

Hybrid Space, Hybrid Rhetoric: *Spatial rhetoric* in Post-Technological Art

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Abstract

This inquiry investigates the Western-centric bias in spatial rhetoric, defined here as the study of how spatial arrangements construct persuasive arguments, within post-technological experimental art, art that engages with the cultural and material conditions after the initial novelty of techno-mediation has subsided. To counter this bias, I propose a cross-cultural theoretical framework that integrates East Asian artistic philosophies with Western critical perspectives. My analytical approach addresses a tendency within Western models to prioritise singular perspectives and linear temporal progressions when interpreting complex hybrid spatialities, which this dissertation defines as environments blending physical and techno-mediated elements, and layered temporalities. I incorporate East Asian spatial philosophies, such as *Shanshui*'s fluid temporalities and the "water-stone" dialectic, to analyse these specific artistic characteristics. I synthesise Eastern philosophies with Western critical perspectives into an analytical framework termed the deep-*shanshui* lens, which integrates the methodologies of chrono-topographic rhetoric and deep mapping. The proposed cross-cultural framework structures the convergence and iterative refinement of the study's theoretical propositions and practice-based artistic explorations. I re-evaluate rhetoric as an embodied, universal spatial phenomenon and interrogate the "spatial turn," an existing paradigm in the humanities. I iteratively forge and validate this cross-cultural framework for spatial rhetoric through a practice-led, abductive research methodology, which involves forming explanatory hypotheses from observation. Within this cross-cultural context, I introduce "chrono-topographic rhetoric" and "deep mapping" as analytical tools. These conceptual instruments dissect how post-technological systems reconfigure spatio-temporal experience and its connections to memory and cultural identity. My two artistic series, "Post-Bits Human Universe" and "Post-Lingnan School of Paintings," provide sites for the cross-cultural framework's practical application and iterative refinement. Analysis of the artworks demonstrates how the projects utilise East Asian logic to develop tools for making post-technological art. My iterative and reflective practice-based inquiry culminates in the proposed cross-cultural theoretical framework, now practice-informed and designed to foster a more inclusive and reflexive interpretation of hybrid art forms in contemporary artistic practices interacting with the nexus of space, technology, and cultural heritage.

Keywords: Spatial Rhetoric, Aesthetic Roaming, Zaojing, Double and Doubled Screen, Deep Mapping, Deep-*shanshui* Lens, Chrono-topographic Rhetoric, Cross-Cultural Aesthetics, Post-technological Art, Experimental Art

Dedication

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Acknowledgments



Figure 0. Chinese Calligraphy of “未知死，焉知生” (TO NOT YET KNOW LIFE, HOW IS ONE TO KNOW OF DEATH?), 2017. Artwork © 2017 Racelar Ho.

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1. Introduction

This dissertation undertakes a conceptual inquiry into the *Wuyou Yuan* 烏有園 (ethereal garden), a literary and philosophical construct from the Ming dynasty that symbolises intangible spatial permanence through textural and visual representation. I propose this garden as the conceptual anchor for my research inquiry. The garden originates as an intangible, imagined space that contains the core questions informing this investigation. My central argument posits that prevailing Western-centric models of spatial rhetoric are insufficient for interpreting the realities that post-technological experimental art produces. Prevailing Western-centric frameworks often fail to account for the interplay of temporality, materiality, and cultural memory that characterises such works. This study therefore proposes and develops a cross-cultural theoretical framework that integrates East Asian spatial philosophies with Western critical theories. The research process examines the transformation of the *Wuyou Yuan* from its initial ethereal state into a realised, albeit ephemeral, site of practice-based knowledge.

I adopt the term *post-technological experimental art* to establish a specific philosophical position for my research and art practice. While descriptors such as computational art or new media art are common, the focus of the descriptors on the apparatus does not accommodate the scope of the present inquiry, which examines less the tool and more the pervasive condition of techno-mediation. My position builds upon Siegfried Zielinski's concept of a condition "after the media" (2015, 2018, 2019; 2005) which posits that we are no longer in an era where media are novel external objects, but one where media have become an integrated, ambient aspect of life (Bourriaud, 2005). The stance of being "after the media" creates the necessary analytical space for an ontological inquiry.

Martin Heidegger's critique of technology grounds the ontological inquiry. Heidegger argues against viewing technology as a neutral instrument, proposing instead that modern technology functions as *Enframing* (Gestell) (2013), which is a mode of revealing that orders the world as a resource to be optimised, shaping our entire way of being. When critique remains at the instrumental level, the critique reduces the artwork to what Michael Fried, in his analysis of modernism, distinguished as *objecthood* (1998), which is a state where the work becomes the apparatus, rather than preserving the artwork's medium, which is the quality of pointing to a

world beyond the object. The view of technology as more than a neutral instrument finds theoretical support in Michel Foucault's analysis of discursive formations. Technology is a system of power/knowledge that produces a "discursive space" and governs the possibilities of thought and action (Buckley et al., 2019; Foucault, 1980c; Somers, 1994; Wang D., 2013). I select the term "post-technological" not to ignore the apparatus, but to shift the critical focus from the object to the ontological and discursive conditions that technology produces.

The term "post-digital" is also insufficient because the term's temporal framing is misleading. While theorists like Florian Cramer (2015) and Geoff Cox (2015) define the post-digital condition as a state where techno-mediation has become a mundane and pervasive aspect of life, I argue that the term's prefix "post-" nevertheless implies a sequential relationship that is conceptually limiting (Bourriaud, 2005; Nolasco-Rózsás & Schädler, 2023). The post-digital framework proves insufficient for my research because the framework's critical position remains dependent on the digital paradigm as the paradigm's point of reference. By focusing on the condition of being after the digital revolution, even in a mundane state, the discourse of the post-digital inadvertently reinforces the centrality of the apparatus the discourse critiques. The conceptual dependency on the digital paradigm often manifests in an aesthetic preference for glitches or analogue media, which indicates a stylistic or reactive stance that fails to transcend the underlying ideology of technological mastery. The reactive stance remains conceptually dependent on the digital paradigm the stance opposes, rather than transcending the paradigm.

The term "post-technological" marks a philosophical shift. The term's meaning reorients from a chronological sequence toward a conceptual position external to technology-dominated worldviews. A post-technological stance critiques the technological impulse to abstract and disembody human experience into manageable data, a process that can be dehumanising (Germain, 2017). A post-technological position seeks to accommodate the world's constitutive ambiguity and depth, resisting the drive for total transparency and control.

Moreover, adding the term "experimental" is also important to me. The descriptor "experimental" distances my practice from the production of finalised, closed systems, such as a polished data visualisation. Instead, "experimental" signifies an artistic practice that functions as an integrated process of thought and action (Guo S., 2017; Jackson & LaFarge, 2024). The practice is an iterative inquiry where the act of making tests, shapes, and corrects aesthetic and theoretical frameworks. An experimental approach values contingency, process, and the exploration of

ambiguous meaning-relations over the presentation of a resolved sensory spectacle.

In contrast to a techno-centric worldview, my research addresses the spatial logics that inhere in East Asian artistic and philosophical traditions. I propose that the Chinese concepts of *Ruhua Guanfa* 如畫觀法 (the method of viewing as painting) and *zaojing* 造景 (the art of creating scenic compositions) offer alternative models for understanding space. The aesthetic and architectural approach of *Ruhua Guanfa* integrates principles from the Chinese *Shanshui* 山水 (mountain-water/landscape) paintings (Gu K., 2020; Jiang J., 2020; Tong, 2018; X. Wang & Jin, 2023). A *Shanshui* painting differs fundamentally from a Western canvas in its material composition and viewing protocol. An artist typically creates the work on fragile silk or *Xuan* paper (宣紙) substrates, which require storage in a rolled format rather than continuous display. The viewing experience constitutes an intimate, ceremonial act. A viewer unrolls a handscroll section by section, often from right to left, in a process that resembles reading a book. This sequential revelation constructs a temporal journey through the landscape, a progression in space and time that the artist deliberately choreographs (Barnhart et al., 1997; Hearn, 2008; Wu, 1996, 2010). The artwork frequently integrates poetry and calligraphy with the painted image, reflecting the classical principle of a shared origin for poetry, calligraphy, and painting (Barnhart et al., 1997; Bush & Shih, 2012; Zong, 2011, 2023). This prescribed, unfolding viewing method provides the material and cultural basis for *you* (游, aesthetic roaming), a concept that also extends to the curated exploration of classical gardens. The art of *zaojing* constructs symbolic landscapes in Chinese classical gardens to reflect cosmic harmony (K. Li, 2014; X. Wang, 2020; Q. Zheng & Zhang, 2020). *Ruhua Guanfa* and *zaojing* treat space as a medium for structuring narrative and shaping perception. I synthesise the principles from these traditions into the deep-*shanshui* lens, which functions as the analytic apparatus of this dissertation. The lens combines Eastern sensibilities with Western critical methodologies to interpret contemporary art.

This investigation re-conceptualises the screen as a spatial agent. In traditional Chinese art, the *ping* 屏 (screen) establishes a dynamic apparatus that divides, frames, and conceals, creating an interplay between presence and absence. The role of the screen as an architectural object, a painting surface, a pictorial motif allows the apparatus to structure physical space while simultaneously mediating the act of viewing (Wu, 1996, 2010). The formation of the *Chongping*

重屏 (double screen) exemplifies the screen's spatial agency, using nested layers of representation to construct visual hierarchies and question the nature of pictorial reality. I argue that contemporary techno-mediated interfaces adopt and substantially expand the screen's traditional spatial function, creating what I term the "doubled screen". The "doubled screen" describes a multifaceted apparatus that manifests in several distinct modes. One operational mode allows the apparatus to function as a techno-mediated mirror, generating feedback loops that implicate the spectator within the artwork's operational system and establish a reciprocal gaze. In a second mode, the apparatus provides an immersive conduit, where technologies of virtual and augmented reality establish thresholds to parallel or superimposed worlds. A third function transforms the screen into a generative surface, supplanting representation to become an active interface that, through algorithms and interaction, co-produces reality. Each operational mode transforms the screen from a passive surface into a significant site for the production of new spatial and social relations.

To analyse these spatio-temporal configurations, this dissertation integrates two methodological tools that constitute the core of the deep-*shanshui* lens. I propose the first tool, "chrono-topographic rhetoric," as a framework for analysing how specific spatial arrangements inscribe and express time, revealing the layered temporalities of post-technological environments. The second tool adapts the established method of "deep mapping", offering a cartographic practice that penetrates surface representation to uncover and interweave the multiple strata of historical, cultural, personal, and material narratives that constitute a place. The two methodological tools enable a mode of analysis that examines the underlying structures of meaning that the interaction of technology, space, cultural memory, and embodied experience co-produces.

The intellectual and artistic trajectory of this dissertation, therefore, outlines a progression from the ethereal to the ephemeral. The inquiry begins in the conceptual space of the *Wuyou Yuan*, where I formulate the research problems. To explore these problems, I construct the deep-*shanshui* framework as the primary theoretical contribution of this dissertation. The construction of the framework proceeds through a historical re-evaluation of rhetoric (Chapter 2), an analysis of the spatial turn (Chapter 3), the development of the methodologies (Chapter 4), and an examination of post-technological screen practices (Chapter 5). Finally, I applied and tested the theoretical framework I claimed in Chapter 2 to 5 against my artistic practice in the case studies of Chapter 6. This application reconceptualise the initial ethereal garden as an ephemeral garden;

the resulting body of knowledge, while transient, offers a contribution to the understanding of hybrid space in our contemporary world.

1.1 Problem and Questions

Scholars in geography, media studies, and architecture have developed the field of *spatial rhetoric*, which examines how space is conceptualised and utilised as a medium of meaning. The theoretical models of spatial rhetoric derive from Western philosophical traditions. The resulting analytical approaches, while advancing the understanding of the interplay between space, perception, and meaning-making, often overlook the philosophical, aesthetic, and cultural dimensions of non-Western traditions, including traditions from East Asia. This oversight has also hindered the integration of East Asian rhetorical-artistic frameworks with Western spatial rhetoric theories, which I will demonstrate through analyses post-technological experimental artworks. Many analyses of post-technological experimental art have relied on Western theories of embodiment and immersion, that have failed to account for culturally specific conceptions of relationality, materiality, and spiritual resonance that are present in East Asian traditions. The lack of comparative research between Western and non-Western approaches to spatial rhetoric and post-technological art limits cross-cultural dialogue and restricts the potential of non-Western spatial logics to enrich contemporary artistic practices. This dissertation addresses this gap by proposing a cross-cultural framework for spatial rhetoric that integrates East Asian traditions with Western theories, challenging Eurocentric paradigms and broadening global artistic discourse.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this dissertation is to develop a cross-cultural framework for spatial rhetoric by integrating East Asian rhetorical-artistic traditions with Western theories, contributing to spatiality discourse and offering practical insights for post-technological experimental art. The research sets five objectives:

1. Examine East Asian rhetorical-artistic frameworks and their relevance to *spatial rhetoric* in contemporary art.
2. Analyse how post-technological art integrates East Asian spatial concepts into multilayered configurations.
3. Compare Western and non-Western approaches to spatial rhetoric, identifying unique

conceptualisations and symbolic significance.

4. Investigate technology's role in compressing and transmitting space-time in hybrid artistic environments.
5. Develop a framework bridging traditional East Asian spatial practices with contemporary post-technological art.

Research Questions

The development of this framework aims to contribute to spatiality discourse and offer practical insights for post-technological experimental art. To achieve this aim, the research pursues the following research questions:

Thematic Area 1: Comparative Analysis of Western and non-Western Approaches to Spatial Rhetoric

What are the key differences between Western and non-Western approaches to *spatial rhetoric* in terms of conceptualisation and future implications?

Thematic Area 2: Theoretical Foundations of East Asian Rhetorical-Artistic Framework

What are the key philosophical and aesthetic principles underlying East Asian spatial concepts, and how do they differ from Western approaches to *spatial rhetoric*?

Thematic Area 3: Role of Technology in Space-Time Compression and Transmission

How do digital technologies redefine traditional notions of spatiality in the context of East Asian spatial concepts?

Thematic Area 4: Integration of East Asian Spatial Concepts in Post-Technological Experimental Art

How are East Asian spatial concepts, such as *pingfeng* (screen) and *chongping* (double screen), manifested in post-technological experimental art?

1.2 Methodology: The Deep-Shanshui Lens

To address the research questions, I developed and employed a methodological apparatus: the deep-*shanshui* lens. This lens is a hybrid analytical framework designed to interpret the layered spatio-temporal phenomena in post-technological art. It synthesises Western critical theory with East Asian aesthetic principles, providing a cross-cultural toolkit for analysis and practice-led inquiry. The lens comprises three interlocking components:

1. **Chrono-topographic Rhetoric:** This is a theoretical framework I developed to analyse how temporal experiences are constituted through and inscribed within specific spatial, material, and medial configurations. The framework rejects the view of time and space as separate containers for events. An alternative understanding posits the co-constitution of time and space in the production of artistic meaning. The inquiry investigates how “graphic” inscription charges “chrono-” (time) and “topo-” (place) elements with rhetorical meaning, generating meaning that exceeds the physical constituents of the elements by activating virtual potentials.
2. **The Water-Stone Metaphor:** I propose this concept as a metaphorical and analytical heuristic to articulate the tension between fluidity and permanence. “Water” represents the flow of time, data, and ephemeral experience, while “Stone” signifies elements of relative permanence, such as material sites, objects, and cultural concepts that act as anchors or sites of inscription. The dialectic provides a language for identifying and analysing how the fluid and the fixed co-produce meaning within a chrono-topography.
3. **Deep Mapping:** This dissertation employs deep mapping, a methodology drawn from an established field of critical cartographic practice, for applying the above concepts. The methodology rejects singular, objective representations of place. The methodology excavates and interweaves multiple layers of evidence, including historical data, cultural narratives, personal accounts, and sensory experiences, to represent the contested, and multi-vocal nature of a place or an artwork. Excavating and interweaving evidence makes the layered realities of post-technological art legible for analysis.

These three components together, informed by the *Shanshui* aesthetic principles of *you* 遊 (aesthetic roaming), *qiyun* 氣韻 (spirit resonance), and *yijing* 意境 (artistic conception), form the deep-*shanshui* lens. This apparatus enables a mode of inquiry that is sensitive to both the material-technological conditions and the cultural-aesthetic dimensions of artworks under investigation.

1.3 Contributions and Dissertation Structure

This dissertation contributes to post-technological experimental art by bridging traditional East Asian spatial concepts with contemporary practices. The argument unfolds across seven chapters, each building upon the last to develop a cross-cultural framework for spatial rhetoric.

To challenge Eurocentric paradigms and foster cultural inclusivity, **Chapter 2** first provides a historical overview of rhetoric, expanding on a Greco-Roman focus to establish a cultural context. **Chapter 3** then traces the intellectual genealogy of the “spatial turn” in the humanities. I examine the preceding cultural and ontological turns to demonstrate how the re-theorisation of space as an active, contested, and socially produced medium established the theoretical conditions for the emergence of spatial rhetoric as a critical field.

Building upon this foundation, **Chapter 4** develops the dissertation’s methodological contribution: a framework designed to provide artists with a structured approach to creating multilayered spatial configurations. I elaborate within the chapter on the concepts of chrono-topographic rhetoric, the water-stone metaphor, and deep mapping. The dissertation grounds the aforementioned concepts in both Western theories of media and temporality and the non-Western chrono-poetics of Shanshui aesthetics, offering methods for the interpretation of hybrid art forms.

The subsequent chapters apply and refine the cross-cultural framework. **Chapter 5** tests the framework against a specific medium: the post-technological screen. I analyse how artistic practices transformed the screen from a passive surface into an active interface for producing layered visualities, mirrored worlds, and immersive environments, using the concept of the “doubled screen” as an analytical tool. **Chapter 6** presents the case studies of my art practices, applying the deep-*shanshui* lens to analyse a progression of my artistic practice, beginning with the experiments that led to the formation of the Independent Various Art Space (IVAS) and its performance system, and culminating in two artistic series: the Post-Bits Human Universe (PBHU) and the Post-Lingnan School of Painting (PLSP). The practice-based inquiry encourages a reflexive approach, prompting a consideration of how artistic work reflects cultural narratives and engages with broader discourses on spatiality and technology.

