Spring 2022

Audience Patina: An Enmeshment of Architecture and Theater

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Bard College

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Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of the Arts
of Bard College

by
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Table of Contents:

Abstract:

This senior project entitled *Audience Patina:* An Enmeshment of Architecture and Theater explores the interconnections and juxtapositions between environmental topographies, liminal space, and imaginary dreamscapes. The project consists of interdisciplinary research used to create a large-scale installation piece, as well as the direction of the play *The Stars Come Out at Night.* This installation was created in conversation with the play, which was written by fellow theater department senior, Emily Kaufman-Bell. The play is the essential work that briefed the design around a dreamlike environmental imagery. The design and research explore how space and bodies communicate with each other and have the ability to press change on to one another. Precedent studies that primed this work, include but are not limited to*: The Manhattan Transcripts* (1976-1981) by Bernard Tschumi, Maya Lin's *Water Line*, and *The Host* by Anna Fries (2020).
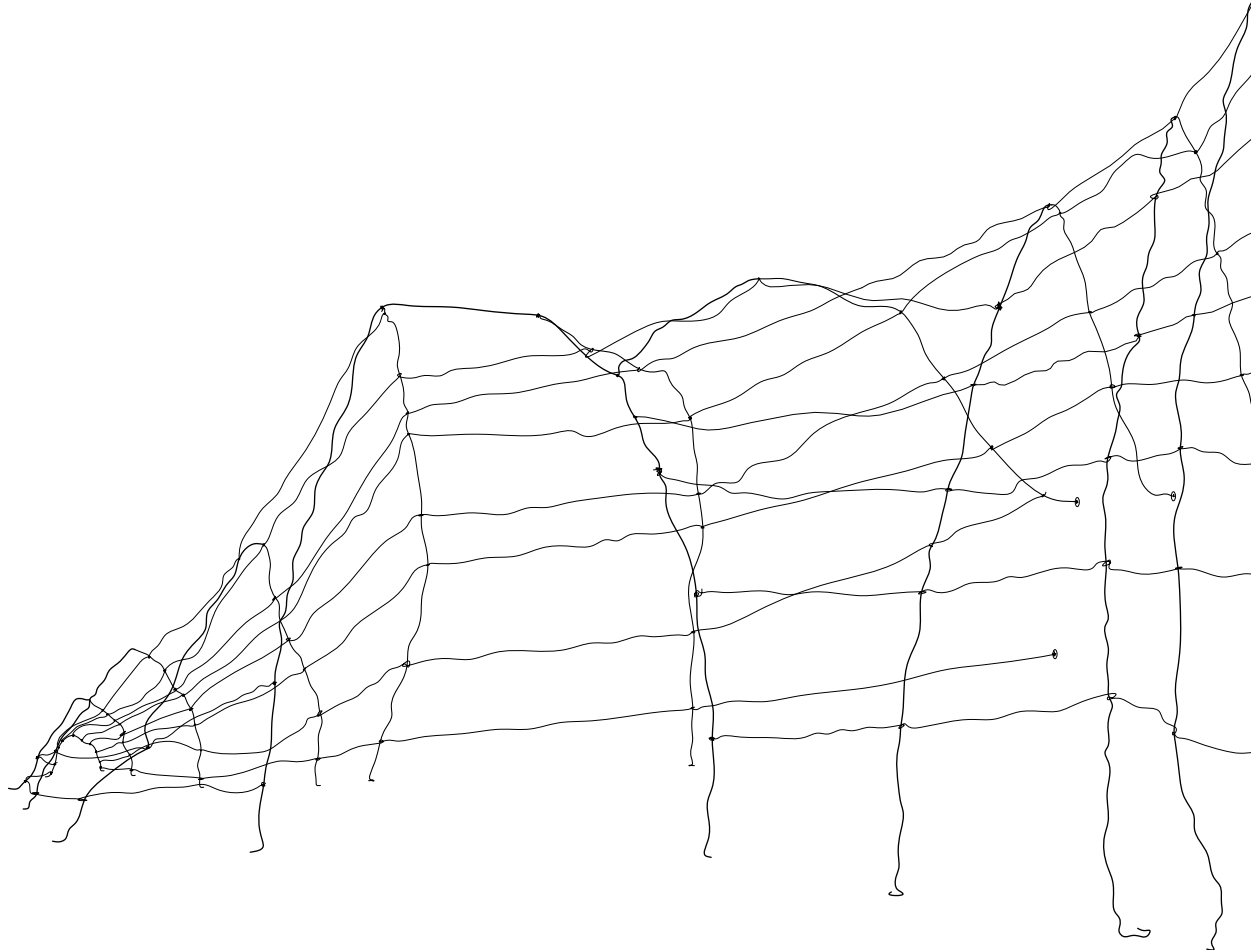
Introduction:

The definitions of things interest me. Because once we define something, that is the point at which we can alter or even obliterate its very existence, scrape together the blown apart pieces, and start again.

I directed and designed the world of *The Stars Come Out At Night,* a play written by Emily Kaufman-Bell. Emily and I worked closely together on the themes of this play, that both resonated with her and allowed me various paths of research and options for set construction. This specific senior project explores the relationship between the fields of theater and architecture through the research and staging of her script. While she was writing, I was researching. The story, characters, and dialogue are all her own and a part of her senior project. Here, I will discuss my own research, two design plans, and the show's ultimate tonal and directorial choices I made.

In The Beginning:

In the beginning, most of our reference points were movies. It is disheartening actually, that so few of our references were plays. Instead, we leaned towards popular media which was more accessible. We started with *The Village* and *The Truman Show.* We were both interested in simulated or constructed realities, realities that were just ever-so-slightly off from the here and now. My research began with Lydia Kallipoliti's, *The Architecture of Closed Worlds Or, What Is the Power of Shit?* Kallipoliti surveys a vast number of closed world designs, exploring the micro to macro differences between simulated, closed, and artificial realities.[1] I amassed a list of designs and historic events that fascinated me from this book. From there, I researched the work of Dan Graham, Hito Steyerl, Monika Sosnowska, Do Ho Suh, and Janet Echelman. Their work, in disparate ways, immerses their audience through different material choices into completely

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[1] Lydia Kallipoliti, The Architecture of Closed Worlds Or What Is the Power of Shit? (Zürich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2018).

original constructed worlds. I admire these architects' and artists' work, but found it challenging to hone in on what the visual tone of the play would be. This is because, I did not understand what the play was just yet myself. I let their work percolate, and many of their influences popped up one way or another in both my first and second design iterations.

Design One – Void, Thresholds, and Boundaries:

By December 2021, Emily finished the first full draft of *The Stars Come Out At Nights.* In conjunction with draft one, came the first design for the play, *The Variables Playground: Void, Threshold, and Boundary Space.* In this plan, I played with the given architecture of theater: platforms, flats, curtains, and scrims, to explore how the formal fields of architecture and theater intertwine.

Both designs are within the context of the Old Gym, the student black box theater at Bard. The space is forty feet by eighty feet with an eighteen-foot-high ceiling. It has crumbling walls and approximately 17 working lights, depending on the day. More often than not, it is set up in a proscenium, although as a black box theater it is malleable. I hold this space dear to my heart;I have been one of three students to run it for the past three years. In the back of my mind, I knew whatever I designed needed to be: 1. big, 2. engaging and 3. not a proscenium.
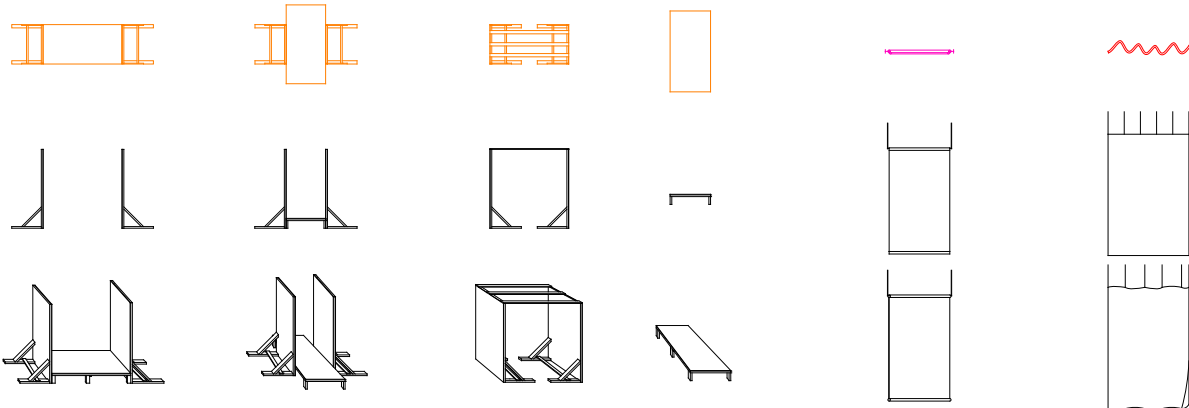
Fig 1. Ali Kane, "Kit of Parts in Three Perspectives" from *Variables Playground*, 2021

Everything in *Variables Playground* was able to sit on a level and equal playing space. I placed a grid on the floor as a visual scale marker, then created different iterations of void, threshold, and boundary spaces using the architectural objects of the theater. Monika Sosnowska's *Antechamber* (2011), became a precedent for what I created. Flats are typically used in proscenium set ups to create false perspective and fake realities; I placed them, instead, in relation to platforms and curtains around the space like a large game of chutes and ladders. Audience and actors alike were able to move wherever they pleased throughout the play, creating a different show for each audience member.

