

Reflecting on Architecture through Creative Writing and Blogging

INDI PhD Research Proposal & FRQSC Application
-Firdous Nizar





Thesis Title

Reflecting on Architecture
Through Creative Journalism:
Blogging as a Design Thinking Model



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Reflecting on Architecture
Through Creative Journalism:
Blogging as a Design Thinking Model

Research Question

How could reflective blogging creatively inform contemporary design thinking and making methodologies in architecture pedagogy?

Abstract

- Contemporary architecture discipline - Object-oriented professional practice
- Less importance to research-based design processes and study of lived experiences
- *Creative Reflection-On-Practice can equally contribute to architectural production.*
- Potential of *reflective blogs* for architecture and design explorations through non-conformist methods:
 - Digital storytelling and multimedia as opposed to conventional print magazines and books on architecture
- Architecture journalism and critical theory not recognized in the discipline (pedagogy + practice)

Abstract

- Recent mandates on open access publishing - blogs are emerging as vital formats of ‘digital scholarship’.
- Assess impacts of *blogging as a reflective and pedagogical design thinking model* on architecture:
 - Comparative analysis and mapping of existing blogs, a series of gaps in contemporary blogging in architectural design will be identified in order to experiment, develop and test an *alternative blog format* as a preliminary version of reflective and pedagogical blogging for architectural education.
- Contribution: Students, educators and practitioners can learn and share constructive insights from previous designs for future projects.

Keywords

- architectural design
- cultural journalism
- research blogging
- design communication
- reflective writing
- design thinking model
- spatial narratives
- conversational design
- speculative architecture
- architectural pedagogy



Funding

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Duration :	Maximum 12 terms
Announcement of results :	End of April 2021

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FRQSC Application

Deadline:

14 October, 2020, 4pm

Eligibility:

Canadian + International

CV:

Canadian Commons (FRQSC)

Internal Review:

N/A

Recommendation Letters:

N/A



FRQSC Application

Activity details

- Registration
- ◆ Applicant
- ◆ Pre-eligibility
- ◆ Title and research fields
- ◆ Program / Host organization
- ◆ University record
- ◆ Scholarships and awards obtained
- Experience and achievements
- **Project or program description**
- Bibliography
- Partnerships
- Other documents
- Signature and submission



FRQSC Application

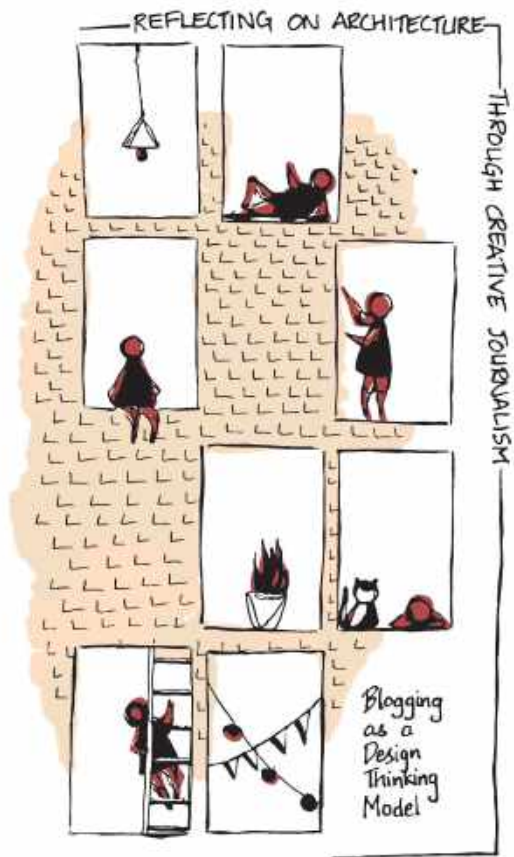
DESCRIPTION DU PROJET DE RECHERCHE

Rédigez clairement votre projet de recherche de manière à répondre aux critères d'évaluation définis dans les règles du programme. Précisez l'originalité de la problématique, la contribution du projet à l'avancement des connaissances, l'approche théorique, les objectifs de la recherche, l'approche méthodologique et le calendrier de réalisation du projet.

