

See

Use

● ● Create

See Use Create

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Experimental Practice

a journey

Throughout the fall semester of 2022 the course Experimental Practice took me and 19 other architecture students on a versatile journey around the globe. The first weeks of the course were spent at a Permaculture Farm outside of Trondheim. Split up into four groups we worked on the realization of an outdoor kitchen, a forest toilet, a horse shelter and a mobile chicken coop. The natural surroundings and the demands of our clients had to be considered carefully and sensitively. Together with four other students I worked on the realization of the outdoor kitchen. During the weeks in the forest, we had to deal with tough weather conditions while developing our concepts on site. This experimental approach of trial and error, of experimenting, constructing and deconstructing again was an intensive phase for the whole course. After finishing off the building phase with the first cookout surrounding the newly built outdoor kitchen, it was time to reflect on our process during two weeks of studio-based work and lectures. During this phase the focus was set on the connection between art and architecture and the different influences these two areas can have on each other and the approaches to architecture in different cultures and times throughout history.

The journey continued and took us across the globe to CEPT University in Ahmedabad, India. As part of the research project “Threats of Innovation” we had the chance to experience the Indian culture and traditional textile craft in an academic setting. Through a hands-on block-printing workshop each of us produced their own ornamented textiles. Together with faculty members and students from CEPT University we then combined the individual textile cloths and created an architectural space with it. The exhibition showcased the students work and some traditional fabrics. Back in Norway all students started to reflect on their experiences and designed an exhibition that showcases the interwoven experiences of all the students during the semester. In addition to the exhibition, we as students are reflecting on our personal journeys. This book is mine.



See Use Create

a reflection

This journal showcases my personal journey throughout the course *Experimental Practice*. It is my space to reflect on all the experiences I had during this time: impressions that turned into lessons, moments that turned into memories and seemingly coincidental circumstances and relationships that revealed themselves as transformative in the process. As I looked back on a semester full of emotions I started to write down words that came to my mind while reminiscing:

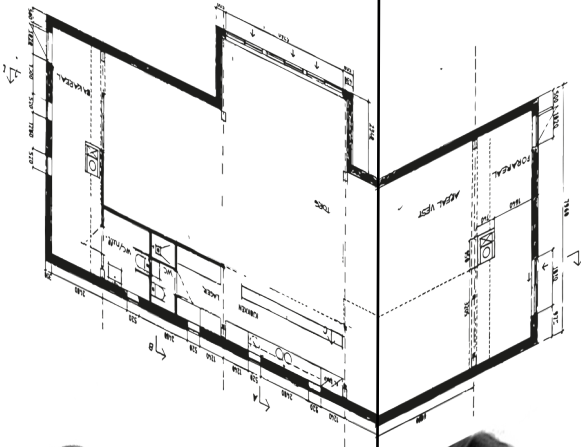
belonging longing finding
looking searching seeing
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place space stage theater
setting objects subjects
people humans users
nature
pattern composition
tradition technique
experiment experience memory
listening hearing understanding
telling sharing caring
tactile treated touched
craft create creation

The essence of it all can be brought down to three big learnings for me: I learned to *see* places, objects and patterns and *use* material, tools and technique to *create* space, narratives and memories.

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EXHIBITION

RETHINKING SPACES



As an equivalent to the personal reflection that takes place in this journal, we as a group of students created an exhibition that is a collection of our experiences. Taking place at Skiboli, the exhibition serves as a portrait of our collective reflection and canvas for our review. We worked together in groups to incorporate the different projects and workshops. Some materials are translated quite literally, while others are

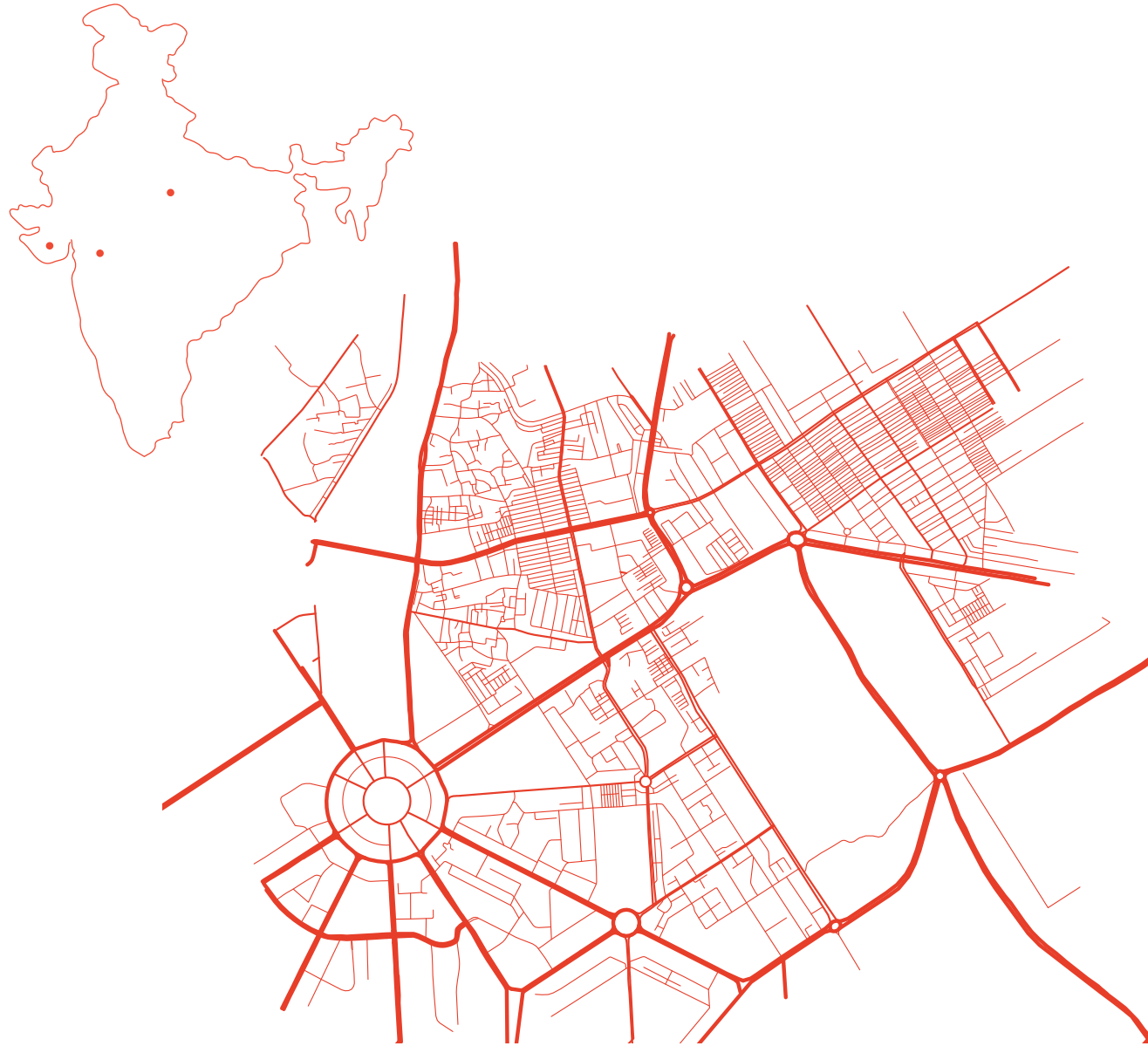
experiences a collection of transformed into exhibition pieces. The materials used vary from the original taken from the forest or India, to adaptations made at the wood workshop with recycled pieces from other student projects. The exhibition shows our experiences as a whole bit also functions as a platform to display individual journeys and stories. Each student contributed individual fragments to create the whole.



See

Places

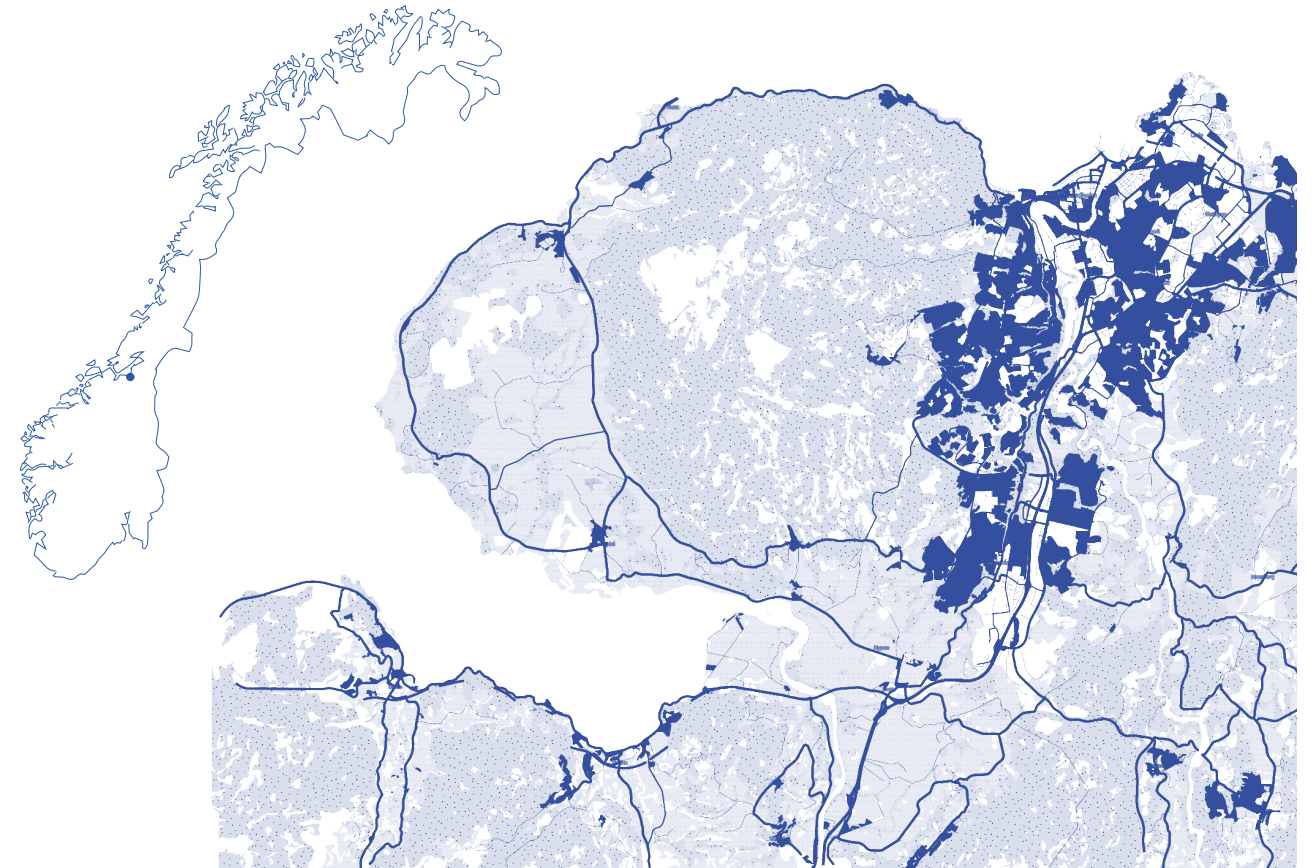




Places

common ground

What is a place? What makes India and Norway so different? Is it the geographical situation that brings different climates, seasons and hours of daylight with-it? Is it the population density that spans from maybe under 10 persons per squared kilometer in the forest to over 10 000 in Delhi. Is it the political background? Is it the religious differences that bring out buildings like temples or churches? Maybe it is all of these. Maybe that is the common ground all places over the world consist of. The place is the canvas of our lives and also the image and reflection of our lifestyle. It is like a theater with a backdrop that was built throughout centuries that hold a stage for our lives to *take place* on.



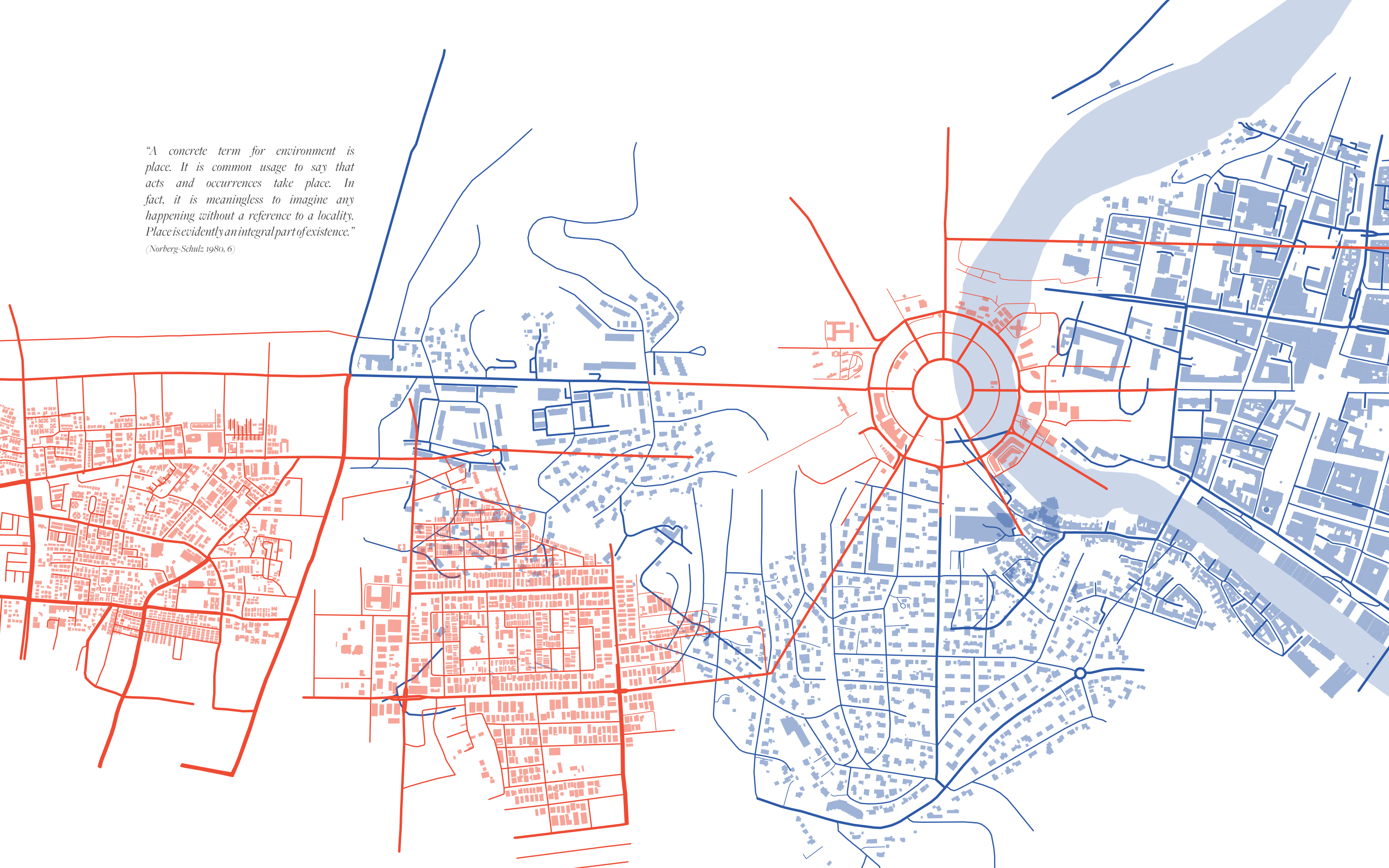


"The beauty of this place, the quality in it which touches us, the thing which makes it live, is, above all, that it is carefree, that it is innocent." (Alexander 1982, 535)



"A concrete term for environment is place. It is common usage to say that acts and occurrences take place. In fact, it is meaningless to imagine any happening without a reference to a locality. Place is evidently an integral part of existence."

