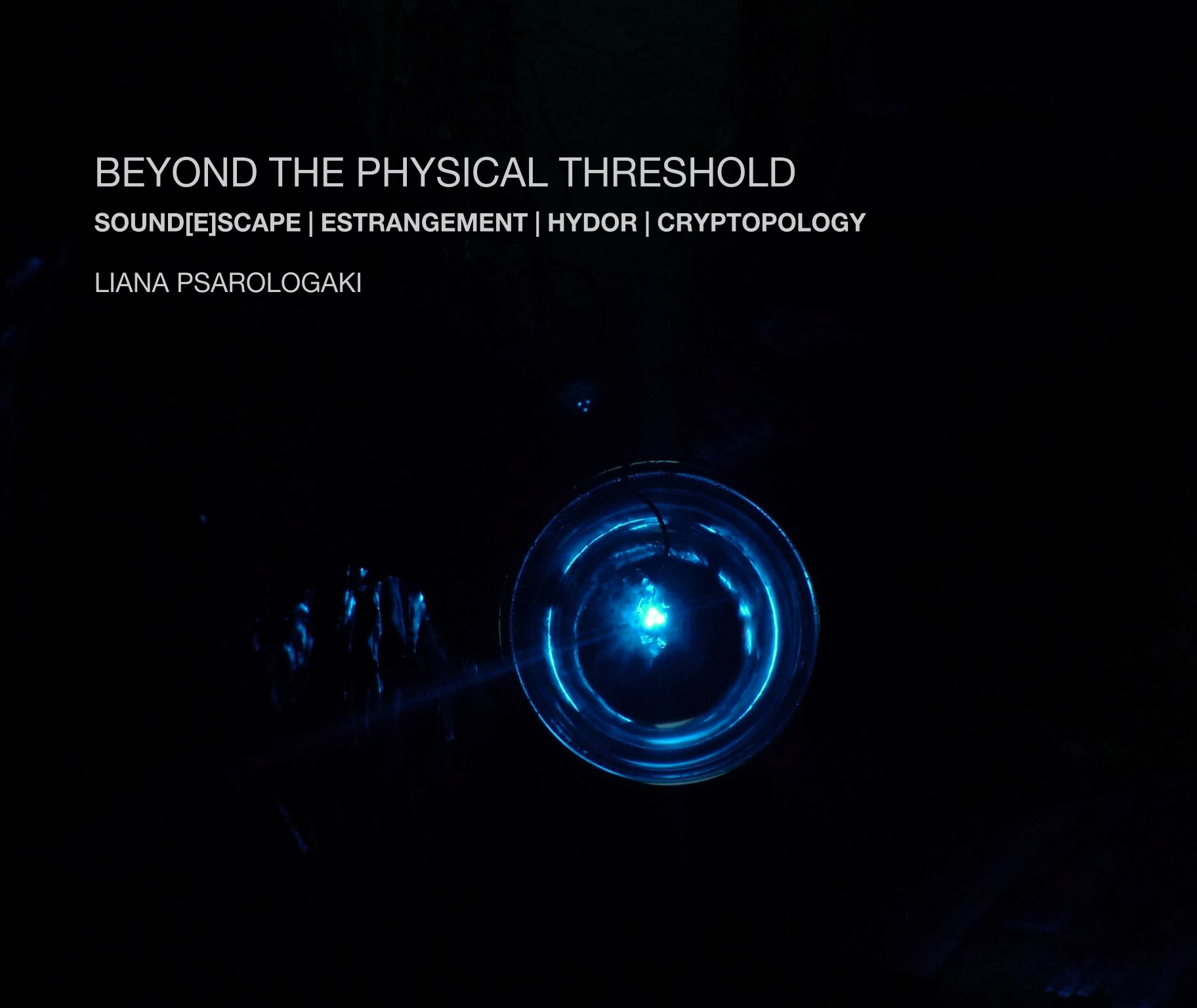
BEYOND THE PHYSICAL THRESHOLD

SOUND[E]SCAPE | ESTRANGEMENT | HYDOR | CRYPTOPOLOGY

LIANA PSAROLOGAKI



Cover Images:

Front: Liana Psarologaki *Hydor* (2013) detail © Liana Psarologaki
Back: Liana Psarologaki *Cryptopology* (2014) installation view © Liana Psarologaki

blurb

PREFACE

This book was created as a visual reflection for the practical side of the PhD project *Beyond the Physical Threshold: Enfolding the Ontology of Immersive Experience*. It serves as a fundamental component to the thesis and contains the Thesis Accompanying Material Disc that includes the practice documentation in A/V format. The aim was to creatively present a timeline for the practical side of the research project illustrated through photography, sketches, diagrams and drawings, which are categorised by project. The book starts with an introductory chapter on the inauguration of the creative practice and the primordial attempts of making. Each work, then, articulates a chapter and unfolds from site mapping to post-production and documentation. The book concludes with the illustration of a fully realised project. It analytically presents the processes undertaken for the development and realisation of this project from first site visit and conceptualisation to in-situ testing of the final installation and exhibition.

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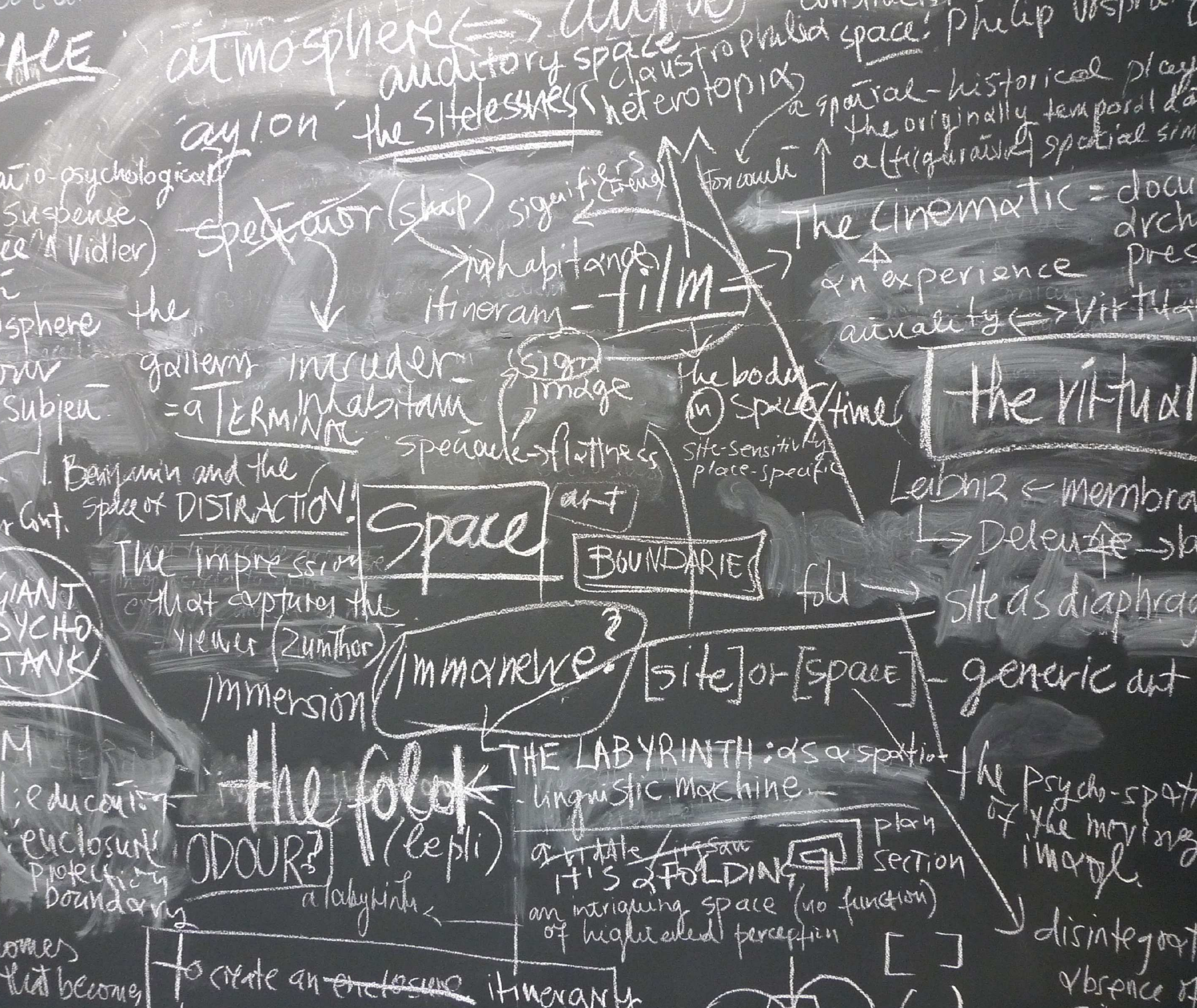
INTRODUCTION

The project began to develop a practical side soon after its inauguration in September 2011. The first attempt to illustrate thoughts in practice was the transformation of the studio walls into a continuously changing blackboard, a spatial journal to host layers and layers of textual and visual reference. The composition started as a layout of the core themes for the project clustered around key theorists and approaches. The map soon began to expand and complicate with the insertion of specific terms that were later embraced or negated in the process of writing. The content on the blackboard changed frequently and at a later stage during the project it included diagrams and sketches as well as printed images of work by other practitioners.
The art studio became a map to inspire, remind and connect ideas together. This process not only became the starting point of the creative practice but shaped the methodology of the project and ensured its development keeping a track of the changes occurring at each stage. The studio wall was photographed frequently to visually document the processes of thinking and writing.

