

HANNAH BRODIE, WITH SIMON TWOSE

Spatial momentums

INTERSTICES 24



Fig. 1 Hannah Brodie (2024).
Performative drawing overlapped
[Drawing]

Prologue

A fixed and final architecture often follows the act of drawing, but what if architecture were to remain a drawing, with the vitality of an open sketch? Drawing brings performative gestures to life through records of its making—its traces. *Spatial momentums* experiments with these traces, using their performative possibility to reframe and alter conceptions of architecture, and in doing so, offers new perspectives on urban space. It is a contemporary critique on the relation between drawing and built space and engages drawing's capacity to be an ongoing, open process directed towards architecture, in an effort to discover sketch-like performative possibilities.

Spatial momentums poses the question: How can architecture remain a sketch? This is pursued through three “acts” or drawing experiments, with each progressively increasing in scale and architectural complexity. The acts distil strategies that allow architecture to remain in an open, sketch-like state. Act I offers a spatial installation that explores drawn gestures at a bodily scale. These performances are subsequently “staged” through a series of architectural drawings, and in the final act, Wellington City becomes part of the sketch performance, imbuing both city and architecture with the spontaneity and openness of a sketch.

This research orchestrates an inter-subjective encounter, bringing together the artistic realms of performance, drawing, and writing to expand architecture as a traditional discipline. The artistic research considers (the act of) drawing as a performance that unfolds through an interplay of thought, surface, and the drawing hand. This exploration draws upon diverse forms of embodied and artistic knowledge that arise through moments of slippage and deviation, where different modes of drawing practice enter into dialogue, intersecting, overlapping, and at times, colliding.

It is framed as creative practice research, weaving together experimental practices and critical reflections, with each creative act marking a canvas of understanding, of artistic knowledge and its agency. Through intensifying drawing's sketch-like potentiality, *Spatial momentums* seeks to contribute to understandings of drawing and architecture, as well as to meticulously interact with the potentialities of drawing with the city.

The term “drawing” is synonymous with “sketch,” with both considered simultaneously nouns and verbs. This embraces the idea that drawing is not solely a static representation but also a dynamic expression, a fusion of bodily action and resistance, of material, blurring the lines between the performance of drawing and unexpected acts of drawing's matter in response. Therefore, a ten-minute sketch is not just a drawing enacted within a specified timeframe, but a performance involving drawer and drawing, embedding a host of complex spatial, temporal, material, and conceptual conditions within the act of sketching. Performative drawing in this research is thus the capacity to render thought visible, where thoughts become actions in concert with space, material, and time.

The performative methodology aligns with art historian and theorist Sarat Maharaj's notion of “no-how,” which challenges static and fixed scientific and art research methodologies.¹ Following these ideas, the work approaches design as an open practice of engaging with ever-evolving indeterminacies that are never fully captured. Through this, drawing as a terminal, finite representation is jolted into becoming an active force in the creative process.

This performative methodology unfolds through three distinct “acts,” each of which introduces a set of elements or “actors” that operate within the overarching framework of “drawing” as a performative medium. “Drawing” as a character entangles itself through various performances with paper, space, material, site, and event. These create an overall performance in the spatialisation of the sketch, as both ongoing architectural thinking and an ongoing, open architecture. Each act presents a series of investigations, which theatricalise—through the medium of drawing—architecture's ambiguous presence.