Fig 2. Three Iterations of *Variables Playground,* 2021.

I was also influenced by the 2012 play *Habit* by David Levine. Audience members were invited to walk around a 1:1 scale house and peer through the windows to watch the action of the play unfold. Levine was interested in examining the intersection of theatrical audiences and gallery audiences, placing less importance on actors' emotive and physical choices, and more on the play being performed on a loop for eight hours a day,

> So they could do whatever they wanted within this fully functional house: eat, piss, shit, shower, nap, watch TV, so long as the play was performed over and over. It was this constantly changing thing. My question was, if you turn theater into a sculptural object, if you don't charge admission, if you get rid of seats, if you get rid of the illusion of the unique event as well as everything that signifies the experience of the theater, what's left?[2]

The physical and emotional expectations surrounding seeing theater is much different than

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[2] David Levine, "No Applause. Repeat," in *Bruce Nauman: Theater of Experience* ed Katherine Atkins and Kelly Kivland (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2003), 85-86.

going into a museum or gallery show. The body moves differently throughout the constructed

space around them, as well as interacts differently with the boundaries of the space based off of

its definition of what it holds inside. Levine's exploration of looping theater takes the spectacle

off of trying to soak up every scene and allows audience members to explore the nuances and

differences each time the performance starts again. It creates a wholly different structure. It

places the importance less so on the furthering of the plot and more so on the repetition and

micro-irregularities that live both inside and outside of the loop.

  In this design, I purposefully wanted to toy with the idea that no one audience member

would see the same show. Like *Habit,* or *Sleep No More* for a more popular example*,* audiences

could choose which actor they want to follow and at what point they want to move to another

space in the theater.
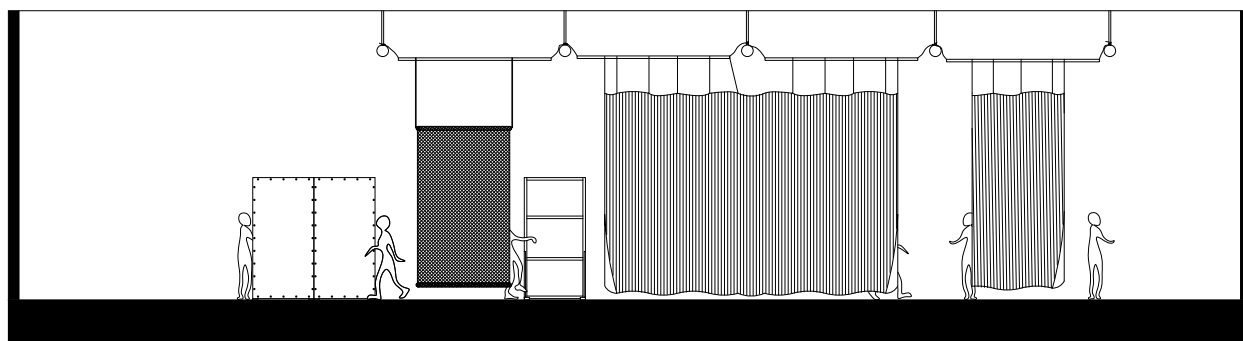
Fig 3. Movement Section from *Variables Playground,* 2021.

December 2021 - Midways and The Death of Design One:

  Variables Playground was the design and concept I presented at midway showings

for the theater department, and a written version was presented before my midway board for

architecture. Even as I argued for this design, I did not think I would use it. It made sense to me

as a thesis and was a clear way to organize my own thoughts and research around architecture in

relation to a western, more commercialized theater. However, it lacked connection to the script.

To me, design one was about abstract space being imbued with meaning by bodies and action.

By late December, I believed the play needed an environmental space that could uplift the story already solidified on the page. I knew that my research and ideas were developing alongside the script's developments and by January 2022, design two: *The Skeleton Canyon Pass* came into being.

The final version of the story Emily wrote became about the main character Jesse and his personal journey through a dream-like world as a response to witnessing his friend, Sonny's, death. This decision structurally changed my concept of what the play's container, so to speak, would be. It is not unlike someone saying that the most important part of a house being built is having a space to entertain, then coming back a month later and saying they actually want a house just for themselves as a personal sanctuary. The previous design was moot. Accordingly, I changed everything: my research, my design, and especially my thinking around the structure of the performance.

The Capital "G" Grid:

A brief aside on "the grid." When I start designs, I like to place a grid over any existing floor plan I have to work with. This works to organize my thoughts while showing different levels of scale. With *Variables Playground,* I began with a 6-foot grid marked out on the floorplan of the Old Gym. From this, I placed curtains, scrims, platforms, and flats in direct or indirect relation to each other, creating a playground for both actors and audience to explore through free movement of the space. The grid seemingly creates a totality of order; it breaks up any feeling of realism in the set. This leaves the design and space distinctly theatrical, as in, nothing got to where it was by accident. This choice to use a grid on the floor, directed design one towards a play of variables. In design one there were clear and distinct rules: open void space, boundaries in your way, and thresholds to pass through to get to the next vantage point.
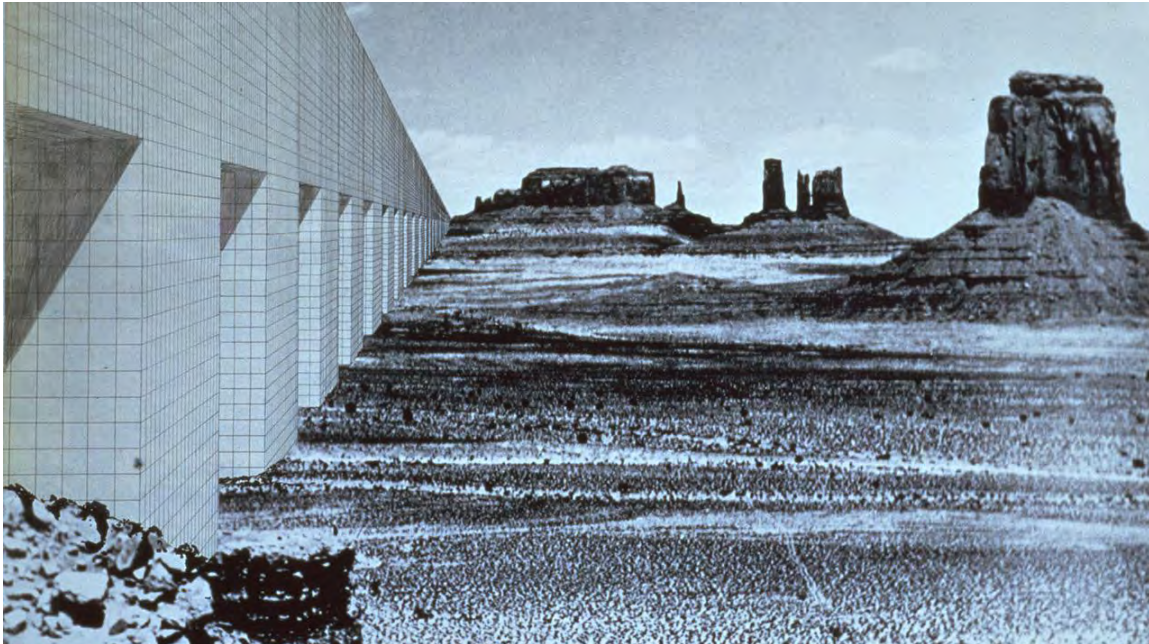
Fig 4. Superstudio, "Arizona Desert" in *Continuous Monument II,* 1969[3]

One of the most architecturally "iconic" collection of grids is from the work of

Superstudio, a group of Italian architects in the mid to late 20th century, whose most famous work

was never built. They articulated their manifestos for future utopias through collage, where they

superimposed grids or gridded structures over existing landscapes:

> We believe in a future of 'rediscovered architecture,' in a future in which architecture will regain
> its full power, abandoning all ambiguity of design and appearing as the only alternative nature…
> we move towards the 'continuous monument'-a form of architecture all equally emerging from a
> single continuous environment.[4]

This form of creating architecture with only one monumental visual gesture, of course does have

a very specific style. Superstudio's grid aesthetic is seen in the myriad of collaged iterations in

their series the "Continuous Monument." This aesthetic is seen in contemporary design, both in

physical work like Hito Steyerl's 2015 immersive piece "Factory of the Sun," and virtual work

such as Anna Fries' and Malu Peeters' digital play, *The Host.* Superstudio's designs encapsulate

this architectural aesthetic of a base design with a grid at its center.

