



Article

The Longhouse [2015-]

Neil Spiller

Editor of AD (Architectural Design)

Founding Director of the AVATAR Group (Advanced Virtual and Technological Architectural Research)

Professor Emeritus, University of Greenwich

Visiting Professor, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada

Visiting Professor, IAUV Venice

neilspiller0@gmail.com

"[My house] is diaphanous, but it is not of glass. It is more the nature of vapour. Its walls contract and expand as I desire. At times, I draw them close about me like protective armour...But at others. I let the walls of my house blossom out in their own space, which is infinitely extensible."¹

The *Communicating Vessels*² is a drawn, polemic architectural project that has been twenty years in the making, it explores the impact of twenty-first Century technology on the old dialectic between house and garden. The project is highly surreal and often uses narrative, particularly the relationship between "The Professor" and "The Boy". The Professor lives on the Island that is its site. Recently, it was clear that it was time to start to design the major piece of the constellation-the Professor's house- it has become named the *Longhouse*. 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 fluttering's, 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 highly reflexive and responsive series of spaces and relationships. The house choreographs itself and develops this daily choreography by reading its site; this site is a virtual changeling site- constructed infinitely by a mysterious *Chicken Computer*.

For Surrealists, the "house" can be seen as the microcosm of their consciousnesses. It's doors, windows, thresholds, attics, cellars, ceilings and floors - 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 twenty-first century technology has further accelerated these transcendent geometries of the house. The Longhouse seeks to describe the architectural opportunities and effects caused by space and objects forever metamorphing and dynamic within the surrealistic whirlpool of extreme and magical domesticity.

1 - Georges Spyridaki, *Mort Lucide*, p.35, Seghers, Paris, 1952

2 - The *Communicating Vessels* project has been published in parts around the world over the last 20 years, recent publication of some of its parts have occurred in AD's *Protocol Architecture*, March/ April 2011, *Drawing Architecture*, September/ October 2013 and *Future Details of Architecture*, July /August 2014. The project is also featured in Neil Spiller, *Architecture and Surrealism- A Blistering Romance*, 2016 (Thames and Hudson, London)

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, forms seemed to hang in the air. Hermes awaited him with an erect countenance and wished him well. The boy skirted around the 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, 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 the *Gates of Hell* or the *Baptistry* portal. The door opens out on the house's primary axis, its core organizing principle- the reason for its length.

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

Some say Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors Even (The Large Glass)* (1915-23) was first inspired by the Kentish sash windows so different to French windows, whilst he visited Herne Bay, chaperoning his sister who was at a summer language school in 1913 (Herne Bay is incidentally about 2-3 miles north of the Island of Communicating Vessels). Like the *Large Glass*, the Longhouse is defined by its lateral split through its centre.

An extensive drawing exercise opened the eyes of the Longhouse to the choreography of chance, collision, detourment and anomaly revealing a very extraordinary and particular house. A house of vomiting asphalt gar-

