

# TRANS ENDING GEO METRY



Neil Spiller,  
*Door,*  
Longhouse,  
Communicating Vessels,  
2015

*opposite:* The first drawing of any part  
of the Longhouse, predating any plans.  
Its main feature is an inverted angel.

*Duchampian Split Plan*

*above:* The plan form of the  
Longhouse is superimposed on  
the setting out of *The Large Glass*  
(1915–23), illustrating its deep and  
close connection with Duchamp's  
masterpiece.

**Neil Spiller** Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Vestibulum erat tellus, pellentesque in elit vel, ornare suscipit justo. Suspendisse congue semper sapien, sed finibus ante accumsan nec. Vivamus quis est eu augue fringilla varius et eget lectus. Donec mi dolor, tincidunt id scelerisque a, placerat nec augue. Donec tortor ex, aliquet non lacus ut, dictum ultrices sem. Ut dolor nunc, viverra sed tincidunt eget, elementum at diam. Quisque orci justo, semper et lorem et, tempor tempus mi. Proin sem ante, laoreet id tempor a, commodo nec felis. Suspendisse congue bibendum nisl at laoreet.

[My house] is diaphanous, but it is not of glass. It is more the nature of vapor. Its walls contract and expand as I desire. At times, I draw them close about me like protective armor ... But at others, I let the walls ... blossom out in their own space, which is infinitely extensible.  
— Georges Spyridaki, *Mort Lucide*, 1953<sup>1</sup>

A drawn, polemic architectural project that has been 20 years in the making, *Communicating Vessels*<sup>2</sup> explores the impact of 21st-century technology on the old dialectic between house and garden. Highly surreal, it often uses narrative, particularly the relationship between ‘The Professor’ and ‘The Boy’. The Professor lives on the Island that is its site and the Longhouse is his home. It is a *Prytaneion*, a place of surreal banquets inhabited by ghosts, dreams, desires and mythic creatures. A memory palace of shifting relationships, of momentary flutterings, cartographies and trajectories, where objects have the same accountability as people. It is a place of flame, of heat, of a rotten sun, of dusk and dawn, where the vertical is assimilated into the horizontal and where Modernism breaks down. The Longhouse is a profoundly reflexive and responsive series of spaces and relationships. It choreographs itself and develops this daily ballet by reading its virtual changeling site, constructed infinitely by a mysterious Chicken Computer.

For Surrealists, the house can be seen as the microcosm of their consciousnesses. Its doors, windows, thresholds, attics, cellars, ceilings and floors as repositories of memories, fears and loves. The house is simultaneously a theatre of meditative creative repose and a maelstrom of the defamiliarised uncanny. Juxtapositions of scale, material, thoughts, dreams and nightmares run riot through its interiors. Our 21st-century technologies have further accelerated these transcendent geometries. The Longhouse seeks to describe the architectural opportunities and effects caused by space and objects forever metamorphosing within the surrealist whirlpool of extreme and magical domesticity.

*The Boy pulled the oars out of the little boat’s rollocks and guided the small craft to the edge of the Island. A few nervous glances side to side, an unsteady, muddy step ashore and a hastily tethered boat to a rickety jetty later, he was ready. The jetty led into the woods, where strange forms seemed to hang*