In this light, the grid becomes the given visual variable, like the kit of parts created in

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[3] Superstudio, "Arizona Desert" in Continuous Monument II, 1969, collage on photographic print, 196in, x 254in, Centre Pompidou, Paris, France, https://www.centrepompidou.fr/en/ressources/oeuvre/cGEXx4x.
[4] Cristiano Toraldo di Francia, Alessandro Magris, Roberto Magris, Piero Frassinelli and Adolfo Natalini, "Superstudio on Mindscapes," Design Quarterly no.89 (1973): 28.

Variables Playground. Design, of course, forms in response to *something*, it does not come from a vacuum, but it is interesting to note the white void and vectored grid as a base level that is present *before* formal design with a capitol "D" even begins. I would argue that this phenomenon in design is so prevalent because it is an attempt to organize elements we have no control over, such as the natural world. Rather we dissect it and try to organize the pieces.

Design Two – No Context, as Context:

Along this line, with the grid as my "base level zero," I started designing a new world for *The Stars Come Out at Night.* I thought about Emily's play within the context of no context; that is, not picturing it set in a theater or in any kind of practical "real" space. I envisioned it as being set in the base of a canyon in the desert. Somewhere like the Grand Canyon. This type of environment has its own monolithic and imposing aesthetic. I saw the characters of Jesse and Sky setting up their tent, with two looming orangish, sandy mountains protruding in, the sky setting behind them, and darkness overtaking. It is liminal space, with characters like Hope, Sonny, Vernon, and The Colonel seemingly appearing and disappearing through what should be an impenetrable wall of the canyon. This environmental hurdle is no longer a barrier. I saw all this within the context of my own gridded void imagination that the visuals of Superstudio inspired.

A canyon pass is a transitory place. One must decide whether to keep going on their journey forward, or turn around and find another route. This bottle necked, hollowed out space becomes the site of exploration and discovery for the characters. The organic environment thus becomes the container in which Jesse attempts to tuck away his immediate past trauma of witnessing Sonny's death. With looming canyons, as protection, Jesse's mind is attempting to create a safe place, to tuck away all of the bad, i.e. the bombing and Sonny's death, into
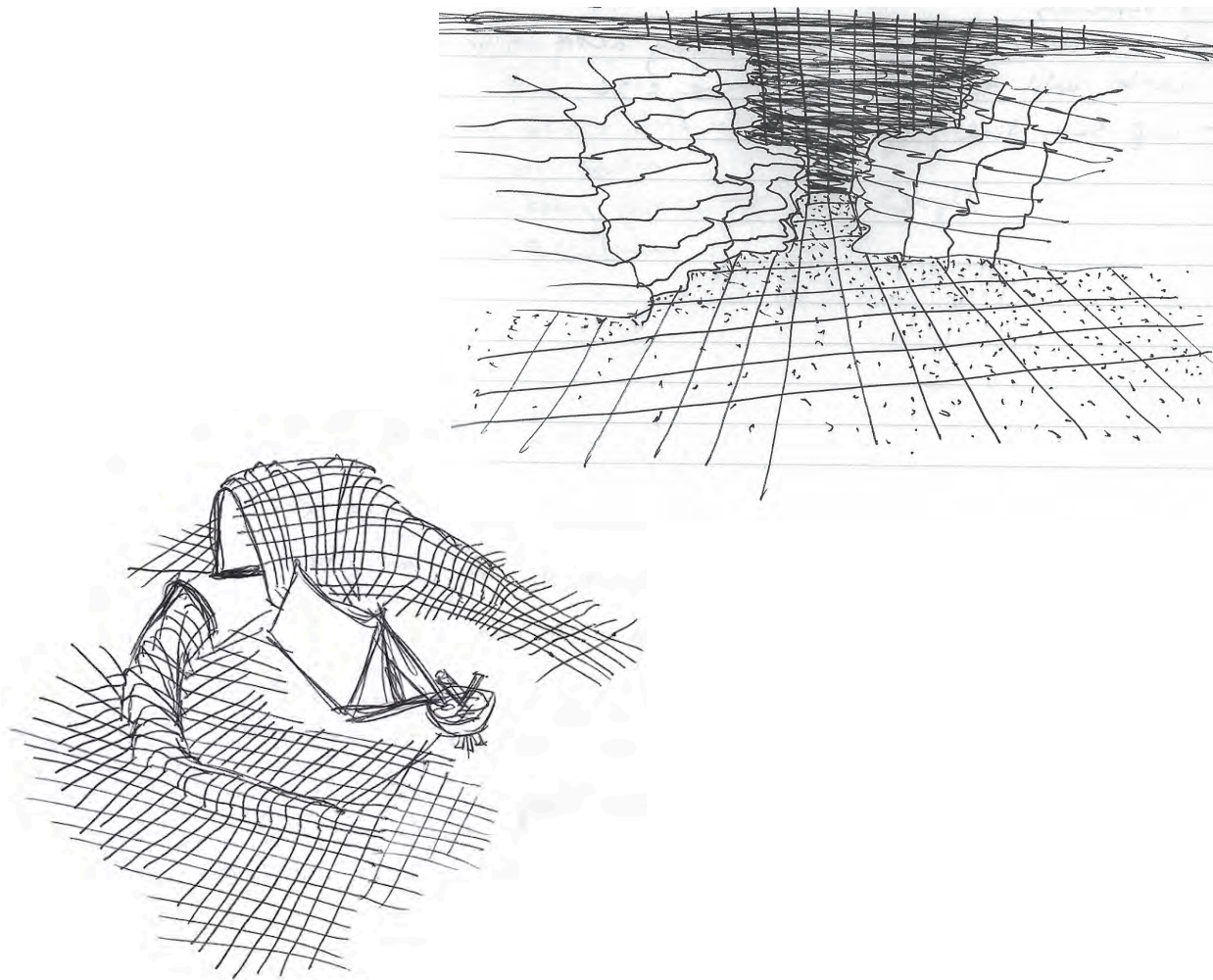
Fig 5. "Gridded Canyon Sketch" (top right), "Mesh Mountains with Tent" (bottom left) for *Skeleton Canyon Pass,* 2021-2022, hand drawings done in pen.

the impenetrable walls of the canyon. However, Sonny intervenes in this world time and time again. He first appears in memories, then in hauntings, then finally, near the end, as a being with full agency. All of these occurrences push Jesse further and further out of his own situational contentment. The arc of the show is Jesse realizing that this world he has unwittingly made for himself is in fact more of a purgatory, or holding pattern for his mental survival rather than a space to process and move forward. The characters of Sky, Vernon, and The Colonel, are there to keep Jesse content and in this world. By the end of the play, Jesse decides against most of the characters wishes to leave the site, because he has now seen what the world is, a figment liminal dreamscape, rather than reality.
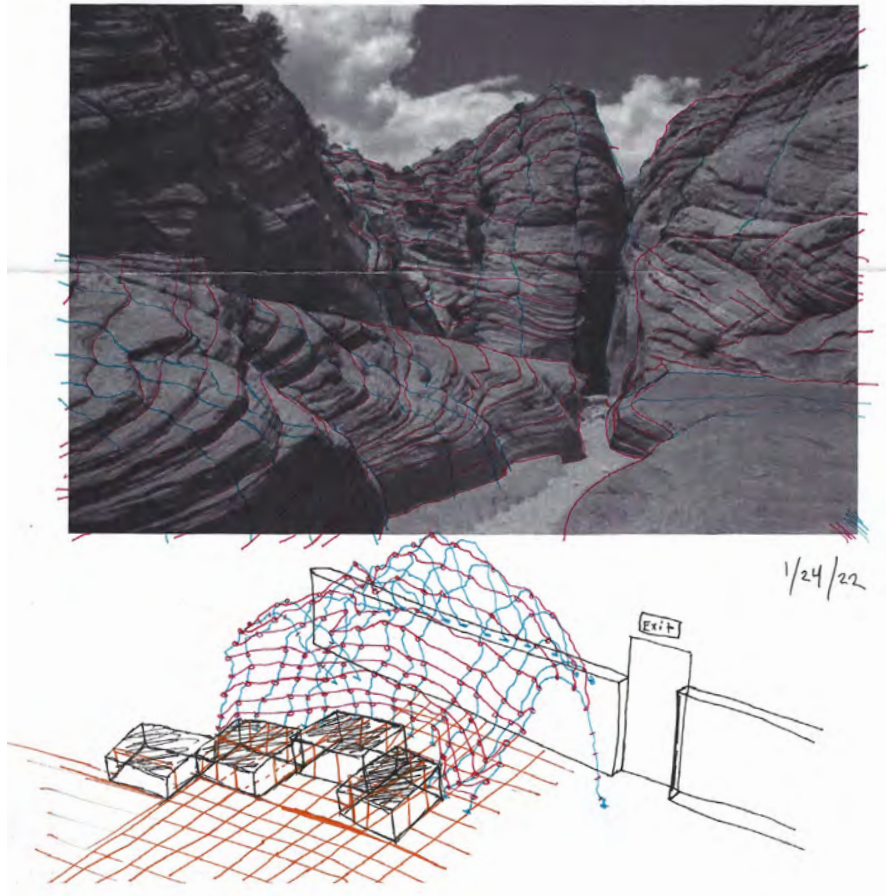
Fig 6. "Canyon Trace in Two Colors" for *Skeleton Canyon Pass,* 2022, scan of pen drawing on printed stock image.