Right:
spatial journal: mapping of ideas on studio blackboard wall, February 2012


atmosphere
auditory space
claustrophobia
space: Philip
the sitelessness
heterotopia
a spatial-historical
the originally temporal
a figurative spatial
suspense
Vidler)
spectator
signifiers
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arch
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intruder
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the body
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the virtual
subject
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inhabitant
spectacle - flatness
site-sensitivity
place-specific
Benjamin and the
space of DISTRACTION!
Space
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The impression
that captures the
viewer (Zumthor)
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THE LABYRINTH: as a spatio-
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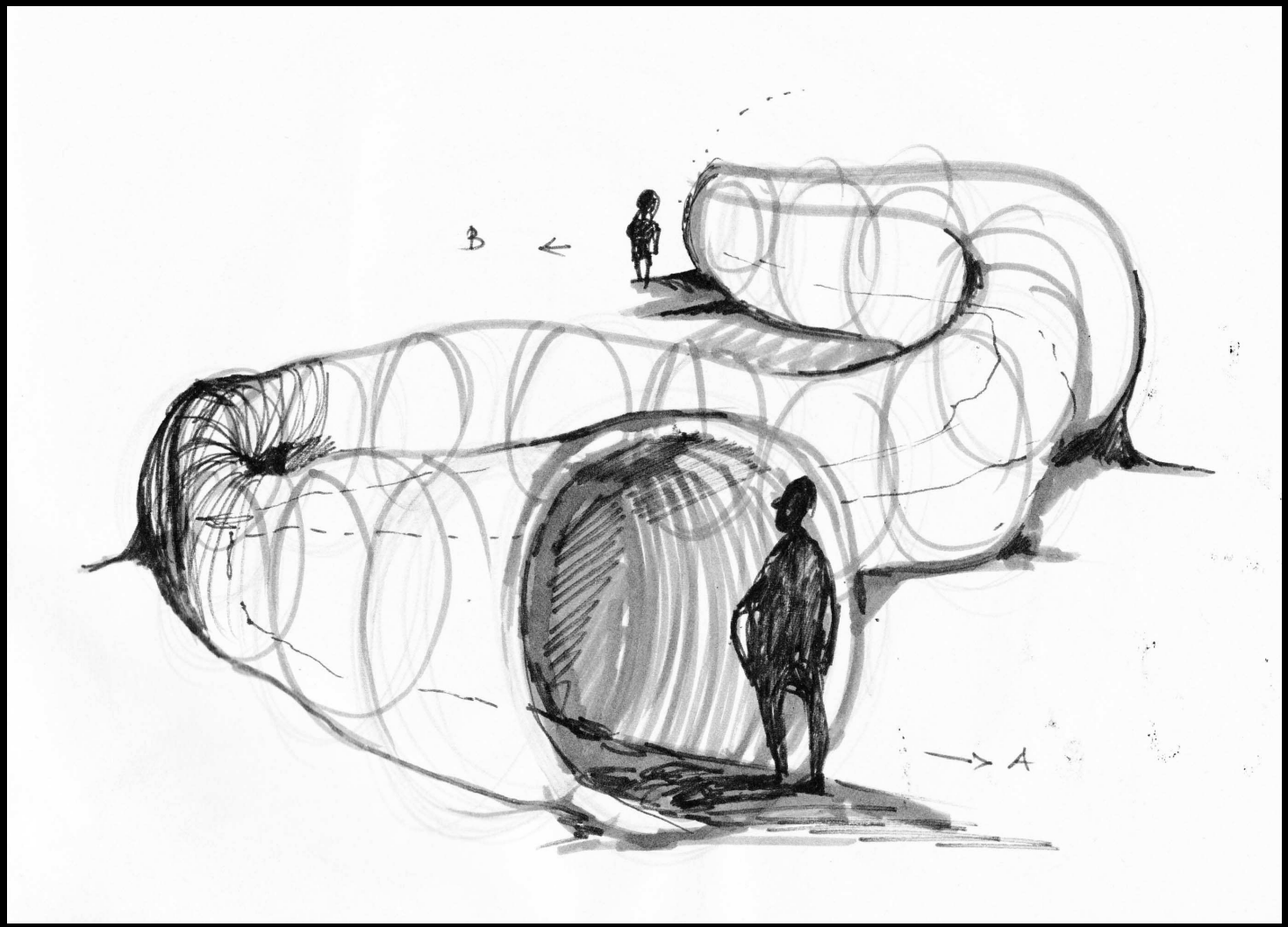
image.
ODOUR?
enclosure
protection
boundary
IT'S A FOLDING
plan
section
a labyrinth
an intriguing space (no function)
of heightened perception
disintegr
absence
to create an ~~enclosure~~ itinerary
that become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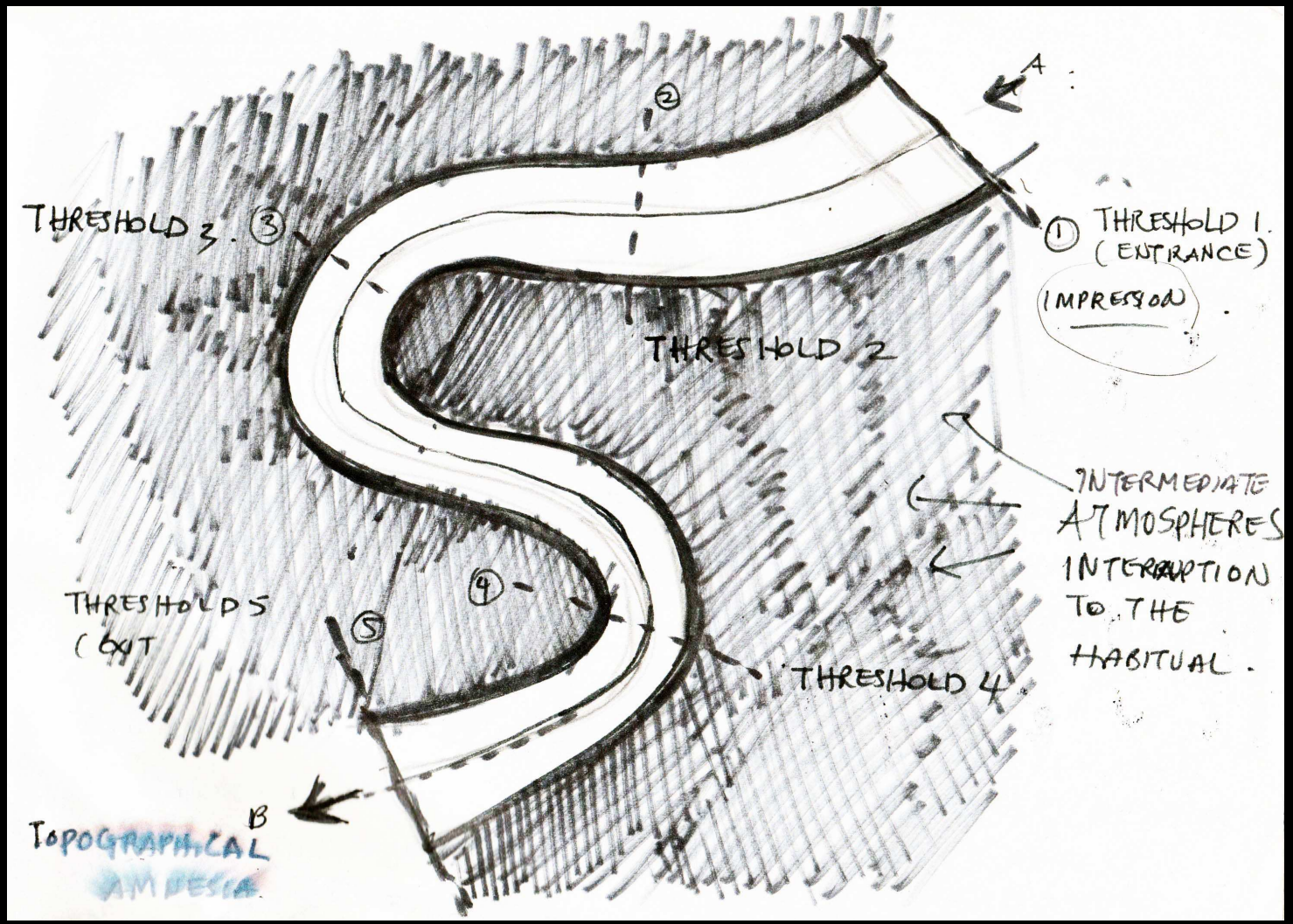
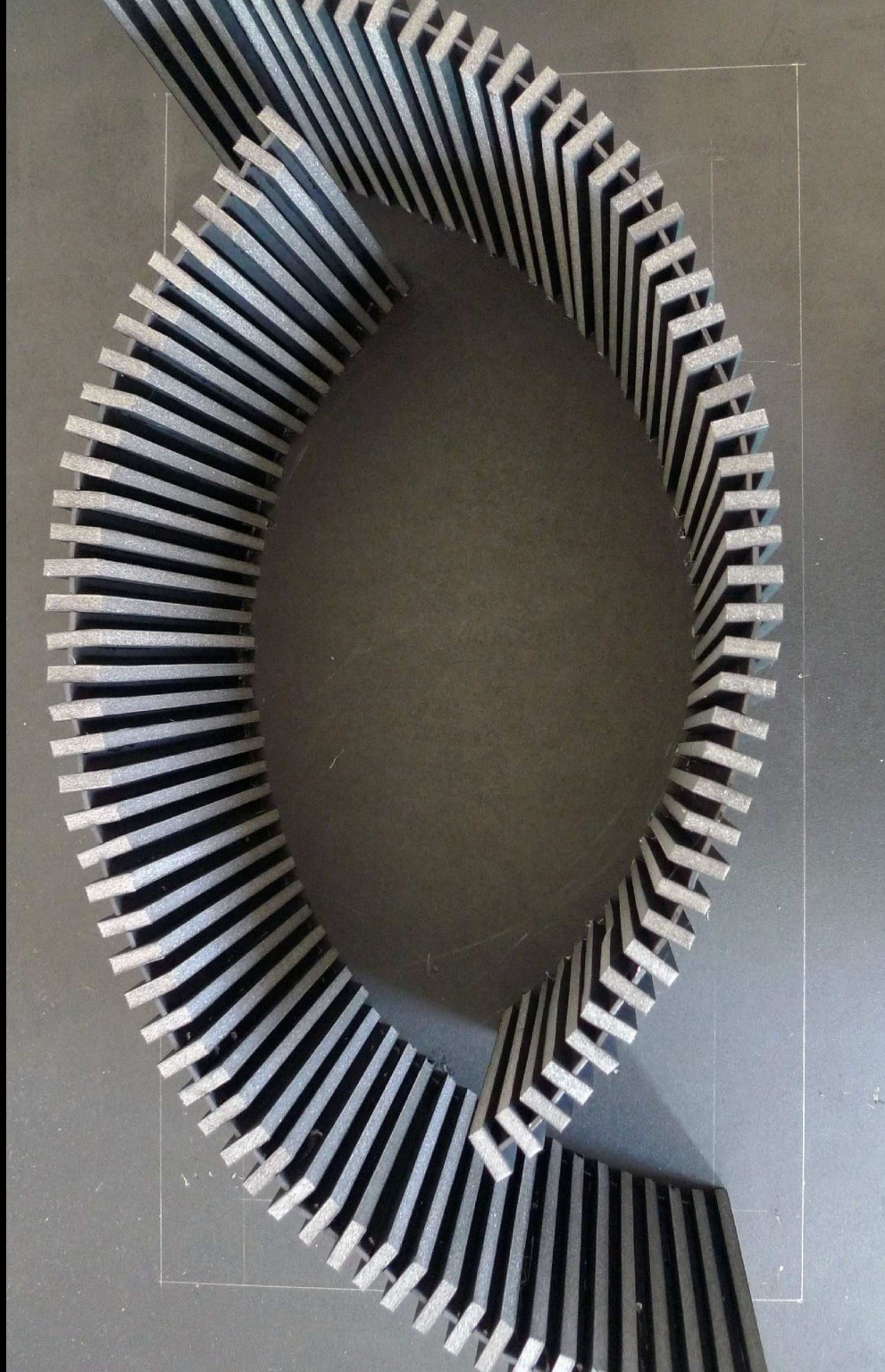