(Norberg-Schulz 1980, 6)



canvas of exploration

During our time in India, we explored the city of Delhi, traveled to Ahmedabad, got to know our hosts and fellow students at CEPT University, took a night train to the crafts region Kutch, participate in a Block-Printing workshop and got to curate our own exhibition with the textiles we created. Every day we experienced something surprising and new. We learned new techniques, met new people and enjoyed the new academic and architectural perspective we gained. We tried new food, lost our fear of crossing the streets and after hesitating for the first few days enjoyed every TucTuc ride to the fullest. We got used to the spices, the colors and the life that fills the streets around us. Even though our itinerary was well thought through the most beautiful moments occurred spontaneously: singing together with the Indian students on the bus, learning the traditional Gerba dance and spotting monkeys while walking through the streets.







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Objects

fragments of existence

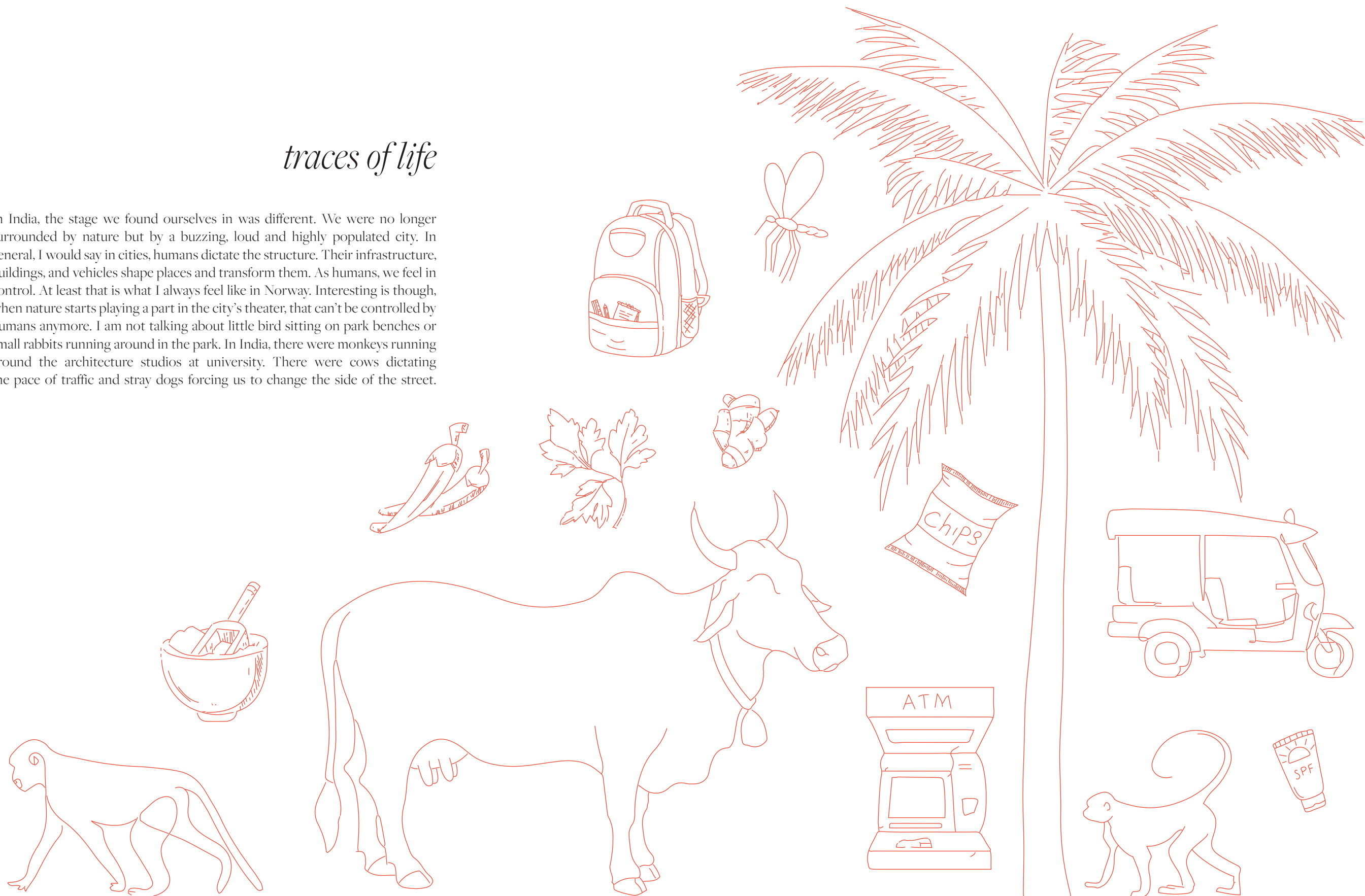
When I consider the place as *the theater* with a stage then the props and settings could be the synonym for the objects. Objects that are naturally found at a site or brought there by humans. Objects that tell a story of the place's history, origin and use. In the forest the objects we first found were of natural origin. They told a story and completed the picture of the site. The moment we arrived at the site we changed the scenery. We interfered with the natural stage that was the site.

Almost like at the theater, when the first act is over and the backdrop and the props on stage are changed for the next scenes, we woke the forest out of its sleep and turned it into a building site. The objects that made the place though, stayed. They were altered and relocated but the components of the site stayed the same. During the weeks we were working on the outdoor kitchen we added ourselves and our objects to the natural surroundings. Backpacks, building tools, lunchboxes and water bottles crowded the space. Stones were pushed around, earth taken away and trees turned into building materials. The site changed with and through us. We collected artefacts, rearranged branches, pinecones and earth. But after we were done and the building process was completed, the site calmed down again. The second act was over.

Now, the forest lays still again. All the objects came to a rest. They might have been reused, repurposed and relocated but they all remain part of the theater. If I consider us as human users as part of the play, I think we would be objects too. Throughout this process it often felt like we weren't the subjects of our doing. We weren't the ones dictating the plan and telling the site what to do or how to correspond. We were dependent on our surroundings. We were the objects to *nature's theater*.

traces of life

In India, the stage we found ourselves in was different. We were no longer surrounded by nature but by a buzzing, loud and highly populated city. In general, I would say in cities, humans dictate the structure. Their infrastructure, buildings, and vehicles shape places and transform them. As humans, we feel in control. At least that is what I always feel like in Norway. Interesting is though, when nature starts playing a part in the city's theater, that can't be controlled by humans anymore. I am not talking about little bird sitting on park benches or small rabbits running around in the park. In India, there were monkeys running around the architecture studios at university. There were cows dictating the pace of traffic and stray dogs forcing us to change the side of the street.



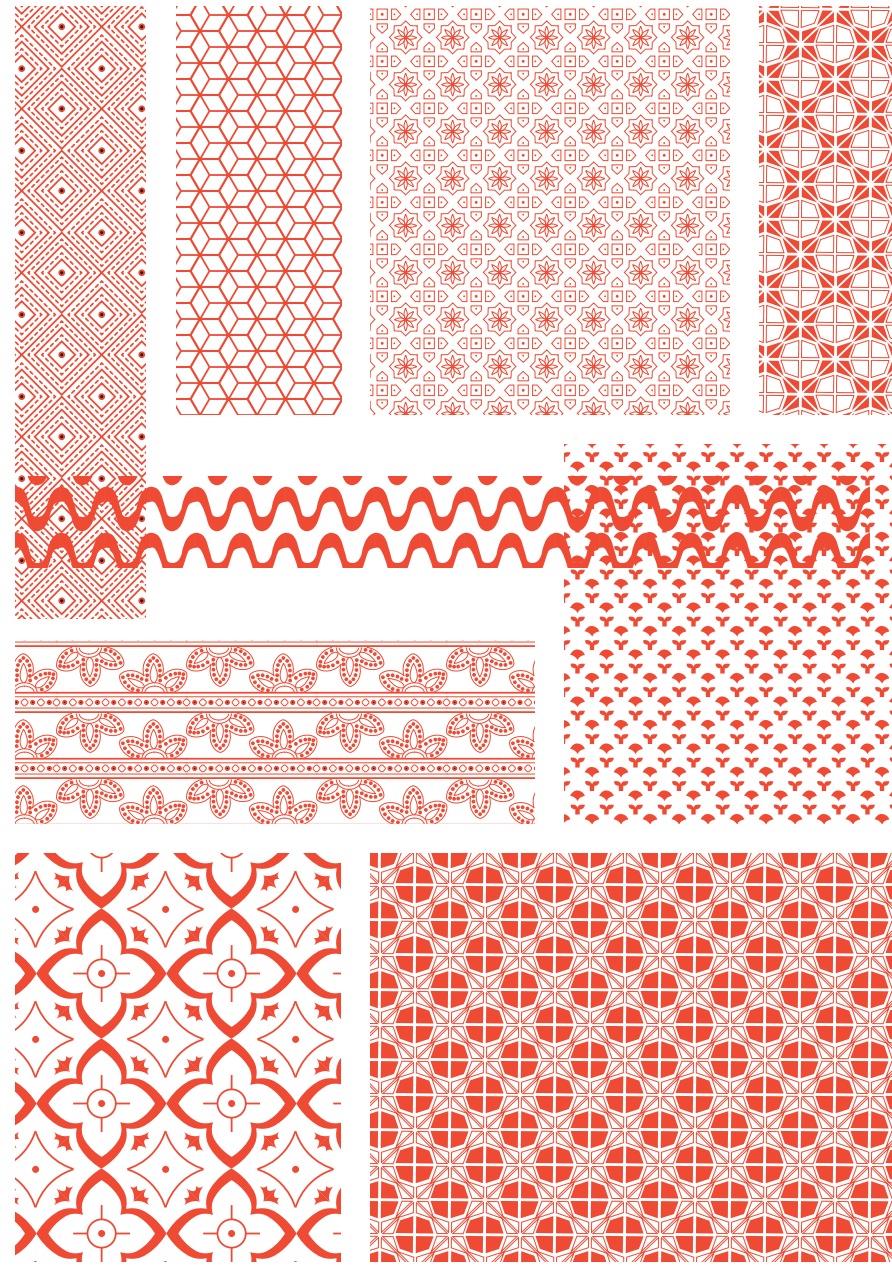


*"Natural elements are evidently the primary components of the given."
(Norberg-Schulz 1980, 10)*

See

Patton

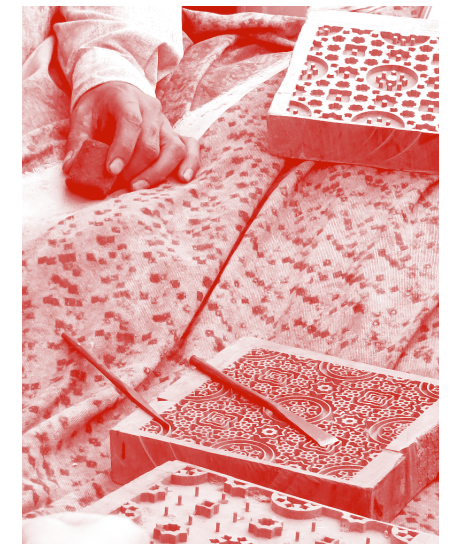
Erin

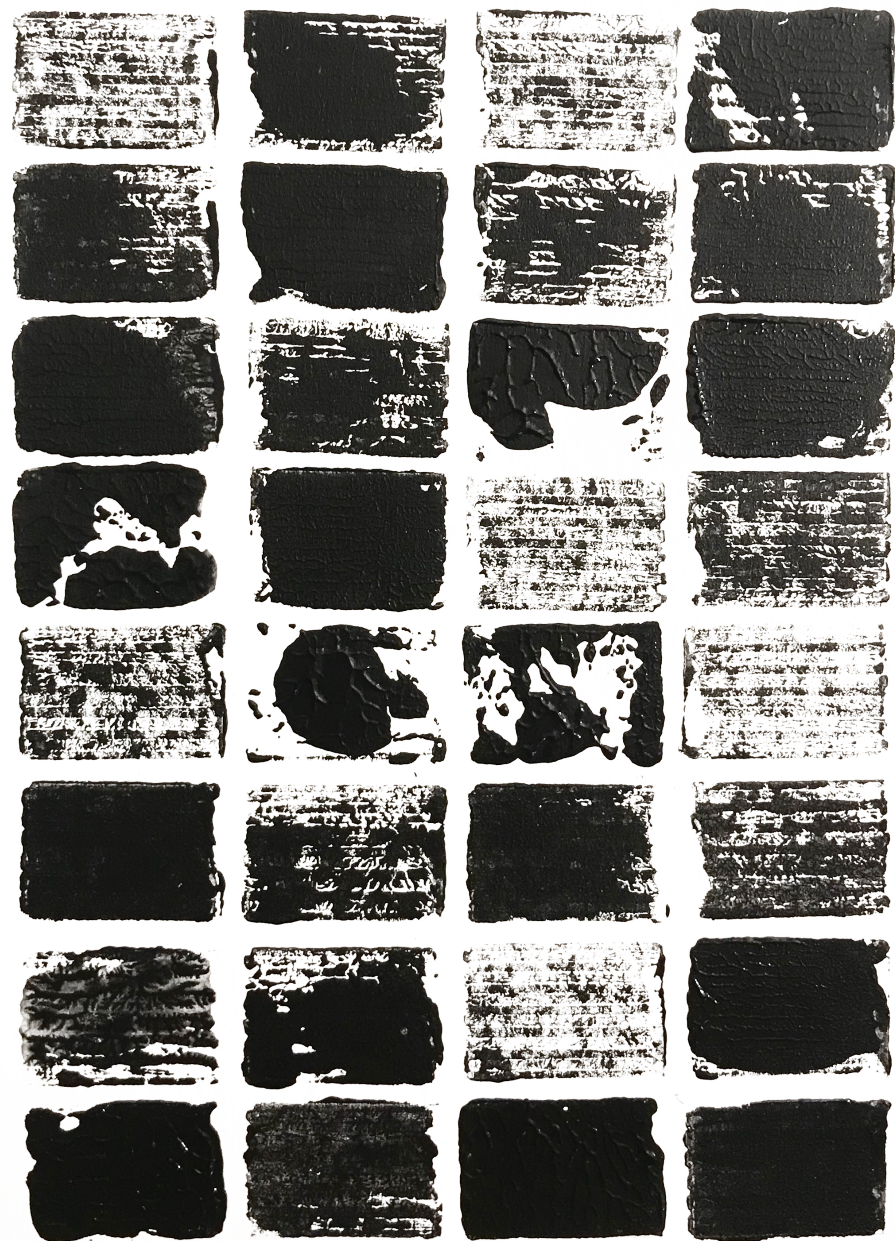


Pattern

expression of heritage

After arriving to India, it wasn't long before we were introduced to patterns. Geometrical shapes and lines that through symmetry, repetition, rotation and combination with each other form ornaments. Of course, patterns were not a new concept to me, but their use on everyday items and symbolism caught my attention. They mean more, then the stripes on my t-shirt or the print on my coat. Patterns, as I learned, are used to express heritage. Their symbolism shows belonging to a certain region, religion, profession or even a family. During our time in the crafts-region Kutch we had the chance to explore different symbols and ornaments used in the Block-Printing process to create patterns. These patterns were originally created for the shepherds of the region that identified themselves and members of their nomadic community through the ornaments and colors used on their textiles.