Site Context, as Context:

Transferring my canyon mind musings to my site of the Old Gym became my next hurdle. My idea was to have two large "canyons," built from aluminum wire, interconnected into a warped gridded topography. They would snake along the length of the Old Gym, and grow to a height of 15 feet in the middle. These canyons would create a cocoon around both the audience and stage, enrobing the show in a dreamscape of our natural world. These environmental barricades also compress the already elongated space into an even skinnier stretch of theater. There is nothing like paper mâché covering the wire armatures, nothing disguising the metal. It is not trying to become something it is not. Instead, it is evoking a feeling, a memory, a sensation. It is liminal space, a skeleton for the story that is being played out.

Water Line and The Host, As Precedent:

The first visual precedent that subsequently affirmed my design and material choices was *Water Line* by Maya Lin. This work was a part of a greater exhibition in 2006 called *Systematic Landscapes*. She used digital mapping software to recreate the ocean line as suspended interconnected strands of wire. She changes the perception of the environmental piece by placing the sculpture above the viewer. This piece observes our society's obsessive nature towards the things we cannot see, specifically only in one direction which is up.[5] But when it is something below us like the ocean floor, the ocean line becomes an impregnable boundary that we really have only begun to explore. Lin disorients the viewer by placing them below the water line, and asks them to imagine the world on the ocean's floor. Although there is nothing but air between each strand of wire, the form allows the viewer to fill in the ocean in their mind.

Through the open space left inside the undulating grid, the water line is then seen. She plays with the situational dynamic between the spectator and the work itself. Now, under the water line, the viewer is stuck, never seeing what's living above. Lin's material choice of using wire is the most visually and physically close precedent to the *Skeleton Canyon Pass*. Originally, I thought of using sheets of chicken wire to outline the juts of a canyon. After explaining my canyon musings to a friend, she told me to look at Lin's *Water Line*, which made me know my idea was possible, because there was precedent for it. This precedent allowed me to alter my plan and create freehand mesh, rather than using something so closely netted like chicken wire.

Emily's play evokes the sensation of memories and dreams seemingly lost and then coming into view. With Lin's work, she uses interconnected wire to represent water, the air in between all the different pockets of wire is negative space, but the viewer's mind and imagination takes over and fills in that space with the whole of the ocean. Simultaneously, the

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[5] "Women of Yale Lectures (2016-2020)," Yale University online, accessed March 4, 2022. https://president.yale.edu/president/women-yale-lectures-2016-2020

viewer has to imagine what lives under the water line, since so little is known. With both *The Water Line* and *The Host* by Anna Fries and Malu Peeters, a theme of filling in is seen, and became a part of my own design plan for the piece.

Fig 7. Maya Lin, "Water Line" in *Systematic Landscapes,* 2006[6]

The Host is a digital play, born out of a physical performance, entitled *Virtual Wombs.* In *Virtual Wombs,* Fries and Peeters used VR and other digital technologies to supplement their physical playing space, "Virtual Wombs brings virtual reality into the theater space and plays with speculative states. The work deals with mutation and transformation and with the potentials of 'worldbuilding', the creation of digital, reality-expanding worlds…The production is a hybrid of a spatial soundenvironment, a light installation and a VR trip into which visitors are invited in small groups.[7] *Virtual Wombs* uses VR alongside even newer technology within a physical theatrical space while *The Host's* format is entirely digital. Because of this, it feels more like a video game than a play or movie, because it allows the audience member to have full autonomy over where they want to go and what they want to see. The play is a series of "rooms" made up of warped environmental worlds descending into night. Their digital world gestures to this idea of "filling in" through having no avatar that the audience member follows. This work explores

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[6] Maya Lin, "Water Line" in Systematic Landscapes, 2006, steel wire, Henry Art Gallery, Seattle, WA, https://www. mayalinstudio.com/art/systematic-landscapes
[7] "Anna Fries & Malu Peeters (CH/NL) Virtual Wombs," Kaserne, accessed April 25, 2022, https://www.kaserne-basel.ch/en/programme/virtualwombs/16-09-2021_18-00.

themes of non-binary pregnancy and navigating this journey that is wholly gendered through

the lens of "motherhood." Audience members use keyboard keys to pan and tilt, move forward

and backwards to explore. The camera view does not follow an avatar even though it feels like a

video game. So, this ambiguity towards who the audience member is performing as in this world

is left to the viewer to choose and fill in with their imagination.

Fig 8. Anna Fries, Malu Peeters, *Virtual Wombs*, 2021[8]

The topographies of the space in *The Host* have ghost grids built into them, and look

like vector images. They highlight to the viewer that this world is not realistic, it is someplace

new, and very much unfinished, proving that nothing is set in stone. The mountains and natural,

yet surrealist, environments of this digital world are in juxtaposition to the "screens" showing

YouTube influencer-like clips as fake found footage from the internet. The visuals from this piece

are similar to Superstudio's collages, but instead of superimposing the grid on top of an already

existing natural environment, it uses the grid as a base for building a decidedly unrealistic new

world.

The constant need to touch keys and make choices as the audience member does not

allow one to sit back and take in the performance. Instead, the viewer must constantly decide

where to go and what to do next. It does not let the audience member become fully engrossed

[8] Anna Fries, Malu Peeters, Virtual Wombs, 2021, still from performance, Kaserne Basel, Basel, Switzerland, https://annafries.net/#virtualwombs

in a passive narrative, rather the work centers choice and agency. Through the plans for *Skelton Canyon Pass* and the seating arrangement, I attempted to craft a similar experience in which the environment rejects passive consumption of the story (though in this second design, it did have a formal seating plan).
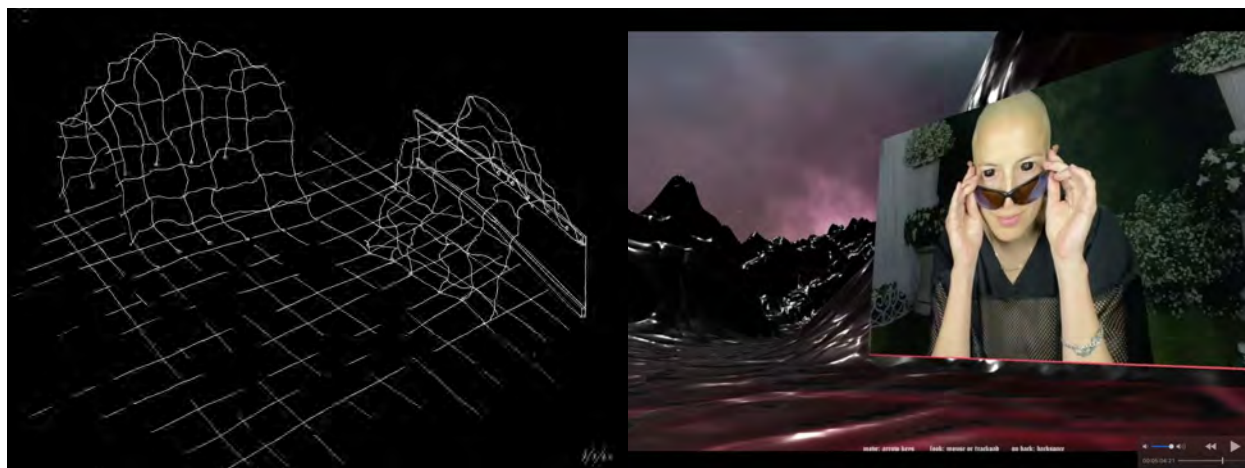

Fig 9. "Inverted Sketch" of *Skeleton Canyon Pass,* 2022 (left). Anna Fries, Malu Peeters, *The Host,* 2020 (right).[9]

The Audience Watching The Play, Watching The Audience:

The two snaking canyons are made up of archways of thicker wire with thinner wire connecting them horizontally. The arches, which differ in heights from six feet to fifteen feet tall allow actors to walk through them. Audience seating runs parallel and butts up against the canyons, with four foot square platforms creating a second raised row of seating, mimicking the movement of the wire. Because of this placement, audience seating is staggered too and creates an informal in the round set up.