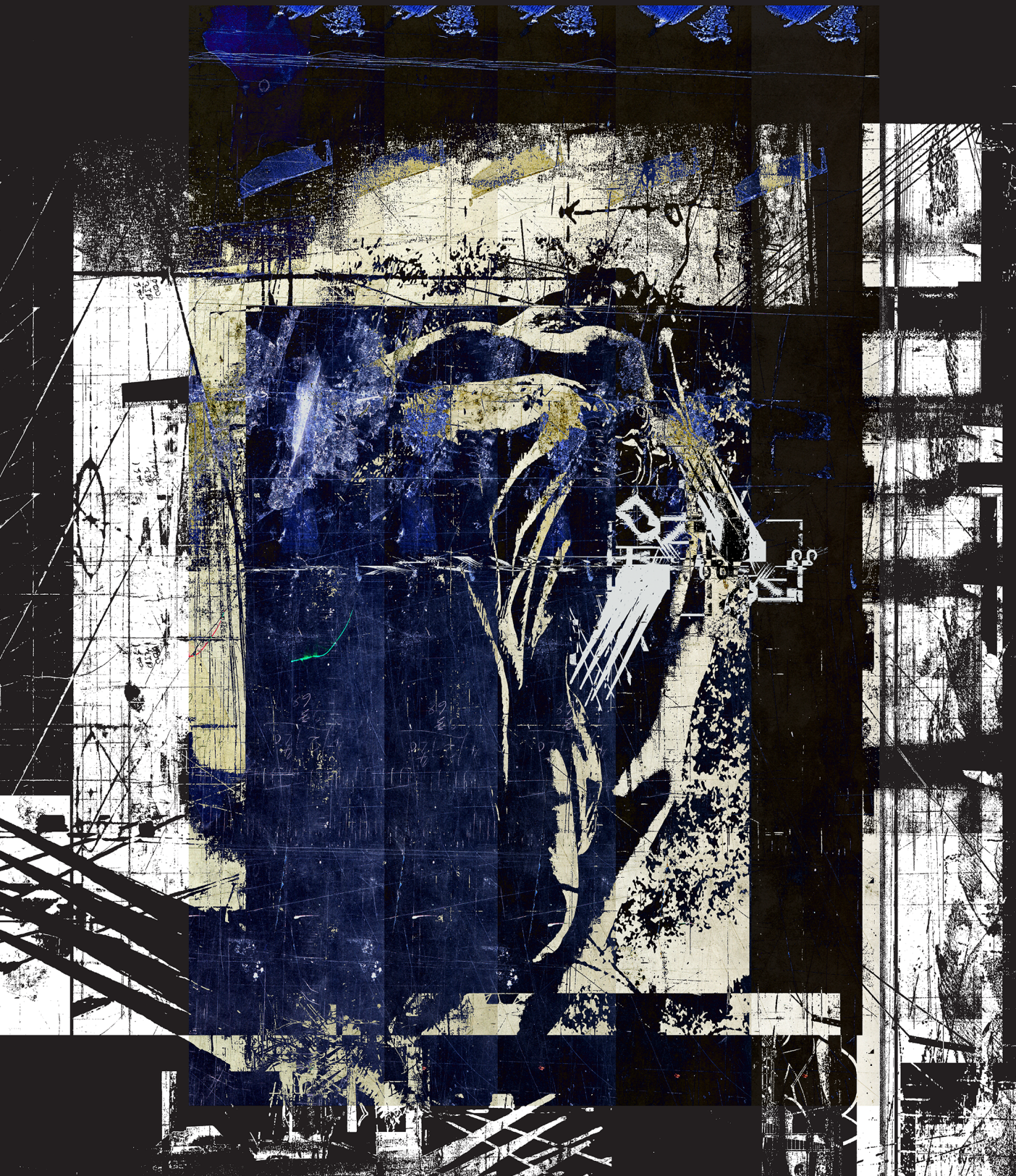
goyles - spewing grease, Hecate's triple form- hovering over the ground and passing through walls, the manikin meat hook, the Hall of Dummies the boxing Match, the Minotaur with bicycle seat head and the Bride and the Nude descending the staircase amongst other entities, concepts and movements across topographies virtual, actual and chemical. A marvelous menagerie provoking in the Professor, the enigmatic resident of the Longhouse on the Island of Communicating Vessels, memories of diamonds and rust across the seven seas of wonder.

...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 virtual and chemical metamorphosis combined with the virtual choreography of the chance "tic" or "flutter". Positions of, and the nature of objects and architectures are conditioned by mixed ontologies, scopic regimes, numinous presences and reversible time. This reversible time stalks objects and disturbs their gentle entropy and peaceful rest. The vitality of architecture has increased a thousand-fold. To the twenty-first century agile architect, these architecturally disruptive technologies breathe new life into the language of architecture. The verbs of architecture are being recast.