Finally, **Chapter 7** concludes the dissertation. I recapitulate the arguments, summarises the findings, acknowledges the research’s limitations, and proposes potential avenues for future inquiry into the developing relationship between space, technology, and cross-cultural artistic practice.

2. An Overview of the History of Rhetoric

Rhetoric, with its extensive historical lineage, has traditionally been conceived as the pragmatic art of verbal conduct, closely woven into the fabric of persuasion, reception, and allure across literary forms, oratory, and pedagogy. Within the seismic shifts of global political terrains and growing Eastern theoretical dialogues over the last half-century, however, contemporary rhetorical theory confronts a state of “cultural aphasia”¹, which is defined as the inability of non-Western traditions to assert their own value within a discourse dominated by Western norms. Systemic Westernisation of the discipline constitutes an epistemic rupture that has reduced rhetoric to a subordinate element of Western intellectual traditions, silencing the polyphonic potential of rhetoric (M. D. Gu, 2003; Okabe, 1990; Sun, 1996; Swearingen & Mao, 2009; B. Wang, 2013). Rhetoric’s polyphonic potential includes the capacity to recognise diverse persuasive modes and to place approaches grounded in communal harmony, spiritual resonance, or ancestral wisdom alongside Greco-Roman models of logic. Under the hegemonic glare of Greco-Roman rhetoric, vibrant traditions like Irish rhetoric have faded into obscurity; meanwhile, non-Chinese Eastern paradigms, Japanese rhetoric among them, succumb to Western-centric homogenisation (Okabe, 1990), resulting in the systemic marginalisation of these rhetorical traditions. The recognition of these power asymmetries, linked with spatial and identity politics, necessitates a revaluation grounded in postcolonial critique to deconstruct Western epistemic hegemony and restore global rhetorical plurality (Albrecht, 2019; Spivak, 1999).

Scholars and critics in comparative culturology, driven by circumspection and an imperative to preclude misinterpretation, have progressively formalised a concept of culture rhetoric. Culture rhetoric, as a concept, extends beyond verbal artifice to function as the ontological core of content and a generative matrix for epistemic systems. The formulation of rhetoric emerges from intersecting cultural codes, where discursive forms and cultural praxes interlock (Bratta & Powell, 2016; Cobos et al., 2018; Hum & Lyon, 2008; Lyon, 2009). Yet, any attempt to create a single,

¹ This conceptual framework emerges prominently in analyses of cross-cultural epistemic hierarchies (Spivak, 1999). Drawing from postcolonial critiques of knowledge production, the metaphor diagnoses structural incapacities within marginalised groups to formulate self-representation within dominant discursive systems. Ulla Connor’s (2004) subsequent analysis identifies how ostensibly universalist frameworks suppress heterogeneous forms of cultural expression through normative linguistic protocols.

universal model for rhetoric, which I term “*pan (macro)-rhetoric*”², confronts an epistemological impasse. Ignoring specific cultural context renders any analytical framework inadequate. For example, a rhetorical framework prioritising the Western concept of *logos* (logical appeal) fails to account for a context where persuasive authority derives from communal harmony or spiritual lineage. To treat these distinct rhetorical situations as homogenous is to overlook the untheorised, and often decisive, influence of their specific historical and power dynamics. An alternative analytical entry point lies in reconceiving rhetoric as a faculty immanent to the human condition, one that manifests through affective, intentional, and intersubjective acts. Conceiving rhetoric as an immanent faculty destabilises established cultural binaries, including the spatially-defined opposition between “East” and “West”, and simultaneously inscribes heterogeneous lived experiences.

However, the efficacy of ancient linguistic practices for conveying complex ideas remains a contested topic in academic discourse, largely because no definitive analytical frameworks exist to mediate between Eastern and Western rhetorical traditions (Galambos, 2017; M. D. Gu, 2003; Hum & Lyon, 2008). The primary analytical goal is to synthesise cross-cultural perspectives without reductionism. However, imposing rigid taxonomies upon disparate rhetorical traditions or constructing monolithic narratives to achieve that synthesis often yields outcomes that are both reductive and imperialistic. The construction of monolithic narratives positions one cultural tradition, often Hellenic, as the principal originator or “grand author” of rhetorical concepts, marginalising or overlooking the parallel invention and autonomous development of rhetorical practices in other cultures. In a postcolonial iteration, rhetoric is a discursive formation fraught with contingency; while scholars contest the definition of rhetoric across temporal and spatial

² The term constitutes a conceptual synthesis mediating Western rhetorical traditions and cross-cultural communicative practices. Its theoretical scaffolding derives from Kenneth Burke’s dramatism (1969b, 1969a), Stanley Fish’s reader-response theory (1989; 1976), and Walter R. Fisher’s narrative paradigm (1985), while simultaneously interrogating James Phelan’s (1996) literary-centric model of narrative-as-rhetoric. Rhetoric here constitutes symbolic mediation of social action through audience-specific textual strategies, where narrative is an argumentative apparatus for persuasion and ideological transmissions. The 1980s cultural turn precipitated theoretical shifts including the ontological turn (Holbraad & Pedersen, 2017a; McDonald, 2017), rhetorical turn (Arnett et al., 2007), and spatial turn (Ayers, 2010; McAlister, 2019), collectively displacing formalist logocentrism with situated analyses of symbolic power and intersubjective dynamics. While Phelan (1996) reconceptualises narrative as a rhetoric transaction activating cognitive-affective reader response, his framework, by remaining confined to Western literary canons, consequently overlooks the broader material and geopolitical contexts of rhetorical production, including non-textual cultural artefacts and the forces that shape canonisation. The “pan/macro” prefix thus enacts dual operations: retaining the Western epistemological core while constructing an inclusive platform accommodating non-literary modalities, extra-textual spatial practices, and cross-philosophical dialogues between Eastern and Western hermeneutic traditions.

contexts (Hum & Lyon, 2008), the resulting instability paradoxically allows the concept to function as a means of dismantling hegemonic knowledge systems. The proliferation of comparative rhetoric methodologies has produced two divergent scholarly trajectories: one applies emic frameworks, which analyse foreign linguistic systems from an insider's cultural perspective (Galambos, 2017; Hum & Lyon, 2008; Okabe, 1990); the other mobilises etic paradigms, which apply external, universal analytical models to recontextualise local rhetorical traditions (J.-Z. Gu, 2008; Harbsmeier, 1999). The opposition between emic and etic methodologies, which carries a risk of epistemic violence, presents a central problem within contemporary studies of comparative rhetoric. As Wang (2013) and Swearingen (2023) contend, efforts to essentialise cultural difference risk reinscribing colonial epistemes, wherein hegemonic linguistic frameworks constrain perceptions of alterity. The triangulation of language, spatiality, and identity creates an imperative for decolonised analytical models to delink from binary logics and amplify the co-existence of multiple, diverse social voices within discursive practices.

My analysis of the epistemic disparities between Eastern and Western rhetorical paradigms reconceptualises the paradigms' relationship as dialectically constitutive, not dichotomous. This decolonial reframing prioritises symbolic entanglement over hierarchical opposition. Prioritising symbolic entanglement over hierarchical opposition dismantles Eurocentric epistemic universality and resists cultural essentialism. This approach invites interrogation of post-technological spatial practices through what Walter Magnolo (2012) terms "border thinking". Epistemic negotiations occur in liminal zones between dominant and subaltern knowledge regimes. Critics within comparative culturology, such as Arabella Lyon (2008) and Homi Bhabha (2012), however, caution against overloading hybridity, arguing that emphasis on cross-cultural commonalities risks reifying neoliberal multiculturalism's assimilative logics. Lyon's "third system of thought" (2009) emerges here as a tactical hermeneutic, synthesising Confucian *shu* 恕 (reciprocity) with Ivor Armstrong Richards's (2001) semantic triangulation to mediate incommensurable rhetorical ontologies. Yet, the methodology's reliance on Greco-Roman derived linguistic and conceptual frameworks to frame or interpret non-Greco-Roman epistemic positions reveals what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1999) identifies as a structural, and perhaps irreducible, tension or violence in the act of cross-cultural representation.

2.1 Rhetoric Beyond Boundaries: Cross-cultural Inquiry

In this section, the analysis interrogates Eurocentric narrative in rhetorical theory by foregrounding

vernacular practices across ancient civilisations. The study of rhetoric has historically privileged frameworks derived from ancient Greco-Roman traditions, which have sustained Western intellectual hegemony for centuries (Lloyd, 2020a; B. Wang, 2013; Zaleski, 2020). The historical privileging of Greco-Roman frameworks, however, obscures the plurality of rhetorical systems emerging autonomously within global cultures. Distinct cosmological, ethical, and sociopolitical matrices embed each rhetorical system. How might non-Western rhetorical systems disrupt the epistemological hierarchies that sustain Eurocentric teleologies of communication? Interventions in comparative rhetoric offer an alternative to the teleological assumption of Western centrality by amplifying practices from ancient East Asia, the Hindu world, Egypt, and Ireland, where language's function subordinated instrumental persuasion to become a performative harmonisation with natural and cosmic orders (C. Lipson & Binkley, 2009; Lloyd, 2020b; Mao, 2020; Swearingen et al., 2009).

In the East and Southeast Asian cultural interaction system, for instance, rhetorical traditions privileged alignment with *Tao* 道 through non-verbal discourse and somatic gestures, diverging categorically from the agonistic dialectics of classical Athens. Meanwhile, Vedic mantras in ancient India and Egyptian rituals of *ka* and *ba* reconfigure rhetoric as an invocational act, entwining speech with spiritual embodiment. In what ways do the reconfigurations of rhetoric necessitate a rethinking of rhetoric's ontology boundaries beyond Western logocentric paradigms? A decolonial lens confronts the teleological framing of rhetoric as a uniquely Western construct, repositioning rhetoric as a universal phenomenon mediated by cultural specificity. Cross-cultural excavation intends to broaden the epistemic horizons of human communication and seeks to critically address hierarchical epistemologies responsible for the systemic marginalisation of non-Western intellectual genealogies.

2.1.1 East and Southeast Asian Cultural Interaction System

The East and Southeast Asian cultural interaction system, embracing ancient China, Japan, Korea, and Southeast Asia, constitutes a geographical and intellectual domain where rhetorical traditions evolved through sustained cultural exchange, philosophical discourse, and artistic innovation over two thousand years. The interdisciplinary study of Chinese civilization, examined through linguistic, literature, historical, and material lenses, interrogates the operational dynamics of rhetoric in interconnected societies by demonstrating how transregional philosophical frameworks,

such as the Daoist principle of *wuwei* 無爲 (non-coercive action), enable multidirectional exchanges (Harbsmeier, 1999; Lyon, 2009, 2020) while accommodating regionally specific discursive practices like Japanese 漢文 (*kanbun*), Korean 한문 (*hanmun*), and Vietnamese 漢文 (*hán văn*) system, vernacular adaptations of classical Chinese texts through mediation using Chinese characters (Chow-Bing & Shih, 2019; Denecke et al., 2017b; M. D. Gu, 2013; C.-C. Huang, 2019). Within this sphere, language, and rhetoric are not restricted to basic communication. They constitute crucial vehicles for articulating and developing a philosophical system centred upon harmony between human communities and their natural environment. Chinese rhetorical practices, traceable to the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BCE), established foundational spatial concepts through texts such as *The Rhetoric of Literary Chinese* 漢文文言修辭學, which structured and catalysed intellectual traditions across East Asian thoughts (Denecke, 2017b; C. Lipson & Binkley, 2004; Shen, 2021). These traditions conceptualised space through active negotiations between human agency, cultural memory, and cosmological patterns, exemplified by principles like *tianren heyi* 天人合一 that positioned rhetoric as a mediator of socio-natural equilibrium.

Abstract cosmological principles of early Chinese rhetoric materialised in concrete literary forms that configured spatial discourse across East Asia through sustained cultural negotiations of graphic sign systems. Within Chinese tradition, spatial rhetoric materialised in literary genres like *fu* 賦 (descriptive poetic exposition) and *zhi* 誌 (geographical or memorial record or place gazetteer), which both encoded moral allegories within landscape descriptions (M. D. Gu, 2013; Mair & Zhang, 2025; Rusk, 2020). Japanese rhetoricians, although adapting Chinese models, developed the rhetoricians' own descriptive spatial philosophies by cultivating concepts like *kotodama* 言靈, and the concept of *kotodama* attributes metaphysical agency to language's capacity to configure both physical and spiritual realms (Denecke, 2017a; Konishi, 2017; Konishi & Miner, 2017).

Across the specified cultural contexts, rhetoric mediated a complex apparatus for negotiating relationships between individual bodies, social architectures, and cosmic orders. Ming Dynasty treatises like *The Garden Treatise* 園治 (C. Ji, 2012; Ji C., 2021), for instance, illustrate how spatial rhetoric informed architectural design, transforming gardens into three-dimensional arguments about the ethical position of humanity within nature (Tianhua, 1994; Wang X. & Jin,

2014, 2017, 2018; Wu, 1995, 2024). Parallel approaches manifest in the Japanese Zen gardens (M. Marra, 1995; Okakura & Nivedita, 2005; Weiss, 2013), Korean palace complexes (Fu et al., 2002; Sim & Korncki, 2017), and Southeast Asian temple architectures (Chow-Bing, 2019; Chow-Bing & Shih, 2019; Huntington, 1907), where spatial configurations materialized philosophical principles from shared regional heritage. The interlocking traditions constituted the foundation for examining how regional adaptations generated distinct methods of conceptualizing language, space, and embodied experience. Subsequent analyses focus on China and Japan. The two regions exemplify adaptations of core concepts from the East and Southeast Asian cultural interaction system. While Korea and Southeast Asia's rhetorical traditions remain integral to the broader framework, the analysis concentrates on China and Japan to elucidate spatial rhetoric's manifestations most relevant to practice-based enquiry. Subsequently, the discussion synthesises the overarching cultural commonalities and shared philosophical frameworks of the East and Southeast Asian cultural interaction system.

China

An examination of the Chinese rhetorical tradition's relationship to formal knowledge systems reveals a structural difference from the Greco-Roman counterpart. The systemic divergence finds institutional crystallisation in the *Liuyi* 六藝 (Six Arts) schema. The *Liuyi* epistemic framework treated rhetorical practices as inseparable components of ritual and literary disciplines and cultivated governance capabilities through six integrated technical domains (Harbsmeier, 1999; Mao, 2006; Zheng Z., 1984). The Zhou Dynasty (1046-256 BCE) institutionalised the *Liuyi*, and the *Liuyi* organised aristocratic education around six performative domains: *shi* 詩 (poetic recitation), *shu* 書 (archival documentation), *li* 禮 (ritual performance), *yue* 樂 (musical cultivation), *yi* 易 (cosmological divination), and *chunqiu* 春秋 (annalistic historiography). A specific socio-political framework institutionalised the six domains: *shi* involved reaction of odes from the *Shijing* 詩經 (the Classic of Poetry) to cultivate diplomatic eloquence; the *shu* trained administrators through analysis of historical decrees in the *Shangshu* 尚書 (the Classic of Documents); the *li* required mastery of ritual protocols to reinforce feudal hierarchies; the *yue* harmonised musical performance with cosmic order; the *yi* interpreted hexagrams from state divination; and the *chunqiu* honed moral judgment through chronicle analysis (Y. Liu, 2004; Zheng

Z., 1984). By the Han Dynasty (202 BCE – 220 CE), administrative demands reconfigured the *Liuyi* into practical governance skills: *li* 禮 (state ritual administration), *yue* 樂 (court music regulation), *she* 射 (military archery), *yu* 御 (charioteering logistics), *shu* 書 (bureaucratic calligraphy), and *shu* 數 (fiscal mathematics). This replacement of the Zhou's performative curriculum excluded the *shi* 詩 and *chunqiu* 春秋 components while introducing martial (*she* 射 and *yu* 御) and bureaucratic (*shu* 書 and *shu* 數) disciplines. The replacement of the Zhou's performative curriculum excluded the *shi* 詩 and *chunqiu* 春秋 components while introducing martial (*she* 射 and *yu* 御) and bureaucratic (*shu* 書 and *shu* 數) disciplines. Each component served imperial bureaucracy through distinct administrative capacities: the *li* standardised ceremonial protocols to legitimise centralised governance; the *yue* formalised musical rites for court propaganda; the *she* and *yu* elevated martial prowess for territorial consolidation; the *shu* guaranteed orthographic consistency in legal codices; and the *shu* institutionalised fiscal management through land surveys and taxation systems (Y. Liu, 1996, 2004; Zheng Z., 1984).

Among the six domains of the *Liuyi*, *shi* occupies a distinctive position as a practice that is simultaneously textual, performative, and spatial. Whereas *she*, *yu*, or bureaucratic *shu* cultivate instrumental competences, the recital and composition of odes materialise cultural memory in embodied settings, like court audiences, diplomatic banquets, and architectural altars, where voice, gesture, and architectural staging fuse into a lived rhetoric of place. The fusion of poetic language and choreographed environment marks *shi* as the earliest Chinese precedent for spatial rhetoric. The present study traces the conceptual thread from antiquity to post-technological practice. To ground the claim, the following section turns to the *Shijing*. The canonical corpus institutionalised *shi* both as cultural artifact and spatial discourse.

