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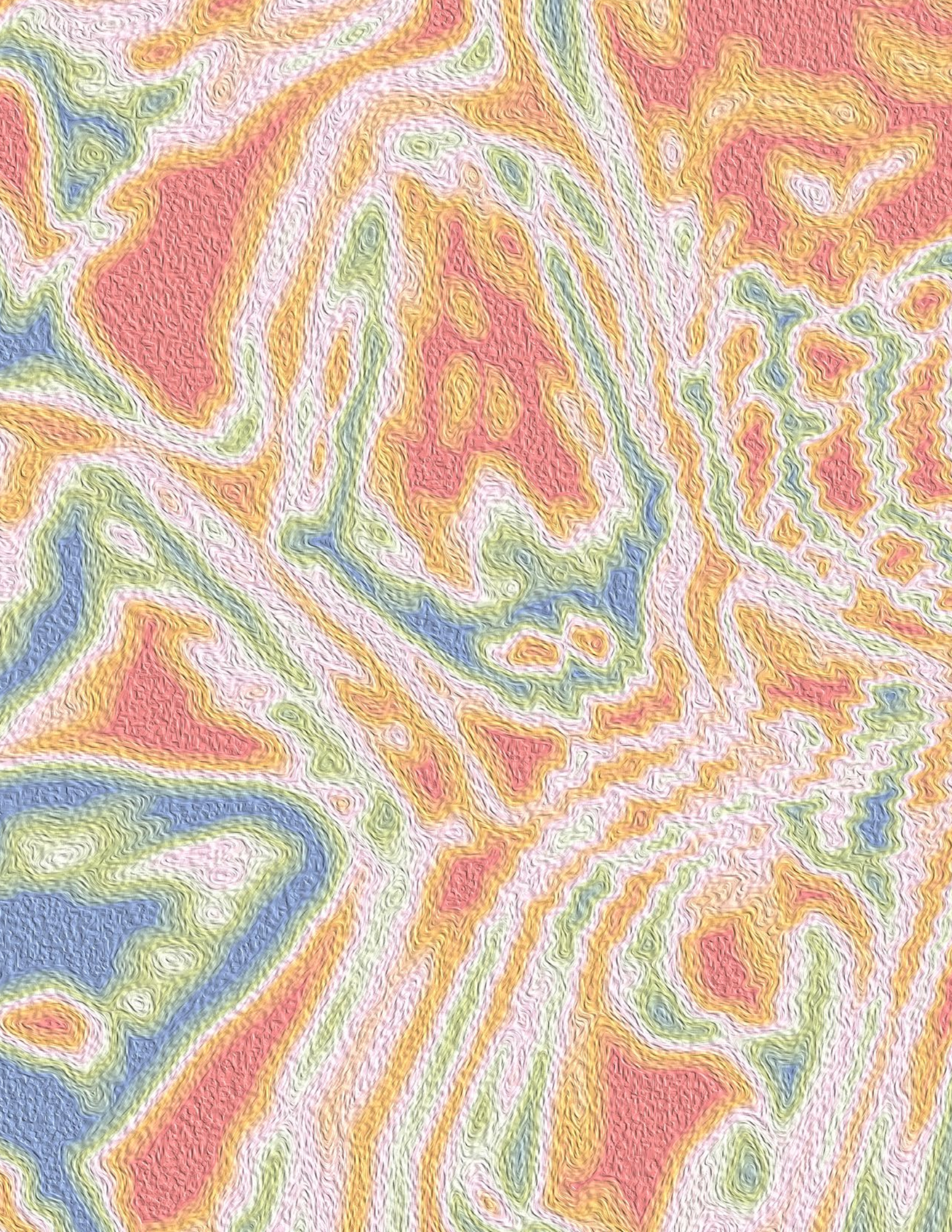
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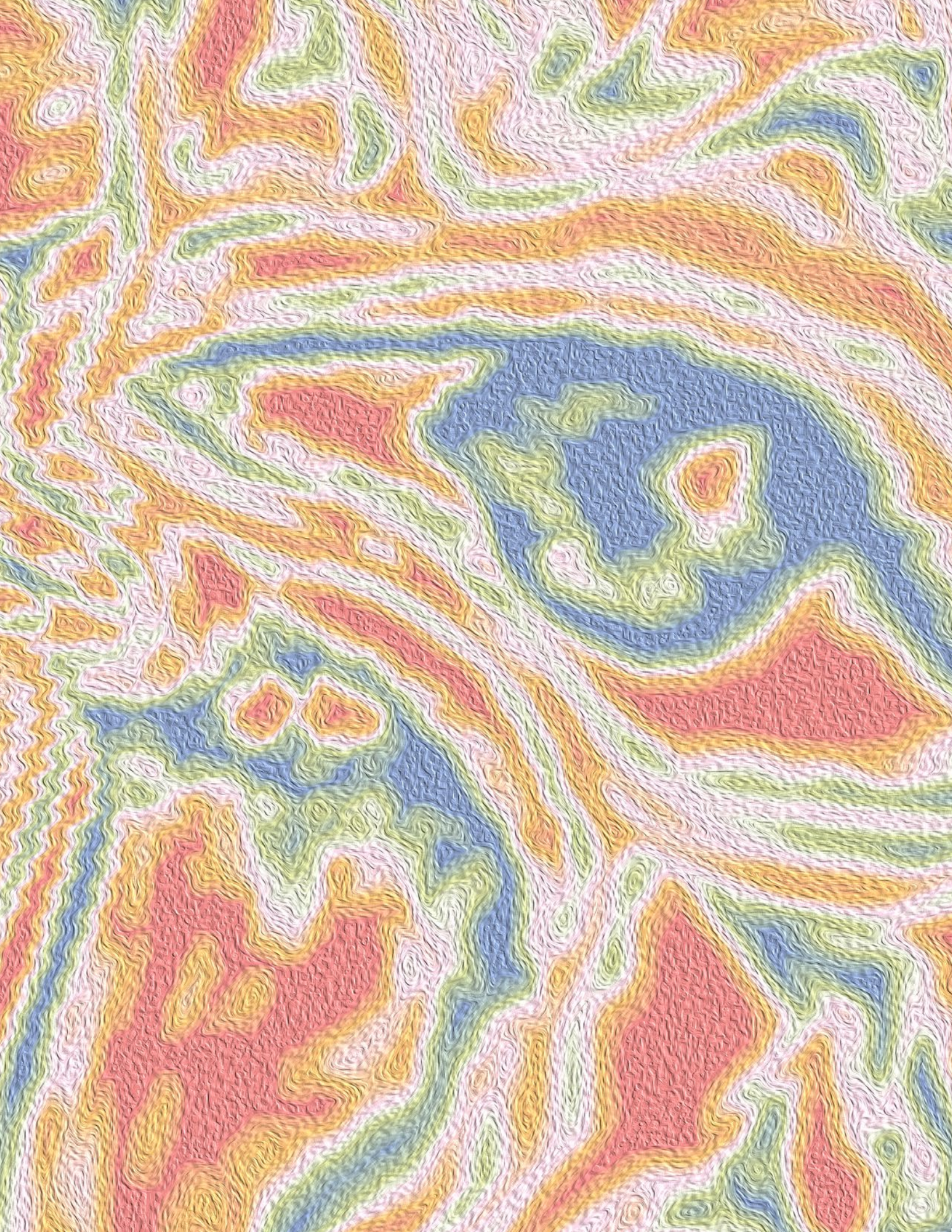


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Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation at Columbia University,
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Dear Reader,

We here at URBAN Magazine (editors, contributors, and you, the readers) don't just study, work, and think about the built environment. We live in it. Each year we face the challenge of representing the people, places and questions that make up our profession, but we aren't only urban thinkers. With Volume 36, we considered how we come to know cities and kept returning to a kind of knowing that all urban dwellers, human and more-than-human alike, have in common: our lived experiences.

Sensorium—literally defined as the part of the brain that receives and interprets sensory stimuli—is our attempt to understand how we experience cities. We encounter our surroundings through the senses (or lack thereof) on a daily basis, but we don't always pause to process our relationship to them. We think of this volume as a kind of collective urban journal where we can study and reflect on our cities through the rawness and vulnerability of our own lives.

If we've learned anything from our incredible contributors' interpretations of the theme, it's that difference is universal. Though we may share the same spaces, we experience them uniquely. We who plan, design, and build cities are part of shaping this collective future that is felt, smelt, seen, heard, tasted, remembered, contested... lived. These lived experiences are what imbue our work with meaning.

To you, reader, we offer Volume 36 as a sampling of the plurality of urban life through the lens of *Sensorium*. During your time here with us, we encourage you to consider a novel perspective that we hope will stand the test of time: yours, and ours.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Ayomikun James Awo-Thomas". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ayomikun" being the most prominent.

Senior Editorial Team

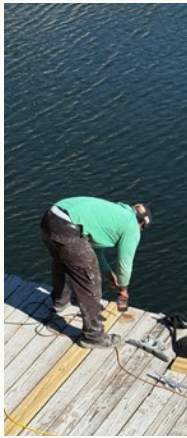
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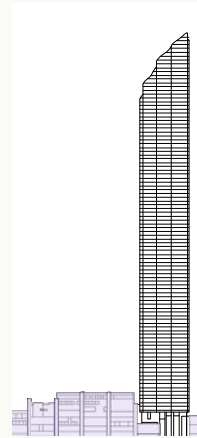
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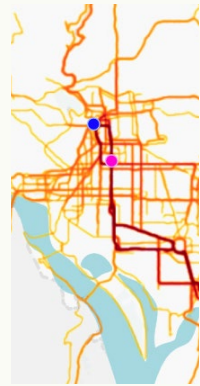
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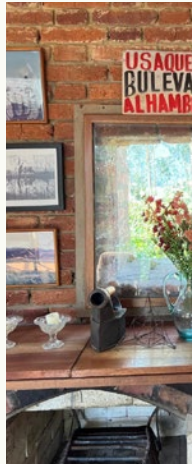
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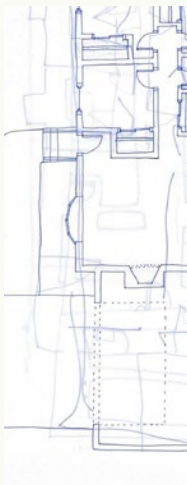
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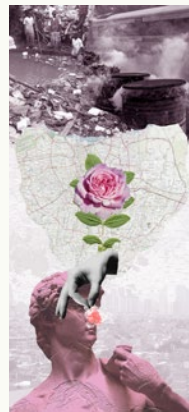
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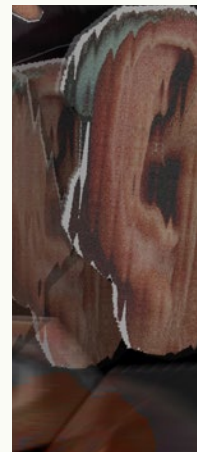
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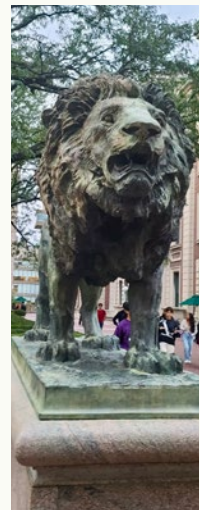
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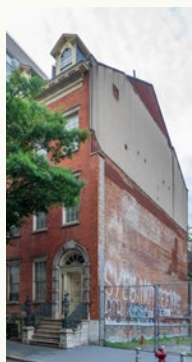
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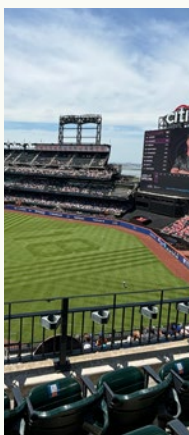
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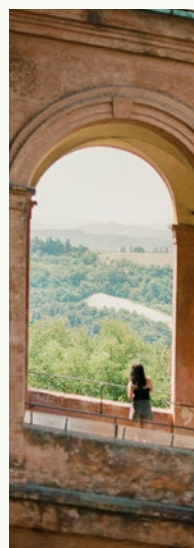
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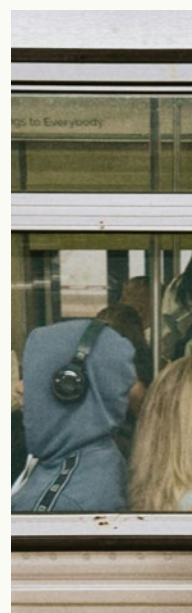
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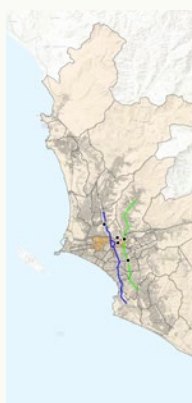
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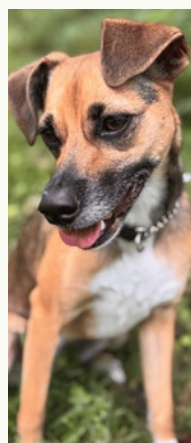
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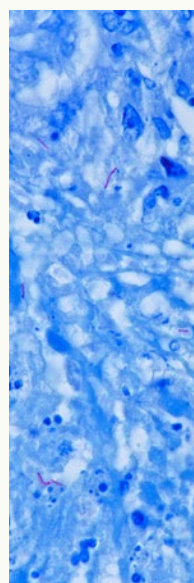
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Runners jogging in Central
Park in the Upper West Side.
Image by Patrick Gruban
(via Wikimedia Commons)



Roxy Blocksdorf

Roxy (MSUP '26) is from Baltimore. Her work explores how urban forms and different landscapes impact and shape our relationships.

MUSCLE MEMORY

I met Lamar on a hot June day last summer—it was my second time running as a guide for people with disabilities. The week before, I had done a training run with three other guides and a blind man in his late 30s. In the training, the man and I held onto opposite ends of a stretchy rubber athletic band, a sweaty tether with which I guided him through Central Park. Aside from a 15-minute online training, I had no credentials whatsoever.

I was late to my first shift, rushing from my internship where I had changed into shorts and sneakers in a tiny bathroom stall, hoping I didn't see anyone on the way out. Lamar and I were both late, so we were paired together by default (thankfully, I now know, even though I'm always a little late, Lamar is usually even later).

He's tall, probably 6'2", and I would have guessed he was in his early 30s if he hadn't told me about his two grown daughters and 16-month old granddaughter. He's also wildly popular, immediately greeted and slapped on the back by every experienced guide there.

I was nervous on our first run. In addition to doubting my ability to keep him safe, I also worried about my hopeless sense of direction. Having lived in New York for less than a year, I stuck to the same running path on the west side of Central Park out of fear of getting lost, which tended to happen every time I veered off the path. At the meet up point at Engineer's Gate on the Upper East Side, I started sweating thinking about the two of us, lost and disoriented on a little side path. Lamar's tether is different from the shared rubber band many other

runners use; he opts for a two-sided buckle that wraps and snaps around each of our waists, with about a foot of bungee between us. He was much more stuck with me.

He told me his pace (he's faster than me) and how far he wanted to go (he has much more endurance than I do), and we set off. It was hot and the sun was persistent, setting late in the day but casting golden light around. We made some small talk (he's from the Bronx, I'm from Baltimore), but mostly my words were about the run. "We're coming up on a hill," or "we're going to turn a little to the right here," I'd say, hoping this was enough. He is so tall that his head would sometimes graze the leaves on branches, a danger I had never even considered. "Just lead the way," he'd said, feeling the pull of my movement in the bungee between us.

As we approached the fork on 72nd Street, I panicked. He wanted to run four miles, and I couldn't decide if we should turn left or right. One way would get us to Columbus Circle, the other would get us onto a runner's loop. I thought about getting out my phone, looking at my map, but before I could, Lamar huffed, "Let's make a left here." We made our left, and I held back a strong urge to ask how he knew where we were. He can't see; I knew this from our first meeting and from putting our tether on and from the nature of this run itself, but he knew exactly where we were. The rest of the run continued in the same way: I slowed us down when we needed to pass someone or moved us left when we had other runners approaching on

our right, and Lamar told me where to go. He said that if I needed water, there was a fountain coming up and we could stop. He gave me a warning before we started on the Three Sisters, the stretch of hills in Harlem that took all my energy to cross. When I told him we'd hit Engineer's Gate soon, all he said was "Yep."

We started running regularly together, and Lamar kept leading the way. He told me about his job, his goalball team, his upcoming races, his proclivity for wine and happy hour. In our shared familiarity, I told him candidly that I had a horrible sense of direction, that I was grateful that he knew where the bathrooms were and how to get there. I asked, once, how he knew about the cut across at 86th, how he knew exactly when we'd reached it, but he just shrugged and said he's a native New Yorker.

We spoke recently about his running with a guide. I asked how he can trust strangers—people he knows nothing about to—take him running through the park twice a week. He trusts himself,

Australian visually impaired track athlete Gerrard Gosens sprints with his guide/lead runner during a race at the 2000 Sydney Paralympic Games. Image by Sport the library (via Wikimedia Commons)

he answered. When you've been doing something for 30 years—longer than I've been alive—he knows that he can keep himself safe, and he can adjust to anyone because of that.

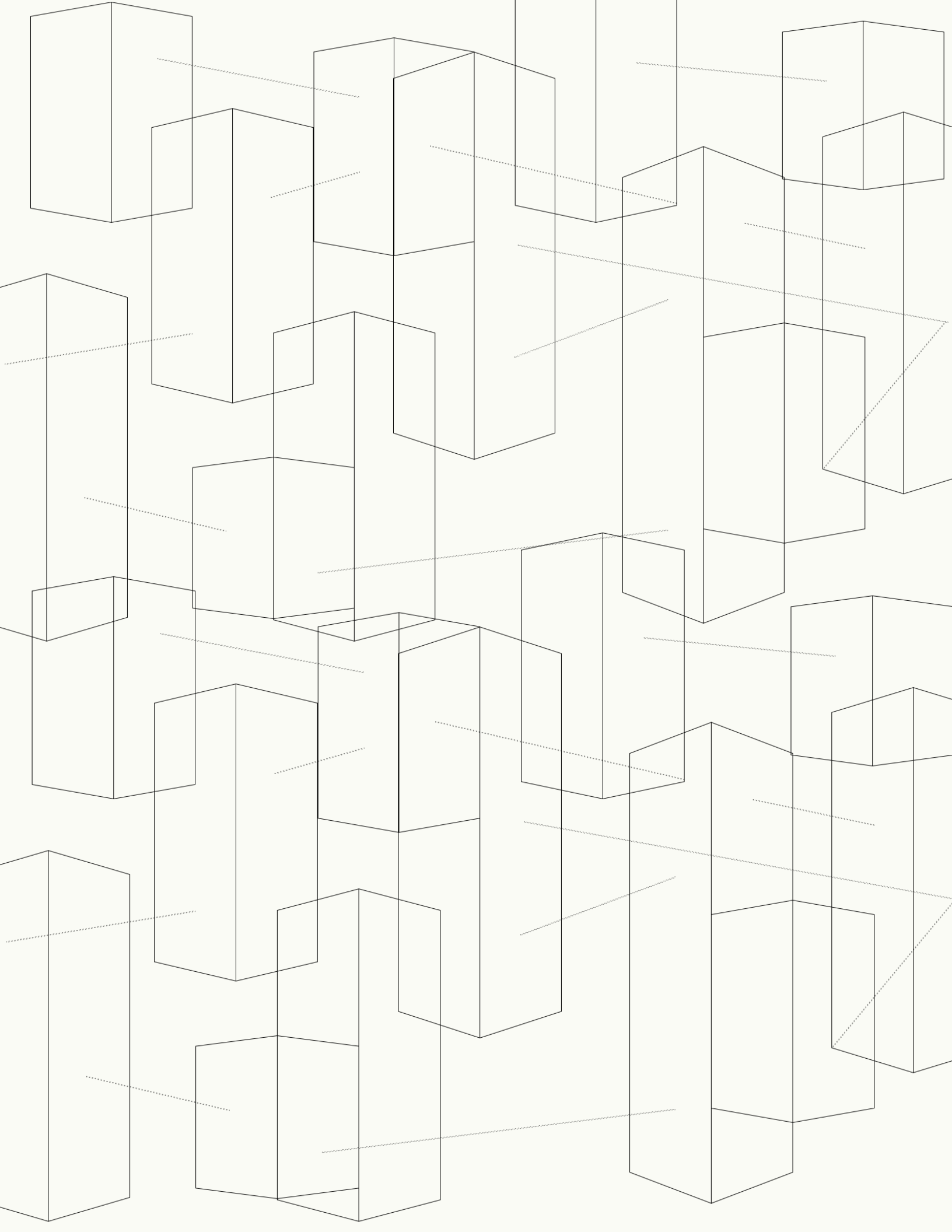
I also asked how he knew the park so much better than I did. Part of it, he said, was environmental: the elevation is always the same at certain parts of the park, like Harlem Meer, and felt different than the elevation by the reservoir. The south end of the park smells like horseshit, and there's usually music there—for the tourists. He said he used to know he was in Harlem when it started smelling like weed, even though now the whole park smells like it. He smells pretzel and hot dog carts and knows when more voices and other languages mean we've crossed 72nd Street. Part of it though, he said, is muscle memory. This is his training location, a place he's worked hard to know. He laughed about a recent guide who tried to point out landmarks as they passed them ("We're approaching Bethesda Fountain here. We're at Strawberry Fields now."). "You're not gonna surprise me and tell me anything I don't know about this park," he'd told her.

He ran a race recently, a half marathon in Charlotte, having never been there before and running with two women he had never met who had never raced as guides before. I asked if he was nervous, but he told me no almost before I

could finish my question. "I'm a basic bitch, I don't need a lot of information," he laughed, noting that some athletes want to know their pace, what mile they were on, the upcoming elevation. I laughed too, embarrassed because I often tell him when we finish another mile. Ultimately, he said, he knows he's going to finish the run, so the details don't matter so much. "I just need someone who can see a lot better than me."

I wanted to know if he had a favorite running memory. He said he loves to run for the conditioning, but mostly for the camaraderie. "Meeting an exorbitant amount of people from all walks of life," he said, "establishing relationships with people who are willing to sacrifice their time and energy to be a part of someone's life who absolutely needs assistance, it's a beautiful thing, and it shows that people are not all bad. There are good humans in this world."

**Part of it though,
he said, is muscle
memory. This is his
training location, a
place he's worked
hard to know.**



Ellie Madsen

Ellie is a researcher, designer, and software engineer working at the intersection of media, computation, and the environment.

READING THE HYPERCITY

Post-Structuralism and Sense-Making in Navigable Space

Our understanding of navigable systems—from physical [cities](#) to the digital web—depends not only on the information embedded within them, but also on the form through which information is structured. These relational structures determine how places and media are organized and experienced, sensed and made sense of. In [urban](#) contexts, spatial legibility and semiotics have been expressed through metaphors of [reading](#) and [writing](#) the city. Drawing upon the analogy of the text, [hypertext](#) presents a more suitable form for representing urban space: decentralized, nonlinear, and dynamic.

The term “hypertext” was first introduced by computer scientist Ted Nelson in 1965—over twenty years before the invention of the World Wide Web. Nelson used the prefix *hyper-* (beyond or in excess) to describe “text which is not constrained to be [linear](#) [...] which contains links to other texts” (Nelson). From its origin, hypertext produced a new navigable spatial logic for structuring knowledge. While we may take links for granted today, they were instrumental to the decentralized nature

of information shared on the internet. Essential properties of the web—interconnectedness, non-linearity, [distributed authorship](#)—could not have been realized without this new media infrastructure.

In the same decade, urbanists began theorizing approaches to representing complex urban environments through non-hierarchical systems. In *The Image of the City*, Kevin Lynch wrote that people use [mental maps](#) to make sense of urban environments. He proposed a lexicon of elements—nodes, [paths](#), edges, districts, and landmarks—to illustrate how cities are rendered legible when experienced by moving bodies (Lynch). In *A City is Not A Tree*, Christopher Alexander, too, borrowed vocabulary from the field of computer science—in which a *tree* is a common data structure made up of nodes and edges—to argue against the analogy of hierarchical trees in urban planning. Instead, Alexander proposed the semi-lattice, a more complex model of overlapping categories which is characteristic of natural, unplanned cities. One justification was that this bidirectional [network](#)

logic is found recurrently in social structures: “the systems of friends and acquaintances form a semilattice, not a tree” (Alexander).

A number of proposals have imagined spatial visualizations of [hypertext](#) based on real-world metaphors. One notable case is Andreas Dieberger’s 1998 dissertation *A City Metaphor to Support Navigation in Complex Information Spaces*, which puts forth the Information City as a “conceptual user interface metaphor based on the structure of a city” (Dieberger and Frank). Picture a version of Wikipedia that’s structured such that each wiki page is a room in a building, which is part of a neighborhood, which together construct a city. Dieberger based the Information City’s topology on [Lynch’s](#) lexical elements: container, landmark, and [path](#). The provocation bridged the gap between [urban](#) and information [networks](#), highlighting how spatial arrangement can serve as both metaphor and method to express [non-hierarchical](#) relationships between discrete elements.

This convergence of networked thinking stems from a broader intellectual shift away from unified narrative and stable representation. From literature to philosophy, postmodernist thought presented knowledge as relational and [situated](#). Co-constructed networks, like the web, actualized these ideas by providing an infrastructure with infinite capacity for adaptation. Nelson’s earliest ideation of [hypertext](#) stipulated that “such a system could grow indefinitely, gradually including more and more of the world’s written knowledge.” With no regulation over the creation of new links, half a century later the topology of the world wide web has been incrementally sculpted by millions of individual contributions. The pioneering hypertext scholar George Landow applauded hypertext for instantiating Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of the rhizome as a post-structuralist assemblage of multiplicity in opposition to singular [authorship](#) (Bishop). While arborescent models fix knowledge as hierarchical and stemming from a single origin, rhizomatic structures have no center, no beginning, and no end (Deleuze and Guattari).

Likewise, the unplanned city grows organically: its texture and form are molded by many multi-

temporal hands. Hyperlinks branch into offshoots; desired [paths](#) are grafted from paved streets. Spatial [networks](#)—from the web to the city—operationalize the rejection of metanarratives. “The city is grafted in this graphic sense,” writes media studies scholar Shannon Mattern in *A City is Not a Computer*. “It’s a polyglot palimpsest of codes and scripts and plans.”

