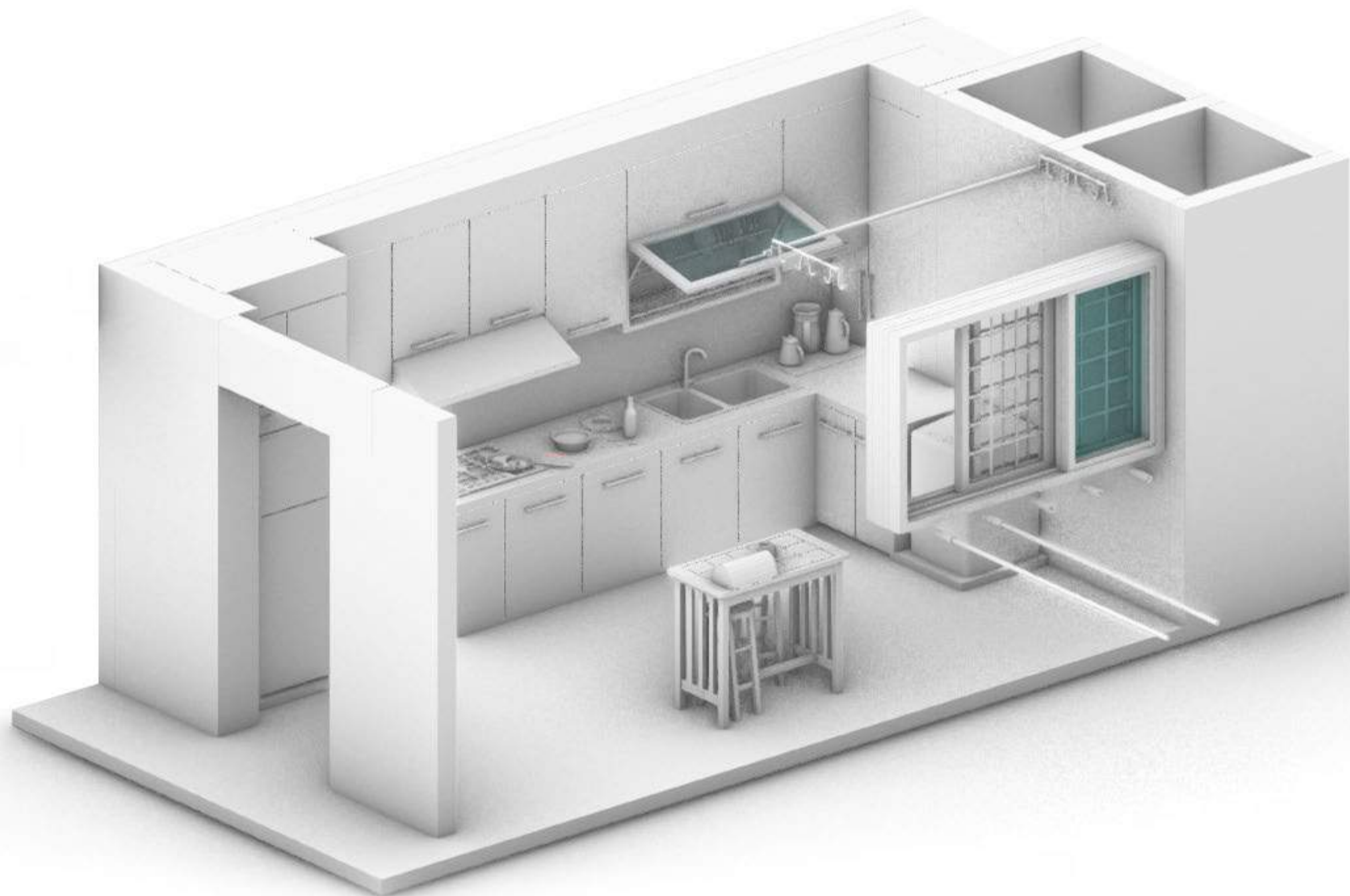
\$3-4 / kg

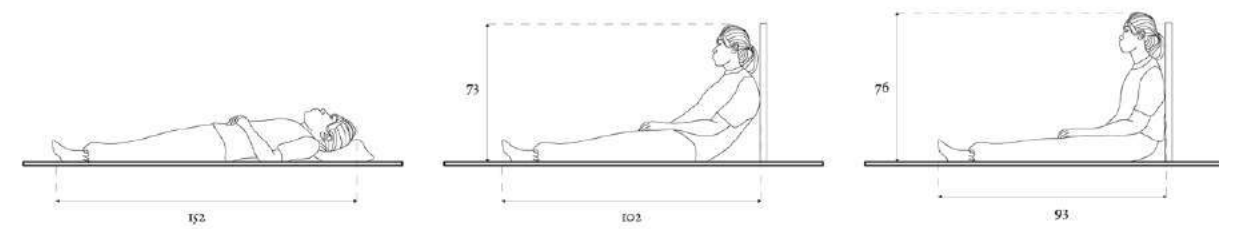
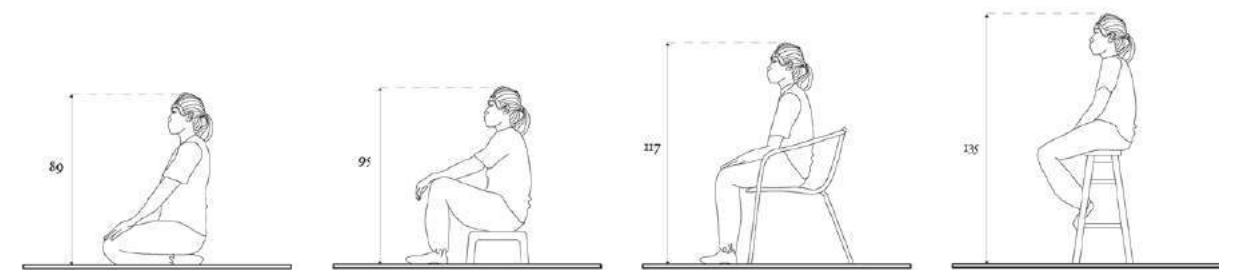
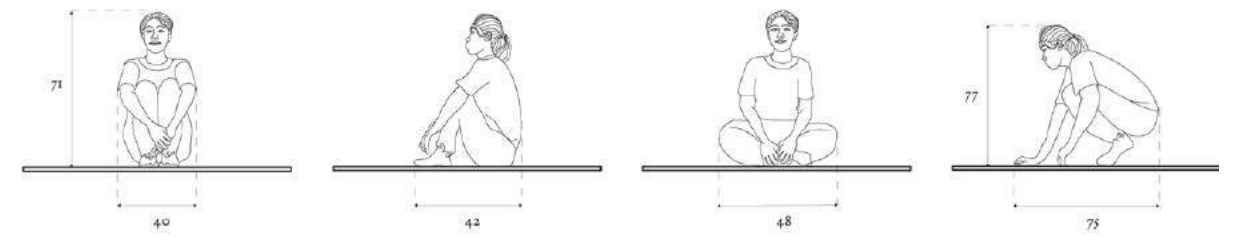