Spatial potency becomes legible in the *Shijing*. The earliest Chinese poetry collection (c. 12th – 7th centuries BCE), the work established foundational paradigms for literary production and cultural-aesthetic traditions. The Western Han period (202 BCE-8 CE) later canonised the collection as a Confucian classic for the work's acknowledged historical status. The contributions of the *Shijing* to Chinese aesthetic and cultural development constitute a foundational construct for understanding poetic-literary traditions and subsequent artistic practices. The multigenerational impact of the collection continues to define intellectual paradigms. Diverging from mythological traditions, the *Shijing* focuses on secular human experiences, like personal achievements,

introspective reflections, and emotional complexities, while largely eschewing divine or shamanistic elements. The structural legacy of the *Shijing* formalised the *Liuyi* 六義 (Six Principles). The principles operate as follows: *feng* 風 (airs of the states) documents regional customs through folk songs; *fu* 賦 (narrations) presents direct exposition of events or objects without metaphorical mediation; *bi* 比 (comparison) creates analogical reasoning to link disparate concepts; *xing* 興 (avocation) introduces themes through associative imagery; *ya* 雅 (odes) address the political and social themes of the Zhou dynasty in courtly compositions; and *song* 頌 (hymns) venerate ancestral virtues in ritual panegyrics (Wang Y., 1994; Yi & Liao, 2007; Zheng Z., 1984). The six forms framed a foundational schema, and the schema conceptualised expression as a mode of sociopolitical harmony.

The *fu*, *bi*, and *xing* techniques employ sceno-emotive imagery to fuse external landscapes with internal states. The resulting fusion founded preliminary conceptual frameworks for later theory of the *yixiang* 意象 (imagery) and *yijing* 意境 (artistic conception). The conceptual frameworks permeated poetry, painting, architecture, and landscape design, encapsulating Chinese aesthetic ideals like “poetry within painting, painting within poetry”, “landscape within painting, painting within landscape”, and “emotion born from scene, scene infused with emotion” (Lai, 2009; Yi & Liao, 2007; Zong, 1987, 2011). The *yixiang-yijing* dynamics form the theoretical foundation of the dissertation’s core analytical framework. The core analytical framework is spatial rhetoric. Subsequent chapters unpack the operational mechanisms of spatial rhetoric.

In addition, the *Shijing*’s emotional discourse exemplifies *zhonghe* (中和, moderation and harmony) aesthetics (Wang Y., 1994; Yi & Liao, 2007; Zong, 1987) through Confucius’s dictum *yue er buyin, ai er bushang* 樂而不淫，哀而不傷; joy without indulgence, sorrow without devastation) (Confucius, 1979). The poems of the *Shijing* balance dialectical tensions of love and resentment, passion and restraint, self and collective, through structured refrains that temper extremes, cultivating a poetics of measured sincerity. The aesthetic negotiations first codified in the *Shijing*’s two axial principles: *zhonghe*’s harmonising beauty and the interdependence of *mei* 美 (aesthetic-formal excellence) and *shan* 善 (ethical substance). The dyadic framework would anchor Chinese aesthetic thought. Sustained cross-medium elaboration in poetry, painting, and landscape architecture reinforced the framework’s foundational status. The *Shijing* also provided a moral-ethical foundation in pre-imperial China. The collection’s *meici* 美刺 (praise-critique)

poetics operationalised Confucian virtues, such as filial piety, marital fidelity, benevolent governance, to cultivate social cohesion (Wang Y., 1994; Yi & Liao, 2007). The ritualised poetic narratives unified communal ethics and naturalised hierarchical relations. The narratives' performative reiteration of sanctioned behaviours and affective registers encoded Zhou patriarchal norms.

The *shift* from Zhou's performative-cosmological paradigm to the Han technocratic administration marked a redefinition of epistemic priorities within elite education. The new paradigm restructured the knowledge-governance nexus through spatial mechanisms, and the restructuring reconstituted elite pedagogy as an apparatus for implicit choreography of ritualised environments. Non-discursive modalities within the apparatus supplanted verbal persuasion's role in social ordering (Wang X. & Jin, 2014; Wu, 2018; Zheng Z., 1984). The *Liuyi* (Six Arts), however, excluded the discipline of rhetoric from the curriculum's spectrum. The curricular lacuna emerged primarily from the absence of a clearly defined concept of "rhetoric" as a distinct and systematic discipline during the *Liuyi*'s formative period. Confucian critiques targeting elaborate linguistic practices perceived as lacking substantive grounding further reinforced the exclusion.

A specific philosophical stance rests on the principle of *wenzhi binbin* 文質彬彬³. The principle posits an equilibrium between *wen* (文, stylistic refinement) and *zhi* 質 (substantive content). Confucius also advocates *yanzhiwuwen*, *xingwebuyuan* 言之無文，行而不遠⁴ and the advocacy emphasises the underlying correlation among *zhi* 志 (one's intent), *yan* 言 (language recorded according to pronunciation), and *wen*. The philosophical stance perceived prioritising ornamental language as a deviation from ethical-material foundations through the language's disproportionate focus on aesthetic form over substantive essence. Xunzi, for example, critiqued

³ See the Book VI *Yongye* (雍也). The dialectical examination of this chapter of *wen* and *zhi* converges in the maxim: "Zhisheng we ze ye, wensheng zhi ze shi. Wenzhi binbin, ranhou junzi. (質勝文則野，文勝質則史。文質彬彬，然後君子。)" (Confucius, 1979, p. 72). This passage presents an ethical dialectic between substance and refinement. The Confucian ideal of *junzi* 君子 finds its resolution in *wenzhibinbin* 文質彬彬, a state that reconciles the potential antinomy between an ethical core and its aesthetic expression.

⁴ The full passage containing this fragment exhibits conceptual comparisons with what contemporary scholarship identifies as rhetorical devices. As documented in the *Xiang Gong* (襄公, Lord Xiang) chapter of *Zuo Zhuan* (左傳, Zuo Tradition), the text states: "Zhongni yue: zhi youzhi, yanyizuzhi, wenyizuyan; buyan, shui zhi qizhi? yanzhiwuwen, xingerbuyuan. Jinweibo, zhengruchen, feiwenci buweigong, shenciye. (仲尼曰：志有之，言以足志，文以足言；不言，誰知其志？言之無文，行而不遠。晉為伯，鄭入陳，非文辭不為公，慎辭也。)" (Confucius, 2017, p. 220). Attributed to Zhongni (Confucius), this passage provides the earliest known textual instance where the characters *xiu* (修, cultivate/cultivation) and *ci* (辭, words/speech/expression) appear in conjunction. And this terminological pairing demonstrates a conceptually comparable framework to modern understanding of rhetoric practice.

wenzhang ni er cai 文章匿而采 (overly adorned writing)⁵ as symptomatic of societal disorder and argued that a *junzi* 君子 (refined/virtuous person)'s speech should be eloquent yet restrained. The *junzi*'s eloquent yet restrained speech runs counter to the *xiaoren* (小人, petty/inferior person)'s *bianshuo* 辯說 (argumentations), which Xunzi characterises as *duoyan wufa erliu mianran* 多言無法而流湎然 (verbose, lawless, and indulgent)⁶. The *xiaoren*'s superficially polished rhetoric may initially demonstrate logical coherence. Xunzi, however, asserts the rhetoric's resultant trajectory toward absurdity due to a foundational lack of ethical-material restraint.

The Han institutionalisation of *Wujing* 五經 systematised the Zhou's *Liuyi* 六藝 into a canonical framework that synthesised textual exegesis with ritual praxis. While *jingxue* 經學 (study of Classics) developed into a hermeneutic discipline, the Han reinterpretation preserved elements of Zhou performative traditions, such as *li* 禮 and *yue* 樂, within an expanded educational system that encompassed both literary and practical mastery (Dian & Quanji, 1980; Harbsmeier, 1999; Jin, 2014). The institutional synthesis codified Confucian orthodoxy not through a unilateral shift to textual authority, but through pedagogic mechanisms that integrated classical text like *Shijing* and *Shangshu* with embodied cultural transmission. The material preservation of scrolls and establishment of imperial academies provided institutional vehicles for the synthesis. The vehicles transformed classical knowledge into a dual system of textual scholarship and ritual embodiment (Wu, 1995, 2005). Yet the Han synthesis drew from an older epistemic system from the Spring and Autumn period (770-476 BCE), where cosmological principles like *tianrenheyi* 天人合一 (cosmic-human unity) and *Tao* 道 (natural order) first coalesced.

The *Tao Te Ching* 道德經 (c. 571–471 BCE) expresses the philosophical resonance of the Classics. The foundational Taoist text posits the natural order as an interplay of being and void in Taoist thought. The text's axiom states, *Man takes his law from the Earth; the Earth takes its law from Heaven; Heaven takes its law from Tao; and Tao takes its law from what it is in itself* 人法地, 地法天, 天法道, 道法自然 (J. Liu, 2016, p. 268; カルメル 訳 & 哲学館 編, 1892, p. 12). The axiom positions *Tao* as the primary source of cosmic harmony, obviating Greek metaphysical

⁵ See the chapter *Buju* (不苟/ Nothing Improper) of *Xunzi* (Xunzi, 2017, pp. 16–20, 2014, pp. 16–22).

⁶ See the chapter *Feishierzi* (非十二子/ Against the Twelve Masters) of *Xunzi* (Xunzi, 2017, pp. 37–42, 2014, pp. 40–46)

categories of arche or nomos. *Tao* inhabits an ontological liminality, weaving tangible and intangible, definition and ambiguity, into a generative paradox that underpins all creation. The conceptual framework, though Taoist in origin, permeated the intellectual landscape of the Warring States period (481-221 BCE) and informed the *Wujing* 五經 (five Classics)’s later systematisation. The Han synthesis institutionalised a hybridised epistemology. Within the epistemology, Taoist cosmic unity and Confucian ritual-textual praxis coexisted within the *jing* tradition’s “structured ambiguity” (Wu, 2024).

Within ancient China’s linguistic history, a gap in evidence persists regarding verbal interactions among diverse localised ethnicities during pre-literate epochs. The early Chinese practise of transmitting and transacting linguistic information through an oral-aural process may explain the absence. The oral-aural process allowed for the absorption of various ethnic and foreign languages, vocabularies, and thoughts into the intellectual context of the time. The process of exchange unfolded reciprocally. Foreign civilizations and cultures, in turn, integrated intrinsic concerns, values, and ethnocentrism into the intellectual legacy of ancient China. A complex assemblage emerged and reflected an interplay of influences and exchanges. As the Common Era began and the balance of power shifted, the Chinese found themselves confronting cultural others. The confrontation marked a transition that further enriched and complicated the web of linguistic and intellectual associations.



a



b



c



d



e

Figure 1. Examples of *yuemen* in traditional and contemporary Chinese architecture. (a) *Yuemen* at Yu Yin Shan Fang (余荫山房), a representative Lingnan-style garden, Guangdong, China. Source: Douban (<https://www.douban.com/note/796144230/>), © 2025 綠洲. (b) *Yuemen* at Zhuozheng Yuan (拙政园), a classical Suzhou garden, Jiangsu, China. Source: Douban (<https://www.douban.com/note/826537157/>), © 2025 YUPING. (c) Detail from Jin Tingbiao's Qing-dynasty painting *New Year's Morning* (清金廷標歲朝圖), ink and colour on paper, 96×65.9 cm; the painting depicts a woman passing through a *yuemen*. Source: National Palace Museum Digital Archive (<https://digitalarchive.npm.gov.tw/Collection/Detail/6473?dep=P>). (d) and (e) Two views of a contemporary reinterpretation of *yuemen* within “Yi Xizhidi” Siheyuan (“彝席之地” 四合院) renovation project, a 1,400m² mixed-use space at 91 Beiluoguxiang, Beijing, China; these images show different applications of *yuemen* motif in the modern design. Source: SOHO Design District (<https://www.sohodd.com/archives/173545>) © 2025 SOHO Design District; Author: yuxin.

Chinese art developed unique spatial frameworks beyond foundational concepts. The frameworks inspire the exploration of spatial rhetoric. The interrelated concepts of *pingfeng* 屏風 (screen) and *chongping* 重屏 (double screen)⁷, constitute key spatial mechanisms in traditional Chinese visual culture. The spatial mechanisms create multilayered configurations of space. The configurations displace binaries of presence/absence or visibility/invisibility. The displacement forms an interplay between revelation and concealment, interior and exterior, and the interplay intersects with contemporary post-technological spatial practices. The traditional *pingfeng* and *chongping* represent distinct conceptual frameworks. The frameworks utilise techniques like *toushi* (透視, layered depth perception through multiple viewpoints). These installations construct spatial narratives through *toushi*'s non-linear vantage point⁸ and *shanca* 閃差 (staggered alignment)'s rhythmic disjunctures. The rhythmic disjunctures displace architectural elements to generate kinetic visual tension (Wang X., 2015a, 2015c; Zhang Y. et al., 2018). The approach to constructing narratives mirrors traditional garden strategies. In the strategies, the *yuemen* 月門 (moon gate) (Figure 1) and zigzag path orchestrate movement. The orchestration privileges kinetic discovery over static observation through successive spatial revelations and partial obscurities.

⁷ As a multi-valent interface, the Chinese *ping* (屏) integrates its dual nature as physical boundary and pictorial surface to construct interpenetrating spatial fields, simultaneously demarcating space, framing views, and mediating narratives between concealment and revelation (Wu, 1996).

⁸ Rejecting monocular rigidity, Chinese artists cultivated a fluid spatial consciousness (*ling de kongjian* 靈的空間) through *toushi* (透視), a “penetrative vision” that integrates successive viewpoints and allows the eye to wander through layered realms (Zong, 1987, 2011).

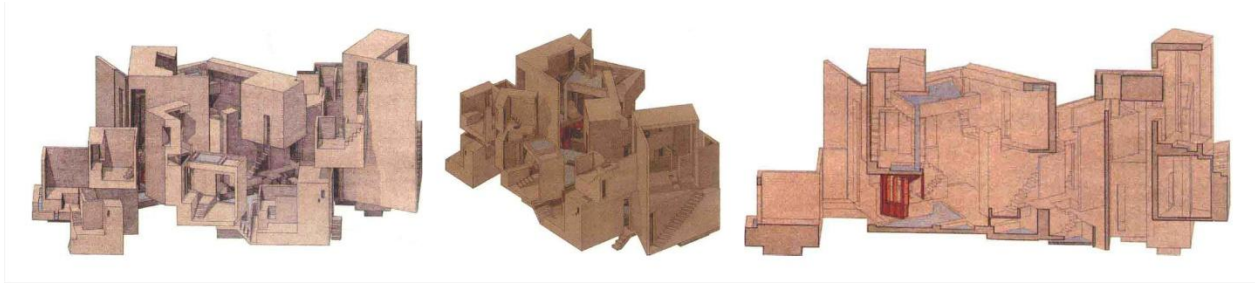


Figure 2. Design study of *nian shi duo shan* (拈石掇山) for the *Wuyou Garden* experiment, Xin Wang. 2014. © 2025 Xin Wang.

In Xin Wang's experimental spatial design series (2017), conceptual interfaces rooted in literati aesthetics function analogously to traditional screens by demarcating thresholds between material and imagined realms. The pedagogical and experimental endeavour develops from Wang's *Wuyou Yarden*⁹ experiment and derives the conceptual architecture from Ming Dynasty garden treatises that treated rockery arrangement as spatial poetry. One of the studies of the experiment (Figure 2) explores the traditional Chinese landscape position technique *technique Nian Shi Zhuo Shan* 拈石掇山. The classical approach constitutes a key principle in Chinese garden design and landscape painting. Practitioners of the approach select and position rock formations to create idealised miniature landscapes. The spatial composition demonstrated in the experiment transforms the two-dimensional painting technique into three-dimensional architectural forms. The modular, cubic structures fragment and reconfigure space through angular geometries and interconnected volumes. The sectional view in the left panel of Figure 2 reveals stone-like architectural elements. The distinct orientation of each unit delineates interior spaces. The spaces illustrate how the structures surmount stacked blocks to map a spatial journey. The central panel demonstrates how the individual stone blocks achieve formal cohesion through calibrated massing and density gradients. The right panel concludes the analytical sequence and foregrounds circulatory pathways and kinetic spatial relationships between elements. The interplay of form and void negotiates principles of traditional landscape aesthetics while invoking contemporary spatial concepts.

Visitors navigate through layered and virtual-and-real interfaces. The navigation allows the

⁹ Shilong's *Wuyou yuan ji* (烏有園記, Record of the Non-existent Garden) (1935) interrogates the relationship between spatial representation and cultural memory by framing garden design as an act of textual imagination. This strategy, embodied in the "Garden of Non-being", evokes Zhuangzian philosophy, critiques the Ming elite's horticultural extravagance, and positions garden writing as a mode of architectural conceptualisation.

visitors to experience a “rhythmised space” where various viewing positions and realities coexist. Whereas single-perspective spatial arrangements constrain spectators within fixed visual parameters, Wang’s architectural implementations of layered spatial dividers orchestrate sequential viewpoint transitions through physical navigation. The dividers perform as three-dimensional screen configurations, guiding visitors through staged spatial intersections that require continuous bodily reorientation. Through corporeal interaction with layered boundaries, spectators become choreographers of a perceptual synthesis, assembling fragmented vistas into coherent spatial narratives. Contemporary post-technological spatial practices represent a transmutation of Chinese “deep spatial” consciousness. The operation of screens as permeable rhetorical apertures mediates layered realities. The screens structure perceived experiences and spatial relationships through what Wang terms a *menzhang shijie* 門障世界 (world of gates and screens) (Wang X., 2015a, 2015b, 2024b, 2024c). This concept originates in the spatial metaphoric of *men* (門, gates/doors/entrances). The elements establish liminal thresholds¹⁰ within Chinese painting, garden/landscape, and architecture design. *Men* perform as spacetime-transformative media, actualising the aesthetic dialectic of *xu-shi xiangsheng* 虛實相生 (mutual generation of void and solid). Congzhou Chen extends the aesthetic dialectic and critiques spatial practice through the lens of *ge ze shen, chang ze qian* 隔則深, 暢則淺 (separation creates depth, openness yields shallowness) (Chen C., 2008, p. 26). The critique argues that *men* placements orchestrate narrative layering through tensions between veiling and revelation.

¹⁰ As thresholds that demarcate and connect spaces, these structures constitute the liminal state Victor Turner characterised as “betwixt and between” (1967, p. 97). This liminality finds its mechanism in what Jean-François Lyotard calls *écart*, a “gap” or “interval” between signifying units (2011, pp. 6, 399). It is this very “space between” that enables an encounter with the *l'événement*: an event that reveals transformative potential by disrupting pre-existing frameworks and introducing the “unpresentable” (Lyotard, 1993). By integrating a physical transition with a perceptual encounter, these mediating structures thus shape spatial experience, moving beyond their purely structural function.