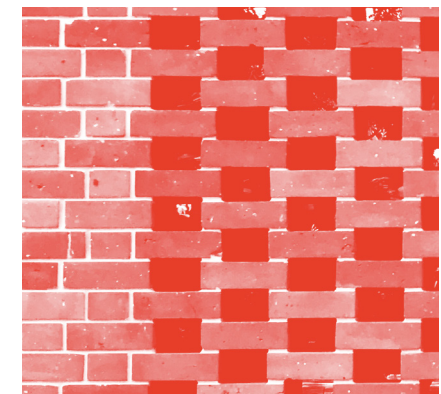
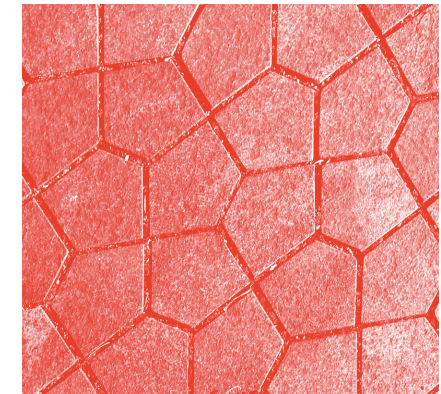
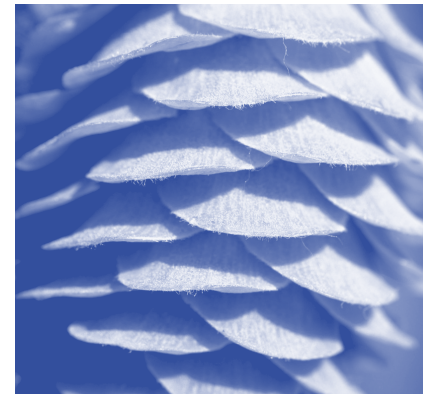
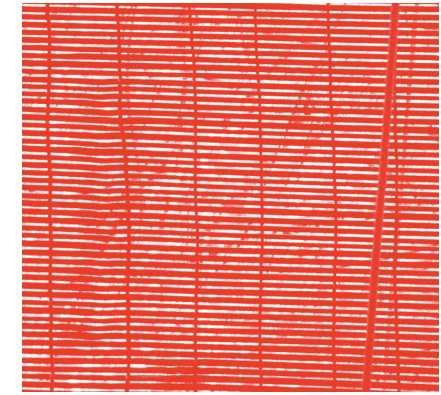


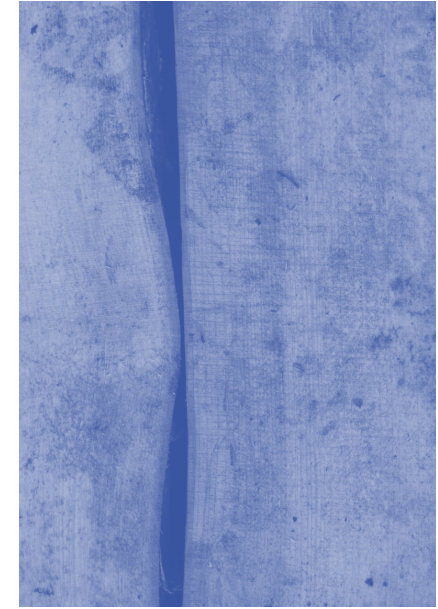
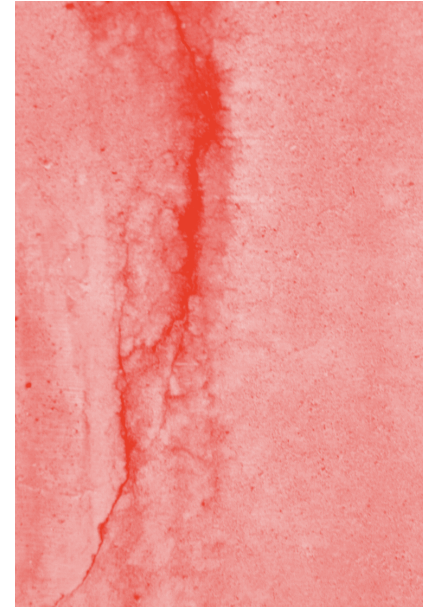


in the everyday

Through the experience at the Block-Printing Workshop, where we got to use and work with very distinctive geometrical patterns, I started to look for inspiration and ornaments in nature and my surroundings. I started *seeing* patterns. After a while I made it a mission to photograph as many patterns as I possibly could on the trip, but also after returning to Norway. I started paying attention. It felt like I was starting to take a closer look. After seeing the site in the forest for many times I thought I knew the place and the objects it inhabited. When I came back from India, I took my camera and started taking pictures of things that I had seen a million times before in my life. Cracks in concrete, pavement, leaves that started to fall, trees, stones, earth, and everything that came in front of my lens. The difference to earlier photo walks was my perspective. I wasn't looking for compositions, nice lighting or objects anymore. I wanted to look closer and find the hidden patterns all around me. After observing my surroundings, the built environment and nature I started seeing a common thread throughout these patterns of the everyday. I realized that natural patterns reflect the object's functions. The pattern of a leaf, a tree or a pinecone for example. Patterns in human made objects on the other hand are often traces of use: the cracks in concrete, the chaos left behind in a kitchen after cooking, the mosaic of dirty footprints on the floor. The thing that they all have in common, is that they are an expression of their substance and purpose. They are all true to themselves.

"First, we have a way of looking at the ultimate constituents of the environment: the ultimate "things" which a building or a town is made of. As we shall see (...), every building, every town is made of certain entities which I call patterns: and once we understand buildings in terms of their patterns, we have a way of looking at them, which makes all buildings, all parts of a town similar, all members of the same class of physical structures." (Alexander 1982, 11)

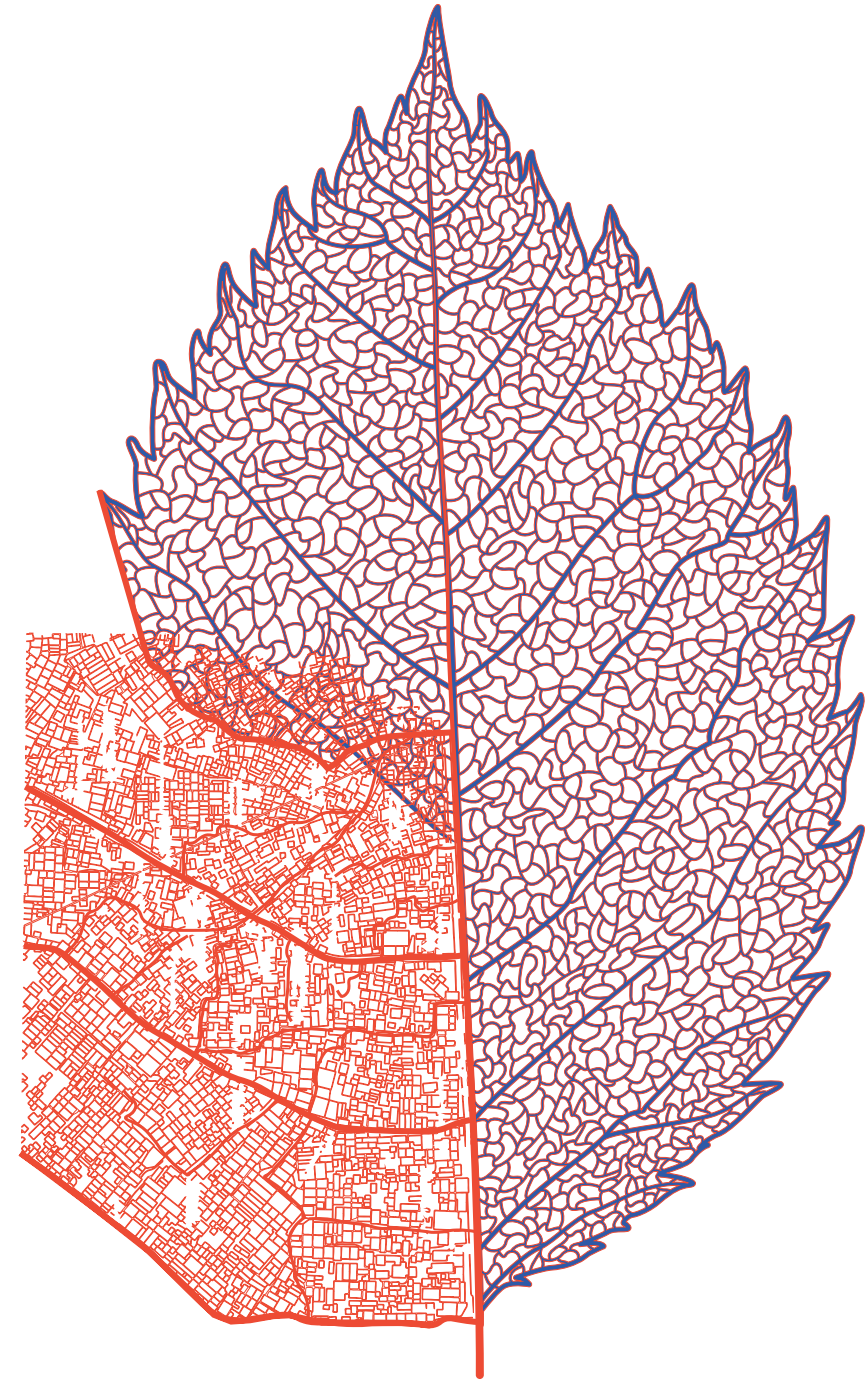






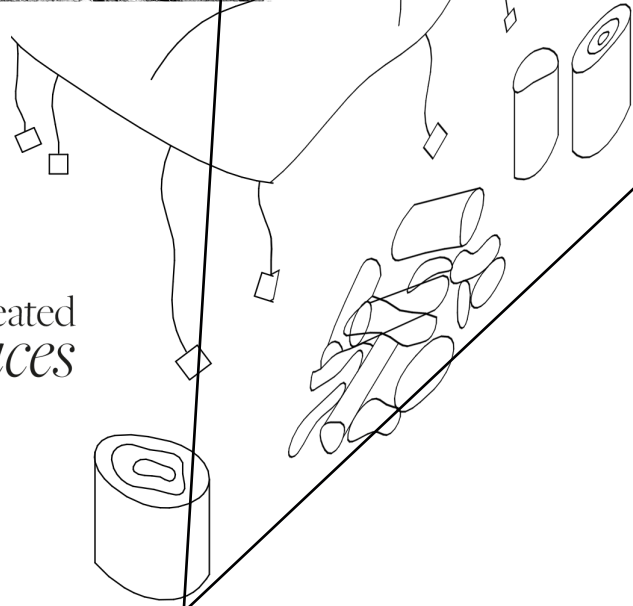
a common language

My journey with patterns this semester has been eye-opening. Taking a closer look, focusing on substance rather than surface, on content rather than objects had a big influence on me. Seeing, observing and capturing patterns has brought me great joy. The most interesting thing though happened while comparing the pictures I took to one another. Disregarding scale and the place or object of origin I was stunned by the similarities I found. While I was busy being overwhelmed by all the new things I encountered during the Trip to India I focused on the differences. I compared the food, the culture, the music, the university campus and basically everything I saw to what I knew at home. Delhi seemed foreign and I myself felt like a stranger. Was I really though? Couldn't I see the common threads? Couldn't I feel the common language?

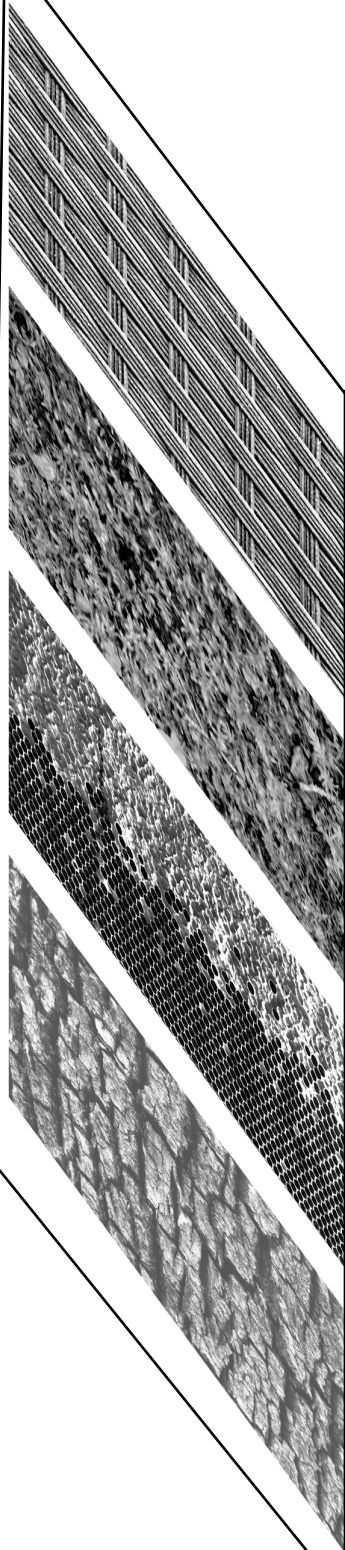




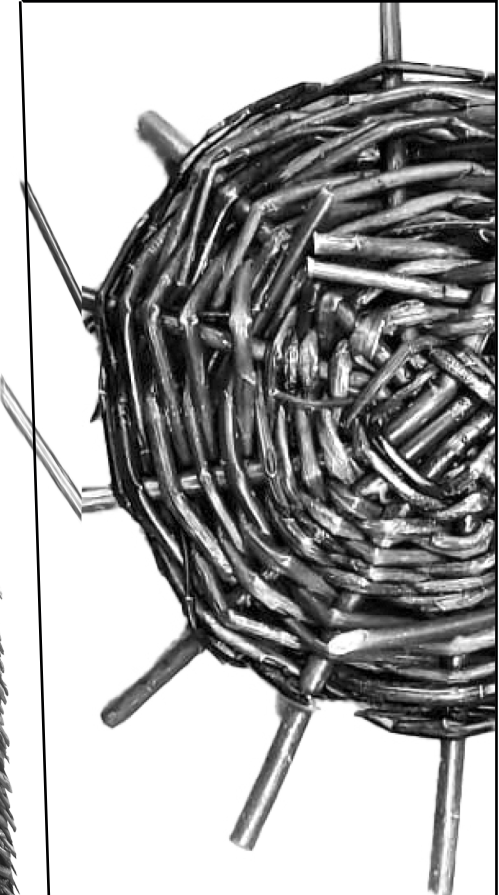
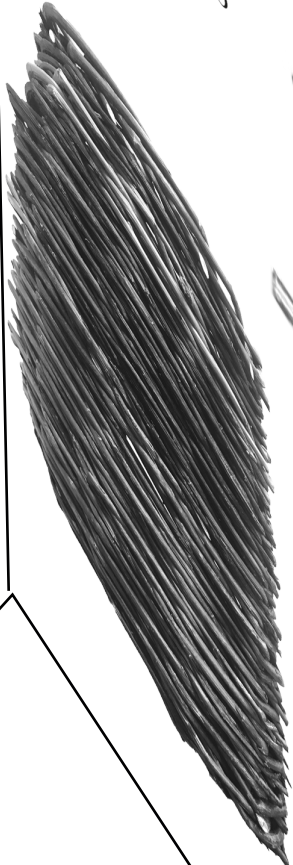
recreated
places