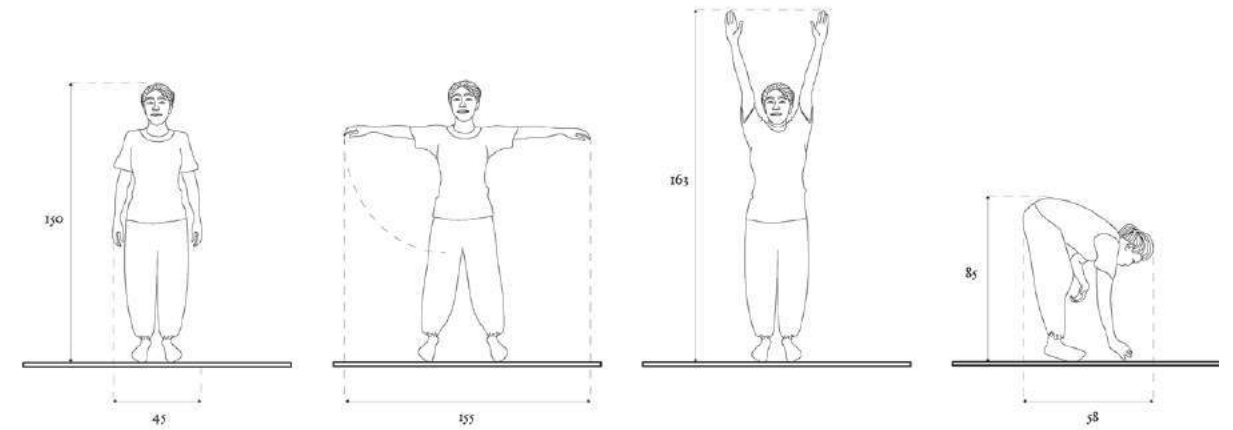
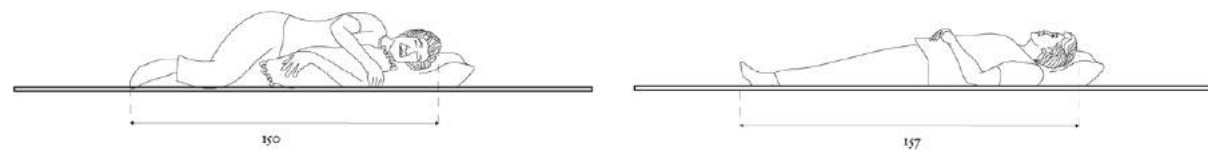
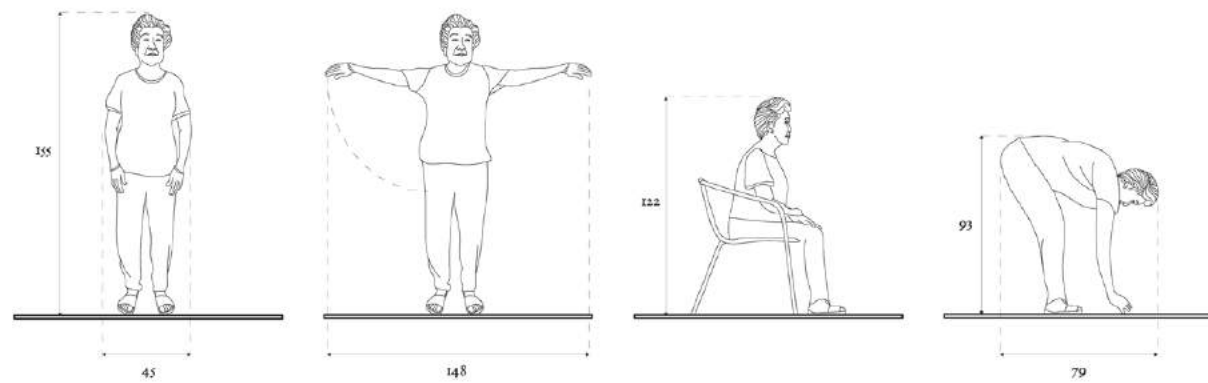
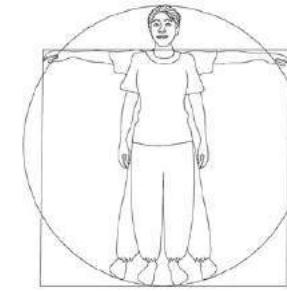
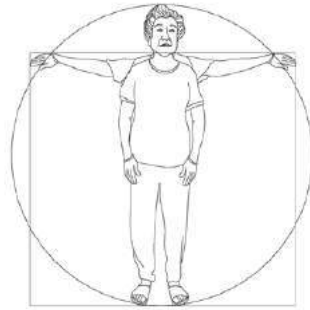
