MENDING ARCHITECTURE:
A PROJECT AND PRACTICE OF CARE

Lisa Vo
Political Architecture: Critical Sustainability

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROGRAM

This program has been crafted as two books: the Practice and the Project. One does not have dominance over the other – both have significant importance in the thesis. Making this division in the program creates a tool to reflect upon the ways the project and practice inform eachother. The two-foldness of the program will carry on through the thesis as a driving motor in developing ideas. The project is a concrete ground for me to conceptualize theories, and to develop and form a practice model. The practice allows for the project to be carried on and aligned with my principles, and to reflect in the real world the concepts developed in the project. While the project and practice have their own specific objectives, the books talk to eachother through a conversation about care as catalyst for change.

THE PROJECT AND THE PRACTICE

My thesis aims to be both propositional in a situated context and suggesting of a way of practice. The spaces and practices created through this project have the function of therapy, care and mending.

Tools created through the practice are to be developed for different scales of therapy: on the governing structures, on the urban fabric of Belfast, on the neighbourhood intercommunity relations, on the individual, on the architecture student, on the academic institution. The intention in developing this speculative model of practice is to create a safe space in which one can heal while also acting politically. It is to create a refuge for one to have power to undertake difficult psychological contexts.

The project, situated in Belfast, aims to be a catalyst design, which would argue for a democratized therapy, and intergenerational justice. With tools for care and therapy, communities can be self-sufficient in changing and mending the spaces of the city.

THE PROJECT BOOK:
THE POLITICAL CONTEXT AND SPACE OF EXPLORATION

[Belfast]

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Political Architecture: Critical Sustainability

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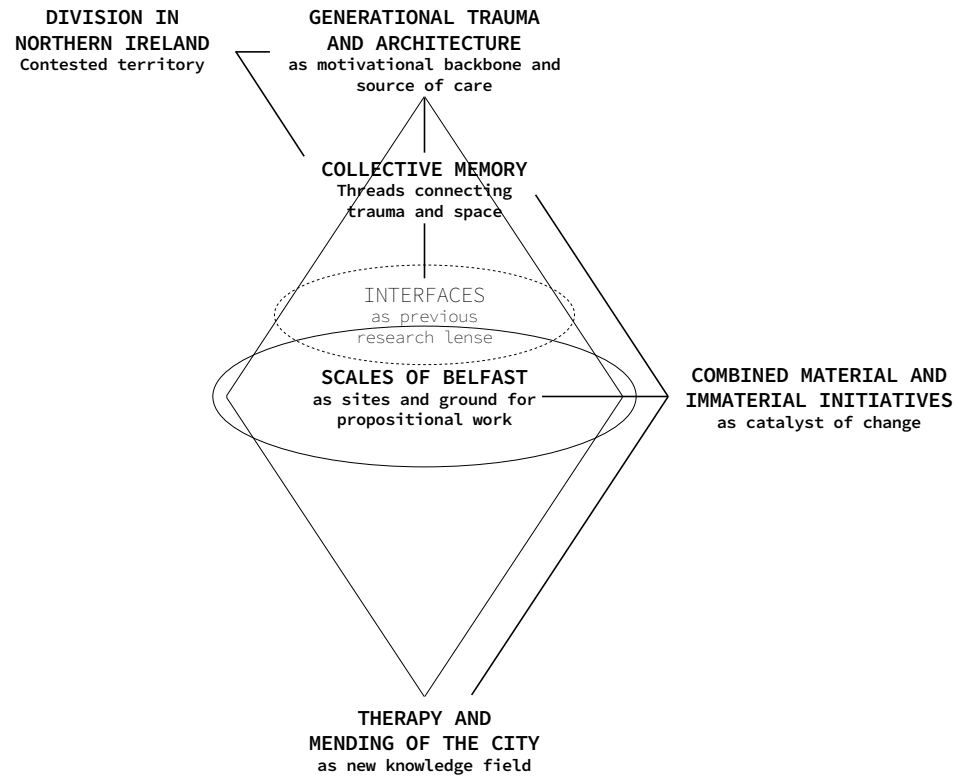
PREMISES AND OBJECTIVES

This project investigates how generational trauma is passed down through architecture, and how as a response, a city and its architecture can mend and go through therapy. In Belfast, traces of past violence remain in space and in memory. The temporality of architecture plays a role in intergenerational justice: the architect has moral responsibility for the impacts on the society and the environment of future generations.