The word “graft” originates from the Greek noun *stylus* or verb *to write*. If “the city and the book are opposed forms” (Raban) then perhaps [hypertext](#) offers a more appropriate form of representation for [urban](#) systems. The city and the web meander, evade [linear](#) narrative, are continually reinvented, and resist static representation. The city’s “spread, contingency, and aimless motion” cannot be forced “into the tight progression of a narrative” (Raban). Likewise, hypertext is “interconnected in such a complex way that it could not conveniently be presented or represented on [paper](#)” (Nelson). *The Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin’s massive collection of unfinished writing on 19th-century [urban](#) life in Paris, is the first well-known attempt to capture this [rhizomatic](#), fragmented form of writing on paper. “With its blind alleys and its maze-like tangle of passages, *The Arcades Project* resembles nothing so much as a city,” states a review of the work. “To read it is to take on the aimless motion of the flâneur, the idle urban stroller” (George). The text’s modularity lends itself to hypermedia:

in 2006 it was adapted into a [hypertext](#) project called Reading the Ruins, which orders and reorders passages for endlessly unique readings (Peaker). The [Information City](#) imagines text as city; Reading the Ruins imagines city as text.

If “metaphors of the book inform how we ‘[write](#)’ and ‘[read](#)’ the city” (Mattern), then metaphors of the web influence how we [construct](#) and navigate the city. Manuel Castells’s 1996 book *The Rise of the Network Society* documented how information technologies like the Internet produce a new social structure. Shortly after, Albert-László Barabási discovered scale-free networks—whose properties recur in [urban](#) and social systems—upon mapping the topology of the web. The structural relationship between digital information and cities is not merely metaphorical: “in both computing and urban

planning, this [arboreal](#) language is simultaneously formal, genealogical, [operational](#), political, and epistemological” (Mattern). A Latourian reading extends this claim by granting agency to the World Wide Web itself. The digital infrastructure of information networks does not simply represent reality; it functions as an agent and mediator of social relations. Hypertext does not describe the city so much as it actively [constructs](#) it.

Our mental maps of [urban](#) spaces are constructed through relational association, connecting similar concepts and places. Similarly, [hyperlinks](#) connect related media on the web. Readers have agency to navigate freely when exploring forking content, constructing meaning as they forge their own [paths](#). The routes traced by users meandering across the web serve as through-lines that allow them to construct mental maps of digital space. In this nature, hypertextual information systems foster associative thinking, sense-making, and provenance.

Today, much of the media consumed on the Internet is no longer discovered independently via [hyperlink](#) navigation, but suggested by recommendation [algorithms](#). Actively seeking out information is replaced with passively consuming streams of content. “As systems take on more decision-making, users have less control over what they see and how meaning or relationships between content are [constructed](#)” (Liu and Almeda). When system logics are obscured, information is [unsituated](#) and provenance is [lost](#). Content is not networked, but sequential and linear. Media surfaces from the [algorithmic](#) black box like mysterious omens; attempts to derive meaning are a [losing](#) game. There are no forking [paths](#) nor desired lines—only the freeway.

Our cities are familiar. We come to know our blocks and neighborhoods through embodied experiences: the corner store, a neighbor’s stoop, our daily walk to the metro. By repeated observation and interaction we make sense of our surroundings and weave detailed [memory maps](#). These same perceptual behaviors carry over to digital space: a 1997 study reported that 58% of users’ web pages accessed are revisits to previously seen pages (Tauscher). In the [Information City](#), the question is “what can I see

from here?” (Bernstein), highlighting the fact that the user’s perception of media is grounded in their situated position. Users exist inside the web; as they navigate hyperlinks they are “transported” from one media site to another. In both digital and physical space, sense-making emerges through repeated navigation, orientation, and embodied experience.

In contrast, the post-hypertext web—characterized by siloed platforms and recommendation algorithms—imbues the user with a metaphorical birds-eye view: the “view from above, from nowhere” (Haraway). Algorithmic media prioritizes novelty over provenance. These logics extend beyond digital space to shape how cities are navigated offline, as [urban](#) experiences are increasingly [mediated](#) by algorithmic suggestions. In 2022, a senior vice president at Google shared that internal studies revealed nearly 40 percent of young people opt for TikTok or Instagram [recommendations](#) over Google’s knowledge network when searching for a restaurant (Huang). Predictive [algorithms](#) direct users to similar places based on their profile activities and are subject to criticism for their lack of serendipity. The absence of serendipity stems in part from digital spaces’ low sensoriability—the capacity of an environment to be sensed—thereby producing a feedback loop of incomprehensibility and [disorientation](#) (Smets).

“In any organized object,” warned [Christopher Alexander](#) in 1965, “extreme compartmentalization and the dissociation of internal elements are the first signs of coming destruction.” The [algorithmic](#) web contributes to the fragmentation of digital space by flattening relational structures and obscuring emergent associations. The digital world does not simply mirror the physical world, but [constructs](#) it: while hypermedia enriches our [mental maps](#) of urban space by linking representations of real-world entities, [linear](#) algorithms impose false metanarratives that sever the complex relationality of place. Preserving [networked](#) information systems and the open web is necessary to sustain infrastructures that afford participatory sense-making. In [reading](#) sensorial and sensible hypertext, we [write](#) richer, more complex hypercities.

Non-hierarchical linked hypermedia structure



Seunghu Kim

Seunghu (MSAUD '25) is an urban designer based in London, exploring ways to make a meaningful conversation between human and nature.

TIME THROUGH COLOR, COLOR THROUGH TIME

Silvered by Sun

Pantone 14-4102 is a color shaped by time and nature. A tree, fallen on a beach and weathered by sun, turns from brown to gray.

Once you see this natural rustic gray, you know time has passed since it fell.

Shaped by UV radiation, brown pigments gradually get broken down to silvery gray, which is highlighted more under the sun.

The beauty of natural aging: it's like nature's order that we shine as we get older.



Façade

Wood used as façade, screen or overhang. It forms the outer layer of buildings and often appears as cladding and shading elements.

August, 2022
Jeju-si, South Korea



Post

In garden, planted edges, timber posts that support plants, signs, and light infrastructures.

September, 2023
Orvieto, Italy

**Piles**

Along waterfronts and former industrial sites, timber piles and structural supports form part of piers or docks.

June, 2024
New York City, USA

**Bench**

In parks and public spaces, it appears in seating platforms and deck surfaces in human scale elements.

January, 2026
London, UK



Mid-west suburban
neighborhood. Image by
David Sager (via Wikimedia
Commons)

Hannah Kosoff

Hannah is an urban planning graduate student interested in sprawl through research, design, and communication, focusing on its impact on human experience.

THE QUIET WEIGHT OF SUBURBAN BOREDOM

The Illusion of Calm

The suburbs' landscapes are often perceived as a refuge for upper-middle-class life, filled with order, comfort, and safety. But walking through them, it becomes hard to tell where you are: Florida, Montana, California? Regional identity dissolves into a standardized backdrop, and the senses begin to flatten. Everything looks the same, sounds the same, smells the same.

Each walk looks like the last: empty streets with nothing but rows of houses with front-facing garages. There's no sound of people or nature, and when sound does appear, it's mechanical—lawnmowers and leaf blowers blending into a constant hum. There are no new smells beyond the uniform scent of cut grass. The landscape is visible and maintained

but untouchable; there's no benches or public surfaces to be occupied. As for taste, seeking something new requires planning—often a car trip. There are no chance encounters with food or street-level cues drawing you toward something unfamiliar; meals are chosen in advance and repeated from the same grocery aisles.

At first glance, boredom may seem subjective. What feels dull to one person may feel calm or desirable to another. But if boredom keeps appearing in the same places, among the same people, and under the same conditions, it's worth asking what it's trying to tell us—and what our landscapes are quietly teaching us to feel.

Background on Boredom

In psychology, state boredom is defined as: “When an individual experiences both the objective neurological state of low arousal and the psychological state of dissatisfaction, frustration, or disinterest in response to low arousal.” (Vogel-Walcutt et al.). Excessive boredom is linked to several negative outcomes, including:

1. **reduced self-control and increased risk-taking (Kılıç et al.; Biolcati et al.);**
2. **negative mental health effects such as loneliness, depression, anxiety, and low motivation (Farmer and Sundberg; Vodanovich et al.);**
3. **lower self-actualization, including diminished autonomy, creativity, and self-esteem (McLeod and Vodanovich);**
4. **cognitive and attentional impairments, including mind wandering and ADHD-related symptoms (Malkovsky et al.);**
5. **social withdrawal and poorer psychosocial functioning (Vodanovich et al.; Watt and Vodanovich);**
6. **and lower performance and disengagement in work settings. (Watt and Hargis).**

By contrast, too little boredom is associated with shortened attention span, dopamine overload, and chronic stress (Bench and Lench; Volkow et al.; McEwen).

Experimental studies underscore boredom’s aversive nature. When left without stimulation, many participants preferred negative experiences, with 67% of men choosing to administer electric shocks to themselves (Wilson et al.). Research also demonstrates that boredom is linked to environmental sensory input: lower levels of perceived information predict higher boredom (Seiler et al.). Psychological and evolutionary theories emphasize that boredom acts as a signal that an activity is no longer sufficiently rewarding and motivates a shift toward alternative, more meaningful pursuits (Bench and Lench). In many traditional societies, such as Aboriginal Australian cultures, there is no direct linguistic equivalent for “boredom.” Anthropologists say this largely because daily life follows natural rhythms rather than rigid clock-based schedules, making the sensation of “having nothing to do” less likely to emerge. While boredom-like states existed historically, they were rare and socially bounded. Scholars argue that modern boredom became widespread during the Industrial Revolution, when time was standardized. Before, states such as *acedia*, *melancholy*, and *ennui* were largely confined to religious or aristocratic classes and carried distinct moral and affective connotations (Musharbash).

Suburbia and Boredom

As industrial cities grew overcrowded and chaotic, planners overcorrected by prioritizing order and efficiency, producing suburban environments that favor predictability at the expense of sensory richness and social life.

However, suburbia is often used as a catch-all term. In *What Cities Say*, Emily Talen notes that there is a crucial distinction: there are planned suburbs, and there is sprawl. Planned suburbs are arranged with community in mind, offering identity and walkability as they are designed around shared civic anchors like parks, neighborhood centers, and transit. By contrast, sprawl results from profit-driven development that neglects social needs. It’s the product of deregulated land use, real estate speculation, tax breaks for developers, and government subsidies for car infrastructure.

The result is swaths of fragmented land filled with strip malls, tract-houses, and highways. Since the terms “planned suburbs” and “sprawl” often get blurred, in this context I’m talking about sprawl.

Example of Postwar Suburban Tract Housing: Levittown, Pennsylvania
Photograph by Jack E. Boucher (via Library of Congress)

Sprawl produces boredom through several interrelated mechanisms.

Land-use: When single-family residential zoning dominates, daily life loses variation. When there's nothing around you but endless rows of houses, there are fewer reasons to move, observe, or engage. Research shows adolescent boredom is lower in contexts with greater opportunities for social engagement and meaningful daily activity (Martz et al.).

Access to public, cultural, and recreational space: In sprawl, public and cultural spaces are sparse, disconnected, or relegated to leftover land. However, high-quality public spaces are strongly associated with improved well-being, social cohesion, and place attachment (Beck).

Architecture style: The architectural design is an afterthought in sprawl. For instance, tract housing or “cookie-cutter” housing—a hallmark of sprawl—feels visually uninteresting and boring. To counteract this effect, environmental psychologists say that features such as “organized complexity” (Lavdas et al.) coherence, mystery, and nature have been shown to enhance visual interest and emotional engagement (Herzog, “Urban Nature”; Herzog, “Urban Spaces”).

Transportation options: Compared to other modes of transportation, driving is more isolating, less physically rewarding, and frequently monotonous. However, the boredom that arises from behind the wheel is deadly. Research shows that drivers spend up to 63 percent of their commute mind-wandering (Burdett et al.). This leads to attention shifting into the brain's default mode network—a state closely associated with boredom (Danckert and Merrifield).

Community engagement: Sprawl's reliance on single-use zoning, car-oriented planning, and limited

public space makes it difficult for people to meet one another by reducing the likelihood of impromptu interactions and accidental encounters that naturally occur in lively street environments. A study in Galway, Ireland found that residents of mixed-use, walkable neighborhoods reported higher social capital, stronger community ties, and greater civic participation than those in car-dependent suburbs (Leyden).

What This Means: Boredom as a Mass Condition

What's new today is not boredom itself, but its scale and embedding. Once associated with aristocratic leisure and excess time, boredom has shifted from a condition of the few to a mass experience—one increasingly produced through suburban development.

More than 55 percent of Americans now live in suburban areas (Pew Research Center), and from 2019 to 2022, poverty in the U.S. grew three times faster in suburbs than in major cities (Brookings Institution). We can see this quiet shift play out in everyday life. Research shows that children from lower-income families spend significantly more time on screen media than their wealthier peers (Rideout). Similarly, 34 percent of households earning under \$9,000 watch more than five hours of TV per day, compared to just 1.1 percent of households earning over \$150,000 (Smith).

Boredom is no longer an affliction of the wealthy with too much time on their hands; it has become part of everyday life for ordinary Americans. If boredom now clusters among certain populations and places, the question is no longer whether boredom is personal, but which environments are producing it—and why.

Author's Note:

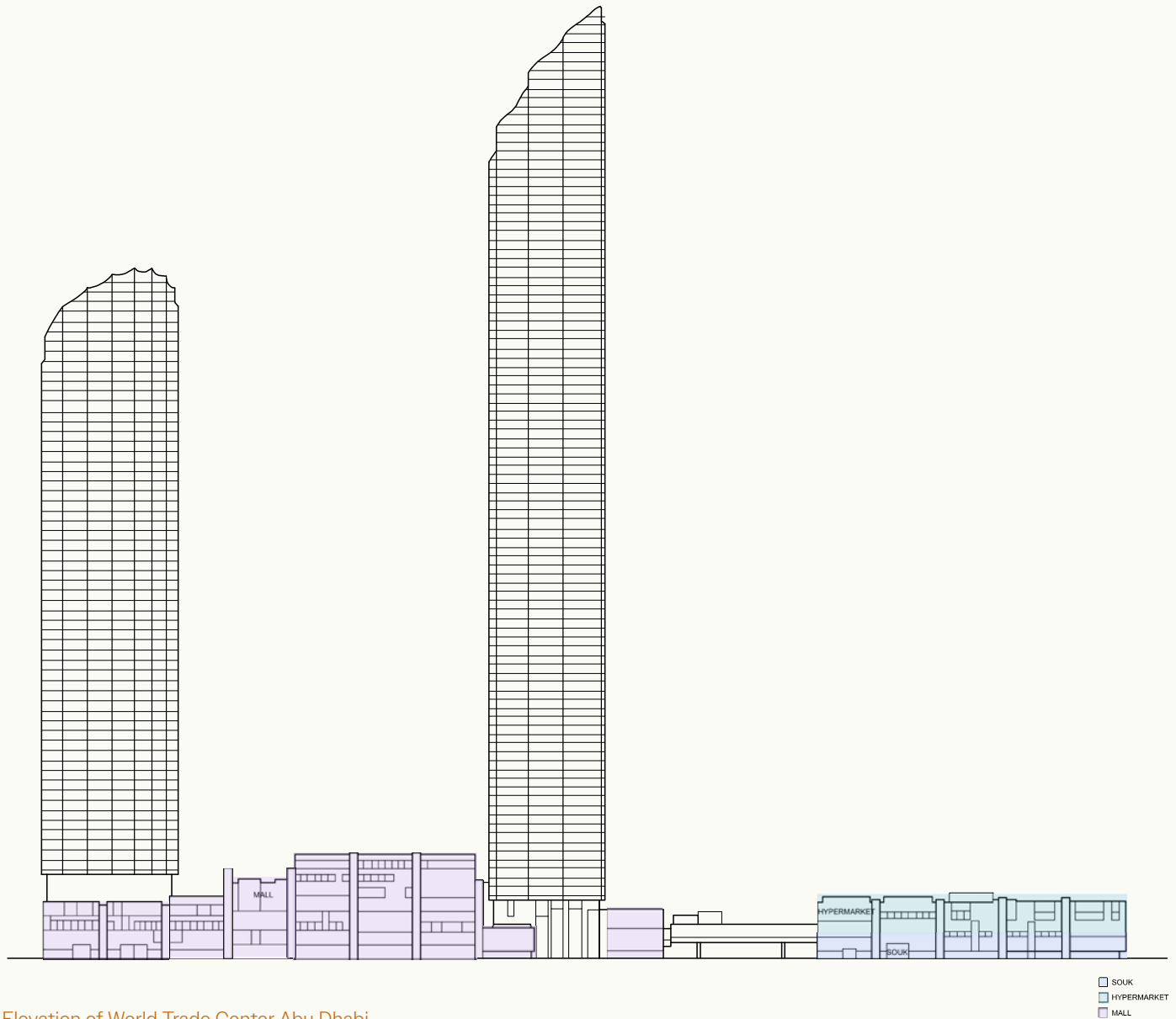
This essay is adapted from and informed by the author's peer-reviewed research "Exploring the Nexus Between Urban Planning and Boredom" published in *Transportation Research Record* (2024).



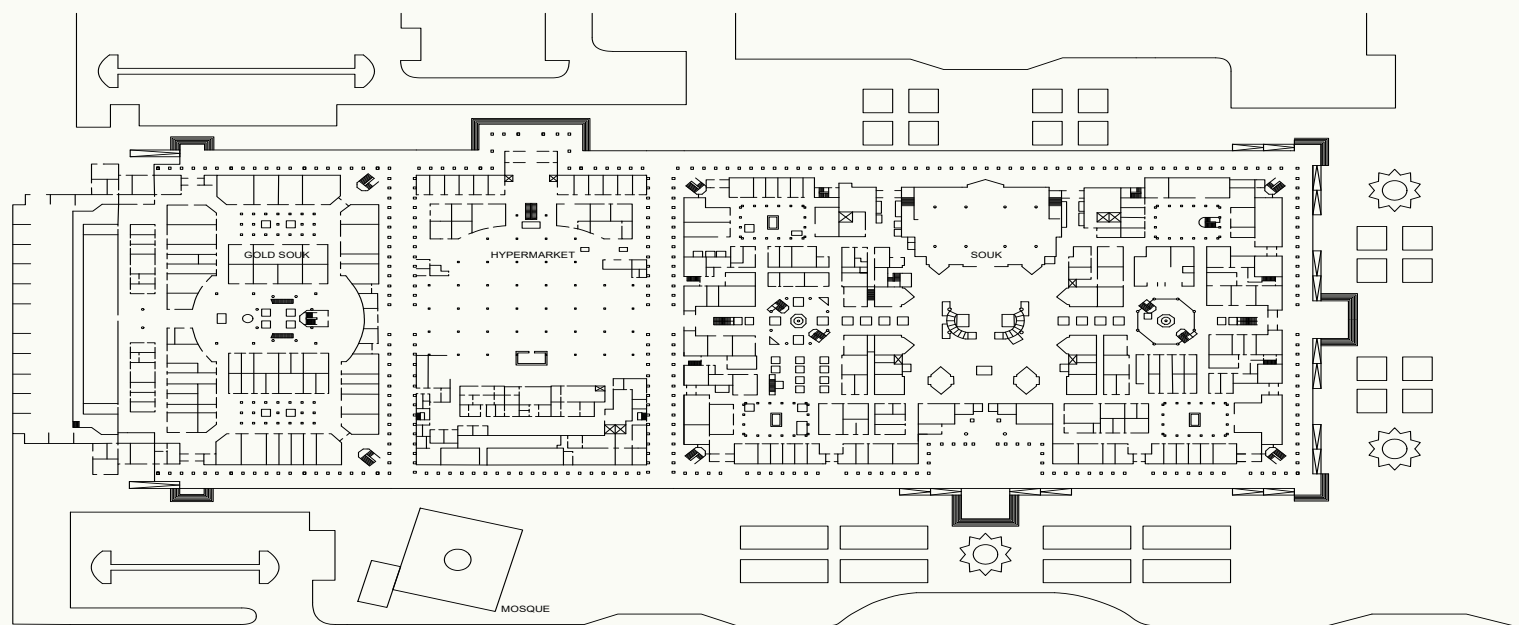
Example of sprawl: Breezwood, Pennsylvania. This image illustrates the seeming randomness of sprawl, where profit-driven development produces a fragmented landscape in the absence of a coherent guiding vision. Photograph by Ben Schumin, May 2, 2006.

Hannah Kosoff





Elevation of World Trade Center Abu Dhabi



Floor Plan of Madinat Zayed Shopping Center

Uthra Varghese

Uthra (MSAAD '20) is a research-driven architect and artist based in Abu Dhabi and New York exploring climate, migration, and material practice.

SENSING THE SOUK

Hybrid Marketplaces in Abu Dhabi

In the contemporary city, few spaces exist today that compare to the layered sensory experience of walking through a traditional souk. The souk, derived from the Arabic word for marketplace, has long served as a nexus of commercial and civic activity in the Middle East. Historically, the souk typology featured merchants' stalls linked by tight alleyways called *sikkas* that opened out into courtyards interspersed with fountains, gardens, and cafes. The souk was an integral feature in the urban planning of an Islamic city and was inseparable from the Friday Mosque. The marketplace followed trade-based zoning with high-status merchandise, namely books and perfumeries, located closest to the Mosque. Meanwhile, trades that produced odors and noise such as coppersmiths and leatherworkers were placed further away. The souk

presented a landscape of sensory abundance with its endless labyrinth of stalls: the pungent aroma of spices, the tactile richness of woven drapes, and the overlapping sounds of merchants and buyers negotiating prices. In recent years, the souk typology has transformed with the rise of industrialization, shopping malls, and online retail. The bazaar now exists mostly as a symbolic reminder of a bygone world primarily for tourists in search of an orientalist experience. In Abu Dhabi, the souk model has been reinterpreted as a hybrid of heritage and modern forms, exemplified by the World Trade Center Souk and Madinat Zayed Shopping Center. Examining these sites reveals the contrasting experiences they offer to visitors, one that is spatially choreographed and the other that evolves organically through informal adaptation.

In the early 1970's, a central marketplace was commissioned as part of Sheikh Zayed's masterplan for Abu Dhabi. Situated at the heart of the city's grid layout, its 200-plus shops were largely operated by immigrant tenants. For over thirty years, the open-air space served the community as an accessible souk for residents to gather regardless of social standing. At an affordable price, one could acquire a wide range of goods from cassettes, shoes, and food to perfumes, carpets, and jewelry. The salesman also represented the diversity of Abu Dhabi's migrant population; walking through the market one might have heard different dialects of Arabic alongside Urdu, Farsi, Hindi, Malayalam, and more. The market functioned as a home away from home for the sellers and shoppers alike as they traded both local produce and goods from their native lands. Then in 2003, just after midnight, a fire broke out in one of the stalls after an electrical short-circuit and quickly spread with perfume, gas cylinders, and other flammable products adding to the blaze. Although fire fighters were quick to the scene and no lives were lost, the fire destroyed a large majority of the shops. Most of the vendors lost their goods and were forced to relocate in search of new spaces to continue their livelihoods.

Following the destruction from the fire, the Old Souk was razed to the ground to make way for new developments by the government. Foster and Partners were appointed to undertake the design and construction of a new central marketplace for the city. The World Trade Center Souk project, as it would be called, integrates a contemporary souk and mall linked by a pedestrian bridge. Two mixed-use towers rise above each retail podium, incorporating office and residential programs. The mall and souk design feature a similar visual language and layout, with elongated corridors and indoor courtyards. The design attempts to modernize vernacular elements; the wooden lattice screens draw inspiration from the region's historic mashrabiyyas, and the geometric painted glass references traditional Islamic motifs. Even though the architecture pays homage to design elements of the past, the experience of moving through the space remains somewhat

sterile. The productive chaos of the bazaar is replaced by order, narrow alleyways give way to broad circulation zones, and intimate, compressed spaces are enlarged by double-height ceilings. The commercialization of the souk has resulted in a loss of sensory richness. The separation of the modern mall and the traditional souk did not last long; in 2018 a hypermarket was eventually added to the second floor of the souk building, and the connecting bridge now houses a food hall. Today, the World Trade Center exists primarily for tourists to purchase overpriced souvenirs produced in factories far removed from both place and process. Meanwhile, the residents pass through it as a transitional passage en route to the mall in search of more internationally identifiable brands. The enclosed environment fosters a sense of exclusivity, limiting its access to more affluent members of society. It is no longer a space where bargain deals are struck.



World Trade Center Souk

Two blocks away from the World Trade Center, the Madinat Zayed Shopping Center represents another attempt to reinterpret the traditional marketplace within a modern context. It was built in 2002 and features classic expressions of Islamic architecture with its colonnades, courtyards, curved archways, and domes. After the fire that destroyed the Old Souk in 2003, many displaced shopkeepers were moved to the newly constructed Madinat Zayed Shopping Center. The complex houses a gold souk, restaurants, and an array of shops selling an assortment of seemingly random items: knock-off handbags hang amidst wigs and abayas, electronics and jewelry are intermixed on counters, while children's toys are strewn across the floor. Even though the plan follows an ordered layout, the small kiosks take over the central courtyards, occupying the corridors and other interstitial spaces. As a result, navigating the market still entails frequent interruptions as vendors promote perfume samples and advertise discounted prices in raised voices. In 2011, as part of an expansion, the central section of the shopping complex was replaced by a hypermarket, bifurcating the gold souk and other retail units. At the time, vendors feared increased competition, but over a decade later both entities continue to co-exist while catering to specialized

and standardized needs. Even today, Madinat Zayed remains a major hub in the city, known for the wide range of services and goods it offers. If something can't be repaired or found there, it is unlikely to be available anywhere else in Abu Dhabi.

The souk has endured despite the rise of e-commerce and the retail gentrification of the hypermarket. Both Madinat Zayed and the World Trade Center Souk are case studies of the hybridization of the souk and mall models. In the World Trade Center, however, the authenticity of the souk has been largely replaced by staged urbanism, whereas Madinat Zayed retains more of the traditional vibrancy and affordability associated with the souk. In these two locations, the souk remains economically viable as long as it continues to offer bespoke goods and below-margin products that are not easily found elsewhere. At its essence, the souk is shaped by an architecture of inclusivity and adaptability that creates a catalyst for cross-pollination across senses. As the city's built environment becomes increasingly homogenized, the souk stands out as a unique public space that functions as a microcosm of cosmopolitanism and cultural exchange.

