



Article

Topo[graphies] of the Un/conscious

Bea Martin

Lecturer, Birmingham City University

beatriz.gomes-martin@bcu.ac.uk

The word topography, obsessively repeated in this text, refers to the process of drawing, a way of being in place. Topography becomes an expansion of charted topoi and connotes a new drawn field of being—a space that is inhabited. The explorations ultimately generate tectonic constructs where the intricacies of chance and circumstance are an inherent composite of an unconscious topographic landscape. A geometric mental field guided towards our emotions rather than just simple logic. Widening the contours of your imagination, encouraging you to go on looking for your own being in a place.

Narratives are bound to topography since they can be redrawn on maps, exposing the interactions of text and space. In mapping terms, a story can be laid out as an experiential trajectory on an existing geography, very much like a palimpsest, where the topography itself will evolve in the process of a visual stratification.

Framed within the mapping of a moving “cartography of the imagination”, these explorations of a rhizomatic topography touch the lived spaces and occupied places of being. A psychogeography, an inhabited map. A graphical record that trails the movement and impulses of feeling which later become symptomatic of their own dis-placed condition.

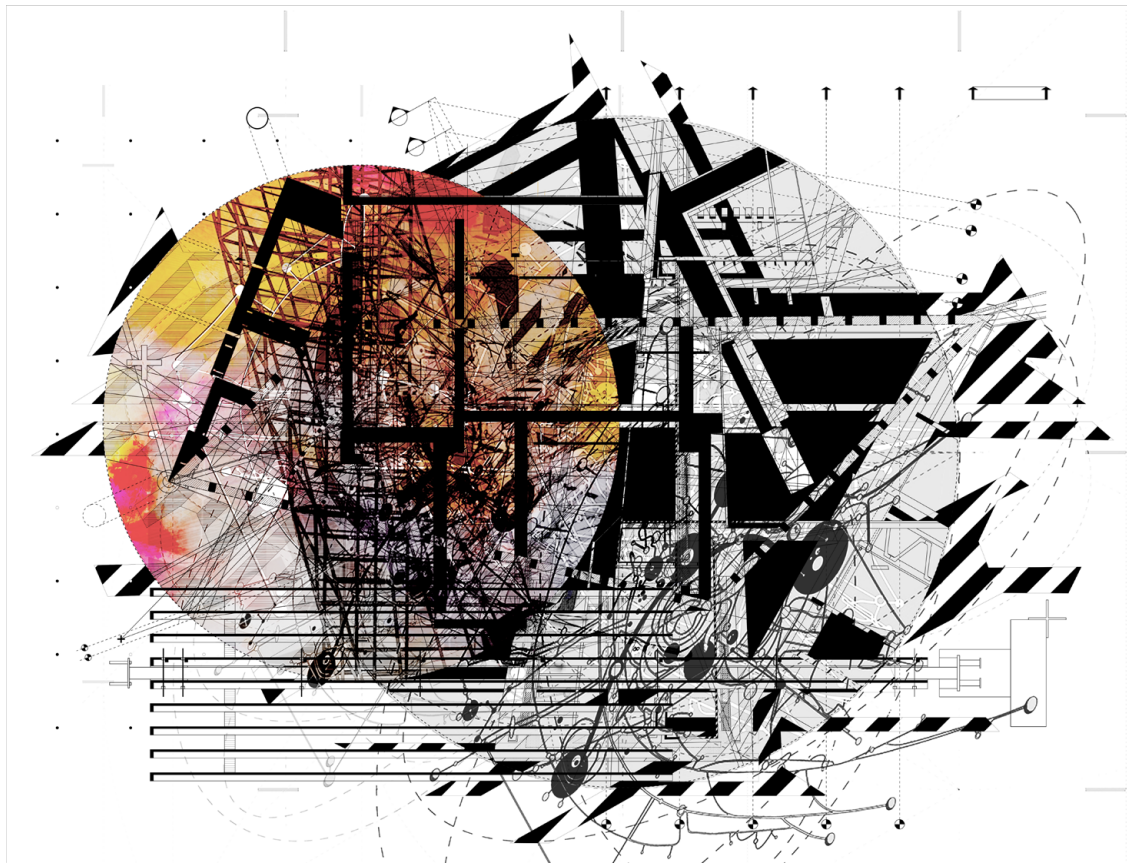
In its various narrative configurations, mapping along

does not reproduce the ordering principle of the analytical encounter but rather tries to chart a movement. I am interested in the narrative of a topography of e-motions. A medium that connects being to space and engages the seduction of architecture and its places of the mind. Emotional topography is about an itinerary, a psychological journey by which one comes to experience being. It is a kind of cartography of place whose compositional lines touch our inner being and draw place in the manner of an intimate landscape. This is a visual construct whose porosity is the very system of our interior, the ‘stuff’ of our inner fabric, a place where lines become a space, an architecture of the unconscious.