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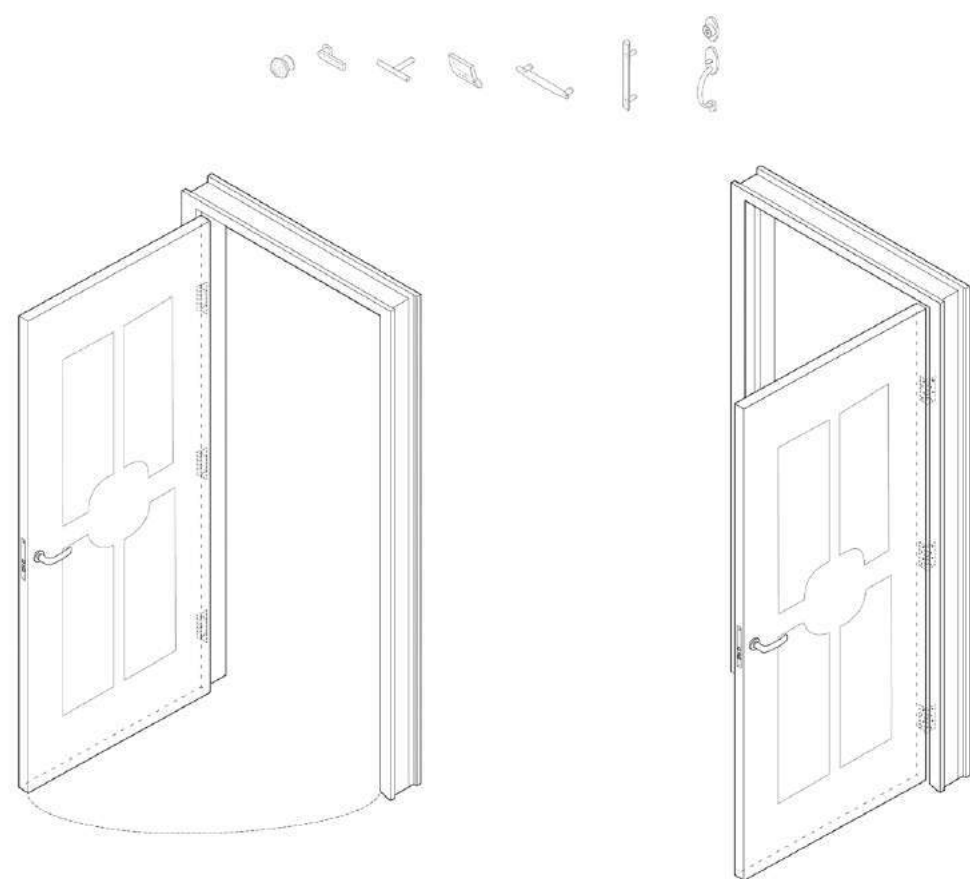
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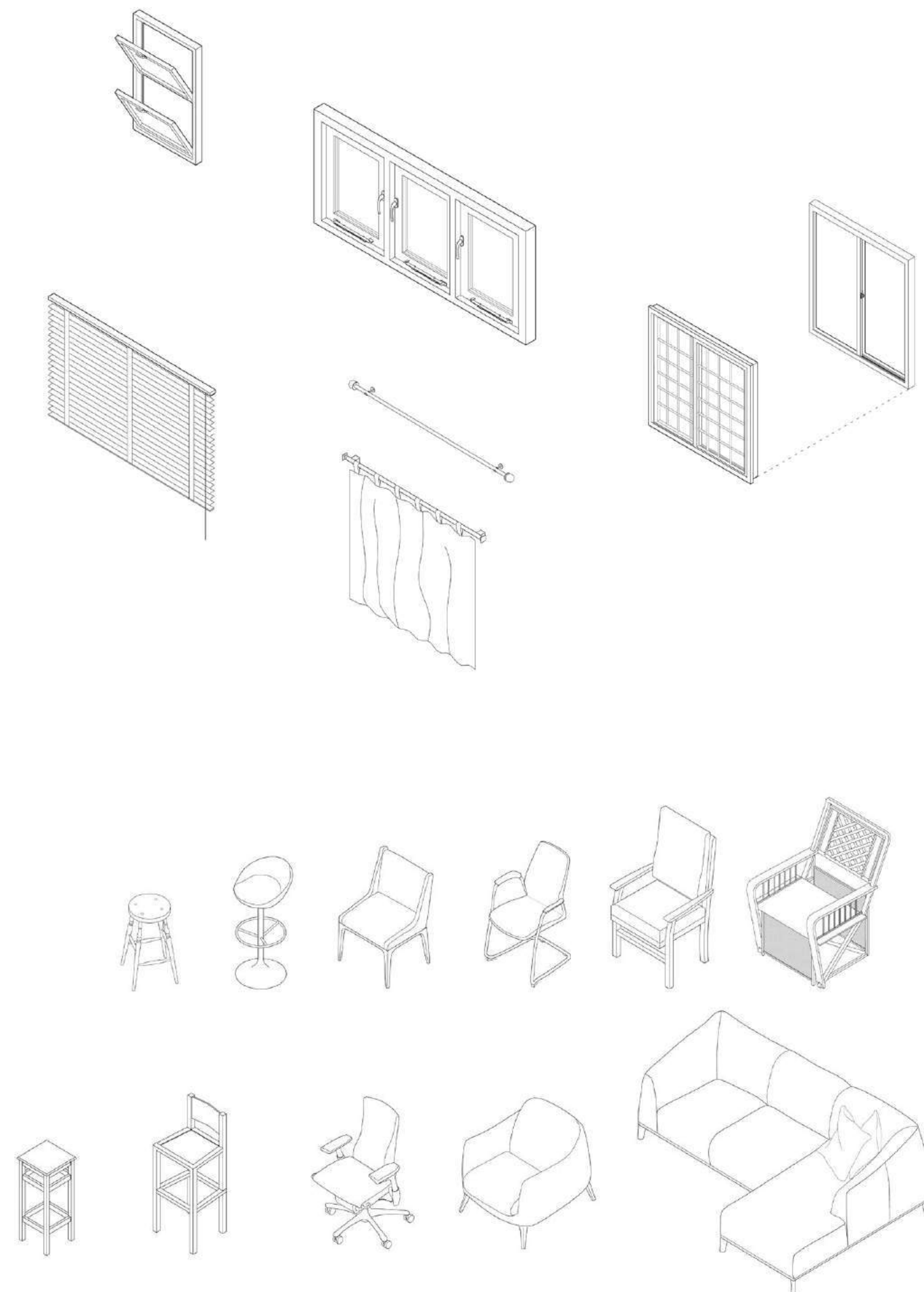