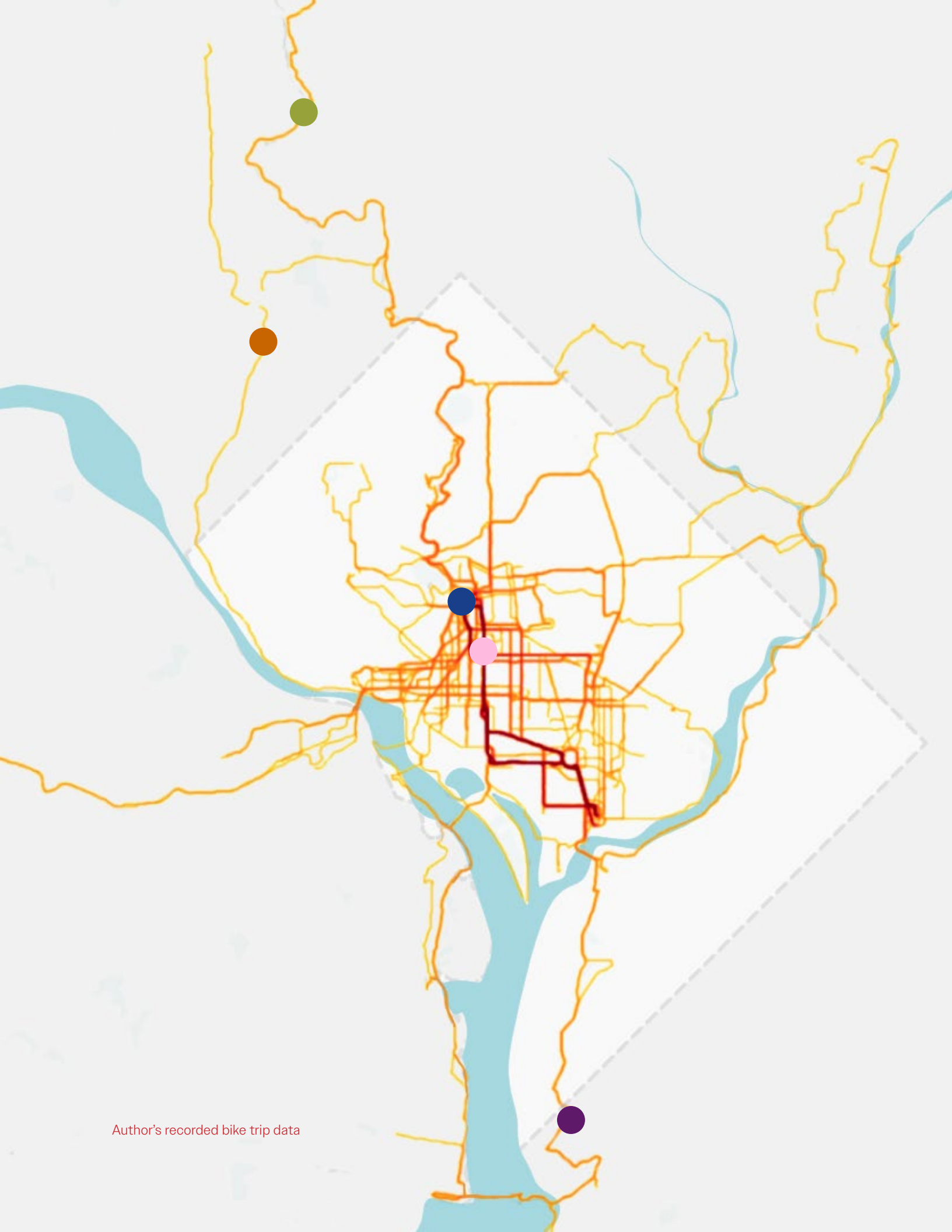
Madinat Zayed Shopping Center Interior





From *Thresholds*
Image by Swezya Joshi
Edited by Ayomikun Oluyadi





Author's recorded bike trip data

Sam Nelson

Sam is an eight-year resident of Washington, DC and an active biker across the region. He works at the District Department of Transportation.

KNOWING WASHINGTON BY BIKE

As I enter the top of the 15th Street bike lane in Washington, DC, my mind is thinking about the workday ahead. The hill starts to descend beneath my tires. And automatically, my legs and hands work in tandem to take me past the blocks of townhouses around Dupont Circle, through downtown, beside the White House, and off to the office. This route has become second nature to me. Over my many commutes, I've come to notice the changes each season brings. In the spring, tulips and daffodils greet me on my ride in. Come summer, the lanes fill with club volleyball players. Traveling on bicycle offers a unique vantage point of the city, at once intimate and immersive. And as the pavement rolls underneath me, the perspective of a bike allows me to tune into the world, my body, and my mind.

From a car seat window, you are an inside observer of the world outside your vehicle. But on a bike, you are truly one with the world. Exposed to the open air,

there's nothing to separate you from the smells of restaurants, conversations among strangers, and the wind in your face. Neither are you anonymous. You must engage with pedestrians crossing the streets or joggers moving in front of you. All together in the street, we acknowledge each other and negotiate our movements through the common space. During the week, I join the ranks of my fellow bike commuters down 15th Street as we sort ourselves by speed and brazenness when faced with a red light. On the weekends, I join the joggers and occasional rollerblader through Rock Creek Park, enjoying a forested escape on the car-free Beach Drive. Biking demands participation with the outer world; there is no distance between you and the city.

Any biker knows the daunting feeling of looking up from the ground in front of you, only to see a wall of asphalt with no end in sight. Facing this, my body instinctively gets ready to push; I know

to gear down, stand up, and get ready to keep the momentum. This physical exertion is encoded in my memory of the city. When I think of Bellevue in SE or Newton Street in Brookland, I think of the feeling of climbing these massive hills. The effort of the ride is inseparable from my knowledge of these places. And my body records more than just the climbs. Some of my favorite moments in the city are cruising down Beach Drive from the top, flying nearly a mile downhill without touching the pedals. I've learned the city through its highs and lows, and my body now understands DC geography as much as my mind does.

Above all, biking feels like freedom—faster than walking, more nimble than a car. Biking in a city offers an exciting combination of exploration, agility, and speed. The region accessible to you by bike is greatly expanded compared to traveling on foot. For me, this takes the internet-viral pani puri served from a gas station in suburban Vienna, Virginia from a fun idea to my new favorite spot. I've also discovered the marvelous multi-level flea market in Ballston, the Korean supermarket in Viers Mills, and the shopping outlets at National Harbor, all because I could ride there. Of course, access to a place via bike depends on the infrastructure to get there, as well as a level of comfort to use it. As cities shift towards less car dependence and more multi-modality, biking expands the destinations we can get to. The more we build, connect, and reinforce bikeable places, the more access and more freedom we will have.

This past year, I achieved a goal of 1,500 miles traveled by bike. I gained a greater sense of connection to my region, from the small details on my commute to work to an appreciation for the great diversity of the outer suburbs. I touched all eight wards of DC, as well as the surrounding counties, stitching together a picture of the way we are all connected. And I was reaffirmed in my sense of freedom and ability to get where I want to go. Every day, there are a million stories passing by each other. On a bike, I am one more of them, pedaling towards my own goals yet alive in the city with everyone else.

In 2025, I logged 1,582.4 miles by bike on the activity tracking app, Strava. By logging these activities, I am able to create a visual heatmap of where I went during this time period. This heatmap is the background image, while activities are lines on the map. The color reflects how often this segment was traveled: yellow-orange for the least traveled, to red for the most traveled.

11/10/2025

The leaves fall and collect in the 15th Street bike lane.



9/13/2025
Biked out to the Korean grocery store in Veirs Mill, MD and enjoying a picnic in the park.



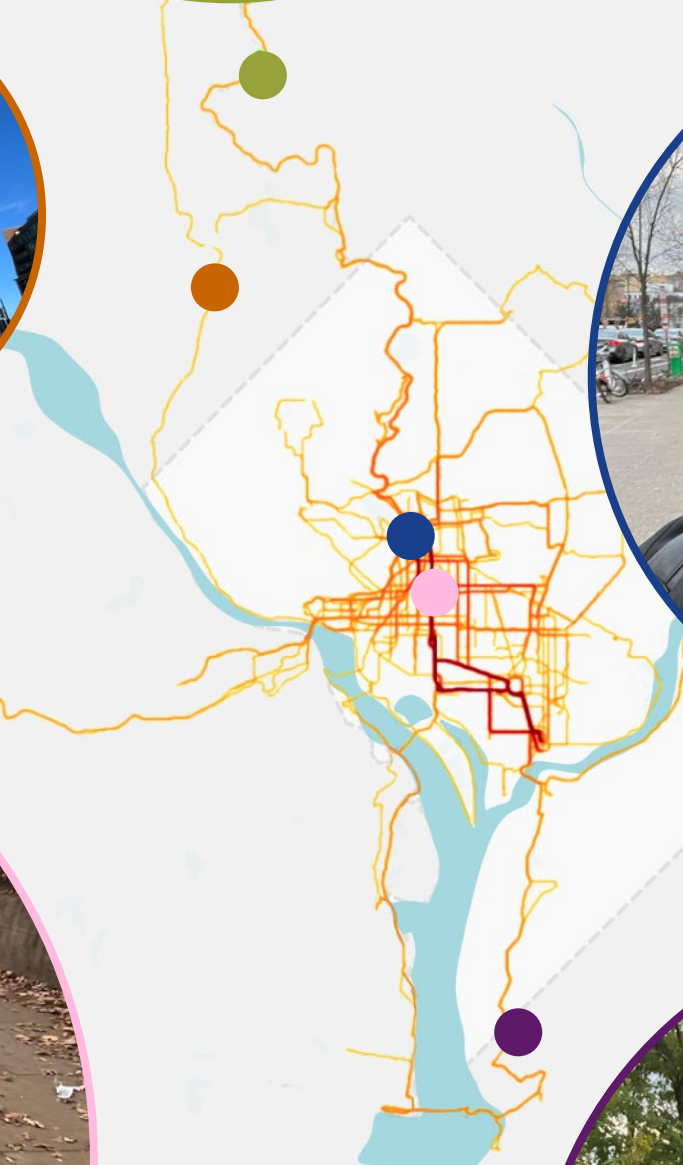
12/31/2025 Completing my yearly goal of 1,500 miles on bike, at the Capital Bikeshare, DC's bike-sharing system, by my apartment.



2/1/2025
The scenic Capital Crescent Trail ends in the urban center of Bethesda, MD.



9/9/2025
One of my new favorite green areas is the Oxon Cove Trail on the way to National Harbor, with beautiful trails and sunset views over the Potomac River.





Adnan Kasubhai

Adnan is an architectural designer and researcher, exploring entanglements between ecology, capital, and spatial fabrication whilst engaging in histories.

SMELLS LIKE CAPITALISM

Odours of Erasure, Memory, and Resistance in Mumbai

Prologue

*Not all that gleams was meant to stay,
Not every dream is solid ground;
The city learns to rise this way,
Where tides were stitched and sweat was found.
Towers of glass rehearse ambition,
Envisioning a cleaner air;
But land remembers each incision,
And keeps what labour leaves in care.*

Bandra slums and skyscrapers against the backdrop of the Arabian Sea and the Mumbai skyline. Image by Zoshua Colah (via Unsplash)

Mumbai is weird. It is a city that parallels the city of dreams, yet I wonder if dreams have senses. If they did, they would smell the sweat of the common man, watch the blood as it dripped from his labour, pulling handcarts through the congested lanes of Mumbai Central. These smells do not enter the vents of the Audis of the businessmen who turn off into the gates of the newly risen high-rise societies. This division, written in odour, marks the boundary of capital. Here is where I wonder what happens in the drivers of capitalism that, within this very growth—or rather right in front of this growth—we see informal settlements naturally and organically grow.

Yet, capitalism smells not only of labour, but of erasure. Walking the western coastline of Mumbai, one encounters an olfactory overload: the salt of the Arabian Sea, the stench of rotting mangroves, the acrid fumes of dredging machines and compactors pushing the final stages of the coastal road. Walk further, if your lungs can take it, and you reach Versova, one of the last remaining *koliwad*s. The Koli, originals of Mumbai and artisanal fishermen, are now being pushed toward extinction. Long before Mumbai was imagined as a financial capital or a global city, the Koli shaped its coastline through tidal knowledge, fishing practices, and seasonal rhythms, inhabiting and navigating a fragile archipelago of seven islands long before reclamation fused them into the city we recognize today. Once, the air carried the pungent salt of fish drying on beaches and Bombay duck laid fresh in the sun to be sold. Now, it carries only the heavy scent of asphalt, machinery, and despair. Smell itself becomes an archive of erasure. And this, too, is what smells like capitalism.

Mumbai stages itself as a theatre. Scripts of late capitalism choreograph its movements and its dreams. The city envisions itself through McKinsey reports and global competitiveness rankings, not through the lives and scents that saturate its streets. In this illusion of progress, smell becomes an inconvenience. It is something to be neutralised, controlled, or expelled. The bourgeois desire for cleanliness recasts odour as a threat. The city begins to deodorize its own memory, cleansing the traces of fish, sweat, spice, salt, and monsoon from its surfaces.

In place of this memory, towers without character rise, glass shafts stretching into the sky at BKC and Worli. Their surfaces glimmer with promise but carry no scent, no texture, no history. The malls at Phoenix and Palladium offer an atmosphere sealed in artificial air, a sterilized version of urban life that erases the sensory abundance that once defined Mumbai. The city is losing its taste for itself. Its theatrics now belong to a dream sold elsewhere, a dream that refuses to smell the land it stands upon.

Coastal Erasures: The Mangroves, The Koli, The Odours That Survival Left Behind

The western shoreline of Mumbai carries the scent of a city being rewritten. It is a coastline that once breathed through mangroves, tidal rhythms, and the daily labours of the *Koli*. Now it carries an engineered choreography of rot, dredging, and asphalt. The air along the coastal road is thick with machines that scrape the seabed and heap the remains onto reclaimed land. The smell of salt mixes with diesel and mud, forming an atmosphere that feels wounded. This is not simply construction. It is an urbicide, a deliberate killing of ecological life and sensory memory.

The coastal road behaves like a staged set. It creates a performance of a pristine waterfront, marketed through renderings of promenades, gardens, and landscaped parks that promise calm horizons. This staging does not emerge from aesthetic desire alone, but from the infrastructural violence required to reorder land, water, and air. These images erase the reality, which is that of a manufactured cleanliness. Instead, they resemble the logics described in the *Planetary Theatre of Tourism*, where destinations are kept in a state of illusion through constant cycles of staging and concealment. The violence is hidden backstage.

Walk towards the few remaining *koliwad*s and the contrast is immediately apparent. The scents of fish, tar, seaweed, and drying nets linger like the last memories of what the coastline once was. These smells carry more truth than any manicured garden on a brochure. The coastline becomes spectral, haunted by what has been removed and what continues to vanish. This is another face of what smells like capitalism.

Bourgeois Environmentalism

The illusion of a pristine coastline does not emerge by accident. It is produced by a particular form of environmental thinking that circulates through Mumbai's middle class: a desire for order disguised as care. After walking past the dredged waters and broken mangroves, one encounters another form of erasure, one that speaks softly and claims

virtue. It appears in the language of beautification, cleanliness and world class ambitions. Here, erasure no longer appears as construction or demolition but as moral reasoning, where order is mistaken for care. This is what has come to be known as bourgeois environmentalism.

Bourgeois environmentalism presents itself as a concern for ecology, yet it holds little interest in tidal rhythms, wetlands, or the fragile life of the mangroves. Instead, it focuses on the removal of anything perceived as untidy or excessive. The smells of fish drying on lines, the tar on nets, the presence of informal markets, and the everyday messiness of coastal labour become framed as pollutants, no longer read as histories or livelihoods but as obstacles to improvement. These are failures of people rather than failures of planning.

The coastal road and its surrounding promenades thrive on this logic. They promise an environmentally improved shoreline while displacing the very ecologies that once sustained it. Environmentalism thus becomes a tool for deodorizing identity—it cleans the city by cleansing the senses, replacing history with landscaped silence.

Counter-Sensorium: Odours That Resist Erasure

Even in a city that tries to deodorize itself, some smells continue to persist. They slip through the cracks of planning documents and rise above the smooth surfaces of glass towers. They form what can only be called a counter-sensorium. These smells are ungovernable; they belong to the city's everyday rituals rather than to any programme of improvement.

Walk through Dadar in the early morning and the fragrance of jasmine and marigold gathers in the air with a force that planning cannot suppress. At Mohammed Ali Road, smoke from grills mixes with spice, creating a thick atmosphere that insists on its own presence. The monsoon arrives and the first rain hits the dust, releasing a scent that folds memory, soil and time into a single breath. These are the

smells of convivial life, the forms of shared presence that Ash Amin describes as the quiet foundations of urban belonging. They are not spectacular, yet they anchor the city far more deeply than the images in any development brochure.

Along the coast, where reclamation advances, the sea continues to release its salt. The fish markets hold on to their distinct, layered scents that connect bodies to labour and seasons to survival. These odours refuse erasure. They remind the city of what it once was and what it continues to be beneath its own narratives of progress. They are the truths that linger in the air long after the illusions fade.

The Smell That Capital Cannot Contain

Mumbai continues to dream of an odourless future. Imagined through towers of glass, landscaped promenades, and the promise of purified air. These dreams attempt to overwrite the scents that have shaped the city for generations. But smell is stubborn. It holds on to the odours that planning and capital try to erase. The scent of labour rising from the streets, the salt carried by the sea, the fish markets that persist in their rhythm, and the damp monsoon air that settles across the city each year—these smells form an archive that refuses deletion. They recall the lives that have built the city and the ecologies that have sustained it. They endure even when development tries to cleanse the sensory world in the name of progress.

To breathe in Mumbai is to encounter this layered resistance. It is to recognise that the city's truth exists not in the images projected upon it, but in the odours that linger, persist, and return. The city dreams of being odourless, yet its truth persists in the air. This is what smells like capitalism. And this is what smells like Mumbai.



John Sandman

John's novel, *A Random Walk*, set mainly in New York in the year after 9/11, appears in the fall.

POSITIVELY 4th STREET

The Underground Railroad Sits Behind the Merchant's House Walls

You've come to New York in the winter of 2025. You think you want to live here but, as with those who came before, you don't know where to look. Everything is so expensive. The outer boroughs seem further away than the rest of the world in that *New Yorker* cartoon.

You walk along East 4th Street, starting from Lafayette where the surrounding streets still have cobblestones. A lot of the buildings seem new, while the old ones seem retrofitted with modern design flourishes that disguise their origins, and you wonder how long this street has looked this way. Once the Bowery, it's now (depending on who you

talk to) the East Village, a former redoubt of the Beat Generation when its habitués were priced out of the West Village, then overwhelmed by hippies in the mid-1960s. Now anyone who can afford seven- and eight-figure real estate can come out and play.

There's a one-story warehouse where food vendors park their carts. Next to it is a three-story brick building at 29 East 4th Street. It looks like your kind of place, a classic New York City row house. Looking a little closer, you notice that it's not a place where anyone lives; it's a museum. There's no room at this inn.

Merchant's House Museum, NYC.

Image by Ajay Suresh (via Wikimedia Commons)

The Merchant's House Museum, Manhattan's first landmarked building, is the only 19th-century family house to survive completely intact, including its interior and furnishings. In a city populated with buildings and people who change and then change again, the Merchant's House has been frozen in time, even as it entered a decline that was thwarted at times then accelerated over the decades.

Now it's the spring of 2026 and you're on the same block. Everything looks the same except for three stories worth of scaffolding where that row house used to be. What happened? You look more closely and notice that behind the hoardings it's still there. The Merchant's House is in the midst of a facelift. Ground was broken for a full-on exterior restoration on July 1, 2025. The \$5.2 million capital improvement project goes from the roof to the street. The stoop will be restored and the bluestone sidewalk will be reset; the brick façade will get a makeover. The museum itself will remain open for the duration.

"This project represents a tremendous investment by New Yorkers and their elected representatives to support the places that make our city unique and livable," said Giulietta Fiore, executive director of the Historic House Trust in a statement. "We are proud to be stewarding this important project."

"Our historic houses are windows into our city's past, connecting New Yorkers to our shared heritage while educating and inspiring new generations," said Iris Rodriguez-Rosa, commissioner of the New York City Parks Department which owns the Merchant's House. "This renovation work at the Merchant's House Museum preserves a unique element of Manhattan's history and ensures that it will remain a thriving educational resource for New Yorkers and visitors alike."

A shadowy developer, Kalodop II Park Corp., has been trying to build a hotel next to the Merchant's House for two decades through proposals that were met with serial rejections. An exception was approval of an eight-story building, reduced from nine stories in April 2014. In September 2018, the City Council

Subcommittee on Zoning shot down a rezoning application. The Subcommittee on Land Use also voted to disapprove the developer's application. However, this was not the last word.

In December 2023, the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) awarded Kalodop a conditional certificate of appropriateness, which is needed when proposed work affects significant architectural features of a landmarked property. But a restoration at Merchant's House is underway.

All's well that ends well, right?

A source in District 6 Councilmember Gale Brewer's office said, "Things may not end well." On February 5, Kalodop filed for new permits to construct a nine-story building at 27 East 4th Street next to the Merchant's House, the site of the one-story warehouse which Kalodop owns.

"Demolition of the existing building [the warehouse] had already been approved by LPC," said Andrew Berman, executive director of Village Preservation, referring to the site of the new proposal. "The Community Board 2 landmarks committee rejected the application for the new building. But the LPC ultimately gets to decide."

Preservationists who oppose this project—Gale Brewer, Michael Hiller, Margaret "Pi" Gardner, Anthony Bello, plus engineers and architects—have said that Kalodop's proposed buildings, like the one that may be on the cusp of approval, will crush the Merchant's House through its sheer weight. Even before it goes up, digging for the foundation may cause the fragile building, which is not sitting on bedrock, to collapse.

Why did the yearlong renovation start when the possibility of a Kalodop building was still on the table? Did the Historic House Trust even know? In a



phone-based shrug, Micheal Hiller said, “This is city government. The right hand doesn’t know what the left hand is doing.”

As unsatisfying as that answer is, neither Giulietta Fiore nor anyone else returned messages left with the Historic House Trust, a nonprofit that has a partnership with the New York City Parks Department, the building’s owner. Parks also didn’t return messages. The worst-case scenario? Kalodop starts digging the foundation and the Merchant’s House, along with its \$5.2 million exterior restoration, collapses in a heap.

If the Historic House Trust seemed in the dark—or in denial—about the ongoing threat to the building, no one in preservation circles or anywhere else was ready for what came next. On February 10, word dropped that the Merchant’s House was part of the underground railroad in the 1800s; a safe house that helped enslaved people escape bondage in the south. The escape entrance was a 2’ x 2’ hole cut into a bureau drawer on the second floor that may have been adjacent to Gertrude Treadwell’s bedroom. Leading down two floors, exactly where it goes and how it was used isn’t clear. It’s been called the first such discovery in Manhattan in 100 years.

“I’ve been practicing historical preservation law for 30 years, and this is a generational find,” said Michael Hiller, an attorney and professor at Pratt Institute. “This is the most significant find in historic preservation in my career, and it’s very important that we preserve this.”

Would this have an impact on the future viability of the Merchant’s House? Its historical bona fides are already established—it’s on the National Register of Historic Places and is a National Historic Landmark designated by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior. Now, concern about the building will increase. If the Merchant’s House came down, the underground railroad link would come down with it. Could this, by hook or by crook, shut down Kalodop’s building once and for all?

“It’s hard to tell,” said Raul Rothblatt, co-founder of Friends of Abolitionist Place, which saved another stop on the underground railroad from demolition—227 Duffield Street in downtown Brooklyn. “It will take time to play out.” Rothblatt added, “I’ve seen too many similar buildings torn down or degraded to think that this site is untouchable.”

The Merchant’s House is mainly identified with Seabury Treadwell, a wealthy hardware merchant whose family lived there from 1832 until 1933 when his youngest daughter, Gertrude, died alone and destitute. The house was built by Joseph Brewster, a hat merchant in 1830, who sold it to Treadwell two years later. Brewster was a rare individual—both a real estate developer and an abolitionist. Brewster helped establish the anti-slavery movement in three Manhattan churches. Documents found at a Rivington Street church include plans to construct the passageway at 29 East 4th Street.

New York State outlawed slavery in 1827, but that didn’t prevent the overseers of freedom seekers from following them north. Since they were considered property, they were fair game for bounty hunters and New York City marshals. And in the 1830s, pro-slavery sentiment was rife. “New York City was pro-slavery and the financial capital of the slave trade,” said Rothblatt. Were those who fled bondage up north at risk? People who publicly called themselves abolitionists were.

It’s not clear why Brewster sold the house two years after he built it or what the Treadwells knew. Maybe this was a precursor to house flipping. But maybe he’d been outed and feared for his life.

“Abolitionists were killed because they were abolitionists,” Rothblatt states. “Even a high-profile abolitionist like William Lloyd Garrison had to travel in disguise when he was in New York. Are there monuments to slavery in the South? Streets of New York—Stuyvesant Street, Bergen Street, Nostrand Avenue—are named after slaveholders.”

Regardless of this newly unearthed history, if the Merchant's House has an empathy deficit in some quarters it's because the preservationist movement doesn't address the affordability issue that comes with the territory in New York. But if you can't live in the Merchant's House, you couldn't live in any of Kalodop's proposed buildings either, with the possible exception of the most recent proposal which has a residential component. Details are lacking, and it probably won't be cheap.

There's an alternative narrative that resists preservation and it's not coming from the developers. In Rothblatt's view, some progressives, in the name of supporting affordability, have cast their lot with developers who will, for example, tear down single family houses in the outer boroughs

and replace them with the Lego buildings that have proliferated in Brooklyn and Queens. They look like they're cheap to build, cheap to demolish, and not all of them are rentals (or cheap).

Even though it's a museum, the affordability crisis has found its way to the Merchant's House in the form of unhoused people who used the stoop as a crash pad, as has been the case elsewhere. A familiar calculus begins when you try to figure out where life on the street intersects with life in a similar building where the rent might be more than half your monthly income. There's much more to the story of New York, behind the scaffolding which veils much of the city, beyond what can be seen. Will you have to negotiate access to your front door with someone occupying the stoop who, like you, wants to call this city home?





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OUTS

Danielle Zarnick

Danielle is a sports fan and professional storyteller on the built environment who finds herself gravitating toward stories of place and movement.

THE SOUND OF THE STADIUM

Baseball, Belonging, Urban Experience

As we file out of Citi Field, the fans around me are buzzing. It's early in the season and the rain has been lightly falling for hours, but that hasn't dulled the energy in the crowd that I feel pulling me along as they chant first, "Let's Go Mets," and then with expletives about the team in the Bronx.