Figure 3. Zhou Wenju, *Chongping Huiqi Tu* (重屏會棋圖, Playing Weiqi (Go) under Double Screens), Five Dynasties Period (907-960), Handscroll, Ink and colour on silk, 40.3 × 70.5 cm, Source: The Palace Museum, Beijing (<https://www.dpm.org.cn/dyx.html?path=/Uploads/tilegenerator/dest/files/image/8831/2008/1563/img0002.xml>) © 2025 The Palace Museum, Beijing.

The spatial syntax finds material precedent in the work of Zhou Wenju, who was a Southern Tang court painter specialising in figure painting. Zhou Wenju's *Chongping Huiqi Tu* (重屏會棋圖, Figure 3) formalises the “double-screen” (*chongping* 重屏) technique of nested spatial storytelling through the painting's depiction of partitioned screens (Wu, 1996, 2018). Zhou's work synthesised the styles of Tang masters Zhang Xuan and Zhou Fang, introducing stylistic innovations influencing subsequent artistic traditions after entering the Northern Song imperial collection as diplomatic gifts. The painting's layered composition employs three sequential divisions to steer the spectator's gaze: first, through foreground figures performing in ritualised leisure; second, with the painted screen's interior scene showing domestic furnishings receding diagonally; and third, terminating at the rearmost partition displaying calligraphic inscriptions anchoring pictorial depth. The multidimensional structure realises *Jingyi weizhi* 經營位置

(positioning) principles¹¹ (Wu, 1996) by exploiting parallel planes as perceptual waypoints, with each screen edge serving as both spatial delimiter and narrative catalyst through the screen edge's placement relative to human figures and architectural elements.

The techniques reflect the tripartite aesthetic hierarchy of classical garden design, comprising *shengjing* 生景 (vital habitual), the ecological baseline of flora, water, and rockwork demonstrating *tianren heyi* 天人合一; *huajing* 畫景 (painterly realm), the compositional curation of natural elements into scroll-like vistas fusing static contemplation and kinetic progression; and, *yijing* 意境 (conceptual realm), the interplay of emotion and environment enabling *xu-shi xiangsheng* 虛實相生 through apertures like moon gates and lattice windows. *Huajing* 畫景 arises from adaptation (Ji C., 2021; Lai, 2009; Zong, 1987), transmuting nature into ink-wash aesthetics wherein Wang Meng's *cunfa* 皴法, planting echo Ni Zan's sparse elegance, while white walls become *xuanzhi* 宣紙 (calligraphy paper) for *yishi weihui* 以石為繪 (stone-as-brushstroke) (Ji C., 2021) vignettes. The painterly strategies of Zhou's nested screens and Ji Cheng's *fenbi weizhi* 粉壁為紙 (plaster walls as canvas) (2021), privilege mediated permeability over boundaries, thence cultivating a spatial rhetoric of *jing* 境 (layered thresholds) prefiguring post-technological interfaces. Rooted in historical practices of garden design, scroll painting, and architectural screening, a principle of mediated permeability defines the function of men and screens in Chinese art, establishing them as a dynamic rhetorical apparatus that forms a liminal interface simultaneously dividing and binding space. The apparatus forms a liminal interface simultaneously dividing and binding space. The negotiation of thresholds through a curated process of selective revelation generates a spatial rhetoric of layered transition. I trace the conceptual lineage of the principle into post-technological contexts in the following chapters.

¹¹ The concept of *jingying weizhi* (經營位置), or “managing positions”, constitutes a theoretical framework in Chinese aesthetics for spatial composition. Identified by Xie He as one of the Six Principles of Painting and later deemed by Zhang Yanyuan as the “most essential aspect of painting” (*hua zhi zongyao* 畫之總要), the principle integrates *jingying* (經營, to plan and measure) with *weizhi* (位置, position) (Zhang Y., 2019). It determines pictorial depth through the hierarchical positioning of “host” and “guest” elements, a method that extends beyond painting into architecture and landscape design, as evidenced in Ming dynasty texts like Wen Zhenheng's *Zhang Wu Zhi* (長物志) (2020), which dedicates an entire chapter to the purpose-driven placement of objects from small furnishings to architectural structures. In turn, this traditional spatial concept proposes a distinctly Chinese approach to spatial relationships, where meaning through their juxtaposition and relative positioning within a unified compositional whole.

Japan

Japanese rhetorical traditions demonstrate both conceptual convergences and divergences when an analysis examines the traditions through the paradigms of the East and Southeast Asian cultural interaction system that the preceding analysis of China established. In comparison to the institutional framework governing Chinese practices like *shi* poetry recitation or *li* ritual protocols, Japanese rhetorical strategies developed through negotiation between localised *Kotodama* 言霊 (word-spirit) beliefs and continental Buddhist-Confucian thought system (Wolfy, 2009). The syncretic process materialized through a layered historical trajectory inseparable from Japan's geopolitical identity as a cultural interlocutor, beginning with the Nara-Heian periods (710-1185 CE) assimilation of Chinese literary models, developing into medieval *waka* 和歌 (Japanese poem/song)¹² indigenized Zen rhetoric, and culminating in the Meiji-era (1868-1912) synthesis of European theories with inherited aesthetic principles. Here, cultural interlocutors absorbed yet filtered external knowledge systems through localized aesthetics, a process demanding the interlocutors redraw rhetorical boundaries instead of transplanting the boundaries (Konishi, 2017; Tomasi, 2020).

Where *Liuyi* anchored *shi* to court spatial regimes, the Japanese court reconfigured this template through *ma* 間 (interval), the operative principle organising shrine precincts, *engawa* 縁側 (verandas) and *waka* banquet sequences (M.-D. Gu, 2021; Konishi & Miner, 2017; Y. Zhang, 2020). By conceptualising voiced sound as a kinetic force capable of expanding and compressing spatial intervals, Heian literati transmuted *Liuyi*'s textual-ritual nexus into *Kotodama* ecology wherein spatial persuasion arises from resonant vibration. Advancing the notion of a “rhetorical vacuum” in Japan often through Orientalist frameworks, scholars like John Morrison (1972) equated Japan's hierarchical society and linguistic complexity with an absence of discursive traditions. The view of a rhetorical vacuum, it appears, stems from a failure to recognise the

¹² *Waka* (和歌) structures verse in alternating five- and seven- syllable unites, exemplified by *tanka* (短歌)'s 5-7-5-7-7 form and *chōka* (長歌) extended sequence. Perfected by Heian nobles (794-1185) as court art, it flourished through imperial anthologies like *Kokin Wakasu* (古今和歌集) (905 CE) and rhetorical devices such *Kakekotoba* (掛詞/懸詞, pivot words) and *Engo* (縁語, associative semantics). Medieval theorists like Fujiwara no Teika expanded its scope through ideals like *yugen* (幽玄, mysterious depth), adapting Zen Buddhist aesthetics of suggestive nuance into poetic practice. Integrating these adaptive strategies, amidst the practice of *kanshi* (漢詩, Chinese poetry), Japan's aristocracy hybridised continental models with native aesthetics, synthesising imported forms through localised creative frameworks.

vernacular rhetorical practices that synthesised Zen Buddhist paradox, Confucian ethical framing, and poetic spatiality. Japanese rhetorical traditions lack the formal nomenclature of rhetoric as a distinct discipline, a situation mirroring China's exclusion of the discipline from the *Liuyi* 六藝 (C. S. Lipson, 2009; Wolfy, 2009; Zheng Z., 1984).

A reliance on compartmentalised Western frameworks, which posit Greco-Roman forensic oratory as the rhetorical ideal, obscures Japan's synthesis of discursive acts within aesthetic, spiritual, and social hierarchies. The Japanese model integrates rhetorical practices into domains such as Zen Buddhist *mondo* 問答 (dialectic inquiry), waka poetic exchanges, and Confucian ethical instruction, precluding the isolation of the practices as a distinct field. Morris's reduction of the model's complexity to a "rhetorical vacuum" illustrates what Edward Said (2003) referred to as "orientalist epistemology", in which the epistemology characterises non-Western communicative practices as deficiencies when they defy Eurocentric disciplinary constructs. Meanwhile, Japanese scholars' postwar deference to the vacuum narrative appears to reflect not a cultural characteristic, but rather the enduring influence of the Meiji-era internalisation of Western academic categorisations which separated rhetoric from Japan's traditionally integrated sociocultural matrices; the political realities of the postwar period, it can be argued, further shaped the deference. The conflation of rhetorical invisibility with disciplinary nonexistence constitutes the imposition of Western taxonomic paradigms onto Japanese cultural patterns, wherein Japanese cultural patterns dispersed persuasive arts across performative, aesthetic, and ethical domains.

Shinto 神道, encompassing Japan's vernacular belief systems, determined the trajectory of Japanese rhetorical practices; the rhetorical practices interacted with and integrated elements from continental cosmological paradigms, such as paradigms centred on abstract principles like *Tao*, which the existing *Shinto* framework adapted. Central to the resulting distinction, *Shinto* practitioners positioned *Kotodama* as the cornerstone of linguistic practice, attributing ontological power to ritualised utterance. Language emerges as a medium whose ontological capacity to actuate material realities stems from ritually precise articulation within sacred contexts (Konishi & Miner, 2017), the language's precise expression within the sacred settings wielding the power to manifest the realities. The ontological premise manifests in the *Kotoage* 言挙げ practice of lifting the spiritual power of words, where performative declarations in ceremonial settings actualise the phenomenon, the declarations name. By rejecting formal rhetorical codification, the spiritual-linguistic practices create an enduring paradigm that prioritises performative efficacy and ritual

accuracy, influencing Japanese communicative strategies through the practices' integration of sacred articulation and material realisation.

Despite the vernacular paradigm of sacred linguistics, the transmission of Chinese learning from the fifth century CE generates layered rhetorical adaptations within Japan's political discourse, which scholars filtrated. The process of filtration materialises conspicuously in Confucianism's gradual embedding within Japan's intellectual landscape through textual mediation by *Kanbun Kundoku* 漢文訓読 (a textual practice based on Chinese characters requiring systematic Japanese phonological praising), where scholars deliberately hybridised Chinese syntactic structures with vernacular performance modes to forge context-specific ethical formations (Chang et al., 2021; Elman, 2014). The hermeneutic strategy, arising from Japan's geographic isolation and cultural self-conception, generates philosophical syntheses in which persuasive efficacy is fundamentally dependent on mediating classical authority through localised social imperatives, and Tokugawa Neo-Confucian rhetoric later formed a dynamic process that reconciles moral universalism with hierarchical maintenance. Material representations of cultural hybridity appear in *Shinto* purification rites known as *harae* 祓え, where practitioners intone *norito* 祝詞 (liturgical formulae) that integrate Chinese cosmological terminology with native spiritual ontologies through textual appropriation during performative utterance (Breen & Teeuwen, 2013).

The adaptive processes reflect the operationalisation of textual adaptation as cultural translation, with early scholars mediating continental texts through lecture formats and waka composition to prioritise cultural congruence over doctrinal fidelity. The trajectory of rhetorical adaptation culminates during the Meiji Restoration as state apparatuses co-opt the Tokugawa-era strategies, with ideologues recontextualising accumulated Confucian *chu* 忠 (loyalty) and *ko* 孝 (filial piety) through semantic engineering to forge imperial subject-forming tropes as ideological linchpins (Konishi, 2017; Konishi & Miner, 2017; Okakura & Nivedita, 2005). Interlocking spiritual and political systems embedded Japanese rhetorical practices, from the Heian court's ceremonial protocols to the Meiji regime's ideological apparatuses. The practices resisted disciplinary autonomy and intertwined the Shinto sacred lexicon with Neo-Confucian doctrinal constructs. The synthesis anchors the practices' discursive forms in the material contingencies of cultural production.

Korean Peninsula rulers, seeking diplomatic and military alliances, mediated the sixth-

century CE Buddhist transmission (Eliot, 2018; Saunders, 2016), which reconfigured Japan's rhetorical landscape by introducing practices that worked alongside, yet remained distinct from, prior Confucian adaptations. At the vanguard of the rhetorical landscape's transformation stood the esoteric *Shingon* 真言 (true word) school, which outlined *Sokushin Jobutsu* 即身成仏 (attaining Buddhahood in this body) as achievable through application of *Sanmitsu* 三密 (three mysteries) rituals encompassing *kaya-guhya* 身密 (mystery of the body), *manas-guhya* 心密 (mystery of the mind), and *vac-guhya* 口密 (mystery of the speech) (Richard D. McBride, 2006; Wolfy, 2009). Redefining language efficacy as cosmic intervention, the doctrine ethos reconstitutes phonetically exact ritual enunciation as the primary mechanism for ontological transformation, displacing human-centric persuasion models.

Simultaneously, metaphysical linguistics assimilated *Shinto's* *kotodama* ontology while diverting from Chinese Confucianism's text-anchored ritual paradigms. Whereas Confucian scholars insisted on fidelity to canonical texts, *Shingon* adepts engineered performative speech approaches that grounded language's transformative capacity in the phonetic precision of vocal performance, fusing Sanskrit mantric formulae with vernacular phonological structures and culminating in the integration of Buddhist *mantra* 呪文(spell-text) into *Shinto norito* 祝詞 (liturgical formulae) (Breen & Teeuwen, 2013; Wolfy, 2009). Ritual specialists operationalised the principle by employing mantra-derived vocal precision to demarcate sacred spaces through directionally calibrated chanting, acoustically reconfiguring shrine precincts according to esoteric Buddhist mandala geometries while conserving *Shinto's* spatial ontology (Tomishima, 2007; Yonezawa, 2013). The spatial-acoustic synthesis reoriented continental Buddhist practices through Japan's constitute a polyphonic rhetorical architecture whose constitutive hybridity resisted foreign doctrinal domination while prefiguring later aesthetic codifications.

The polyphonic rhetorical architecture, rooted in sound-spatial practices, found secular-literary articulation through Japan's poetic tradition. The architecture's codifications materialised in the *Kokinshu* (古今和歌集) or Collection of Ancient and Modern Japanese Poetry (c. 920 CE) preface by Kino Tsurayuki, which systematised Japan's first poetic theory (Konishi, 2017; Tomasi, 2004). Deafferenting from the Chinese *Shijing's* *Liuyi* (六義), the conceptual schema codified six affective categories—*makoto* 誠 (sincerity), *mono no aware* 物の哀れ (pathos of things), *yugen* 幽玄 (mysterious depth), *miyabi* 雅 (courtly elegance), *wabi* 侘び (rustic simplicity), and *sabi* 寂

び (impermanent sublimity)—that prescribed emotional registers privileging affective resonance over formal argumentation. The theoretical positioning materialised through a *Shinto*-inflected epistemological construction where *kokoro* (心, heart mind), defined as a cognitive faculty attuned to *kami* (神, divinities)-mediated reality, enable emotional *makoto* to universalise individual expression and generate collective aesthetic experience (Flowers, 2020). The six categories functioned through a poetic of immediacy, with *makoto* anchoring emotional expression in *kokoro* dynamics and *mono no aware* valorising transient beauty as a conduit for communal empathy. The mechanism manifested in *mono no aware*'s focus on impermanence, where culturally codified responses to phenomena like autumn leaves or fleeting moonlight circumvented rational discourse through embodied immediacy. Motori Norinaga's theorisation of the capacity of poetry to “stir” (*tokimeku*, と き め く) the *kokoro* through sensory immediacy substantiates the mechanism, positioning affective arousal as antithetical to didactic logic (M. F. Marra, 2007).

The aesthetic dispositions extended Kotodama's ontology into secular poetics through *mono no aware*'s transformation of impermanence into a rhetoric resource. The conceptual divergence from Chinese *qingjing jiaorong* 情景交融 (emotion-scenery fusion) originated in distinct operational logics: whereas the Chinese framework sought to harmonise human emotion (*qing*) with natural rhythms (*jing*) through scenic patterns as seen in Tang dynasty poet Wang Wei's mountain-river mediations dissolving sorrow into cosmic continuity, the Japanese counterpart amplified tension by fixating on ephemerality's dissonance, exemplified through Heian-era *waka* in *Kokin Wakashu* where *Sakura* 桜 (cherry blossoms) contrast brief floral beauty with lingering poetic grief via seasonal motif repletion. The difference stems from Chinese scenicism's Confucian and Buddhist syncretic worldview focus on cosmological harmony, which precluded existential dissonance to facilitate emotional resolution through natural assimilation, while *mono no aware* sustained unresolved pathos as *mono no aware*'s rhetoric mechanism through impermanence.

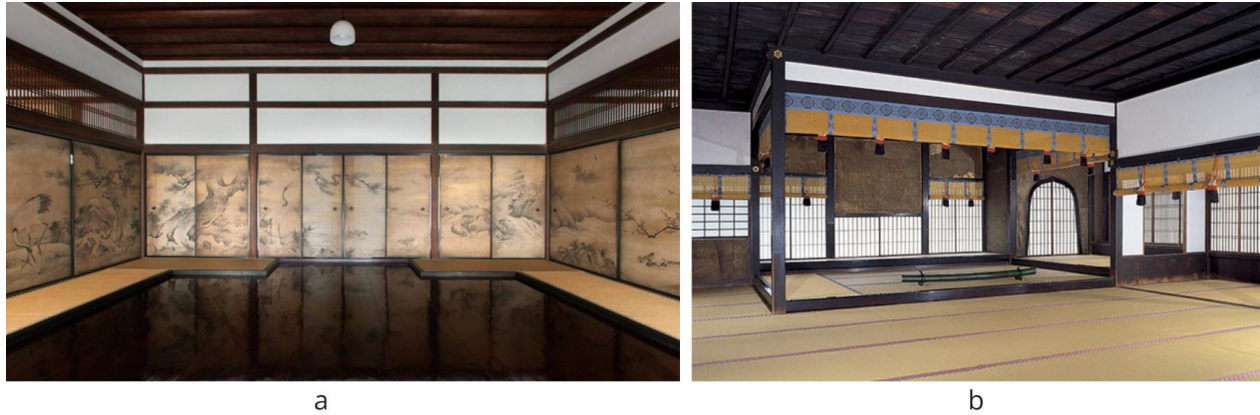


Figure 4. (a) Shiroshoin (白書院, White Audience Hall) of Nishi Honganji Temple, Kyoto, Japan. This *shoin-zukuri* structure, designated a National Treasure, exemplifies late 16th-century opulent design with its *fusuma* adorned in kinpeki (金碧, gold-leaf and mineral pigment) paintings by Watanabe Rokei and his school. (b) Hiunkaku (飛雲閣, Floating Cloud Pavilion) in Tekisuien Garden (滴翠園), featuring shoji within Shokenden (招賢殿, Hall of Inviting Excellence), its first-floor main chamber. Source: Hongwanji (<https://www.hongwanji.kyoto/>), © 2025 Honzan.