*collected
patterns*



*crafted
objects*



SEE

Use

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Material

a tactile experience

“The higher the marble is polished, the brighter the silver is rubbed, and the more the mahogany shines, the more each is considered as an object of beauty: as if the eye delighted in gliding smoothly over a surface.” (Gilpin 1792, 4)

“Once you realize that the only thing which matters is the reality of the situation which surrounds the building, and not your images of it, you are able to relax, and allow the patterns of the language to combine themselves freely in your mind, without trying to impose an artificial image on their combination.” (Alexander 1982, 540)

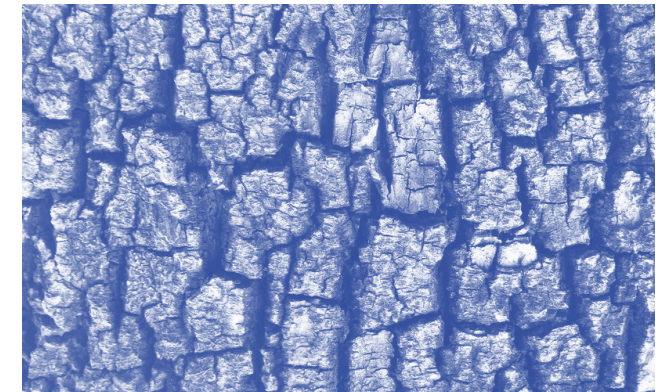
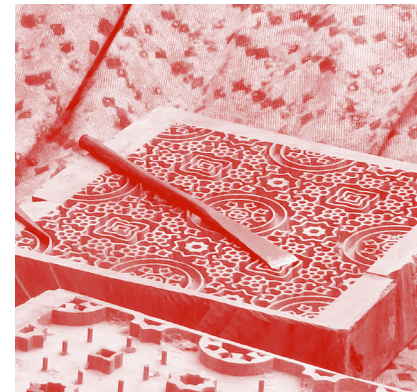
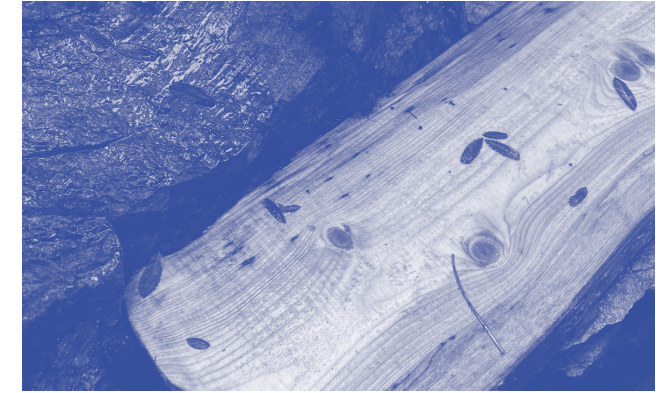
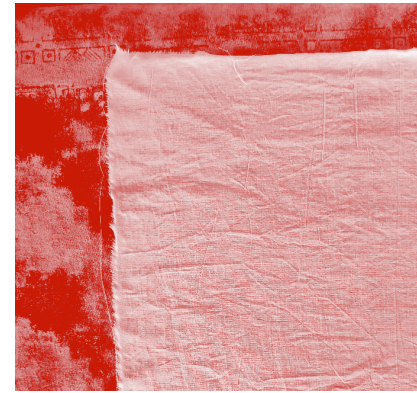
„We must remember that everything depends on how we use a material, not on the material itself. Also, new materials are not necessarily superior. Each material is only what we make of it.“ (van der Rohe, in Rawn 2014)

„You cannot simply put something new into a place. You have to absorb what you see around you, what exists on the land, and then use that knowledge along with contemporary thinking to interpret what you see.“ (Ando, in Iey 2002)

„I sense Light as the giver of all presences, and material as spent Light. What is made by Light casts a shadow, and the shadow belongs to Light.“ (Kahn, in Dar 2019)

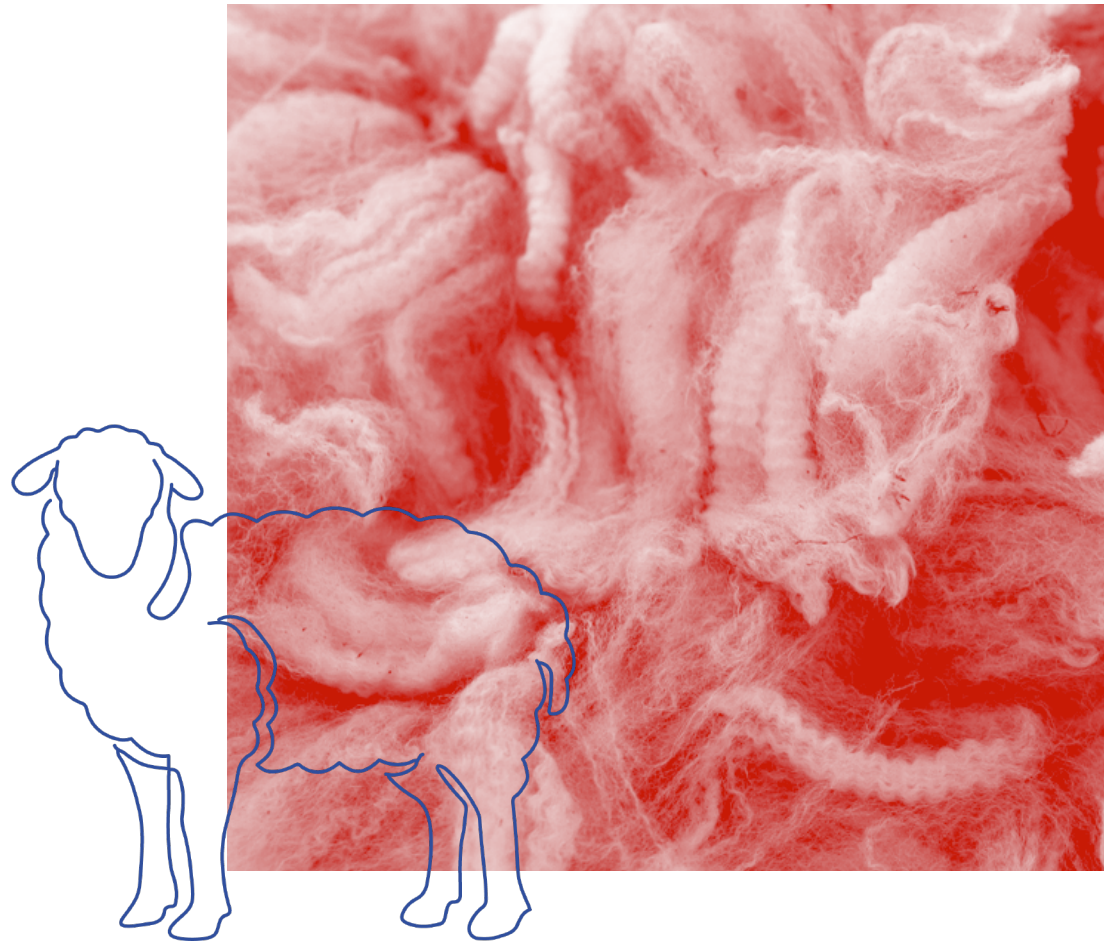
*„Light has not just intensity, but also a vibration, which is capable of roughening a smooth material, of giving a three-dimensional quality to a flat surface.“
(Piano, in Stach 2021)*

“Character however, depends upon how things are made.” (Norberg-Schulz 1980, 15)



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Part of the initial principal for the work in the forest was to use natural materials that the site provided. After observing our surroundings we recognized the potential in the stones, branches, trees and leaves. Outside of our site the farm had more materials to offer. Some of them were natural, like the wool and hay, but some were also found in the barn or organized by the owners. In India, textiles played the biggest roles in terms of material. After working with the handwoven fabrics during the workshop I realized I could find many parallels to the forest in Norway. Materials ask for treatment and wool wants to be woven everywhere.



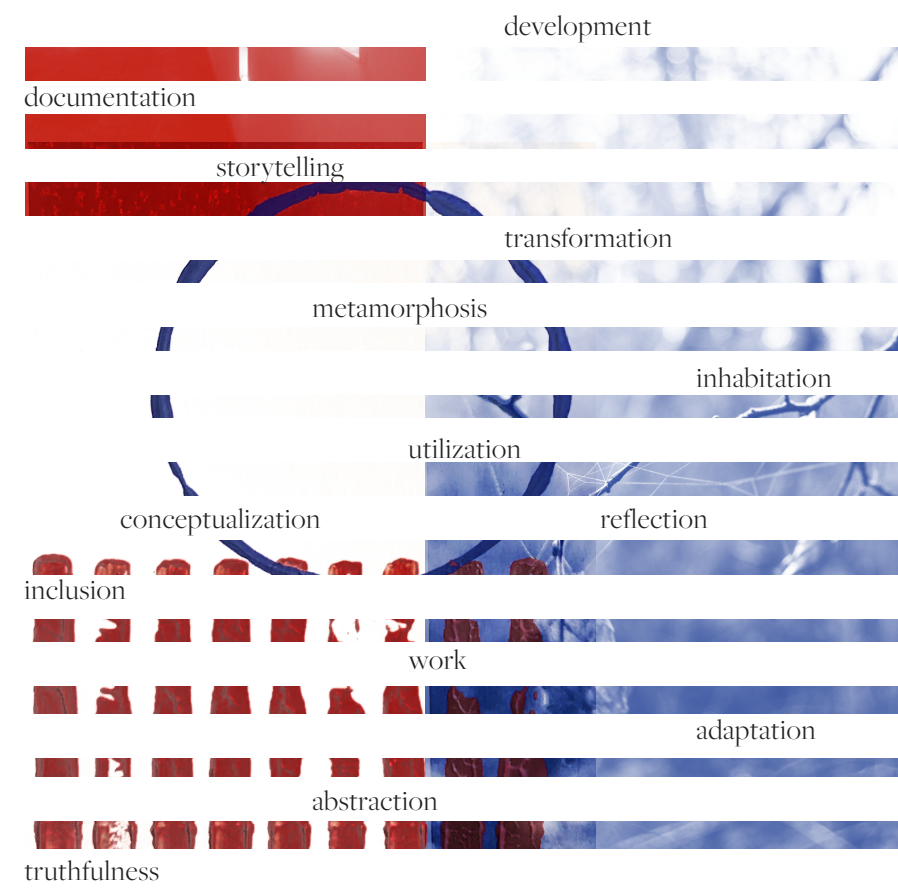
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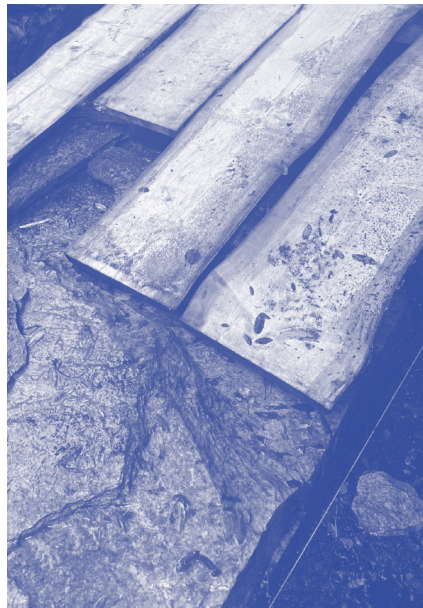


“And it turns out that, invariant, behind all processes which allow us to make buildings live, there is a single common process. (...) But though this method is precise, it cannot be used mechanically. (...) Indeed, it turns out, in the end, that what this method does is simply free us from all method.” (Alexander 1982, 12-13)



Use

Techn
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Technique

an acknowledgement

After the first few days at the forest, we had gained an overview of the place, its objects and the materials we could use for building. We had brought up the tools and started to clean up the stones. We took away bucket after bucket of moss and earth, finding little worms and traces of earlier human use. The work became tiring, and our motivation faded. We were used to having a fixed plan in place, a set goal we could work towards but now we were just digging. The days were long and cold, our muscles were sore and we were starting to get desperate for a guideline, a direction we could follow. We needed some technique. In the context of this journal and our journey with Experimental Practice I actually think technique needs to be looked at differently than what most people might define it as. I don't want to say that we were looking for a technical solution to our design tasks. We weren't expecting a step-by-step instruction manual on how to proceed and transform a site in the forest into an outdoor kitchen space. What we needed was a method of inspiration and through our decreasing motivation we found it in the site itself. The technique we had been searching for came to us the moment we gave up on a plan. It was simple, all we had to do was follow the natural givens of the site.

“To act as nature does is the most ordinary thing in the world. It is as ordinary as a simple act of slicing strawberries. (...) To live like that, is the easiest thing in the world; but for a (wo)man whose head is full of images, it is the hardest.” (Alexander 1982, 548-549)

For me, staying true to a technique means acknowledging the material: recognizing its natural tactility and its way of behaving under different circumstances. Making use of natural characteristics of the materials and shaping it to our own liking. Using certain techniques acknowledges heritage and tradition, that has carried a certain way of doing things throughout centuries. Using techniques is recognizing the knowledge others have found before you: observing, learning, trying and adapting.

Ajrakh

traditional Block - Printing

Saaj

Wasching the cloths in water to remove any finish applied in the mill or workshop.

Kasamu

The cloth is dyed in a cold solution of Myrobalan. This process turns the cloth into a yellow color when it is dried in the burning midday sun.

Khariyanu

A resist of lime and gum is printed on the cloth to define the outline of the design. This is known as Rekh. This stage is repeated on both sides of the cloth.

Dying

The cloth is dyed in a color dye made from natural ingredients.

Printing

Carved wooden blocks are dipped into the natural dye and printed on the cloths.