Placing this performance in the round allowed for a different relationship between the audience member and the play, as well as between the audience member to other audience members. Unlike a proscenium set up where audience members are all facing a stage looking forward, in the round allows for a different type of human interaction and seated implication. Through in the round staging, it is impossible for the audience to watch the show and not

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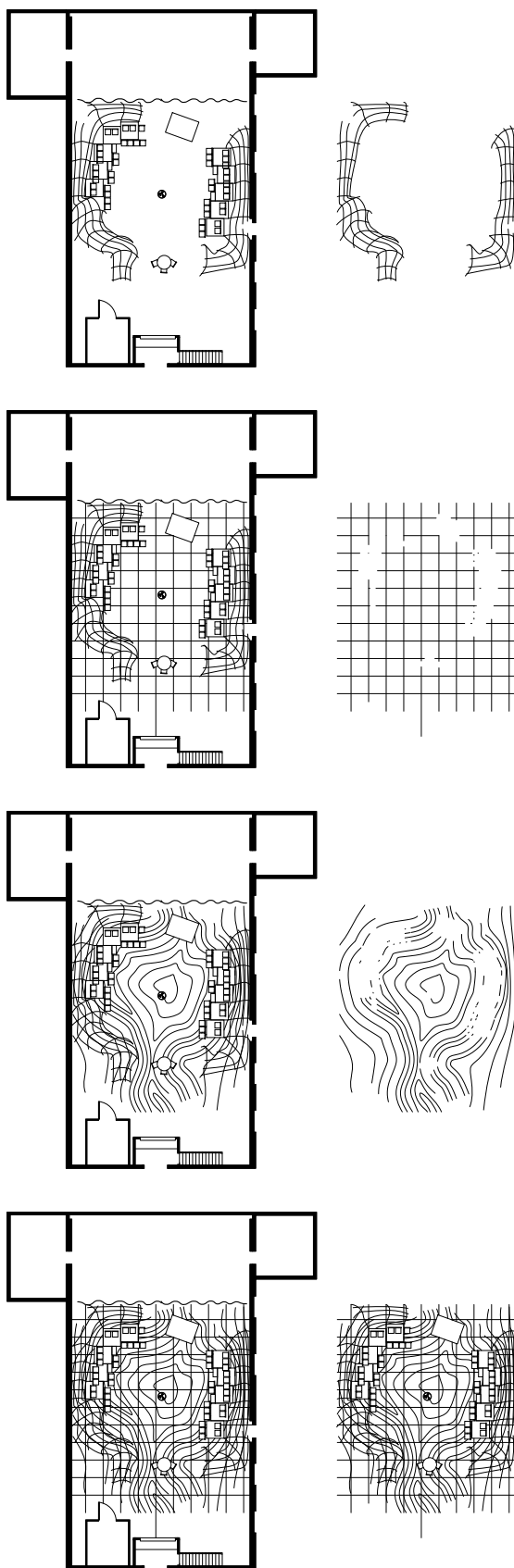[9] Anna Fries, Malu Peeters, The Host, 2020, still from performance, https://annafries.net/#host

recognize the positionality of the audience across from them. This choice works to change the relationship between the play and the audience member to it, by forcing direct lines of eye contact to other watchers. This type of observational awareness, or double awareness, does not allow the audience member to go completely into the land of fantasy and fiction of the story being told. The turning of one's head, looking down at a program, shuffling of feet, are now all in view behind the central action on stage. This awareness, therefore, highlights the presence of metatheatricality already ever present in the theater. People will cough, rustle, fall asleep, or get up to go to the bathroom during a show, but this is all a part of the spectacle of theater. It is live; therefore, variations and deviations will happen each night and become a part of the visual context of the play happening in front of the viewer.

Portals of Movement:

When actors move from one side of the stage to the other, they cross through the wire canyon archways. When an actor walks under the wire archways, the air their bodies displace is felt on the necks of audience members sitting a few feet in front of them. A contrast is then made between stagnant audience members, watching the play unfold, and actors' physical movements both "on" and "off" stage. Their

Fig 10. "Four Iterations" of *Skeleton Canyon Pass*, 2022.

offstage presence is seen and felt. The *Skeleton Canyon Pass* juxtaposes the audience with actors. One is seated watching action while the other is in motion playing the actions. These wire canyons become passageways, both as practical methods for moving across a performance space, while also jumping in and out of time, space, and dimension inside the play. There is something wonderful about an actor walking briskly behind an unsuspecting audience member that jolts and startles the senses inside the expectations of the theater.
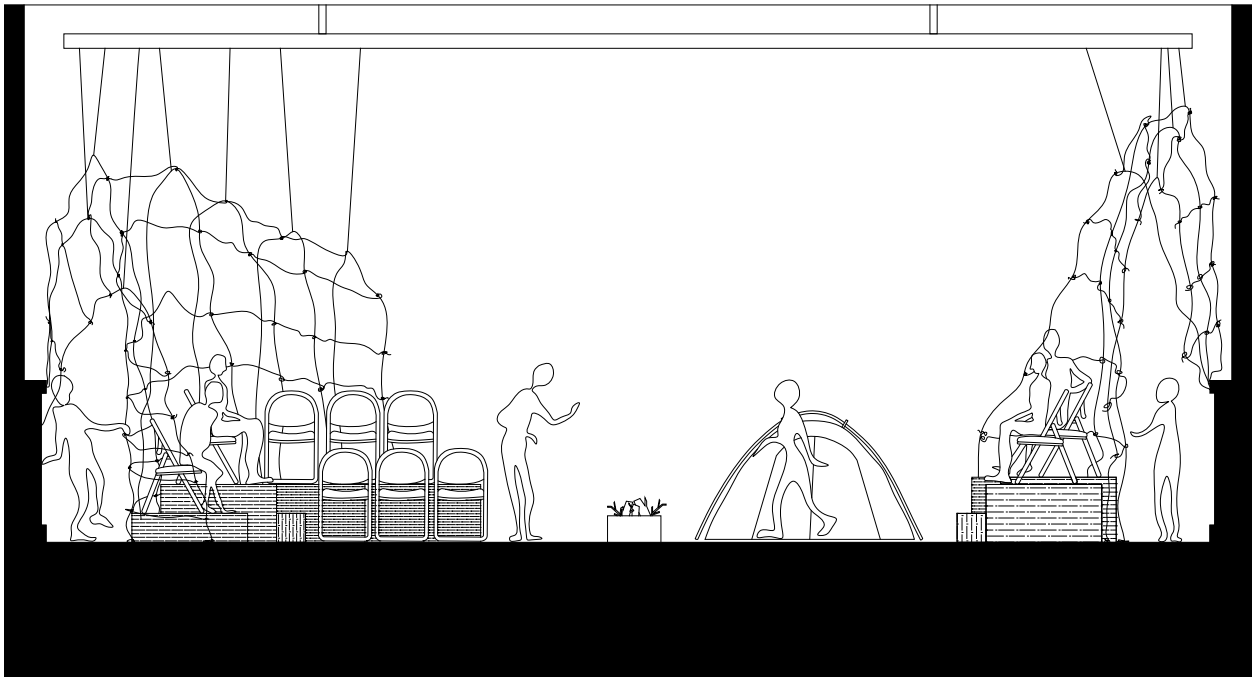
Fig 11. "Movement Section" of *Skeleton Canyon Pass*, 2022.

Part of the direction I gave actors in "the wings" or really under the wire canyons, was to continue the conversations they were having onstage. This created an ambiguity for audience members who picked up bits and pieces of conversation, not knowing if what they were hearing was a part of the formal play or not. I am always interested in that grey area. The auditory and/ or visual distraction of actors speaking in whispers behind audience members will make them have to choose what they want to see and who they want to hear. Consciously or unconsciously, audience members then have to choose from the options of visual and auditory hindrances to the central performance onstage.