Though I attended more games at Citi Field that season—many of which had better weather and were more significant to the team's standings—none had the same lasting impact as this first one of the season. The 2025 leadoff man, Francisco Lindor, went up to bat accompanied by his walk-up song: "My Girl" by the Temptations. In unison, the nearly 41,000 fans in attendance that day sang:

*I've got sunshine on a cloudy day
When it's cold outside, I've got the month of May
I guess you'd say
What can make me feel this way?
My girl, my girl, my girl
Talkin bout my girl, my girl*

This harmony was a tradition repeated at most other Mets games I would attend that season, but the song's lyrics were not lifted by the same life and meaning. The stadium was alive with the collective experience of the fans who just endured a damp and cloudy New York City day, watching the game with excitement for the season ahead. At an early age, I fell in love with baseball. My father, a Michigan native,

Less consideration has been paid to the human experience within the stadium as an extension of its urban surroundings.

is the impetus for my undying loyalty to the Detroit Tigers. Much to my mother's disappointment, my New York baseball fandom follows in a not-so-close second place—much like that of the Mets' second place finish 13 games behind the Phillies in the NL East last season. My affection for and belonging to the tradition of New York baseball has only grown stronger over the years.

As a child, the biggest baseball fans I knew were Yankee devotees. Their little Shih Tzu was named Jeter. On the wall of their basement was a map where the family tracked the baseball stadiums they had all visited. By now, I've been to eleven of the thirty (active) stadiums in urban areas across the US and Canada. Each city left me with a set of distinct memories. Some physical, some emotional, and some sensory. Together, these have all built upon each other to turn each stadium into a place with individual meaning. This custom of stadium hopping connects me to most baseball fans I've met over the years. It elicits an excited conversation about planning, architecture, and aesthetic more commonly featured among urban planners and designers. They, however, don't tend to emphasize the hot dog situation as passionately as baseball fans do.

Urban history and baseball are deeply intertwined. Historian Kevin Baker writes in the introduction to his 2024 chronicle, *The New York Game*: "Baseball is a game that grew up inextricably linked to the place, the customs, and the demands of New York. It was shaped by the challenges, and the possibilities the

city had to offer, by its inventiveness and ambitions, its grandiosity and its corruption. For the last few centuries, the game's trajectory has followed the city's many rises and declines, its booms and busts, its follies and its tragedies" (4).

Much thought has already been dedicated to the history of cities and of baseball. Less consideration has been paid to the human experience within the stadium as an extension of its urban surroundings. While the modern design of Citi Field was created and executed by the firm Populous in 2009, it was designed as an homage to baseball's past: Ebbets Field, home of the Brooklyn Dodgers. Arriving at the stadium, one walks off the 7 train and past the home run Apple from Shea Stadium. They are met by a façade of warm brick, limestone, and cast stone. The arches along the façade are reminiscent of those at Ebbets Field, and as visitors enter the gates, they must first walk through the Jackie Robinson Rotunda. Charles Ebbets built his field in Brooklyn in the 1910s entirely with private funds. The predecessors of the Mets—the New York Giants—also played on a series of stadiums at the Polo Grounds (first hosting an MLB game in 1883) that did not rely on any public funding for development. The boom in stadiums being funded by public money coincided with the wide-scale expansion of the MLB in the 1960s. According to a study completed by the Brookings Institute, only 2 of the 14 MLB stadiums built or renovated since 2000 were done so without federal subsidy or a loss of tax revenue. During the building of Citi Field, \$185 million in federal subsidy was paid and \$214 million of total tax revenue was

lost. This boom which started in the 1960s, defines the current luxification of the sports stadium that John Seabrook chronicles in his recent article in *The New Yorker*, “Only Fans: The Stadium Goes Luxe” (Seabrook).

Despite all the thoughtful architectural design and intricate political and economic history of Citi Field, these features serve only as a backdrop to the other, more experiential, aspects of the stadium. As Yi-Fu Tuan articulates in his book *Space and Place: The Perspectives of Experience*, “The organization of human space is uniquely dependent on sight. Other senses expand and enrich visual space. Thus sound enlarges one’s spatial awareness to include areas behind the head that cannot be seen. More important, sound dramatizes spatial experience” (16). Stadiums, spaces built for people, achieve personal and collective romance through moments of sensory drama; the fans’ echo of “My Girl” around the diamond; the chatter in the stands among friends about the season to come; the yells of “F*** the Yankees” on the way home. These were sensory experiences replicated nearly every game I attended at Citi Field. At Yankee Stadium, you could find similar sensory rituals, including the mirror chant of “F*** the Mets” as everyone filed out of the stadium.

But as I experienced during that dreary May day in Queens, “The importance of events in any life is more directly proportionate to their intensity than to their

extensity” (Tuan 184). While I had essentially nothing besides the wall behind my head (because I was in the cheap seats), I was connected in song with a few thousand other attendees. The weight of the lyrics falling strong and ringing true. What could make me feel that way? Maybe, just maybe, a deeper sense of belonging to the fans and tradition of New York City baseball.





Robert Louis Brandon Edwards

Robert is a designer and PhD candidate in Historic Preservation at Columbia GSAPP whose practice examines Black mobility during the twentieth century.

TWO FIFTH AND CORNER STORES

In a similar tone as Garnette Cadogan's "Walking While Black" and Michael Sorkin's Twenty Minutes in Manhattan, this text will narrate the spatial and multi-sensory experience of growing up in Harlem from the 90s to the 2010s.

The sound of different songs playing simultaneously filled the air. From Eric B. & Rakim to Ma\$, Dipset, A\$AP Ferg, and Rocky. The old heads played Michael, Stevie, Anita Baker, and Maze and Frankie Beverly on Saturdays. Echoes from the lyrics, vibrations from the bass. Music came from other apartments, fire escapes, corner stores, barbershops, cars that were parked getting washed, and cars passing by. Collectively, this music was the soundtrack of the block—of the neighborhood. The dirt bikes, quads, and Mister Softee Ice Cream truck song were like interludes to the soundtrack.

The sound of car alarms, arguments, bottles rolling down the street, gunshots, and sirens throughout the night sometimes made it hard to sleep; but sometimes those sounds helped me fall asleep—like my own weird ambient sound machine. But once I'd fall asleep, the garbage trucks would wake me up.

The smell of urine, garbage, alcohol, and coffee filled the air, hinting that the city never went to sleep. The first ring of the jackhammers and horn honking of commuters, bus drivers, and taxi drivers trying to get to their destinations was the reminder that it was time to get up. Who needs an alarm when the M10 stops in front of your bedroom window?

Collage by Ayomikun Oluyadi and Anna Carl.
Adapted images by Vinod Divakaran, Ajay Suresh,
Heaven-Wings Records and MC2 Erica R. Gardner,
USN (via Wikimedia Commons)

Because I lived on an avenue, leaving the building and stepping out onto the street was like a game of Double Dutch, just trying to get in and fit in and defend my space in the crowd, on the sidewalk, and on the subway. But before I hopped on the train, I had to grab something from the bodega: a quarter water, sandwich, and bag of Lay's Barbecue Chips—wishing it was Pan-Pan's—already thinking about what to eat when I got out of school. Chinese food, Kennedy Fried Chicken (aka the chicken joint or chicken spot), or Famous Fish for a half and half and shrimp and chips.

Because of its rich history and people, Harlem is beautiful. And despite its bullshit, Harlem is and will always be my home. It's where I learned how to ride a bike, talk to girls, window shop on “two-fif,” and celebrate Christmas at the State Building—our own Rockefeller Center. It's where I learned how to box at the Harlem YMCA. Where seeing someone get robbed, stabbed, or shot is just a regular Tuesday. Although tragic, the violence becomes common, and before you know it, you walk around—and through—space with that trauma inside of you. Despite the carried trauma, there was still an excitement that accompanied this built environment. I remember the feeling of the chain-link fence in between my fingers, forearm to forearm with the boys next to me, as we tried to watch basketball games at Rucker Park, barely able to see the action because of the crowd. I also remember the feeling of undercover cops jumping out of unmarked cars, surrounding me, and patting me down while rapidly firing questions at me. “What's your name?” “Where are you going?” “Where are you coming from?” “Where do you live?” I'm scared, nervous, and embarrassed. I feel powerless. The questions are so fast that I can't process them while getting patted down with my hands up, almost like I'm in a trance. “You match the description of...” “Do you have any weapons on you?” “Do you have any warrants?” How do we process these physical and emotional feelings? Do we even process them, or do we suppress them? Having to constantly decide whether to fight, flee, freeze, or fawn—is our nervous system ever regulated?

Multi-sensory experiences of the architectural spaces we occupy become more than just the sum of their parts. If experienced enough, and if we allow it, it seeps in and becomes ingrained in us. We become “products of our environment.” It's in our eyes, our walk, our talk, our traumas, and our accomplishments. It's how we see the world and sometimes, unfortunately, how the world sees us. You can always tell if someone is from Harlem. You see the history and beauty in their eyes and lived experiences, but you also hear it in their tone. The swag, the flyness with the slick talk and quick confidence. The generations of inherited journeying and migrating—moving and navigating challenging landscapes out of necessity, but with a coolness and ostentation that makes others who don't have to struggle want to struggle.

The outro to the playlist would be the sound of the rare night of only hearing the sound of cars driving up 8th Ave hitting the loose pothole in the street. Feeling accomplished because you made it through the hustle and bustle of the day, but knowing you had to do it again the next day.

“Shut the fuck up, Calvin!” “Fuck you, Lisa.”

Yep, that's all a part of the architecture—the built, experiential, sonic, and social architecture. And what those two are really saying is, “We're frustrated, and fuck the government policies that removed the resources from our community that created this sensorium.”

Marcus Garvey Park, Harlem, NYC.
Image by Linda Fletcher, Adjoajo
(via Wikimedia Commons)







Images by Ayanna Sharma
Edited by Anna Carl



Swezya Joshi

Swezya seeks the beauty in everyday encounters, documenting the bilateral influence of the built environment on people and communities.

This series documents elements of urban thresholds, exploring how they mediate our subconscious perception of privacy, collectivity, and the liminal spaces in between.

Thresholds that...



etch the memory of a place into its material fabric...



evoke the divine through layers of craft and detail...



Disrupt rhythms of homogeneity...



Invite stillness and reflection...



Serve as portals to a hidden landscape....



Simultaneously separate and connect...



Form spaces of collectivity...



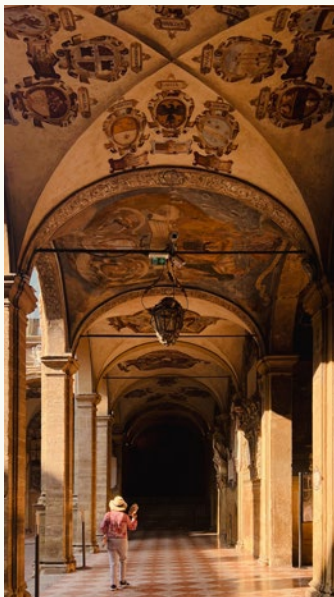
Allow for spontaneous encounter...



Define and enforce the private domain...



negotiate the boundaries between public and private, the individual and society...



Encourage human interaction...



Shape conditions of everyday coexistence....



And use objects of domesticity to reveal the shared intimacy of private life.

Quality Skincare Belongs to Everybody.



Luca Marcelli

Luca is an urban planning student at Columbia GSAPP whose writing moves between critical urban studies, queer theory, and ecological systems.

URBAN EROS

Cruising the City Otherwise

They don't know each other. Like many of us in this devastating and beautiful city, they are just strangers.

A lingering glance—caught between scrolling screens and the vibrating commotion of apathetic commuters—captures his gaze and pulls it back across the subway car. The train's two-tone chime rings out, and they enter a silent conversation of brief eye contact and calculated stillness. His brown eyes seem hungry. There's something alluring in the way his hand grips the steel handrail, effortlessly holding his body in place as the train lurches forward. The man catches his stare. Or perhaps he wants to be caught.

"Stand clear of the closing doors, please," the automated voice interrupts, as more bodies wedge themselves between the L train's metal doors. When their eyes meet again, relief flickers—an almost desperate reassurance that the stranger is still there, still looking, too.

He glances once more. A subdued, knowing smirk passes between them, awakening a strange mixture of arousal and panic. They don't know each other's names. And they don't need to. This exchange between perfect strangers is all it takes to ignite the fantasy.

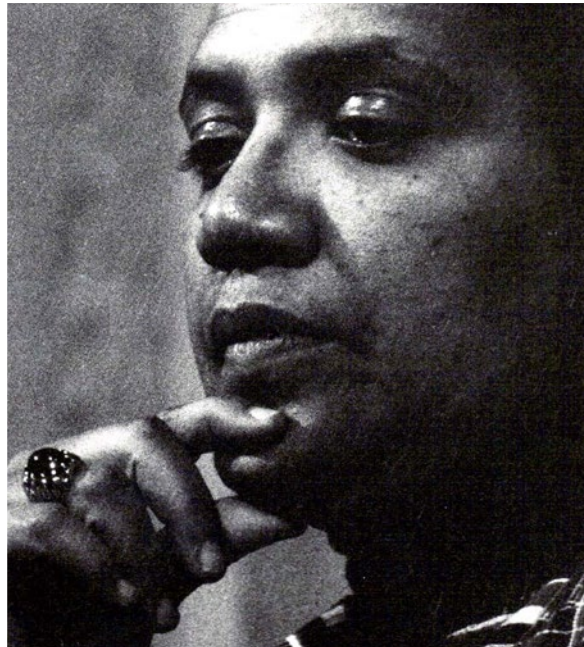
Candid Subway Scene Through NYC Train Window.
Image by Jacob Zyc (via Pexels)

Reanimated by bodies in motion, these underworlds of mechanical monotony and rote isolation are briefly remade by spontaneous desire and fleeting intimacies.

In the crevices of this vast, individualistic city, there has always been a world of possibility within and between us all. In wooded parks, flooding beaches, public restrooms, and otherwise forsaken corners of the city, erotic desire adapts derelict landscapes of neglect into places of abundant intimacy and anonymous pleasure—precisely where we were never meant to find each other. Acknowledging our desires, we are reacquainted with an expansive sense of our own selves, physically and emotionally stretching, contracting, and returning to a world of intimacy, creativity, and sensation.

Insisting on a renewed commitment to critical imagination, queer theorist José Muñoz speaks of cruising not only as a search for bodies but as a search for new possibilities. In *Cruising Utopia*, Muñoz invites us to “cruise” the anticipatory traces of the utopian already sedimented within everyday spaces and habits. “Queerness is not yet here,” he writes. “Queerness is an ideality,” urging us to think and feel a “then and there” beyond the neoliberal present. Cruising, in this sense, becomes a future-oriented practice of hope: a mode of desiring that allows us to perceive openings within built environments otherwise organized by alienation and control.

To cruise is to rehearse a world otherwise—to move through space guided by possibility rather than prescription. Urban planning, at its best, aspires to a similar orientation. As geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore reminds us, planning is fundamentally about “securing the future” (Wilson). Yet amid cascading crises of capitalism, colonialism, and climate catastrophe, imagining that future can feel increasingly out of reach. The challenge, then, is not only to manage the present but to cultivate the collective capacity to dream beyond it. This is why planning matters.



Writer, professor, and intersectional feminist Audre Lorde.

Image by K. Kendall (via Wikimedia Commons)

Yet the discipline’s colonial foundations have long framed urban order as incompatible with unruly nature, bodily desire, and erotic life. The bourgeois etiquette of the city demands corporeal restraint, translating the civilizing mission of city planning into architectures of surveillance and codes of respectability. Hostile urban design, anti-loitering laws, and moralized notions of public decency regulate which bodies may

linger, touch, or desire in shared spaces. Cruising, particularly between queer bodies, unsettles these logics. It refuses the demand that public space be purely the site of economic transaction, privatized belonging, or sanitized interaction. Instead, it reveals the city as sensorial, relational, and unfinished—a terrain of possibility continually remade through embodied encounter.

**Eros, born of chaos, pushes us to live
in accordance with our creative desire.**

Within each and every one of us, lies a wellspring of creative energy ripe with potential for genuine connection and social transformation. Since an early age, patriarchal culture has taught us to fear and distrust that power arising from our deepest and nonrational knowledge. That power, too long denied by technical and bureaucratic regimes of planning, design, and architecture, can help chart future possibilities for urban life. That power is the erotic.

In her essay “Uses of the Erotic,” Audre Lorde describes the erotic as a resource rooted in deeply felt experience and creative potential. “We have been taught,” she writes, “to suspect this resource, vilified, abused, and devalued within western society.” She argues that erotic knowledge can form the basis for shared understanding while amplifying our capacity to experience joy we’ve forgotten ourselves capable of feeling. Like Muñoz, who writes of queerness as an expansive desire for future possibility, Lorde speaks of the erotic as charged with enormous political and creative potential.

Erotic power, like cruising, is not just about sex—though it certainly can be. Audre Lorde admits that there is “no difference between writing a good poem and moving into sunlight against the body of a woman [she] love[s].” Eros, born of chaos, pushes us to live in accordance with our creative desire, no longer willing to subjugate the joy and pleasure our bodies have long been denied.

For those invested in the struggle for queer, trans, and gender liberation, the reclamation of erotic power has proved especially salient as a mode of social transformation, at once deeply personal and political. The Women’s Movement has long challenged the complicity of architects and planners in sustaining anti-erotic and sexist oppression within the built environment.

The brilliant yet overlooked lesbian and feminist architect, Phyllis Birkby [1932–1994], exemplifies a distinctly queer architectural approach rooted in erotic power and utopian desire. After moving to NYC and landing an apartment at the edge of

Greenwich Village, Birkby was immersed in the 1950s lesbian subculture Audre Lorde once described as “the gay girl scene.” Confronted with rampant sexism in the male-dominated world of architecture, she wrote in her diary that it was “like hitting a concrete wall—not one but an entire enclosure” (Birkby).



Photograph of Phyllis Birkby. Image from Sophia Smith Collection of Women’s History, Phyllis Birkby Papers.

With the advent of the 1969 Stonewall uprising and growing calls for gay and gender liberation, Birkby became politically invested in the question of lesbian architecture. Leaving her corporate architecture job, she opened her own practice while beginning to run workshops encouraging women to imagine their “fantasy” environments. For Birkby, women’s environmental fantasy provided a deep sense of connection: it was erotic, bodily, and manifested the feeling of a utopian feminist space. Having collected hundreds of participatory drawings, these expressions of feminist imaginaries showcased a range of creative possibilities, though most of them emphasized collective spaces for connection and social gathering. Many participants also



“My Block by Joan (Lavender Lane),” fantasy drawing, circa 1974. Image from Sophia Smith Collection of Women’s History, Phyllis Birkby Papers

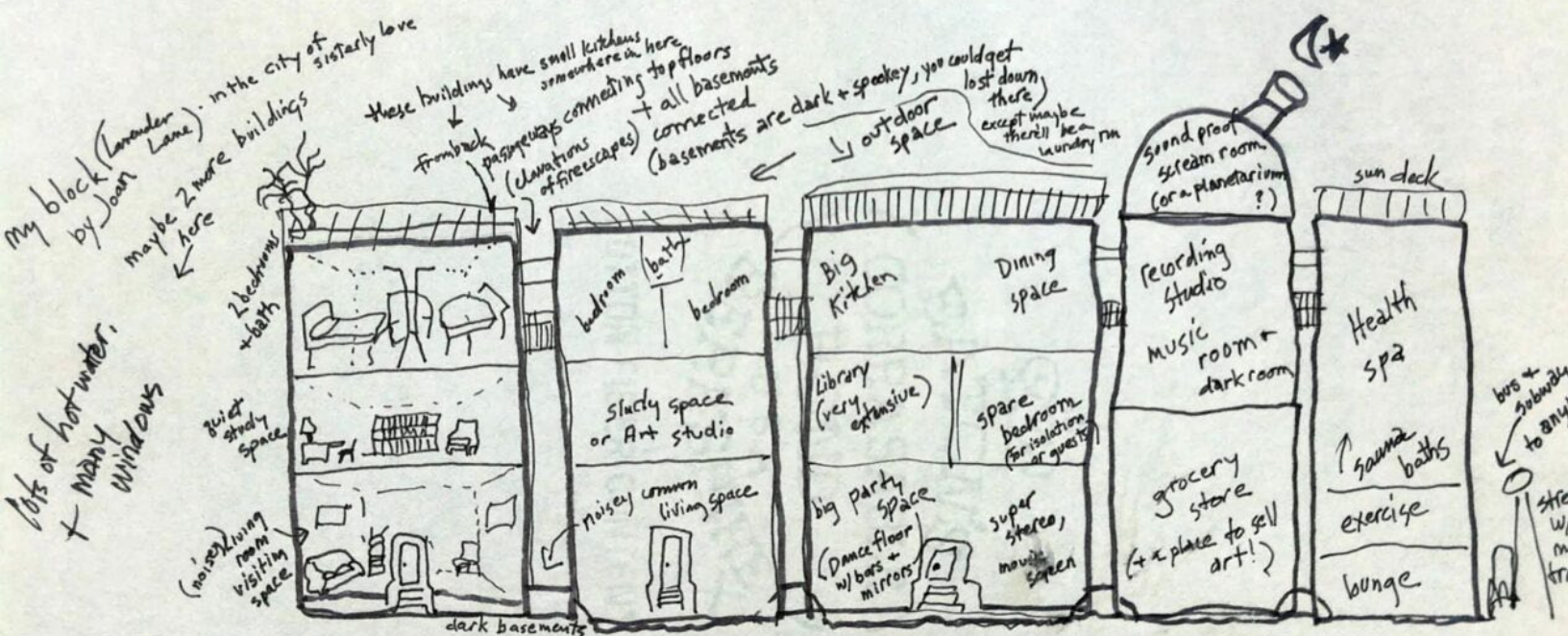
expressed frustration with the isolation of single-family domestic life, visualizing their fantasies to renegotiate the balance between the private and the communal. Some drawings are explicitly erotic, including an imagined “community for ten women” with a “community room for lovemaking.” Birkby always imagined these fantasy workshops as just the beginning, for in her own words, “Fantasy is the beginning of creation.” Fantasy, desire, and utopian dreaming was understood to be the foundation for liberation and political action, reminiscent of the revolutionary work of freedom dreaming within the Black radical tradition. A formative influence on Birkby’s erotic architecture was her participation in the January 1971 feminist takeover of a vacant East Village lot, in which over

200 women transformed an abandoned welfare building into a functional women’s center, including a daycare, health clinic, shelter, feminist school, and food co-op. The erotic sensibility central to Birkby’s utopian vision and political action draws directly from Audre Lorde’s conceptualization of the erotic as power. Birkby quoted the last lines of Lorde’s essay in her own writing: “Recognizing the power of the erotic within our lives can give us energy to pursue genuine change within our world, rather than merely settling for a shift of characters in the same weary drama. For not only do we touch our most profoundly creative source, but we do that which is female and self-affirming in the face of a racist, patriarchal, and anti-erotic society.”

Today's urban planners can no longer afford to deny the eros of the city, this chaotic and creative calling for a future we can and must achieve. The erotic is already, always around us—if only we let ourselves acknowledge its presence. We must return to the abundant knowledge contained within and between our own bodies, refusing to accept anything less than our fullest capacity to feel.

...the city has never belonged solely to planners, developers, or property regimes, but also to those who linger, desire, and imagine otherwise within it.

And so we return to that fleeting glance shared across the subway car: a moment so minor it nearly dissolves into the chaotic rhythm of the commute, yet expansive enough to hold entire worlds of possibility. Cruising reminds us that the city has never belonged solely to planners, developers, or property regimes, but also to those who linger, desire, and imagine otherwise within it. Beneath infrastructures of surveillance and social control, other currents move—currents of erotic knowledge, improvisation, and collective longing. If the city is unfinished, then these moments of encounter are not peripheral but generative, rehearsals for worlds still struggling to be born. To attend to the erotic life of urban space is thus to recognize that utopia is not elsewhere or deferred, but flickering in the charged encounters that briefly remake the present. Our eros is inviting us to follow desire toward the futures we can only begin to imagine.



Fantasy Drawing Workshop, early 1970s. Image from Sophia Smith Collection of Women's History, Phyllis Birkby Papers



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Susana Chinchilla

MSAUD '26

SENSES OF BELONGING

Globalization as a Sensory Shift

How do you know that you've arrived in your city?

Is it the familiarity of sites?

Is it the weather?

Is it the traffic?

How do you know that you've arrived at home?

Is it the sound of family talking, yelling, fighting?

Is it the smell of a home cooked meal?

How do you know that you're being reminded of home, somewhere else?

Is it the flavor of the food, or the flavor of the people?

Is it through tradition?

How are these intimate Senses of Belonging changing as cities change?

These questions above posit Belonging, not an abstract condition, but a sensorial one. As humans, we recognize home and city not through borders or addresses, but through familiarity of sites, sounds, smells, rhythm, and repetition. The sensorial familiarity of space is what allows us to be at home, even when we find ourselves far from it. The recognition of these senses allow us to shorten distances, creating connections and forming relationships where we may never have expected to find them.

Globalization, at a much larger scale, also shortens distances—specifically those between global markets, industries, and cultures. Built on a neoliberal world order, globalization has allowed countries, cities, and people to expand beyond local markets and boundaries; letting the foreign in and the local out. This brings us together in many ways; outcomes including the ability to experience international practices through food, clothing, objects, and architecture. In many places, this kind of movement is initially seen as positive— if Americans or Europeans are coming, this must mean some sort of capital progress, right?

Coming from Bogotá, Colombia, a city and country in the process of rapid globalization, there is a tension between the nostalgia of *todo lo criollo, lo cotidiano, lo típico*, (the everyday things), and *lo nuevo, lo moderno, lo bueno* (all of the new things). As implied through the use of words like *lo bueno* (the good things), the mentality generally reflects a mindset of progress towards these global objects and influences. Of course, this mindset ignores important questions of gentrification, displacement, and the destabilization of our Senses of Belonging.

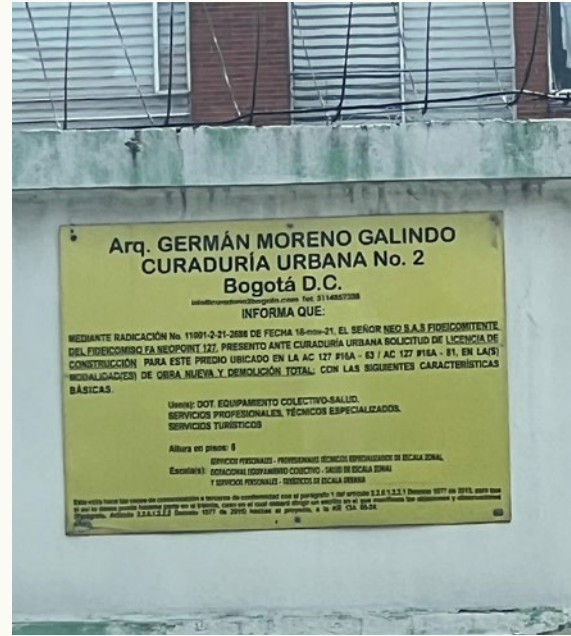
If much of our personal connectedness, or homeliness, is in *lo típico, lo criollo, lo tradicional*, then globalization introduces not just foreign materials and products, but a shift in the sensory

language of the city itself (Freud). In the process of worldly expansion, a sense of cultural specificity has been obscured by globally commodified architectural and urban typologies.