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FRQSC Application

DESCRIPTION DES INTENTIONS DE RECHERCHE

Fabrice Niaz - NZE21091

Refléter à l'architecture par journalisme créatif. Les blogs comme un outil de la pensée de conception

Research Intent

My background in architecture school has given me many insights on design thinking and professional practice in the discipline that has grown to socio-culturally complex over the years, making it harder for novice practitioners to "fit in". I believe that the open-ended and ambiguous nature of architecture and design education has made it difficult to find the "right way" to be trained and better equipped for the real-world challenges it still-banking for the industry. However, more and more global economic trends have compelled the field of architecture to rethink the ways in which it addresses the gaps between academics and practice through advanced technological interventions that promote augmentations of our design skills and services. As an architecture student that covered the world of design research to find answers on ever-possible of holistic knowledge exchange to the discipline, my research position is one of constant oscillation between the roles of a curious observer and an aspiring design practitioner.

However, the digitization of architecture as a service has been further propelled by social historical moments including the disruptive practices that we find ourselves in. This has greatly affected creative collaborations amongst students and instructors, whose foundations of peer interaction and collaboration have primarily been built through physical movement within the circulating spaces of design studios in architecture schools. In this sense of the state that has socially distanced many communities of design practices, the "anonymity" of various yet virtual human interactions have been both a saving grace as well as an acute awareness to the norms of architecture and design of the future. While you might argue that these "workarounds" necessarily damage conventional modes of instruction and practice, this research is relevant now more than ever in constituting to the confidence threatened by the socio-cultural disciplines through digital interventions that embrace and overcome their systemic flaws in unexpected ways.

I approach this research with an open mind in order to inform and judge architectural pedagogy for healthier integration of digital tools in the complex processes of design thinking and making. Therefore, I expect novice instructors and facilitators of design learning to be as emphatic in this quest to maximize values of self-reflection and inclusive collaboration amongst students and enthusiasts using online blogging as a platform for creative expression as they eventually venture into real-world problem-solving and solving experiences (linked to holistic knowledge exchange).

Context and Problematic

The architecture discipline has been primarily focused on professional practice that is object-oriented, though primarily "alone" visual representations that brand and market the designs of buildings and their spaces. Though various studies, it has been brought to light that adequate research on architecting design process and how experiential through creative reflection on practice can equally contribute to architectural practice and profession. While reflective journaling and critical theory has been around for decades, its significance to the discipline has not been fully established either in architectural pedagogy nor in practice. It has been observed that architect and designers who have creative writing and communication skills receive their "edge" of learning while encountering a work of architecture or design philosophy" (Morris 2019). The critical subjectivity of the form of cultural journalism arose through the projection of the author's taste, opinion, and personality at the cultural fields of architecture and journalism. This marks at the lack of a formal structure to train research-oriented architects and designers to pursue the path of architecture documentation as there is no fixed form or "style" per se in architecture design (Lange and Lange 2012).

As a prior student of architecture journals, magazines were so much references that greatly influence design trends and direct overall books on architecture and design that were carefully curated over many years (Hartley 2016; Mahr 2017). Although books provide more detailed and richer discursive, great magazines gained traction on account of their ease to publications, distribution and consumption (Lange 2010, 197). By the early twentieth century, the information conveyed on "little" magazines and professional/trade journals began featuring in formal academic journals such the advent of specialized architectural education programs which were otherwise rare before the turn of the century (Foka 2016). Consolidated primarily by architecture students, educators and researchers, academic journals have found readership in the discipline that continues to rely on both commercial and self-published resources with more images and technical drawings that vector reflections and analysis (Harris 2016). However, with increasing emphasis laid on design research to complement the current practice-heavy discipline of architecture, academic journals in the humanities are looking toward a more digital that analog archival of research and design material (Hartley et al., 2016).