The devices lie in micro sites of the household - from the door frame, the hinge between the door and the door frame, door and cabinet handles and all, windows that open different ways, window tracks, window grills, window locks, curtain rods, chairs and sofas and all their variations.



an archive of ILLITERACY



Papunya Tula



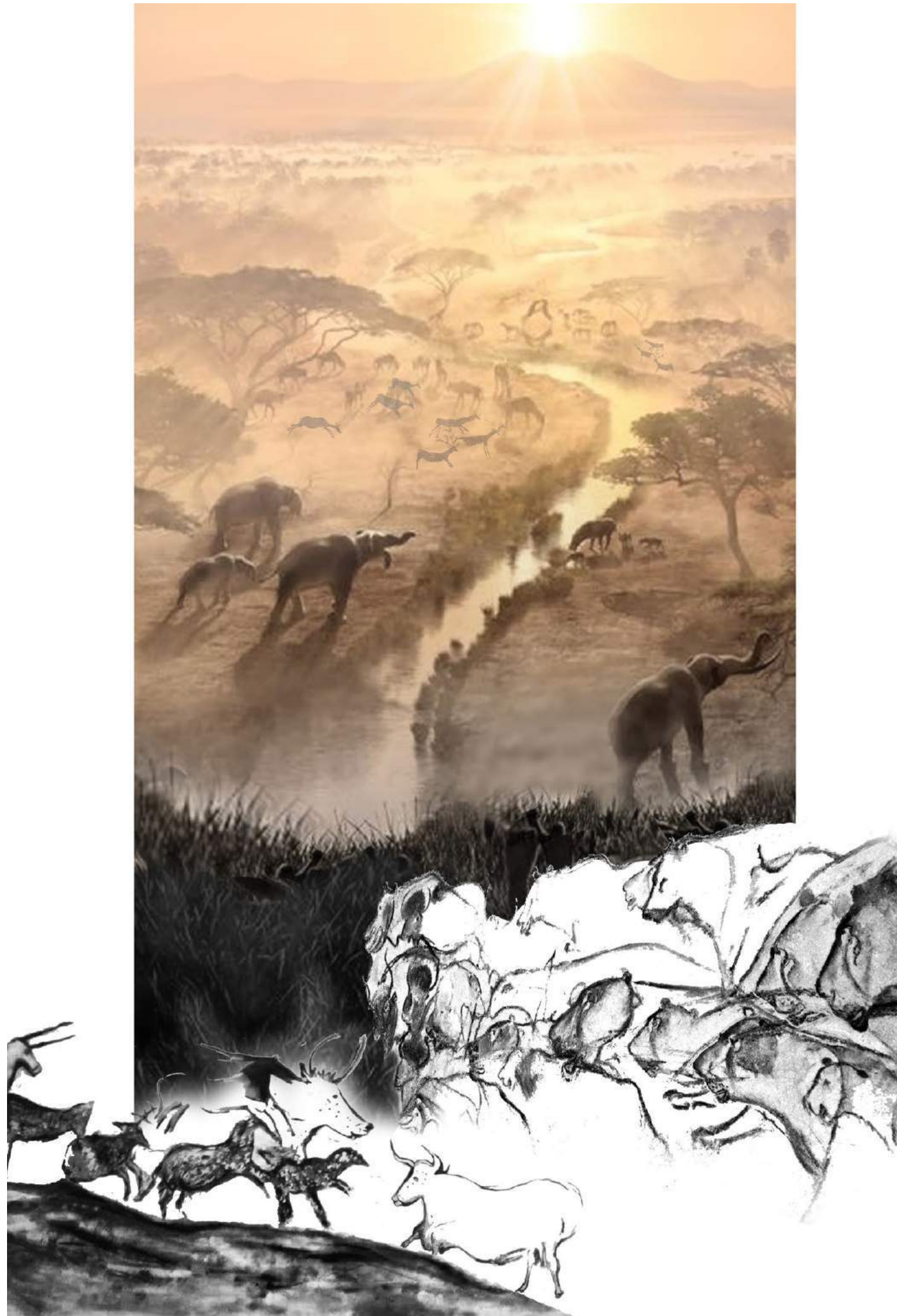
Through an archive of illiteracy, I am looking at people with language and mental illiteracy and how they comprehend society from this minor language.