In essence, sensorial recognition is in conflict. This conflict is not always dramatic; it is often subtle, cumulative, and spatial. It can be heard in the coexistence of typical street noise and street vendors with imported materials for improved interior acoustics. It can be smelled in the persistence of arepas being prepared on the sidewalk, even as Japanese and Korean restaurants open nearby. It can be seen in the juxtaposition of traditional brick, concrete, and painted façades with reflective glass towers that introduce new forms of density and vertical life. The rhythms of the street begin to adjust; lingering and consumption overlap, while public space becomes both managed and improvised. These alterations do not erase *lo típico, lo criollo, lo tradicional*, but reposition them within a changing urban landscape. What was once informal may become more deliberate, or even more consciously preserved. The city begins to feel layered— simultaneously familiar and evolving.

Not all senses, but some. Through our senses of place, globalization and “progress” are experienced as a sensory transformation and a shift in familiarity. The homely and “unhomely” (Freud) aspects of the city exist in tension— creating an uncanny experience that comes and goes as you experience *lo criollo, lo cotidiano, lo típico* while also sensing *lo nuevo, lo moderno, lo bueno*. The city becomes quieter or louder in different ways, cleaner but perhaps less expressive, more efficient yet less legible to memory. This abundance of local and cultural qualities that may have once grounded our Senses of Belonging begins to transform; and as cities change, the physical articulation of culture itself may shift with it.

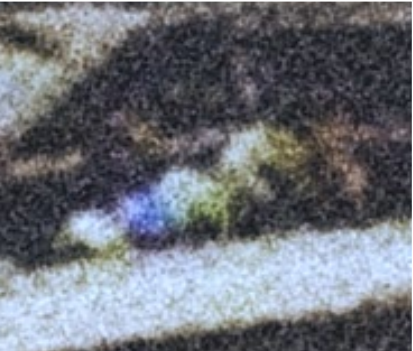
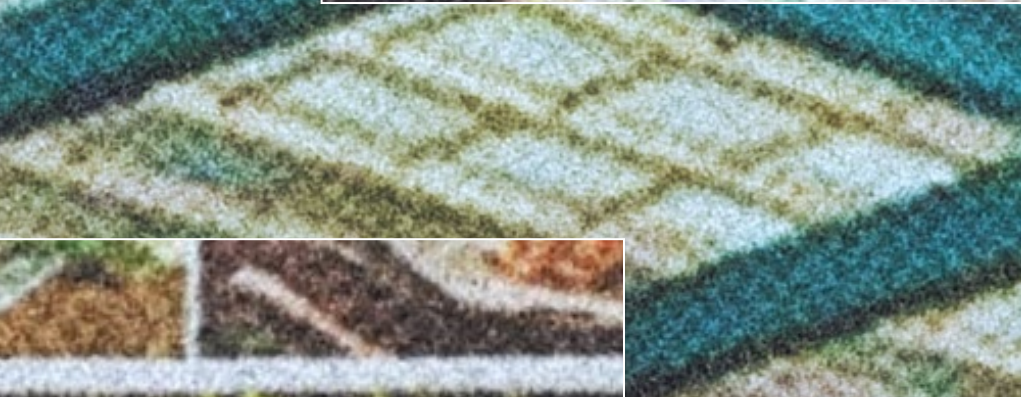
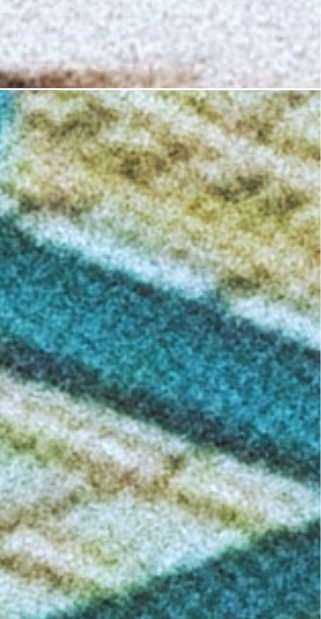
For architects, urbanists, and planners, this sensory recalibration is not neutral. Decisions about material, scale, enclosure, circulation, and program inevitably shape how a city is heard, smelled, touched, and inhabited. In privileging efficiency, cleanliness, and global legibility, design can unintentionally flatten the layered textures that give a place its specificity. If belonging is cultivated through sensorial memory, then urban development participates directly in either sustaining or destabilizing Senses of Belonging. The question is not whether cities should modernize, but how modernization might remain attentive to the sensory infrastructures that allow people to recognize themselves within the spaces and cities they inhabit.



This raises a critical question for architects, urbanists, and planners—

**Can globalization be imagined
not as the replacement of
lo cotidiano
but as an expansion of the textured languages
through which
Senses of Belonging are formed?**

**And how do our
own
Senses of Belonging
adapt to environments that may be
changing
from traditionally experienced
ways of being?**



Gabriela (Gaby) Karnadi

Gaby is an urban planning graduate student at Columbia University (MSUP '26) with an interest in studying phenomena of urban life in Indonesia.

Kalaksitaning (Lala) Atisuci Hatmoko

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EXPERIENCING JAKARTA'S URBAN INFORMALITIES

Informality is an embedded element in Jakarta's urban development that has flourished since before the independence of Indonesia. The city's *kampung kota* (urban villages) existed long before zoning regulations and modern planning frameworks. These settlements grew through community needs, improvisation, and survival, forming a parallel urbanism beside the formal city.



Another form of informality in Jakarta is *Pedagang Kaki Lima* (PKL). It translates to “five-feet seller,” as they historically occupied five-feet-wide side street corridors. Today, they are street vendors who sell many things, from food and drinks to everyday items like tissues, umbrellas, and children’s toys at very affordable prices.



Together, both *kampung kota* and PKL make the urban realm more livable, vibrant, and unique. They act as the filler of Jakarta’s public realm, claiming unused, underutilized, barren spaces in the city. They are not only forms of informality but integral parts of the city’s identity, shaping how Jakarta lives, moves, and feels.



Two of Jakarta’s Most Defining Urban Sensoriums: Kampung Kota and PKL

Kampung kota emerged from rapid population growth and a lack of affordable housing during the early years of Indonesia’s nation-building. At that time, Jakarta’s infrastructure and planning were overlooked in favor of political and

that push daily life into shared spaces. Residents cook, eat, relax, and socialize in alleyways and communal corners, turning circulation paths into living rooms. Walking through a *kampung kota* engages all the senses: the aroma of home-cooked food drifts through the air; conversations and sounds from televisions overlap in the background; hanging



institutional development. As migrants arrived in search of opportunity, unclaimed and vacant lands were transformed into unplanned, self-built neighborhoods that developed organically and expanded based on the needs of the residents. This is one of the largest forms of informality in Jakarta. These settlements are dense with tiny housing lots

laundry, textured walls, and scattered furniture reveal a layered urban fabric. The environment is tactile and intimate, shaped by human activity at every corner. In *kampung kota*, where social life is tight-knit and space is compact, Jakarta feels intensely alive with chats, smells, and visual textures as the residents use alleys and streets as social spaces.



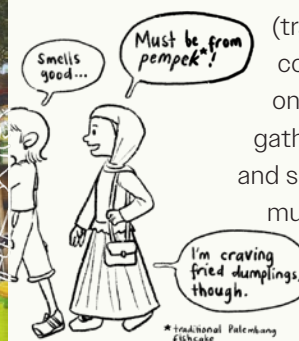
Many of the residents in *kampung kota* are people from rural areas across Indonesia, trying their luck to work in big cities, including Jakarta. They often bring diverse languages and cultural practices, adding more layers and liveliness to *kampung kota*. Those who live here often work in the informal sector, including *PKL*, due to the low barriers to entry and the immediate need for income. It makes *kampung kota* and *PKL* almost inseparable; both form the city's cultural and economic environment

that brims with resilience and adaptation. The emergence of *PKL* stretches back to the colonial period, when itinerant sellers used the five-foot-wide pedestrian corridors along Batavia's streets and were unregistered in the Batavia tax form. Today, their legacy continues in the form of street vendors as they function like urban infill, occupying sidewalks, spaces near bus stops and train stations, office backstreets, and small pockets between buildings.



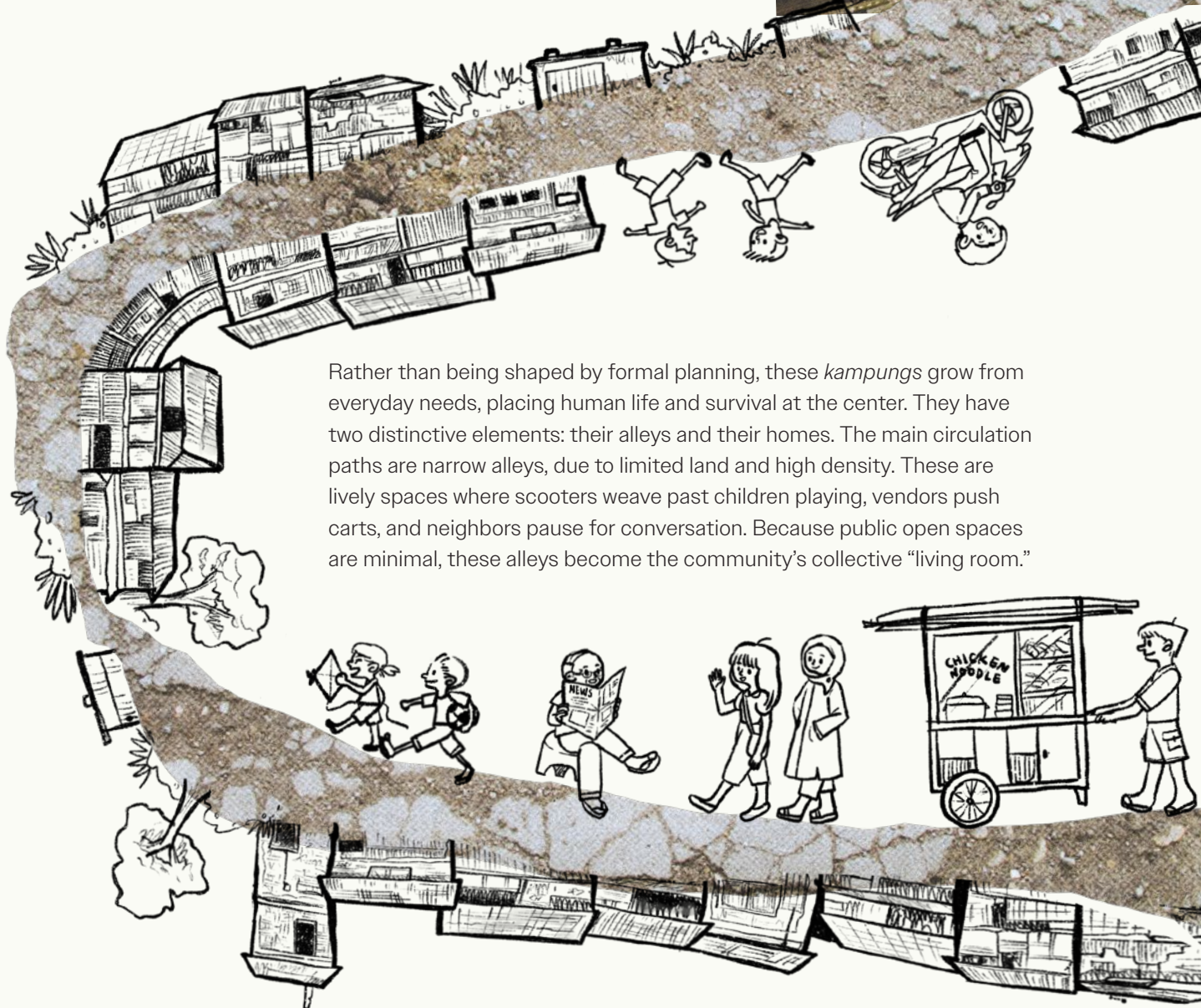
PKL activate the city from dawn to late night, catering to Jakarta's working class, which operates around the clock. Those on the morning shift rely on them for breakfast, and it is easy to find *PKL* selling

porridge, chicken noodles, and other typical morning dishes. In the afternoon, they offer snacks such as fritters, fried dumplings, *siomay* (dim-sum), and *cilok* (chewy tapioca balls).



By evening, they serve coffee and a variety of dinner options, like fried rice and *pempek* (traditional fishcake). Even late at night, coffee vendors remain present for those on overnight shifts. People typically gather around *PKL* to chat, eat, smoke, and socialize. Their presence creates a multisensory atmosphere: the clatter of woks, the smell of sautéed spices, and vendors calling out to passersby.

Many PKL actors, both sellers and suppliers, live in *kampung kota*. If PKL functions as fine-grained elements of Jakarta's urban sensorium, filling urban spaces with small-scale merchant activities, *kampung kota* represents its coarser layer. These dense and organic neighborhoods offer a vivid contrast with the city's expected image: polished, planned, and modern. Rich in texture and activities, *kampung kota* engages all five senses—far from boring.

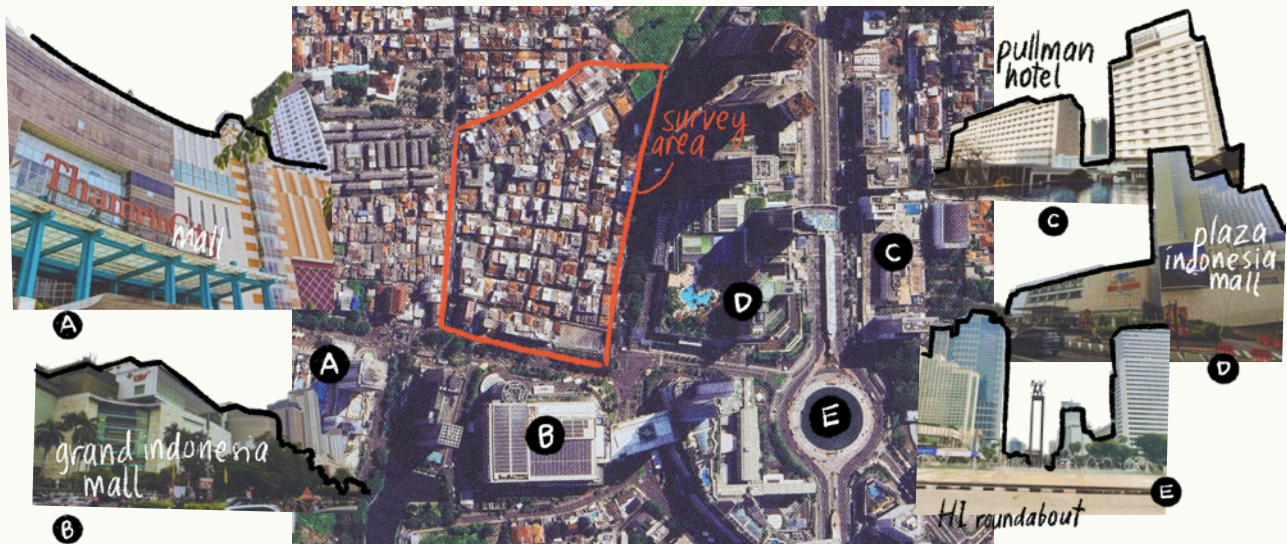


Rather than being shaped by formal planning, these *kampungs* grow from everyday needs, placing human life and survival at the center. They have two distinctive elements: their alleys and their homes. The main circulation paths are narrow alleys, due to limited land and high density. These are lively spaces where scooters weave past children playing, vendors push carts, and neighbors pause for conversation. Because public open spaces are minimal, these alleys become the community's collective "living room."

Meanwhile, the houses inside are built extremely close together, often sharing walls or stacking upward over time. Residents expand gradually; they add a small room on the rooftop, extend the walls, or fill any leftover gaps as families grow. In a *kampung*, daily life is not tucked away behind closed doors, but spills outward into the shared spaces, forming a unique social rhythm at the heart of Jakarta.

Case Study: Kampung Kebun Kacang

Let's visit one example called *Kebun Kacang*, which translates literally to "Peanut Garden." This village is located in a prime spot in Central Jakarta, surrounded by huge malls. Because of this location, many mall workers choose to rent rooms here even though the area is extremely dense with narrow lanes.



Around 70% of the buildings are *kost-kostan* (boarding or rooming houses). You can easily spot these buildings; they are usually two or three-stories tall and built strongly, with painted walls, properly tiled roofs, and lots of windows (sometimes even small balconies). This huge number of rental rooms means that the neighborhood is constantly welcoming new faces, creating a fast-paced, ever-changing atmosphere as tenants come and go.



Here, life spills out from behind closed doors into the shared alleys that feel like an extension of the living room. Lines of drying clothes stretch overhead, tiny shops operate from front rooms, and open kitchens remain visible just beyond the doorway.



The alleys stay busy as doors open directly onto the footpath, while children run through gaps and neighbors chat as they pass each other. Despite the density, community bonds remain strong. People rely on one another and shape their own rhythm of city life, showing how *kampung* communities form a vital part of Jakarta's identity.

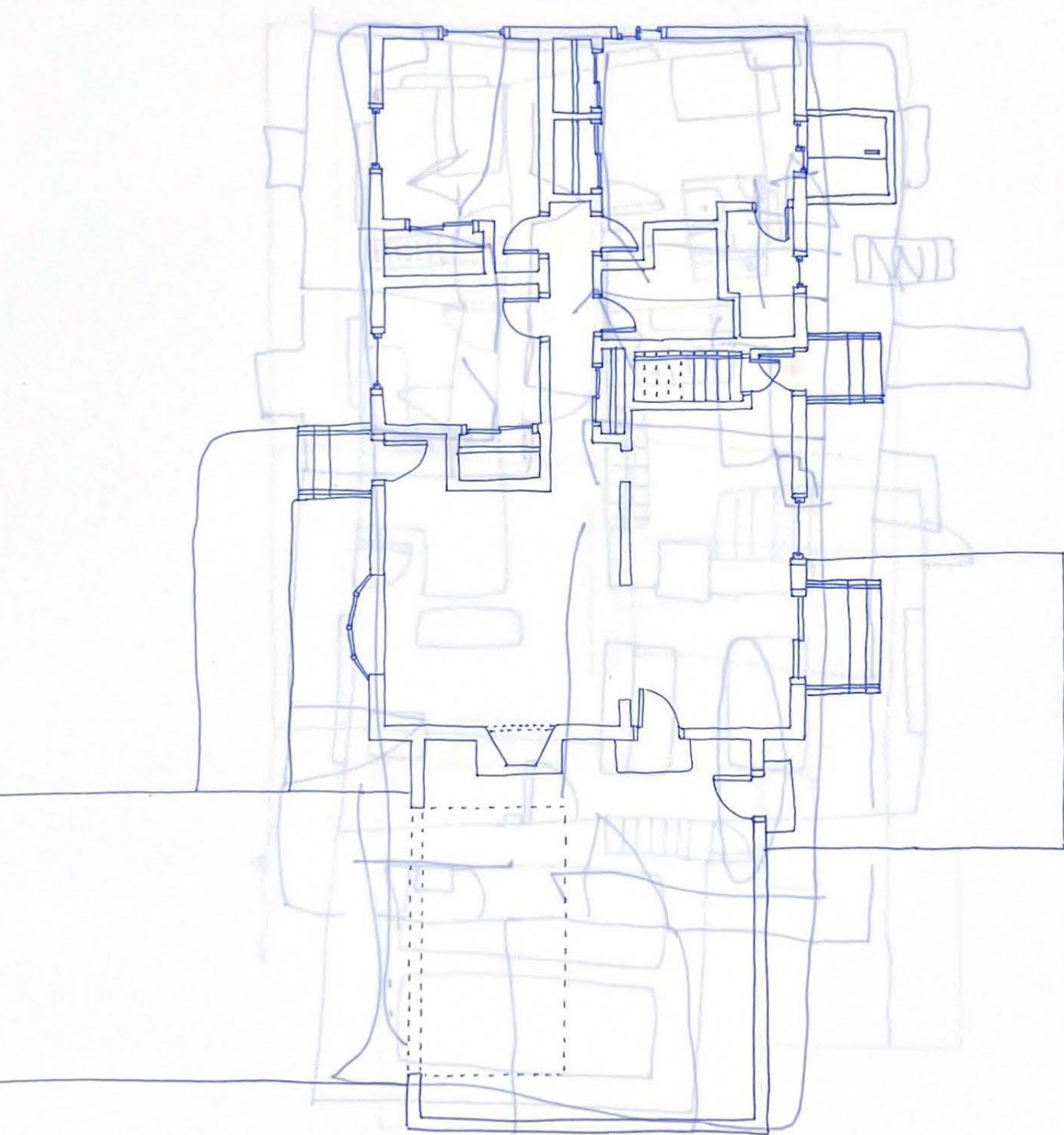


Conclusion

Jakarta, as we experience it, is full of colors, sounds, smells, textures, and tastes. The informal life of the *kampung kota* and *PKL* gives the city its rich sensory layers, filling urban spaces with movement, noise, aroma, and visual bustle. These informal realms teach us to see, to listen, and to feel a city.

They remind us that urban life is not defined only by the glamour of skyscraper lights or the polished aesthetic of urban parks and high-maintenance infrastructure, but also by the everyday improvisations that keep the city human, grounded, and alive.





Layered family drawings of our home floor plan from memory

Samantha Nowak

Samantha is a Master's student in Architecture and Urban Design at Columbia University, with a Bachelor of Architecture from the University of Miami.

THE CHILDHOOD HOME

Mind, Body, Home

How am I supposed to bring a new boy over to meet my mom, siblings, and pets when this is what my childhood home looks like? It's already a ranch—it doesn't help that the interior is scratched up, cluttered, and disorganized. I am one week into dating a new guy, and coming home for the holidays reminds me that if things get serious, I am going to have to propose a new kitchen layout and discard clunky furniture. My childhood home has always been a sensitive topic. From my eighth birthday party to a rare new guest at the dinner table, my mind was frantic to turn the walls into a more welcoming gathering space. While I never felt satisfied with the materials and layout, it took me coming back to my youthful bedroom after all these years to realize that this feeling was bigger than my lust for a new house.

I envied my friends' colonial homes. Glossed wood treads, white painted risers, and the curved ends of balustrades that led to lofted bedrooms—it was a dream. These experiences inspired the transformations I imagined for every room. Being in places that feel good or feel uncomfortable stimulates the mind, and our senses connect our body in space. This mind-body awareness is especially interesting from the child's perspective. Reflecting on Antonio Damasio's position on the false dichotomy of a separate mind and body in *Descartes Error*, "body and brain form an indissociable organism [...]. The organism constituted by the brain-body partnership interacts with the environment as an ensemble, the interaction being of neither the body nor the brain alone" (88). We are profoundly impacted by the walls that enclose us, and how our bodies interact in that space is directly correlated to how our minds develop as we grow up.

From the neighborhood you lived in to the color of paint on the walls, the childhood home molds your immature senses, creating biases toward the space. The way your parents played with you on the carpet, or did not at all, gave you authority over that carpet. The freedom of play at these multiple scales created the way we think, the way we love, and the way we interact. “Memories of the outside world will never have the same tonality as those of home and, by recalling these memories, we add to our store of dreams; we are never real historians, but always near poets, and our emotion is perhaps nothing but an expression of a poetry that was lost” (Bachelard). Gaston Bachelard sets the mood for these relationships, illustrating the home as a focal point for our expressions in space and our connection with home.

I believe there is a parallel between life changes and home changes. I see things in a new way as the spaces I’ve grown up in are rearranged and inhabited differently. Scaling up to the gossip of Cheshire, Connecticut, things felt simpler as a child. The only places that mattered to me seemed to be the places that stood out—where we ordered our pizza, the church where I had choir practice on Wednesday nights, and consignment shopping with my mom. Now, the neighborhood is consumed with retail, multifamily townhomes, and more chain restaurants. But if it didn’t change, would it be able to keep up with our current economy? A changing mind, a changing “village,” and a changing home make a resilient one. This sentiment could be compared to the depictions recorded by a climate-anxious traveler in *Land Sickness*. Experiences we make outside of the home and our steady environments expose us to alarming realities, realizing, “the land is changing, and I am changing with it” (Schultz 36). How we accept this change and accommodate its arrival might be the only coping mechanism to continually evolve in spirit and in place.

The Dining Room

I wonder if this room feels neglected, or used, like a sad girlfriend. A place that encouraged slowing down after a long day, but never seemed to get the

attention it deserved. A table that has presented birthday cakes for a full room of celebrants, or the nice plates and silverware that received their proper use on Easter. When I could not reach the top of the wooden chairs, I sank into them, feeling like I was being detained by the tall wooden bars that made up their backs. Here, I sat on my calves, holding myself by my knees to sometimes use the table for my next art piece. The colored pencils, tape, scissors, and construction paper of the past fell victim to the abyss of papers, mail, bills, and even jackets. After being replaced with a high table and later my grandmother’s table, somehow stuff simply swallows it. The table never stood a chance.

The Kitchen

My young hands disguised the kitchen wall as a canvas in need of a creative makeover. The white walls wrapped in nicks from my careless hours at play, bland to my eye and in need of a new identity. I thought my Crayola posters would entertain the space.

I wonder if this immature sense is the response needed to counter the modernist veil of white spaces. When my family moved in, everything there was white—the walls, the siding, the cabinets. Mark Wigley challenges these decisions, “whiteness is both the effect and means of ‘cleaning’ buildings, bodies, eyes, brains, and society to produce ‘pure,’ ‘clean,’ ‘clear,’ ‘bare,’ ‘neat,’ ‘sharp,’ ‘simple,’ ‘exact,’ ‘essential,’ ‘economical,’ ‘healthy’ people, forms, and thoughts.” This 1963 home is a product of economical, cookie-cutter “cleansing,” and as a child I saw lifeless walls. Why not let children color the kitchen?

The world from below three feet handicapped me in my own kitchen. I had to climb the drawers to reach the spices and peanut butter, and I broke dishes while standing on tiptoes. According to art historian Heinrich Wölfflin, I might be considered “formless”—“an incapacitated (‘formless’) person is not only a person who lacks form in their own body but also a person lacking in capacities to experience form” (Gissen 91-94). David Gissen critiques

Wölfflin's stance of "formlessness" and the "legacy of formalism" in *The Architecture of Disability*. The problematic assumption that form is essential in desirable environments—and the lack of form in body and architecture—is a lack of aesthetics. Who are we designing for as architects? Spaces and environments for able-bodied, average height, neurotypical, middle-aged people are single-serving and create adversity in experiential opportunities. How often are spaces designed for children, especially at home? The home is where children grow; yet, children don't fit in. Connecting Gissen's concept with Neufert's "Universal Man" raises the question of how we nurture child development.