Figure 5. (a) Ryoanji Temple, Kyoto, Japan. (b) Ryoanji Depiction (龍安寺図絵) from *Miyako Rinsen Meisho Zue* (都林泉名勝図会, 1799), Volume IV, illustrating Edo-period perceptions of temple architecture and garden composition. Source: (a) The Gate (<https://thegate12.com/jp/article/423>); (b) Nichibun Archives (https://www.nichibun.ac.jp/meisyoze/rinsen/page7/km_03_04_019f.html).

In spatial terms, Japanese architectural and garden design developed rhetorical approaches that paralleled yet diverted from Chinese practices through kinetic boundary and movable partition technologies. Chinese spatial rhetoric's reliance on fixed *pingfeng* and *chongping* to construct layered narrative spaces catalysed Japanese architectural innovations in *fusuma* 襖 (opaque sliding panels) (Figure 4-a) and *shoji* 障子 (translucent sliding panels) (Figure 4-b), whose reconfigurable boundaries facilitated spatial configuration through manual partition movement (Bu & Kitaoka, 2023; Nishi & Hozumi, 2012; Wang X., 2024a). The movable divides double up as rhetorical

devices by redefining interior-exterior relationships, materialising the aesthetic concept of *ma* 間, a negative spatial interval attaining functional equivalence with physical elements. Within Zen temple architecture, the principle manifests through void-solid manipulations that materialise the Buddhist concept of *ku* 空 (emptiness) (Kenya, 2008; Weiss, 2013), as demonstrated in the rock garden at Ryoan-ji Temple (龍安寺) (Figure 5) where fifteen stones are arranged on white gravel evoke oceanic islands through spatial compression that endorses contemplation over physical navigation.

Japanese garden design further explicates the spatial rhetoric through *karesansui* 枯山水 (dry landscape) conventions diverging from Chinese *yuemen* and zigzag path strategies. The garden master Mirei Shigemori's "abstract natural symbolism" methodology incorporates asymmetrical compositions and minimal elements to fabricate symbolic landscapes. The technique derives from Japan's oldest garden manual, *Sakuteiki* (作庭記, Records of Garden Making) (Takei & Keane, 2011), traditionally ascribed to the late 11th or early 12th century but whose precise dating remains debated. The text codifies a directive to "follow the request of the stone" (石の要求に従え) while rejecting "designs that violate nature" (自然に背く仕立て), an approach that elevates spatial arrangement from an aesthetic exercise to an ethical praxis (Tschumi, 2020). Moreover, the Katsura Imperial Villa (桂離宮, 17th century) exemplifies Japanese rhetoric through the *shoin-zukuri* 書院造 architectural style's "spatial division" doctrine.¹³ Unlike Chinese pavilions, which frame predetermined views through fixed apertures, Katsura's buildings deploy multiple axes to reveal perspectival shifts through tactile reception, as evidenced by its moon-viewing platform, which provides seasonal and temporal vantage variations. The spatial choreography enacts the aesthetic ideal of *usturoi* 移ろい (transience), transforming architectural movement into an embodied rhetoric of impermanence.

The interplay between spatial and linguistic rhetoric became operationalised in Japan's appropriation of Western rhetorical theory during the Meiji Restoration. Japan's Meiji-era reforms

¹³ The villa architectural style is characterised by simplicity and minimalism, emerging from the earlier *shinden-zukuri* (寝殿造, palace-style architecture) tradition as it refines its conventions through *shoin-zukuri*'s emphasis on functional harmony with nature. Through natural materials like wood and paper, this architectural rhetoric employs sliding *fusuma* doors and translucent *shoji* screens to blur the boundaries between built environments and surrounding landscapes. The style's core innovation lies in its adaptive spatial configurations, replacing *shinden-zukuri*'s rigid symmetry with asymmetrical layouts that favour practical human interaction over formal hierarchy.

engineered a institutional recalibration, materialised through Kikuchi Dairoku’s 1879 translation of *Encyclopædia Britannica* rhetorical entries and Tokyo Imperial University (present-day The University of Tokyo)’s curricular restructuring (Okabe, 1990; Tomasi, 2004, 2020). This agenda codified Western conceptual models into endogenous paradigms, a process resulting in contemporaneous architectural innovations. The synthesis diverged from China’s *ti-yong* 中體西用 (Chinese essence-Western utility) incrementalism, which subordinated Western knowledge to Confucian epistemic hierarchies. *Fusuma* and *shoji*’s kinetic adaptability during Edo-to-Meiji political restructurings showed the bureaucratic reform’s spatial correlates (Bu & Kitaoka, 2023; Y. Zhang, 2020). The partition structures implied spatial reconfiguration that enacted the dissolution of feudal hierarchies, whereas Zen-derived *ma* principle facilitated the assimilation of Greco-Roman rhetorical conventions into *haragei* 腹芸 (implicit corporeal negotiation), synthesising cross-cultural communication through corporeal semiotics.

In comparison to China’s externally disrupted *ti-yong* paradigm, the synthesis was instrumental in Meiji Japan’s nation-building through controlled cultural hybridity; and, through the calibrated transpositions, Japan achieved what Wang (2024a) terms “genetic continuity” by metabolising foreign system through endogenous spatial logic. The institutionalisation of Western rhetoric conventions during the Meiji period functioned as a pragmatic response to nation-building imperatives¹⁴, as evidenced by curricular documents from Tokyo Imperial University that replaced vernacular discourse models with translated European text (Okabe, 1990). The process generated a pedagogical system where Ciceronian disposition integrated traditional Japanese indirectness in argumentation, preserving the communicative essence of the indirectness and formalising the rhetorical architecture of the system.

Official education reports from 1885-1895 demonstrate how Aristotelian categories were applied to analyse *waka* poetry, subordinating Western taxonomy to existing aesthetic conventions

¹⁴ In Meiji Japan, such imperatives were mainly defined by the adoption of the Western concept of the nation-state, which later became central to the imperial Japanese identity. This approach contrasts with the experience of Imperial China, which did not develop a comparable internalisation of the nation-state model during the same period. Thus, for Japan, the deliberate incorporation of external system, including linguistic tools like the development of *Romaji* (ローマ字) for transcribing Japanese using the Roman alphabet, served as to re-establish and fortify a new political order. In China, conversely, the pressures of Westernisation worked to destabilise the entrenched imperial order, ultimately contributing to its overthrow. This historical process unfolded in the notable absence of a comparable, state-driven early adoption of a Romanisation system for the script. The state would not implement its official *Pinyin* system until 1958, as earlier Romanisation efforts were initiated by external forces.

rooted in *mono no aware* and *yugen* (M. F. Marra, 2007; Okakura & Nivedita, 2005). The methodological adaptations emerged from the government’s modernisation agenda centred on practical oratory training at the expense of theoretical synthesis, demonstrated through three initiatives (Okabe, 1990; Tomasi, 2004, 2020): the 1890 *Chuto Gakko Shujiho* 中等学校修辞法 (Middle School Rhetoric Methods), requiring debate skills cultivation, Tokyo Imperial University’s 1885 curriculum reform that curtailed Aristotelian rhetoric to 30 contract hours against 60 hours for *oyo enzetsu* 応用演説 (applied speech instruction), and the Foreign Ministry’s 1889 directive emphasising *ibunka shomei senryaku* 異文化説得戦略 (cross-cultural persuasion tactic) in diplomatic training. The institutional adoption catalysed linguistic standardisation through parliamentary transcriptions (1890-1910), wherein Aristotelian disposition structured debate protocols while upholding honorific components. The scholars of Japanese literature Haga Yaichi and Sugitani Torazo authored *Sakubun Kowa oyobi Bunpan* 書翰文講話及文範 (Textbook of Rhetoric, 1902), which transposed Ciceronian rhetorical systems onto vernacular codification through standardised *kana* 仮名 (syllabary) usage and epistolary structure reforms (Tomasi, 2004). The synthesis defined written discourse through the 1902 Education Ministry guidelines that hybridised classical *jo-ha-kyu* 序-破-急 (introduction-development-climax) narrative structures with forensic rhetoric in compositional pedagogy. Tomasi’s “hybrid form” materialises in *waka* poetry analysis through Aristotelian taxonomies, sustaining allusive techniques rooted in *Kokin Wakashu* tradition.

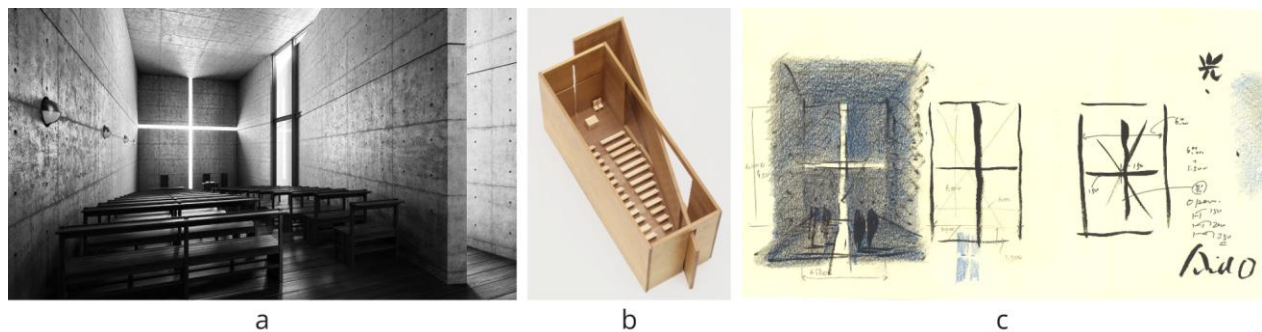


Figure 6. (a) Photograph of the Church of the Light, Ibaraki, Osaka, Japan. Source: Luchta (<https://luchta.jp/event/akionagasawa/church-of-the-light>). (b) Architectural model of the Church of the Light. Source: MoMA (<https://www.moma.org>). (c) Original design sketch by Tadao Ando, employing scroll format. Source: Toki no Wasuremono (<https://www.tokinowasuremono.com/artist-a01-andou/>).

The modern Japanese rhetorical landscape exemplifies the iterative synthesis of historical

adaptive processes analysed previously, through which Meiji-era institutional recalibrations sustained continuity between contemporary practices and pre-modern paradigms (Konishi, 2017; Tomasi, 2020). Extending the Edo period's spatial configuration strategies through *fusuma* and *shoji*, contemporary discourse perpetuates rhetoric features embedded within *Kotodama* conceptual paradigm and Zen spatial logic. Three mechanisms instantiate the continuity: firstly, the persistence of *haragei* in contemporary communication, which extends Heian-era courtly indirectness (Takai, 2003); secondly, the transposition of *ma* principles into visual design through negative space utilisation (Kenya, 2003; Nguyen, 2020), as exemplified by Kenya Hara's conceptualisation of white space in his treatise *White* (2008); thirdly, the reconstitution of *wabi-sabi* as a counter-rhetoric against technological perfectionism in industrial design (Juniper, 2011). In architecture practices, Tadao Ando's Church of the Light (1989) (Figure 6) demonstrates the synthesis by demonstrating the *ma* concept through a cruciform aperture that simultaneously references *shoji*-mediated light diffusion and Christian iconography. The concrete structure's intersecting light beams sculpt diurnal shadow patterns. The ephemeral visual compositions perform the rhetorical function of *mono-no-aware*. This performance fuses Zen spatial voidness with Western geometry (Weiss, 2013).

The progression of Japanese rhetoric from early spiritual practices through continental philosophical integration to modern hybrid forms showcases a distinctive trajectory comparable to but divergent from China's development. Chinese rhetoric persisted as an integral component of holistic knowledge frameworks characterised by the *Liuyi*, whereas Japanese rhetoric diversified through synthesised religious, aesthetic, and spatial modalities that privileged performative immediacy and affective impact above structured discursive reasoning. The distinction persists in contemporary Japanese communication patterns, which continue to represent *haragei*, preserving deliberate interpretive space instead of striving for absolute clarity. In addition, the Japanese approach to spatial rhetoric enriches contemporary discourse with valuable insights. The concept of *ma* offers a counterpoint to Western rhetorical traditions that value assertion over silence. Similarly, the *karesansui*'s deliberate reduction to essential components outlines how rhetorical power can emerge through subtraction. The distinctive features position Japanese spatial rhetoric as a counterbalance to dominant Western approaches in contemporary communication theory.

Cultural Commonality in East and Southeast Asian Cultural Interaction System

A common principle connects Shinto, Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism within the intricate web of Eastern spiritual practices. A shared approach to perceiving and communicating with the “speech” of the universe links these traditions, an approach that unfolds across two distinct yet interrelated dimensions. The first dimension involves the articulation of symbolic gestures and postures as a silent language. The silent language represents enlightenment and cosmic movements, mapping the spatial relationships between the human and the divine. Vocalisation in *yong* 詠 (intonation), *song* 誦 (chant), or Classics facilitates a process of mystical experience as the second dimension. The auditory practice produces an internalised soundscape that functions to diminish the perceived boundary between the self and the cosmos.

A philosophical pursuit extends to the origin of writing in the intellectual tradition of the Eastern Han Chinese, where writing diverges from mere functionality. The text *Shuowen Jiezi* 說文解字 (Explanation of Simple Graphs and Analysis of Composite Characters)¹⁵ from approximately 100 CE (Shen, 2021) delineates how *Cang Jie* 倉頡 conceives the act of writing as a means to decipher and transcribe celestial signs and cosmic laws (Denecke et al., 2017a, p. 78). The inscription constitutes a discourse that represents the essence of the universe and a spatial practise that maps the relationships between the earthly and the divine. Writing, in this context, emerges as a conduit for understanding and a nexus that connects the tangible and the intangible. Within the framework of Chinese linguistic tradition, the six principles known as the *liushu* 六書 (six scripts) emerge as a philosophical construct governing the synthesis of sound and character to constitute both sense and meaning (Galambos, 2017, pp. 32–34). Principles that refine linguistic function to embody an early rhetoric of speech find their expression in the concepts of *xingsheng* 形聲 (formulating the sound) and *huiyi* 會意 (conjoining the sense), demonstrating the interplay between phonetic and semantic elements, where words are not symbols but spatial constructs that combine to form an internal semantic imagery.

The process of meaning-making interrelates with linguistic function and integrates with the ideological foundation of Classics and Tao throughout the East and Southeast Asian cultural interaction system. The cultural commonality, distinct from the classic Western system, eschews the codified structures of persuasion and debate that characterise Greco-Roman rhetoric. The

¹⁵ Other ancient versions of the book can be found at the following website: <http://kanji.zinbun.kyoto-u.ac.jp/db-machine/toho/html/top.html>

rhetorical approach unfolds as a more fluid, indirect, and implicit discourse where rhetorical practitioners navigate the balance between intention and influence, often embracing a roundabout or reverse tactic. A foundation of mutual trust aligns the relationship between orators and audiences with natural and universal orders. A thought process characteristic of the system exemplifies the dynamic; the process presents as an open-ended occurrence wherein participant positions remain fluid and resist a linear progression toward a fixed terminus. Universal natural laws thus redefine rhetoric as a bilateral interchange of initiative, compelling both speakers and listeners to contribute to a shared decision-making process. Through a direct response to and influence over the thoughts of others, each new action within this interchange transforms language into a dynamic entity. Practitioners develop an understanding of the cosmos and the universal laws that govern existence through the perceptions and experiences of speech, sound, memory, and somatic gestures. The interaction of sound and silence, gesture, and resonance reflects a spatial interplay. The spatial interplay acts as a Foucauldian discourse that represents philosophy and functions as a living practice across diverse cultural landscapes.

2.1.2 Near East and the Middle East

In the matrix of human expression, the interplay of diagrammatic representation and sonic symbolism emerges as a unifying thread across five continents. Within the ancient civilizations of Egypt and the Hindu world, scribes, priests, and practitioners demonstrate the interplay as they become the custodians of a sacred tradition. Entrusted with the recitation of mantras, ritualistic speech, and incantations, the practitioners' voices express a cosmic order, each utterance imbued with symbolic gestures and postures (Misfsud, 2009; R. S. Stroud, 2009; W. Watts, 2009). The act constitutes an interaction of sound and silence, form and meaning, that reconfigures the boundaries of time and space. In the interaction, language becomes dynamic through an alignment with natural rhythms.

Hindu World

In the matrix of human communication, the ancient Hindu world presents a distinct matrix, which Sanskrit writing and the Vedas characterise. Circulating independently of a solitary empire, the records radiated across diverse regions, interacting with the ancient writing systems of the East and Southeast Asian cultural interaction system and Egypt (Coleman, 2020; R. S. Stroud, 2009). Yet, unlike the Far Eastern counterparts, the Hindu realm (circa 500 BCE) carved a distinct path, one

that the breath of utterance and verbal narration etched, not ink. Here, speech subsumed words; speech became a transformative ritual, a sacred pronouncement that imprinted lasting marks on the memory, addressing concepts of incarnation and human destiny. The practice was a symbolic exchange, a reflexive practice that cultivated virtue through dharma (Lloyd, 2020c; Lysenko, 2018; R. S. Stroud, 2009). In the interaction, individuals were participants in a cultural phenomenon that informed and shaped individual identities. Unlike the persuasive tactics that ancient Greco-Roman rhetoric favoured, the ancient Hindus sought a spiritual communion, a didacticism that aligned with the principles of dharma (Lysenko, 2018; Oliver, 1971; R. S. Stroud, 2009). The discourse functioned as a non-argumentative form of communication that integrated language and meaning to reflect principles of existence.