According to Félix Guattari (2011), we have the unconscious we deserve.¹ For him, the unconscious is something that we drag around with ourselves both in our gestures and daily objects.² Leading us into believing that the subjectivity of the unconscious is immanent to our ‘essential nature’. The unconscious is in constant reterritorialisation and deterritorialisation whilst moving conscientiously. Dreams constitute a tangible-abstraction of the different material aspects of our waking life. Different logics of intensity are combined, even rhizomised upon themselves. Here, the unconscious is an imaginative process to be unleashed,

1 - Félix Guattari (2011) *The Machinic Unconscious: Essays in Schizoanalysis*, trans. T. Adkins, (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e)), 9

2 - Ibid., 10



Bea Martin, Asynthetonic Projections, 2019

and in doing so epitomises a creative poesis at the threshold of being. The unconscious is further theorised as a 'factory' capable of non-essentialist desiring-production.³ Content is always inextricably linked to an inhabited field. If the unconscious is a machine then it can recreate itself according to its position within a field of relations that situate, place, and eventually move it.⁴

My topographic explorations attempt to reveal, or better perhaps, bring into awareness this field through which all our experiential memories are mediated – a 'field of being'. My interest is in how architectural space registers in such field, or psyche. This includes a graphic exploration of cognitive processes and their visual representation, a structural mapping of mental space through frames and folds of memory, as well as the tectonic field in which

3 - Félix Guattari, Gilles Deleuze, (1983) *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; Reprint edition)

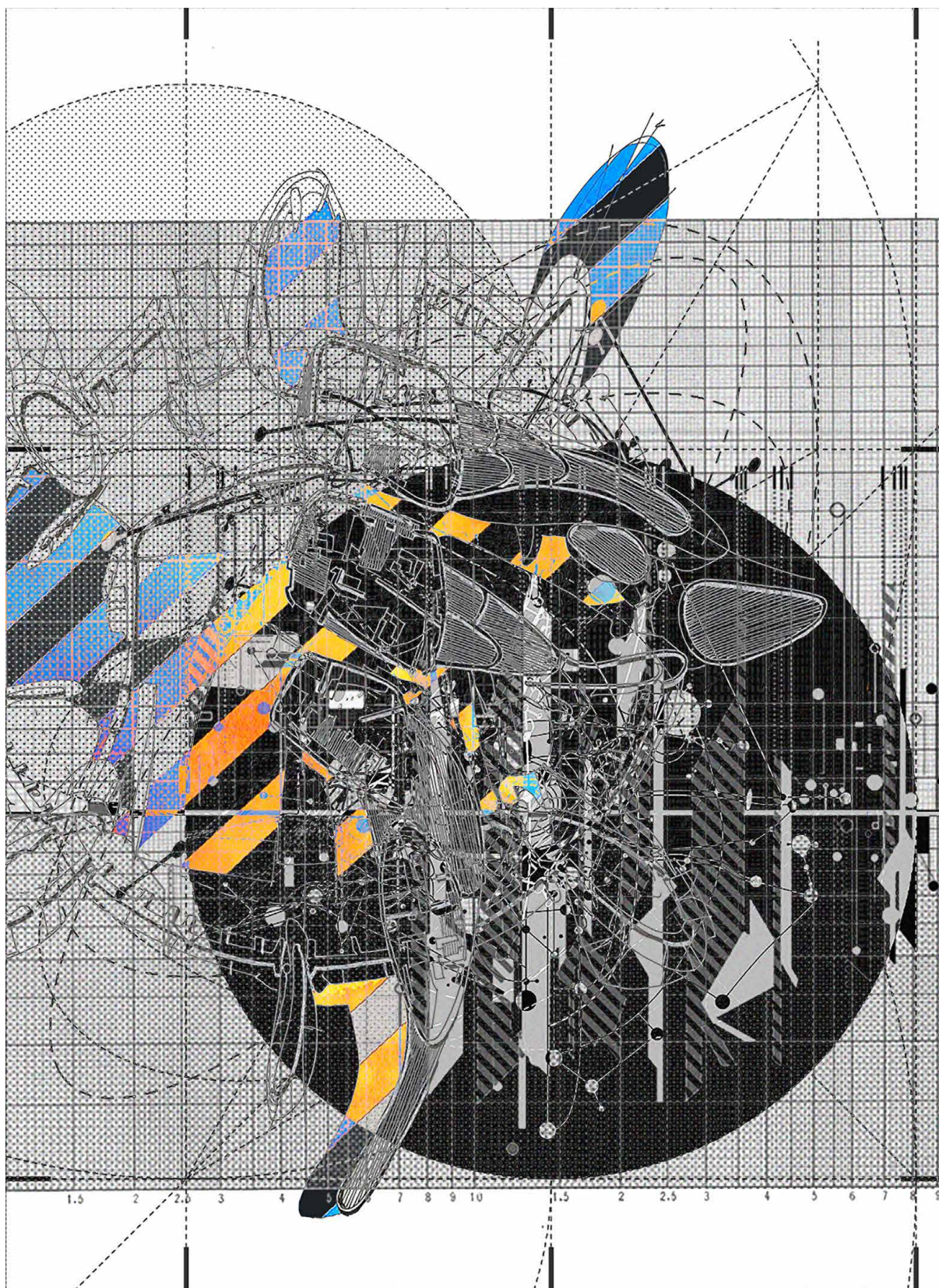
4 - Ibid.

the psychoanalytic encounter between narrator and narrative takes place on a drawing.