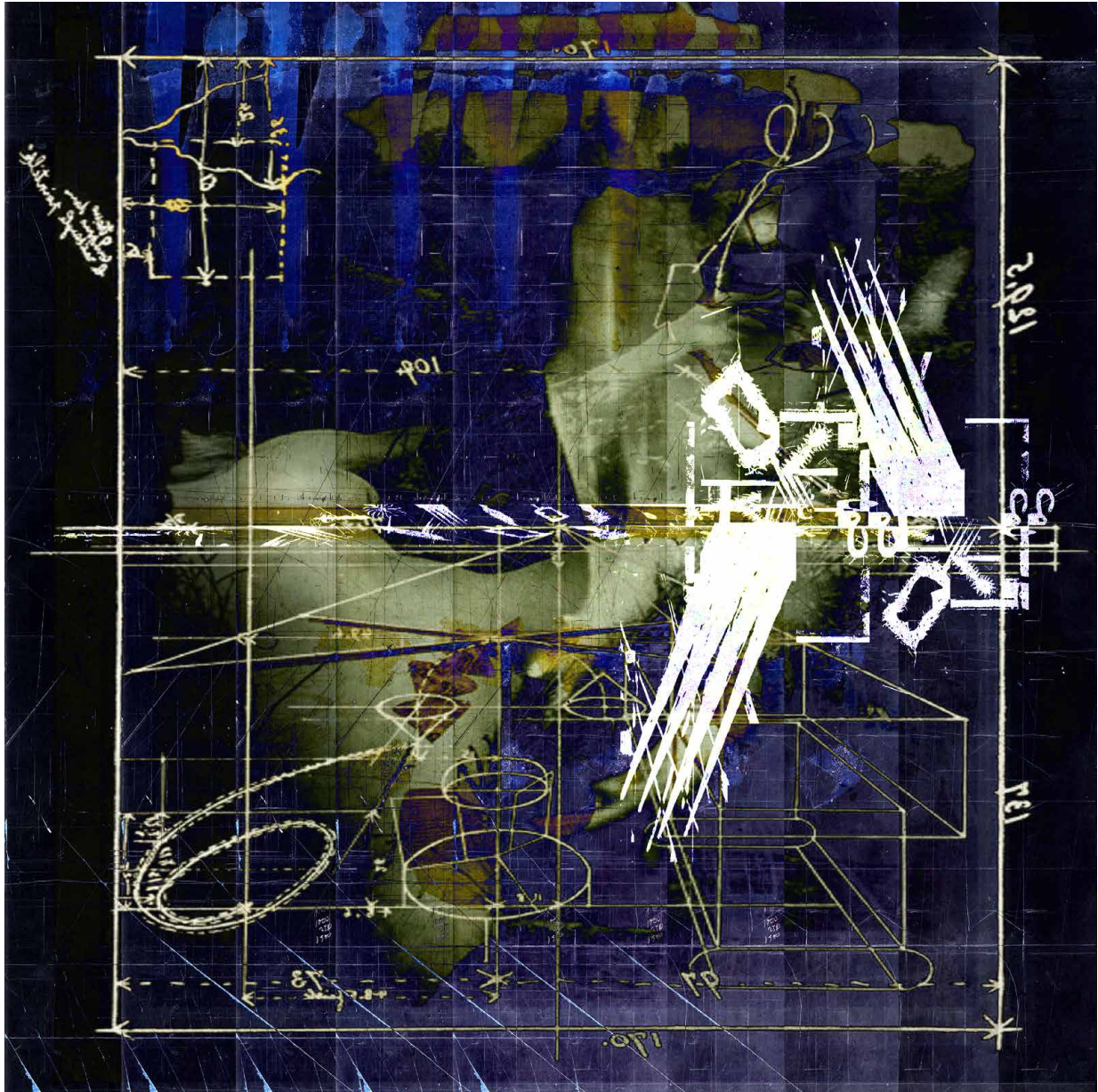
Time based sensitivities are mixed in the cauldron of the virtual world, seen by augmented eyes enhanced by dimensions of chronological slippage, coalescing in a