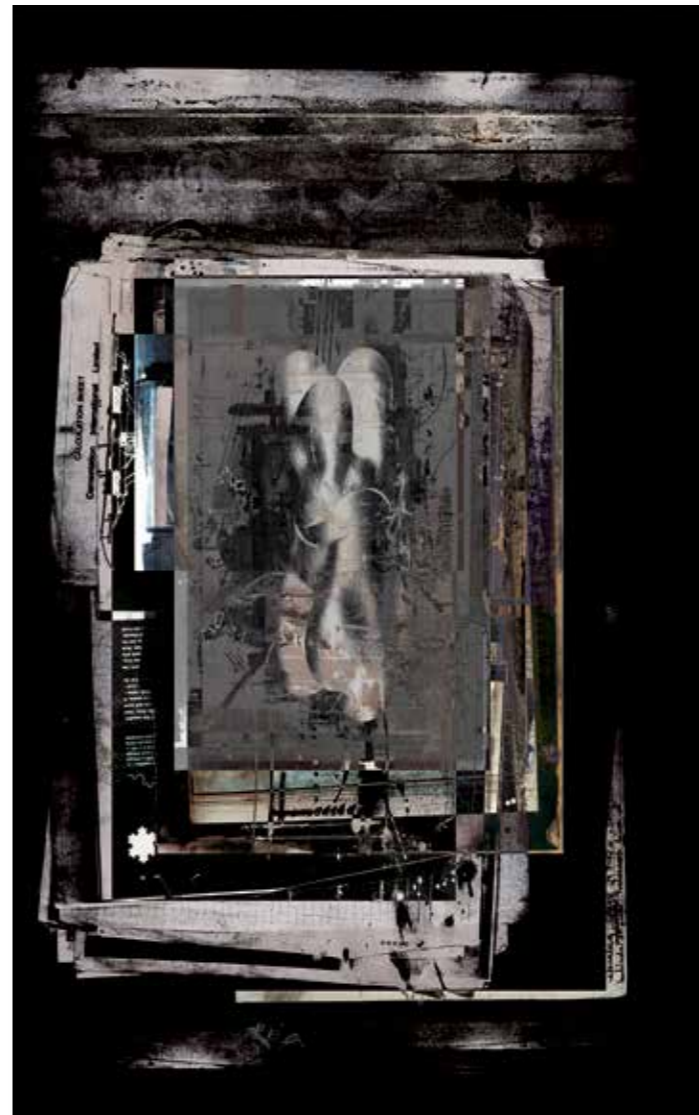
*in the air. Hermes awaited him with an erect countenance and wished him well. The Boy skirted around the Olympian god’s pulchritude and was on his way, deep into the forest of signs (somewhere a storm was brewing) yet the sun was shining.*

*Soon the Boy came to a clearing in the semiotic forest where the sun beat down on him, boring into the top of his head – he dare not look at it. He pushed the hot, maddening sensation mentally aside, thinking instead of the delightful chill and cleanliness of the cool water around the Island, so clear, so sparkling in the sun’s light. The strange house stood in front of him, glinting in the sunlight ...*

In the beginning there was just a door – the implication and celebration of a threshold, the difference between the inside and the outside. A big cast-bronze door embossed with its own signs, symbols and myths – an inverted angel, simultaneously channelling Rodin’s *Gates of Hell* and Ghiberti’s *Baptistry* portal. The door opens out on to the house’s primary axis, its core organising principle the reason for its length.

Next came trying to see through the house’s eyes – its windows, looking both inside and outside. The house is capable of turning itself inside out.

Some say Marcel Duchamp’s *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)* (1915–23) was first inspired by the Kentish sash windows he encountered while visiting Herne Bay in 1913 to chaperone his sister who was attending a summer language school there. (Incidentally, Herne Bay is about 2 to 3 miles north of the Island of Communicating Vessels). Like the *Large Glass*, the Longhouse is defined by the lateral split through its centre. An extensive drawing exercise opened its eyes to the choreography of chance, collision, *détournement* and anomaly, revealing a very extraordinary and particular house. A house of vomiting asphalt gargoyles spewing grease, Hecate’s triple form hovering over the ground and passing through walls, the mannequin meat hook, the Hall of Dummies, the boxing match, the Minotaur with bicycle-seat head and the Bride and the Nude descending the staircase among other entities, concepts and movements across topographies virtual, actual and chemical. A marvellous menagerie provoking in the Professor, the house’s enigmatic resident on the Island of Communicating Vessels, memories of diamonds and rust across the seven seas of wonder.