The act of mending and care towards the built environment suggests an architecture that is both reactive and reflective of changing societal values while also arguing against the current exploitative practices accelerating the climate crisis. The project aims to create tools for intergenerational justice and therapy for the city of Belfast.

Figure 1. Map of persuations in Belfast
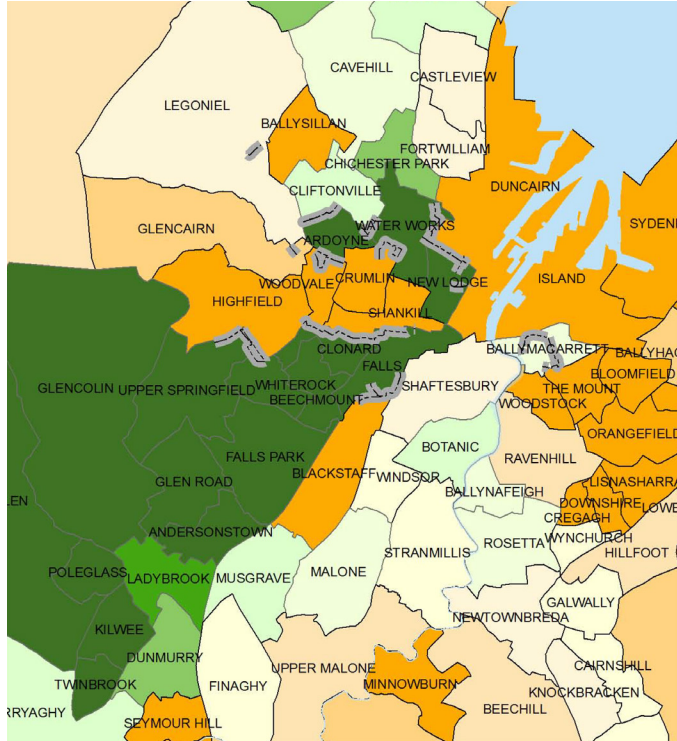
SITE

DIVISION IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Northern Ireland has been continuously shaped by the co-existence of two opposing and defined identities, or persuasions: Catholic Nationalist Republicans, which have allegiance to the Republic of Ireland, and Protestant Unionist Loyalists, which identify as part of the United Kingdom. In 1969, the contested territory was subject to the Troubles, a sectarian conflict which involved fighting, bombing and terrorist attacks.[1] Today, despite the Troubles having officially ended more than 30 years ago, traces of violence and tension are still visible in the city of Belfast and influence the way communities from different neighbourhoods live, long past one's memory of conflict. Persuations and their resulting division still influence one's ability to move and live in the city.

[1] "The Troubles," updated August 24, 2022, https://www.britannica.com/event/The-Troubles-Northern-Ireland-history.

THE INTERFACES

One example of physical traces of conflict are the interface barriers of Northern Ireland. These interfaces, or peace-walls, have been put up between Catholic and Protestant neighbourhoods as protective barriers for residents. In 2013, the Department of Justice of Northern Ireland, implemented a stategy which had the objective the removal and reduction of all interfaces in Northern Ireland by 2023, for the cities to be reflective of where Northern Ireland is in the peace process.[2] To do so, members of Interface Team of the Department of Justice hold regular meetings with communities and key stakeholders, assess apetite for change in Interface areas, and propose schemes for removal and reduction. Today, few Interfaces have been subject to these changes – only a handful of barriers have been reduced or removed.[3]

[2] Department of Justice, "Interfaces Programme: A Framework Document," (Belfast, 2019).
[3] Marie Donaghy, "Interview on the Northern Ireland Interfaces," interview by Lisa Vo, November 17, 2022.