When thinking about movement in relation to the largess of *Skeleton Canyon Pass,* the work of Bernard Tschuni came to mind. In the spirit of his *Manhattan Transcripts* 1976-1981, I created movement studies, both for my actors and my own exploration of how bodies related to this new constructed space. Tschumi studied music, dance and even sports notations in order to create his own drawn language to explore architecture on the page.[10] When I gave blocking for the show, I also gave the actors movement maps, which became visual representations of their different paths of physicality. This gave the actors a new understanding of their individual paths, and how their movement in the space was in relationship with the wire and with other bodies. The canyon archways became a portal to move actors through, not just a spectacle or set piece behind seated audience members. These maps represent the communication and collaboration my actors and my design made together within the show as bodies and space.
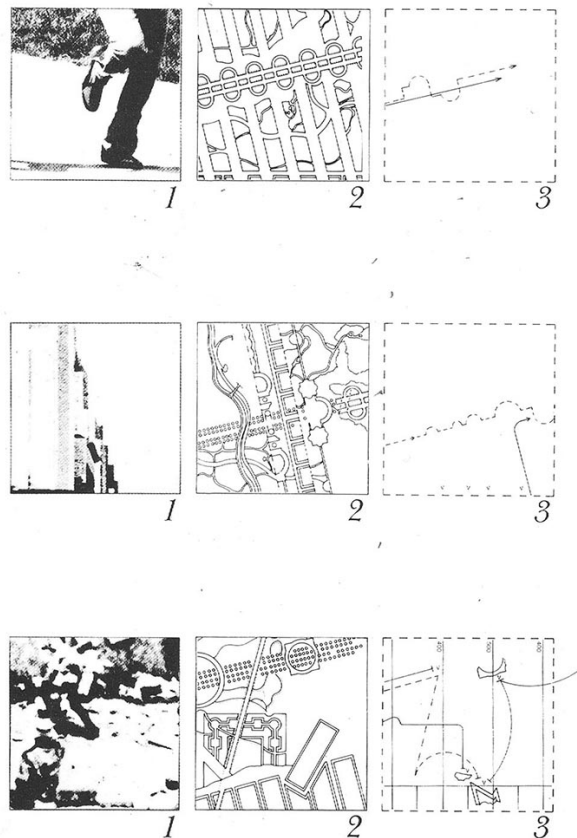
Fig 12. Bernard Tschumi, *The Manhattan Transcripts,* 1976-1981[11]

[10] Bernard Tschumi, "Conversations with Bernard Tschumi," Bernard Tschumi/Zenith de Rouen, ed. Todd Gannon (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 2003), 15.

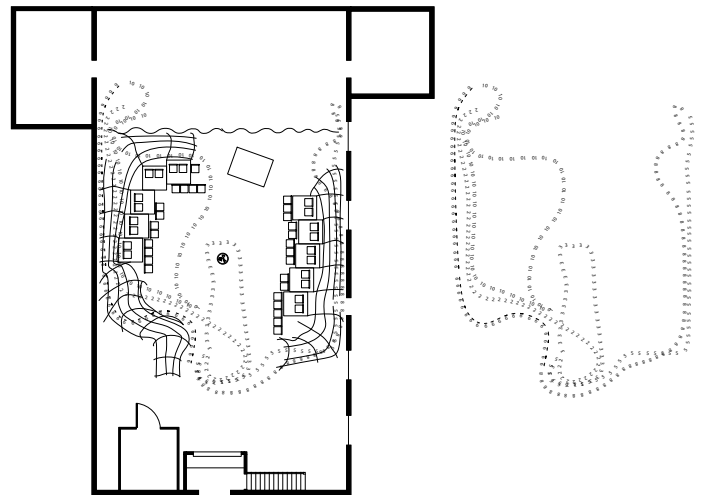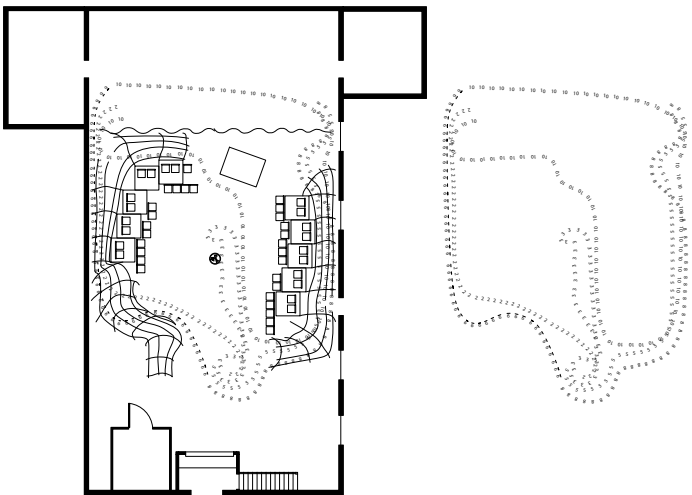[11] Bernard Tschumi, The Manhattan Transcripts, 1976-1981, New York, NY, http://www.tschumi.com/projects/18/

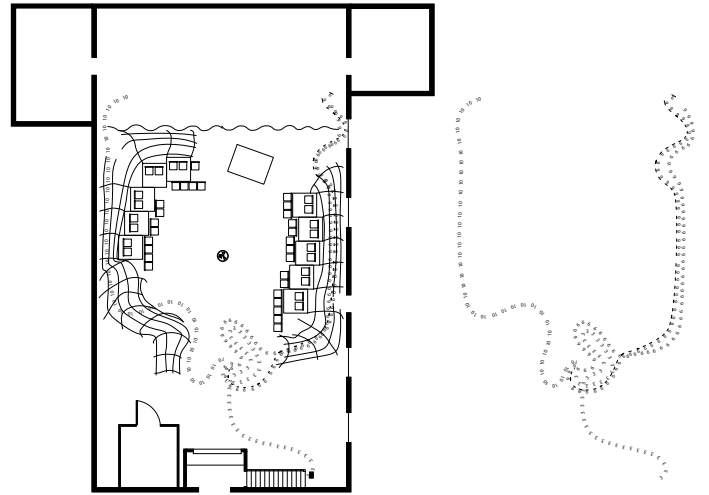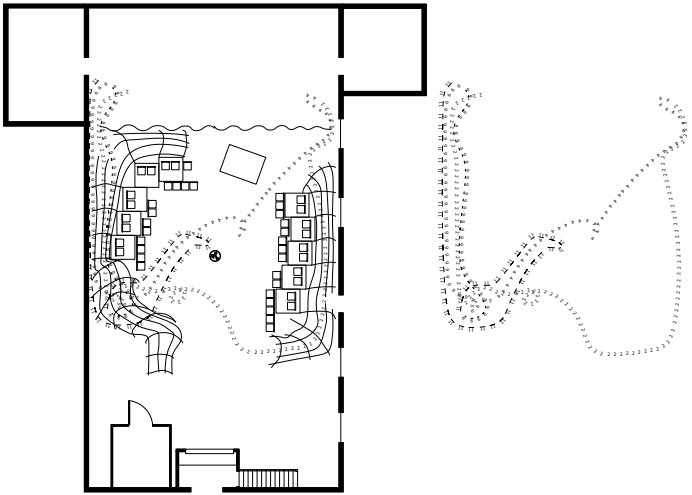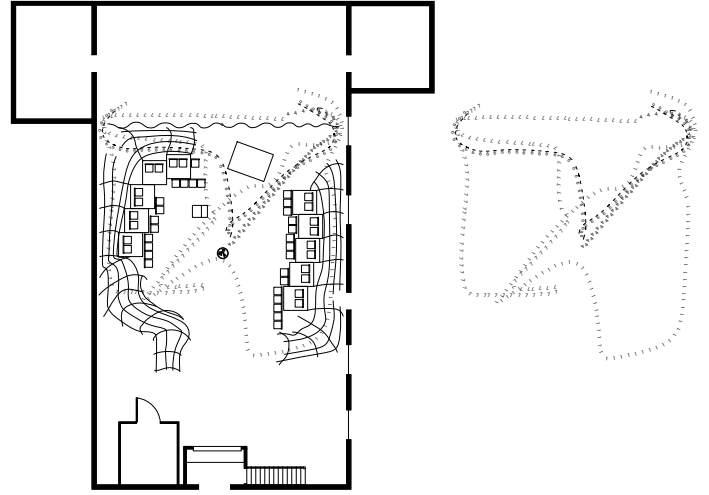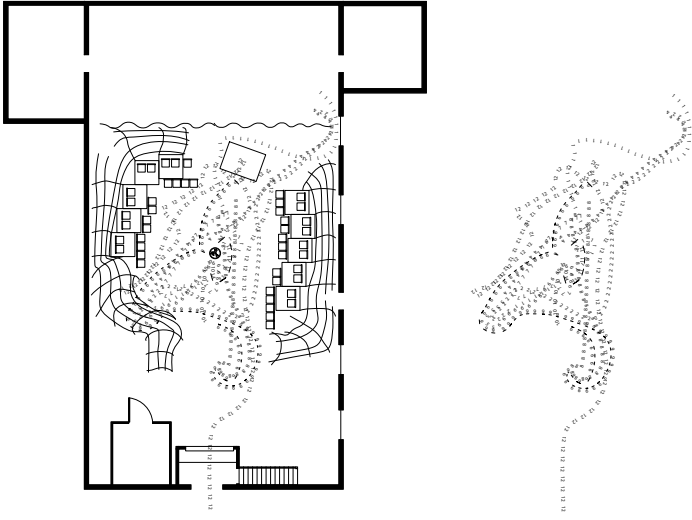Fig 13. "Movement Maps Inspired by *The Manhattan Transcripts*" for *Skeleton Canyon Pass,* 2022.

The World You See Before You:

The two snaking wire canyons encapsulate the main playing space. "On stage" is an

oblong stage, with a fire pit as the focal point of the playing space. Down house left (DHL)

is the wire archway that opens up to the "barrack." The barrack is the left archway's opening,

approximately eight feet wide and seven feet deep. It resembles a cave and is used as shelter in

the show. Throughout the play the barrack is a site of memory, and the environment opens itself

up for these moments of moving from liminal space to pure memory.