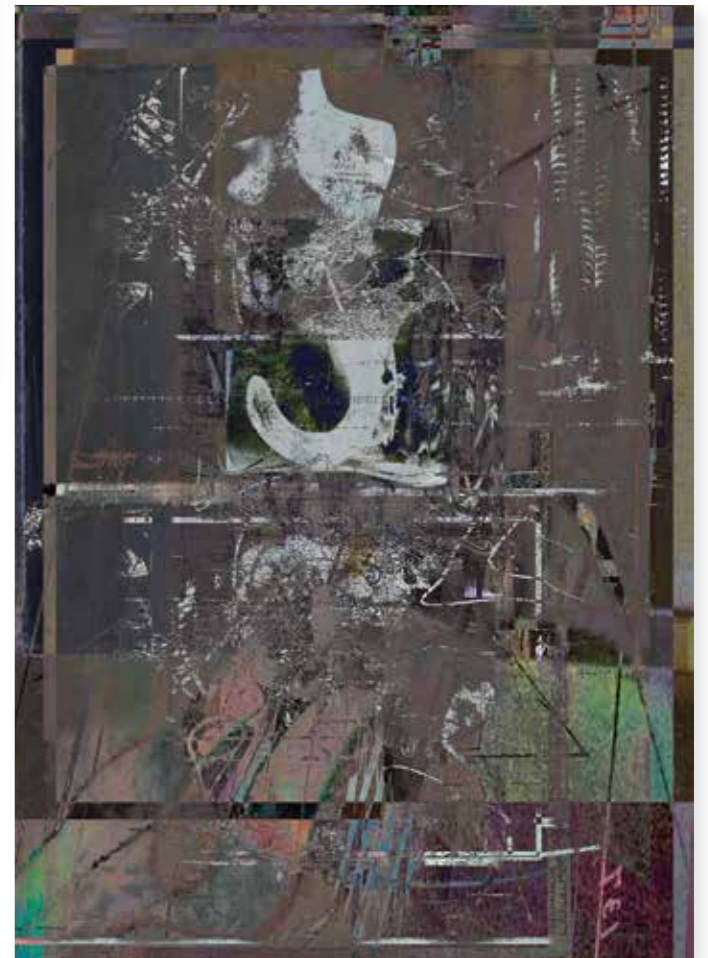


Neil Spiller,  
*Hecate seen through a Window,*  
Longhouse,  
*Communicating Vessels,*  
2015

Hecate is a Classical Greek goddess often seen in triple form. She is associated with crossroads, entrances, dogs, ghosts and magic.

A house of vomiting asphalt gargoyles spewing grease, Hecate’s triple form hovering over the ground and passing through walls, the mannequin meat hook.

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Study for *Hall Of Dummies,*  
2015

The Longhouse has a Hall of Dummies that echoes the Surrealist preoccupation with mannequins.

... Some said the House was a giant's sword, some a spaceship, some a bird impaled, still alive, into the ground, and some others a devilish contraption of ghosts. The Boy surveyed the si(gh)t(e), trying to be still even though his heart pounded in his chest. Some said the house was full of innards – a charnel house – full of blood, bodies, lust and mutilation ...

#### On the Partiality of Sites and Looking

The traditional lexicon of tactics that architects use to place their works in the context of specific sites – how they respond to the genius loci – has been radically augmented by a myriad of new, virtual and reflexive technologies. Changes are upon us; the vista has changed, is changing and constantly changes. Cyborgian geomorphology is a movable feast and here to stay. Permanent architectural context, material sympathies and synthesis, massing, phenomenological and anthropocentric sensitivities are now imbued with the accelerating timescales of digital and chemical metamorphosis combined with the cyberspatial choreography of the chance 'tic' or 'flutter'. The positions and nature of objects and architectures are conditioned by mixed ontologies, scopic regimes, numinous presences, and reversible time that stalks them and disturbs their gentle entropy and peaceful rest. The vitality of architecture has increased a thousand-fold. To the 21st-century agile architect, these disruptive technologies breathe new life into the language of our profession. The verbs of architecture are being recast.

Time-based sensitivities are mixed in the cauldron of the virtual world, seen by augmented eyes enhanced by dimensions of chronological slippage, coalescing in a digital dance above and beyond the pragmatics of actuality. Creating architectonic ghosts penetrating our very souls, acting out their myths and ours.

... Around the house were placed a series of sculptures. One looked like an agglomeration of buttocks, breasts, testicles and cleavages; it looked metallic. The Boy edged towards it cautiously. At its base it said: 'Hecate – Continuum of Buttocks – Before extroversion.' A dog howled somewhere.

The Boy scanned his horizon. In the distance he sees a bulky form topped by a bicycle seat and horny handle bars, a reverse-crucified beefy carcass, a rib-cage bust, a dancing chemise with a Schlemmer leg, a big hook and other extraordinary things. The Boy knew nothing of the semiotic languages they represented, but suffice to say they elicited a sense of foreboding in his little pink guts.

'Ah! There you are! I've been watching you admiring the clefts and cleavages of Hecate and her continuum of Buttocks. She is somewhere else now, and shall we see where? Follow me dear boy.' The Boy had been daydreaming in the fierce sun and had not noticed the Professor appear. He followed the Professor towards the great cast-bronze door, embossed with the inverted angel ...