Gate in the Interface barrier that separates Alexandra Park

In the Falls
and Shankill
neighbourhoods
in Belfast, the
implications of
these barriers
on the way
people live are
significant: the
two neighbourhoods
are isolated one
from another,
causing facilities
to be created in
duplicate, with
little spaces for
inter-community
interactions. The
fabric of city is
divided through
these well defined
neighbourhoods;
architecture,
urban planning
and stakeholders
maintain these
divisions.
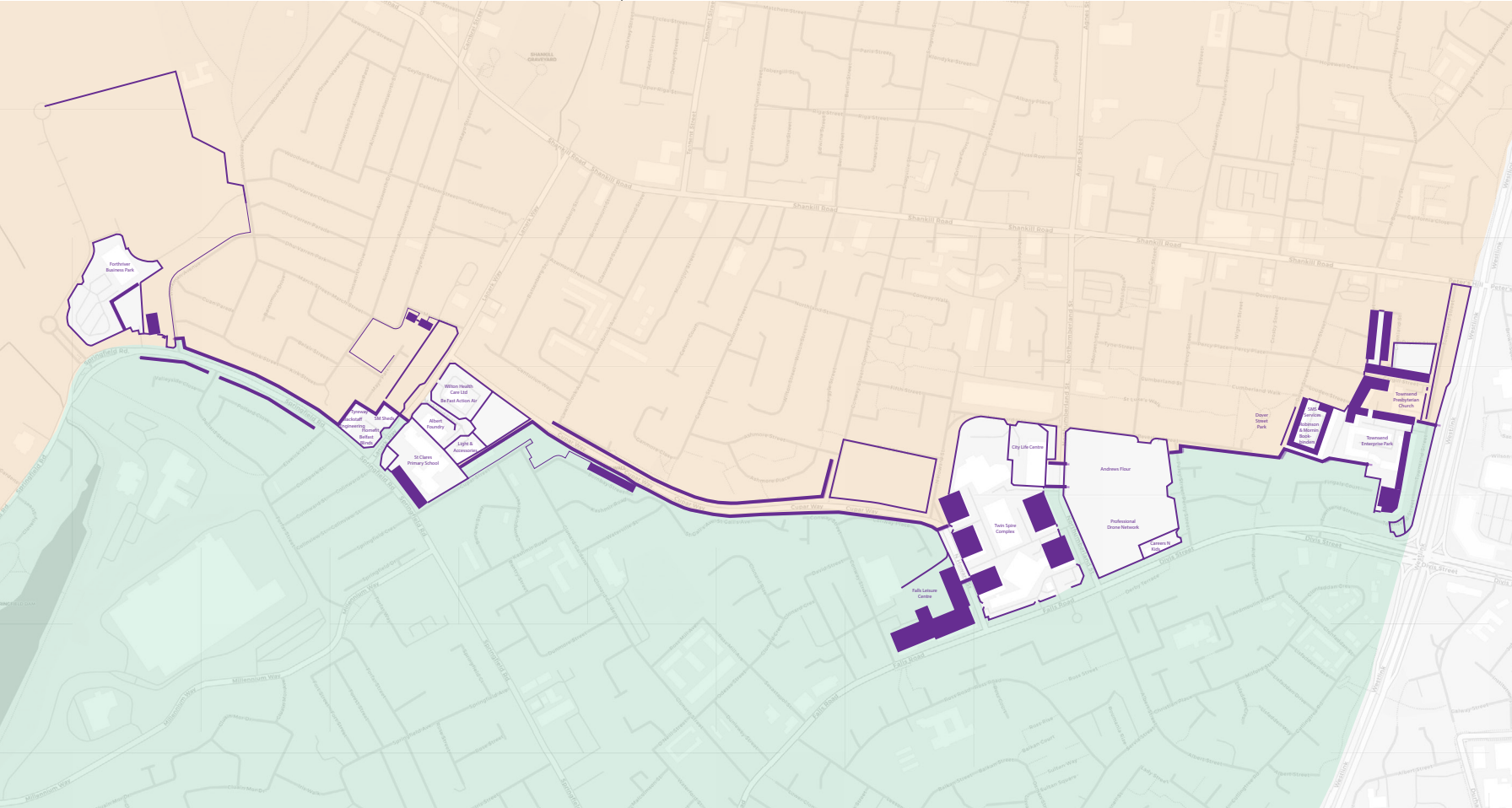
SCALES OF BELFAST

Interfaces are one type of traces which have affected the urban fabric of Belfast. The spaces and conditions they have produced or that they affirm are my sites of interest for therapy and mending. As a point of departure, I chose 3 scales of sites for therapy: the urban, the neighbourhood and the home.