Act I The moment of the drawing: An installation

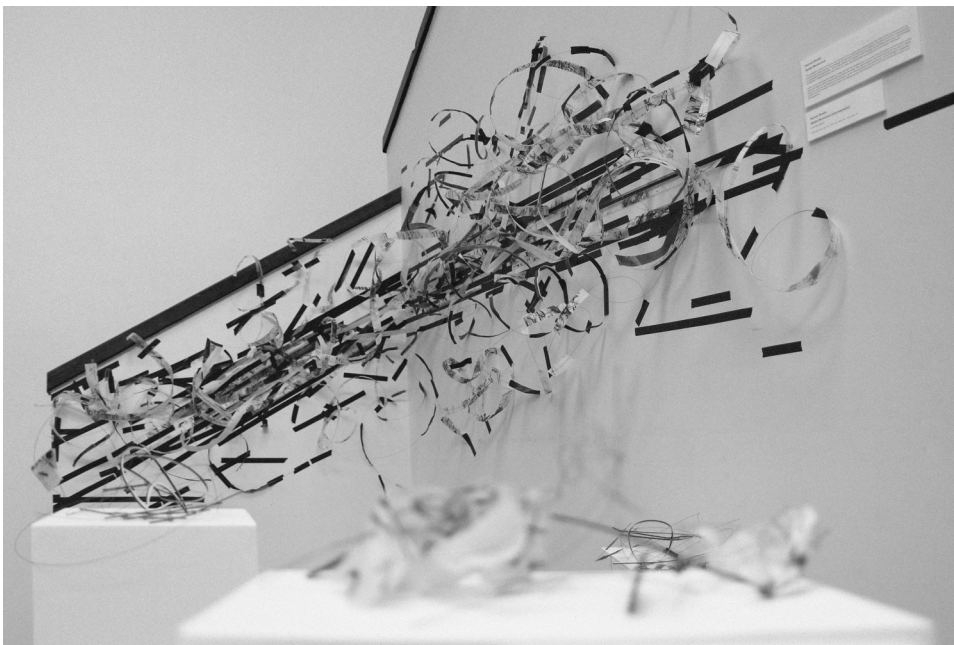
Act I is a result of performative drawing that is a spatialised installation at the scale of the body. The installation was developed over a series of interconnected experiments entitled *Line, Object, and Choreography*. The installation's design examined the intersection of improvised movements and drawing, culminating in the final installation as a performative spatialised architecture—one that persists as a sketch, synthesising drawing, thought, and action.

Drawing serves as the primary medium within architectural representation,



Fig. 2 Hannah Brodie (2024).
Act I, Installation of the objects
[Photograph]

Fig. 3 Hannah Brodie (2024). Act I,
Installation [Photograph]



yet its influence is more than solely instrumental. Drawing's techniques, performances, and materialities hold the ability to contribute to expressive architectural outcomes. In this work, drawing is an active tool for thought more than a final constructed representation. Drawing serves as a means of continual speculation, and drawings exist as the actual works themselves. Philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy suggests that drawing exceeds a functional purpose; its multifaceted and pleasurable nature challenges drawing as a static object, instead becoming a record of performative engagement.² Act I activated the inherent dynamics of pleasure. The works produced during this phase also resonated with the artist Nikolaus Gansterer's practice, which engages playfully with didactic forms, finding enjoyment in challenging rigid structures and rejecting dogmatic approaches, revealing the subversive pleasures of drawing.³ In the words of

architect Peter Cook, when drawing “[...] becomes more abstract than illustrative, it becomes more generically spatial.”⁴ Wherever you stand in the Act I installation, there is an experience of “drawing” generating architectural potentials through multiple, embodied readings (Fig. 2–3). Through the creation of drawings as spatial structures, the installation allowed the viewer to become part of the drawing, inhabiting the drawing space. This caused the drawing to become connected to the spatiality of architecture and to generate thoughts in answer to the question of how architecture can remain a sketch.

Fig. 4 Hannah Brodie (2024).
Spatialising the drawing
[Photograph]