Egypt

In the ancient Near Eastern world, a distinct sensibility shaped the contours of oral traditions, one that sought to transmute the rituals of daily life into a dimension inhabited by supernatural spirits. The tradition diverged from ancient Far Eastern speech systems, developing independently. Central to this tradition was a belief that an individual's identity, encompassing the body, the name (*ren*), the double of the self (*ka*¹⁶), and the power of memories (*ba*¹⁷), was a continuous existence, binding the boundaries of life and death (Karenga, 2012, 2012; C. Lipson, 2004). Archaeological excavations by Egyptologists have unearthed evidence of the belief, revealing an assemblage of material and visual elements. Combined in ritual experience, the assemblage constituted an autobiographical representation, a reflection of self that recast words to encompass the existential questions of "being in the world" and the "afterword" (Karenga, 2012; C. Lipson, 2004; Sweeney, 2004). The resulting rhetoric addressed the nature of existence by engaging with concepts of eternity and the divine.

2.1.3 Western World

In the history of Western intellectual traditions, I will focus on two threads of thought, each resisting compartmentalisation. The Irish tradition diverges significantly from the established

¹⁶ It was a synthesis of one's soul, protective spirit, and doppelganger, which was attached to the physical body prior to death and inhabited in the body after death.

¹⁷ The *ba* was attached to one's physical body during life and separated from it after death.

currents of European intellectualism, safeguarding the cultural uniqueness of the tradition with limited Greco-Roman acculturation. In the tradition, the oral and symbolic idioms of speech and verse are dominant (Johnson-Sheehan, 2009). They provide effective instruments for the fortification of cultural paradigms. Contrary to the unidirectional narratives prevalent in Greco-Roman traditions, Irish mythological accounts unfold as multifaceted dialogues between characters and thematic content, culminating in a pluralistic, heterogeneous consensus. When the consensus proves elusive, foundational coercion re-establishes the natural equilibrium, constituting a defining feature of an Irish rhetoric grounded in the foundational order of the land. The ancient Greco-Roman verbal tradition has shaped the contours of Western thought. The tradition's defining characteristic is the elevation of language abstracts an instrumental function, where language becomes dynamic, reflecting a culture that seeks to understand, persuade, and transcend. From the heuristic (discovery-oriented), eristic (argumentative), and protreptic (persuasive) functions of Homeric rhetoric to the democratisation of eloquence, the tradition has been significant for the evolution of Western intellectual discourse, stimulating intellectual debate and drawing the criticism of philosophers like Plato.

Celtic Rhetoric: The Irish Tradition as a Primary Exemplar

In the assemblage of Western cultural traditions, the ancient Irish represent a distinct thread, weaving a vernacular system of rhetoric. The preservation of cultural identity by ancient Celtic peoples roots the uniqueness of the tradition, which diverges from the prevailing Greco-Roman models in Europe. Ireland exemplifies the historical dynamic, as Ireland's minimal absorption of Greco-Roman influence allowed for a distinct cultural identity to persist (Johnson-Sheehan, 2009). The constitution of speech provides a primary explanation for apparent similarities in the symbolic usage of speech across the cultures, superseding any specific tradition like the Greek model as a primary cause. According to researchers' investigation and comparison of ancient Irish mythology and literature versus ancient Greek-Roman legends, a critical feature of ancient Irish and Celtic European rhetorical practise is that speech and poetry's oral and symbolic forms played a dominant role (C. Lipson & Binkley, 2009). Orators in ancient Irish society wielded the power of magic through repeated recitations and chants of redundant details of the story over and over again to reinforce Irish cultural norms and beliefs. The ancient Irish divided the collection of stories of the mythology into four cycles: *Mythological cycle*, *Ultonian Cycle*, *Ossianic Cycle*, and *Historical*

Cycle (Johnson-Sheehan, 2009). The cycles were complex interplays of characters and content. By arguing through repetitive and formulaic language, the characters and content in the four cycles achieve a multi-way heterogeneous consensus, which provides a counterpoint to the Greco-Roman rhetorical norm of seeking a one-way linear agreement. When the characters could not reach consensus, the characters would restore the Irish natural balance through the foundational forces of incantation or violence. The rhetoric was distinctly Celtic, reflecting a worldview connected to the culture and the culture's environment.

Greco-Roman Rhetoric

Modern conceptions of Western intellectual history often frame the diverse verbal traditions of ancient Greece and Rome as a single edifice, which has shaped subsequent thought and expression. In early pre-literate Greece, Homeric rhetoric, the speech of itinerant rhetoricians, and bardic storytelling laid the complex groundwork for the conceptual landscape of verbal discourses. Homer identified three functions of speech: heuristic function (self-awareness discovery), eristic function (captivation and motivation through language), and protreptic function (guidance and transformation to human thoughts) (Herrick, 2020). Language then emerged as a dual-edged sword, offering the possibility for both reception and persuasion. Bards relied on oral storytelling for the livelihood of bards; devising a rhetorical strategy that varied the pace and length of the stories of the bards to retain audience attention was necessary, as bards had to contend with other existing stories and make familiar ones sound engaging. Empedocles (490-430 BCE) and Corax of Syracuse (proximate 5th BCE) were two of the earliest influential figures of social rhetoric practitioners and played a role in guiding the practise of rhetoric towards the political arena. Secondly, the two rhetoricians infused philosophical ideas and forensic speech into rhetoric, fuelling the division between those who prioritised persuasion, such as the Sophists, and those who emphasised truth, like many philosophers. Thirdly, the practitioners practised rhetoric in public venues such as law courts, including the Athenian Assembly. Fourthly, the orators democratised eloquence, offering training once reserved for the elite, stimulating intellectual debate and drawing the criticism of Plato. The rhetoric of the era was not merely instrumental; the rhetoric was a dynamic component of the culture, reflecting the culture's core values.

2.2 Synthesis: Rhetoric, Art, and Spatial Orientation

A false dichotomy permeates cross-cultural rhetorical analysis through the persistent structuring of

realities with a dualistic lens, exemplified by modernism's tendency to segment history into ordered, progressive stages, and postmodernism's prioritisation of fragmentation. The structuring of reality through a dualistic lens overlooks the underlying premises that an interplay of order and disorder constitutes the world, where structured frameworks and dynamic disruptions continually inform one another. Confining reality to discrete categories distorts the constitutive complexity of reality and dissolves the reciprocal relationship between historical contingencies and contemporary transformations. The reductive tendency is particularly evident in cross-cultural studies of rhetoric, where scholarly analyses dichotomise Eastern and Western traditions into fixed constructs, privileging differences over underlying dialectical processes.

The critique extends to Robert Kaplan's (1966) *contrastive rhetoric* framework which, through diagramming rhetorical structures as rigid typologies, tends to reduce cultural thought pattern to homogenised binaries. Although Kaplan initially mapped linear arrows onto English and concentric circles onto so-called "Oriental" language, with scattered lines denoting Semitic, Romance, and Russian traditions¹⁸, Kaplan's schematic representations subsequently lost the original theoretical context. The disassociation emerged when Kaplan's visual models, intended to reflect culturally distinct thought patterns, progressively lost connection to the pedagogical and rhetorical frameworks the models sought to illustrate. Kaplan's (2005) later work further reinforces the categories by framing non-Western rhetorical practices as through an Anglophile lens, which risks obscuring the dynamic nature of systems structured by localised cultural epistemologies. The tendency is evident in cross-cultural rhetoric studies. Analyses in the field frequently dichotomise Eastern and Western traditions into static contrasts, prioritising differences over shared dialectical processes. For instance, George Kennedy (1997) delineates Greco-Roman rhetoric as emphasising logical proof through forensic debate, while characterising early Chinese practices as relying on symbolic resonance within established cultural frameworks that privilege aesthetic patterning over

¹⁸ Kaplan's 1966 framework categorised Chinese with Korean under the ethnocultural label "Oriental". However, John Hinds (1983) demonstrated this taxonomy overlooked substantive linguistic divergence. Chinese follows subject-verb-object (SVO) and topic-prominent syntax, whereas Japanese and Korean employs subject-object-verb (SOV) arrangement with dual topic-subject prominence. This structural incongruity, combined with Kaplan's problematic grouping of four linguistically unrelated families under the geographic charged term "Oriental", rendered the classification methodologically unsound. Kaplan later dismissed the framework as overly reductive "doodles" (R. Kaplan, 1987, 1988), yet cautiously acknowledged that rhetorical patterns might adapt through cross-linguistic contact, albeit within bounded cultural parameters. Subsequent scholarly work introduced empirical refinements between rhetorical patterns and cognitive processes (U. Connor, 1996; Mao, 2003), progressively reframing cultural practice from deterministic models to dynamically developing constructs.

forensic debate.

Challenging the binary, Arabella Lyon (2004) examines *jian* 諫 (remonstration) in Confucian context through *Lunyu* 論語 (The Analects), demonstrating the reliance of *jian* on ritualised exemplars to mediate ethical hierarchies. Extending the analysis, Lyon (2009) complicates Kennedy's binaries by contrasting the Daoist emergence of *jian* from spontaneous attunement with *wuwei* 無為 (natural orders) against the Confucian model's privileging of ritualised exemplars over verbal discourse, which redefines critique as a culturally embedded praxis and asserts the legitimacy of critique beyond classification as deviation. Similarly, Carol Lipson (2004, 2009) analyses Egyptian tomb autobiographies, positioning the autobiographies as performative texts designed to secure commemorative rituals through biographical narratives, whereas Roberta Binkley's (2004, 2009) examines Old Babylonian oratory, demonstrating that the hymns of the Babylonian high priestess Enheduanna invoked divine authority through ritualised formulae, eschewing reliance on metrical structures. Analyses that frame Greco-Roman and non-Western traditions as fixed dichotomies reduce diverse cultural practices to simplified oppositional categories and tend to valorise Greco-Roman models and other traditions outside the lineage.

Critiques of static cultural models drove the methodological recalibration reflected in the progression from cross-cultural to intercultural rhetoric. Although cross-cultural frameworks expanded analytic scope beyond textual structures to include oral traditions and philosophical systems (Kennedy, 1997), the reliance on the frameworks perpetuated essentialist categorisations through systemic comparisons. Kennedy's systemic model, despite broadening Kaplan's contrastive scope, inadvertently entrenched the conceptualisation of cultural practices as static systems by prioritising taxonomic classification over performative negotiation (U. Connor, 2008; Kennedy, 1997). The approach retained what Ulla Connor (2008) identifies as a "monolithic conceptualisation of culture", wherein taxonomic contrasts overshadowed dynamic interactions between communities.

From the early 2000s onward, scholars such as Connor (2002, 2004, 2008) contented that cross-cultural rhetoric's focus on "differences as fixed entities", failed to account for cultural practices evolving within asymmetrical contact zones. Empirical analysis of multilingual writers reveals that rhetorical strategies adapt contextually instead of adhering to predetermined cultural scripts (Mao, 2020; Mao et al., 2015). The contextual adaptation of the rhetorical strategies demonstrates the constraints of systemic models. Intercultural frameworks advanced by Connor

and Mao foregrounded the analysis of “small cultures” (disciplinary conventions and organisational norms) over broad civilisational categories. The microanalytical scrutiny elucidated how micro-level dialectics between institutional practices and individual agency continually reconfigure rhetorical traditions. Later scholarship moved beyond the prior emphasis on contrastive typologies to trace the “bidirectional flow of semiotic resources” across geopolitical divides. The epistemological positions draw from a theoretical justification that prioritises cultural distinctions over homogenising synthesis. The justification, in turn, extends postcolonial critiques of *epistemicide*¹⁹.

In the 1990 interview, Homi Bhabha contests assimilationist paradigms, contending that emphasising irreducible differences prevents dominant frameworks from subsuming marginalised practices under universalist pretences (Rutherford & Bhabha, 1990), and identifies how celebrations of diversity constitute mechanisms that camouflage hierarchical power dynamics, wherein dominant systems appropriate non-Western elements to reinforce existing hegemonies (Bhabha, 2012; Spivak, 1999). The theoretical interventions materialise within rhetorical analysis through Bhabha’s “*third space*”²⁰, which is a discursive framework where divergent cultural systems negotiate difference through sustained interaction yet resist assimilation into hierarchical unities. The conceptualisation of third-space negotiation establishes the theoretical foundation for intercultural rhetoric’s subsequent methodological innovations, enabling a shift from systemic comparison to process-oriented analysis of dynamic cultural encounters.

¹⁹ The concept of *epistemicide* posited as both extension and critique of Bhabha’s (2012) theory of hybrid negotiation, systematises the dialectical annihilation to Eurocentric modernity’s systematic annihilation of epistemes resistant to Eurocentric modernity’s assimilative regimes, materialising Boaventura de Sousa Santos’s (2015) “knowledge murder” metaphor as infrastructural practice. Bhabha’s (2012) emphasis on cultural encounters’ generative potential retains its theoretical necessity, this premise, however, is radically reframed by *epistemicide*’s exposure of the ontological extermination historically sutured into such exchanges. The systematic eradication of vernacular textual traditions by colonial archives constitutes a conscious epistemic apartheid. Academia’s complicit taxonomies operationalise this violence (Albrecht, 2019; Santos, 2015; Spivak, 1999). This framework, of note, interrogates Bhabha’s “*third space*” by illuminating its necropolitical foundations, wherein hybrid syntheses camouflage the erasure of non-assimilable epistemes. Bhabha’s “*third space*” examines hybrid cultural negotiations marked by ambivalence (Young, 2004). In contrast, the concept of *epistemicide* reveals the systemic erasure of non-Western knowledge systems. This concept exposes how dominant power structures dismantle local epistemologies that resist assimilation. Thus, adopting *epistemicide* over “epistemic erasure” denaturalises the agentive violence embedded in cultural hierarchies. This violence is channelled through subaltern scholars who are embedded in epistemic regimes, while sustaining Bhabha’s subversive incommensurability.

²⁰ To preserve the conceptual integrity of intercultural rhetoric frameworks central to this chapter, Edward Said’s cultural critiques and Frederic Jameson’s spatial dialectics are reserved for the next chapter. This deliberate deferral allows systematic disentanglement to their theoretical convergence/ divergence with Bhabha’s “*third space*” without fracturing the methodological coherence of this chapter.

Intercultural rhetoric, emerging from the third-space epistemology, while maintaining critical awareness of the limitations that Connor (2008, 2011) interrogates and that LuMing Mao's (2011, 2020) analytical frameworks extend, transcends reductive binaries through two interrelated mechanisms. The first mechanism foregrounds the mutual permeability and interpenetration of cultural practices, which the bidirectional flow of cultural signifiers connecting geopolitical and epistemic boundaries manifests. Second, the framework conceptualises traditions as processes developing through hybrid adaptations and polyphonic negotiations. The conceptualisation frames hybrid adaptations entailing the integration of incompatible cultural forms, whereas constitutively conflictual and generative interactions among incommensurate cultural epistemologies characterise polyphonic negotiations. The dual framework circumvents the imposition of static norms. The approach understands cultural practices as dynamic signifying acts. The dynamic signifying acts arise from historical contingency and power dynamics and develop within interdependent networks, where material-symbolic tensions generate new discursive environments.

The practices of the Lingnan School of Painting, for example, constitute what the study identifies as Bhabha's (2012) *third space*. By integrating Western single-point perspective methodologically with East Asian scattered perspective²¹, the Lingnan artists rejected privileging either cultural framework, a stance that documentation throughout the artists' political-artistic practices in the early twentieth century reveals (Croizier, 1988; Ma, 2016; Sullivan, 1996). The refusal culminated in what Hu (2009) defines as "unresolved cultural friction", wherein competing logics coexist dialogically without synthesis or hierarchy. Over decades, the sustained dialectic established hybrid spatial rhetorics, which are discursive environments that reified contradiction as a generative site of innovation. Building on the trajectory, Wang (2002) contextualises the Lingnan School's development from regional praxis to contemporary critiques of Eurocentric binaries and illustrates how unresolved negotiation deconstruct static cultural categories.

The dismantling of static categories enables a dynamic recombination process, wherein rhetorical forms from distinct cultural traditions intersect one another in third-space environments.

²¹ The Maruyama-Shijo School, a late-Edo artistic moment (c. 1840-1868) synthesising Western realism with Japanese ink painting traditions, was subsequently refined by the Kyoto school, which was formally founded by Matasumra Goshun (松村 呉春) in Kyoto's Shijō district, assimilated these techniques. Following the Meiji Restoration (c. 1868-1912), Nihonga (日本画, Japanese painting) underwent further hybridisation through selective incorporation of Western pictorial devices such as linear perspective and chiaroscuro modelling, a process that the Lingnan artists later assimilated through indirect channels (Croizier, 1988). This mediated reception proceeds independently of direct European influence. It reveals the Lingnan School's methodological synthesis of cross-cultural visual rhetoric.

Within these hybrid spaces, prolonged cross-cultural exchanges facilitate recontextualisation, a process that necessitates the mutual adaptation of constitutive elements, narrative structures, visual symbols, and performative conventions. The integration of cultural-cognitive practices²² from one cultural-epistemic framework with value-laden representational systems²³ of another gives rise to synthesised spatial rhetorics, exemplified by Bhabha's (2012) "third space". In this discursive locus, the interaction between Indian *śabda* शब्द (sacred sound) and the Greco-Roman logos λόγος (rational discourse), for instance, reconfigures rhetorical possibilities by maintaining epistemic plurality, embodying the *interdependence-in-difference* central to intellectual rhetoric's reorientation. These emergent modes materialised through the catalytic friction between competing cultural logics, as exemplified when the Japanese *wabi-sabi* 侘寂 aesthetics of asymmetrical impermanence interface with Eurocentric ideals of compositional harmony, or reciprocally when Chinese *yinyang* 陰陽 dialectics enter into dialogue with Aristotelian categorical systems through contextually contingent complementarity.