A
2
THRESHOLD 3. 3
1 THRESHOLD 1.
(ENTRANCE)
IMPRESSION
THRESHOLD 2
INTERMEDIATE
ATMOSPHERES
INTERRUPTION
TO THE
HABITUAL.
THRESHOLDS
(EXIT
4
5
THRESHOLD 4
B
TOPOGRAPHICAL
AMNESIA

Within the first six months of the project, the practice started to move away from illustration towards visualisation and making. The first preliminary sketches and diagrams present abstract ideas that define the nature of different experiences in space and are fundamentally theorised. However they fail to connect the experience with a specific locus; a site. The same problematic is shared by the first attempt of making.

The production of scale models attempted to sketch the concept and formality of various abstract spaces with no consideration of a specific site for realisation. These attempts shared limited prospective of being physically realised yet were informative.

The post-production photographic documentation of these physical in-scale representations implied another level of methodological engagement. This became one of the set methods for documenting the different phases of the creative practice during the project. Only in the second year of the project the practice started to formulate project proposals with the potential for realisation.

Previous pages:
preliminary sketches and diagrams presenting key theoretical ideas visualised in practice



Right:
Surrounded II (2011)
abstract model

SOUND[E]SCAPE | ESTRANGEMENT | HYDOR | CRYPTOPOLOGY

Sound[e]scape, Estrangement and Hydor were the three interim creative practice works completed between 2011 and 2013 in the process of the doctoral project Beyond the *Physical Threshold: Enfolding the Ontology of Immersive Experience*. Each project was developed as a notation or response to a specific architectural site and aimed to frame different theoretical ideas in practice as well as generate questions to further explore through theory. The discourse evoked by these projects is not exhaustive, on the contrary affords multiplicity and openness to methods, media and further exploration. Cryptopology was a site-specific immersive installation realised in 2014 at The Crypt Gallery St. Pancras Church London as the summative creative practice work in the context of the doctoral project. The work attempted to realise a multi-sensory lived experience and a receptive atmosphere to explore the poetics of site-reliant immersion in practice.

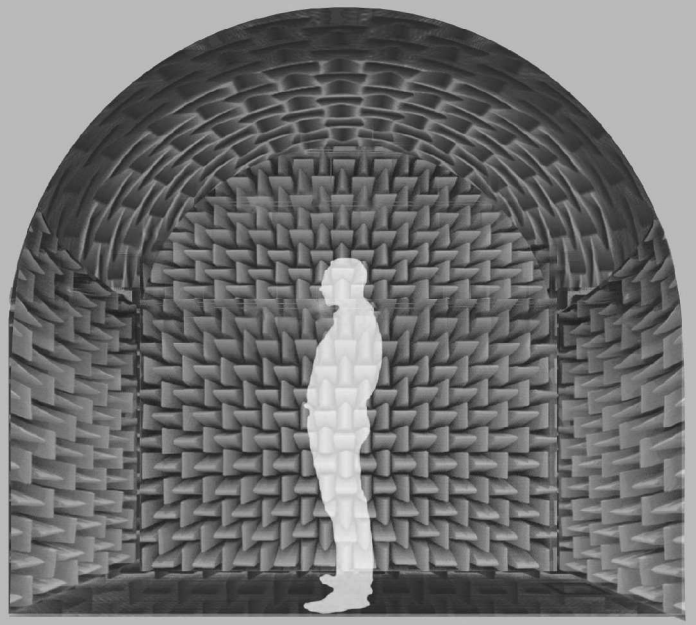
SOUND[E]SCAPE (2012)

Sound[e]scape was a project developed only as a proposal, however linked to a specific site; the Square Towers in Old Portsmouth (Southsea). This old fortress has become part of the Millennium Path and formes a physical barrier between the seascape and the town of Southsea.
During the site visits it became evident that the site lacked an ambient sound of its own. Its natural soundscape was a combination of external sounds: the sea waves and city traffic; so thin it proved almost non recordable.
The internal soundscape was created solely by the sounds and noise produced by the visitors and was situational, depending on the climate, time and events scheduled to take place on site.

Left:
Square Tower Old Portsmouth
interior view towards the entrance

Right:
Square Tower Old Portsmouth
view from window

Following pages:
Square Tower Old Portsmouth
interior view from entrance



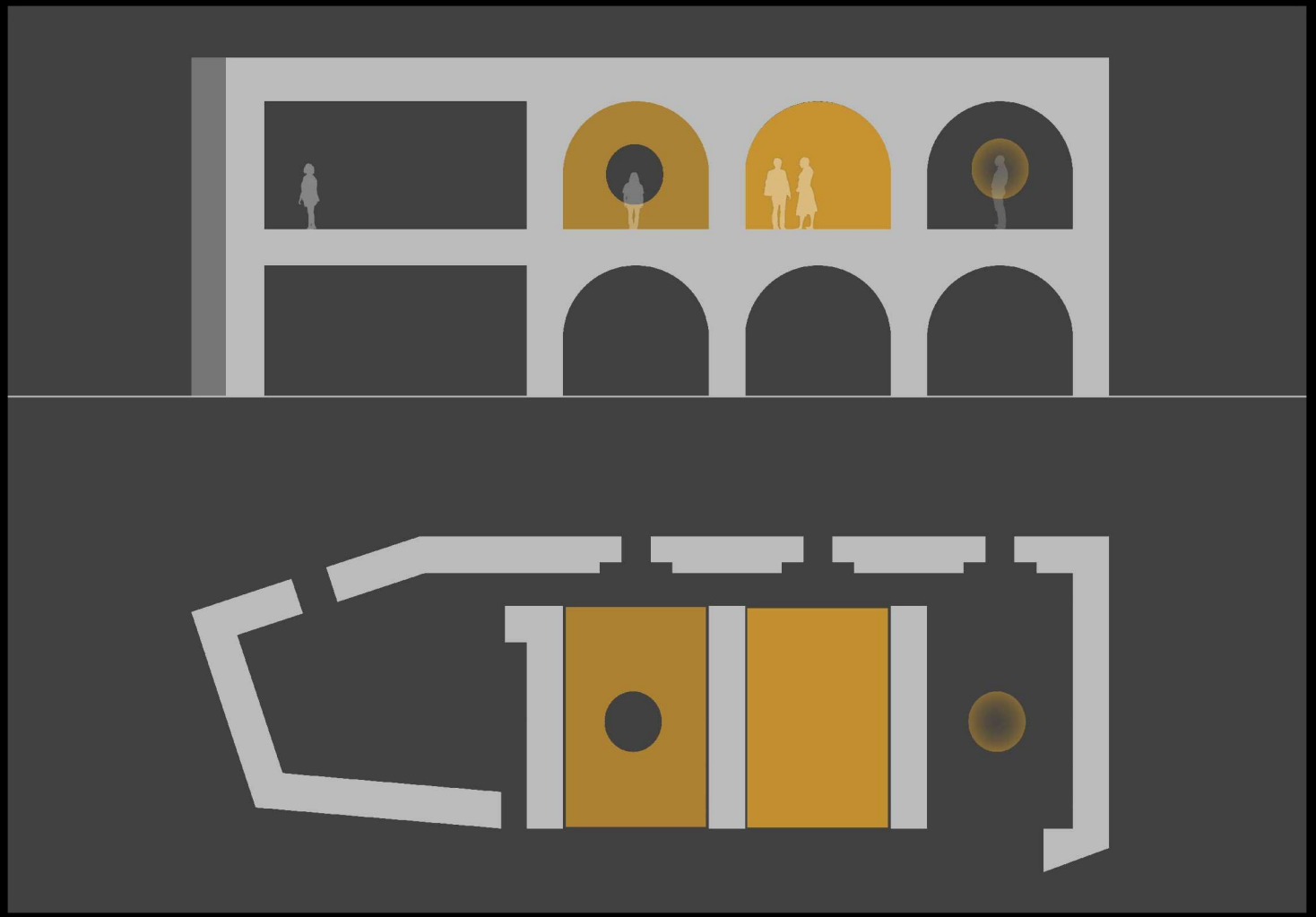
The sound installation proposal Sound[e]scape conceived specifically for the Square Tower in Old Portsmouth responds to the paradox of the site not having a singular and autonomous soundscape. The proposal provides two of the four tower chambers with specifically orchestrated soundscapes. After the intervention, the interior of the space would become a series of acoustically immersive environments.

The changes in the acoustic conditions of the space would form immanent thresholds and the experience would rely upon these transitions as there is no other way of passing through the space solely experiencing one sound condition.