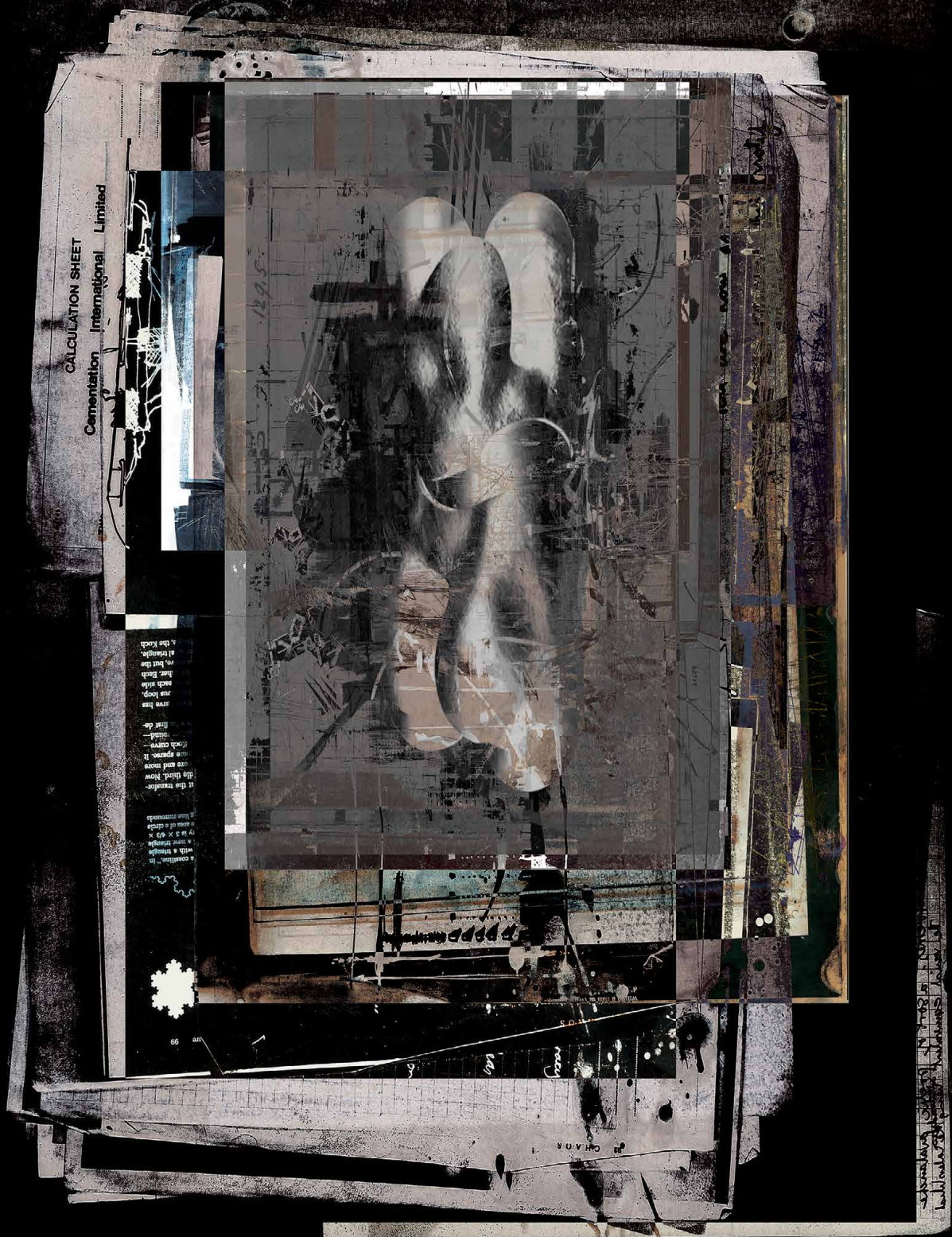
Neil Spiller, Longhouse, Door, 2015

tocks, breasts, testicles and cleavages, it looked metallic. He edged towards it cautiously at its base it said: "Hecate - Continuum of Buttocks - Before extroversion". A dog howled somewhere...

...The Boy scans his horizon, in the distance he



Neil Spiller, Longhouse, Duchampian Split Plan, 2015



Neil Spiller, Longhouse, Hecate seen through a Window, 2015



Neil Spiller, Longhouse, Study for Hall of Dummies, 2015

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 semi-otic 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 hadn't seen 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 stone masons 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.

... Once inside, the door shut on its gas piston hinges, the House was strange inside, very STRANGE indeed. The two halves of the house met along a longitudinal split, a weird dining table straddled it, full of anecdotal topologies. Windows perforated the walls. Through the windows the outside was very different from the calm clearing the boy has just come from. They were broadcasting an alternative reality. Often that

reality 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.