The Living Room

Velvety purple sofas became more than a lounging space. My father and I made up games in the void

formed between the coffee table and the long couch. I would run as fast as I could, timing the openings so I would not get swooped up into his arms. The distance between the single couch chair and the big couch made the perfect space for a game of catch. In my boredom, I would sometimes retreat here, longing for an idea for what to do next as I stared out the bay window. With a turn of my head, the perfect plan for the most devious fort sprung to mind. The couches were stripped to the bones as the heavy cushions formed a hidden oasis. With new couches over the years, those ideas no longer excited me. After a flatscreen TV took over what used to be a mirror above the mantel, the living room seemed to have a new life.

The Bathroom

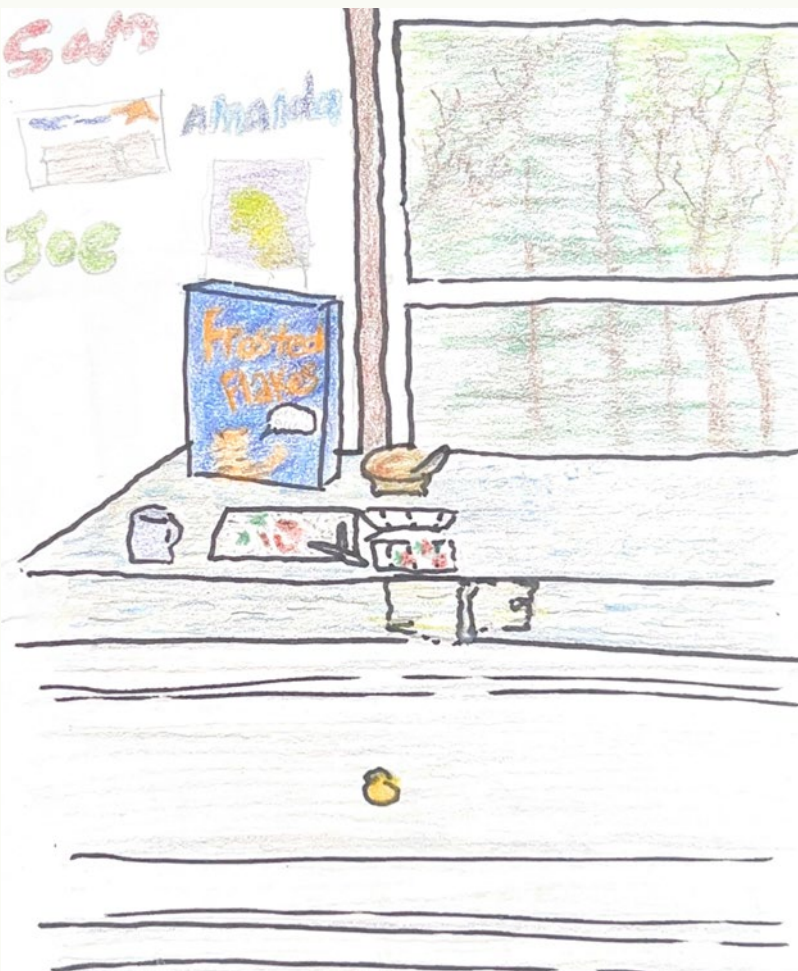
Rushing water echoed through the walls, crashing into the tub. Quickly, the next step is to squeeze as much body soap into the waterfall as possible. Mom taught me the perfect recipe: a heap of baking soda and body wash to fill the humid air, creating a balance of chemical scents and natural powdered exfoliants—the joys of bubble baths. I would pretend to be a mermaid, dunking my head from one island of bubbles to the next. My babysitter and mother chaperoned the nightly ritual, unamused while they made sure I didn't drown from flooding the floors. The tiles seemed so much bigger then. The tub is no longer the pool I never had. Now, the occasional shower with one-year-old soap is comforting.

Joey's Room

The air was thick. It was my brother's room. It is my sister's room now, and the air feels even thicker.

Mom's Room

How could I have survived without my parents' room? A three in the morning night terror was saved by the security of mom and dad's bed; fortified between their two bodies, I was safe. Speckles of dust floating in the morning sun filtered the air, awakening me to the Tyndall effect. Dreams gave stress or bliss that will not go beyond my own bedroom now, consolation that mom and dad could no longer provide. Purple walls with earrings



Morning breakfast. Prepared, devoured, and left behind on the false granite counter

sprawled on the table tops reflect my mom's ownership, a room for one. Briefly standing in the cold room, I am only sneaking in to steal from the closet or to draw lip liner in the mulberry bathroom.

My Room

A fight for space became a separation of personalities. My sister had her side, and I had mine. There always seemed to be a menacing array of clothes; the gray carpet was rarely visible. I would tiptoe over mountains and clench my teeth in anticipation of stepping on a Barbie's high heel. Not to mention all the sharp objects in the walls: tacks were generously poked to hold strings, pictures, posters, leaving a tryphobic nightmare until mom spackled the entire wall. New paint for new eras; it was chartreuse when Amanda moved out. Ideas, toys, and emotions have all been passing tenants of the room. A place where an American Girl doll had a bed, and children reflected on the joys and disappointments of their day. A baby grew into an adult. Childlike creativity still prospers nonetheless. A burst of rebellion in high school meant taking a sharpie and writing on the short wall visible just upon entering, a mural of words: "Fill your boots," "say yes," "send it." Constant reorganization and remodeling were reflections of a refined identity.



Basement

The stairs down to the basement were covered with worn white carpeting, speckled with threads of blue and red. The last few steps were signaled by the left-hand trapezoidal wall opening, broken up by three skinny wooden bars, peeking into an overview of yesterday's Barbie, Lego, and crafts. I would make my final leap onto the basement floor, gripping the longest wooden bar, now wobbly from my routine gymnastics. My morning began with peering out the living room bay windows in an outward quietness, but my mind was now racing with the ideas of the different things I could do. I was still in my pajamas, and it might stay like that the whole day unless my neighbor Sarah wants to play outside. Until then, I was consumed by the motivation to make a carnival for my Littlest Pet Shops.

At first glance, everything is open space, but my baby dolls, Littlest Pet Shops, Polly Pockets, and Barbies define regions dedicated to specific types of play. The Littlest Pet Shops were usually neglected, but they were undergoing a major transformation. The Barbies were invited, too. In a radial space, various activities were created to complete the carnival experience—some rides, some games, and even some places for particular characters to occupy for reasons I can no longer remember. The most popular ride was the swing. The swing was a hanging object, slightly off-center, overlooking all other activities. Secured by a push-pin and my go-to bonding method of tape and string, it could spin in the air freely. This element created anarchy in the population, with people flying, trying to run away from unruly boyfriends or cynical girlfriends, where fantastical means of separating from their problems became a favored mission. Through these toys, I found ownership over the underground playscape. "The reality of embodiment mandates a radical reevaluation of long cherished dogmas that split the material from the intellectual, the mind from the body, and the self from the environment" (Robinson and Pallasmaa 3). Through this basement, playing and manipulating space produced synergy through my mind and body.

A shared bedroom with two identities



Underground fantasy land, the basement, strategically organized by toy and play

Solastalgia

These memories are the core of my character. How I solve problems, how I navigate difficult times, how I make decisions—it all leads back to these moments in this home. I wonder if you feel the same. We may have never realized what was happening in our homes as adolescents, or even the places we call home now, but it is the quiet place of rewiring and reimagining who we are. Gaston Bachelard reinforces the idea of mind and body working together in space, leading us to imagine, “the house shelters day-dreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace.” Our dreams were so different as children, but our desires and motivations were so closely influenced by the home, which might be the reason for who we are today. This is an intimate place, where innocent identities developed, and where home, whatever it means to you now, begins to take on an entirely new meaning. In *Earth Emotions: New Words for a New World*, Glenn Albrecht coins the term “solastalgia” for loss of place. Connected to *Land Sickness* for the difficult reality of climate change and changing landscape, solastalgia is a somber interpretation of losing what we are familiar with. “In direct contrast to the dislocated spatial dimensions of traditionally defined nostalgia, solastalgia is the homesickness

you have when you are still located within your home environment” (Albrecht 38). Solastalgia was manifested through the environmental sense; I believe the definition applies to the childhood experience as well. I always wanted to change my home—I still do—but I wonder if coming to terms with how deeply unsatisfied I was reveals that constantly reveling in new spatial projects was (and still is) my greatest joy.

Layers of memories inside the childhood home





Gilang Pidianku

Gilang is an urban designer and spatial data analyst specializing in evidence-based planning, coastal city resilience, and the pursuit of equitable urban growth.

SCENTLESS PARADOX

Olfactory Divide & Economic Pressure

Adapted images by Mas Agung Wilis Yudha Baskoro (via iklimku.org), Wikimedia Commons, Openstreetmap and author's own photographs

Jakarta calls itself a “melting pot,” where nearly 1,235 ethnic groups from across the archipelago live, each bringing their own uniqueness and traditions. The term connotes vibrance in the spectrum of smells from across Indonesia that we can experience, varying from delicious food to the scents of spices and ingredients. The city was memorable from my first visit in 2024. As someone who previously lived in a remote area in Borneo—where rivers are typically pristine—my visit to Jakarta was my first time encountering the smell

of a dirty and polluted urban river and experiencing new kinds of spices in a traditional market. It was such a beautiful first impression of this city.

When I moved to Jakarta in 2020, it began to reveal another side to me. First came the city’s vulnerability, as it experienced the pandemic in the same year. Then it shifted into a new crisis, when the city was ranked the most polluted city in the world in 2022. For me personally, it also became a place that offered little chance to recover from anosmia—in my case, a permanent loss of the sense of smell. This long-term disability means I will miss every olfactory layer of the urban experience. Yet, in this scentless paradox, losing my sense of smell did not blind

me to the city. It made me more attentive to the olfactory divide and the economic pressure hidden in Jakarta's polluted air.

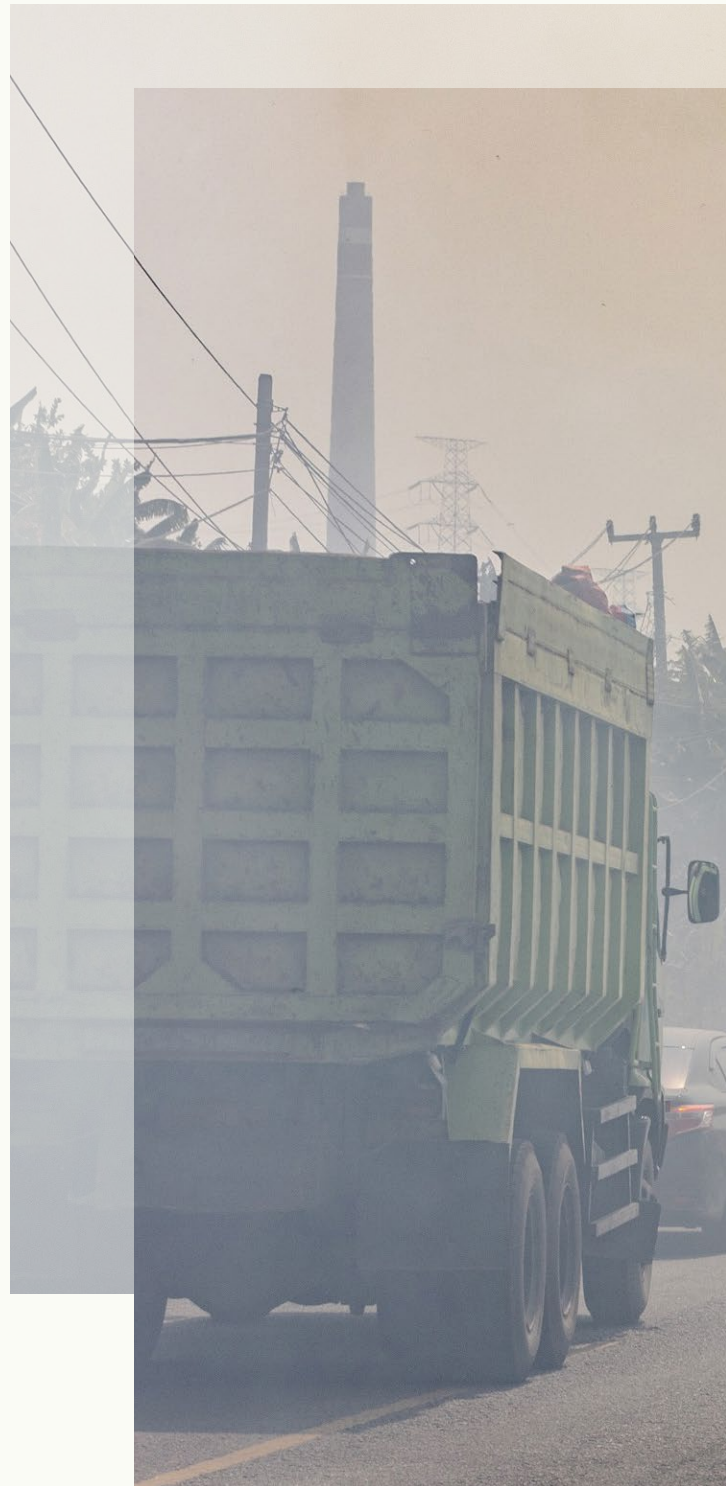
The Anosmia Survivor

In a small, cramped 1.5 x 1 meter boarding room in Jakarta, I experienced my first COVID-19 infection. This was the last time I could enjoy delicious food or a simple whiff of laundry detergent that quietly unlocked a memory. The smell of laundry was not just a fragrance; it was one of my favorite reminders of home. How about food? I will never be able to fully taste Jakarta's range of cuisines, shaped by almost 1,300 ethnicities, each with its own bold and distinctive flavors. I will miss every piece of scent of this city and the smells that once carried me back to my hometown.

Anosmia not only stops me from recalling memories; it is also a silent danger. I am constantly haunted by the fear that I can not detect the smell of something burning, which could lead to a dreadful outcome. What's more, anosmia has caused me digestive problems over the years because I cannot smell stale food. While at that time I lived on barely above minimum wage, it was challenging because my options for healthy, fresh food were limited, and access to it was additionally restricted due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This story concludes my individual experience as an anosmia survivor, however, it raises a broader question: what is it like outside my boarding room, in the urban reality that is shared by Jakarta's 11.6 million inhabitants? As a middle-class worker in Jakarta, I am considered lucky that I can enjoy clean, filtered air inside the office throughout the day. However, there are 444,777 construction workers (BPS Jakarta) and one million online taxi drivers in Greater Jakarta (CNN Indonesia) who do not have any option to choose based on wellness. They remain exposed to PM2.5 and PM10 in outdoor areas for up to 16 hours every day.

The pollution means Jakarta inhabitants live in an unhealthy city. Fine particulate matter (PM2.5) can injure the olfactory epithelium, reducing the chances that people with anosmia can recover and possibly creating new respiratory-related issues (Zhang et al. 5-7). Jakarta not only demands our productivity, but it is also pushing us to accept unnecessary and unhealthy living conditions.



A lone motorcyclist forced to endure a profound “odor injustice” simply to sustain their daily lives. Image by Mas Agung Willis Yudha Baskoro (via Iklimku.org)

The Non-Anosmic Who Suffers

Anosmia paradoxically heightened my sensitivity in other senses. I could not perceive the scent of space, and yet I became more attentive to surrounding conditions. This experience unexpectedly deepened my understanding of socioeconomic inequality in Jakarta: the city's economic drivers are the ones who experience the greatest burden of olfactory injustice. The majority of the workers of Jakarta are classified as informal workers. An estimated 80% of Jakarta's

total population live in informal, urban kampung. Living and working alongside polluted rivers, poorly maintained markets, hazardous industries, and overflowing waste, residents face persistent exposure to unpleasant odors. This goes beyond mere annoyance; it can trigger physiological stress responses, exacerbate respiratory issues, and contribute to mental health challenges. It is not merely about subjective discomfort. It involves measurable impacts on quality of life and potential long-term health risks (Sustainability Directory).



The odor of Jakarta does not exist in fancy places, affluent neighborhoods, or so-called economic centers.

You find it mostly in the outdoor spaces of urban kampung. Children and parents in Jakarta's wealthier neighbourhoods or economic centers may never encounter the odor of unmanaged waste disposal on their way to school, work, or home. They move through the city sealed inside cars which contribute to the pollution—even the electric ones. They are not the workers that keep the city running, but they benefit daily from cleaner air and more pleasant smells.

Informal laborers are not the only group that lives with Jakarta's pollution. Rini Andriani is a mother of two daughters (ages six and four) and married to a dumping vendor. Her family represents one of many from marginalized groups who suffer from health problems and the economic burdens of respiratory disease caused by Jakarta's pollution. Her second daughter began showing symptoms of asthma at five months old. By age two, she required an oxygen humidifier bottle and continued to rely on medication to breathe. The economic burdens were extreme, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic when her husband's income declined. She summarizes the struggle by saying, "high expenses, and the income doesn't match."

Workers and stories like Rini Andriani may not represent all pollution victims in Jakarta's urban kampung, but they illustrate a broader reality: in a city that demands ever more productivity, staying healthy often requires spending more. Otherwise, people will not survive, and they will slip deeper into poverty.

Reflection

Jakarta's clean-air initiatives deserve appreciation. The provincial government is encouraging the use of electric vehicles (EVs) through its public bus fleet, expanding charging infrastructure, and reducing the luxury goods tax on EVs. These initiatives align with a broader push toward an energy transition. But what will this transition do to solve air pollution from the 16 coal-based power plants surrounding Jakarta? If the city and the government keep demanding productivity from the population, are they recognizing the harm that air pollution is already doing to productivity today, and what will happen if it remains unsolved? Currently, pollution from industrial emissions costs IDR 221 trillion (approximately USD 13 billion), leading to IDR 159 trillion in health costs (approximately USD 9.4 billion). Are they only focused on the demographic peak expected in 2045 and expecting economic growth will follow? Demographically, Jakarta has a low birth rate, creating concerns about projected economic growth.

Jakarta sees over 10,000 deaths, including 330 infant deaths alone, and 5,000 hospitalizations for pollution-caused, cardio-respiratory diseases every year, costing an estimated USD 2.9 billion (Syuhada et al.). Moreover, there is growing evidence that links air pollution to child stunting and adverse birth outcomes, such as low birth weight and preterm birth.

Air pollution does not discriminate—it can harm children from both the higher and lower economic classes—but economic systems do. As the next



Man fishing in the trash-polluted Ciliwung River in Jakarta, Indonesia
Image by Fridus Steijlen (via Wikimedia Commons)

generation, they will carry the burden of an aging population with growing health problems, while also facing pressure to meet the 2045 national economic targets. These goals risk locking young people in the middle-income trap or pushing them into informal work. They will have to be more productive amid worsening pollution if the city continues to delay serious action.

Every generation in Jakarta today has lost more than fresh air. They have lost the chance to improve their quality of life and achieve upward mobility without bearing the costs of a crisis they did not create.

For the people who have already lost their sense of smell—fellow permanent anosmia survivors—I think there is little hope of recovery for us in the coming years—of regaining the scent-linked memories we once had. But for future generations, I hope they will have the opportunities to make memories with their senses that they can carry with them, every day in their beautiful life.



Collage by Ayomikun Oluyadi.
Adapted images by McKenna Phillips,
Mark Paton, Chris Curry, Nicholas Ng
and Alex Guillaume (via Unsplash)

Fikri Izza

Fikri is an architect and preservationist based in New York, focusing on soundscape preservation across architecture and sound practice.

LISTENING BACKWARD

A Street Named After Its Soundscape

When my grandmother began to lose her sight due to glaucoma, our family assumed her home would become unfamiliar. It did not. She recognized who entered, sensed where people stood, and navigated rooms through footsteps, voices, and subtle shifts in reverberation from one space to another. Long before I studied architecture or historic preservation, she showed me something I did not yet have language for: space can be known through listening. She no longer saw the walls and corridors of her house, but she still perceived its spatial landscape. She understood its soundscape.

R. Murray Schafer defines the “soundscape” as the acoustic environment as perceived and understood by those within it (7–9). A soundscape is not background noise. It is an organized field of signals,

rhythms, echoes, and overlaps that shape how space is experienced. For my grandmother, soundscape was not supplementary to vision—it replaced it. Through it, she registered distance, anticipated movement, and sensed presence.

Architectural preservation, however, remains largely ocular. The discipline speaks fluently about memory, meaning, and lived experience, yet its methods overwhelmingly privilege what can be stabilized and seen. Even when soundscape is acknowledged—as in the designation reports of the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) describing the historic soundscape of Tin Pan Alley—it remains textual. We are told that it mattered. We are not shown how it structured space.

The intellectual groundwork for change already exists. Jorge Otero-Pailos argues that experimental preservation challenges the field to reconsider what counts as preservable and how to engage phenomena that resist conventional material frameworks.

Jonathan Gunderlach proposes that sound can function as a character-defining feature of historic places (13). Scholars from Schafer to Karin Bijsterveld to Mark M. Smith have demonstrated that acoustic environments are historically produced and that attending to sound reshapes how we interpret the past (Bijsterveld; Smith 349). Conceptually, preservation is prepared.

What remains underdeveloped is the method.

Historic soundscapes rarely survive as artifacts. As David Garrioch and Flora Dennis demonstrate in their respective studies, past acoustic environments are reconstructed from complaints, regulations, memoirs, and descriptive accounts. Sound enters the archive as a reaction, rather than an object. When preservation encounters a soundscape that no longer exists, it has few tools beyond narrative description.

This limitation becomes especially visible in Tin Pan Alley.

West 28th Street between Broadway and Sixth Avenue served as the center of American popular music publishing between roughly 1893 and 1910. At the turn of the twentieth century, the block formed part of Manhattan's Tenderloin District, a dense entertainment zone where theaters, nightlife venues, and music publishers operated in close proximity. Publishers along the block supplied sheet music to Broadway productions and to a rapidly expanding urban public, shaping the sonic texture of American modernity.

In 2019, the LPC designated five buildings—47, 49, 51, 53, and 55 West 28th Street—recognizing their collective role in shaping the American music

industry. Beyond its commercial significance, the block housed the Gotham-Attucks Company, one of the earliest Black-owned music publishing firms in the United States (New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, 49).

Separately, the commercial and spatial model of Tin Pan Alley later inspired Denmark Street in London, which became known as “British Tin Pan Alley” (New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, 49). The influence was structural rather than institutional.

The buildings remain.

The soundscape that named the street does not.

In January 1903, *The Morning Telegraph* referred to West 28th Street as “more commonly known as ‘Tin Pan Alley,’ from the multiplicity of song publishers’ pianos” (New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, 47, 14). The name itself preserved an acoustic condition. Contemporary descriptions recount narrow row houses packed with upright pianos played continuously throughout the day. Songs overlapped, repeated, and collided through thin party walls. Windows were open. Melodies spilled into the street. An anecdote recorded in the LPC report recounts how publisher Harry Von Tilzer dampened piano strings with newspaper to soften complaints; journalist Monroe H. Rosenfeld reportedly remarked that the instrument sounded like “a tin pan” (New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, 47, 14). Whether embellished or exact, the implication remains clear: the identity of the street emerged from its sound. The architecture did not merely contain this activity—it structured it. Small rooms, shared party walls, dense occupancy, and open windows produced a specific acoustic field. Piano playing was labor. Repetition was testing. Overlap was a competition. The soundscape was not incidental to the industry—it was the industry itself.

The LPC reports explicitly recognize this acoustic condition as central to the site's significance (New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, 47;

If preservation confines itself to material shells, it risks conserving surfaces while losing the conditions that made them meaningful.

51). Yet today, standing on the block, the spatial logic feels incomplete. The masonry is conserved. The façades are intact. But the acoustic relationships that once organized the block have vanished. Visitors can see the buildings, but they cannot hear how the space functioned.

If preservation confines itself to material shells, it risks conserving surfaces while losing the conditions that made them meaningful. To interpret Tin Pan Alley without engaging its soundscape is to stabilize only half of its architecture.

This is not an argument for nostalgia. It is an argument for spatial literacy. In acoustic practice, auralisation is used to model how environments might sound. Reframed within preservation, it can function as a backward-looking interpretive instrument—not as theatrical reconstruction, but as evidence-based modeling of how documented soundscapes interacted with documented architectural conditions.

Without such tools, preservation remains visually competent but acoustically incomplete.

I return, inevitably, to my grandmother. She did not need to see her house to understand it. Through its soundscape, she sensed presence, distance, and movement. Listening did not provide an image; it provided access to function.

If soundscape can reveal how contemporary space works when vision fails, it can also reveal how historic space worked when its acoustic conditions are gone. We may never recover the exact soundscape of Tin Pan Alley. But if preservation is willing to treat soundscapes as spatial evidence rather than atmosphere, we can begin to interpret how that street once made sense.

Otherwise, we preserve the walls while losing the world they once held.

HOPE BEHIND THE GATES?

Fear and Loathing in Morningside

Zachary Rosman

Zach is a second-year urban planning graduate student at Columbia's GSAPP who is committed to solving the housing crisis equitably.

I was somewhere around Manhattanville
on the edge of gentrification when the mask slipped
and delusion began to take hold.
To my left were sauron-like towers,
and to my right, sterile façades
of a land to the growth machine sold.
Vestiges of old stick out like a hopeful flame:
Is this Brave New World or a city of manifold?

I was at the bottom of a hill, in more ways than one:
looking up at the fabric of spacetime before me
and trying not to dwell.
I entered the wormhole
followed by shadows
of masked agents coming to take me to hell.
Dodging and cursing to shake them off,
I approached the bridge and hoped all would be well.

I thought Columbia was free to enter for anyone.
But the gates were shut
and I was sans-ID—not yet a club member.
When Zuccotti Park was evicting protesters,
the university was my playground,
nine years old and snot-nosed, as I remember.
Today, I was just some random guy,
a fool stuck outside the gates of the big spenders.
My luck was down as of late.

Photo of the front of Scholar's
Lion Statue at Columbia near
Havemeyer and Mathematics
building



View of Butler
Library, upside
down

From a social glut, I'd had multiple kicks in the gut.
In the last month, ties with friends were cut in a saga.
Meanwhile, the weight of family contradictions crushed.
Told by all, in one way or another, to "bugger off,"
I had run when confronted, but I would no longer be Jonah.
Come hell or high water,
I was going to enter
Nineveh.