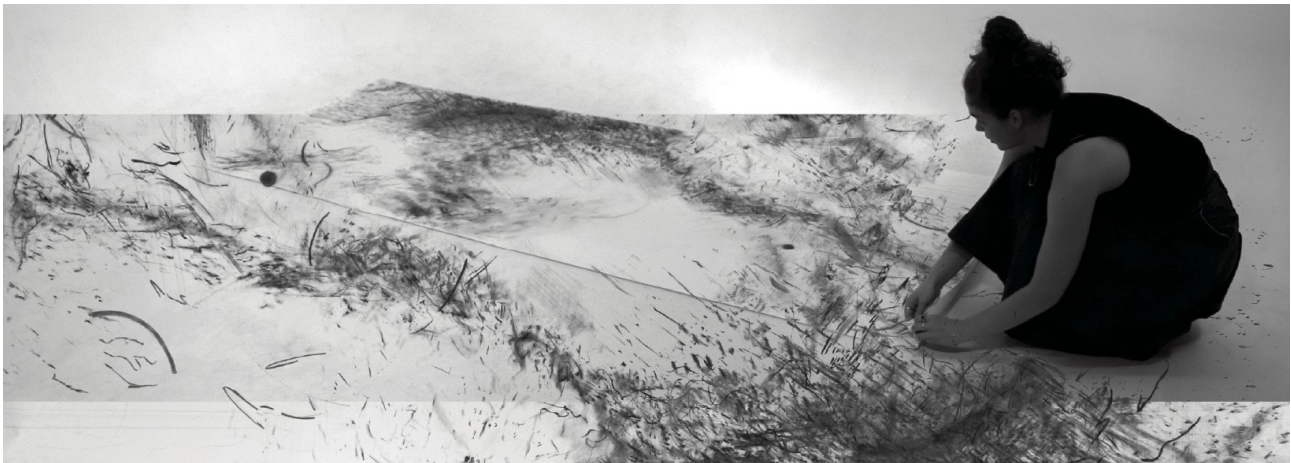


Fig. 5 Hannah Brodie (2024).
Performative drawing hung
[Photograph]

Act II Spatialising the drawing: Space and site

Act II was the result of investigating “spatial moments” through the exchange of drawing media, performance, and site. Expanding upon the performative dimensions of drawing introduced in Act I, Act II explored the ways in which drawings materialise within the physical world, acquiring a degree of permanence. The aim of Act II was to explore how performative drawing is affected by two opposing spatial fields. The first is the space of drawing, tested by sketching space on a large white sheet of paper (Fig. 4–5). The second is the space of the city, tested by sketching with a site in Eva Street, Wellington (Fig. 6). Act II explored how the performative nature of sketched drawing, across two spatial fields, could hold potential for open and ambiguous architectural outcomes.

Architect Jonathan Hill identifies the term “white paper” as appropriate for architectural drawings as it acts as both programme and site.⁵ This is because the paper possesses edges, surface, and depth. In the first part of Act II, the performative drawing on the expansive white paper surface engaged with these qualities, creating a dialogue between drawing as a site and drawing as an act. Smudges and smears within these drawings were reminders that drawing happens on a surface, creating accidents which shift intentions and enact new ideas on a page, drawing out new responses to the project, and by extension, new thoughts on architecture.

In the second exploration of Act II, the conditions of drawing shifted from white paper to an urban territory: a location in Eva Street, Wellington. The site is already marked by a pre-existing field of traces on its surface. By drawing with the street and its field of marks, I was able to reframe the street as a sketch, working with built limitations that inherently brought a structured nature to the



Fig. 6 Hannah Brodie (2024). Act II,
Drawing on site [Photograph]

performative drawing. This urban field drawing engaged iterations of density, layering, expanding, and recombining through drawing out material impressions involved in mind, body, and action. These found their way onto paper (Fig. 7–9).

As architectural theorist Sonit Bafna identifies in drawings, specific marks on the paper are linked to “[...] the artist’s ability to take advantage of our natural propensity to see figures in certain arrangements of marks.”⁶ In the final stages of Act II, the work shifted to physical modelling, to distil the marks and figures in the drawing as three-dimensional entities or “characters.” Moving from two dimensions to three served as a method to materialise and embody qualities expressed in the drawings, illustrating aspects such as occupation, scale, light, and atmosphere in a three-dimensional context.

Through the research in Act II, it became easy to draw things that were impossible to build, so herein lies the question: What might a sketch architecture be? The materiality and small gestural qualities of these three-dimensional characters tested this by enabling a shift in dynamic from the drawing of impossible architecture to spatialised and possible spatial outcomes. Act II aimed to translate the nature of performative creation and its adopted language into something that can be truly manifested as architectural space.