Drying

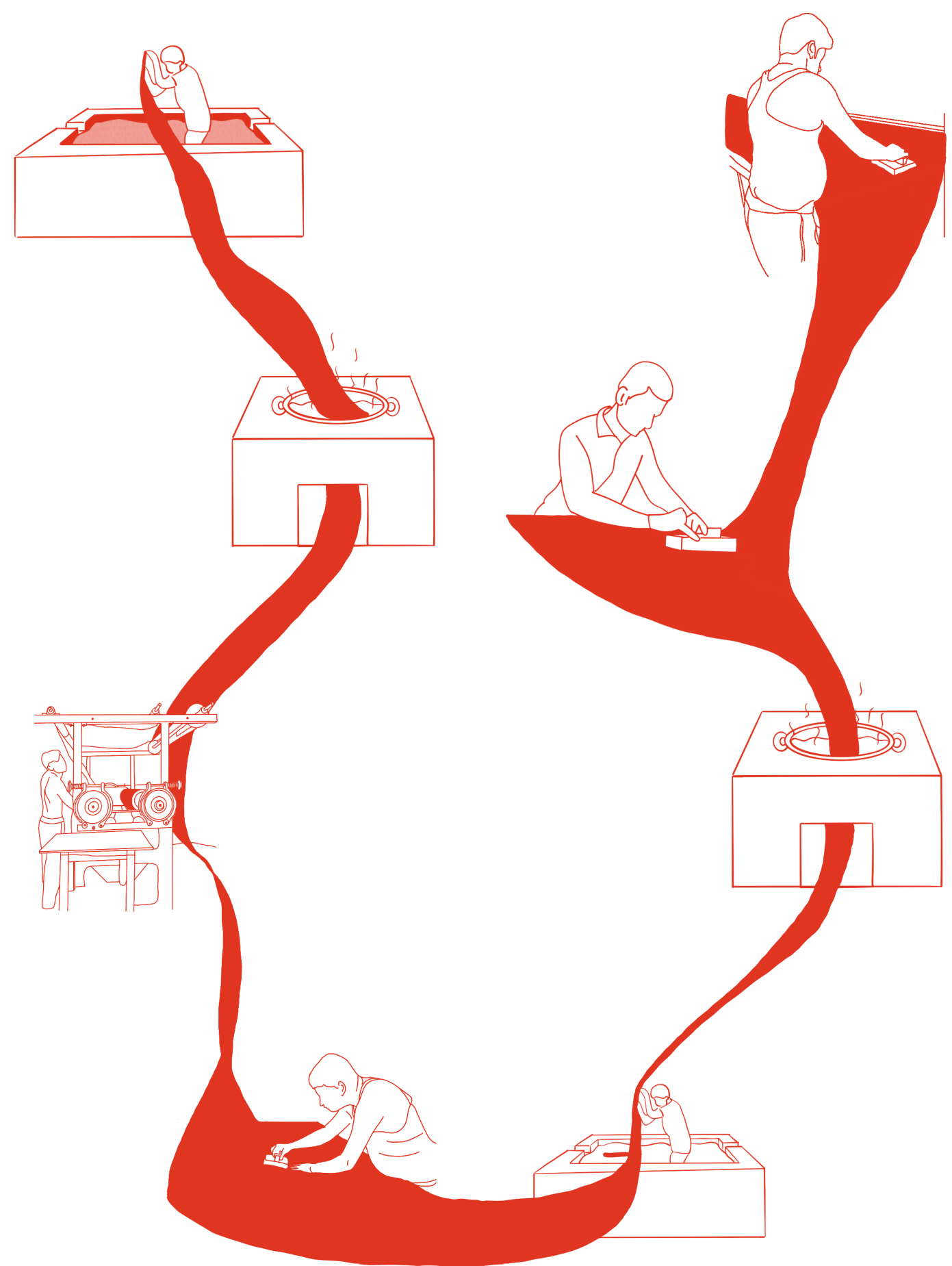
Once the printing is completed, the cloths are laid in the sun to dry.

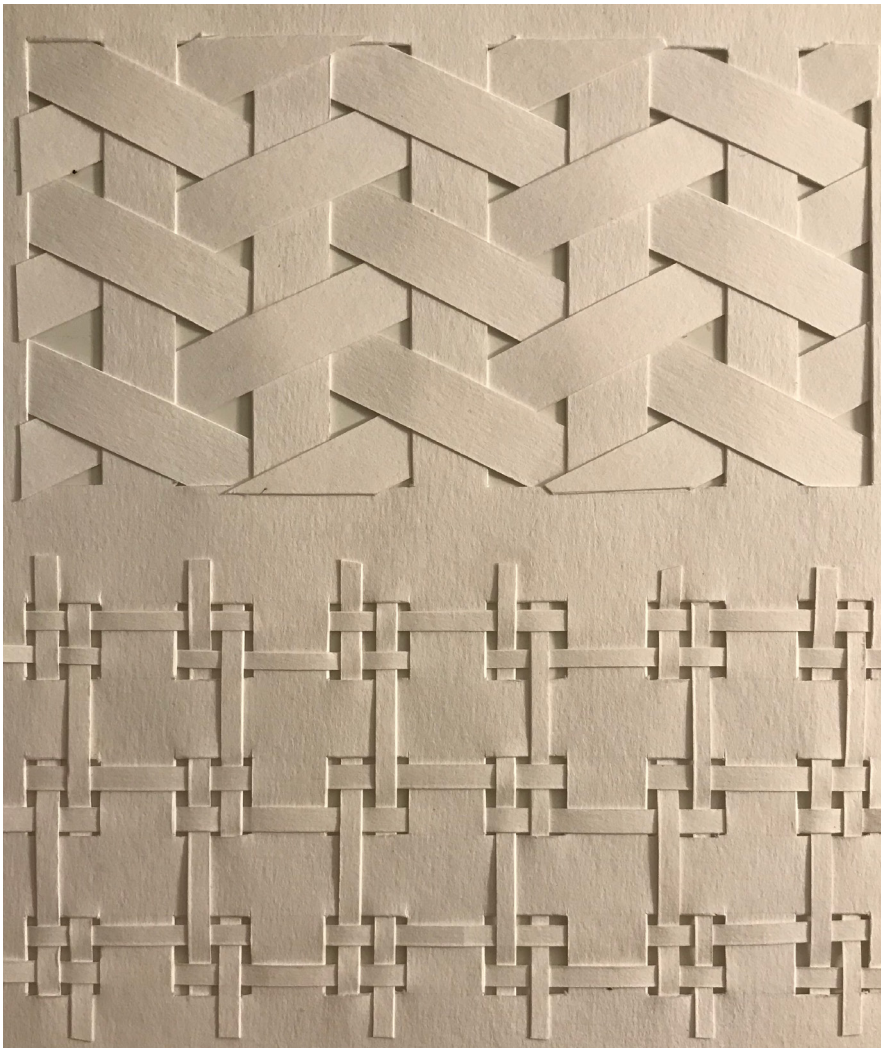
Vichamu

The cloths are washed under running water and drained from any paint.

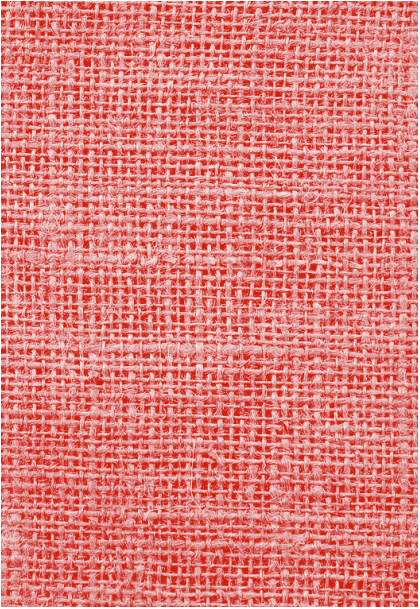
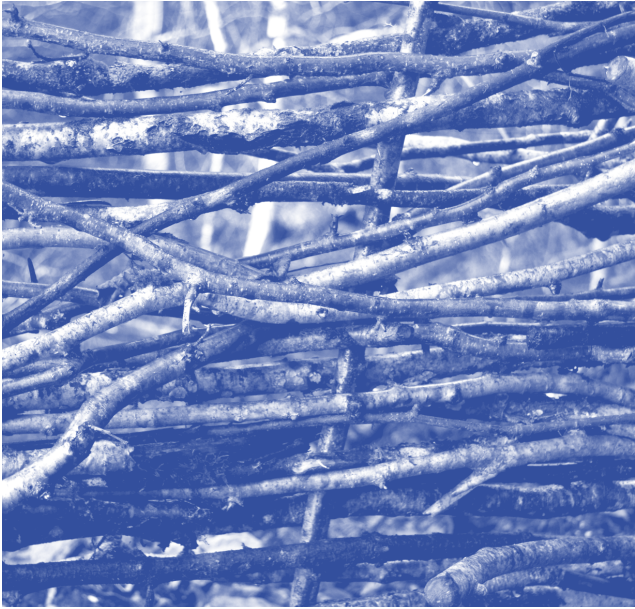
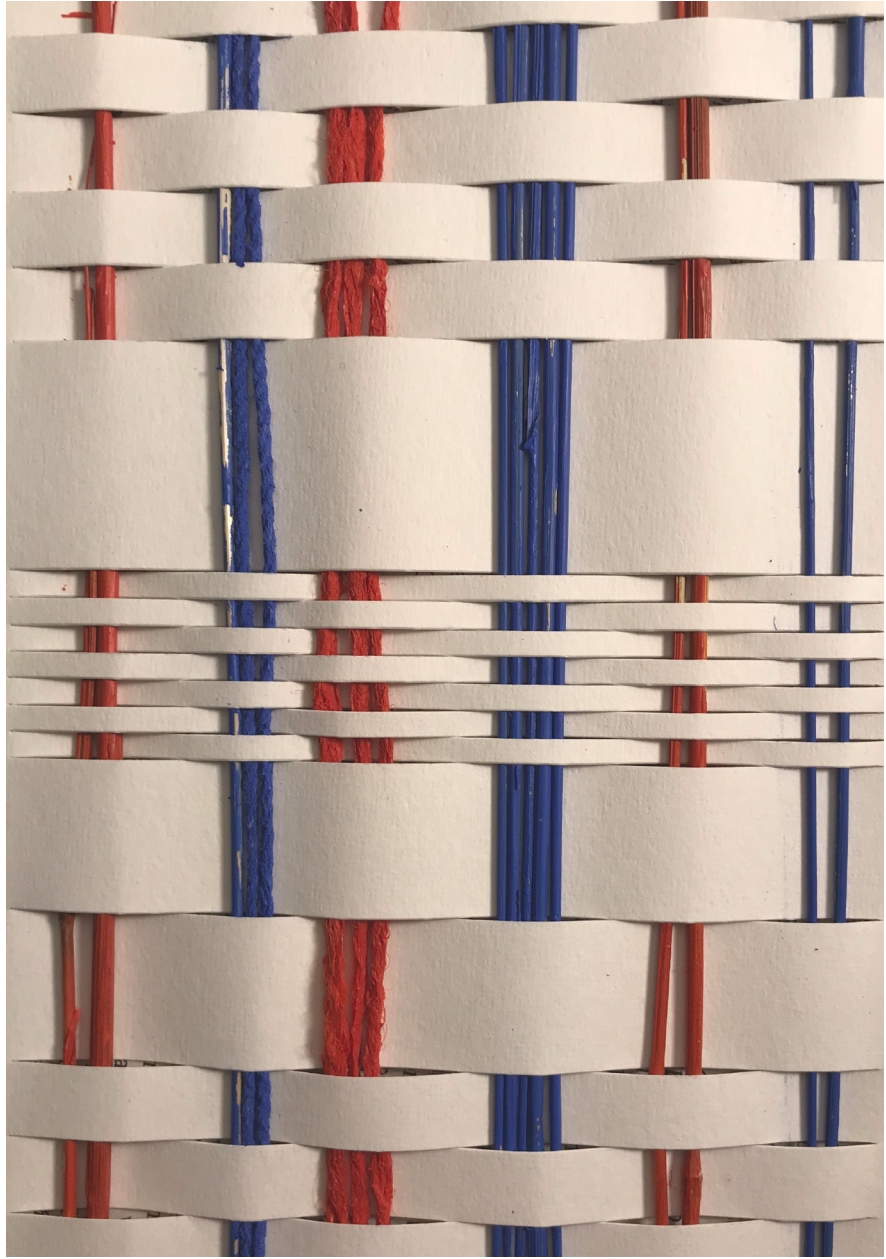
Boiling

The cloths are washed in a boiling alum solution in a wood fired pot.





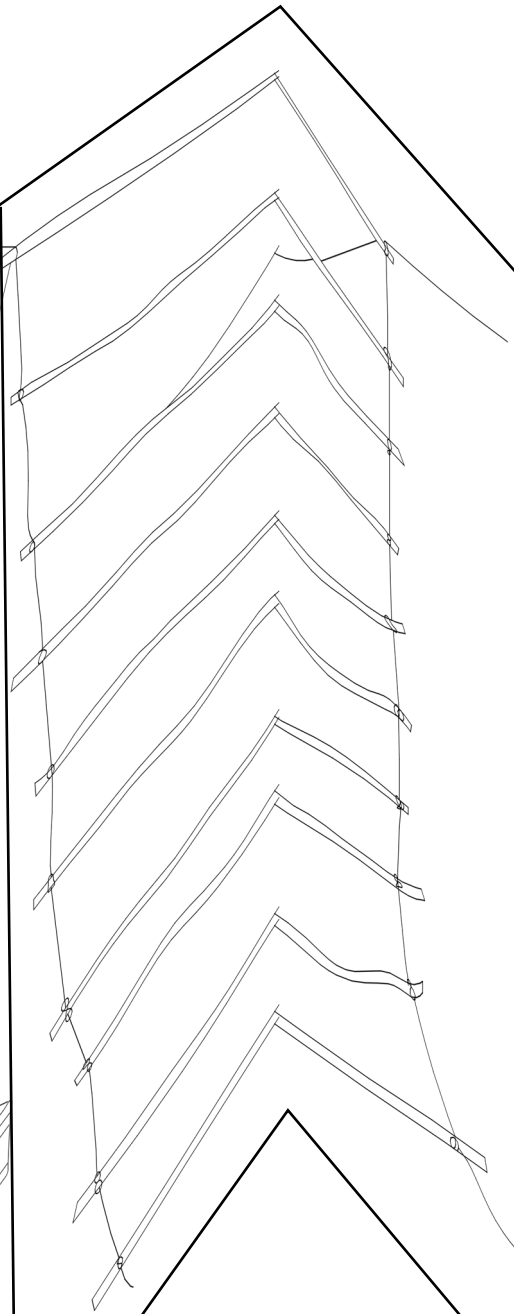
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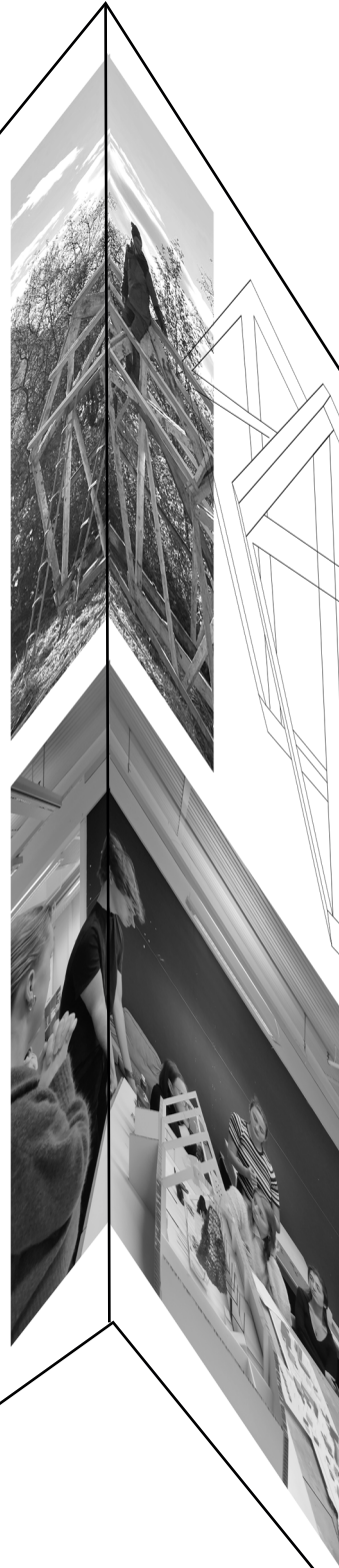
RETHINKING SPACES