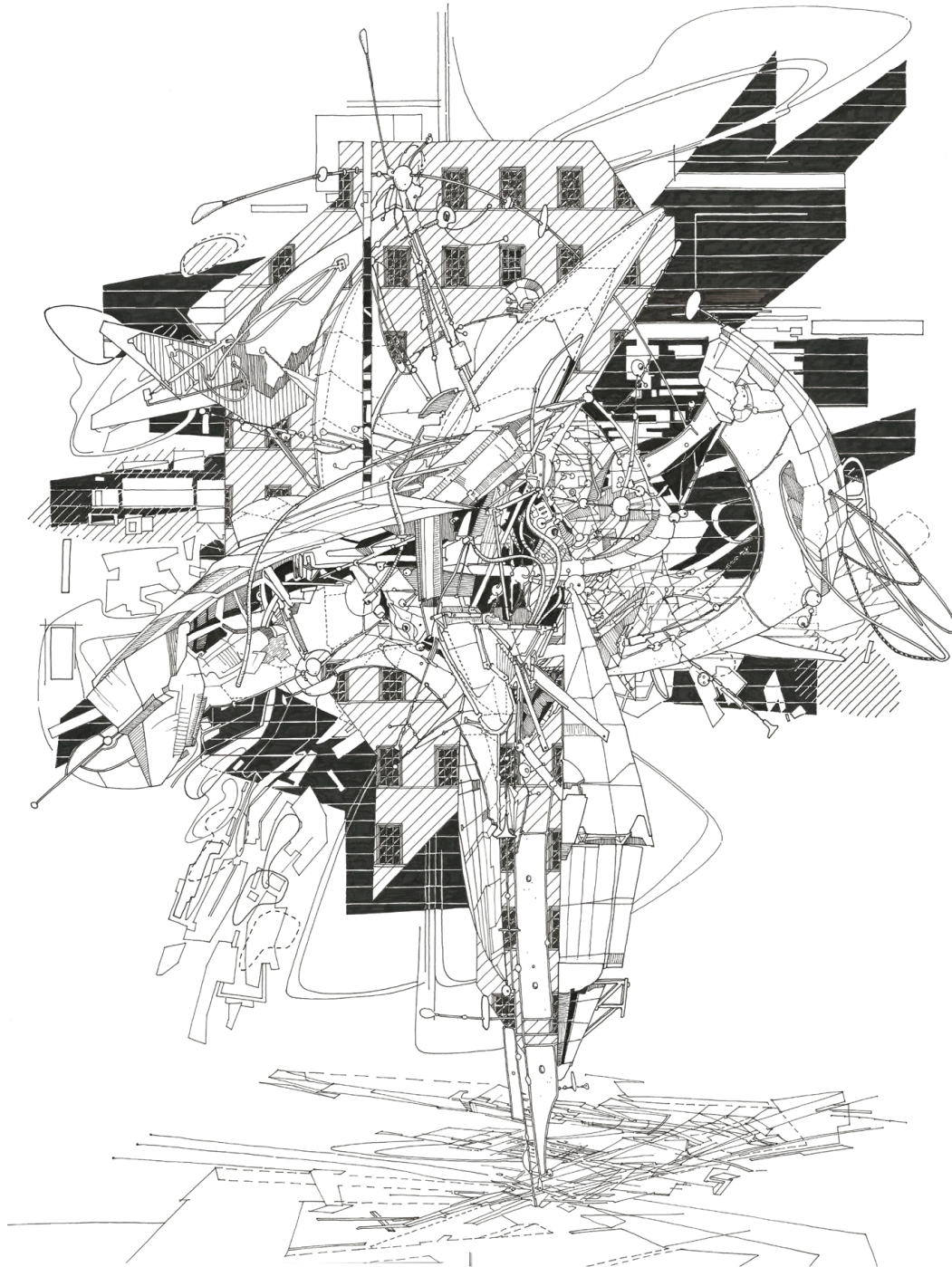
Drawing as a Machinic Assemblage

A drawing should be conceived as a machinic assemblage – a drawing that is multiple. Its function or meaning no longer depending on an interior truth or identity, but on the assemblages, it forms with other drawings.

When Deleuze and Guattari talk about machinic assemblages they refer to the domain of physical objects, how they interrelate, and how they affect and are affected by one another. Here, a machine is not merely a technological object rather an open apparatus to its environment. A functional arrangement of heterogeneous flows and self-organising interactions. Like a machine, the function of a drawing is not to represent or convey information, but to repeat. I am not interested in how drawing represents, but in what



Bea Martin, Terrain Vague: Expectant Condition(ing), 2019



Bea Martin, The Mirror Cracked from Side to Side, 2020

drawing does. A sort of performative approach to representation.

Within a field of emotions, the topographic relationships of component parts are not stable and fixed; rather, they can be mis-placed, dis-placed, and re-placed amongst different fields, thus testing processes of coding, stratification, and territorialisation. A drawing that is made up of conditional articulations, hierarchies, compositions, and stratified fields. This is a drawing made from other drawings.