#### Gothic Genetics

In Gothic cathedrals, like Wells and York, the medieval stonemasons made tracing floors and tables on to which they inscribed the geometry of their architecture, against which they could hone their stone carvings. Today the resultant palimpsests of lines and arcs read like the genetics of Gothic architecture etched on stone, condensed into a heady mix of trajectories and vectors.

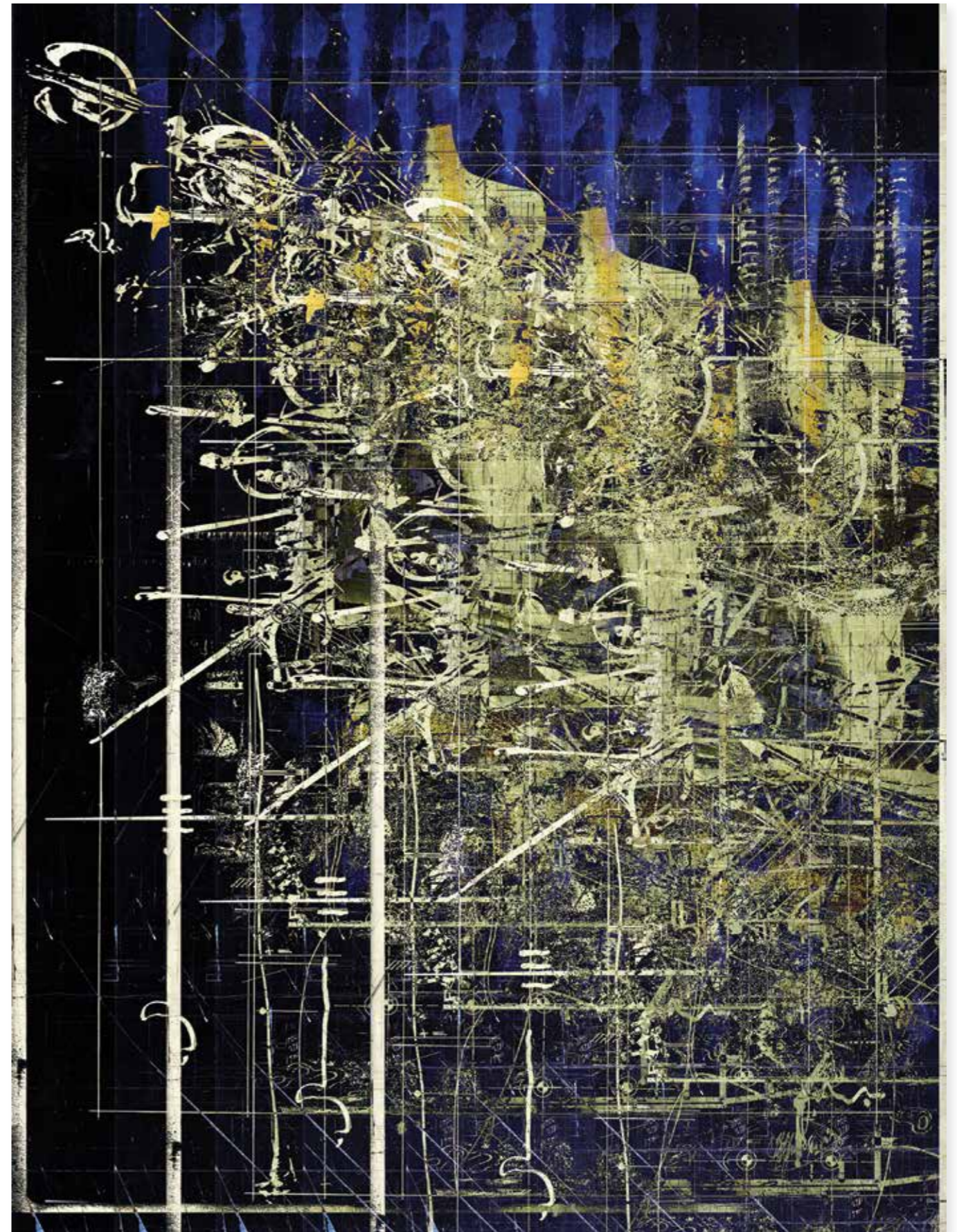


Rib-Cage Bust with Rose, 2015

Another view from a window framing one of the ghostly presences that circulate through the house and garden.