recycled
materials



*re-invented
techniques*



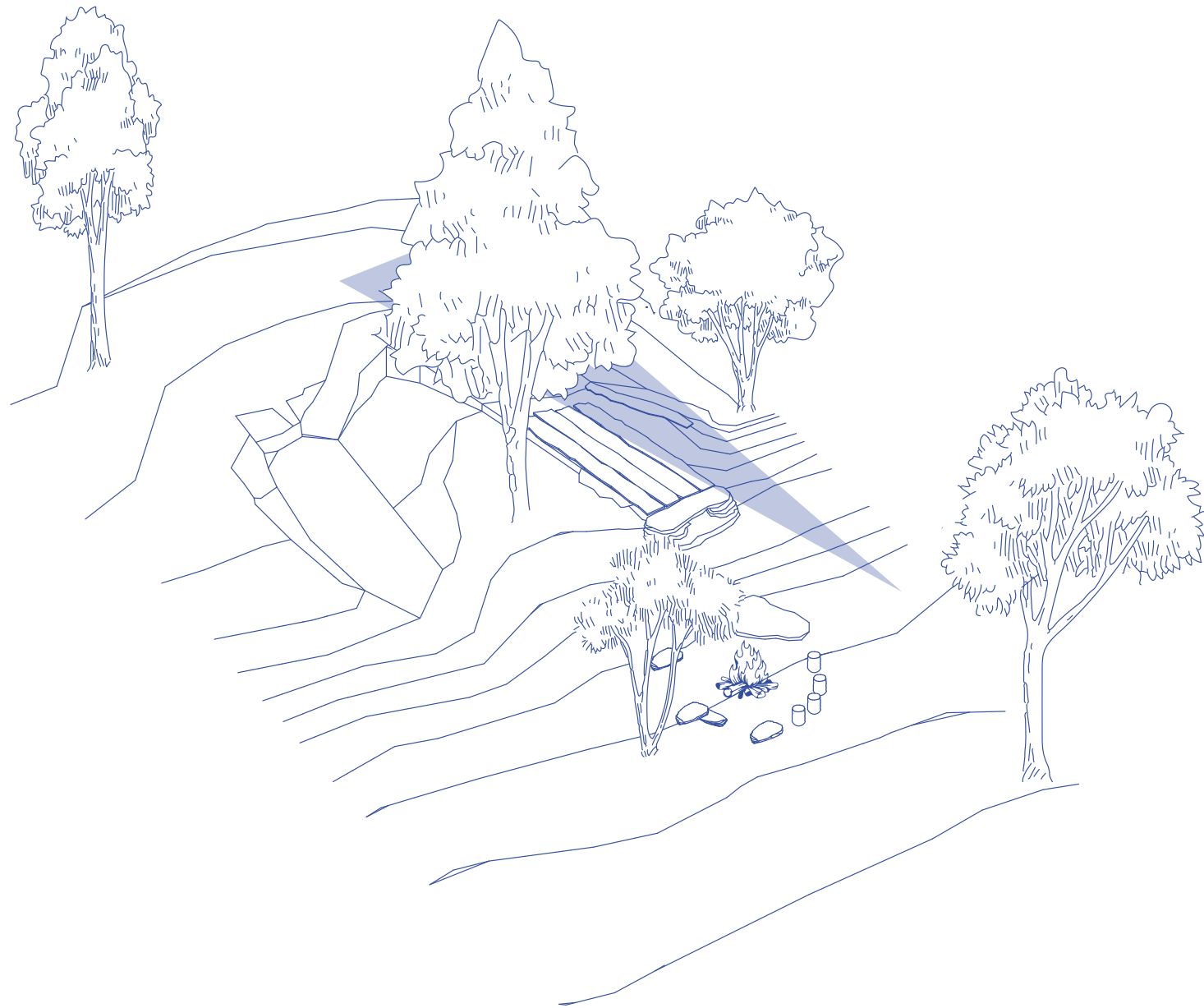
tools
of transformation

USES

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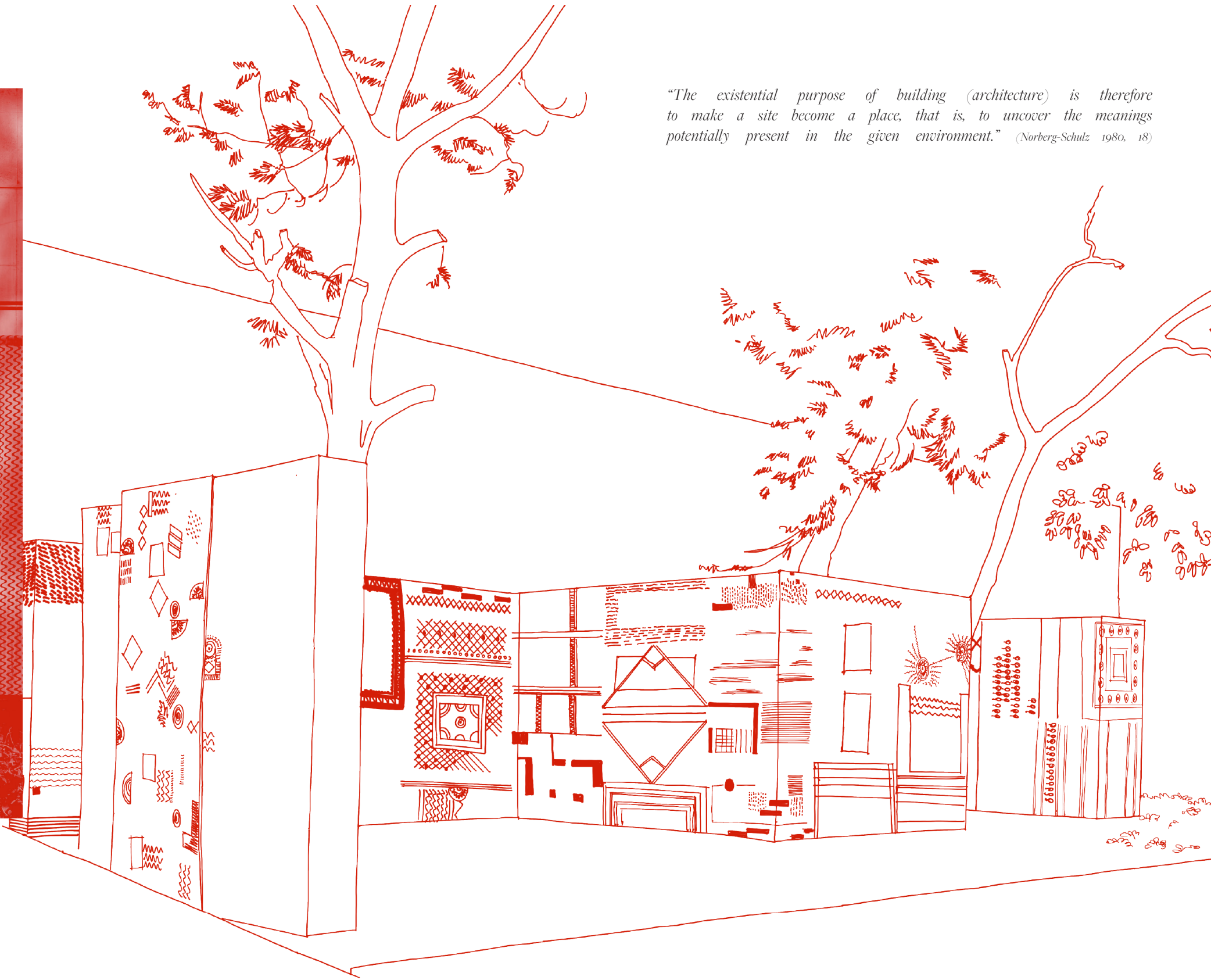
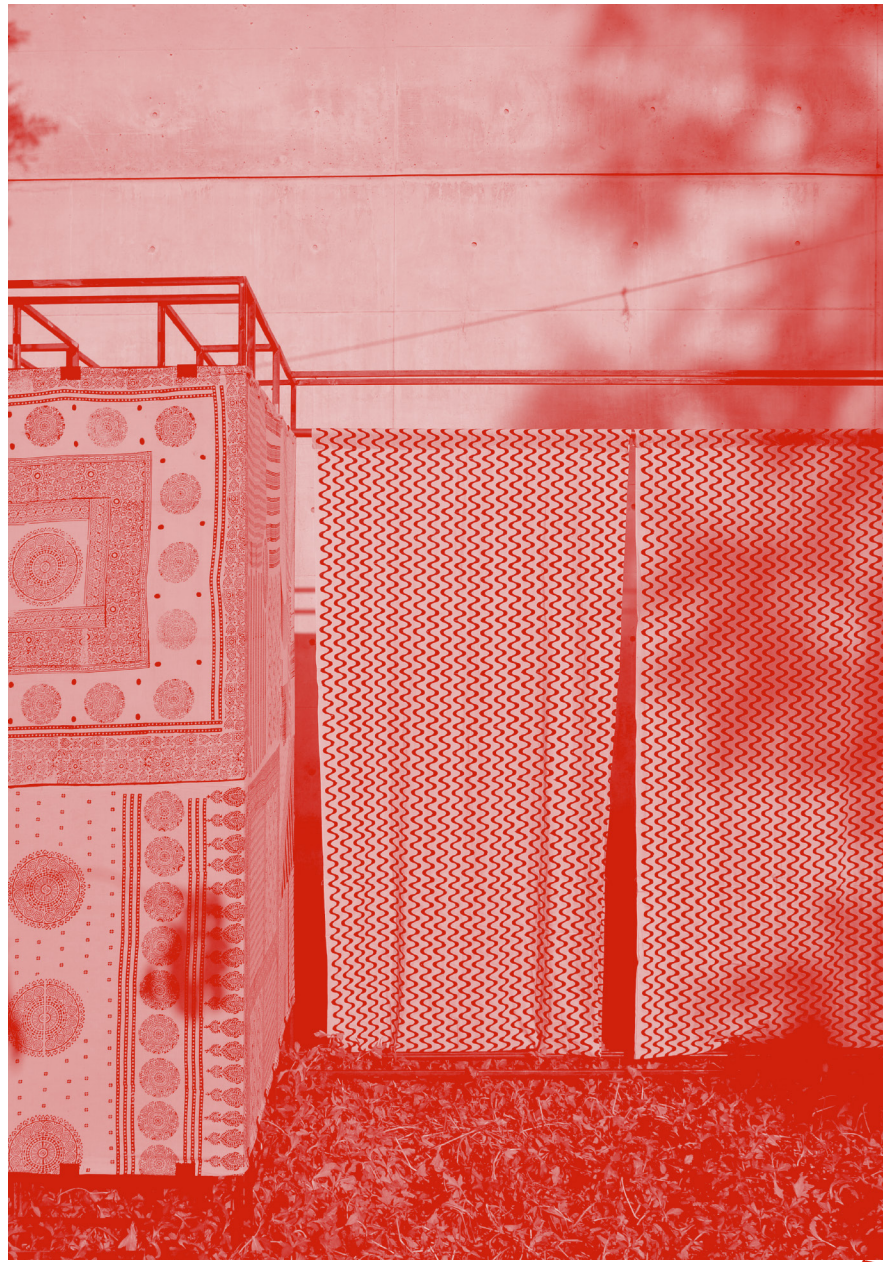
ace



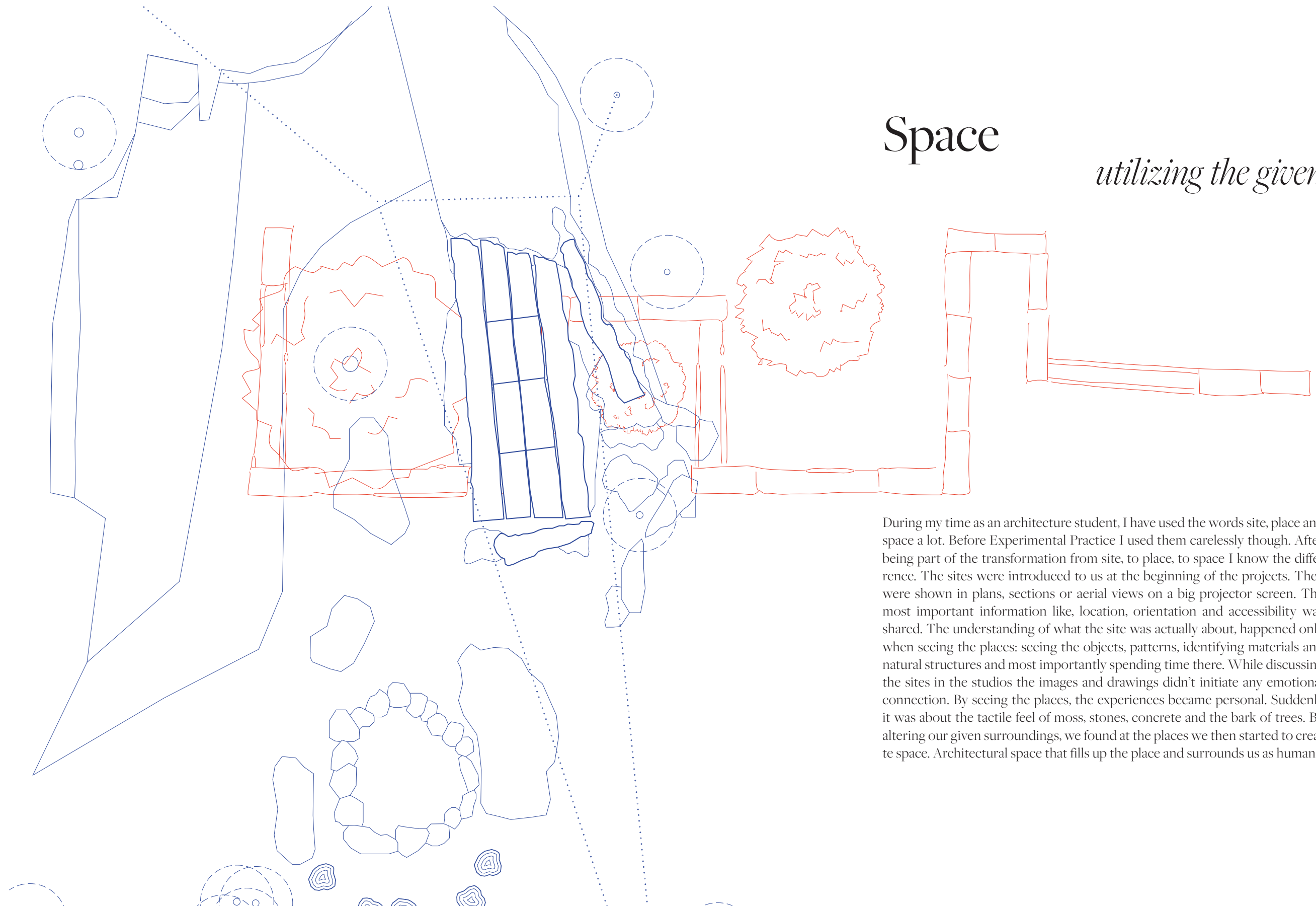
No house should ever be on a hill or on anything. It should be of the hill. Belonging to it. Hill and house should live together each the happier for the other. (Wright 1977, 168)