At the **urban** scale, the city is divided into Protestant or Catholic neighbourhoods, with people navigating mostly the spaces of their persuasions. Issues of inclusivity surface when one is excluded from many parts of the city. Navigation is also restricted by physical structures: interfaces, gates, highways and lines of transit greatly affect the mobility of people in the city. These ruptures in the urban fabric are conditions which would involve municipal and governmental structures.

Within **neighbourhoods,** when one persuation is in majority, spaces of commemoration are created to remember the past events of violence. Memorial gardens, murals and parades are created without resistance or contention. These spaces often promote antagonism between communities, which enters collective memory. Attempts at intercommunity relations do not happen in neutral spaces. Persuations and identities dawn over public spaces, streets and buildings of neighbourhoods.

The **home** suggests a intimate, bodily experience of the city. From the perspective of the resident, the home can be a place of refuge, but also of dissociation from the challenges of the city.

These are sites where immaterial and material initiatives have the potential to come together as therapy for Belfast. Acting upon a multiplicity of scales is important, as therapy for the city involves multiple patients, from structures to people, from governments to individuals.

An instance of the Falls-Shankill Interface, with resident's caged in backyards

FUNCTIONAL PROGRAM

The project aims to be a catalyst design,
which would argue for a democratized therapy
and for mending the spaces of Belfast –
at the urban, the neighbourhood and the
domestic scale.

The functional program of these spaces
are therapeutic spaces, where immaterial
initiatives about care and mending
intercommunity relations are materialised
into physical spaces – safe spaces.

These immaterial initiatives might include
exisiting initiatives, like meetings between
youths from separate communities to plan a
trip together and inter-community christmas
markets, or new proposed initiatives, such
as intercommunity repair workshops...
Therapy can take on many forms : in the
context of the city of Belfast, therapy
could be a set of practices, a continuous
process of work and care for more
inclusivity, mobility, mindfulness, and
positive relations towards another with the
intent of intergenerational justice.

ARCHITECTURAL TERRITORY

The architectural territory refers to themes/fields that I wish to expand on through the semester, 3 themes that I consider would benefit from new knowledge and artistic research. *Generational trauma* is a motivational ground, for *Collective memory* to be an investigating thread, which connects to *Therapy of the city*, which is a new field.

## GENERATIONAL TRAUMA AND TEMPORALITY OF SPACES

The Department of Justice are owners and responsibles for the Interfaces in Northern Ireland. Their work constitutes of processes towards interface removal or reduction, community consultations, and change of opening hours of gates that interupt interface barriers.[4] Change can take years to happen; it took 8 years to push back the closing time of one of the Falls-Shankill gates by one hour.[5] Constructions, however temporary they may be, can linger on beyond their imagined or intended lifetime. The interface walls have adopted a temporality which has the ability to affect multiple generations, beyond one's memory of conflict. This difficulty or inability to create change in the physical environment and in the collective memory can affect future generations, and brings up the issue of generational trauma and intergenerational justice.

[4] "Department of Justice Interface Programme," Justice, August 26, 2022, https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/articles/department-justice-interface-programme.
[5] Lisa Vo, "Field Notes from Northern Ireland," (October 2022).

Previously, by looking at the interfaces
and their surrounding areas in Belfast, I
have investigated the permanence of traces
that architecture produces. Going forward,
looking at the city of Belfast as a fabric
which has being built and continues to
build overtime, I hope to bring forward
the issues architecture can produce in
terms of intergenerational justice: social
and environmental conditions created by
architecture have longevity. My project
works towards intergenerational justice by
looking at ways in which temporality can be
accounted for in architecture, to move away
from the paradigm of eternity and persistent
forms in architecture.