The cross-cultural dialogues mentioned previously, such as the interface between Japanese *wabi-sabi* and Eurocentric harmony, provide examples of Bhabha's third-space logics in practice. Within the negotiated spaces of cross-cultural dialogue, conflicts emerge as sites of productive tension. What Mao (2020) terms "translational negotiation" recasts the productive tension as a process that mediates between "facts of nonusage" (suppressed cultural practices) and "facts of usage" (dominant epistemic norms) to move beyond binaries. The catalytic potential of Mao's

²² In its constitutive manifestations, cultural-cognitive customs (those tacit frameworks that shape how communities interpret and enacted meaning) resist conformity to stylistic conventions. Take, for instance, the paradigmatic case of the Chinese *dao* (道), wherein a principle of equilibrium informs correlative thought processes, or the Japanese *kotodama* (言霊), through which language a generative, ontological force that actualises reality. Correspondingly, the dialectical reasoning characterising the Indian *nyāya* (न्याय) tradition and the ritualised discourse underpinning the Egyptian *maat* (m3't) compose epistemic architectures regulating perception and action irrespective of individual agency. Pierrre Bourdieu (1977)'s *habitus* provides an analytical lens here: these "durable dispositions" mediate cultural transmission and adaptive praxis, circumscribing possibilities whilst generating alternatives. From *dao*'s analogical fluidity to *kotodama*'s linguistic efficacy, and from *nyāya*'s dialectical methods to *maat*'s cosmic order, the dialectic of constraint and innovation reveals how cultural practices simultaneously sustain and reconfigure rhetorical traditions.

²³ These systems are symbolic codes that, by their constitutive structural logic, encode cultural hierarchies and epistemic values. Irish *filíocht* ritualised genealogical authority through performative verse, while the Japanese *kotodama* conceptualised language as a spiritual force shaping reality. The nature of these frameworks precludes an equation with neutral semantic vessels. They are institutionalised mechanisms that reinforce specific knowledge paradigms. This is achieved by embedding epistemological norms within their architecture, which remain obscured until revealed through comparative analysis.

(2020) translational negotiation engenders a triadic structure (Bhabha, 2012; Lefebvre, 1992) and recasts the mediating process to displace binaries prioritising certain traditions over others. The triadic structure displaces hierarchies separating essence from application or dominant from marginal paradigms by fostering a dynamic interplay between competing norms. Analytical frameworks predicated on binary logic elide the rhetorical development that arises from the generative conflicts within negotiated spaces. The elision of rhetorical development stems from an overreliance on contrastive frameworks, which perpetuate reified epistemic divisions and impede dialogic engagement between codified traditions and emergent syncretic practices. I contend that the kernel task of intercultural humanities and rhetoric lies in reconceptualising existing limitations through methodologies designed to interact with cultural complexity. Intercultural humanities and rhetorics priorities situating the fragments of human worlds within historical and contemporary contextualisation while preserving the fragments' fragile uniqueness and ambiguity.

I accomplish the reconceptualisation of existing limitations by analysing the mechanisms of world-making and transformation, which entail reconstructing cultural narratives without erasing the narratives' constitutive contradictions. To synthesise Greco-Roman rhetorical perspectives with “non-Western” frameworks, a scholar must acknowledge both the stability of classical rhetorical principles and the fluidity of the principles' adaptation across diverse cultural ecosystems. The acknowledgement of stability and fluidity dismisses the notion of rhetoric as a singular tradition and instead presents rhetoric as a dynamic interaction between continuity and innovation. The analytical recognition that coherence emerges not from uniformity, but from the productive friction generated by multiplicity and unity, is the centre of the reframing of rhetoric as a dynamic interaction.

Historical processes, whether in the development of classical Chinese garden aesthetics or the evolution of Western oratory, demonstrate how cultural practices thrive through the integration of ordered systems and disruptive reinterpretations. The field of intercultural rhetoric (Casmir, 1997; Lu, 2020; Xiaoming, 2008) questions the artificial dichotomy of “Eastern” and “Western” traditions by stressing the dialectical relationship between ordered systems and disruptive reinterpretations, proposing instead the methodological framework central to the field, which allows hybridity to emerge as the normative condition of cross-cultural encounters. The progression from Kaplan’s initial contrastive models to Bhabha’s third-space negotiations

evidences the dynamics of questioning dichotomies and proposing hybridity, uncovering how translation politics and cross-cultural comparisons essentially remould rhetoric's conceptual boundaries. The trajectory from contrastive models to third-space negotiations prepares the analytical groundwork for interrogating spatial dimensions in the next chapter, where I subsequently develop the focus through the exploration of pan-rhetoric phenomena.

2.3 Rhetoric as a Universal Phenomenon and Behaviours

In the shadowed recesses of antiquity, the origin of rhetoric remains an enigma, elusive and undefined, akin to other primitive forms of emotional expression such as painting, dance, and music. Bereft of substantial and persuasive archaeological evidence, the genesis of rhetoric defies pinpointing, its early history shrouded in ambiguity. Yet, in the shared characteristics of oral communications that bridge the East and West, that transcend cultural boundaries, I propose a rational hypothesis: that rhetoric was born as a discovery of orality as a narrative medium, a nuanced matrix where words transcended symbols and became a living dialogue with the world. As I will show, the proposed hypothesis resonates with the intricate interplay of power and knowledge that Michel Foucault explored, and with the spatial dynamics of Doreen Massey, weaving a complex understanding of rhetoric as not just a tool but a reflection of the very nature of human existence.

Verbal discourses played a significant role in the transmission of culture heritage, particularly in those cultures that predated the invention of writing media, as we saw in the last section with Japanese and Celtic cultures. As Walter Benjamin notes, in pre-modern societies, people passed down knowledge and experience through shared oral narratives such as tales, fables, and legends (Asselin et al., 2008; Benjamin, 2008, 2019). The oral transmission of knowledge suggests that vernacular rhetoric in non-dominant cultures existed before the introduction of foreign discourse principles, and the vernacular form retained some of its original identity as it evolved. Rhetoric, whether in dominant or non-dominant cultures, never functions as an isolated system. Itinerant and local experts, Logicians/Sophists, Strategists/Orators, Syncretists, preachers and storytellers/bards travelled across continents transmitting knowledge, exposing beliefs, and achieving secular consensus via varying vocal rhythms, pitch, and narrative structure. In other words, rhetoric does not abstract from a particular civilisation and culture but instead entwines with foreign ideas to create a distinctive system.

Scholarly debate exists regarding the classification of rhetoric; some researchers contend that

rhetoric functions as a specific attribute of certain disciplines within a civilisation or culture (Benjamin, 2008; J.-Z. Gu, 2008; Swearingen, 2023), as semi-autonomous pigeonholes, while other scholars posit that rhetoric arises as a natural phenomenon from human experiences (Carey, 1992; Dewey, 1958). The latter, broader perspective informs what I will call pan(macro)-rhetoric, a universal expression that transcends the boundaries of human civilisation. As a practise of verbal discourse, rhetoric does not exist as a solely human or so-called “civilised” phenomenon; in fact, observers can see rudimentary forms of communicative influence in the interactions of non-human animals, while complex rhetorical practices also feature in the diverse verbal traditions of various human societies, including those sometimes historically categorised as “primitive”.

Alternatively, speech acts comprise auditory signs that join together meaningful signifiers, such as words, or phonological elements, to form a signified concept (an iconic, phonological image), phrases, or acoustic assemblies. Rhetorical practise functions as a signifier, and the content of the practise stands as a signified. The “signified impression,” which humans and non-humans, as well as primitive and civilised societies share, likely constitutes the most primitive form of ritualised behaviour for engaging with nature/universe. What I call “pan(macro)-rhetoric” serves as a unifying term, bridging diverse manifestations of rhetorical practice and illuminating the interconnectedness of all communicative beings. The primal form of ritualised engagement with the nature of the universe, which Kennedy (1997) explored in his study of oral cultures, manifests in the age-old practices of incantations and recitations, a seeking of autonomy and communion with the natural world. The resulting expression constitutes a rhetoric that breathes, a living testament to the universality of expression and the intricate interplay of being.

One may posit that rhetoric reaches back to the very dawn of human consciousness, predating the crystallisation of civilizations and cultures. John Dewey (1958) and James W. Carey (1992) suggested a perspective that expands the definition of rhetoric beyond structured argumentation to encompass the fundamental process of creating and transmitting meaning through symbolic forms, a capacity inherent to sentient existence. Within the earliest hominids, the innate ability to infuse speech with layered significance and thought likely thrived, serving as a primal tool to grasp, perceive, and commune with cosmic life and the universe itself. The profound connection between language and existence, between the articulation of thought and the fabric of reality, hints at a universality that transcends humans.

In the next section, I will delve into the concept of rhetoric as a natural phenomenon manifest in everyday practises and aesthetic experiences. Drawing upon the theoretical landscapes of Michel de Certeau and engaging in a dialogue with Massey's geographical humanism, the examination will show how rhetoric not only affects but actively shapes our awareness and perception of the spaces that surround us, weaving the intricate matrix of one's existential experience. If rhetoric's primordial entanglement with human consciousness, as both artifice and autonomic reflex, transcends civilisational taxonomies, the materialisation of rhetoric demands scrutiny beyond comparative frameworks. The ensuring analysis shifts from epistemic cartographies to corporeal geographies, tracing how rhetoric's 'naturalness' coalesces in the gestural, the neurasthenic, and the spatially insurgent, that modes of being that elude cultural essentialisation by inhabiting the interstices of body and world.

3. From Cultural and Ontological Turns to the Spatial Turn

This chapter navigates the territories of spatial rhetoric, a field of inquiry that extends across multitude disciplines. Scholars in this area explore how specific spaces mediate the conveyance of memory (Bishop, 1992; Dickinson, 2020; Rice, 2016; Topinka, 2012; Wright, 2005), the ramifications for human bodies moving through varied environments (Lefebvre, 1992; Massey, 1994; Tuan, 1977), the interplay between human and non-human entities (Holbraad & Pedersen, 2017c; Parikka, 2016), and the rhetorical capacity of inanimate objects (D. Berry & Dieter, 2015; McAlister, 2019). The discussion brackets cartographic procedures and deep mapping techniques, reserving these specific methods for the following chapter. Instead, this chapter focuses on historicising the conditions that enabled the development of such practices.

The chapter's argument concentrates on how the cultural and ontological turns in the humanities provided the necessary preconditions for the "spatial turn" of the late twentieth century. This intellectual movement re-evaluated space as an active social product and proposed spatial rhetoric as a multifaceted concept expanding analysis beyond physical geography to encompass socially constructed spaces (Dickinson, 2020; Lyon, 2013; McAlister, 2019). The resulting analytical approach extends traditional rhetorical frameworks to embrace elements from geography, architecture, and urban planning. This epistemic shift validated post-technological spatial practices as rhetorical acts and enabled the initial metamorphosis of these practices into spatial rhetoric tactics.

My interrogation of this history traces three phases: early twentieth-century positivist geography, the post-1960s politicisation of space, and the late-modern narrativisation of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) alongside critical cartography. The analysis foregrounds the crosscurrents between the work of Michel de Certeau (2011a, 2011b) and Doreen Massey (1994, 1995, 2005). De Certeau's ideas on walking trajectories, which probe how individuals traverse and interpret space, inform this dissertation's central argument. Massey's spatial politics augments this understanding by scrutinising the power dynamics and social relations that configure space.

By reconstructing this intellectual lineage, the chapter demonstrates how theorists theorised space as a contested terrain defined by social, political, and economic forces. This reconceptualisation obliges rhetoric to incorporate questions concerning emplacement, scale,

and power. From this foundation, I extend the analysis to the concept of deep time-space, an interpretive framework that allows for an exploration of how human activity affects and is affected by space and time. The deep time-space framework, which contends that space and time function as both separate physical dimensions and conjoined facets of human experience, establishes the theoretical basis for the empirical analyses presented in the chapters that follow.

3.1 Prelude: The Cultural and Ontological Turns

The late twentieth century provided conducive terrain for ideological transformations, catalysed by factors including the end of the Cold War and the rise of neoliberalism. This intellectual climate gave rise to a series of “turns” that influenced the humanities. Among these, the Cultural and Ontological Turns altered the understanding of space, place, and identity, laying the intellectual groundwork for the Spatial Turn. The Cultural Turn, with intellectual roots in nineteenth-century anthropology, emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Biernacki, 1999; Weigel, 2009). The movement provided a counterbalance to structuralist or materialist paradigms, which often prioritised economic and social structures, and aimed to deconstruct grand narratives such as the Enlightenment belief in universal progress (Gottlieb & Karatzogianni, 2018). The subsequent Ontological Turn, which surfaced in the mid-1980s with roots in the 1970s (Heywood, 2017; Holbraad & Pedersen, 2017c; Paleček & Risjord, 2013), advanced a critique of anthropocentrism. This critique questioned the privileged status of human “being” over non-human entities and re-examined the subject-object dualism foundational to post-Enlightenment Western thought (Heywood, 2017; Holbraad & Pedersen, 2017c).

The Spatial Turn, a theoretical reorientation that emerged in the 1960s, had its intellectual precursors in the positivist geography of the period. The movement countered historicism, which privileges temporal analysis, by advocating for an understanding of space as a dynamic, socially constructed entity (Soja, 1989, 2000; West-Pavlov, 2009b). The core argument of the spatial turn posits that space shapes human experience and social relations. This perspective opened avenues for inquiry across disciplines, including history and literary studies (Acharya & Panda, 2022; Ayers, 2010), and encouraged scholars to explore the intersections of space, power, and identity.

The resulting interdisciplinary approaches prompted a re-assessment of culture as a domain for struggle and negotiation (Wilken, 2014) and led scholars to re-examine foundational premises, methodologies, and ethical considerations (Holbraad & Pedersen, 2017c). The concept of space as

a dynamic and relational construct became a key theme in discourse in the humanities. Rhetorics developed within these interdisciplinary frameworks, with analyses that aimed to augment spatial theory and question existing power dynamics (Falkheimer & Jansson, 2006; J. Fisher & Mennel, 2010).

3.1.1 The Cultural Turn: Space as Semiotic Terrian

The Cultural Turn marked a move away from structuralist approaches, which sought to identify universal, underlying structures in social phenomena, and instead prompted a re-examination of how culture shapes human experience (Biernacki, 1999). A reassessment of places followed, viewing them as sites where political power is enacted, such as when a public park is repurposed for a political protest. The speaking subject also underwent a re-examination, viewed as a product of cultural and discursive forces. Scholars reconsidered rhetoric's role as a force that shapes material reality, for instance, through architectural designs that guide or control the movement of inhabitants (McAlister, 2019; McAlister & Ewalt, 2018). This re-evaluation extended to material practices, where the understanding of spatial design became a form of argumentation. Architectural aesthetics and interior design, for example, provided mediums for conveying political viewpoints (McAlister, 2019). This shift laid the groundwork for the notion of *heterotopia*, which became a concept for spatial rhetoric. Foucault (1986) defines *heterotopias* as “other spaces” where existing places are “simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted”. A cemetery, for example, exemplifies a heterotopia by juxtaposing the world of the living with the world of the dead, maintaining its distinct rules and temporalities. *Heterotopias* manifest in two ways: they can create an illusion that exposes the constructed nature of “real” spaces, or they can form a separate, ordered space that stands in contrast to the perceived disorder of everyday life.

Building on these intellectual shifts, cultural theorists have offered interpretations of the relationship between space, time, and materiality. Nathan Stormer for instance, proposed supplanting the semiological understanding of space, which treats space as a system of signs, with an approach that acknowledges the network of material and semiotic components that constitute social space. Henri Lefebvre (1992) elucidates space as a complex entity that pervades all senses and bodies. De Certeau (2011b) develops this concept by characterising space as “practiced”, accentuating the dynamics of how the everyday actions of inhabitants produce space. This perspective treats space as fluid and interactive, reflecting its historical composition and the interplay of material conditions and discursive practices. The work of these theorists

reconfigured the understanding of space by integrating cultural, political, and semiotic aspects.

This dynamic view of space is further developed in feminist geography. Joshua Ewalt (2018), informed by Massey's (2005) work, defines space as "a momentary articulation of moving matter," an entity produced by the interactions of social and material elements. This redefinition allows for an examination of how spatial arrangements and subjective experiences mutually constitute one another. Massey's analysis challenges a conception of space as a closed system with fixed boundaries, instead presenting it as open and defined by its external relations. Her work exposes how power manifests spatially through inequalities, such as the placement of industrial zones in low-income neighbourhoods, which creates unequal health outcomes. Massey (1999) also demonstrates power's role in the apportionment of identities, showing how gated communities spatially enforce class distinctions and limit political interaction. Furthermore, her work counters a masculinist logic (Massey, 1994) that suggests technologies like the internet can nullify space, an idea she argues ignores the material realities of those who are not mobile (McAlister, 2019). Through discourses of gender, race, and labour, this feminist geography examines how social meanings are ascribed to the body, revealing, for instance, how domestic versus public spaces subject a woman's body to different expectations and constraints.

3.1.2 The Ontological Turn: Multiplicity and Relational Being

The ontological turn developed as a theoretical reorientation following the postmodern re-evaluations of the 1980s. Scholarly debate concerning the movement's theoretical premises and methodological implications has occurred across disciplines such as anthropology, archaeology, and science and technology studies (Bessire & Bond, 2014; Holbraad & Pedersen, 2017c). The turn reconceptualises analytical priority by shifting focus from discrete entities to the relational processes that constitute them. A conceptual move of this nature unsettles conventional dichotomies between subject and object, nature and culture, or matter and symbol. Heywood's (2017) work clarifies that the philosophical root of the ontological turn involves a shift away from what people know (epistemology) towards what constitutes their reality (ontology). This re-characterisation of anthropological knowledge conceptualises knowledge and existence as co-constitutive, which in turn frames anthropological inquiry as an act that co-creates the realities it studies. A focus on the existence of multiple "real" worlds displaces the cultural turn's emphasis on representations and perceptions. The challenge to representationalism that the ontological turn poses reconceptualise reality as emergent. Some scholars define the ontological turn as a form of

hyper-structuralism, which is an analytical framework that extends structuralist analysis beyond abstract symbolic systems to examine how the material enactment of social relations in objects produces these systems and invests them with meaning (Biernacki, 1999; Parikka, 2023).