The entrance and the second chamber maintain the original non-soundscape, whilst the first and the third chamber receive the two sound interventions. The first chamber hosts a surround sound system (source, amplifier and four satellite speakers) playing white noise and a sound-reflective structure. The noise reflected concentrates to the centre of the space creating an enveloping feeling. The last chamber becomes an anechoic chamber with all sounds absorbed by the surface of the interior skin creating a sense of isolation.

Right:
Sound[e]scape
plan and section sound intervention diagrams

Previous pages:
Sound[e]scape
section sound intervention visualisation

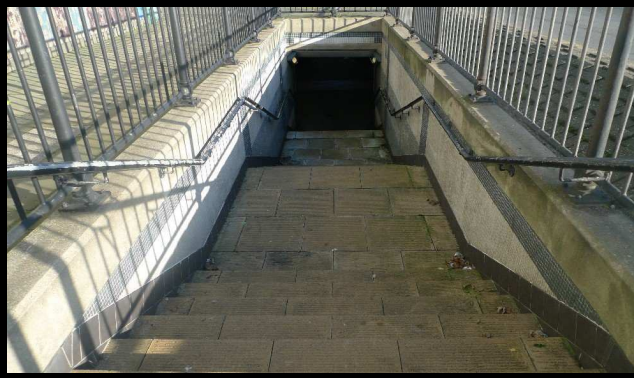


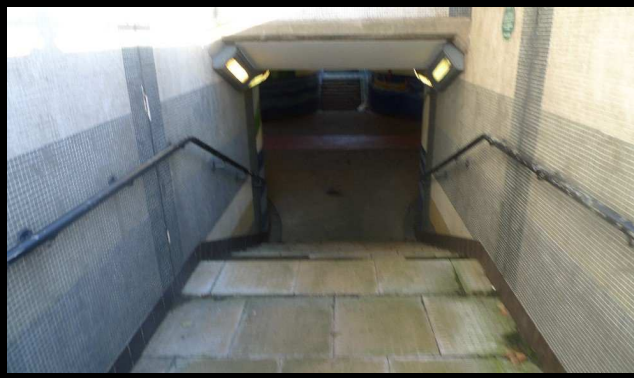
ESTRANGEMENT (2013)

The central subway in Dover, Kent was the site for project proposal Estrangement. The pedestrian underpass that connects the town centre with the iconic landmark of Dover Castle, the waterfront and the station is a geographical and topological junction. With its almost symmetrical-in-plan order, the circular layout of exits and the signs indicating directions to destinations, it becomes a point of orientation.

The movement of the passers-by is linear with minor variations and a preferred direction from the station towards the town centre and vice-versa. The site itself encourages the linear movement as a shortcut for the pedestrians, in the absence of traffic lights on street level.

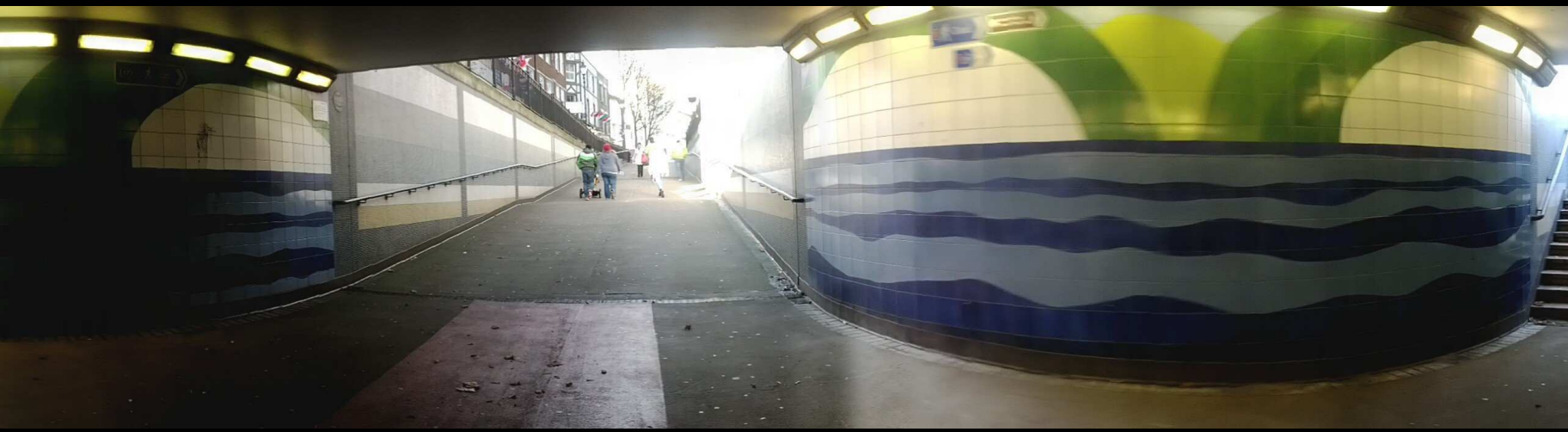
The strong linear pattern can be however interrupted by an intervention on the elements that sustain and reinforce it: the self-awareness of position within space and the movement and orientation by habit.

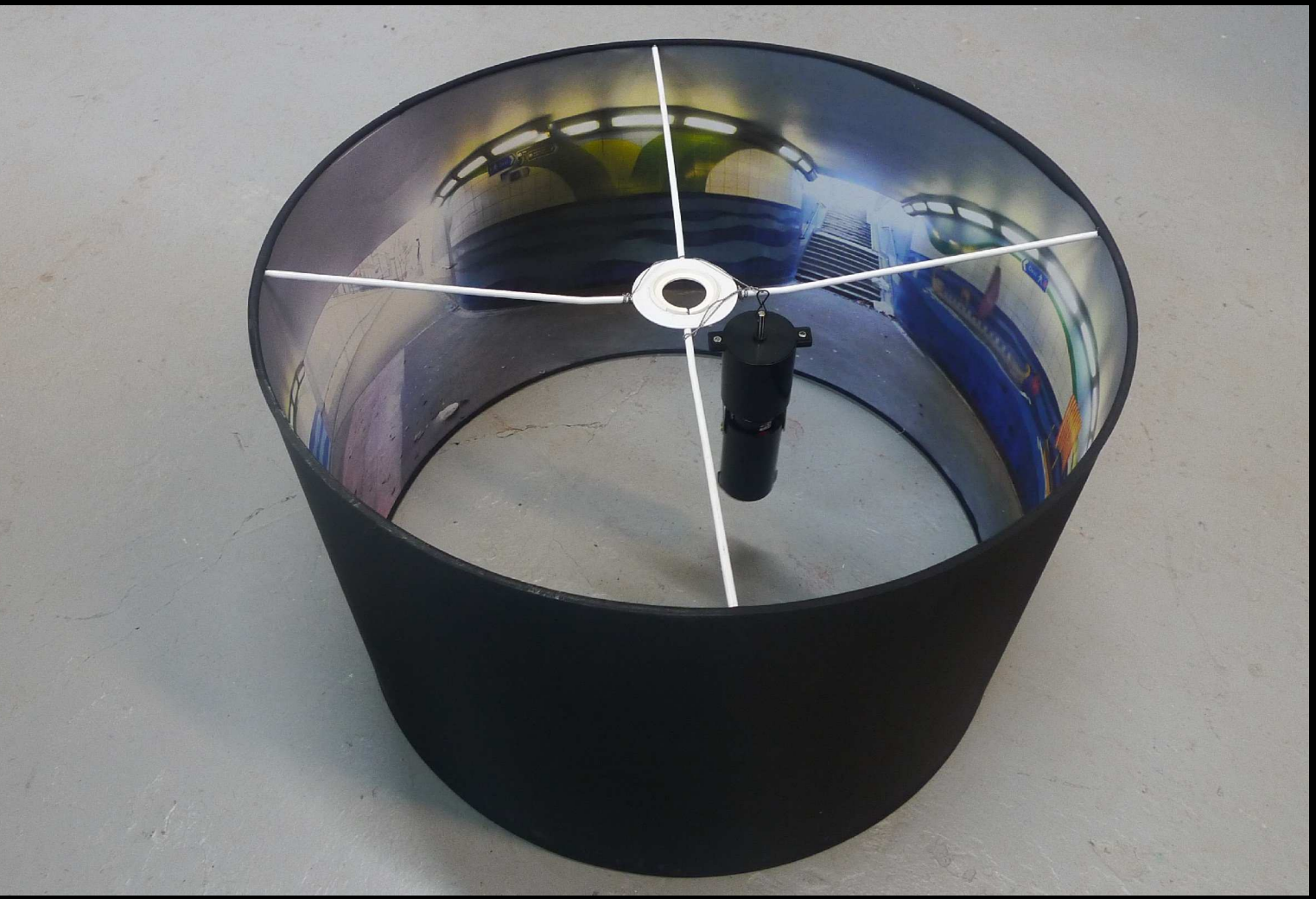




Left:
Dover underpass
view towards an exit point

Right:
Dover underpass
views approaching from an entrance at street level





Estrangement is the intervention proposed in response to the site mapping of Dover underpass. It synthesised the concepts of panorama as a primordial immersive mechanism to evoke the feeling of estrangement once the habitual –and in this instance– linear movement in the space is disrupted.

A panoramic site model that could be used as a head-worn device was made to test how the panorama, rotating movement and soundscape alteration can potentially produce immersion. The model followed an attempt to capture the spatial calibration, symmetry, order and repetition in a single image. A headset playing the sound of cicadas on loop was attached to the model once worn.

Experiencing Estrangement involves sensory input that is not accurate, for instance elements limited to peripheral vision or moving too fast during spinning. Disorientation associates with losing awareness of location in the immediate world. It imposes a feeling of being trapped in a spatial continuum with no escape although no physical barriers are set. A new geography of intimacy is generated by a subject who is presently taking part in a spatial event without fully apprehending it.