How can architecture participate in
intergenerational justice in face of the
climate crisis and problematic social
conditions?
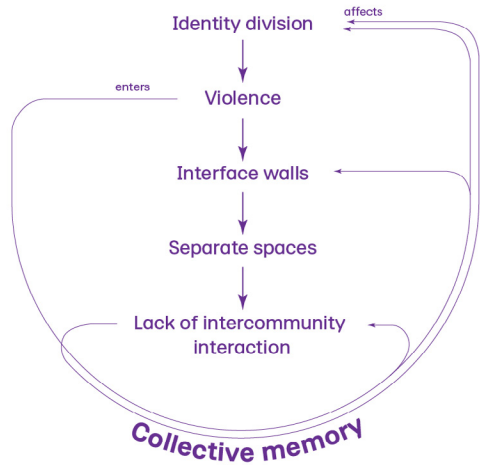
One of the threads of feedback caused by the interaction of collective memory and space in interface areas.
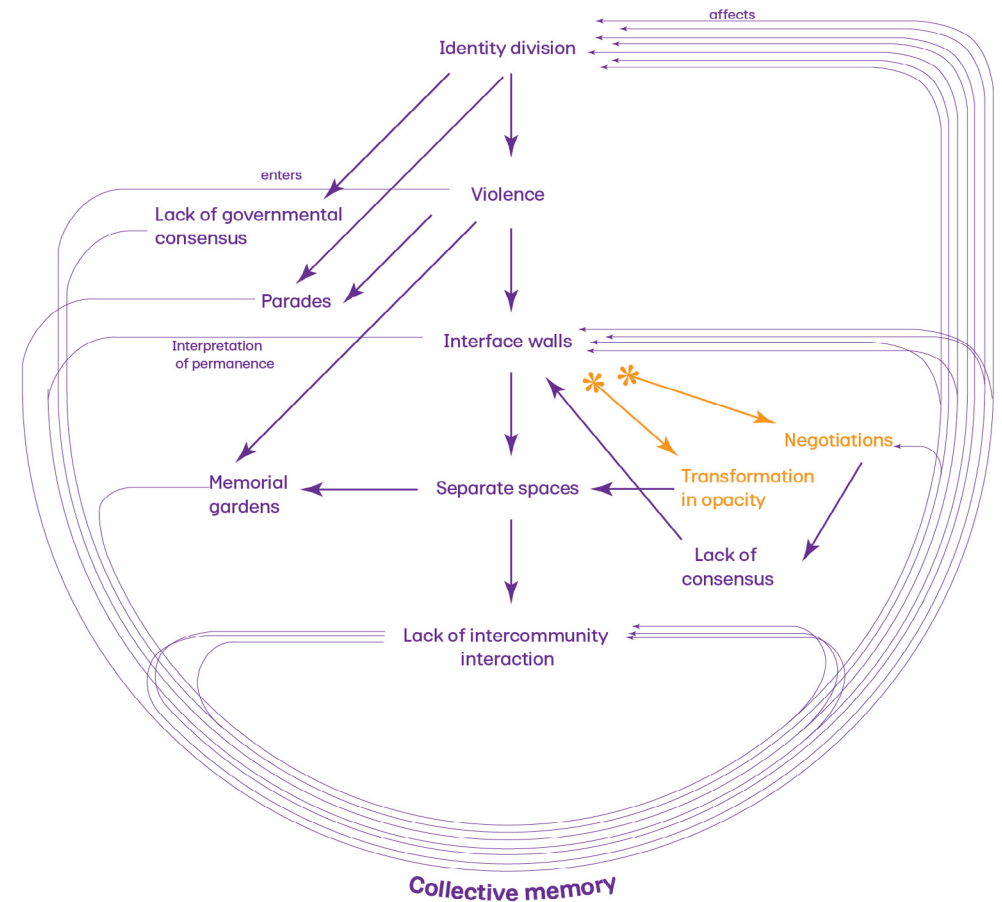
COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND SPACE: ENTANGLED THREADS

Perceptions around the peace walls are embedded into collective memory, causing future generations to relive the consequences of past events. The interfaces are one manifestation of intergenerational injustice. Looking around the interfaces, what affects them and what they produce, we can discern a complex and resistant urban fabric:

> *The difficulty in making transformation on the Northern Ireland Interfaces can be explained through the cyclic threads created by the relationship between collective memory and space. Using the different manifestations of this relationship as brought forward by Halbwachs, I have identified these existing threads in the communities and the cities who have maintained the presence of the Interfaces. By tracing the threads of cause and effect, I bring forward the feedback loop that is created by collective memory.*[6]

[6] Lisa Vo, "An Entanglement of Collective Memory and Space: The issue behind the difficult Interface transformation in Northern Ireland" (dissertation, 2022), p.21.