I searched for an entrance to get onto campus,
but how to make it into this armored fort?

Amsterdam and 118th, 117th, 116th, but without ID
everywhere I went was met with thwart.

I refused to quit and retraced my steps.
I would not once again fall short.

My hands now trembling, I had to win,
but they threatened me with police escort.

I yelled to myself for I must be crazy.
Would my attempts land me in court?

About to give up at the last possible entrance,
some guards waved me in to this last free port.

Through a second wormhole, I was finally in.
And once on campus, those gates distort.

Walking through the street, my muscles loosened.
It was like I had been searching for my keys
only to find them in my hand, right there in sight.
Surrounded by the majesty of Butler, Low, and Avery,
these towering symbols of the University,
brought me to cloud nine in all of their might.
When I could picture myself as a student,
being here felt right.

Once inside the gates, I knew I would go to this place.
But it was locked from the city outside, a distant, far off space.



Dana Murtada

Dana is a Columbia GSAPP student whose work blends architecture, photography, and design, informed by the cultural depth of her Lebanese roots.

THE SENSES THAT RAISE US

The room was left baking in the sun, so when we entered, I moved quickly to turn on the AC.

The furniture around us was hot to the touch, and the heat existed as a thickness in the air flow.

The air conditioner visually disrupted the space. It sat high up on the wall, as if trying to hide, but its wide box was too large to blend in. It looked worn, and made noises of old age. The cold air began to spew out slowly, and with it, a mechanical scent.

I wasn't sure how at first, but all of a sudden, I was four years old at my grandmother's apartment in Beirut. She had a long red couch that became synonymous with her identity. It was textured and patterned, with pale green motifs and little yellow dots that danced

around it. Red, yellow, and green satin square pillows found a home on this couch. Sitting at the front, it was supported visually by sheer soft sand colored curtains, next to the beige wallpaper from Paris whose edges were coming off the wall.

To its left, stood a narrow air conditioner whose aged colors blended together.

For the first eleven years of my life this home was my understanding of Lebanon.

A country I am from, but was allowed only glimpses of through the summer and winter months. Each visit we stayed with my mother or father's family, but we typically spent most of our time in Beirut in my Teta (grandmother) Nabila's apartment. In this house, I was Lebanese. I spent time with my cousins, playing with the trinkets, books, and gadgets around the house. With the textured fabrics, rugs, or curtains in my Teta's apartment, our understanding of material grew. We spent time in the kitchens, tracing our fingers around the Disney Princess themed plates and cups, and shook cereal boxes because they had prizes in them. I stood small but mighty observing the glass cabinet that held only the most precious of items. There was a sharp glass table that felt both good and dangerous to the touch. It was here that I explored the depths of my imagination and learned the world was large. In those summer months, sitting on the long red couch with my little feet spread out, I would get a little too hot. Conveniently I could reach my body over the side of the couch and position my head in front of the cold air coming out of the machine.

My grandmother moved apartments when I was 11, into the apartment building other family members resided in. Many items came along with her, but in a new space they took on a separate identity. I never stopped to think about the space we had lost; it made sense to move forward.

It was only years later, when I was 23, that the mechanical scent in a friend's house ignited a part of my memory I had forgotten was there. The feeling was so special, an unlocking of my memory in a way I didn't think possible. A feeling that if I could I would bottle up in a jar, and it would be warm.

I had forgotten that smell. I had forgotten that there even was a smell. I had forgotten just how much this home shaped my identity, my creativity and my imagination. It is through the senses, that this home shaped these things, and through my senses that I remember its importance.

We may lose spaces, but we keep them in intangible ways, through occasionally experienced intangible senses.

There are days in which I have walked outside my home, and felt so strongly that it smells as it did when I was 13 years old. The feeling is soft, and keeps me warm when I feel far away from home. So I began to ask others: what does your grandmother's home smell like?

With casual conversations between friends, I learned more about how a grandmother's home becomes warm through the sound of family members who surround you. I understood how the distinct sound of a doorbell could mean remembering the entrance to a home of belonging. The familiar cold feeling of a leather couch could evoke a powerful emotional response, because it can be both startling and cooling at the same time. A home can smell stuffy, but in turn this just means full of life. It can be overcrowded, too many images, but this is representative of a long life lived.

These are the senses that raise us, stick with us as we age, and shape how we experience the world for the rest of our lives.

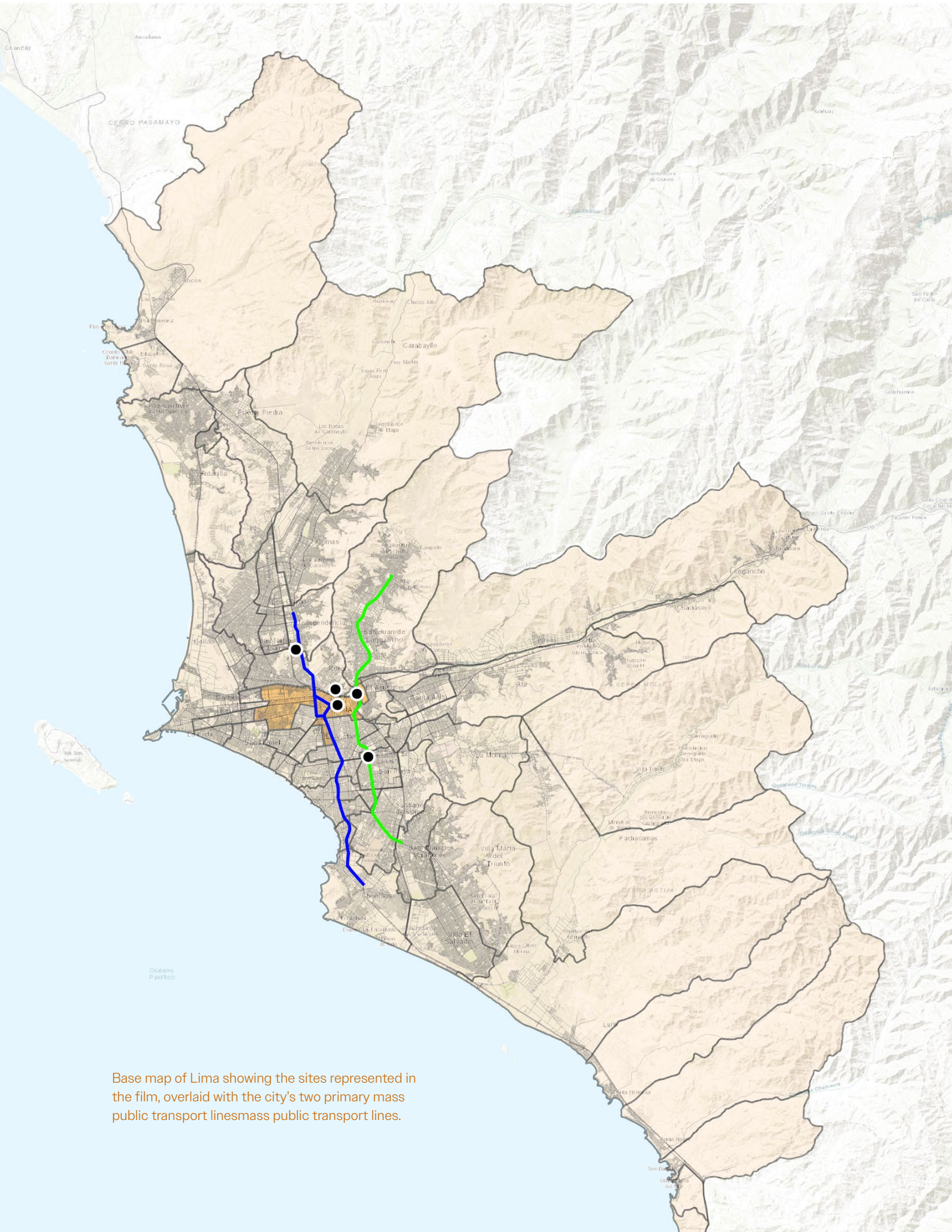


**We may lose
spaces,
but we keep
them in
intangible
ways.**



Photo by Charlie Back





Base map of Lima showing the sites represented in the film, overlaid with the city's two primary mass public transport lines.

Miguel Angel Santivañez Lopez

Miguel is a licensed architect from the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú and a Master of Science in Architecture and Urban Design candidate at Columbia GSAPP.

CORAZÓN DE LA LUNA

Mapping Vulnerability and Urban Atmospheres in Lima

Editor's Note: This piece analyzes the cinematography of 2021 film *El Corazón de la Luna* (*Moon Heart* in English) written and directed by Aldo Savini. We encourage you to watch the movie to understand on the author's cinematographic references.

A City Revealed Through Silence

Corazón de la Luna (2021) unfolds almost entirely without dialogue, relying on images, atmospheres, and repetition. Through the journey of its protagonist, M, an elderly woman moving across Lima, the camera follows her routine of work, grief, and sleep. The film, from director Aldo Salvini, constructs a fragmented yet cyclical portrait of the city, where the spaces she traverses are not neutral backdrops. They are agents that shape her emotional world and reflect broader urban conditions: precarity, memory, isolation, and the constant push of the city against those who inhabit it from its margins.

The story follows her early mornings working as an *estibadora*, loading and unloading packages, sacks, and food—a common job in Peruvian markets. Her age emphasizes her physical vulnerability, while the informality of this manual labor reveals economic precarity as she is paid by the day or even hour

depending on the amount of work available. Her days in the market are often marked by science-fiction cartoons, remembering her deceased son. Her trajectories around the city, connecting bus stops across different locations, are often shown at night, submerged in an aura of mystery and uncertainty. She is accompanied by Yawarbot, an anthropomorphic robot whose presence reflects her obsession with sci-fi cartoon characters and joins her in some of the places she visits throughout her story.

One of these places is the Presbitero Maestro, Lima's oldest cemetery, where she goes alone to grieve her son. The robot is absent during her first visits but later accompanies her. Locations like her home, near an abandoned industrial area and the commercial streets of Independencia, portray her nocturnal life in the city. The combination of candlelight and artificial lighting, with dreamlike distortions, helps construct the world presented to the viewers.

A few key spaces structure the film's spatial narrative:

1. Mercado Central, a modernist public building defined by ramps, slopes, and visual complexity;
2. Lima's nighttime transportation system, where the protagonist repeatedly moves through stations, platforms, and buses enveloped in chaos and vulnerability;
3. And The Presbítero Maestro Cemetery, a monumental and symbolic space often regarded as enchanted, where architecture intersects with memory and myth.

These locations, visited cyclically across different days, create a non-linear spatial-temporal loop. The protagonist's body becomes the connector between urban space, memory, and repetition.

Mercado Central: Ramps and the Weight of Daily Survival

The Mercado Central, the first modern building in the city, is one of the visually strongest spaces in the film. Its modernist configuration of ramps and interior slopes produces a sense of disorientation. The protagonist navigates these inclines slowly, carrying visible physical fatigue, her aging body in direct tension with a functionalist building designed for constant movement and commerce.

The marketplace is not filmed as a site of abundance or community. Rather, it becomes a labyrinth, an urban mechanism that she must endure. This visual strategy aligns with the film's cyclical logic: she returns to the market at various moments, each time repeating similar gestures and actions.

Her daily routine places significant strain on her back. Seeing much younger people, usually men, carrying heavy sacks emphasizes the difference of gender, size, and age between her and the other *estibadores*. The market is repeatedly portrayed as harsh, demanding, and indifferent. It is a workplace where everyone is on their own, located in one of the most important nodes of exchange in the Peruvian capital.

The resolution of the film, when she recovers her son, presents the same place in a completely different light. The atmosphere becomes warm and joyful. The market ramps, rather than sloped paths of continuous effort and exhaustion, transform into

a setting of greetings and celebration. Customers and workers alike become guests, applauding and chanting as they walk through the space, celebrating the reunification of the family.

Night Transportation: Moving Through Shadows and Lights

Public transit scenes, especially at night, portray the city at its most raw. Stations and bus stops become liminal zones where vulnerability is intensified. The protagonist moves through tight sidewalks and streets. These spaces are marked by chaos, noise, and unpredictability; all filmed with a kind of documentary closeness. In Lima, nighttime mobility reveals structural issues: safety concerns, long commutes, and precarious labor rhythms. The film captures these conditions not through exposition, but through the protagonist's body language, hesitation, exhaustion, and occasional fear.

It represents an inescapable reality to anyone who relies on public transportation, as the vast majority of Lima's citizens do. The bus stops and the massive columns supporting the only metro line at the time construct an aesthetic encounter with informal urban spaces. These infrastructures inadvertently draw attention to residual spaces of urban design throughout the city.

Although these settings are depicted primarily at night, the film's ending introduces a contrasting scene in daylight, where strangers in the street seem reunited within an atmosphere of pace. Cars, noise, and fear disappear, as if the world pauses to honor the protagonists, who are welcomed with applause. People approach them, acknowledging their joy as a shared achievement. The sidewalk itself becomes the protagonist, transformed into a luminous path of success, where mother and son walk together shining with every step.

Presbítero Maestro Cemetery: Architecture, Ritual, and the Spectral City

The Presbítero Maestro Cemetery, one of Latin America's most important neoclassical cemeteries, occupies a distinct atmospheric layer in the film. Its monumental corridors, mausoleums, and statuary form a stark contrast with the chaos of the city.



The protagonist's presence here introduces a symbolic dimension: death, memory, and the encantado—or enchanted—space associated with this historic cemetery. The place is both a real architectural object and a metaphoric landscape. It is filmed with stillness, long takes, and a contemplative pace.

M's journeys are somber and filled with nostalgia for the place. She carries a wooden ladder, symbolizing the sacrifices she makes for her son, whether to visit him or his memory. She cries in despair as she stands beside his columbarium wall. These visits are deeply emotional. She is the only person present, a solemnly stark contrast to the chaos and indifference that prevails elsewhere. The cemetery is a revered temple, a safe site where she can endure her loss.

Yawarbot's role as a redeemer is enshrined at the end of the film when he reunites mother and son. Framed in camera by the walls once associated with sorrow, the space is transformed. It no longer functions as a reminder of nostalgia but becomes a spiritual refuge for the three characters. Even in the cold atmosphere of the cemetery, the only witnesses—the dead in the columbaria—seem to silently welcome their reunification.

Unlike traditional narrative arcs, *Corazón de la Luna* uses spatial repetition, and eventually aesthetic rupture, to construct meaning. The protagonist's movements across the same spaces on different days generate a temporal loop, making the film feel more like an urban ritual than a linear journey.

Urban Atmospheres and the Aging Body

Across the three spaces, one theme remains constant: the relationship between a vulnerable body and an often hostile city. Lima is not depicted as a city of monumental plazas or scenic vistas. Instead, the film turns its gaze to spaces of everyday survival—markets, bus stops, cemeteries—revealing a city shaped by inequality, precarity, and accumulated memory.

The protagonist's age, depicted in her slow walking pace, painful gestures, and visible fatigue, transform ordinary spaces into

physically demanding environments. Architecture and infrastructure become obstacles, and the city emerges as an active participant in her daily struggle. This interaction between body, infrastructure, and atmosphere is one of the film's most powerful contributions to urban representation.

The spatial transformation at the film's resolution, the protagonist's dreamlike distortion, suggests that reconciliation and refuge may exist, even if only temporarily, within the same spaces that once symbolized struggle.

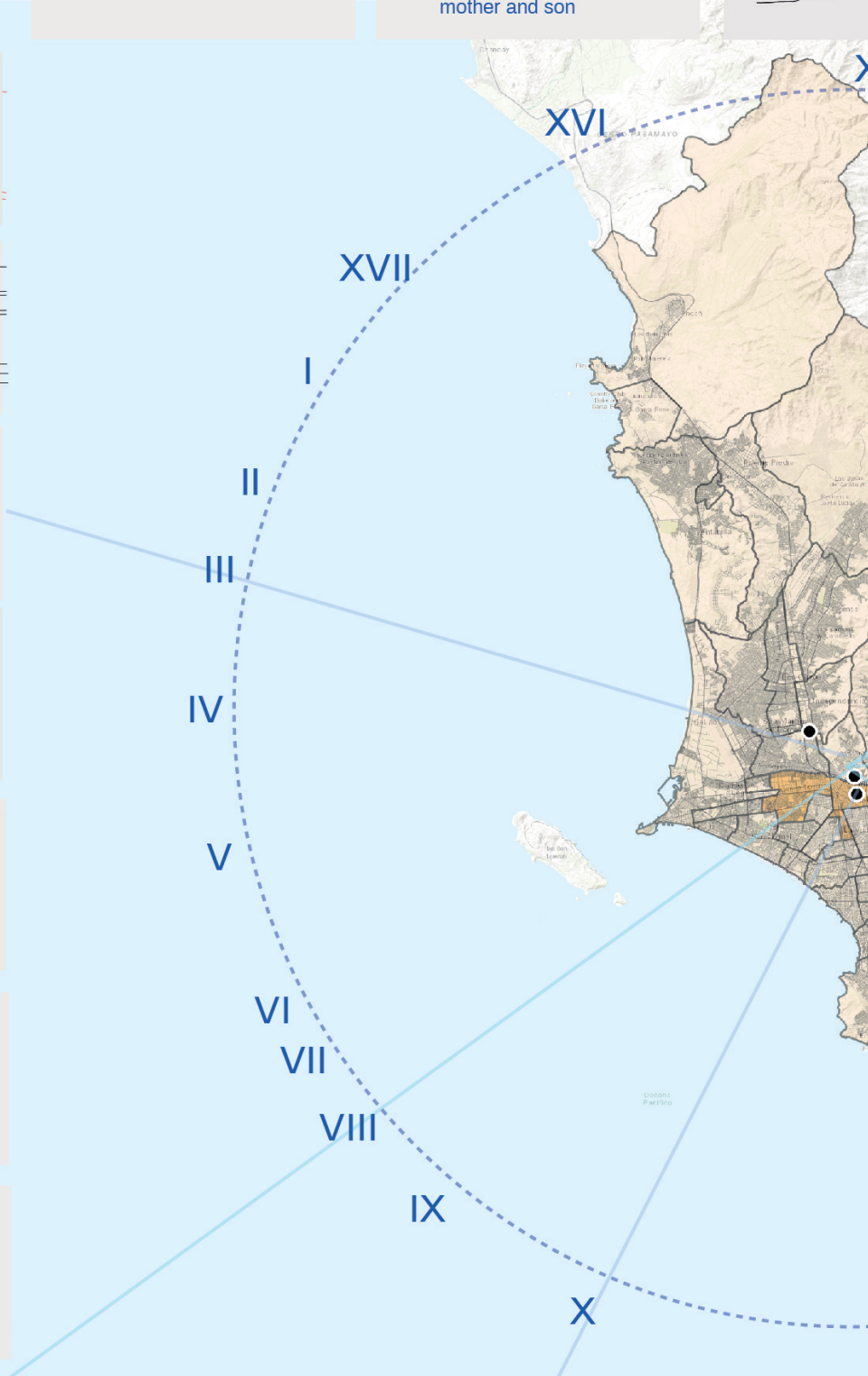
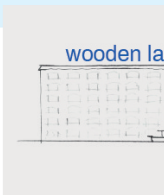
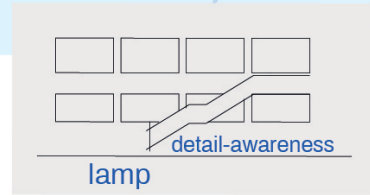
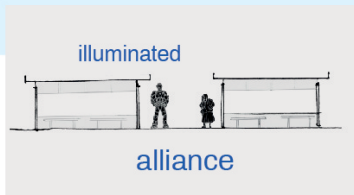
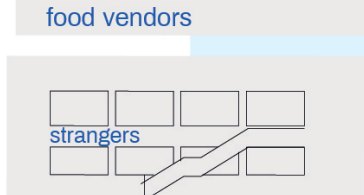
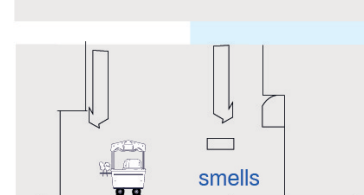
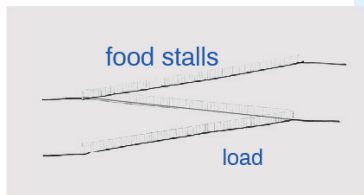
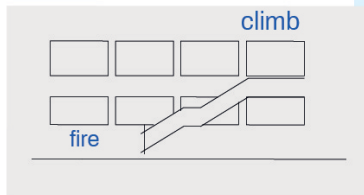
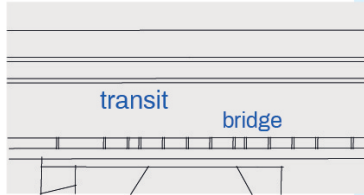
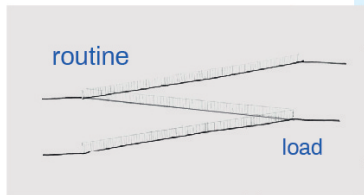
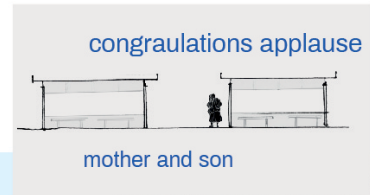
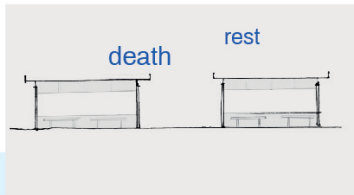
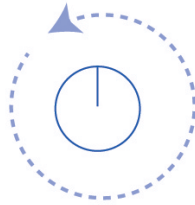
Conclusion: A Cartography of Memory and Precarity

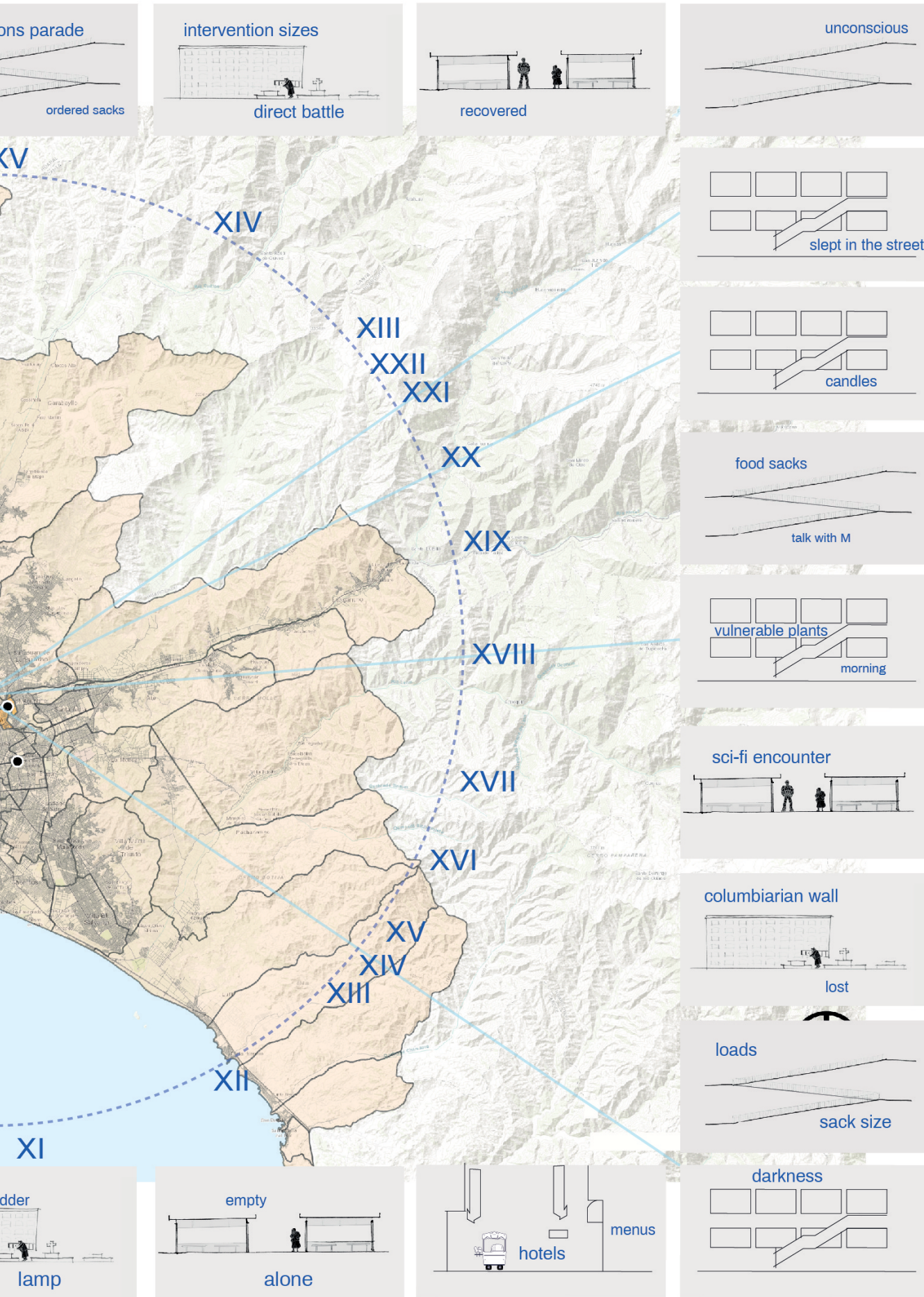
Corazón de la Luna offers a rare cinematic cartography of Lima, one that foregrounds vulnerability, repetitive movement, and the emotional textures of everyday urban spaces. By mapping the protagonist's encounters across Mercado Central, transportation infrastructure, and Presbítero Maestro Cemetery, the film reveals a city that oscillates between chaos and quiet, hostility and contemplation, routine and ritual.

The journey of M is not an isolated case. Even when framed as dreamlike science-fiction, the narrative renders visible ways in which many vulnerable groups move through, interact with, and struggle against the city. The film demonstrates how urban spaces shape personal experience, especially for those who inhabit the city from positions of precarity. The fantastical elements do not distract from marginality, rather they intensify its condition, while centering her emotional state of exhaustion, devotion, and joy.

Through silence, atmosphere, and rhythm, the film invites viewers to see Lima not as a static backdrop, but as a living, demanding organism that must be navigated with resilience, memory, and a constant will to resist.







Chronological keyframes of each scenario paired with a base map of Lima locating the film's sites

FRANK
RODNEY
HINTON JR.

NEW YORKER



PRIOR
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UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

from

To.

July 2002

Manuela Hurtado Sabogal

Manuela is a NY-based urban designer/
architect obsessed with subway
textures, sounds, and the tastes of
Queens...and its odors (unfortunately).