Left:
Estrangement
model

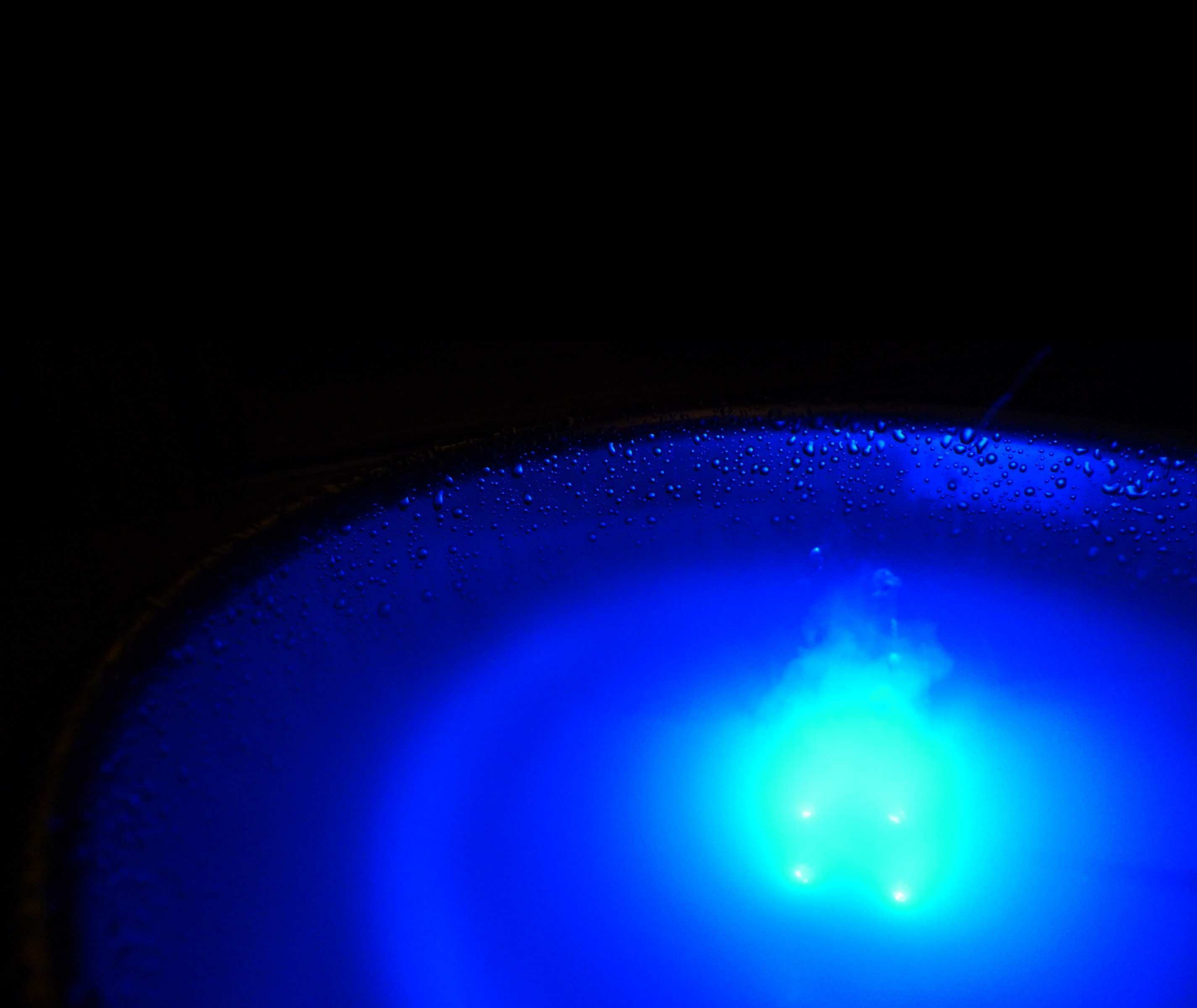
Previous pages:
Estrangement
panoramic view of the site

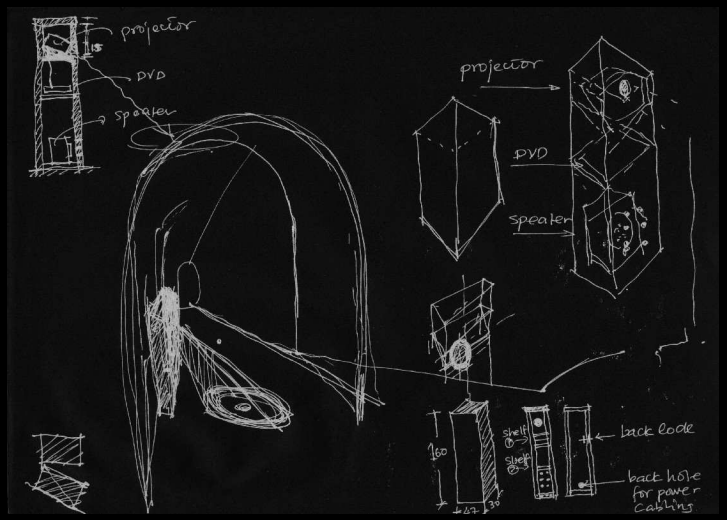
HYDOR (2013)

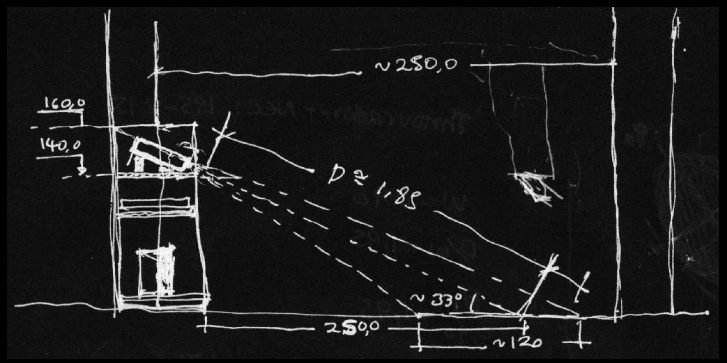
Hydor followed a different pattern from the earlier projects. It started with the audiovisual documentation of an object in the studio. An LED water atomiser submerged in a bowl of water whilst in operation was recorded in different light conditions and from a variety of viewpoints. In this case, documentation provided a heightened or alternative perception of an object and space by distorting the scale and the view as well as amplifying the sound it is producing. The object becomes a virtuality. The physical object and its virtual self were then inserted and appropriated in an actual site; the Canterbury Cathedral water tower and cloisters hallway.

The culturally heavy surroundings of the cathedral cloisters consist a place in-between inside and outside. They filter the spiritual atmosphere of the cathedral interior towards the freshness of the gardens. The geometry and order of the passage that the visitor walks to experience the artwork first allows a part perception and then reveals the whole of the installation. The projection of the distorted object compliments the physical presence of the object and vice versa. The work examines the different intensities of experience created by actual and virtual presence of the same spatial element.

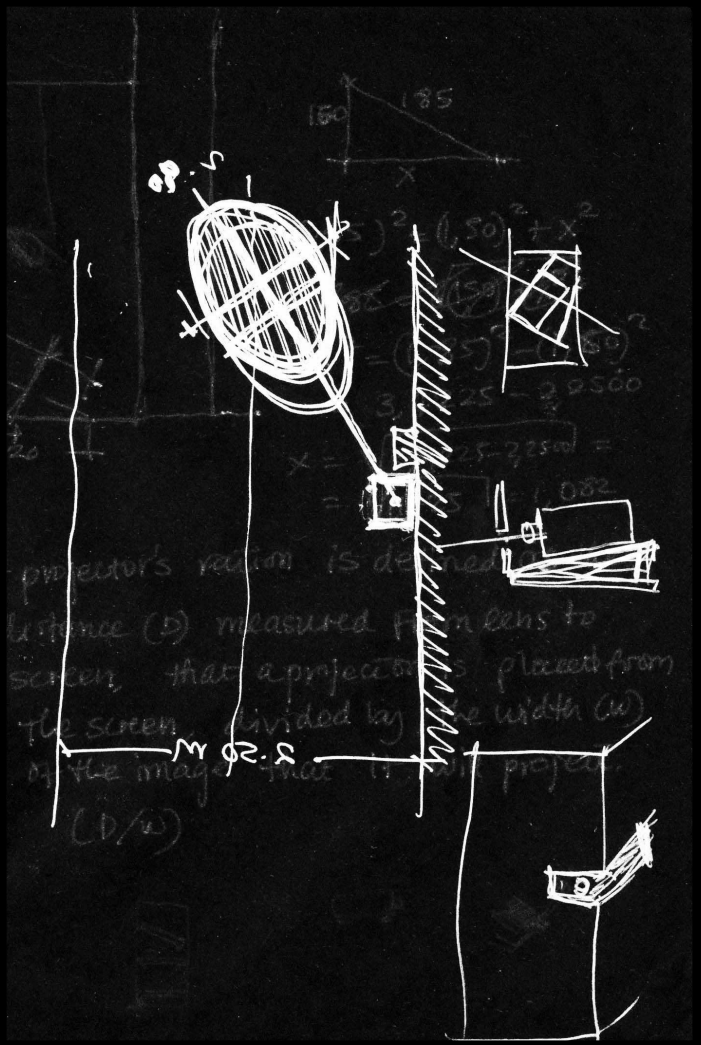
Right:
studio testing and documentation of a water atomising mist-maker (detail)







Left:
Hydor
in-situ testing of A/V projection installation view

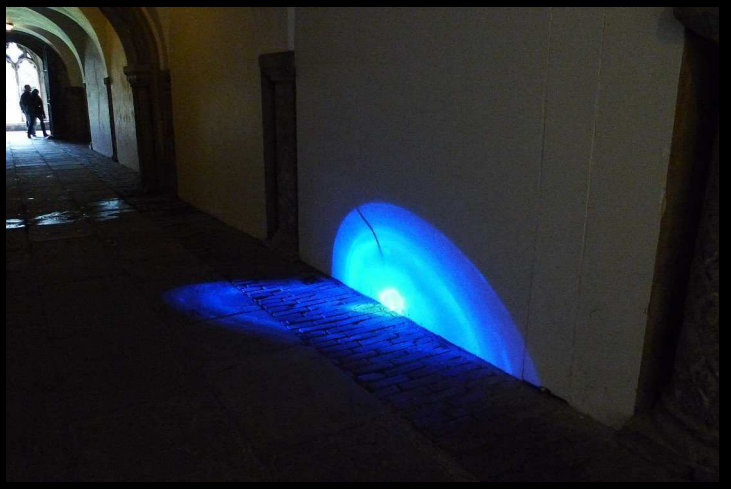


Above
Hydor
notes on the construction and installation of A/V projection

Whilst the studio testing of Hydor defined its formality (colour, scale, object view), in-situ testing revealed the different spatial calibrations the projection accommodates. The projection afforded different intensities depending on its position on the different architectural elements of the cloisters hallway: vaulted ceiling, walls, floor. The architecture of the site defined the intervention, which subsequently recalibrated the architectural space.