“Each one of us wants to be able to bring a building or part of town to life like this. It is a fundamental human instinct, as much a part of our desire as the desire for children. It is, quite simply, the desire to make a part of nature, to complete a world which is already made of mountains, streams, snowdrops and stones, with something made by us, as much a part of nature and a part of our immediate surroundings.” (Alexander 1982, 9)



"The existential purpose of building (architecture) is therefore to make a site become a place, that is, to uncover the meanings potentially present in the given environment." (Norberg-Schulz: 1980, 18)



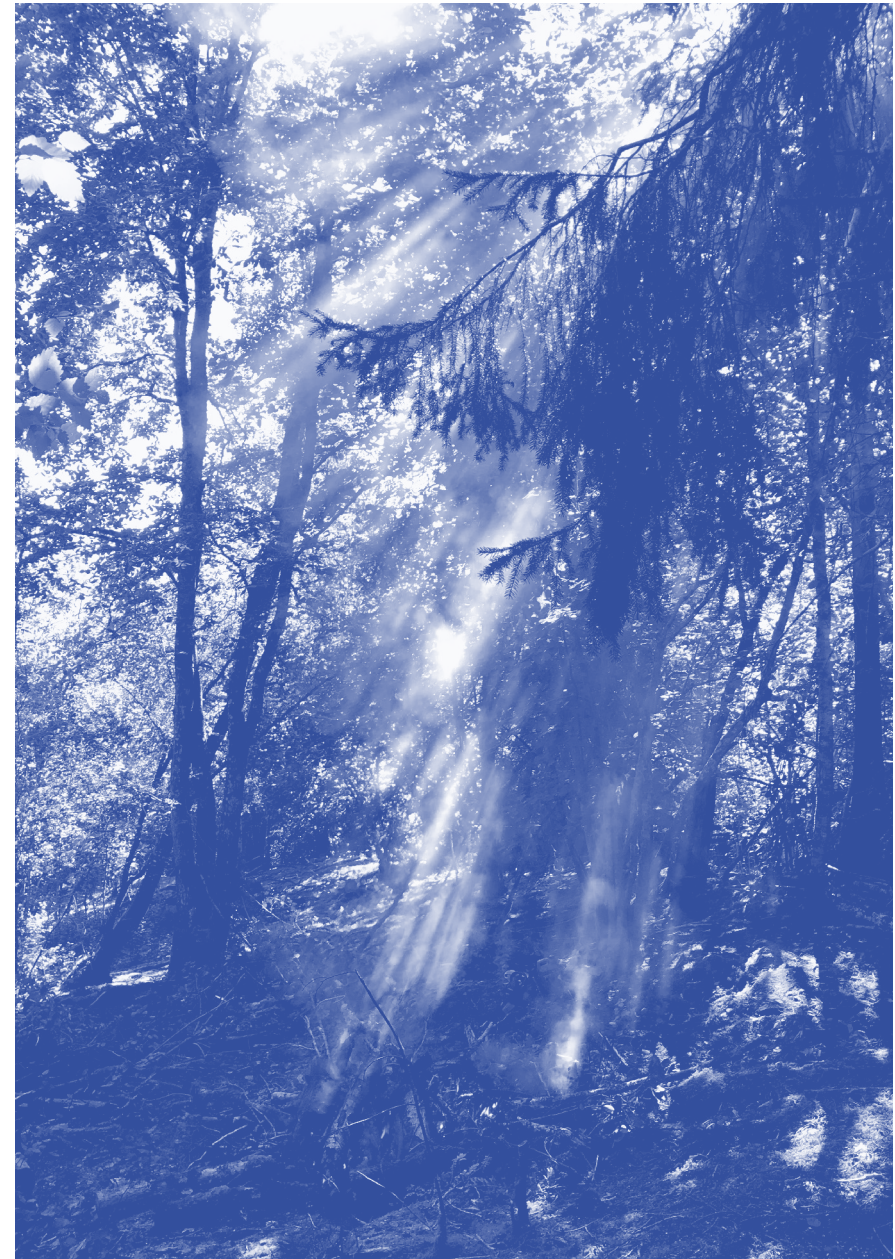
Space

utilizing the given

During my time as an architecture student, I have used the words site, place and space a lot. Before Experimental Practice I used them carelessly though. After being part of the transformation from site, to place, to space I know the difference. The sites were introduced to us at the beginning of the projects. They were shown in plans, sections or aerial views on a big projector screen. The most important information like, location, orientation and accessibility was shared. The understanding of what the site was actually about, happened only when seeing the places: seeing the objects, patterns, identifying materials and natural structures and most importantly spending time there. While discussing the sites in the studios the images and drawings didn't initiate any emotional connection. By seeing the places, the experiences became personal. Suddenly it was about the tactile feel of moss, stones, concrete and the bark of trees. By altering our given surroundings, we found at the places we then started to create space. Architectural space that fills up the place and surrounds us as humans.



“To some extent the character of a place is a function of time; it changes with the seasons, the course of the day and the weather, factors which above all determine different conditions of light.” (Norberg-Schulz 1980, 14)





Create

Narratives

Narratives

bringing space to life

Creating architectural spaces is only the beginning. When our work in the forest was done and our exhibition in Ahmedabad was set up, the spaces' lives began. In the forest we celebrated our completed built with a big fire and shared lunch. The table was set, everyone brought food and drinks, we cooked on the fire and the place came to life. After we had built the stage, the actual play could take place. In India, fellow students, faculty members and even the monkeys started exploring our exhibition space as soon as it was set up. It invited people (and animals) to wander through the textiles, find common patterns, symmetries or contrasts. Even though the two projects had big differences in their surroundings, the materials used and their time and purpose of use they had one big thing in common. A common thread that should be found in all architecture.

This moment is where the *theater* analogy ends for me. Life isn't scripted and can't be rehearsed. We aren't all acting numerous scenes that can be meticulously planned and improved to perfection. All that architecture can do in my opinion is set the stage. Set a space that reacts to human use, animals, seasonal changes and other environmental influences. I believe architecture often proposes a very strict and predesigned case of use that limits its users in their own development and creativity. In our fast-paced everchanging society today, shouldn't architecture be flexible and adaptable?

With our proposal for the outdoor kitchen in Katy and Magnus' forest we hope to have achieved exactly that. A setting of natural materials that together form a space that leaves much room for individual *narratives*. The stories with which they, their family, friends and guest will inhabit the space are what makes it valuable to them and in my opinion architecturally remarkable. The platform, made entirely out of material from the site itself, follows the line of stones and becomes part of nature. It is an expansion of the natural surroundings and offers a gathering place, without disturbing the original feel of the site. It is just there: simple, egoless and serving. What makes it great is the narratives that are created around it.



Famous architectural theorist Vitruvius raises the question of architecture's origin in his text "De architectura libri decem", written around 20 BC. For Vitruvius, fire was the beginning of all human civilization. According to him it induced the first speech-like communication and led people to settle down (Meisenheimer 2018, 224-227). Many years later German architect and theorist Gottfried Semper puts emphasis on this theory and explains the habit of humans gathering around the fire as the origin of all settlement and building practice that followed later. (Semper 1851).