NEW YORK CAN FEEL US

Scanning Around the City

Through the overlaying of words in all its languages, the city is read as a kind of non-place. In these pieces, we look through a hand-held scanner at patterns, typefaces, and tags as a form of identity gathered from stations and streets across New York. What emerges are layered fragments multiplied, screened, and linearly dodged into one another. Where typography, residue, and wear become a visual field.

These layers mirror the city's own complexity. Over the course of two months, its movement was observed: how objects erode, how their surfaces accumulate time, how paper melts, how use becomes legible as texture. Each scan acts as

a record of contact or a small archive of friction between surface and feeling. The central motivation was always rooted in the digital, within the mediated world and its attempts to translate the human onto a screen. In that sense, scanning New York's textures was not simply a technical act; it became a way of reconstructing the city's diversity through overlapping strata, where the urban experience is composed—much like in Photoshop—through layers that are blended and brought into frame.



From left to right, we see promotional stickers found on a trash can while walking through Brooklyn; the warping of the image is caused by the sensitivity of the hand scanner. Next appears a touch of blue from Manhattan site barricades, marked with a bit of chalk graffiti. Finally, we see an old gate from a closed newspaper street stand.

Here we see a classic subway floor pattern, an everyday, almost static form of movement. It appears slightly more orange than usual due to an overlay of textures from subway windows, including scratches and scars. The text at the bottom offers a brief way of sensing the city, using the subway's classic typeface, Helvetica.

**As Of Now, The City Feels!
The Unknown Droplets Shine The Rust
Torn Papers Adorn Light Posts
Fingerprints Stain The Metal Railings
Shrieks Echo The Tunnels
Stories Told In Tags
Languages Create A Mixtape Of Culture
The City Feels All, One Feels All**



Authored by Goose
Typed by Erma Swartz

Erma is an urban planning student at Columbia exploring cities through stories of climate, community, and everyday life.

THROUGH GOOSE'S NOSE



An Experience.

If you are an active dog in New York City, the small dog parks that are interspersed around the city just do not cut it for you. You need a place to stretch your overly long legs and really chase the birds. You likely will, therefore, ensure your companion person adjusts their morning routine to make sure you get to Central Park between the hours of 7am and 9am each day. You will then also learn that those hours are simply suggestions, as there are no actual doggy police waiting to arrest you and your companion when you “accidentally” overstay well into mid-morning. There are simply too many things to smell, too many sticks to chew and carry, and too many leaves to rip apart. You simply need more time to explore!

You may even throw a tantrum and refuse to leave before you are well and ready, despite the person police potentially coming to charge your companion.

And what do you care? You don't know what money is. Either way, you will have found the best place to be a dog in New York City.

Once you have settled into this new routine, you will notice that at the edge of the North Wood on the west side, just up the hill from the park entrance on 110th, you are likely in the city's happiest and smelliest spot, if only for a few minutes. A place where the collective desire to be a good dog companion (and potentially the consistent bullying you have trained your companion to expect if she does not bring you) brings together different combinations of the same 40 or 50-odd dogs and their companions, depending on the day, of course. And oh, there are just so many dogs' butts to smell, so many dog markings to find and cover up, so many humans with treats about. It is puppy heaven, and you get to go every single day!

You might find yourself drawn to peers who can run almost as fast as you. It is extremely probable



There are simply too many things to smell.

It will be impossible not to notice, however, that on frigid days, when the wind blows like a whip across your face, you and everyone else may not be interested in getting to know the companions or dogs in your community. You yourself may be extra protective of your ball, and the human companions may decide new friendships are less important than hiding within their weird removable fur.

But as the city thaws and the flowers start to break through the slowly warming ground, you probably will also take note of feeling friendlier, more willing to play, and more open to sharing your ball. Your companion person will also start to shed their layers of ice. You can bet that once again, they will smile at Marmite's and Dragon's companion people and start to chat. Your companion person will likely want to go on longer walks and stop to smell the flowers like she is a dog herself. You'll need to jump on her to remind her who the cute one really is, though.

And finally, just as the seasonal change comes into full swing, your nose perks up and all the smells of the city appear to be especially stinky—just the way you like it. You missed the strong scents of life in the city.

Before, in the frigid cold, it was hard to sense where the squirrels or rats may have been burrowed. Now your nose knows where they're likely hiding. You can hear the rustling of leaves and the breaking of sticks as little creatures you want to chase begin to move around the wood. You have no choice but to chase them up trees that you simply cannot jump high enough to enter.

that you will become best friends with dogs like Marmite and Dragon, mutts with similar chihuahua ancestry to your own. And before you know it, you'll be curing your companion's seasonal depression and forcing them to be friendly to others from around the neighborhood, a precious gift in a city so big. And your companion will owe this entirely to your vivacious personality. Imagine the treats they will have to give you!

As the winter deepens, all the good doggy times you are a part of will likely tear up the grass. Then the rain that falls and the water that freezes may make this sacred place slippery. And by all accounts, no paws of yours will abide these frightful conditions. So you'll have no choice but to bid your new friends adieu and make your way south, toward similar but new parts of the park. You may find hills from which your companion insists on throwing your ball, despite her definitely knowing it's exhausting to run uphill each time. You may make different friends in the process of discovering this new refuge, and so your companion will again be inclined to have pleasant morning chats with the other companions in the area.

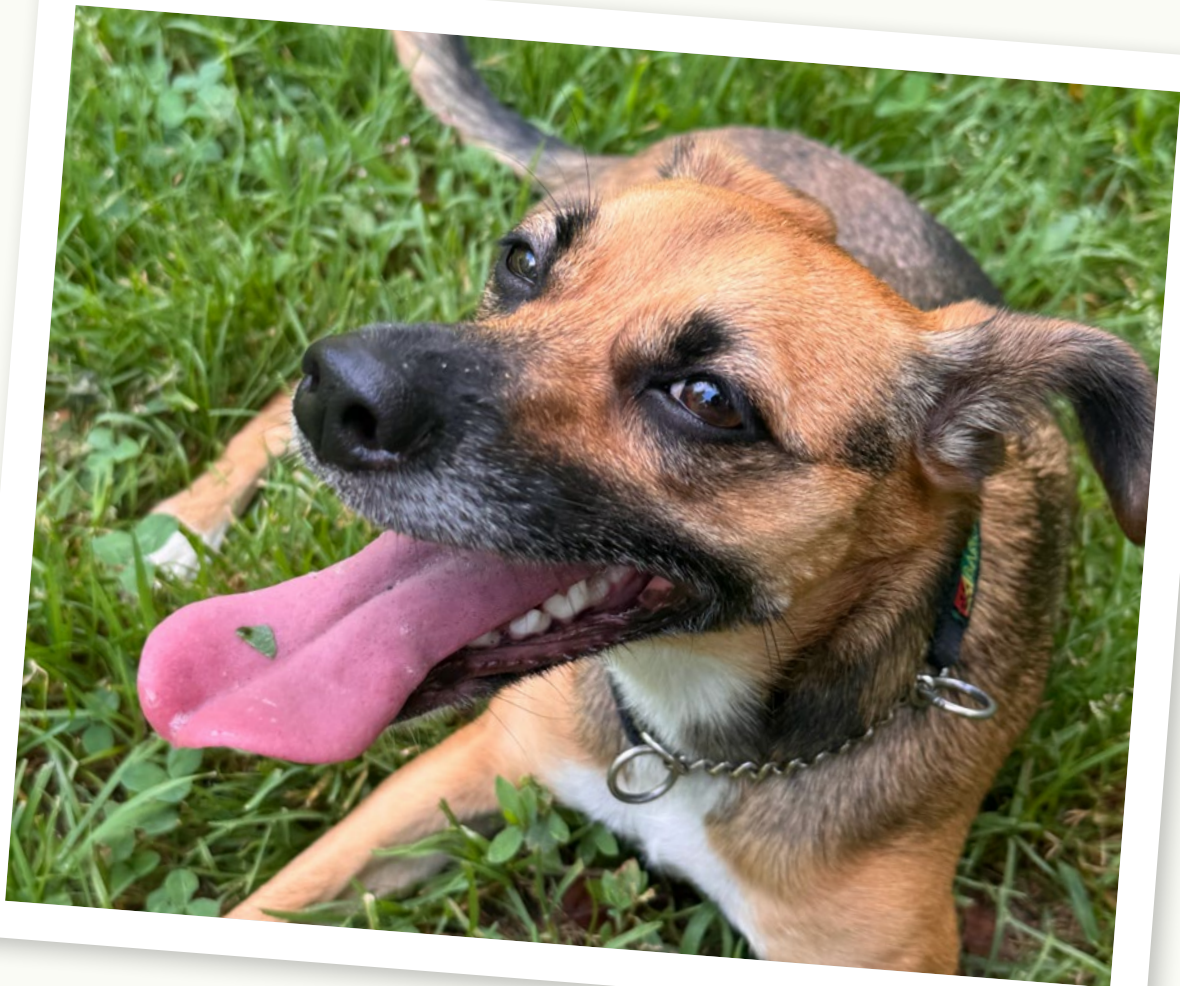


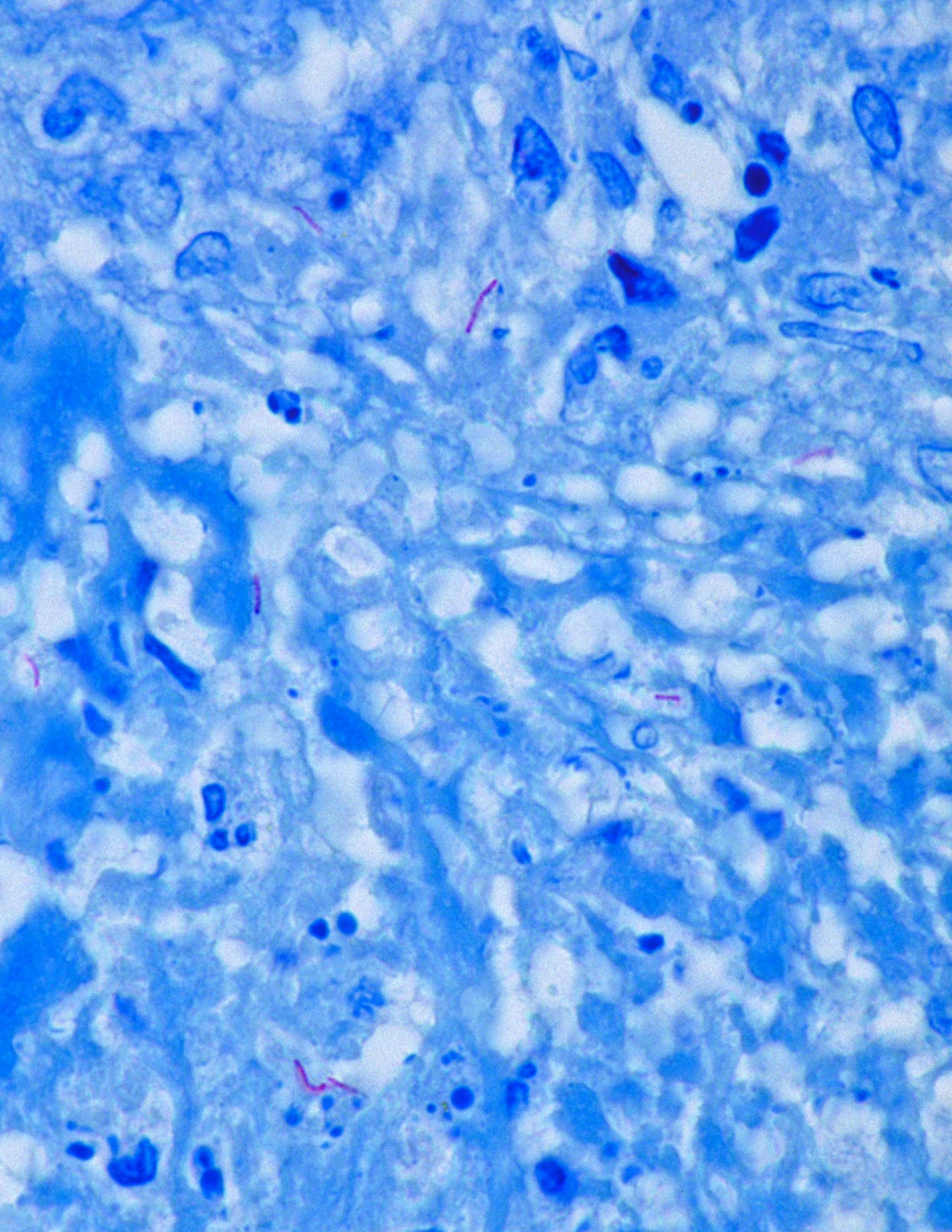
You're finally warm enough and feel outgoing and alive, happy to chase your ball through the many open spaces in the whole of Central Park, this vast woodland that belongs to all the dogs of the city. The sun begins to stay out for long hours. The trees begin to breathe again, and the birds return to brighten the spirit of the city.

You can smell the food the companions bring as they picnic on YOUR hill. The boxes on wheels, you think they're called food carts but you're not sure, have returned to the park, full of boiling and grilling meats, and it becomes so difficult to listen to your companion and not run over asking for a snack. You know deep down that now it's time to make friends with all these people, just in case they are willing to hand over some of whatever smells so good.

The small companions [children] start to accompany your peers on their daily journey to and through the park, and those are your absolute favorite friends cause they chase you and never ever tire of throwing your ball. You feel the grass quickly grow between your paw beans, and finally the great hill reopens, allowing for more puppy celebrations and person socialization.

You know that it could compromise your journalistic standing and betray your puppy bias to explain that every weekend, new events and furry families come to celebrate the warmth and the bloom together, even past the hour of 9am, so you don't tell your readers about that. Instead, you ready yourself for a full summer of sunshine, rolling in the dirt, and trying your best to catch chipmunks in the wood.





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FEAR AND PLEASURE IN MICROBIAL EXCHANGE

Fear is the beginning. “Anxiety is considered to be man’s first experience at birth and one of the most primal motivating forces [...] Through architecture, the abstract, directionless anxiety of the foreign and unknown is moderated to an object-oriented, direct fear of concrete threats. It is expressed in constructions intended to defend and combat against anticipated dangers. Control and the artificial order of surroundings created via man made structures (among other things) numb the pain of anxiety and create space for safety and security.” The outside, the cold, the dark, the dirty, yours not mine; it is through the lens of architecture that we can begin to understand fear.

Most of us are born afraid, crying, pushed from the architectural home of the womb and into a hospital. A hospital is a place that takes all the power of design, engineering, and psychological will to eradicate the fear of death. In turn, it produces it. Alvar and Aino Aalto’s Paimio Sanatorium is

one of the cleanest examples of how architecture internalizes the modern anxiety about disease. Designed in the early 1930s for tuberculosis patients, the sanatorium embodies a belief in hygiene as aesthetic order. Every surface and opening was carefully designed to support healing through environmental control. The Paimio Sanatorium website writes, “Tuberculosis was a much feared disease in the 1930s, and Paimio Sanatorium was an institution where the patients were isolated. Its tall, white, 7-storey high outline was unlike anything that had been seen before in the Finnish countryside. Despite people’s fear of the disease the project was publicised from the beginning in a positive light, as there was seen to be a real need for a modern tuberculosis hospital.” This reconstruction of microbial disease fear in a “positive light” produced a different kind of anxiety, one where hyper-design for sterilization inevitably created more segregation and difference.

Ziehl-Neelsen stain of the acid-fast bacilli *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. Placental thrombus, a blue non-reactive counter stained sputum and the reactive bacteria stained pink. Image by CDC/Dr Edwin P. Ewing Jr. (via Wikimedia Commons)

Mycobacterium tuberculosis is the bacterium responsible for tuberculosis, a highly infectious disease that primarily attacks the lungs. Transmission occurs through the exchange of microscopic respiratory droplets between individuals, making close contact a significant risk factor. The disease exemplifies how microbial exchange can have profound consequences, as the bacterium spreads invisibly through everyday interactions, shaping both public health responses and the design of spaces intended to contain and treat it. Ellen Lupton writes for The Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum, “To design the Paimio Sanatorium, Alvar and Aino Aalto leveraged the best science available at the time, which called for cross-ventilation and heliotherapy (exposure to sunshine) to treat and prevent tuberculosis. They considered everything from chairs and sinks to closets and beds. Sinks with angled basins were designed to minimize the sound of splashing water. Nonporous flooring and curved surfaces were easy to clean. Verandas were designed for resting outdoors.” The Paimio Sanatorium is undeniably beautiful, but the white, clean, sharp beauty is unsettling.

This logic of sterilization persists into contemporary architectural culture. Yoshio Taniguchi’s 2004 expansion of the Museum of Modern Art in New York rearticulates modernism’s obsession with purity in visual rather than strictly hygienic terms. The museum’s pristine white surfaces and sharply controlled environments create a sense of aesthetic cleanliness. The museum becomes a kind of art sanatorium, where both the art and visitors are contained within a controlled and sanitized atmosphere. In 2004, John Updike wrote for *The New Yorker*, “Times Square has been sanitized and skyscraperized; the subway cars are brightly lit inside and graffiti-free inside and out. New York is going pristine. It is not easy, while gingerly stepping over loose floorboards and extension cords as thick as boa constrictors, to picture the new Museum of Modern Art in every tidy and clean-swept detail, but enough was on view last month to persuade this visitor ‘that the final effect will be immaculate, rectilinear, capacious, and chaste.’”

Chaste—abstaining from extramarital, or from all, sexual intercourse—is a most interesting word to describe the architecture of MoMA.

Microbial exchange is also a condition of intimacy, a form of connection that underlies our most pleasurable encounters. The idea of architectural intimacy was developed in Sylvia Lavin’s *Kissing Architecture*. Lavin proposes that architecture’s liveliness comes from its ability to merge with other disciplines, materials, and bodies. The metaphor of the kiss captures the essence of this exchange: an act that is both risky and pleasurable, both a crossing of boundaries and an affirmation of connection. The kiss becomes an architectural event, a microcosm of how built environments mediate contact and communication.

Pipilotti Rist offers a sensorial counterpoint to Taniguchi’s sterile architecture. “The basic concept was not to try to destroy or be provocative to the architecture, but to melt in. As if I would kiss Taniguchi. Mmmmm’ [...] This is how Pipilotti Rist described her installation in the atrium of the Museum of Modern Art titled *Pour Your Body Out*.” The installation invites visitors to recline on pink carpets, surrounded by sound, color, and moving images that dissolve the boundaries between body and space. “Rist was not, of course, talking about actually kissing Yoshio Taniguchi, the architect of the museum. Rather, Rist was describing how her work would come into temporary contact with Taniguchi’s.” Rist’s work transformed the museum from a space of control into one of immersion, where touch, breath, and proximity become part of the aesthetic experience.

The literal act of kissing, as explored in microbiological research, reveals just how profound these exchanges are. A 2014 study titled “Shaping the Oral Microbiota Through Intimate Kissing” found that in a single ten-second kiss, partners transfer an average of eighty million bacteria. This microbial transfer is not random; the researchers suggest that kissing evolved not just for affection, but as a mechanism of microbial communication, a way of

sampling the other's internal ecosystem, and to aid in mate assessment and immune system compatibility. Our mouths, which harbor over seven hundred species of bacteria, become ecological sites of intimacy. The kiss, in this sense, is both an act of love and a microbiological experiment.

Further research proposes that kissing may have evolved to protect women from cytomegalovirus infections during pregnancy, that exposure to a partner's microbes through repeated, controlled contact helps the body build immunity. "The hypothesis presented in the current manuscript proposes that although kissing does indeed expose an individual to the risk of oral infection, its main function is to confer protection from diseases with far more serious consequences." The paradox is striking: what appears to be an act of vulnerability and exposure is, in evolutionary terms, a strategy of protection. Pleasure becomes a way of managing fear. The microbial exchange is thus both erotic and immunological, both risky and necessary.

Even Adam and Eve can be read through this lens, as the first moment of human microbial exchange, when touch inaugurates both knowledge and vulnerability.

Architecture, too, participates in such exchanges. Few projects capture the tension between fear and pleasure as clearly as Diller + Scofidio + Renfro's Blur Building. Constructed from clouds of atomized water, it dissolves architecture into atmosphere, erasing boundaries between structure

and environment. Visitors enter a mist of humidity, enveloped in an experience that is simultaneously cleansing and disorienting. The building is literally made of the medium through which microbes travel, air and water, turning architecture into an ephemeral ecology. But within this beauty lies potential danger: the same mist that produces visual wonder could harbor *Legionella* bacteria, which cause Legionnaires' disease. The "Blush" portion of the project was never realized, but the architects proposed that visitors wear coats outfitted with electronic lighting and vibrating sensors that responded, algorithmically, to the proximity of others who had given similar answers to a questionnaire.

Microbes move. Bodies touch. Air circulates. Architecture cannot stop exchange; it can only choreograph it. To design only against fear is to produce spaces of distance, anxiety, and exclusion. To acknowledge pleasure, intimacy, and risk is to admit that architecture is not a barrier but a medium, one that stages encounters

rather than prevents them. Perhaps the task of architecture is no longer to cleanse the world of contamination, but to design for contact that is conscious, negotiated, and alive. Fear may be the beginning, but intimacy is what keeps us human.





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Hope Behind the Gates? Fear And Loathing In Morningside

Author: Zachary Rosman

Editors: Jane Hutton (Content), Anna Carl (Design)

The Senses That Raise Us

Author: Dana Murtada

Editors: Ava Miller (Content), Haochen “Isaac” Tan (Design)

Corazón de la Luna: Mapping Vulnerability and Urban Atmospheres in Lima

Author: Miguel Santivañez

Editors: Bolun Qiu (Content), Haochen “Isaac” Tan (Design)

El Corazón de la Luna. Directed by Aldo Salvini, University
of Lima and CREA, 2021.

New York Can Feel Us

Author: Manuela Hurtado Sabogal

Editors: Amalia Kamien (Content),
Ayomikun Oluyadi (Design)

Through Goose’s Nose

Authors: Goose and Erma Swartz

Editors: Ava Miller (Content), Haochen “Isaac” Tan (Design)

Fear and Pleasure in Microbial Exchange

Author: Amalia Kamien

Editors: Roxy Blocksdorf (Content), Anna Carl (Design)

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“In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni”

Author: Xinyu “Kelly” Yan

Editor: Chanel Chin (Design)

DESIGN APPENDIX

Sensorium Cover

Sense Organs (Five Senses Vector Illustration): MicroOne, Adobe Stock, Image #244914939 <https://stock.adobe.com/images/244914939>. Used with modifications

Authors/Editors: Ayomikun Oluyadi and Anna Carl (Design)

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Article titles are set in Scotch Display Fat 50pt, all caps.

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Byline and page numbers are set in Owners Text Bold 10pt.

Headers and body text in Owners Text Light 10pt.

Subheadings in Owners Text Regular 10pt.

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Orange (#C96500)

Pink (#B24A6A)

Green (#5F7F1F)

Blue (#1A3F8A)

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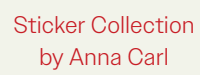
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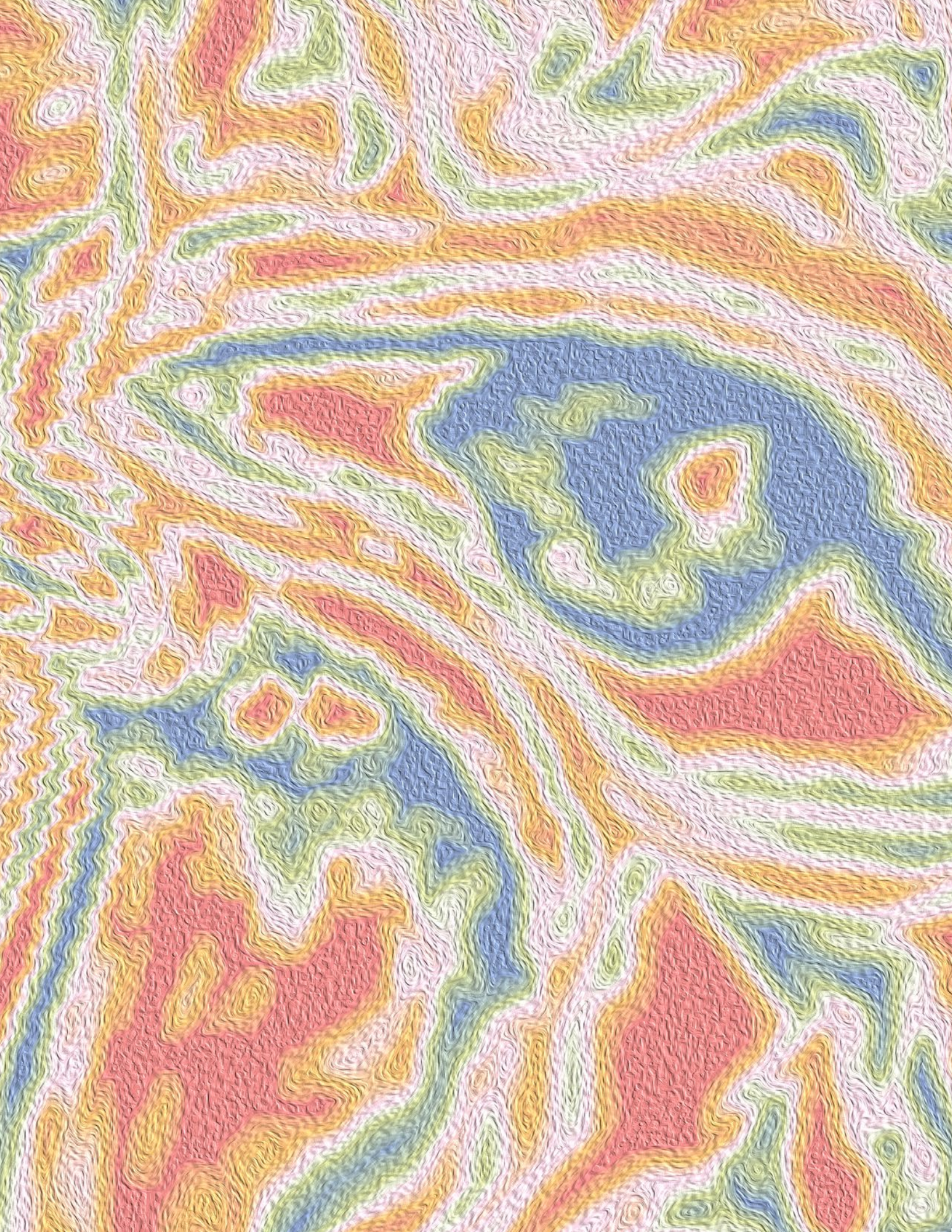
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