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In the late twentieth century, architecture and design blogs have taken over much of the daily online content consumed by researchers as well as practitioners in the design industry. With recent emphasis on open access publishing, open access peer-reviewed are looking toward blogs as vital forums of "digital scholarship" (Wicks 2011). Although blogs form a higher frequency of content generation and publication than periodicals, blogging in its current format has limitations in adopting a critical voice as well as producing quality content on a regular basis that is historically inclusive of multiple narratives from the discipline. "I believe the focus of the attention on architectural criticism has largely been on the means of delivery rather than the form. The review is still the review. The blog is something else, and its effect on architecture and criticism is still to be determined" (Lange and Lange 2012). Hence, the proposed research recognizes the potential of reflective blogging for architecture and design applications through non-conformist methods of digital sampling and analysis as opposed to conventional print magazines and books on architecture. These blogs could contribute to the collective endeavours of design research and education with an aim to balance the architectural discipline between research and practice. As a result, future designs could be more informed by past and present experiences and narratives, without including unnecessary insights.

Research Question : How could reflective blogging and contemporary architectural journalism creatively inform design thinking and making processes in architecture studio pedagogy?

Hypothesis : The state of architectural journalism has seen many shifts in its dissemination of knowledge owing to technological advancements and blogging can be seen as a contemporary form of reflection on practice. In the architectural blog, *Architecting the Future*, Akshaya Mehta advocates that "architectural journalism is also reflective. We can understand our mistakes and hence, learn not to repeat them in the future, and we can propagate advantages and the positive so that they can be replicated ahead, keeping at mind the conceptual and contextual details" (Morris 2019). Therefore, blogging as a design thinking model may have great educational potential in relation to digital communication methods such as their learning types "senior, multidirectional and non-linear" (Hicks, Meier, and Rousseau 2019). Furthermore, reflective blogging in architectural journals can produce dynamic responses that may have an impact on architectural design research and pedagogy. Therefore, the research aims to assess the impact of blogging as a reflective and pedagogical design thinking model in architecture where students, education and, eventually, practitioners could benefit from the constructive insights for future design projects. Through comparative analysis and mapping of existing blogs, a series of gaps in contemporary blogging in architectural design will be identified in order to experiment, develop and test an alternative blog format as a preliminary version of reflective and pedagogical blogging for architectural education.

Objectives

1. To identify and characterize the different architecture and design blogs around the world
2. To form an analytical grid that helps map the blogs in relation to architectural design research and pedagogy
3. To gather key data of each of the blogs that were mapped as architecture research.
4. To analyze and compare the reflective nature of the characterized collected data in these research blogs
5. To experiment an alternative blog based on the gaps identified in previous phases of this research
6. To test the criteria of the architectural blog and their "reflective and pedagogical" capacity.

Theoretical Framework & Methodology : The research will formulate an analytical grid through theories of "reflection-on-practice" and "tacit knowledge" (Schön 1984) to study blogging as a means to look back and initially reflect on the design process while being an active designer. These theories by Schön highlight the creative intentions of a designer that allow them to learn hands-on while drawing insights from previous projects and methods to propose future innovations. This theory an interested with empirical perspectives of the "science of design" of space and "scientific methodology" (Gross 1980; Rittel 1980) against placid epistemological explorations of "phenomenology" (Merleau-Ponty 1964; Pollman 2012) and " lived spatial experiences" (Leifer 1991). The materialist approach to design of spaces as geometric entities are intertwined with the lived sensations of the designer in a space that is being conceptualized through the design thinking and making process. Studying the lessons between these perspectives would enable the research to accommodate the "open knowledge" (Votaw 2009) of the designer, including students and researchers, through their "sensational and corporeal" (Bafantua 2012) perceptions of site (space) they live in.