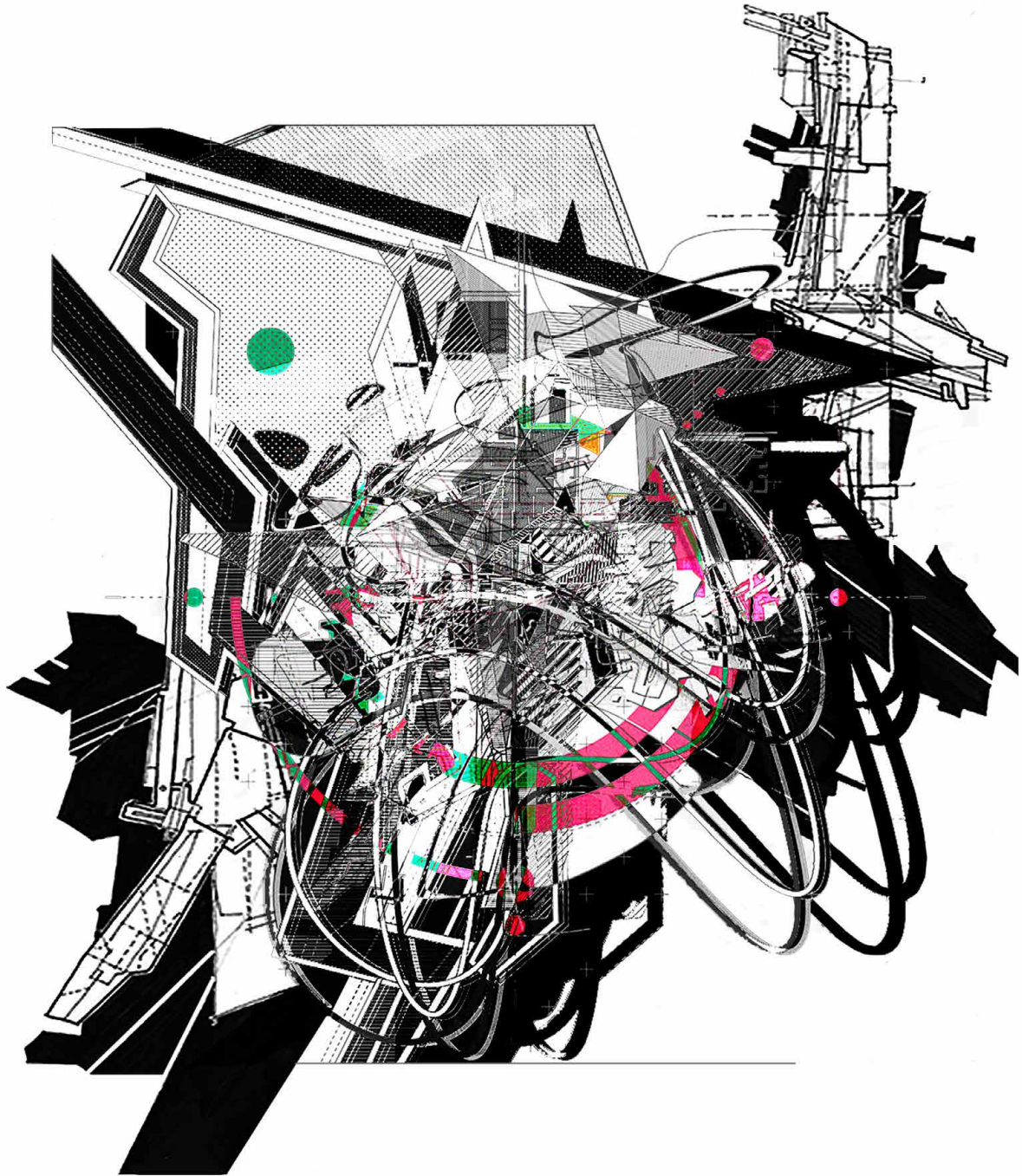
My methodology draws an analogy to the work of Deleuze and Guattari by exploring drawing as an assemblage. An exploration of how the drawing is put together and stratified as a subject, and a careful manoeuvre through the bleak conception of the 'drugged body' provided by these two philosophers. I argue that a drawing should, ultimately, be valued for what it can do (rather than what essentially 'is') and that assemblages should be assessed in relation to their enabling, or blocking, of a drawing's potential to become other.

e-Motional min(e)d fields

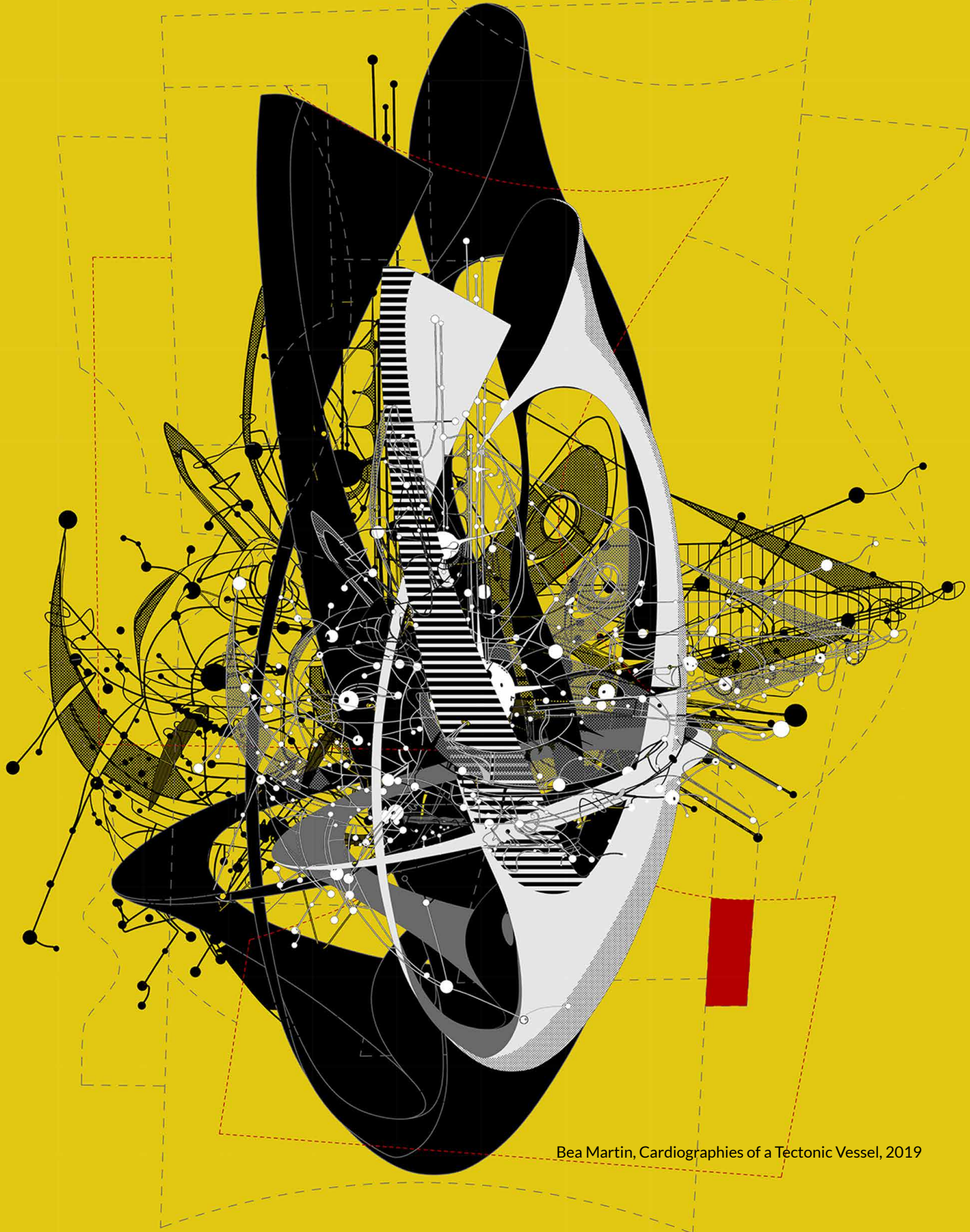
The topography that entertains the unconscious includes inhabitants and the forms of their passage through spaces, including places of being. This schizo-landscape is a terrain of vessels. A place that both "holds and moves". Here, the idea of the vessel carries a double meaning: that of the ship and that of the artery⁵; it implies fluidity and map-reading. These geo[ographies] of being and vessels must entail some sort of charting. A navigational system of representations ordered and moulded as itineraries to be experienced in a viewing that mandates motion.