On the archive of illiteracy through drawings, I will be looking at three main parts:

1. Pre literacy - cave paintings and Papunya Tula art
2. knowledge-illiteracy (knowledge which my grandmother never had)
3. mentally-illiterate
(intelligence that my grandfather slowly lost due to dementia; he has passed)

Like how he slowly lost his memories and retreated back to a child-like state, my memory of him has faded - I would like to reconstruct his consciousness through different memories of him from his wife and daughter.

At the same time, I look into a parallel archive of illiteracy through literature. Specifically, I'm looking at two books: Ella Minnow Pea by Mark Dunn that looks into knowledge illiteracy due to language degradation, and Flowers for Algernon by Daniel Keyes that looks into mental illiteracy, and allows us to trace the journey of a major language to that of a minor one through the subsequent degradation of the subject matter.



Cave Paintings

Cave paintings are a living archive, curated by history and edited by geology over millennia.

The archive of cave paintings seems to be a major language - they are accessible to the masses through this universal understanding of representation. However, I argue that these archives are marked in a minor language - it is one that we can attempt to interpret, but never fully comprehend simply because we were not there.

This is a language our ancestors shared, but now this language has been deterritorialized by modern values and structured analysis. Our existence is always understood through our current mastery of literacy - when we view cave art today, we are viewing a civilisation from the opposite end of the spectrum.

The archives of cave paintings then become a way of mediating us within ourselves in the anthropocene where the major language is capitalism.