Fig. 7 Hannah Brodie (2024). Act II, Maquettes exposed [Photograph]

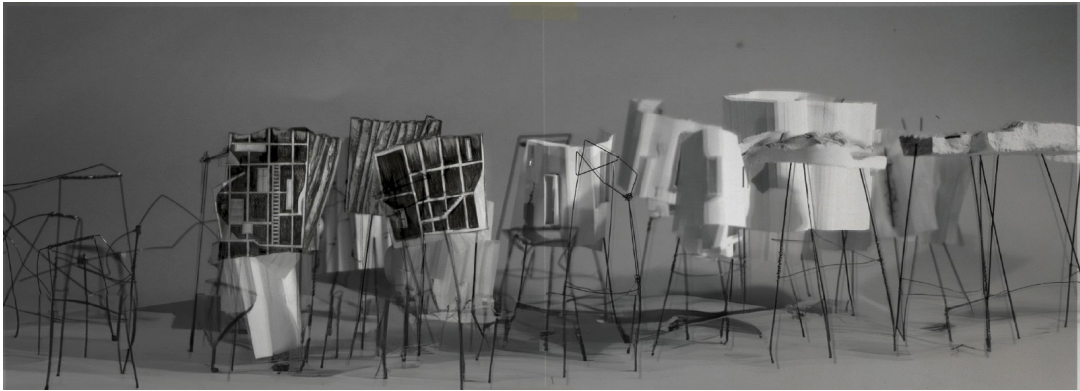


Fig. 8 Hannah Brodie (2024). Act II, Maquettes habitation [Photograph]

Fig. 9 Hannah Brodie (2024). Act II, Drawing maquettes [Photograph]



Act III Staging the drawing: Event and architecture

Act III was a continuation of thinking about how architecture can remain a sketch, as both a drawing performance and spatial proposition. Act III responded to the question posed by architectural theorist Marcia Feuerstein and Gray Read: “What if buildings were considered not as objects but as actors in the city, which perform with and among people in the small improvisations of urban life?”⁷ In Act III, drawing emerges as a performance of investigation, extracting design elements and programmatic considerations from the city’s unexamined spaces, accentuating their potential to prompt architecture as a drawn performance.

Act III is set within Wellington City. The site extends beyond the limits of Eva Street out into the wider city. By employing architectural objects as props and the city as a stage, the buildings become actors. A sequence of spatial propositions was generated that engaged the myriad actors, reimagining the city’s domestic and private typologies as a play of architecture and occupation (Fig. 10).

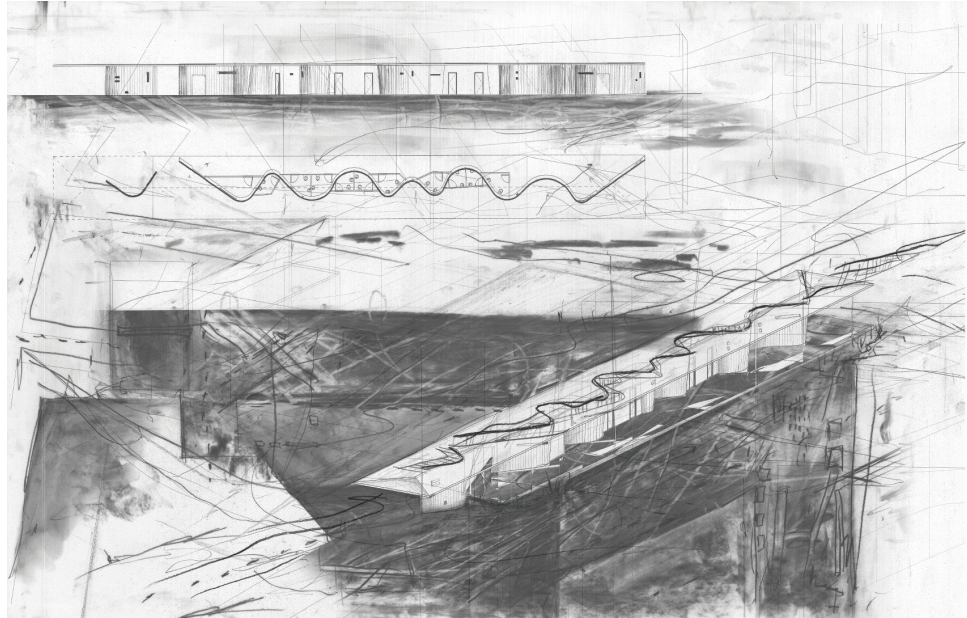


Fig. 10 Hannah Brodie (2024).
Act III, Drawing in the city [Drawing]