What is explored and weathered here is the plan of an unconscious topography in which emotions can 'move' us, for they themselves organise as a route. These are mapped as tectonic transformations, drawn as moving expressions. An embodied motion at different speeds that activate the senses in an aggregated sequence of emotional responses. Evoking emotion in the shape of motion as one travels through it. This exploration of emotions in the formation of experiential drawn spaces dictates a collision of conceptual ambiguities; these can be in the form of boundaries, surfaces, and passages. A dialectical terrain of countless thresholds.

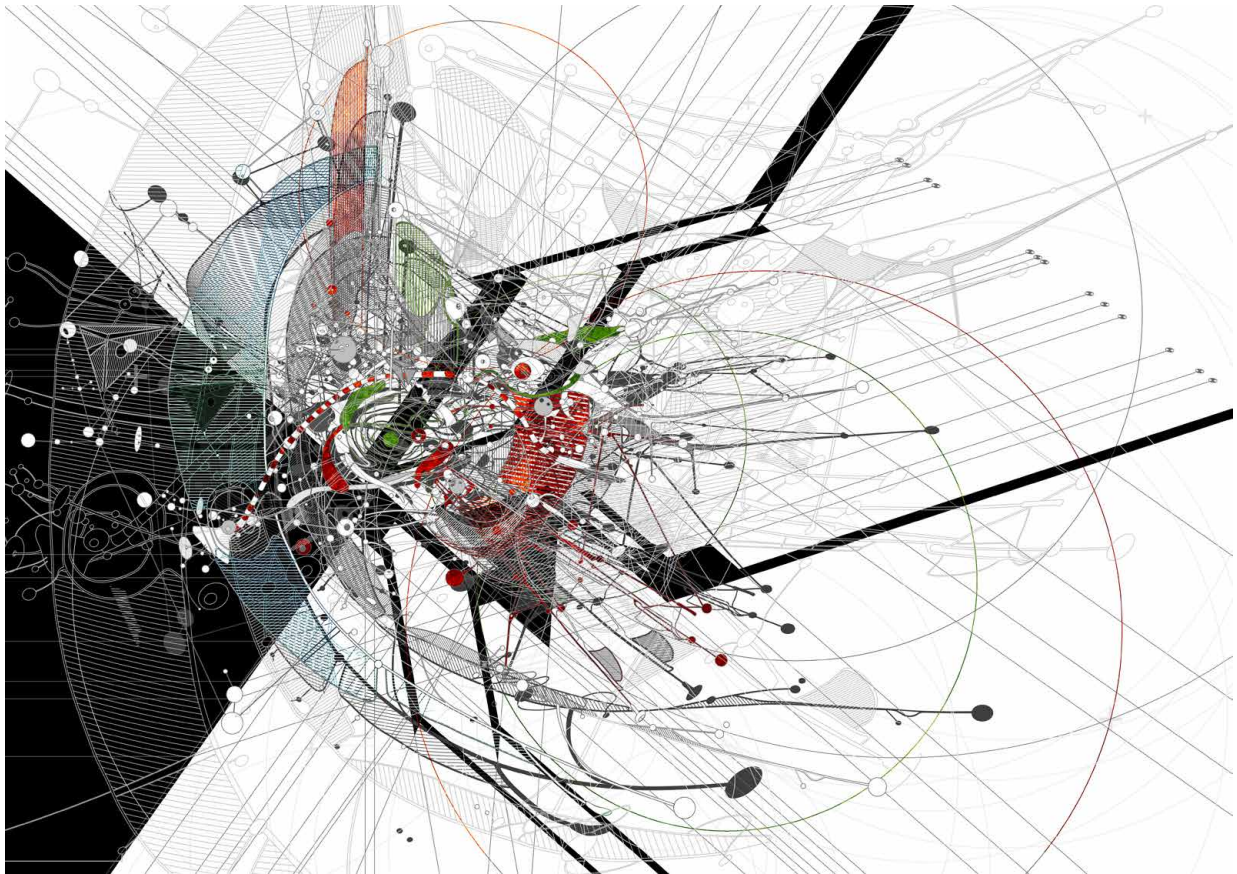
5 - as in blood vessel



Bea Martin, Stratified de-Location, 2020



Bea Martin, *Cardiographies of a Tectonic Vessel*, 2019



Bea Martin, *Stillness in Motion*, 2017

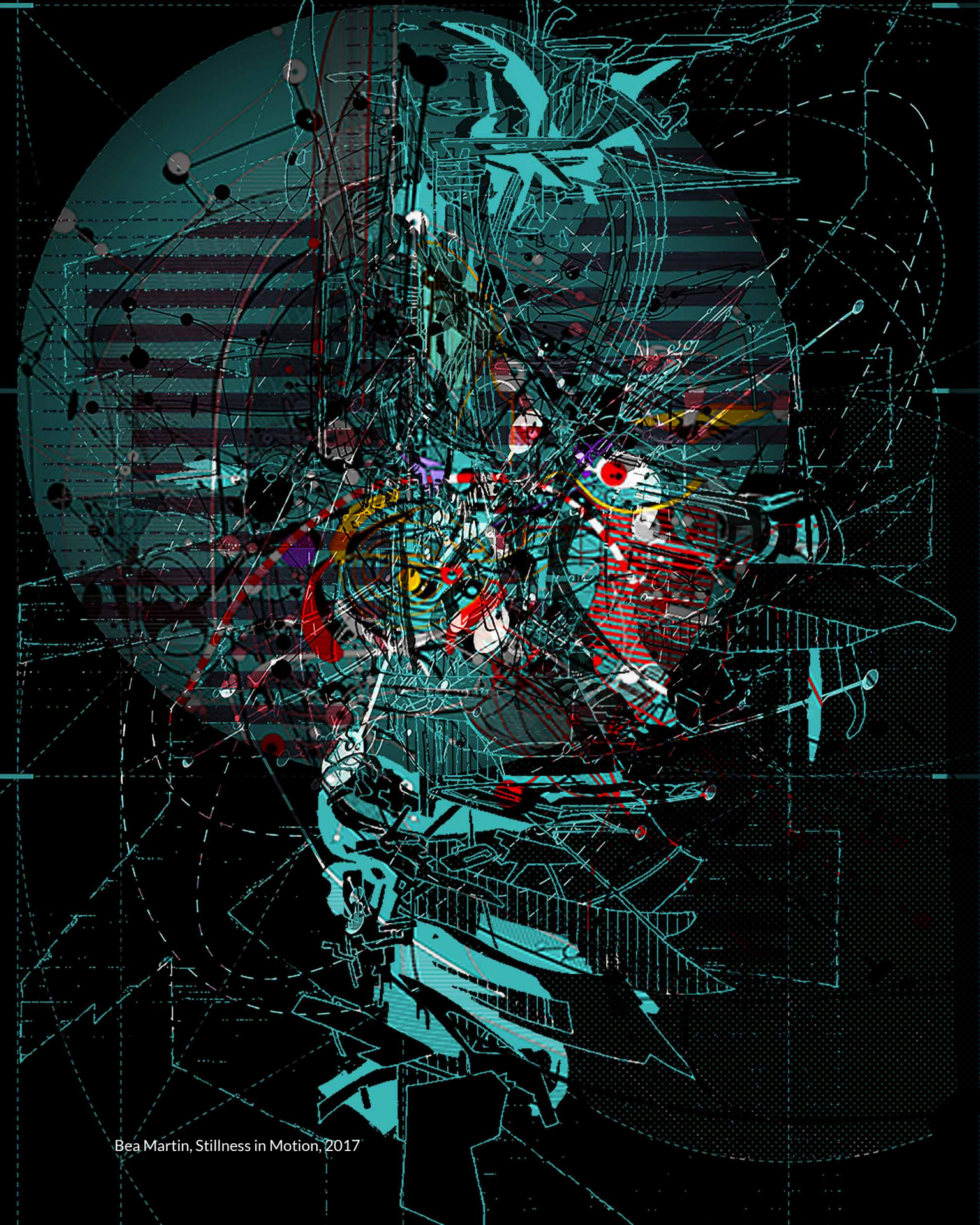
The use of the word 'ambiguity' here is not a literary attempt; the aim is to explore the traces, to manipulate the lines, to prod the unconscious and uncover unspoiled territories of the mind and perhaps attempt at some measure of solidity. The mutable properties of words and their ability to carry multiple meanings in a variety of ways, are a major component of poetic language, as they are for visual expression. In no way, such narrative is meant to work as a license to search for multiple meanings with no awareness of the controlling context in which ambiguity may appear; on the contrary, it is fundamental to consider, purpose, context, and condition, in addition to the running backdrop narrative, when explicating meaning.

In so doing, this intentional discursive geography is mobilised by multiple tactics of reading space, transforming the descriptive dialogue into a representational discourse, a narrative mapping of places and being, a field of "inhabitants and vessels."