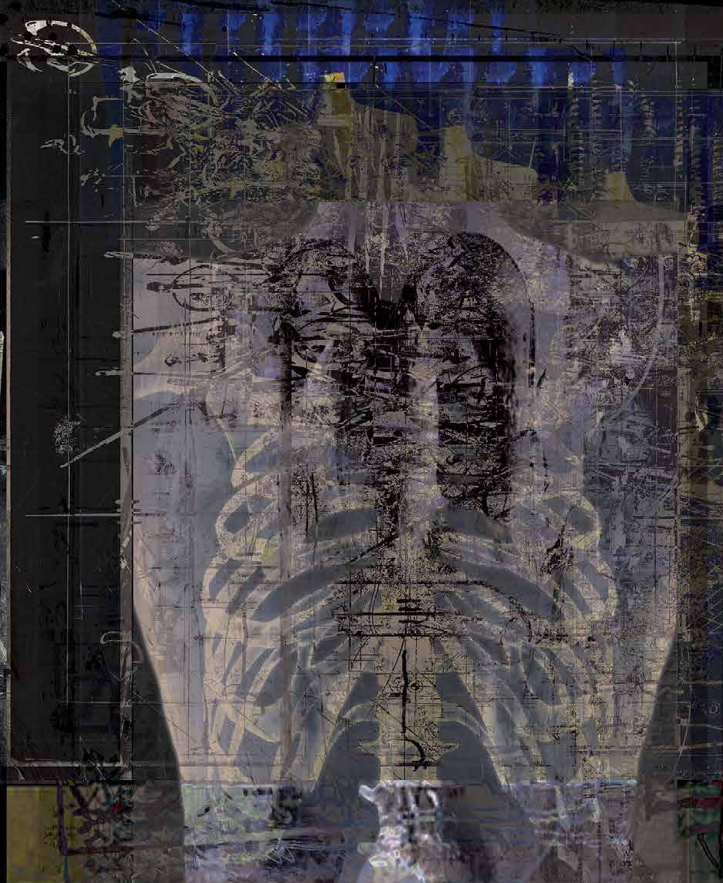
The house remakes and reassembles its interiors daily. It choreographs itself and develops this daily dance by reading its sites—virtual sites. The best way to understand this element of the house is to use the analogy of an old record player. At a certain time a record is played, read by the arm and stylus and the grooves of the record and their shifting topology translate into music. The Longhouse does not let you choose the specific spatial music at a particular time. The agent of chance that defines what the stylus and arm touch at any point is the "Chicken Computer". Now imagine millions of record players, virtually passing through each other, extending arms and sensitizing or desensitizing styli playing millions of records for short periods of time. The "records" are a shifting virtual terrain determined by the Chicken Computer, in which a virtual Longhouse sits, its virtual wings and parts - styli that wax, wane, activate, deactivate and change position millions of times per second. The house contacts its virtual self every morning at dawn. As the Sun rises and the house reads the virtual terrain of the day (this might include other architectural spaces or landscapes, paintings, drawings and even itself or a fleeting mixture of all these) determined by the Chicken Computer in a flurry of virtual sensing passing its shifting sensitivities through virtual fields, remembering and storing these space-time vectors to be played out by presences through the day and into the deep, dark night.