The presence of water in the A/V projection was implied, impressed and virtual yet in the end even more intense than the actual presence of water in the physical object (mist-maker). The superimposition of the projection on the architectural space interrupted the journey of the visitors who were intrigued and bemused. The actual mist-maker was placed in the middle of the water tower, complimenting on the circular order. The water emitted a cloud of light mist and was illuminated with a bright blue light. Although visually and physically engaging it was less spatially intense than the projection. The scale of the projected mist-maker and its sound amplified and reflected on the hallway walls did not fight the surroundings only stood out as an event. The actual object only merged physically with the site as a small scale physical imposition. Its success remained limited to its visual presence implying that the projection was a live streaming recording of the object itself.

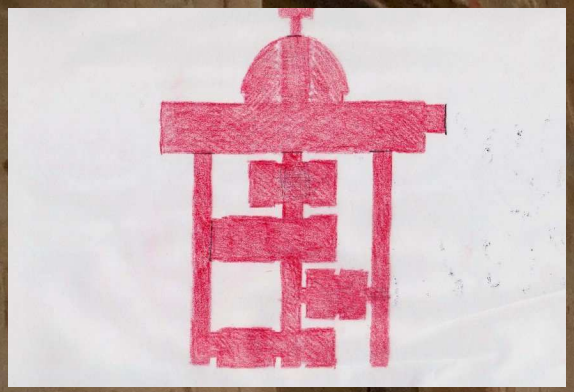
Right:
Hydor
in situ A/V projection testing of A/V projection on different positions and directions in Canterbury Cathedral cloisters hallway

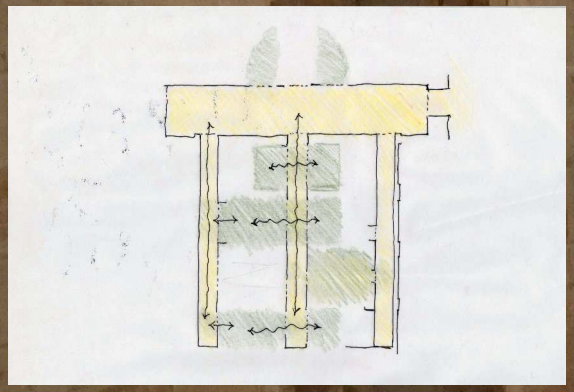


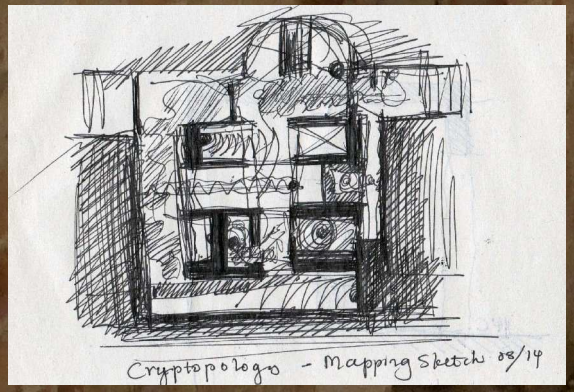
The intensity of the mist-maker effect was very fragile. It depended very much on situational factors such as the natural climate and light conditions. On a windy day the mist barely formed small swirls in the air just above the surface of the water; otherwise soaring as a low level thick cloud around the pillars in the middle of the water tower. During a bright sunny day the intervention remained subtle, half-hidden behind the pillars, awaiting to be discovered by the curious visitor. Late in the evening, the light of the mist-maker became more visible, reflecting on the stone surfaces. Standing out in the darkness of the surroundings, it lit up the space like a blue firefly, trembling as the water surface waved smoothly producing a drizzle.

Right:
Hydor
mist-maker installation at Canterbury Cathedral water tower
installation view

CRYPTOPOLOGY (2014)



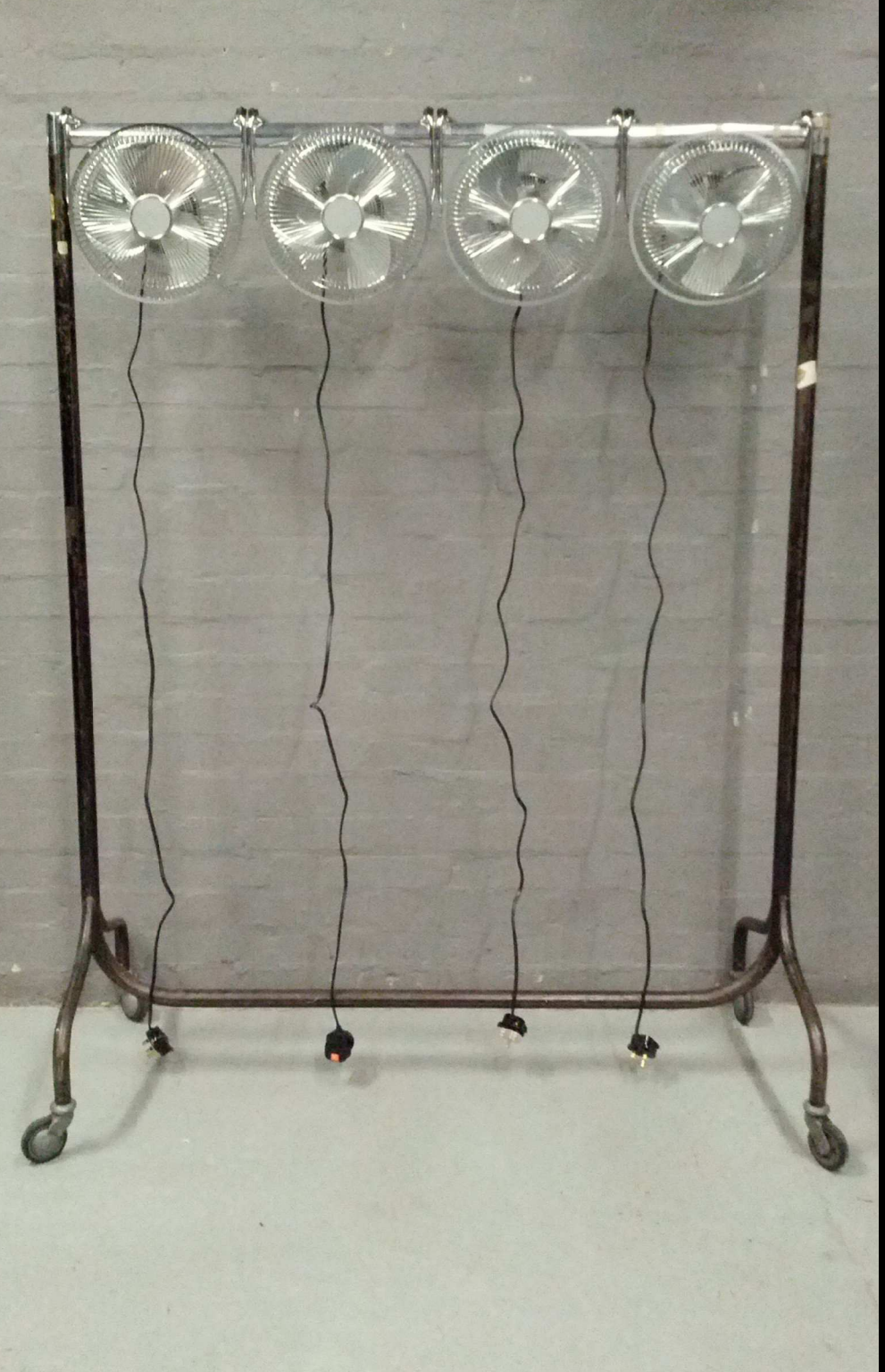



Cryptopologo - Mapping Sketch 08/14

The selection of a site for the last creative practice work was very critical. The Crypt of St. Pancras Parish Church on Euston Road, London is part of a Grade A listed building operating as a gallery. The project started with an exploratory site visit followed by a proposal that was soon reviewed and accepted for realisation. The proposal was based on a primordial mapping of the Crypt and promoted the space as the artistic medium to create a multi-sensory immersive experience. The space was mapped with observation notes and sketches, filmed and photographed again after the proposal. The mapping concentrated on the order of the space, the interconnectivity of the chambers, the layout of the passages and the micro-climate of each space within the Crypt. The first diagrams present the Crypt as a network of spaces, a labyrinth of symmetry with a sole entrance and exit. The physicality of the site is very strong and the atmosphere composed by the limited ventilation, the concentrated humidity and the sustained low temperature is imposing. The character of the site can only be embraced and subtly manipulated to hide and conceal selected elements. It had soon become clear that the intervention would extend beyond the physical threshold, focusing on the non-substance made properties of the environment. A preliminary diagrammatic layout of the intervention presented potential placements of different spatial modalities and what sensory faculties they were targeting. It visualised concentrations of temperature and scent, soundscapes and thresholds of light and air. Abstract and processual, the first mappings of the experience were based on the site visit observations and recollections as well as studio testing on different techniques and technologies. The more the work developed the clearer it became. The moderating agent of the experience would be the most fundamental of the spatial elements, the most fragile and ethereal, the less material: air.