... Once inside, the door shut on its gas-piston hinges. The House was strange inside, very strange indeed. Its two halves met along a longitudinal split, straddled by a weird dining table, full of anecdotal topologies. Windows perforated the walls. Through the windows the outside was very different from the calm clearing the Boy had just left behind. They were broadcasting an alternative reality that flowed through the interior of the house – all determined by that morning's virtual sensing. Virtual Nudes swaggered down staircases, Minotaurs raged, chickens computed, angels inverted, and Hecate encountered the meat hook, all within the Longhouse, encouraging the Professor to reflect on his past ...

The house remakes and reassembles its interiors daily. The best way to understand this is to use the analogy of an old record player. At a certain time a record is played, read by the arm and stylus, and the grooves and their shifting topology translate it into music. The Longhouse does not let you choose the specific spatial music at a particular time. The agent of



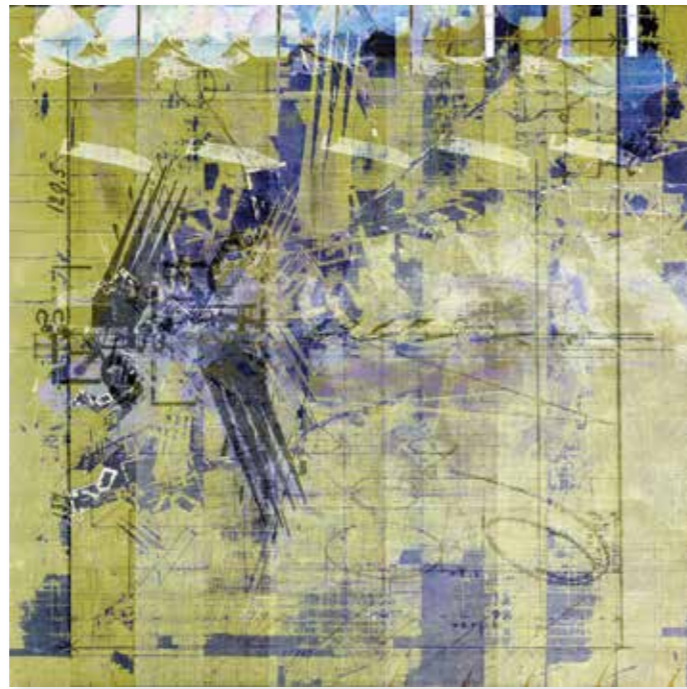
Nude Descending Staircase, 2016

Another reference to Duchamp, but also a real, ghostly Nude coming down the stairs.

chance that defines what the stylus and arm touch at any point is the Chicken Computer. Imagine millions of record players, passing through each other, extending arms and sensitising or desensitising styli playing millions of records for short periods. The 'records' are shifting virtual terrains in which the virtual Longhouse sits, its wings and parts the styli that wax, wane, activate, deactivate and change position millions of times per second. The house contacts its cyberspatial doppelganger every morning at dawn. As the sun rises, the real house reads its ballet instructions of the day (this might include other architectural spaces or landscapes, paintings, drawings and even itself or a fleeting mixture of all these), in a flurry of sensing, passing its shifting sensitivities through numerous fields, remembering and storing these space-time vectors to be played out by presences long into the deep, dark night.

Longhouse Scanning, 2017

Depiction of the velocity and diversity of scanning raw material. Here the virtual house is scanning a visionary architectural drawing as input data for the real house to reconfigure itself.



Scanning Plan, 2016

The virtual doppelganger of the house splits and fractures as it reads its site(s).