Hence, through these frameworks, the research will adopt methodologies that are intrinsically based on creative yet critical narratives of embodied spatial experiences in architecture and the both interaction. The analytical grid that would emerge from the theoretical framework will help in the objective of identifying scientific yet narrative characteristics of existing blogs that

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would allow experimenting a reflective and pedagogical alternative to contemporary architectural blogging. The theoretical framework will be adopted throughout the three main methodological phases of this research: (1) Identification, (2) Analysis and (3) Synthesis. The first phase of identification of the existing blogs in architecture and design adopts narrative inquiry as a qualitative research method. Narrative inquiry will be used to identify and gather relevant material from the blogs such as stories, pedagogical journals, field notes, lesson conversations, interviews, photos, and narrations of life experiences. The second phase of the research will focus on the comparative analysis and categorization of existing blogs based on various characteristics that enable mapping the blogs along a spectrum of artistic/poetic expression to scientific/rational accounts of architectural design. These characteristics will be identified through the analytical grid formulated using the theoretical framework of "reflection-on-practice" by Schön and "tacit knowledge" of designers by Rittel and Rittel. The research method adopted in this phase is order to analyze and map the blogs as: (1) Content analysis and (2) Critical Discourse analysis. Finally, the third phase of this research will entail the synthesis of the reflective and pedagogical characteristics derived from the analyzed blogs through an experimental alternative blog. This synthesis will begin by using the characteristics identified against the perceptions of the respective authors and make them through qualitative interviews and surveys. The resulting discussion would provide creative insights for the experimental blog which would be developed through the metaphors of "metaphor", "augmentation" and "speculation".

Contribution to Knowledge

"This is a significant and challenging step for scholars, especially when faced with norms and values which oppose, hinder or fail to recognize these forms of scholarship" (Wicks 2011). Only a few traditional and institutional scholars in more countries like India have interdisciplinary course options in architectural journalism (Morris 2019). Hence, the research seeks to create awareness on blogging as an emerging form of architectural journalism and representation that could be used as a learning tool for architecture students. This research thus aims to contribute to students' "capacity for invention" and "interpersonal understanding" that could redefine design pedagogical methodologies research with the pace of contemporary relations in media and architectural practice (Fitzner 1998).

How are objectives met, how and long-term contributions of this research to the architecture and design community
Short-term: The research will contribute to the integration of non-traditional modes of architectural design education through a written thesis that would propose reflective blogging as a design thinking model for architecture students. The research would also experiment an alternative blog on architecture and design that would serve as a preliminary version to the proposed format of "reflective and pedagogical" blogging and pedagogical design thinking models for architectural education.

Mid-term: The research would also look into collaborating with the authors of existing blog platforms in order to test and validate the characteristics identified that make architectural blogs "reflective and pedagogical". These collaborations would contribute to the ongoing redefinition of design thinking models for architectural education.

Long-term: The research would contribute to current changes to address real and design programs that would incorporate reflective blogging as a method of formalization/ritualization in architectural pedagogy. This would enable students to adopt blogging as a means of reflective thinking and designing upon in their architecture training.