Left:
The Crypt St. Pancras Parish Church London
site visit photograph and three preliminary diagrams mapping the layout, connectivity and calibration of the spaces

Next pages:
The Crypt St. Pancras Parish Church London
Air penetrating into the space from entrance and oculus (detail)
Site visit photographs

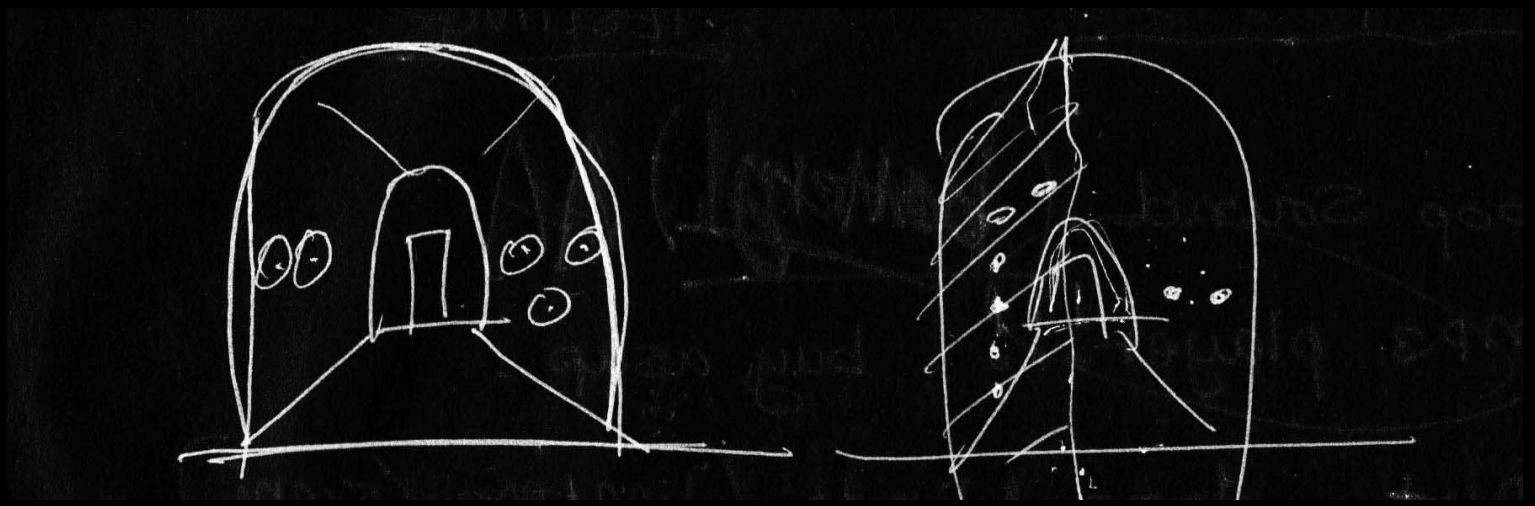


Air manipulation was tested in studio before development in-situ. Different air flow mechanisms were explored, concentrating on the effect in space. The desirable result was to create a wall or threshold of air in space by aligning a set of four 17'' fans horizontally or vertically on a wall or mobile structure.

The air flow mechanism would then be tested in-situ to decide its exact position; in the middle of a chamber interrupting the interior, on the walls of a chamber creating an enclosure of air or at the back of a passage dynamically circulating the airflow of the whole Crypt. The decision remained till the final in-situ testing.

Left:
Cryptopology
Studio testing of airflow with the use of fans

Right:
Cryptopology
Sketches of directed air flow effects in space

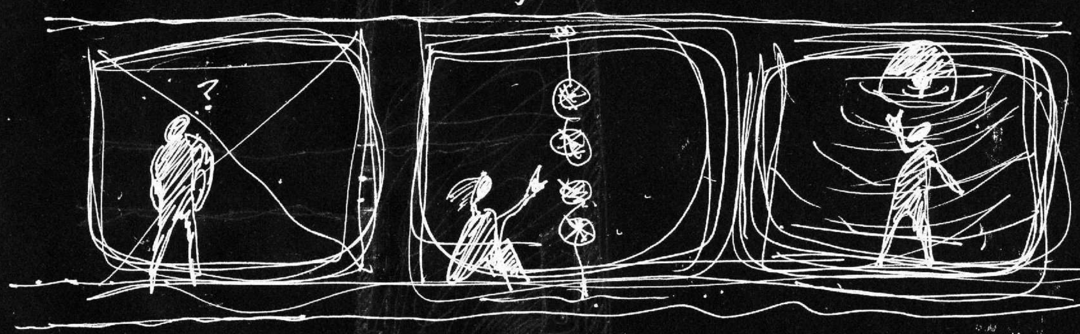


The in-situ testing of air focused on moving and temporarily operating the vertically aligned mechanism of fans to examine different effects. An artificial fog machine was used to make airflow patterns visible in order to identify the most efficient position for the fans. The four-fan set concluded at a central point of the of the Crypt at the entrance of an open wall chamber, facing towards a passage that served as the symmetry axis of the space in plan.

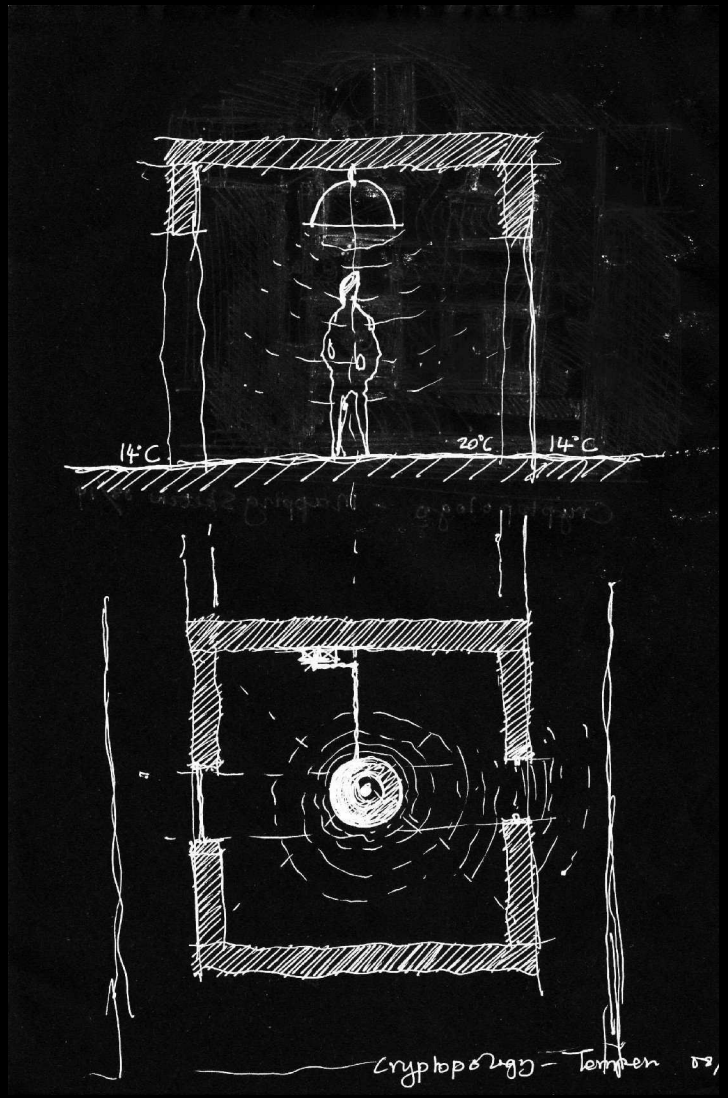
The fragile structure was suspended from a beam and held in place by thin fishing wire. The mechanism remained hidden in the darkness of the Crypt only making its presence noticeable by the humming noise of the fans and the intense breeze of their airflow. Priority was given to airflow testing in-situ to moderate the rest of the interventions around it. A very important decision was taken. The gallery lighting would remain off and the space would be sensed visually only by through the light intervention of the work.

Left:
Cryptopology
Aiflow mechanism installation

Right:
Cryptopology
Aiflow mechanism installation (detail)



Cryptopology : To Temper 08/14


14°C
20°C
14°C

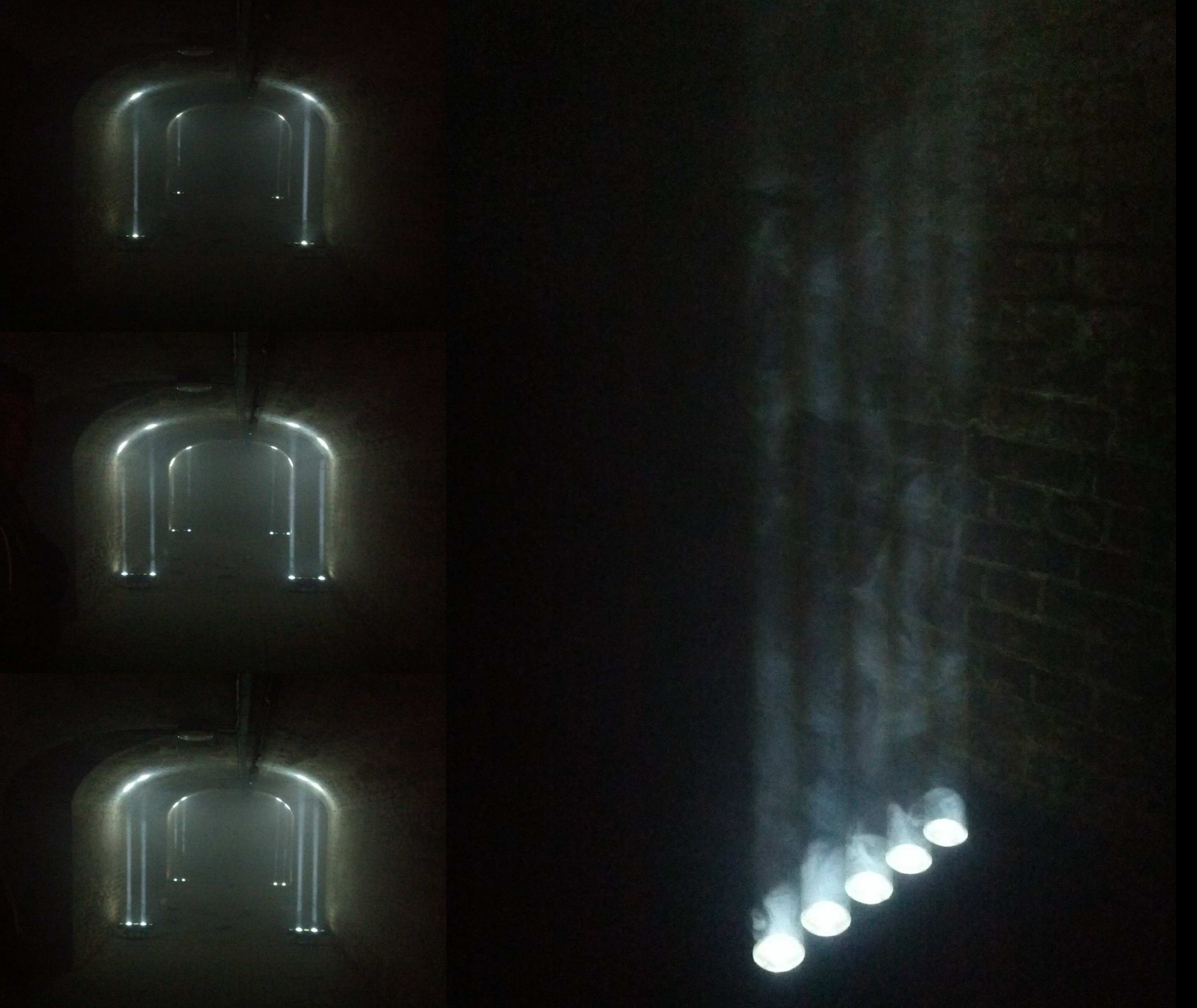
Air was not only manipulated in terms of its flow and circulation but also its temperature and composition (scent). The climate of the Crypt was moderated to create a cinematically orchestrated affective atmosphere. The smellscape of the Crypt was enhanced by the smell of the vaporised essential oil of frankincense and black pepper concentrated in a small chamber in the heart of the Crypt. The olfactory experience of the space had a hint of familiarity yet the smell remained unrecognisable.