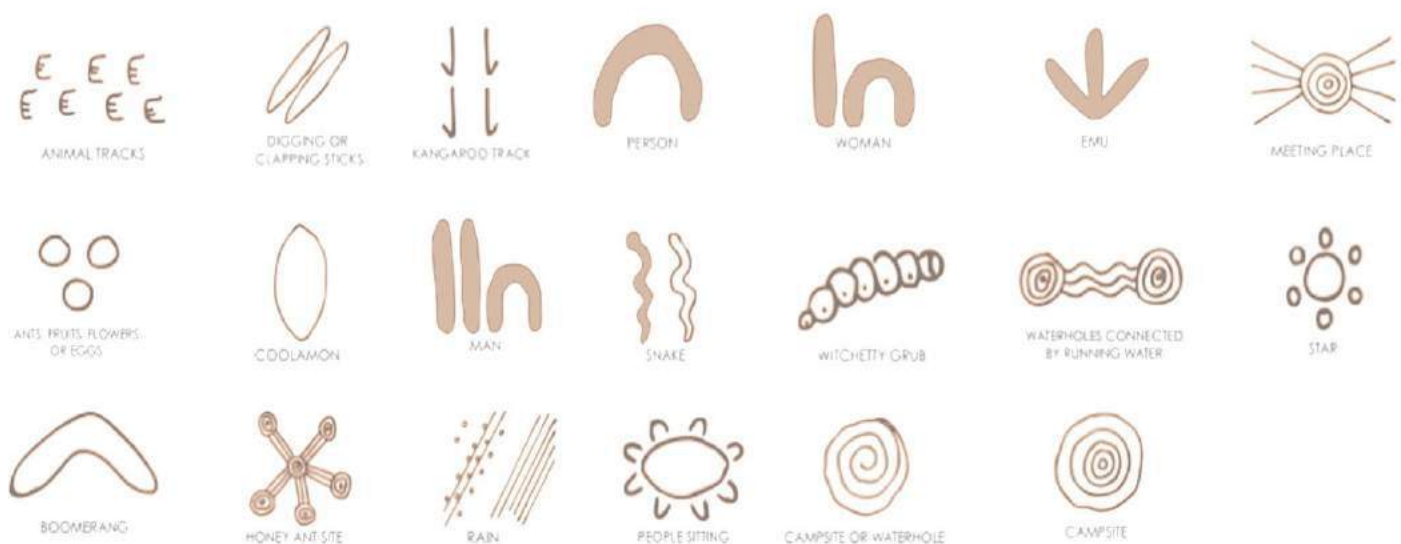
Papunya Tula art movement

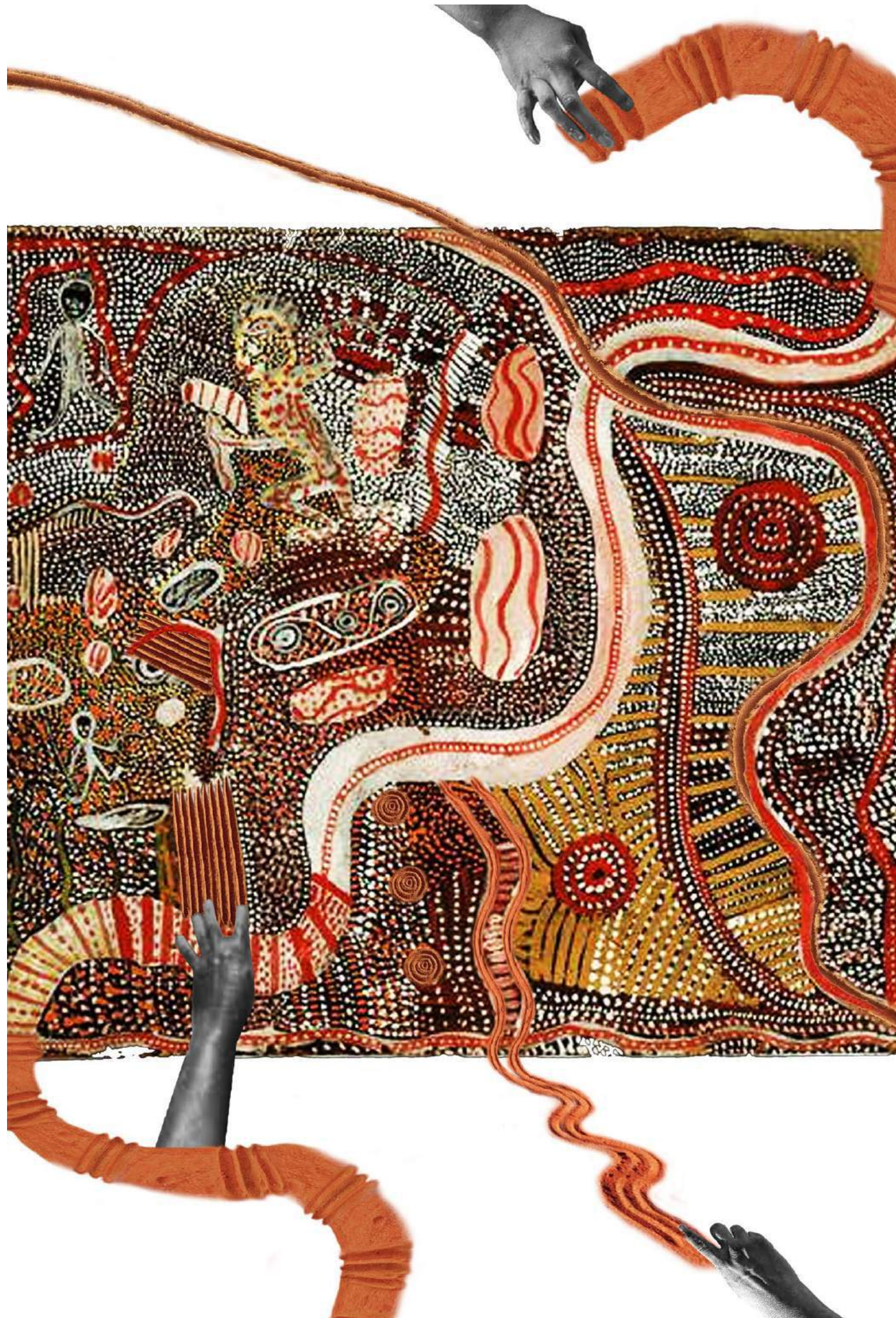
The movement was born in the early 1970s in the oppressive conditions of a government settlement opened under a racist assimilation program. The government thought that Aborigines were not ready to live as “white Australians” and had to be re-educated to hasten their “advancement”. This meant relocation of Aborigines from their traditional lands and suppression of their language, art and culture.

One element is songlines - lines that cross the country and put all geographical and sacred sites into place in Aboriginal culture.

An art teacher posted to the local school saw children drawing songlines and symbols in the sand, and encouraged them to transfer this to a more permanent media. This also became a way for the aborigines to sustain cultural tradition while adapting to a global economy. Honey Ant Mural was the first mural painted on the school wall, but it was quickly painted over as it was said to have revealed sacred knowledge.

Some of the first paintings they produced contained sacred knowledge that should not have been revealed to outsiders. Realizing the consequences of increased publicity, artists painted over sensitive elements in previous paintings and began to paint children’s stories, which were open to all members of the community.





Papunya Tula - Children's story by Johnny Warangkula Tjupurrula

Papunya Tula art movement

This is a collage on top of *Children's story* by Johnny Warangkula Tjupurrula.

Tjupurrula painted this "water dreaming" work abiding by that general rule. On the left, two young children watch a ritual elder dance surrounded by ceremonial objects. Dense patterns of dots, circles, sinuous bands and parallel lines fill the canvas. White tracks describe watercourses, concentric circles recall waterholes or soaks and the smaller lines denote running water. Tjupurrula's innovative and intuitive compositions often run out of the frame. The Australian outback is extremely dry and water resources are scarce. In Aboriginal culture, water-bearing locations are passed down through communal oral histories, and Tjupurrula was one of the custodians of an important waterhole called Kalipinypa.

In the collage, strokes in sand replace lines of running water, depicting the history of the original art form.

THE QUICK BROWN FOX JUMPS OVER THE LAZY DOG
 THE QUICK BROWN FOX JUMPS OVER THE LAZY DOG
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 PACK MY BOX WITH FIVE DOZEN LIQUOR JUGS

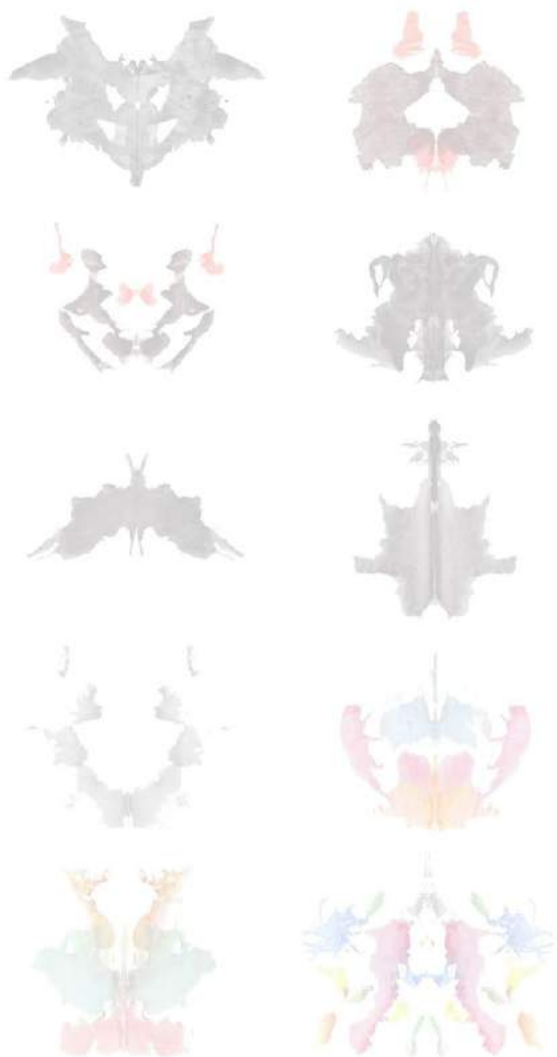
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Parallel archive of illiteracy through literature.