Interior, 2016

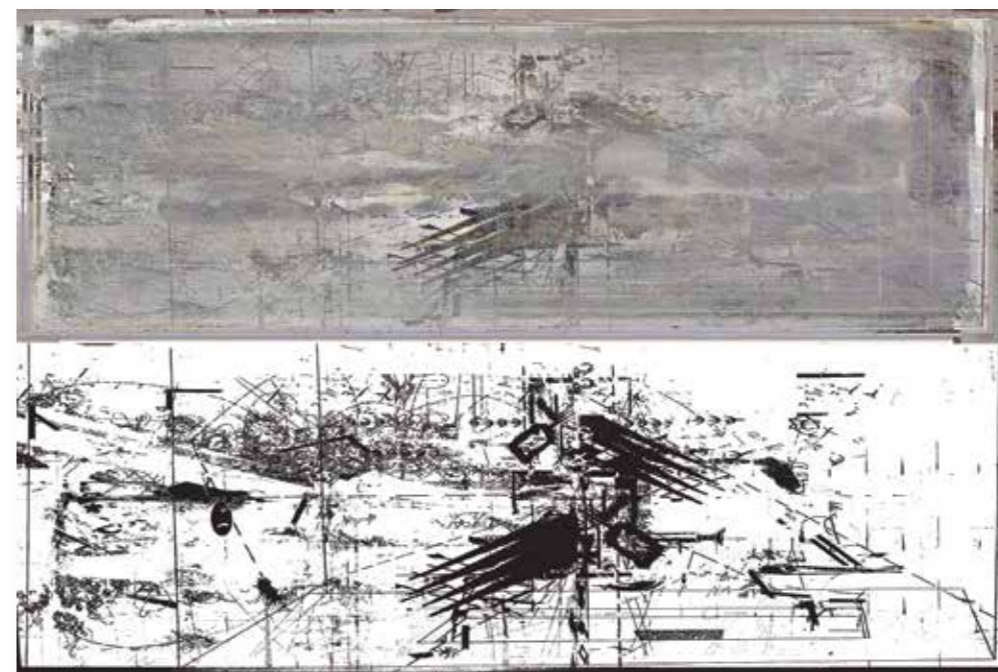
The Longhouse can 'pull' augmented reality spaces, objects and buildings through itself. The drawing shows Gian Lorenzo Bernini's aedicule for the tomb of Alexander VII (1671-8) in St Peter's Basilica, Vatican City, extroverted into the painting studio of the house.

The Longhouse makes little distinction between the virtual and the non-virtual; it can pull objects, spaces and forms through itself, set them on paths at infinite speeds, and borrow architectures from elsewhere, combining all into a spatial performance at once mnemonic and proactively poetically creative. The interior is a series of aedicules of varying sizes containing the sacred objects and bodies of the moment. In his book of architectural essays *Heavenly Mansions* (1963), Sir John Summerson writes of the etymology of the *aedicule* and its architectural roots: '[The Latin word] for a little building is aedicula and this word was applied in classical times more particularly to little buildings whose function was symbolic – ceremonial ... It was also used for the shrines – again miniature temples – in which the *lares* or titular deities of a house or street were preserved.'<sup>3</sup> He also asserts that the cosiness and defensible scale of infants' play creating small imaginary houses under tables was another driver in the semiotic adoption of aedicules in both Classical and Gothic architecture.

... *The Boy stared down at the table, which stirred uncomfortable yet unfathomable emotions in him. At once yearning, at once inquisitive, at once repulsed. The table had indentations on a burnished undulating terrain within which were inscribed a series of geometries. Above it hung a sewing machine, its thrusting, bridely proboscis sharply visible, and a fluttering umbrella opening and closing like a hungry maw. Below the table, another landscape of strangeness, sometimes peeking through the top surface, sometimes not. The Boy placed his forearm into one of the undulations. It fitted perfectly, causing an intense but not understood feeling in the pit of his stomach. The Professor just watched.* ▣

Notes

1. Georges Spyridaki, *Mort Lucide*, Seghers (Paris), 1953, p 35
2. Published in parts in, for example, Neil Spiller and Rachel Armstrong, *AD Protocol Architecture*, March/April (no 2), 2011, pp 60-7; Neil Spiller, *Drawing Architecture*, September/October (no 5), 2013, pp 112-19; Mark Garcia, *AD Future Details of Architecture*, July/August (no 4), 2014, pp 118-27. The project is also featured in Neil Spiller, *Architecture and Surrealism: A Blistering Romance*, Thames and Hudson (London), 2016, pp 176-87.
3. John Summerson, 'Heavenly Mansions: An Interpretation of Gothic', *Heavenly Mansions and other Essays on Architecture*, WW Norton (New York), 1963, pp 1-28.



Upper Surface of Banqueting Table, 2017

Plan of the table, and underneath a diagram of its distressed surface showing its palimpsest of geometries.

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