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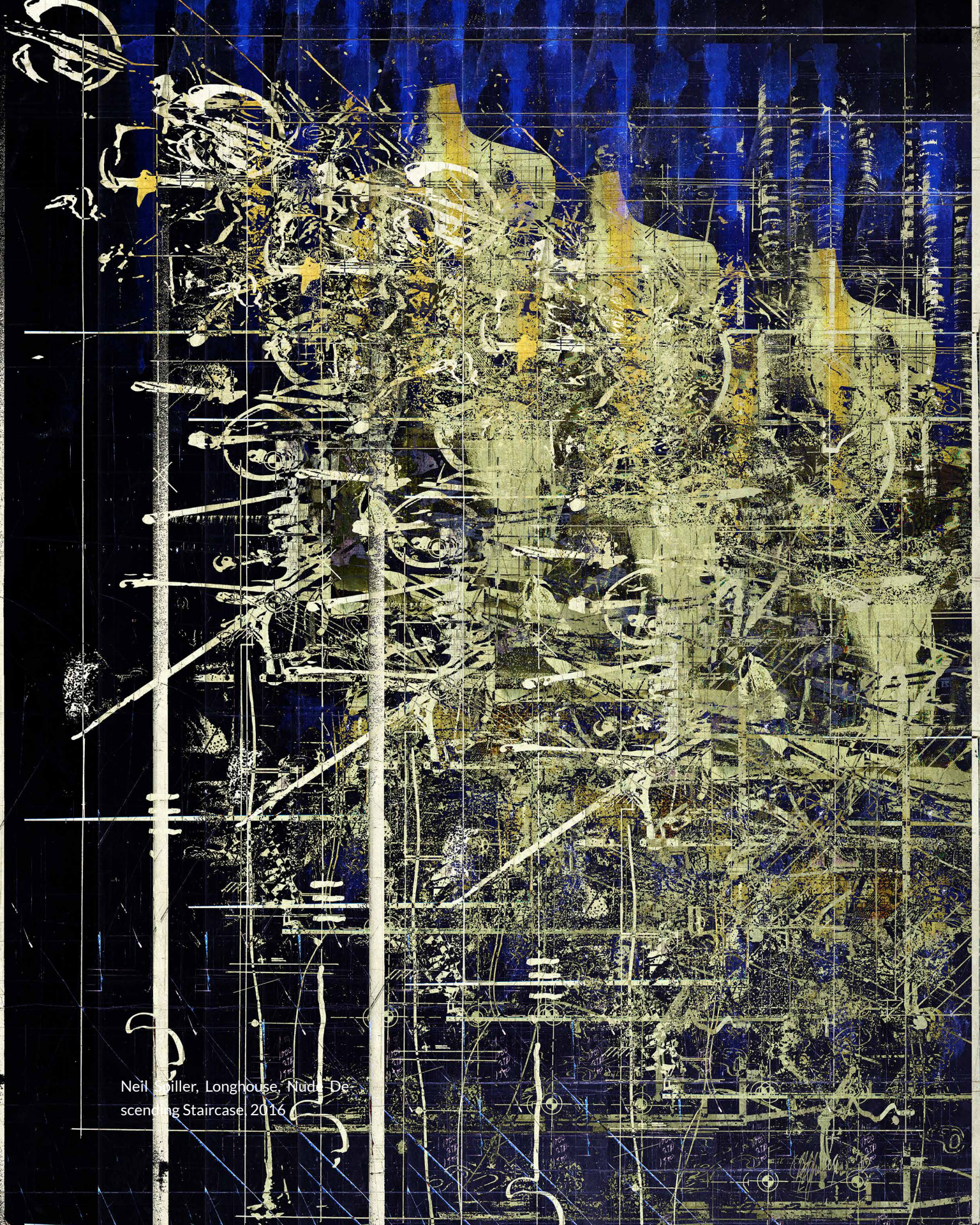
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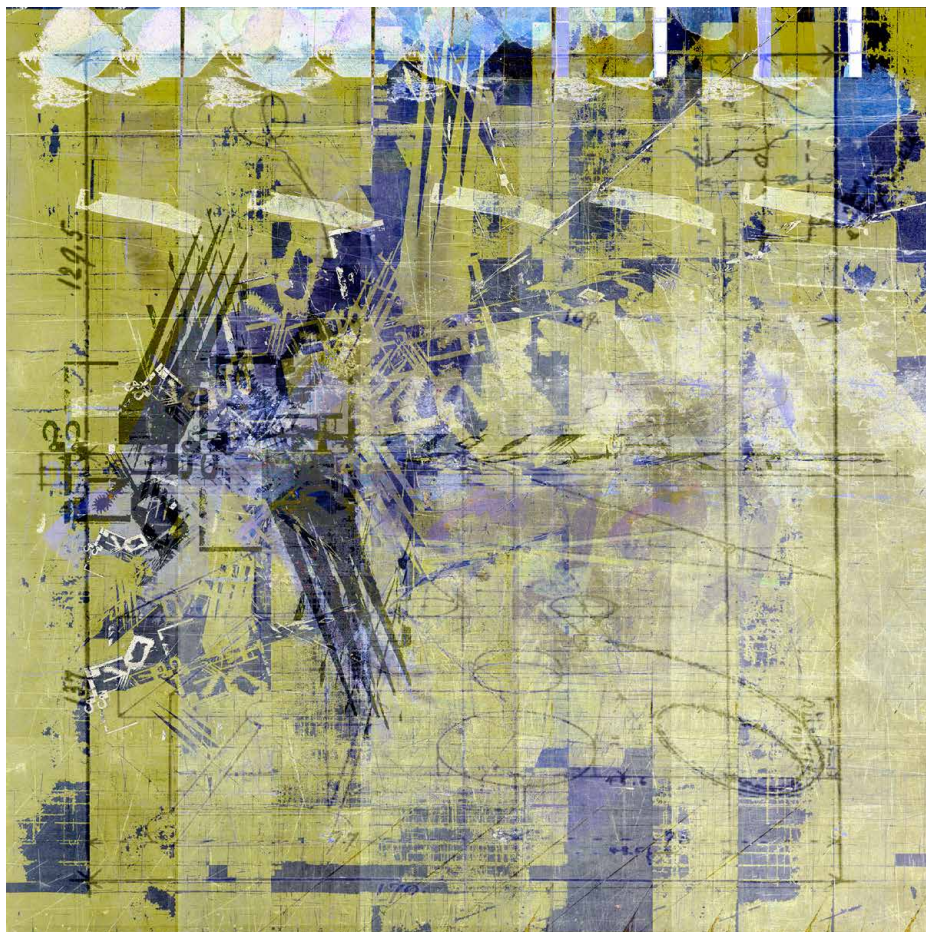