I used *Ella Minnow Pea* by Mark Dunn - to look into knowledge illiteracy.
 As a lipogram, this book looks into language degradation through the subsequent subtraction of letters in the alphabet.
 Using the pangram 'the quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog', I wanted to illustrate the loss of alphabets as the book progressed.



time



Parallel archive of illiteracy through literature.

I used *Flowers for Algernon* by Daniel Keyes - to look into mental illiteracy.

The entire novel is made of progress reports by a mentally handicapped man named Charlie, who is the first human test subject to be transformed by an experimental surgery that allows him to become intelligent, preceded only by a mouse named Algernon. As he reaches genius intelligence, he notices that Algernon's intelligence is deteriorating, indicating that the same thing will happen to Charlie.

This looks into mental illiteracy, and allows us to trace the journey of a 'sound mind'/major language to that of a minor one through the subsequent degradation of the subject matter.



Elizabeth Is Missing

This is a map based on *Elizabeth Is Missing* by Emma Healey – it shows the layered spaces brought up, from the perspective of the main character, Maud, who has dementia.

The motifs in the book are things like tinned peaches, birds, marrows, and Elizabeth, which are the few things that Maud bring up over and over again. They sort of become landmarks in space as she navigates between these few spaces – especially Elizabeth’s home. Maud understands that it is an important space, but she cannot remember why. Put the motifs together, and we find out that her sister is buried in Elizabeth’s garden, under the marrows.

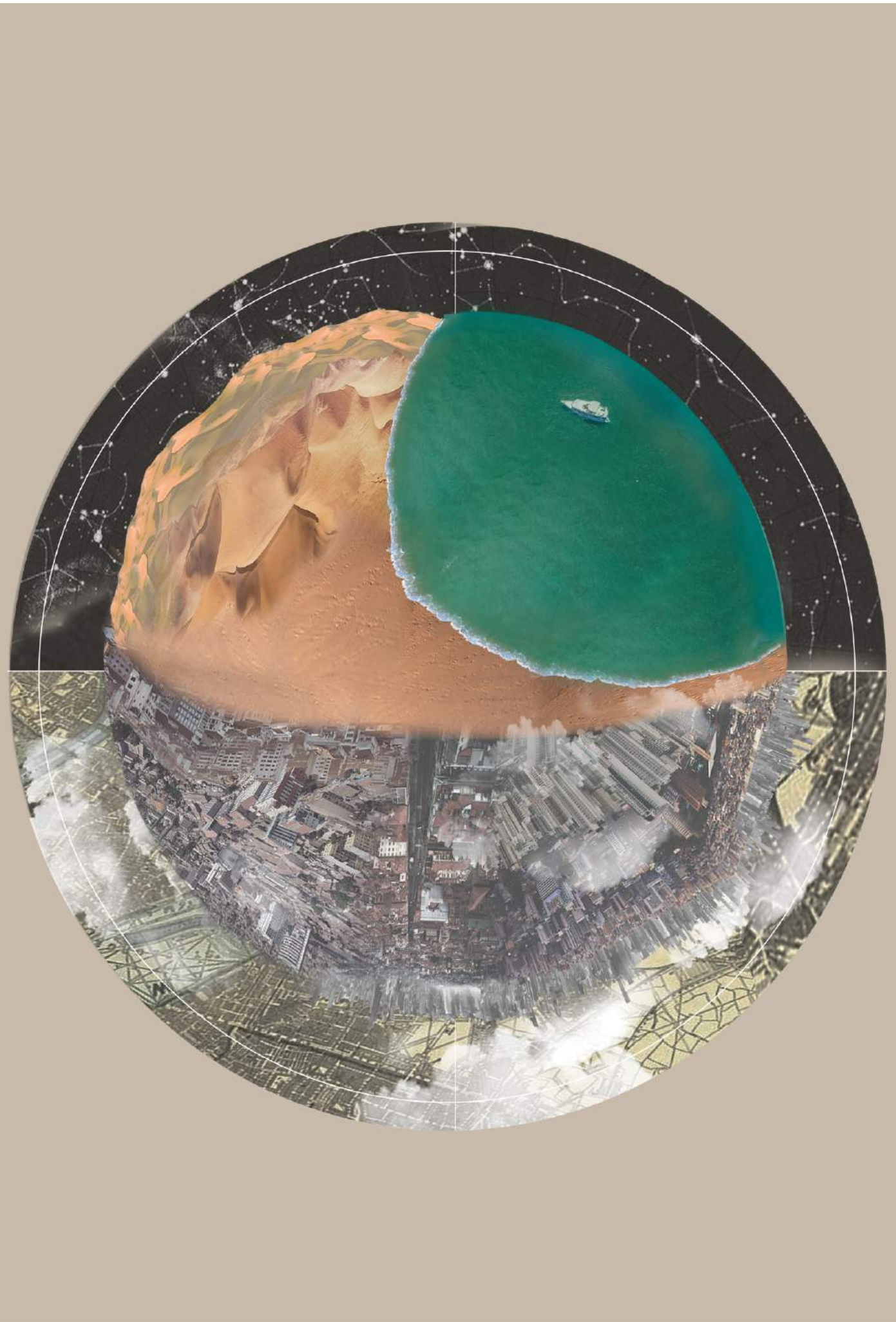
I structured this map based on one quote in the book ‘*It was like doing a jigsaw puzzle, except that even when I’d finished there were still some bits missing.*’ There is a consistent dislocation of description and references of space and objects, as she moves between the vague and the specific, the remembered and the forgotten. The result is a layered reality where the pieces don’t fit together, like how her mind and actions are separate – thus, Maud constantly experiences time and spatial dislocation.