Performative drawing as a research method led to ambiguity and complexity through adventitious marks that enabled imaginative modes and narratives to emerge. Instances of clarity and architectural significance were woven together, capturing fleeting moments of form and presence as the work progressed. The architectural characters depicted shapes and formal qualities that are closer to what someone might consider to be a habitable, usable building. Yet they still possess the qualities of the performative drawing that engendered them. The qualities manifest through atmospheres of drawing—qualities of charcoal and graphite smudges, which find their way into the architectural propositions. The lines and marks produced through the performative drawings actively shaped space, cutting, erasing, mapping, extracting forms and wrapping them around buildings, transforming them into entities of their own and changing the city (Fig. 11).

The sketched characters proposed a type of event in the landscape, where the architectural programmes of dwelling, orientation, and rest offer architectural provocations, to coerce imagined ways occupants, space, and material engage with the city. Through performative sketching, the work prompts reflections on how architecture in city spaces can remain a sketch while interrupting the very fabric of the city, with the sketch acting as both architecture and device for thought.

Fig. 11 Hannah Brodie (2024).
Drawing Act III, Creature 2 [Drawing]



Epilogue: Drawing conclusions

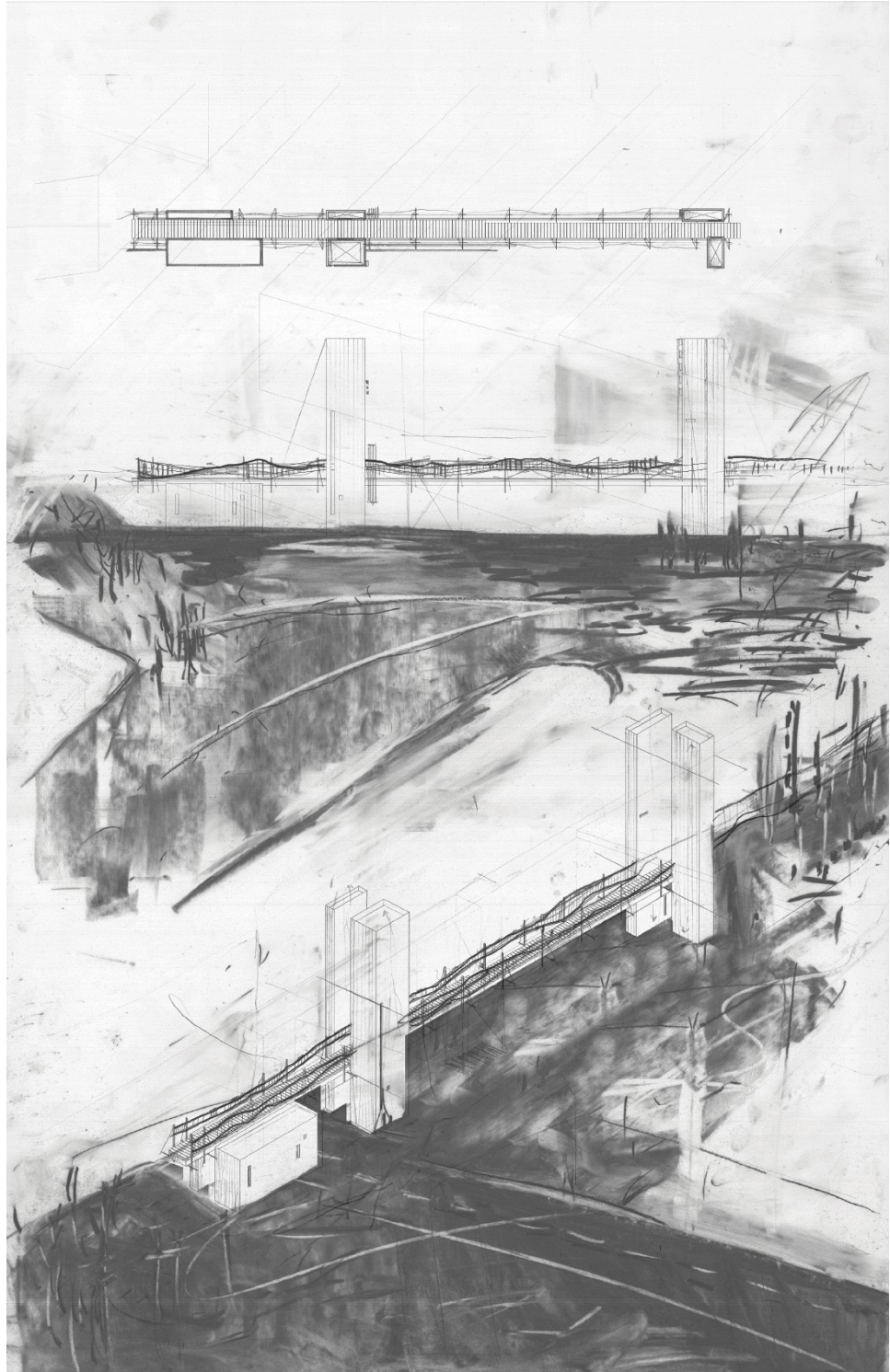
The drawing/s and architecture resulting from this research remain sketches collecting acts of discovery that are inherently open, sketch-like and in-between states. This way of reimagining architecture, through instilling it with performative possibility, challenges the way architecture is considered and, perhaps, might manifest in a material reality. This potential to challenge architectural norms is a key outcome of *Spatial momentums*, drawn from a realisation that drawing is not only a medium of expression but also a performative and investigative tool.