Project Timeline

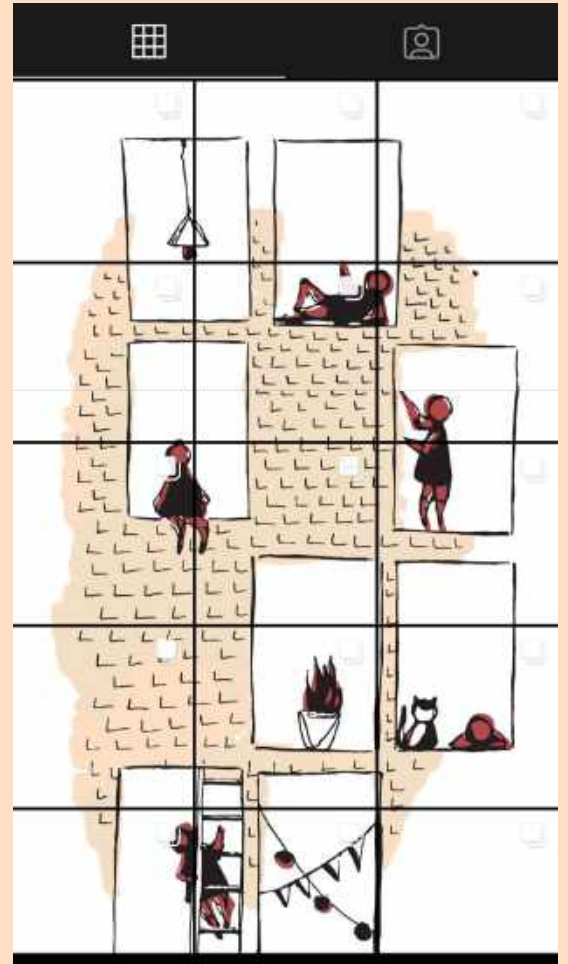
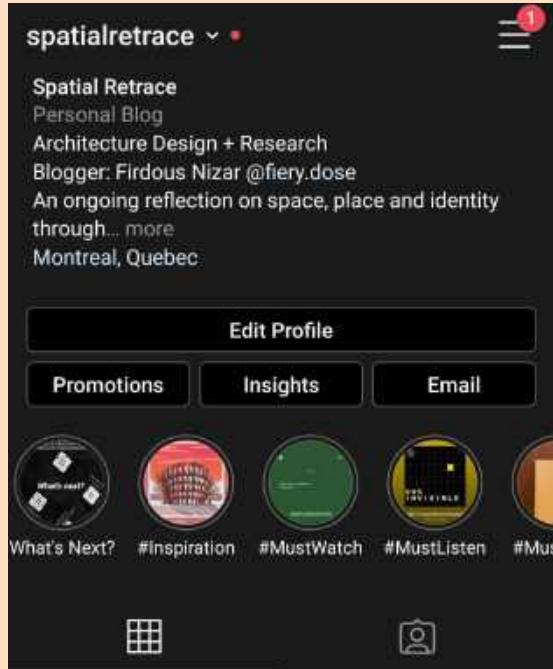
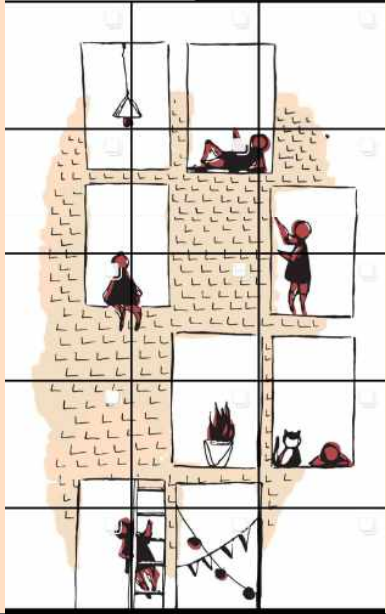
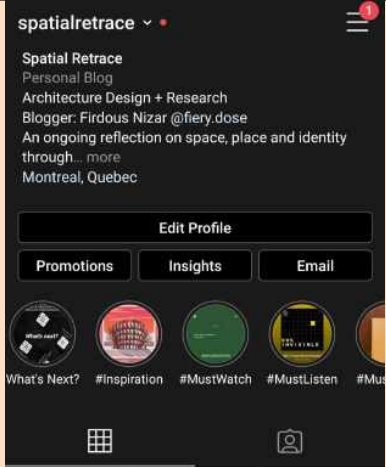
Year 1: The initial narrative investigation of a theoretical framework for identifying, classifying and categorizing key online architecture blogs in the research in terms of analytical integrity and innovative digital sourcing methods.