When connecting the threads to each other as they connect in the existing communities, the cause and effect of collective memory are entangled together. These entangled threads become a fabric that is rigid, stable and through which relations between the Interface and collective memory are reproduced. Looking at this entanglement, it becomes easier to understand the difficulty in transforming the interfaces, and the failure of goal set in the T:BUC initiative. The resulting fabric is a web that is difficult to interrupt.[7]

[7] Vo, "An Entanglement of Collective Memory and Space: The issue behind the difficult Interface transformation in Northern Ireland".

Entangled threads in the social fabric of the city.

A gate separating the
shankill and falls
neighbourhoods

*However, looking at the existing immaterial
and material initiatives, we can see how
they could loosen the threads. The analysis
of the existing initiatives show how
important intervention – both the material
and immaterial – is to break the feedback
loop that is currently in place. The pairing
of the immaterial and the material could
create a bigger rupture into the existing
fabric and allow for transformation of the
city. The city is a collective mind that is
embodied through space: in order to affect
change on the Interface barriers, one has to
create therapy for both the collective mind
and the physical body of the city.*[8]

[8] Vo, "An Entanglement
of Collective Memory
and Space: The
issue behind the
difficult Interface
transformation in
Northern Ireland".

THERAPY OF THE CITY THROUGH CARE, MENDING AND FLEXIBILITY

I think of re-neighboring as one of the manifestations through which a city might go into therapy after traumatic events. Re-neighbouring implies a series of actions towards more inclusivity, mobility and positive relations between one another. Care comes up as a way of mending the city and providing for these needs. If the city is a fabric, Belfast's urban fabric is one that has perhaps been ripped, burned, stained, weakened during times of violence and political tensions.

Mending in the textiles culture is an act of repair and alteration of an existing fabric for the benefit of extending longevity, reducing waste, spending less, and divesting from destructive systems. Mending is a skill, a craft, a tool which frees oneself from harmful systems. With such tool, one does not rely on larger systems to provide for needs, and become self-sufficient and empowered. This is also a process which is therapeutic. It brings mindfulness, appreciation and value to the garment.[9]

[9] Fibershed, "Mending Clothes & Textiles Is a Mindful Act of Resistance to Destructive Systems," Fibershed, March 9, 2022, https://fibershed. org/2022/03/09/ mending-clothes-textiles-is-a-mindful-act-of-resistance-to-destructive-systems/.

Mending and care in urban planning and architecture can produce similar outcomes. It also suggests in architecture an on-going process rather than a cycle of replacement. The old fabric is still visible. In terms of collective memory, this is a practice that is sensible about not erasing the past, but sitting and being mindful of it, and working continuously towards repair.

What techniques and tactics can be used for mending the city fabric?

Architects often speak of sustainability in terms of environmental impact. I wish for architecture to also be sustainable in the way it impacts society and its changing values. For it to be responding to urgent social conditions simultaneously to the urgent climate crisis. How can architecture respond to these responsibilities? In mending, most of the existing fabric remains. Stitches, patches and embroidery are added and give the garment a new use. The textile and the mending create and output that is flexible: it adapts and reacts to the needs.

I refer to therapy as a set of practices, a continuous process that argues against the goal-oriented strategy of the Department of Justice for the Interfaces removal. It is practices of work and care rather than steps to acheive a certain outcome. Fabric rips, frays and deteriorates unpredictably, and stitches and repairs are not made towards a predetermined ideal garment.