Elizabeth Is Missing

Tried to use more abstract forms/ mode of representation; showing jumbled space, slipping in and out and between layers of mental clarity.

The spatial dimension is exploded, but they overlap with each other.



Literacy and Space

Intuitive navigation as a way of investigating the relationship between literacy and space.

In general, people navigate their way through landmarks and directions. Those who are map - literate are also able to understand and navigate space through maps.

Explorers who traversed deserts and oceans had to navigate their way by tracking the movement of the constellations to determine their cardinal directions, and latitude. They could also use nature's imprint on the landscape as a means of navigation, like releasing a leaf in the air. For example, the nomadic Arabs look at sand dunes, formed at 90 degrees to the prevailing wind to determine directions.

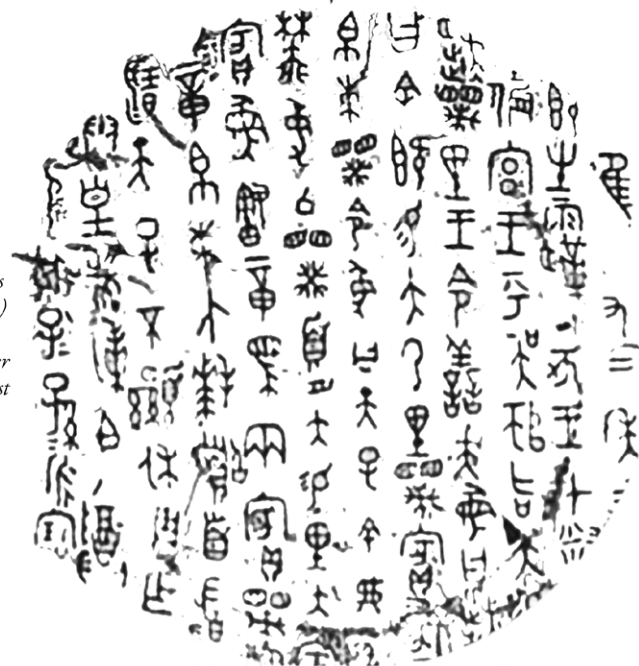
However, people who are map-illiterate are unable to understand a 3d space on a 2d representation - this made me consider the representation of space - how current architectural drawing conventions, representations and perspectives are western constructs - I did not really go down this path, but I feel like it will be crucial down the road, following the research of illiteracy and space, to reconsider and retranslate such spatial representations.

Oracle bone script
(甲骨文)



Chinese bronze inscriptions
(金文)

writing was done with a stylus in the
wet clay of the piece-mold from which
the bronze was then cast.



Chinese bronze inscriptions
(金文)

inscriptions engraved after
the bronze was cast

Pictograms

evolution of Chinese characters + influence of mediums

Looking at methods of writing in relation to each time characters were updated. Evolution (variations between from different regions):

Oracle bone script (甲骨文)

This was the form of Chinese characters used on oracle bones - able to record the Old Chinese language in its entirety. Most of the oracle bone graphs are not depicted realistically enough for those who do not already know the script to recognize what they stand for; although pictographic in origin they are no longer pictographs in function.

Chinese bronze inscriptions (金文)

Early bronze inscriptions were almost always cast (that is, the writing was done with a stylus in the wet clay of the piece-mold from which the bronze was then cast), while later inscriptions were often engraved after the bronze was cast.

Words were free on a 2-d plane, spread out, distinct clear strokes. As it became inscribed, distinct characters were neater, stayed in vertical lines. Transition from 'free script' to 'strict script'.

Great Seal (大篆)

Before the Qin conquest of the six other major warring states of Zhou China, local styles of characters had evolved independently of one another for centuries, producing what are called the "Scripts of the Six States", all of which are included under the general term "Great Seal Script". Under one unified government, however, the diversity was deemed undesirable as it hindered timely communication, trade, taxation, and transportation, and as independent scripts might be used to represent dissenting political ideas. Hence, Emperor Qin Shi Huang mandated the systematic unification of weights, measures, currencies, etc., and the use of a standard writing script.

Official script (繁体隶书)

Seal strokes gradually changed round to square fold, writing faster, because the bamboo, wooden slips (bamboo slips). It is difficult to draw round strokes when writing with lacquer.



Images as a main form of communication

I look back to the possibility of images as a main form of communication - this would reach a wider audience, allowing various minor illiterate groups to share a language with society. In *Rhetoric of the image*, Roland Barthes talks about the complex relationship between language and images, and how they inform one another. He also highlights the coded nature of images and symbols, in that the process and result of drawings are inevitably subjective. - Similar points are also made by John Berger in *Ways of Seeing*.

While I do not dispute these arguments, I would also argue that language is subjective in itself; the nature of communication is not subjective. Thus, I believe that the way forward would be to go back to a pictographic state that both image and language share.