Year 2: The refinement of theoretical framework, analytical grid and initial comparison and mapping of the blogs identified. Preliminary surveys and initial interviews will also be taken for more relevance with the content of the blogs.

Year 3: Field studies and experimentation of the potential of the shortlisted blogs in architecture, studio classes in schools in Montreal. Detailed surveys, intensive workshops and interviews with students and instructors will be conducted this year.

Year 4: Conceptual, prototyping and testing of a proposed model of utilizing blogging for architecture studio pedagogy will be conducted through several iterations with students, instructors, researchers and practitioners.

my reflective blog: Spatial Retrace



Scope

The first phase of this research would be to identify and analyze architecture blogs, around the world. This comprehensive list of blogs for in-depth analysis will focus on architecture and design blogs over the past decade (2010 to present). The complete list of blogs to analyze will however be based on a finer series of criteria developed in their search. This will therefore entail an iterative process of identification and selection. Currently, the broad categories of blogs identified are: (1) Corporate Blogs, (2) Magazine Blogs, (3) Academic/Database Blogs, and (4) Personal Blogs. Illustrated through the contemporary discourse of the COVID19 pandemic and its impacts on architecture design and research, the following live list of blogs is a sampling of those to be studied:



ArchDaily
Education, Flexibility, and Openness: How the Borders Are Handling the Post-Coronavirus Crisis



Kollectif
MANIFESTO: Reconnecting Architecture During A Time we will experience



Architect
Up-Ed: Time, Space, and Adapting Room in the Age of Social Distancing



The Site Magazine
Transformational Strategy



Casalini Architect
How will we approach the health of our communities and our planet after COVID-19?



Rethinking The Future
10 Innovative Conceptual Public Space Design Post-Pandemic



Volume Zero
Back to Work: Reconnect Reconnect Reconnect: A Guide for Safe Workplace



Magazine Esquisses (OAG)
Confession (in person): reflection on opinions



Dialogue blog (Gender)
Signs of the Death of the Workplace: How Have Strains Emerged?



Life of an Architect (Bob Bossen)
End of Architecture School: Semesters COVID-19 Edition



Sreelka Mag
Public Problems: An Architecture of Infection and Environmental Control



Redshift (Autodesk)
Architects Are Redefining Remote Team Collaboration Under Lockdown



Talkitect (Lucas Gray)
The Field Feels Smaller



Domos (Editoriale Domos)
Design for Design: A manifesto against the coronavirus and for design