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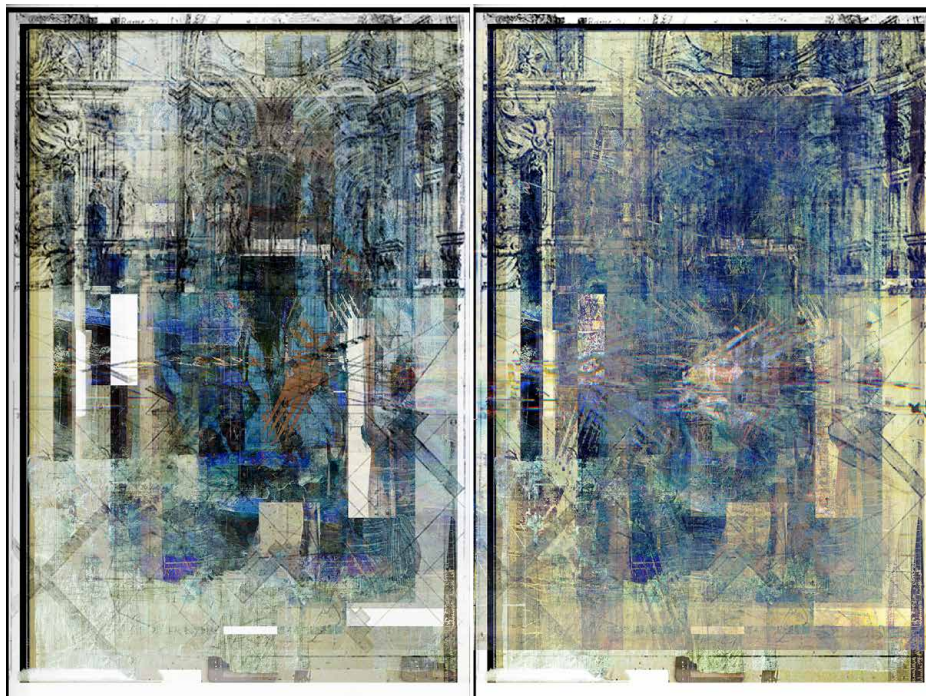
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the party