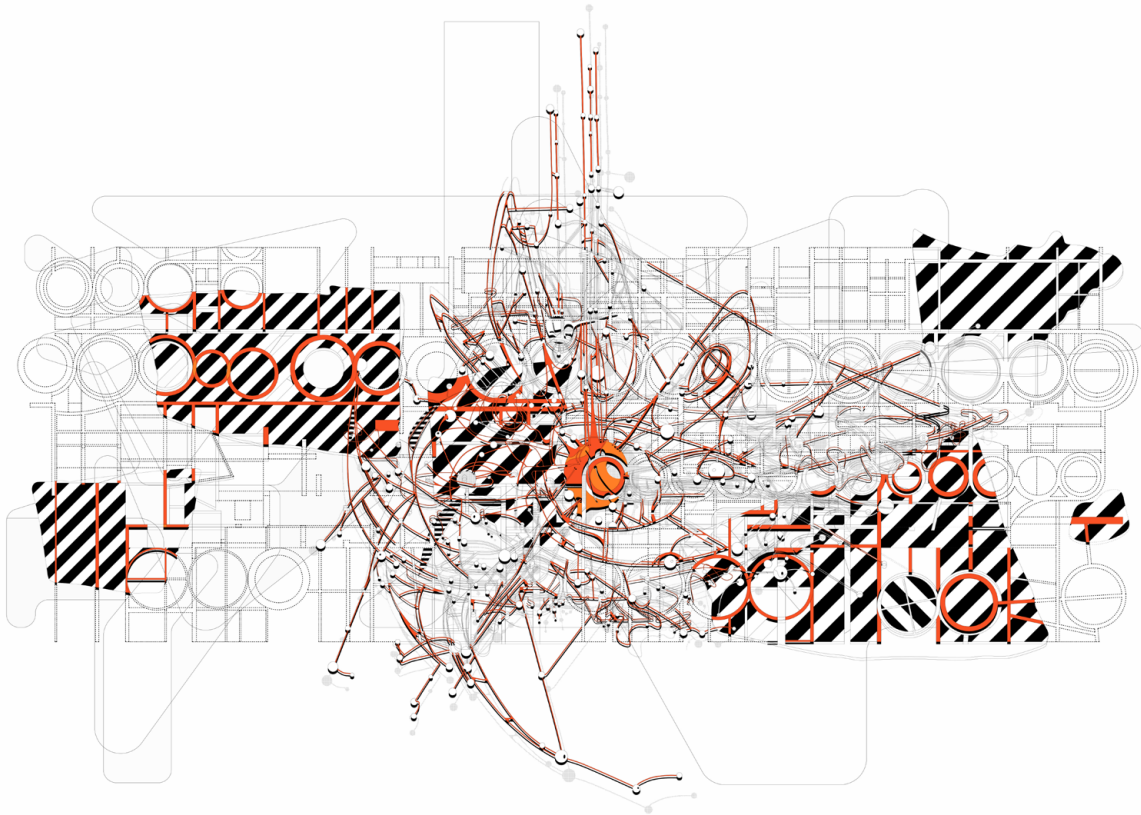
Mnemonic Palimpsests

Over driven by a topographic impulse, these visual constructs explore the inner direction of a field of being and expose its interior disposition. Cartographic framed edits, where the moving construct itself is theorised, metaphorically, as a vessel, as a means of transportation that is carrying us away on an emotional journey; a vessel that becomes the vehicle for emotions. These emotional fields are no longer mapped by a distant eye, rather a terrain mapped as "mind of one's own", topographic narratives as if in a memory theatre.

The spatial agency of architecture has provided a potential framework for organising knowledge. Specific mnemonic techniques connected to the art of memory, such as the spatial recollection of loci, of topoi –one would walk around in one's memory as if in a building inspecting the objects therein—a place inhabited by mnemonic journeys through architectural spaces.



Bea Martin, Stillness in Motion, 2017



Bea Martin, Ojibwe, 2018

Once visualised, these decontextualised objectiles, extracted from different intervals, different places and belonging to different orders, are all able to take on the same significance on the aggregated machinic palimpsest. Memory here is repetition, but with a difference, it is not recitation. Repetition creates a variation in the way things appear, paving the way to novelty. Memory needs to be trans-figurative. It demands a de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation. Hegel did not reduce memory to a kind of dull recitation of the past; he wanted to create something permanently moving. A wheel that turns, returns, and turns again. His memory theatre was a kind of *perpetuum mobile*.⁶ An endlessly recreating and re-enacting memory mechanism.