Dwell
10 Innovative Designs for Navigating Public Space During COVID-19



Abitars
Time and its Isolation

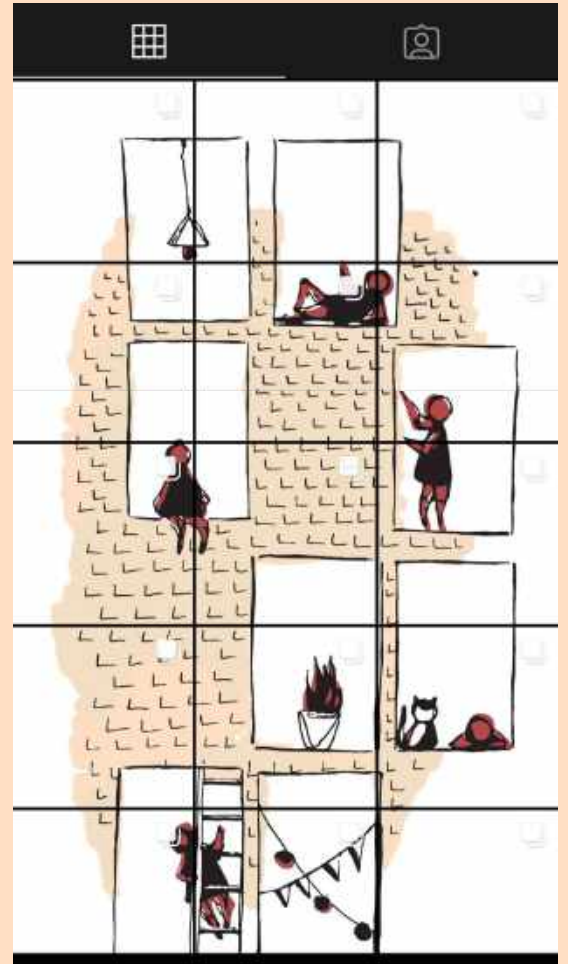
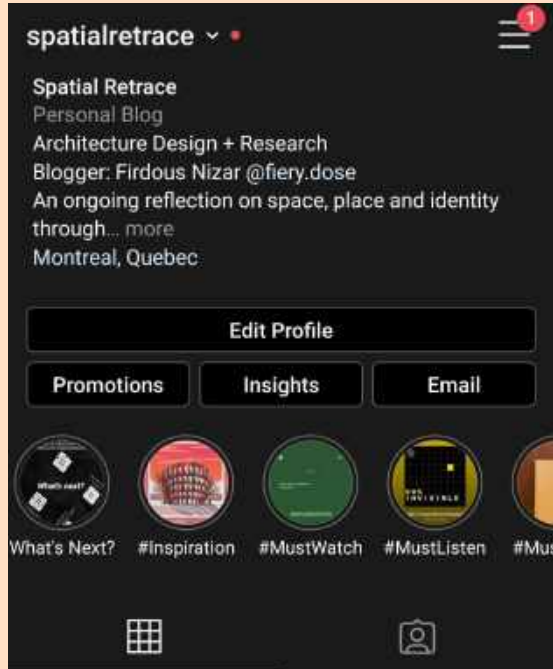
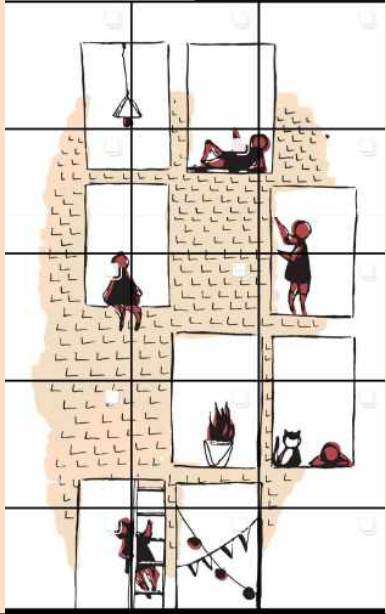
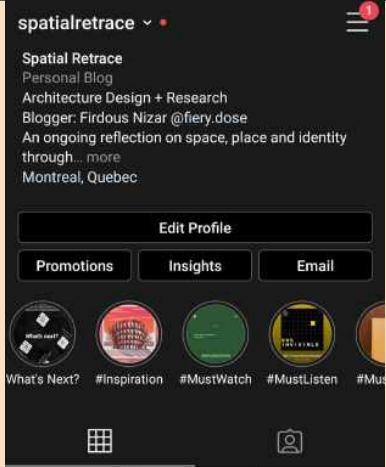


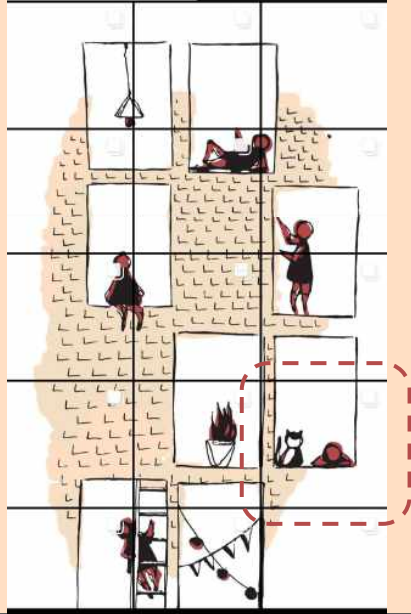
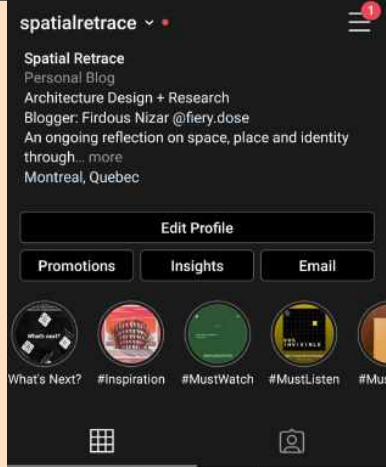
ArchiVibe
Designing for social interaction after Covid-19