Up house right (UHR) is a new shelter, the tent. At the top of the show, the characters

of Jesse and Sky bring the tent onstage and build it. At the end of the show Jesse alone, takes it

down and carries it out of the theater. The tent is a cheap white and blue tent. This is in direct

visual contrast to the rest of the skeletal environment. The greater landscape of the canyons are

skeleton sketches of a space, waiting to be filled in. The tent stands as the tangible representation

of this dream world Jesse creates. It is shelter and protection from the past, but of course the past

seeps in through the barrack, standing in opposition to the new tent. This standoff holds for the

entirety of the show. By the end of the play, Jesse knows the world he has built himself is not

needed anymore, takes down the tent and leaves this created world behind.

The last individual location onstage is the observation table. Down house center (DHC)

are 3 folding chairs around a small circular table. The characters of Vernon and the Colonel, and

subsequently Hope, are the onlookers into this world Jesse has built. Vernon and the Colonel

bring the chairs and table on before the show begins. The house lights are still on, and this action

bleeds into the formal beginning of the play.

I added numerous origami paper swans hanging from the canyons with clear fishing line,

as the symbol from the script of love and trust between Sonny and Jesse. It is also the tangible

object at the end of the show that allows

Jesse to move on. This specific visual is in

all of Emily's recent plays she has written.

In the original stage directions, she wrote

"origami swans fall from the ceiling"

in the middle of the show, when Jesse

revisits Sonny's death. Solving a practical

obstacle – I could not get them to fall from

the ceiling – I instead suspended them in

midair, a reminder that Sonny is always

with Jesse.

The wire archways were held

down to the ground via black gaffer tape,

Fig 14. *Skeleton Canyon Pass* floorplan, 2022.

a small Brechtian nod to behind the scenes theatrical supplies being used onstage, for audiences

to see how the theatrical world was created. Again, nothing is pretending to be what it is not.

The wire was so malleable and soft that it did not need sandbags or concrete to solidify it as a

base. Some of the archways stopped before going all the way to the floor and were coiled then

screwed into the wall with washers clinching the wire between the wall and the washer itself. By

wrapping the twelve gauge thinner wire around the archways of the six gauge thicker wire, the

large netted mesh started to solidify and work together to stay upright. The peaks of the canyons

are held up by black tie line – another traditionally backstage theatrical tool – which is tied to

cross beams connected to the electrical grid. The woven wire forms a grid that is warped by the

organic movements of the canyon's striations.

Fig 15. House Left Wire Mountain (left), House Right Wire Mountain (right); The Stars Come Out at Night, 2022. Photography by Ginger Port.

In short: the two wire canyons are the majority of the dream world, and together they create a cocoon container for the play to take place in. The fire pit is the focal point of the stage, and is the arbiter between the tent and barrack. Finally, the observation table mimics the surveillant eyes of the audience on the outskirts of the stage. This is the *Skeleton Canyon Pass* design, Design Two, and the one I ultimately constructed for the performances of the play.

Scales of Time in Theater vs. Architecture:

This project in its definition is temporal, it is fleeting. It only existed in its whole practicality for four performances. Bodies in space, performing the play under the wire netting came together as one, for a total of two hours over three days. It took seven days to build the

two wire canyons, while it only took an hour to bring them falling down and coiled back up. Exploring production/set design through an architectural lens specifically brings up questions of temporality. Most architecture, in a formal sense, is designed to last years, decades, maybe even centuries, while a production is typically just a few weeks. It's a scaffolding of a reality, not meant for a concrete stay on this earth. Thinking about the value of a project in terms of its staying power is nearly impossible, because taste and aesthetic are always changing. If one thinks about this project in that sense, this was a failure, or at least very not sustainable, because it only physically existed for less than two weeks, and it took much longer to build than to use it for its purpose.

But can we put such a lens of practicality or utility on art? Or is the temporality, the collective effort and labor that goes into constructing something impermanent, part of what is affecting theater in contrast to other artistic disciplines? This is art, and this architectural piece along with the play it housed is about sensation, feeling, and memory. And what art is really about a return on your investment? Looking at the physical records of the work - the crumpled scripts, the pictures taken during dress rehearsal with eight people in the audience, the video of the Friday night show with a packed house, the drawn floor plans that deviate from the living piece – looking at and taking in all of these records will never be the same as the sensation I

Fig 16. Stills from 7 days of time lapse footage building *Skeleton Canyon Pass,* 2022.

or you felt on experiencing the work in person. Whether you loved it, hated it, felt tepid about

it, the records of work put into this project can be a catalyst for the sense of memory the piece

originally elicited.

A Tangent on The Definition of Definitions:

Going to "see theater," is different than "seeing architecture." In its definition, theater will

never be the same from one performance to the next, specifically because of human variation.

This is something I am clearly quite interested in: variation. With architecture, the factors at play,

namely materiality, offer opportunity for variation. Something like a brick or stone or metals may

change and wear over time, but the time scale of variation is much slower. Patina can take years,

where the patina of an audience takes only a few hours. Something like fabric, mesh, rope, can

change its positionality or be interfered with by other elements, but they do not have the human

ability of agency, to drastically change course in a matter of seconds.

A person can go to a building or an installation with no one else around and experience

the architecture in front of them. Does the experience of architecture change with more

people present? Can that same person see a play with no one in it? Where is the line between

performance and art? In the example of David Levine's *Habit,* he created a piece of theater

specifically to mess with the understood concept of the audience. The play, the script, the actors'

choices were not as paramount as the simple idea of the show running continuously for eight

hours a day, and the audience coming and going as they please. In this line of thinking, when

is architecture performance and when is a performance a piece of architecture? Can inanimate

materials create performative gestures like that of actors? Is it completely unfair to place a brick

and a human equally in this fight called theater?

The Stars Come Out at Night is a play that has a formal script. There was a group of

actors, with assigned roles, there were rehearsals, there was specific blocking and notes given on actions and intentions, by me, the director. All of this qualifies the art we made as theater and the space we performed in as a set. But did the wire become more? Did the bodies in space merge with the archways, and create a greater line of communication?

This makes me consider the role of hierarchies. It feels to me that in the world of a more traditional western, American commercialized theater, the play comes before the set. The set is considered temporary and not architecture because of its built use and temporality. If I were to build a set of wireframe mountains in the woods, in a gallery, on a sidewalk in New York City, how would the definition of the work change because of its geographic location? Because I built them inside a theater, for a play, it is then considered a set. So then, the definition of a thing is based off of its relational use value. I am interested in what others would deem the *Skeleton Canyon Pass* out of its situational context. Would they call the work a sculpture, architecture, a set? Can it be all three at once?

Fig 17. House Left Wire Mountain and Barrack from Skeleton Canyon Pass design for The Stars Come Out at Night, 2022. Photography by Ginger Port.

A play that I wish I could have been alive to see is The Builder's Association production of *Master Builder* performed in 1994. They built a three-story scaffolding of a house, and performed on it every night. During the day time, they opened it up as a piece of art. During the

performance, TVs, radios, and sound buzzers would intermittently go off within the house, while

pieces of the building would fall off the sides as the plot of the play spiraled. This production

created an equal base for the architecture of the show to be seen as both the set and as its own

installation. It gave specific times slots in the day for both definitions of the thing. With a piece

like *The Host* that's structure is solely digital, the format of the world is both more expansive

and physically smaller in scale because it is relegated to the size of a computer screen. Fries and