Me MOJES

Create

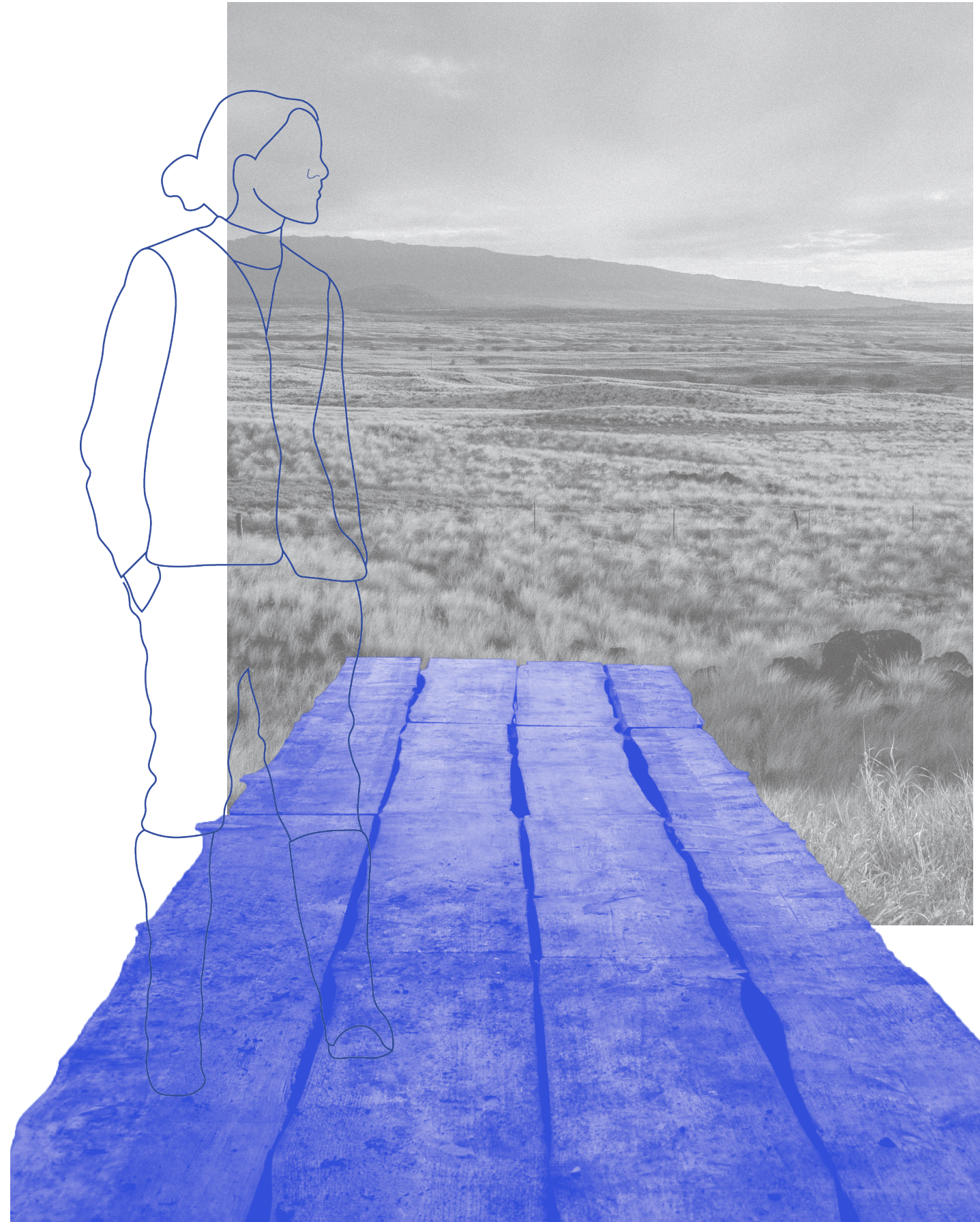
Memories

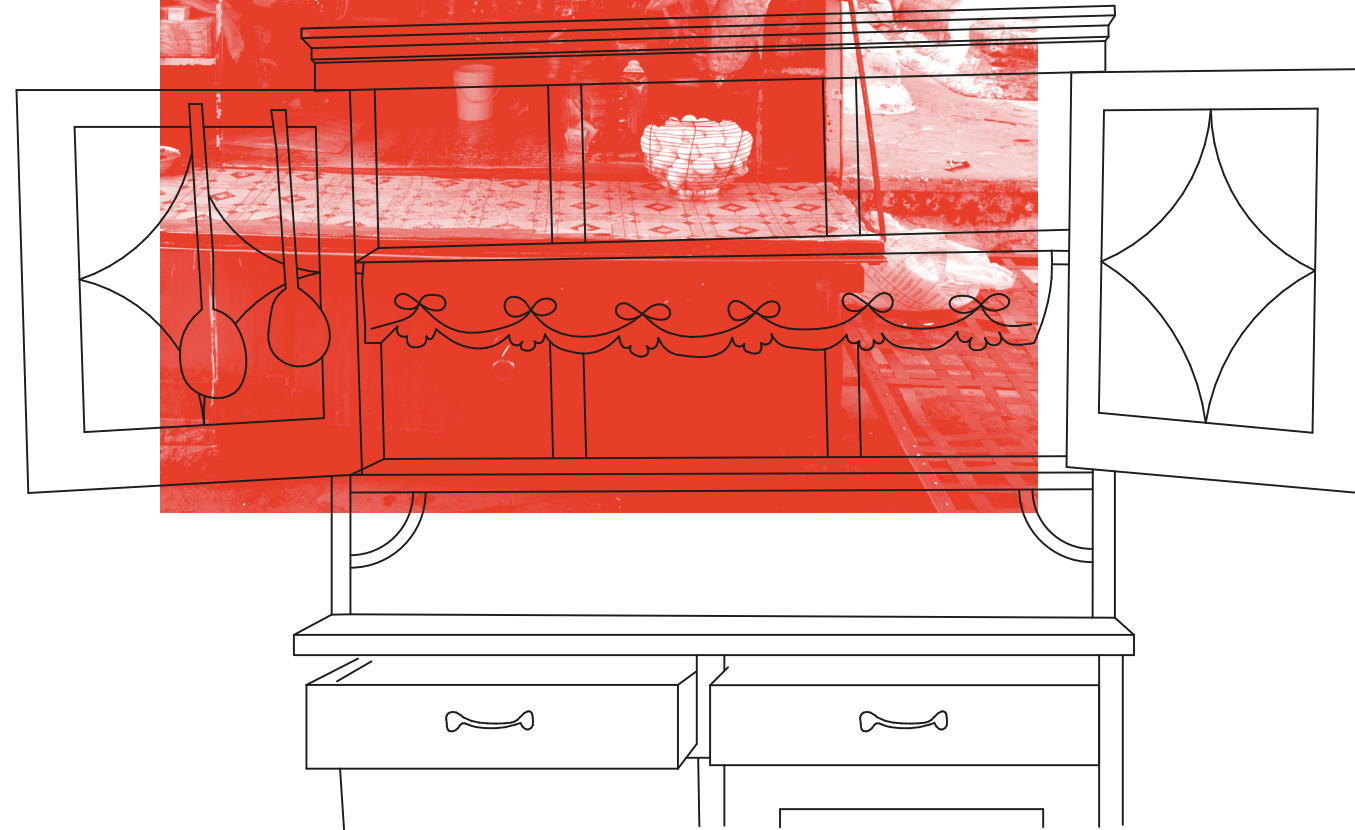
a connection through time

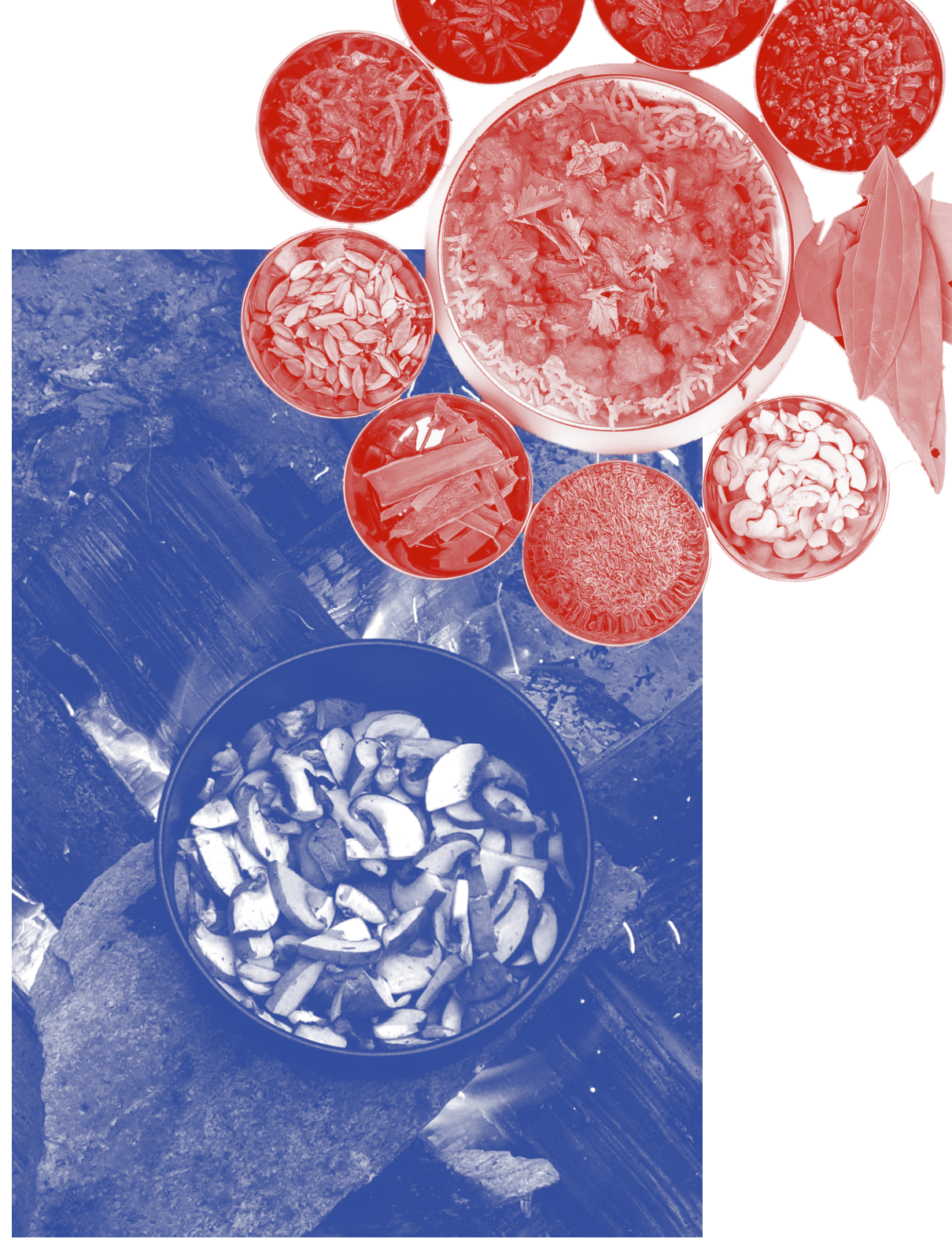
With the creation of narratives, I describe the doings and patterns of use and movement at a place in a specific moment. When that moment has passed, it becomes a memory. Memories are little pockets of time embedded into our brain. Some of these moments considered as milestones during the course of our lives: or first day of school, the 80th birthday of a loved grandparent, a wedding day. Others aren't as clear as these big events. The smell of apple tart in my grandmas' kitchen, the feel of a familiar surface, the melody of a song. These little stimulations can connect us to a moment in time that has long passed. Sometimes they aren't even connected to a concrete image and merely make us feel warm, loved or anxious.

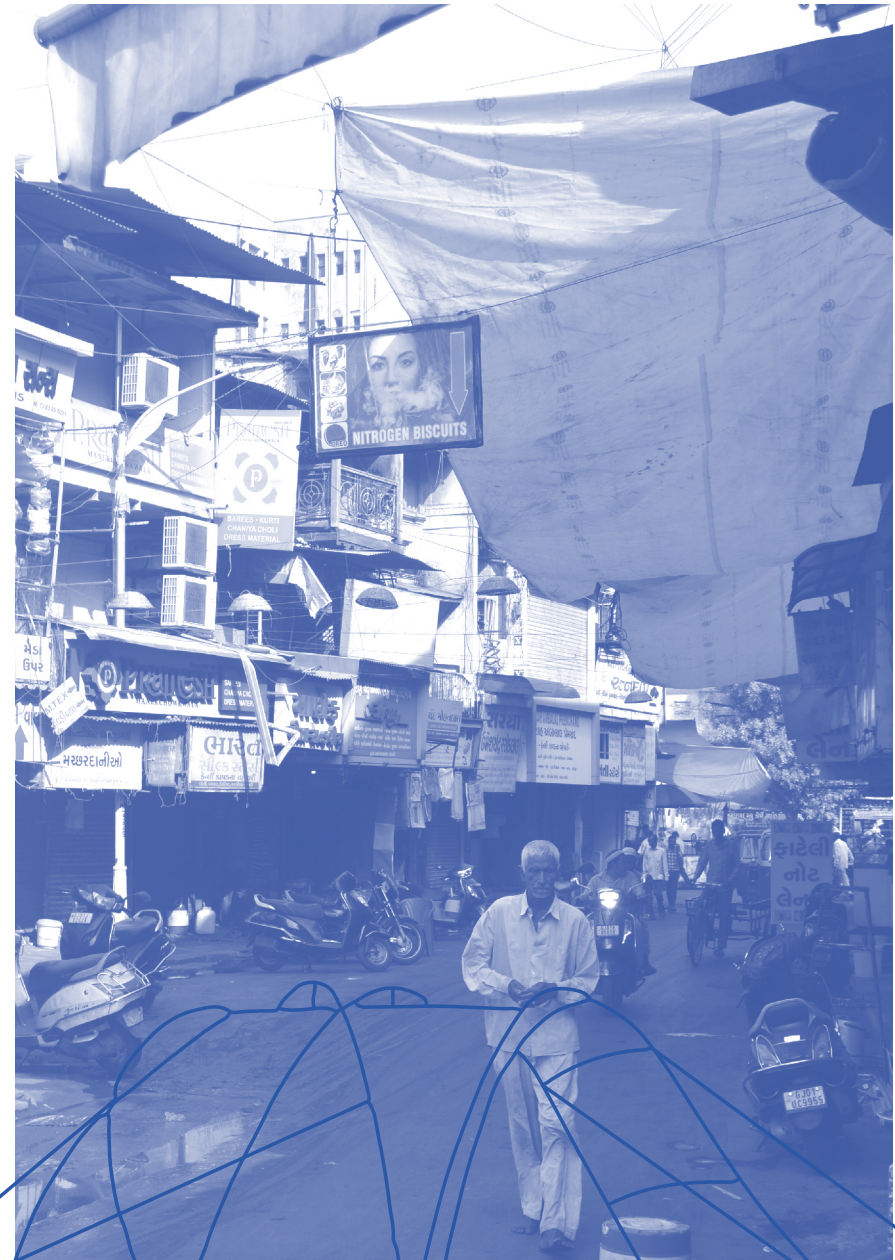
Katy, our client at the Permaculture Farm, grew up in Argentina. She moved to Norway with her husband to raise their children. The outdoor kitchen they wanted to have in their forest was intended as an homage and analogy to the Argentinian way of cooking meat and vegetables over open fire. With our design of the platform, we wanted to create the illusion of the open and wide Argentinian landscape for her, that would remind her of home.

What I realized during this semester is that everything I saw, touched, smelled and heard is part of my memory now. The places, objects and patterns I saw, the material, tools and techniques I used and the spaces and narratives we created together. I focused on my sensations and experiences and paid a lot more attention to the feel, scent, shape and tactility of things and architecture. Now, the sight of an open shopping cart in India reminds me of my grandma's old kitchen cabinet, the sound and smell of fire reminds me of our nesting in experience, that I also see in the big textile that shade the streets of Ahmedabad.





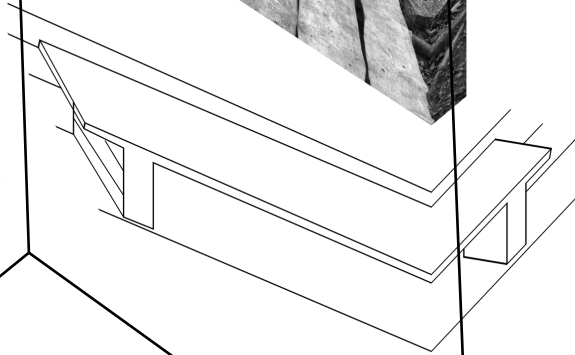
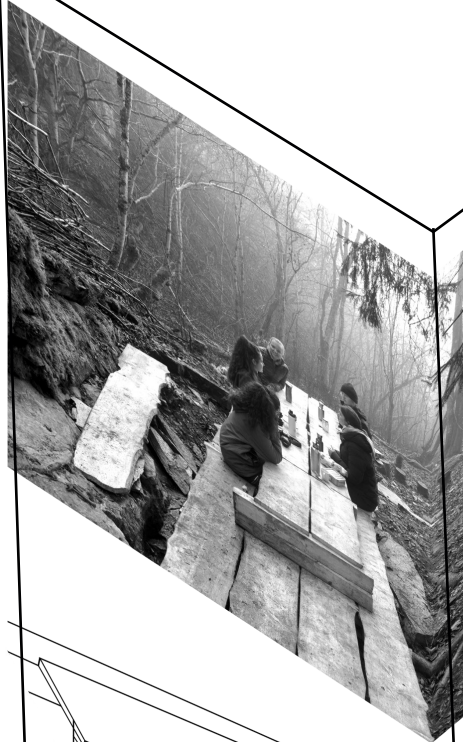




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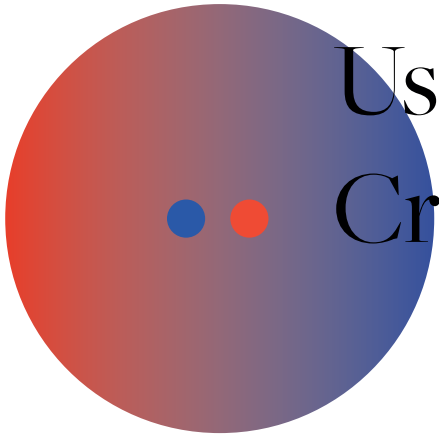
*an assembly of
space*



*translated
narratives*

*a mosaic of
memories*





See

Use

Create

See Use Create

a revelation

The places we spent most of our time in during the course of Experimental Practice couldn't be more different from each other. There was the building site for the outdoor kitchen, laying in the forest next to a small stream within the farmland of our clients Katy and Magnus. This forest was the site, theater and blank canvas during our first months of the semester. In contrast to these natural and calm surroundings I found myself in a completely new environment when arriving in India. After 24 hours of traveling, I was tired, quiet and overwhelmed. It was hot and humid. Shoved into a taxi, sitting on each other's laps, our well protected belongings strapped onto the top of the car we headed into the vibrant, loud, colorful and chaotic city. For the first few days I only noticed the differences that obviously existed to what I knew in Norway. I must admit I was arrogant and judgmental. I interpreted a situation by what I thought to be the reality, made up of stories and images I had put together in my head. I was so focused on my own perspective that it took me a few days to realize my behavior.

The assumptions I had, the preexisting thoughts that limited my mind to what I knew and have seen before prevented me from being free and open. Thinking there is only one way to do things is ignorant. It puts the world into a black and white grid, in which everyone tries to be right. The moment I stopped talking and started listening, the moment I stopped presuming and started seeing, experiencing, recognizing, touching, sensing, connecting and emerging, was the moment I was put in my place. It isn't about the "right" way of doing things. It is not about the general solution we think is right or our believe to know best. My opinion didn't matter at all anymore, because I realized it wasn't about me. I wasn't the subject of the situation that knew what's best. I was an object, getting the incredible opportunity to experience something unknown and new.

Now that I think about it, the situation in the forest wasn't that different. Before we started, I was used to having a strict plan. I had presumptions about what would be best for the site and our clients without even knowing them and their situation. I looked at references of kitchens and gathering places and was sure to know everything there was to know about outdoor kitchens. How difficult could it be to create seating around a fireplace? Well, the realization hit rather quickly. The place didn't look exactly like the image I had made up in my head after seeing the plans and pictures. The measurements we took were wrong and the positions we had marked for the trees didn't take in wild branches or seasonal changes in their appearance and thickness. I had to adapt my expectations and follow the "given".

If I am being honest, I started the semester by questioning the concept of the course. What could an outdoor kitchen built in Norway have to do with a Block-Printing workshop in India? How should we create architectural spaces when there was no set outcome? How should we find common factors and threads that tie it all together? After reading through this book, my journal, I hope you can see how drastically my perspective has changed. I treasure the experiences I had while building and designing, but I realize now that it was never about the actual built results. It was and still is about the places, objects and patterns I saw along the way. It is about the material, tools and techniques I learned to recognize and use; And it is about the spaces, narratives and memories we created together.

"We must first learn a discipline which teaches us the true relationship between ourselves and our surroundings. (...) And what happens finally, is that we learn to overcome our fears, and reach that portion of ourselves which knows exactly how to make a beautiful life instinctively." (Alexander 1982, 13+16)

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See Use Create

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