The answer to how architecture can remain a sketch lies in conditions of drawing that allow things to remain irresolute, incomplete, unfixed—in an ever-present sketch-like state—whether the end result is a drawing on paper, an object in space, or a built reality. The question prompts new ideas of what constitutes an architectural outcome. This work reconsiders the notion of a “final” architecture by asking how a building might embody the open-ended, exploratory qualities inherent in a messy sketch.

The beauty of this type of work is that it never ends. There is no chance of getting stuck—where one mark ends, hundreds more wait to be drawn. Endless drawings and sites equate to endless improvisational partners and therefore endless possibilities. Even the field conditions of the white paper allow a connection between thought and the drawing hand to open architecture as an unending continuation, suggesting ways that architecture may forever remain in a sketched-like state.

The conclusion to this research question remains inherently contingent, as the work persistently pursues an idea that resists definitive resolution—an ongoing search for something that can never be fully grasped. To answer the research question, as an end, is to close off the answer completely, but a sketch is open-ended—you can complete the drawing of architecture as and when you choose.

Fig. 12 Hannah Brodie (2024).
Drawing Act III, Creature 3 [Drawing]



NOTES

1. Sarat Maharaj, "Know-how and No-How: Stopgap notes on 'method' in visual art as knowledge production," *Art & Research: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods* 2 (2009): 2, https://s3.amazonaws.com/arena-attachments/47179/Sarat_Maharaj_-_Know-How_and_No-How.pdf.
2. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Pleasure in Drawing* (Fordham University Press, 2013), 17.
3. Nikolaus Gansterer, "Nikolaus Gansterer—Lines Fiction. Drawing & Animation," *Lines Fiction*, 2014, accessed 8 November 2023, <https://linesfiction.de/lf/lines-fiction-online/nikolaus-gansterer/>.
4. Peter Cook, *Drawing: The Motive Force of Architecture* (John Wiley & Sons, 2014), 193.
5. Jonathan Hill, *Occupying Architecture: Between the Architect and the User*, (Routledge, 1998), 82.
6. Sonit Bafna, "How Architectural Drawings Work—and What That Implies for the Role of Representation in Architecture," *The Journal of Architecture* 13, no. 5 (2008): 535–64.
7. Marcia Feuerstein and Gray Read, *Architecture as a Performing Art* (Routledge, 2016), 1.