Since the site maintained a unanimous and relatively low temperature level in all of its spaces, the initial idea of creating contrasting enclosures of cold and heat did not prove feasible. Cold is a condition of energy absorption whilst heat of energy release. It was made evident during in-situ testing that to engage the receptive visitors in an event of energy absorption was very much challenging. On the contrary, an enclosure of energy release was realised efficiently by suspending a halogen heater from the ceiling of a chamber. The visitors spending time underneath bathed in warmth and felt the contrast of the original site temperature once stepping outside of the chamber.

Left:
Cryptopology
Heat room entrance installation view

Right:
Cryptopology
Visitor experiences the heat room

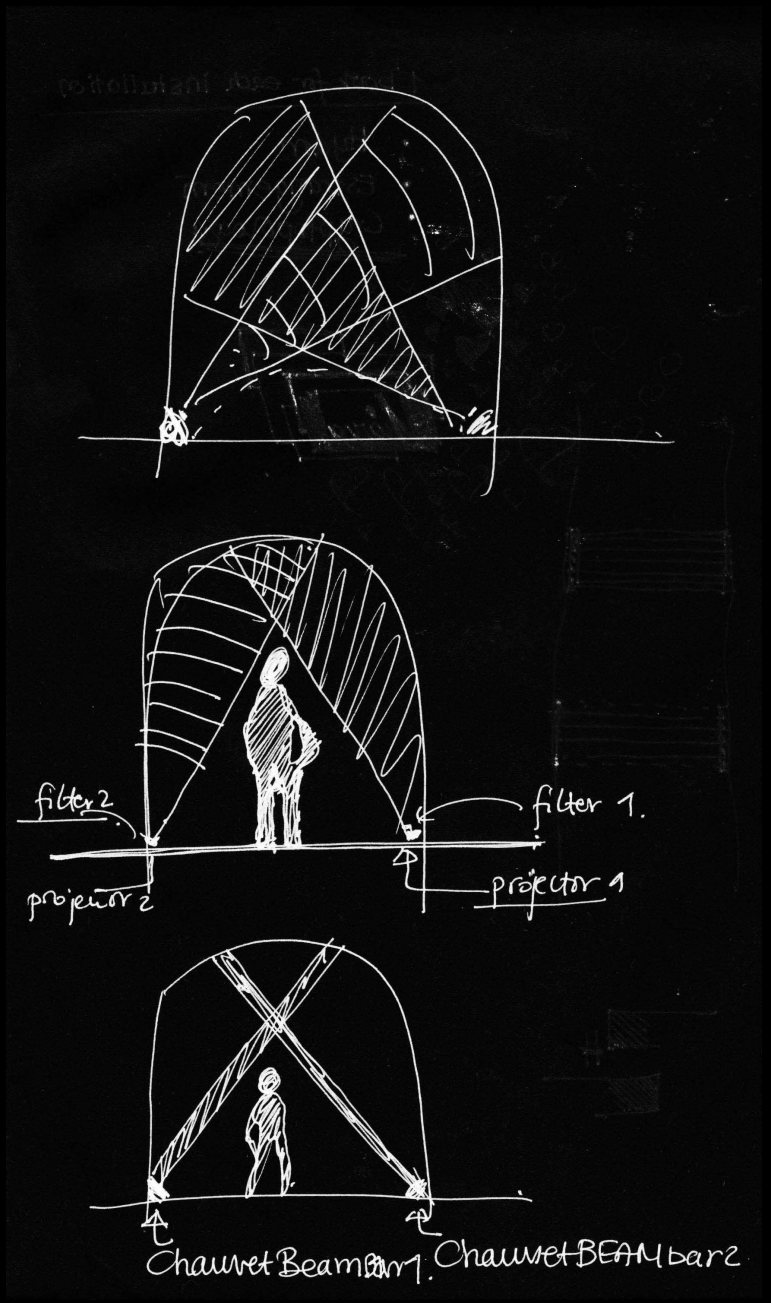

H&M



The light intervention of the project was the most intense visually and the first to be encountered by the visitors upon entrance. Studio testing focused on selecting the technology to produce the desired effect and ensured smooth operation of connected lighting devices. In-situ testing and development defined the final synthesis of the light installation.

Four Chauvet BEAMbars™ connected and controlled via DMX created immaterial light gates; thresholds framing the main passage in the labyrinth of the Crypt.

Different light combinations were tested to decide on the intensity, number and frequency of the beams. Including artificial fog in the testing process, gave flesh to the light beams that appeared as solid illuminating bars crushing on the vaulted ceiling of the interior.



Left:
Cryptopology
In-situ testing of different light modes and detail

Right:
Cryptopology
Sketches of different light effects

Right:
Cryptopology
Light installation final mode; interior view

The light intervention in Cryptopology welcomed the visitors in the interior of the Crypt indicating three more corridors to explore on their left hand side. Once in between the light gates the visitors had no indication of spatial boundaries other than the light beams, which framed and enveloped them in a cloud of thick fog. The space absorbed and guided, inviting the visitors to touch the intangible and feel the essence of light on their fingertips.

The more one stayed in the space, the more the space revealed. As the eyes became accustomed to the absence of ambient light, the passages appeared brighter and the steps became more confident. The light within the Crypt created interesting contrasts and marked thresholds and non-physical boundaries of areas with different spatial qualities. The light emitted by the heater penetrated the curtain on the chamber door and intruded the corridor giving away a hint of warmth.

The light gates, visible from every corridor in the Crypt served as a reminder for the location of the main passage coordinating the movements of the visitors. All corridors concluded in a second wide passage, divided in two by a sharp diagonal plane of white light, projecting on the Crypt wall giving the impression of a virtual door.

Right:
Cryptopology
Visitor interacting with the light installation close-up

Following pages:
Cryptopology
Light thresholds and immaterial boundaries

Apart from the scent, the only intervention that was solely tested in-situ was sound. Located in two different parts of the Crypt two sound sources created the illusion of a dripping water soundscape, temporarily interrupted by the humming noise of the fans. The main sound source that played the water dripping sound on loop, was situated at the end of the concluding corridor concealed in the darkness behind the light source that created the diagonal plane.

The sound echoed on the walls and ceiling of the Crypt creating a virtual space beyond. The impression was so strong that visitors frequently attempted to explore the space touching the wall at the very back. The soundscape afforded alterations even when the work was on show and offered different experience to the audience visiting on each day. The sound dripping recording was replaced by brown noise, which in discourse with the humming of the fans created a depth of space at the back enhancing the impression of a virtual space even more. The abstraction and ambiguity of the brown noise eliminated the connotations inherited by the water dripping sound.

Left:
Cryptopology
Light intervention at the back of the Crypt

Cryptopology looked at the empirical exploration of a space as a localised event of sensory input and intimate affects created in response to atmospheres. Although the stimulation of the sensory systems is orchestrated, there is no preconception on the journeys followed by the visitors. Scent, light, sound, temperature and airflow recalibrated a space that remained half-visible to the visitors who moderated their own as well as others' empirical readings in a reciprocal giving and taking.

Space gives us its atmosphere and we give back our affects. Our experiences are temporal journeys of mood, emotion and tempered conditions. They cannot become unless localised. We sense and feel. We feel and think. We think and respond. We respond and become. We cross the threshold and immerse.

Right:
Cryptopology
Light intervention installation view

CREDITS

BEYOND THE PHYSICAL THRESHOLD:
SOUND[E]SCAPE | ESTRANGEMENT | HYDOR | CRYPTOPOLOGY

This book is published on the occasion of the PhD thesis *Beyond the Physical Threshold: Enfolding the Ontology of Immersive Experience*, completed by Liana Psarologaki; a practice-based doctoral project sponsored by the University for the Creative Arts UCA validated by the University of Brighton.

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Sponsors:
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Re Create interreg IVA
ERDF
University of Northampton


blurb

This book presents a visualisation of the creative practice developed in the context of Liana Psarologaki's PhD research project entitled: *Beyond the Physical Threshold: Enfolding the Ontology of Immersive Experience.* The doctoral project was sponsored by the University for the Creative Arts (UCA) and explored the poetics of a contemporary art practice that is fundamentally architecturalised.

The interim creative practice attempted to become a vehicle for the transportation of thoughts rather than presenting finalised immersive spaces and were highly theorised. The final creative practice work explored fully the poetics of site-reliant immersion. Its development, realisation and documentation was partly supported by UCA's involvement in the Recreate project an Interreg IV A France (Channel) - England programme, co-funded by ERDF and The University of Northampton.

The book presents three interim projects:
Sound[e]scape (2012)
Estrangement (2013)
Hydor (2013)
and one summative project:
Cryptopology (2014)