UN Sustainable Development Goals
My approach to therapy of the city would argue against the way of implementation of the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Under the 3rd goal, *Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages,* the Target 3.4 aims to "By 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being." Under goal 11, *Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable* Target 11.7 aims to "By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities."[10] A time-based goal goes against the principles of therapy: each city, each neighbourhood, each person heals in ways that are not always measurable in time or quantifiable.

[10] "The 17 Goals: Sustainable Development," United Nations (United Nations), accessed February 19, 2023, https://sdgs.un.org/goals.

THE PRACTICE BOOK:
THE ACADEMIC CONTEXT AND SPACES OF INFLUENCE

[Copenhagen]

Lisa Vo
Political Architecture: Critical Sustainability

CONTENTS

PREMISES AND OBJECTIVES

This architectural practice aims to
establish a knowledge field on the
influence of student work on academic and
political entities and decision makers. It
investigates the sensitive relationships
required for these interactions to exist,
and establishes a practice which highlights
the difficulty in involving and/or
connecting to political structures to voice
criticism or appreciation.

My architecture practice is also confronted
with the difficulty in sharing knowledge
accross cultures and spaces, which I wish
to bring forward through this proposed way
of working. This difficulty presents itself
when one is being challenging of existing
political structures, while remaining
sensitive and caring of the situated
context.

Through this practice model, I aim to create
a safe space for care and influence.

CONTEXT

THE ACADEMIC FIELD
Student architecture projects often study a real world, situated context to create a speculative proposal, one which most likely remains inside the walls of the Academy. In these types of proposals, change or influence is imagined, speculative. One moment where this influence punctures outside of the academic world are during critiques and examinations, where censors and examinors are presented with new ways to do architecture. However, this influence often remains inside the architectural field.

My practice in the context of academia investigates how tangible political influence can be created through architecture student work. In the practice of the architecture student, time, energy and care can be put towards political influence. This can take on different forms: interventions, activism, contaminations, collaborations, communications, alliances, friendships...

THE FIELDWORK PRACTICE
Fieldwork is one approach which encourages students to engage with the site in a social manner: to observe, interact, connect and speak with local stakeholders. My fieldwork took place in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Working with a site that is not at close proximity, but to which I feel urgency to study is a challenge that I am confronted to. Working in a situated way, from an external situation, one must find ways to reproduce, replicate, remember the bodily experience after being removed from the site and its people. Photographs, fieldnotes, sketches record a condition, an event, a moment in time in Belfast, but sensitive conversations, feelings, perceptions and care are what is left in the mind when coming back from fieldwork to Copenhagen.

How does one maintain precious connections through distance?

How does one care for people from another place?
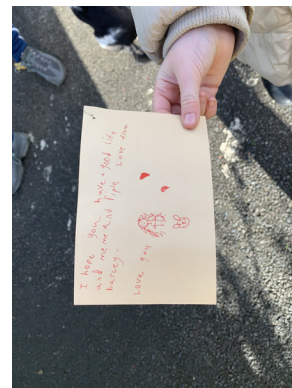
ARCHITECTURAL TERRITORY

THE DIFFICULTY OF INTERACTIONS WITH ANOTHER CONTEXT

Collaborations across spaces is challenging. One must be aware of the power dynamics that exists between the different contexts. However, in building knowledge in an unexplored field, diverse and external perspectives are important.

When practice involves fieldwork in another context, it requires energy and social courage, as well as sensitivity. This investigation into a model of practice seeks to understand how this work can be done ethically and sustainably. It suggests a practice in which a safe space is created, for collaboration through allies at different scales, and other endevours which are based in care.

Different existing organisations serve as inspiration for my practice in how to deal with this diffulty. Habitat for humanity works in providing housing in the world's poorest communities, in a structure of cooperation and involving future homeowners with volunteers. They aim to influence how housing issues are being handled in governmental entities at different scales.[1]

Architects Without Borders uses architecture as a tool to support vulnerable populations. In Denmark, there is an opportunity in building up competencies and knowledge for use in collaborations. When working in an external context, Architects Without Borders takes co-responsability for social, economical and environmental development.[2]

[1] "About Habitat for Humanity," Habitat For Humanity, accessed February 19, 2023, https://www.habitat.org/emea/about.