Neil Spiller, Longhouse, Nude Descending Staircase, 2016



Neil Spiller, Longhouse,
Scanning Plan, 2016



Neil Spiller, Longhouse
Scanning, 2017

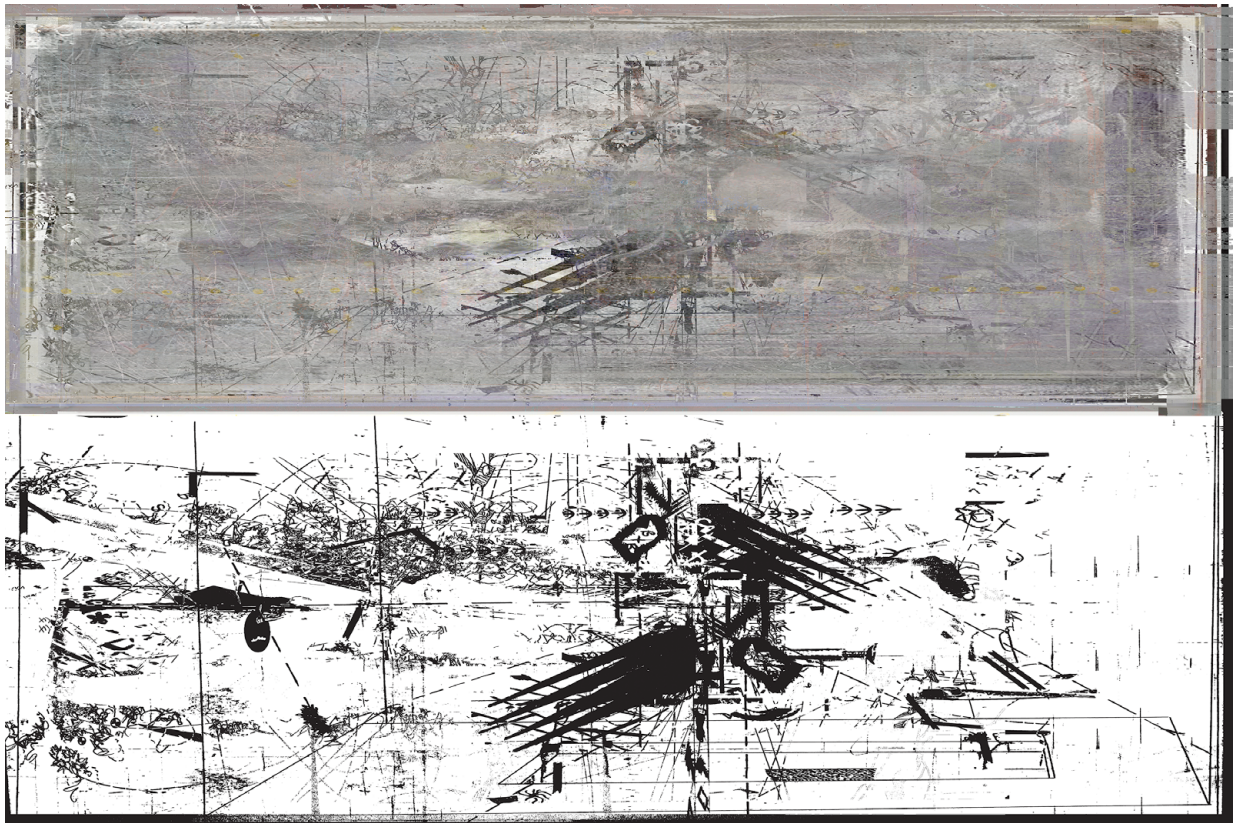
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Neil Spiller, Longhouse,
Interior, 2016



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 of the Longhouse is a series of varying sizes aedicules containing the sacred objects and bodies of the moment. Sir John Summerson in his book of architectural essays *Heavenly Mansions* (1) 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. Summerson also asserts that the cosiness and defensible scale of infant's play creating small imaginary houses under tables was also one of the drivers in the semiotic adoption of aedicules in both Classical and Gothic architecture.

*The Boy stared down at the Table, it 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, this caused an intense but not understood feeling in the pit of his stomach. The Professor just watched...*³

3 - John Summerson, *Heavenly Mansions: An Interpretation of Gothic* in John Summerson *Heavenly Mansions and other Essays on Architecture* New York, 1963: 1-28



Neil Spiller, Longhouse, Upper Surface of Banqueting Table Longhouse, 2017