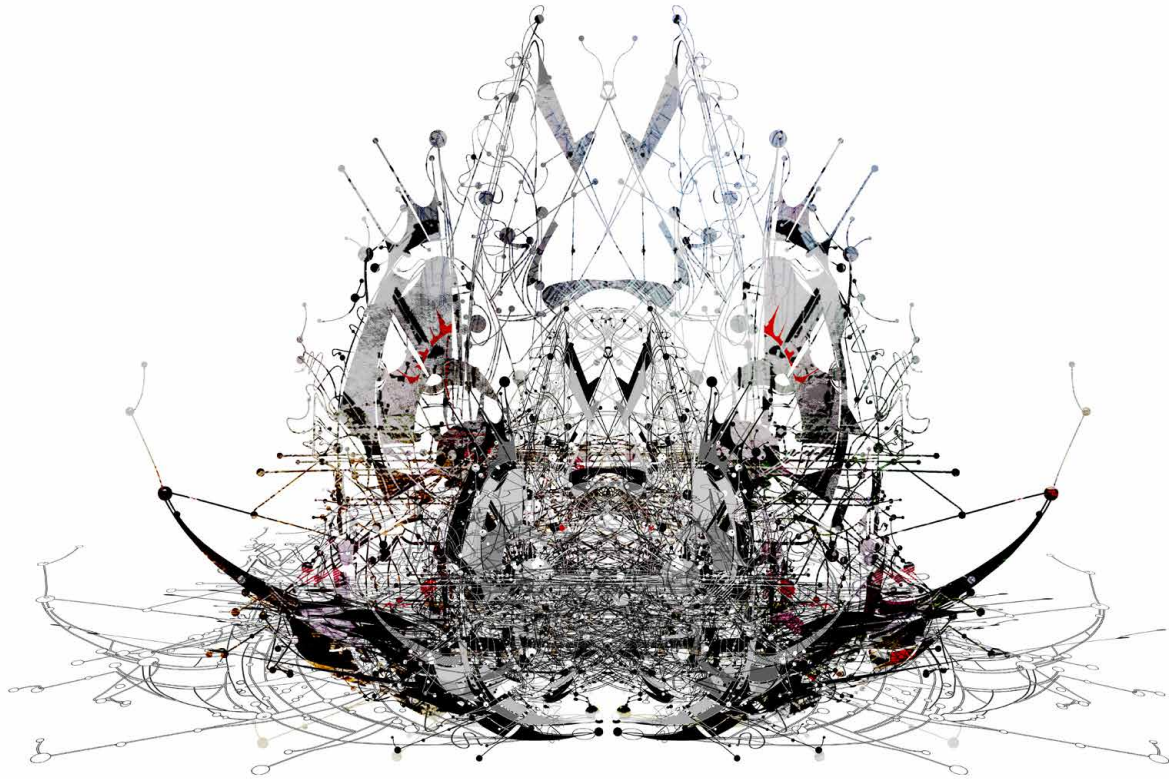
Spatial representations include tectonic machinery in its topography. I eager for an architecture: a 'room' in which to wander and make my own. The making of topography as a room of one's own is an anthropological process that

has travelled a route of pastiche collations. This, however, is not a simple ad-hoc process. The construction of this fuzzy room involves becoming the space and embarking on a dominant mnemonic discourse of interiority. Cartography no longer refers to an actual context, but it shows the latent memory or meaning of a site turning it into a surrealist landscape of the mind, a system capable of influencing further mind places.

Analogue Places of Mind

These mind places and their spatial relation, I can imagine them hollow, barren, and vacant, but I cannot imagine them without a space of being. Constructs comprise the probability of conditions but also require a taxonomy. In the realm of the infinite presence of being, one's instinctual functioning dictates the multiplicity of positions and conditionings. The various strata of consciousness are to be intruded in readiness for new paradigms. It is this field of heavy sedimentation of the contingent detachment of Being that one is to proceed with the process of interiority.

⁶ - Simon Critchley, *Memory Theatre* (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions; 2014), 74



Bea Martin, The Butterfly, 2018

J. G. Ballard (1991) wrote of a man driven to madness by awareness of interiority in his story "The Enormous Space": "By shutting out the world my mind may have drifted into a realm without yardsticks or sense of scale. For so many years I have longed for an empty world, and may have unwittingly constructed it within this house. Time and space have rushed in to fill the vacuum that I have created."⁷ The extra-dimensional features of the mental space that lend reality to a hidden world of illusions, as Ballard writes, "came to claim me." In the darkness of our thoughts the invisible grows visible. This is a meta-place, a space with no physical limits. These figments, fabrications, hallucinations, are a representation of place within a place in constant recitation. A supplementary scale interferes with the attempt at conquering these shadowy unknown interiors, natural order undyingly disturbed, geometry 7 - J. G. Ballard, War Fever (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux; 1991), 128

as we know it, fails to respond. Paralysis sets in, caused by the realisation that the underlying problem with representation is the dilemma of understanding the place that envelopes us all. Yet the question lingers: what do we mean by place?

Here, I take hold of Eugene Thacker's book (2011) *In the Dust of This Planet* reworking his three ways of interpreting the world⁸ in an attempt at a possible enunciation of place: 1) the place-for-us, or the place in which we live, the place of consciousness; 2) the place-in-itself, or the unreachable place that we turn into the place-for-us, the place of pre-consciousness, and 3) the

8 - Eugene Thacker writes that there are three ways of interpreting the world as we know it: 1) the world-for-us, 2) the world-in-itself, and 3) the world-without-us. Eugene Thacker, *In the Dust of This Planet: Horror of Philosophy Vol. 1* (Winchester, UK; Washington, USA: Zero Books; 2011), 4-6.

place-without-us, or the unearthly and abstract place, the place of the unconscious. The place-in-itself may co-exist with the place-for-us. By contrast, the place-without-us cannot exist side-by-side with the conscious place-for-us; the place-without-us is the subtraction of the bodily-us from the place itself; it is the place of being. Thus, choosing one place over another plays a crucial role in the construction of visual assemblages for each place of being that takes on a whole different condition than any other: Conscious, Preconscious, and Unconscious positions.

Reference

- Ballard, J. G. (1991). *War Fever*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux
- Critchley, S. (2014). *Memory Theatre*. London: Fitzcarraldo Editions
- Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (1983). *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; Reprint edition.
- Guattari, F. (2011). *The Machinic Unconscious: Essays in Schizoanalysis*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e)
- Thacker, E. (2011). *In the Dust of This Planet: Horror of Philosophy Vol. 1*. Winchester: Zero Books