[2] "About AUG," Arkitekter Uden Grænser, accessed February 19, 2023, https://aug.ngo/about-aug/?lang=en.

METHODS

MOTIVATORS

Motivation is essential for tackling difficult tasks, such as investigating generational trauma and creating safe spaces of interaction with people of other contexts. Within generational trauma comes up personal barriers that are difficult to sit with, but that are also a source of motivation. Practices and rituals can be used in order to carry the project forward, to find energy in engaging in challenging and sensitive subjects. Personal stories are a way into understading complex structures. Crafts and other meditative practices allow for another way to think, through one's hands. Personal motivators which involve care also suggest an output that is alternative to the more widespread ideas of what productivity is in modern society, are what is valued in terms of production in an architecture project.

There are years, days, hours, minutes, weeks, moments, and other measures of time spent in the production of "not writing." Not writing is working, and when not working at paid work working at unpaid work like caring for others, and when not at unpaid work like caring, caring also for a human body, and when not caring for a human body many hours, weeks, years, and other measures of time spent caring for the mind in a way like reading or learning and when not reading and learning also making things[...] Trauma is always the indirect direct producer of so much not writing. It is like a mind which has a shadow and then is the shadow and then isn't a mind or its shadow but isn't at all.[3]

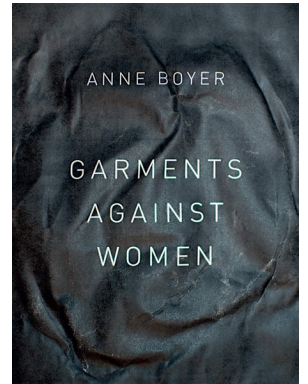Anne Boyer on "Not Writing"
From *Garments Against Women*

Figure 1. Garments Against Women

[3] Anne Boyer, Garments against Women (Boise, Idaho: Ahsahta Press, 2015), p.44.

Figure 2. Garment repair

Figure 3. Carpet celebratory repair

EMBROIDERY AS A MENDING AND THERAPEUTIC PRACTICE

Embroidery and stitching are methods that I will use as therapeutic processes for my own practice, as well as processes to look into for theorizing about therapy of the city. Embroidery becomes a basis for theory, as well as the materialisation and expression of it. [See chapter "Therapy through care, mending and flexibility" in the Project Book]

I decide to use embroidery as a medium that keeps track of past thoughts, but is flexible enough to express new ideas through time. The stitches are material traces that retain temporalilty throughout the thesis. In the project, this can be manifested through the reworking of previous material.

Figure 4. Reweaving and embroidery repair

CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM

Constructive criticism has been one method I have used in building knowledge and gathering opinions on tactics for therapy of the city. This communication of constructive criticism can take on my forms, but friction exists because of distance and time between the communicators. Representation and rhetorics are important in creating a space for collaborative listening: language and images used are to be both sensitive and challenging for constructive criticism to be established.

MULTIPLICITY AND SCALES

Multiplicity suggests that therapy does not manifest itself in one particular way, rather that it is a field of possibilities. Working with different scales speaks of scales of influence. I aim to work at different scales of city, of stakeholders, and through a multiplicity of representations. Collective memory, concepts surrounding therapy of the city and the particular spaces of Belfast are difficult to grasp; using a combination of drawings, models, diagrams and the translation of material into multiple mediums helps to take in the complexity.

DELIVERABLES

COLLECTION OF MOTIVATORS
The collection of motivators is an ensemble of objects or products of practices and rituals that have been used in order to carry the project. This collection is positioning process as part of a propositional project and practice.

CATALOGUE OF EXPLORATIONS
The catalogue of exploration has been an on-going work which started from a field trip in Northern Ireland. It was created as a communicative medium between myself and the Interface team in the Department of Justice of Northern Ireland, and hopefully will continue to encourage conversations between different stakeholders.

MANIFESTO FOR THERAPY OF THE CITY
A manifesto for therapy of the city could take the form of a practice manual, with a set of principles defining the scope of the therapy.

EMBROIDERED TRACES
Embroidered material will be produced as opportunities for relfection and motivation.

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LIST OF FIGURES