Decen
From Billboards to Partnership: new ways to set business after

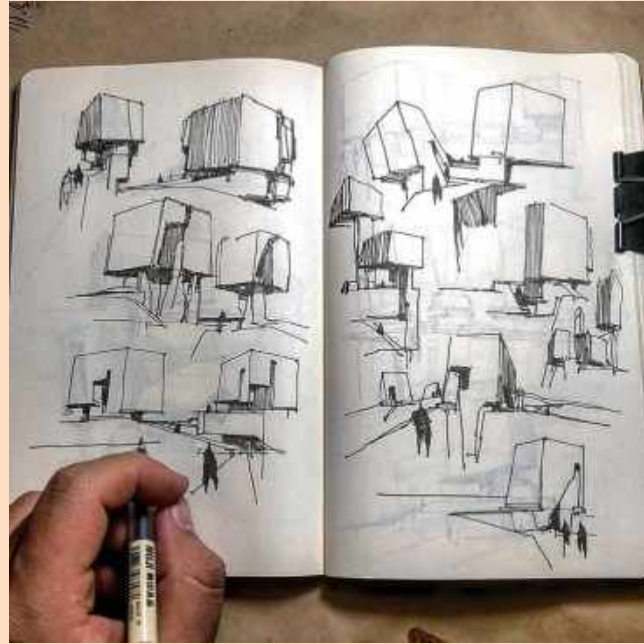
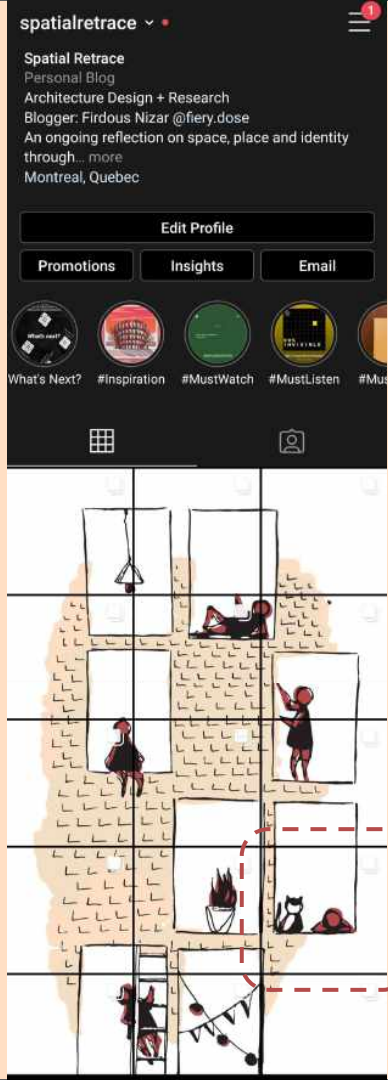
my reflective blog: Spatial Retrace





He attributes the door handle as your home greeting you with a handshake as you step into its warmth, not as a measure of temperature, but a feeling of gravitation that either soothes you or puts you on the spot endowing you with a myriad of responsibilities to sustain the moments of coming back to this space that would keep greeting you with many more warm handshakes.

my reflective blog: Spatial Retrace



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