Peeters created countless rooms to explore, that would be improbable in a physical reality, but

again, because the viewer has full control and the story is nonlinear, would most people look at

the work and say it is a piece of theater?
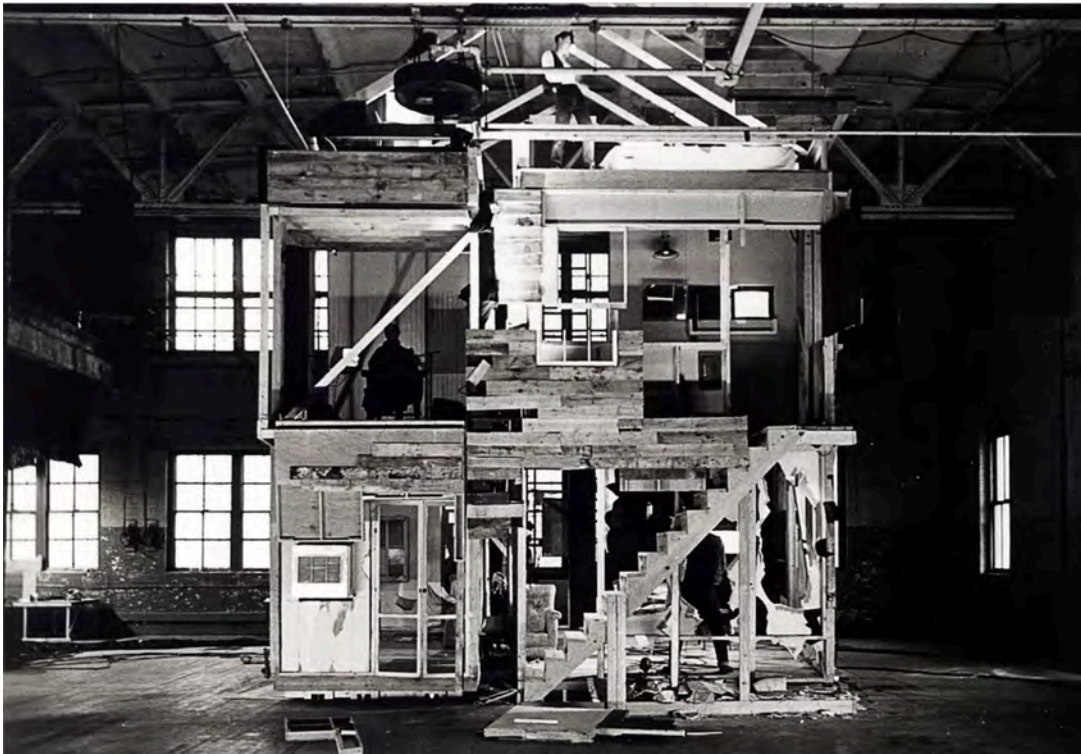
Fig 18. The Builders Association, *Master Builder,* 1994[12]

In The End:

This all brings me to my final of many questions raised but not definitively answered in

this paper: does it even matter? What I have learned in the last year working on this piece is that

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[12] Builders Association, Master Builder, 1994, photograph, Industrial Space, New York, NY,
https://thebuildersassociation.org/shows/master-builder/.

art will always transcend the lines of definition and category. It is just the nature of the beast, and some people will see it and some people will not.

I believe that throughout my high school years at a fine arts high school, I learned about every aspect of theater, but all through a lens of compartmentalization: "Yes, but what do you want to do specifically in the industry? Are you interested in acting? Stage management? Directing? Being a set designer? What do you want to *do.*" I am not blaming the institution during those four years, because it was an invaluable baseline of knowledge I could not have gotten anywhere else. But I recognise that I do hold it, sometimes like baggage - running into my own deep seeded anxieties of all of these compartments disrupting one another - instead of just making the thing I want to make in the first place.

Fig 19. Jordan Becknell (left) and Jack Pelster-Wiebe (right), The Stars Come Out at Night, 2022. Photography by Ginger Port.

I recently came to the book *Body Building: Architecture and Performance* after finishing the production. It is a compilation of architectural works that explore performance through architectural theory and practice. Charles Aubin, the co-editor of the book, begins his introductory essay by stating, "With its emphasis on performance and solidity, architecture at first resists an easy pairing with live performance, more typically associated with transience, ephemerality, or elusiveness. But beyond the surface differences, architecture and performance share a core concern: the push and pull of bodies and space."[13] What jumps out to me from this book is the "push and pull" or really tipping of scales between a piece of work deemed more heavily architecture based vs. a work that is more heavily performance based. Theater and performance do differ, but interestingly none of the works in this collection, which has projects dating back to the early 20th Century, deal with a more formal form of theater. Instead, the book looks at architectural gestures that are performative. Aubin ends this essay by admitting that the field of performance and architecture has only recently been written about or critiqued in a formal setting, but has so much more to cover and explore.

From the outset of this project, from the outset of choosing these two majors, I always saw how architecture and theater conversed with each other; it was a given in my mind. It amazed me to read Aubin's introductory conceit and see the structural narrowness of projects they collected to show, all being from the perspective of architects creating performative work within the field of architecture. To me, it is in fact as easy as the "push and pull of bodies and space." This can be the catalyst for work or the conclusion of the work.

Theater and architecture's convergence is founded on both field's ability to intervene and disrupt the status quo. Together the two work to restructure and uproot deep seeded preconceived notions of how the fields are supposed to be, through theory and practice work

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[13] Charles Aubin, Carlos Minguez Carrasco, "Slippery Floors," in Body Building: Architecture and Performance, (New York: Performa, 2019), 8-23.

around community, the role of the audience or spectator, and the structure of containers for art in general. This piece worked as my sounding board to effectively explore my own feelings around the physical set up of theaters and architecture's place in conversation/collaboration inside of a theater setting. It is evident to me through *Body Building,* my other research in both fields, and research that goes beyond the formal definitions of theater and architecture - that performance and architecture are constantly interacting. The makeup of a space can constrict bodies, while bodies can actively prompt deliberate or indeliberate change on to space. Theatricality simply heightens this relationship to a new plane and highlights the similarities and differences. I am fascinated by this relationship, it is as deep as it is fruitful, and I will continue to explore it, both together and separately, though they already seep together unconsciously in my thinking, and will continue to do so, I believe, for a very long time.

Fig 20. *Skeleton Canyon Pass* design with origami swans for *The Stars Come Out Tonight,* 2022.
Photography by Ginger Port.
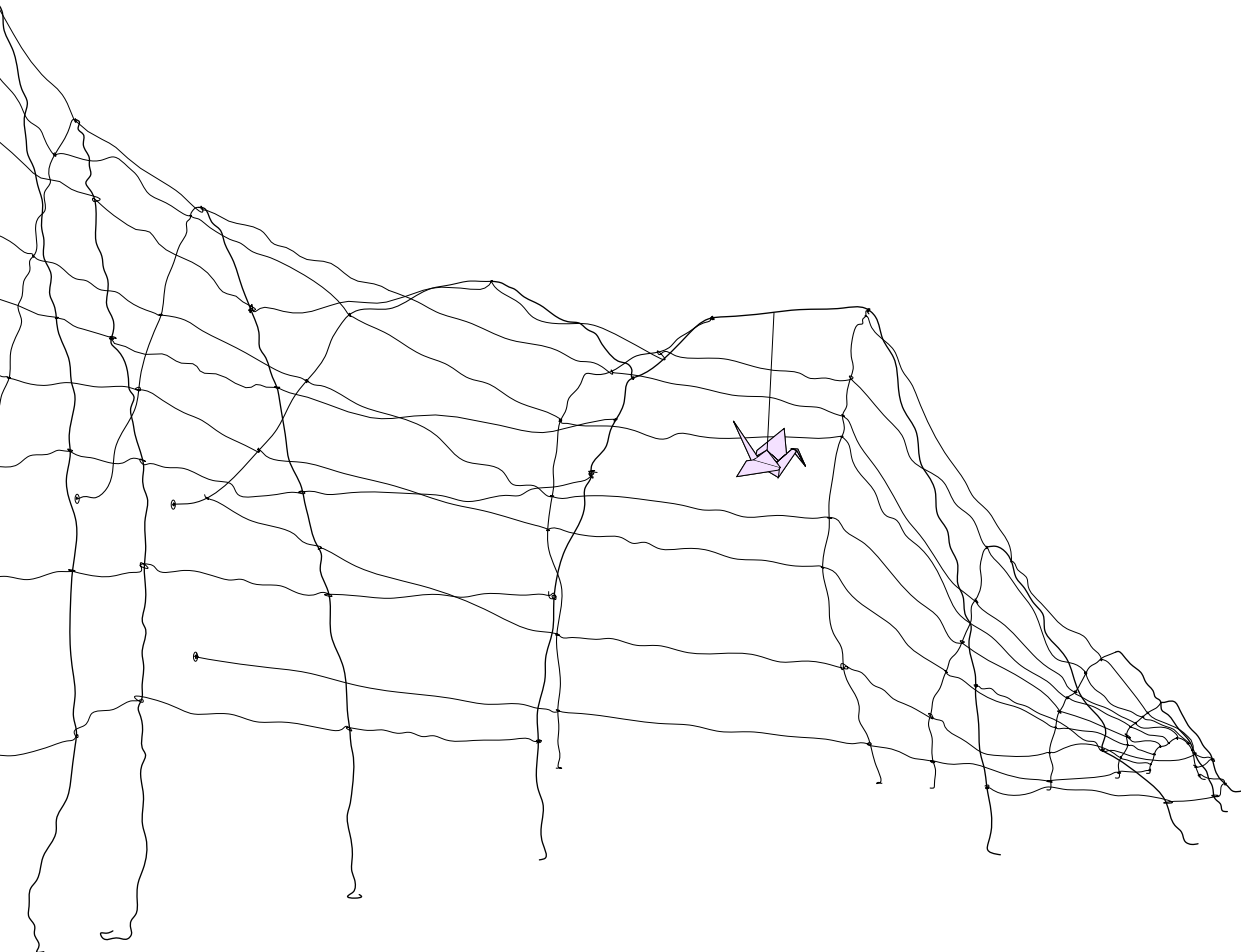
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