The development of an anti-representationalist stance within cultural anthropology, which informs the ontological turn, began with the “Oxford School”. This intellectual movement contested anthropological paradigms that prioritise representation, challenged the primacy that structuralism and post-structuralism affords to language, and questioned the discipline’s use of analytical concepts such as “society” and “culture”. Led by Edwin Ardener, the “Oxford School” contested the idea that language and culture represent a pre-existing world, suggesting instead that these forces shape what people consider real (McDonald, 2017). The school proposed a method that treats the anthropologist’s own analytical concepts as ethnographic artifacts that are products of a specific Western worldview. The ontological turn relates to various disciplines, drawing from post-structuralism while also critiquing its linguistic focus (Bessire & Bond, 2014).

The critical stance extends the reflexive posture associated with the 1980s “crisis of representation” and continues earlier intellectual legacies (Holbraad & Pedersen, 2017c). The work of several theorists further developed the anti-representationalist stance. Roy Wagner (1972), for example, offers an alternative to the metaphysical constraint of a single reality by demonstrating how cultures invent their worlds through symbolic systems. Marilyn Strathern (2006; 1980) employed a method of systematic self-critique to question her analytical categories, showing in her work on Melanesian societies that focusing on “relations” instead of “individuals” reveals a social reality where Western concepts of the person do not apply. Eduardo Batalha Viveiros de Castro (2014; 2020; 1993; 2017b) proposed using “ontology” as a methodological tool that allows ethnographic encounters to reshape the analyst’s own conceptual apparatus. Annemarie Mol (2002; 1999) redefines a disease as a singular biological entity, showing how different clinical settings “enact” a condition like atherosclerosis as multiple, distinct-but-real objects. The work of these theorists demonstrates how the intellectual lineage of anti-representationalism informs methodological innovations that reveal previously obscured facets of ethnographic material.

The methodological framework of the ontological turn requires an intensification of reflexivity, reorienting its focus from epistemological presuppositions to ontological conditions (Holbraad & Pedersen, 2017c). A reorientation of this kind entails a mode of inquiry that requires practitioners to remain attentive to the ontological conditions of their own knowledge production.

The framework requires practitioners to treat their analytical concepts and presuppositions as objects of inquiry, which allows ethnographic materials to retrospectively reshape the theoretical framework of the analysis (Sivado, 2020). The critical inquiry re-evaluates methodology as an object of analysis and interrogates the foundations of anthropology by questioning disciplinary distinctions. A multi-realist stance reorients conventional anthropological analysis by requiring the analyst to accept informants' worlds as real in their own terms, which fosters a multifaceted view of human existence (Holbraad & Pedersen, 2017c; Kuhn, 1969; Quine, 1969). An alternative to representationalist anthropological modes that treat informants' worlds as systems of belief for interpretation against a single, objective reality is thus proposed. The alternative approach poses ontological questions, such as "what might a thing be?" or "how might one conceptualise time as circular?", to challenge epistemological frameworks premised on such representationalism. A key methodological significance of the movement is a *modus operandi* that inverts the conventional relationship between data and theory. Instead of using pre-existing theory to explain ethnographic materials, the new *modus operandi* uses the contingencies of ethnography to generate and transform analytical concepts (Henare et al., 2007; Holbraad & Pedersen, 2017c). The methodological inversion enables a re-examination of foundational anthropological categories, such as the distinctions between nature and culture or the individual and society.

An ontological approach carries implications that extend beyond human culture and has influenced the subsequent spatial turn. The intellectual movement interrogates and reconfigures foundational assumptions that treat space as a fixed, undialectical container for social activity (Foucault, 1980b). By focusing on a multiplicity of realities and existences, the ontological turn revises conceptions of space that reduce it to geographical or physical dimensions. An ontological framework posits the notion of "relational space," defining the concept as a dynamic field that a network of interactions produces, where an "object" can encompass physical artefacts, non-human entities, techno-mediated systems, and abstract concepts (Bryant, 2014; Parikka, 2023). The relational definition of space elaborates upon the ontological turn's emphasis on interconnectedness, applying this principle to spatial theory by treating space itself as a product of interactions. The turn's perspective prompts anthropologists to engage with forms of evidence such as non-human agency, for which Zielinski's (2006a) proposition of technology as a mechanism with its own inhuman logic provides a theoretical precedent. A focus on enacted realities extends spatial rhetoric to accommodate a multiplicity of co-existing worlds, as seen in archaeological

analyses of sites like Stonehenge, where monuments are understood as assemblages that constitute social realities (Tilley, 1997). Similarly, Marc Augé's (1986) study of the Legba fetish illustrates how a single object simultaneously embodies an ancestral link, a physical marker, and a dimension of destiny, thus prompting discourse to move beyond geographical delineation (Conley, 1993).

While the ontological turn has prompted scholarly debate regarding its impact on anthropological paradigms (Bryant, 2014; Heywood, 2017; Holbraad & Pedersen, 2017c), the intellectual movement has also encountered scholarly scepticism. Critics contend that a preoccupation with "alterity", which is the state of difference in being, may lead to a form of intellectual exoticism, wherein the "Other" becomes an object of romanticisation rather than understanding (Bessire & Bond, 2014; Hage, 2012; Paleček & Risjord, 2013). Other scholars scrutinise the turn's tendency to emphasise the multiplicity of realities for its potential to obfuscate existing power dynamics and societal inequalities (Bessire & Bond, 2014; Todd, 2016). These critical arguments present counterpoints that inform the ongoing discourse and necessitate a process of methodological and theoretical refinement. Despite such objections, the ontological turn continues to alter anthropological discourse and addresses the political implications of anthropological practice by engaging with the politics of anthropology. The movement derives an ethos from Friedrich Nietzsche's (2001, p. 30) "gay science"²⁴, which advocates for an experimental approach to knowledge. The value of the Nietzschean ethos is grounded in a shift in analytical practice, establishing a heuristic framework that generates new concepts from ethnographic particulars and offers an alternative to conventional cultural critique.

3.2 The Spatial Turn: Three Phases

This section examines the intellectual genealogy and historical trajectory of the "spatial turn". The inquiry extends across various disciplines. Synthesizing the intellectual groundwork of

²⁴ The term "Gay science" (La gaya scienza) traces its etymological lineage to the Provençal troubadours of the twelfth to fourteenth centuries, who employed the term to denote the art of poetry. Nietzsche, in his work *Ecce Homo* (2007), reinterpreted this term to encapsulate a synthesis of "singer, knight, and free spirit", a triad representative of early Provençal culture. The term represents an intellectual construct, articulating the interplay between artistic ingenuity, chivalric values, and intellectual autonomy, and presents a counterpoint to the prevailing compartmentalisation of intellectual endeavours, interrogating demarcations by prompting examination of the fluidity between artistic and intellectual pursuits. The concept's reappearance in an epoch of specialisation provides a reminder of a former unity among roles and competencies. Nietzsche's formulation prompts a re-examination of how society delineates and esteems intellectual activities, advocating for an approach that incorporates the complexities and contradictions inherent in any form of knowledge.

the cultural and ontological turns, the spatial turn of the late twentieth century re-evaluated space as a social product, proposing an analytical approach that complements physical geography with an analysis of socially constructed spaces (Biernacki, 1999; Foucault, 1984; Lefebvre, 1992; Soja, 1989). The resulting epistemic shift extended traditional rhetorical frameworks to incorporate elements from geography, architecture, and urban planning, which constituted post-technological spatial practices as rhetorical acts and facilitated the transformation of these practices into spatial rhetoric tactics (Falkheimer & Jansson, 2006; J. Fisher & Mennel, 2010; Warf & Arias, 2008).

My examination of this history traces three phases: early twentieth-century positivist geography, the post-1960s politicisation of space, and the late-modern narrativisation of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) alongside critical cartography. The reconstruction of this intellectual lineage demonstrates how theorists conceptualised space as a contested terrain defined by social, political, and economic forces (Lefebvre, 1996; Massey, 1994; Shome, 2003). A reconceptualisation of this nature requires rhetoric to incorporate questions concerning emplacement, scale, and power. The analysis foregrounds the crosscurrents between the work of Michel de Certeau (1986, 2011b) and Doreen Massey (1994, 1995, 2005), whose respective ideas on walking trajectories and spatial politics inform my argument regarding the configuration of space.

Grounded in the reconstructed intellectual lineage, the analysis extends to the concept of deep time-space. The interpretive framework of deep time-space facilitates an exploration of the reciprocal relationship between human activity and the spatio-temporal environment, examining how specific spaces mediate the conveyance of memory, affect human bodies, and reveal the rhetorical capacity of non-human and inanimate entities. The deep time-space framework, which contends that space and time function as both separate physical dimensions and conjoined facets of human experience, establishes the theoretical basis for the empirical analyses in the chapters that follow (Lefebvre, 2009; Malpas, 2012; Soja, 1989). The discussion brackets cartographic procedures and deep mapping techniques, reserving an examination of these specific methods for the subsequent chapter.

3.2.1 Phase I –The Dawn (Late nineteenth century to 1960s)

The initial spatial turn, which transpired as an intellectual movement between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, prompted a re-evaluation of space as a social product whose

configuration influenced social dynamics (Lefebvre, 2009; Massey, 1994; Schmid, 2016; Soja, 1989). A confluence of factors catalysed this conceptual reorientation. Specific developments included progress in space-contracting technologies, the institutionalisation of the Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) system, the widespread adoption of democratised cartography, and the development of contemporary geographical discourse. Intellectual advancements, such as Albert Einstein's theories of relativity, also disrupted the conventional Newtonian view of space as a fixed, absolute container for historical time (Barrows, 2016; Falkheimer & Jansson, 2006). The new paradigms that emerged from these shifts conceived of space and time as a unified, dynamic continuum and established a conception that continues to shape contemporary thought.

Scholars, however, debate the specific historical origins of the spatial turn, offering differing accounts of its initial emergence. Samuel Y. Edgerton's (1976a) scholarship, for instance, presents a complex historiography that traces the movement's primary origin to the Renaissance. Edgerton (1976b) argues that Filippo Brunelleschi's 1425 experiment constitutes a primary foundation for this shift (Damisch, 1994; Déotte, 2001; Tally, 2013). Brunelleschi's experiment, which demonstrated the principles of linear perspective, produced a foundational change from a spiritual cosmology to an anthropocentric empirical framework. The new empirical framework generated widespread consequences across multiple domains. In art, the framework established linear perspective as the dominant technique for achieving veridical representations of space. In science, the empirical framework provided a model for how an observer could systematically verify observation through repeatable, geometric procedures. In technology, the experiment demonstrated the integration of technical devices within an artistic process to produce new, reproducible forms of knowledge. The establishment of this empirical framework transformed sensory perception, modifying artistic techniques for rendering spatial depth while influencing scientific and technological investigation into the semiotics and ontological aspects of space.

Edgerton (1976a) also identifies antecedents of the spatial turn in ancient Greece, adding a layer of complexity to the historical narrative. In antiquity, thinkers including atomists, Pythagoreans, and Stoics initiated inquiries concerning the ontology of vision, the propagation of visual energy, and the ocular mechanisms involved in the act of seeing (Germain, 2017; W. J. T. Mitchell & Hansen, 2010). An examination of these concepts marked a turn towards empirical scrutiny and the formulation of mathematical models to explain the physical world. Preceding civilisations, including ancient Greece and Rome, utilised empirical methods for spatial

representation. The ancient cultures did not, however, employ a systematic, mathematical framework of linear perspective. Knowledge of such a framework diminished during the Middle Ages in Western Europe, and other civilisations that classical learning influenced failed to develop the system prior to the Renaissance (Biernacki, 1999; Lefebvre, 2009; Manovich, 2002).

The paradigmatic transformation of the spatial turn elicited controversies among historians, in part because the movement emerged from an intersection of developments across multiple fields. The turn's interdisciplinary character generated specific critiques. Firstly, the adoption of theoretical frameworks from geography, sociology, and philosophy challenged disciplinary boundaries and altered the foundational epistemology of historical studies (Doorn, 2005; Falkheimer & Jansson, 2006; Warf & Arias, 2008). Secondly, a concern arose that the focus on spatiality could marginalise the temporal dimensions central to historical analysis (Elden, 2002; Foucault, 1980b; Soja, 1989). Thirdly, the relational focus of the spatial turn shifted analytical attention away from fixed, bounded entities like nation-states, which had served as the primary units of historical analysis (Holbraad & Pedersen, 2017c; Malpas, 2012; Massey, 2005). Furthermore, the process of decolonisation in the mid-twentieth century prompted a critique of Eurocentric paradigms. The postcolonial critique challenged the privileging of a singular, linear conception of historical time and the presentation of European spatial models as universal, highlighting instead the existence of multiple, coexisting spatialities (Rieber, 2013).

Lefebvre's (1992, 2013) work provides a theoretical foundation for navigating these complexities. The French theorist examined the interplay between temporality and spatiality to inform new interpretative approaches. Lefebvre's (1992, 2003, 2022) critique of technocratic urbanism, exemplified by architects such as Le Corbusier, cautions against the potential disintegration of the city's social assemblage (Elden, 2004). His analysis of state mechanisms and technological innovations demonstrates how power relations reconfigure the built environment, transforming space into a site of power under neo-capitalism (Lefebvre, 2009; Merrifield, 2013). The resulting analytical framework enables scholars to identify and scrutinise a range of "spatial actors", from individual inhabitants and architectural structures to transient elements like light and sound. An examination of these actors and forces provides a basis for negotiating "spatial projections" and "signifiers". The negotiations encompass a range from architectural designs and zoning laws to the social narratives that shape spatial perception and usage, marking a departure from traditional models that reduced urban spaces to geometric outlines.

The prevailing spatial discourse now analyses how corporeal dimensions, such as fractured territories and social stratifications, interrelate with intangible and perceptual facets, including gendered, racialised, and emotional landscapes (J. Ewalt, 2017; Lefebvre, 1992; Massey, 1994; Soja, 1989). Developing from the postmodernist valorisation of locale and specificity, the scholarly focus on multifaceted spatiality acknowledges the specific dynamics operative across diverse geographical settings by rejecting universal truths and grand narratives. The spatial turn in critical social theory, the differentiation between space and place, and the expanding rhetoric of cartography constitute a shift that continues to reconceptualise spatial understanding in contemporary academic dialogue. Technological advances, disciplinary convergences, and mutable epistemological paradigms influenced the intellectual history of the initial spatial turn and collectively reconfigured the conceptual and material landscapes of spatial understanding.

3.2.2 Phase II –The Journey through Reorientation (1960s to 1980s)

The second spatial turn, which occurred between the 1960s and 1980s, reoriented academic focus from the physical environment to metaphorical spatial constructs, including spaces that are gendered and racialised. Historical archives reveal that the intellectual dialogues of this period emphasise the role of space and locale in shaping human experiences, identities, and societal interactions. The inquiries addressed the emergence and transformation of spatial awareness, the delineation of space and its symbolic representation, and the spatial facets of social, cultural, and political phenomena. A convergence of theoretical currents characterised the mid-twentieth century and provided the intellectual impetus for this reorientation, including the re-evaluation of Marxism and the rise of post-modernism, structuralism, post-structuralism, and feminism.

A shift in the conceptualisation of space took place across the humanities and social sciences, moving from a view of space as a passive, absolute container to an understanding of space as a dynamic, socially produced medium. The scholarly re-evaluation of space arose from several intellectual trends that, despite their different origins, converged to reject the Newtonian or Cartesian conception of space as an absolute, passive container for objects and events (Crary, 1992; Massey, 2005; Smith & Katz, 2004; Soja, 1989). One line of inquiry originated in critical geography. David Harvey, for instance, analysed the phenomenon of time-space compression as a condition of postmodernity (1989). Harvey's work defined time-space compression as the perceived acceleration in the pace of life, where innovations in transport and

communication technologies make spatial barriers less significant. The analysis connects the perceptual shift in the experience of time and space to the emergence of flexible accumulation, a post-Fordist mode of capitalism that requires accelerated turnover times in production and consumption. Soja (1989) and Massey (2005) extended the inquiry, arguing that social relations construct space. Soja's "socio-spatial dialectic" posits that while social life produces spatiality, the produced spatial forms simultaneously constrain and enable social action. Massey defined space as the dynamic product of a multiplicity of ongoing social relations, which become material through practices such as capital investment, state governance, and daily social interactions. The resulting spatial arrangements constitute what Massey termed "power-geometries" (1999a), which describe how the spatial organisation of social relations unequally positions different social groups in relation to the global flows of capital and information.

A different perspective originated in humanistic geography, which prioritised subjective experience over quantitative analysis. The humanistic framework proposed that abstract space becomes a meaningful place through the cognitive and emotional processes of an individual. Yi-Fu Tuan, for example, argued that perception, imagination, and interpretation are the specific mechanisms through which the transformation from space to place occurs (1979). Tuan's scholarship distinguished between a public monument, which functions as an accessible symbol, and a familiar home, which becomes a location that derives its meaning from the accumulation of personal, lived experience and emotional attachment over time. Concurrently, an intellectual shift known as the "linguistic turn" posited language as a system that constructs reality rather than describing it and prompted a similar reconsideration of space as a discursive product (Blakesley, 2008; Derrida, 2013; Lefebvre, 1992; White, 2004). Michel Foucault's analyses contributed to this reconsideration by providing a method for examining the production of space through his concept of the *dispositif*, or apparatus (1980a), a heterogeneous network that includes discourses, institutions, and architectural forms. The analysis demonstrated that spatial arrangements are instruments in the exercise of power and the constitution of knowledge (Foucault, 1980a, 1995; West-Pavlov, 2009a).

Avant-garde art collectives introduced a practical, experiential dimension to the re-evaluation of space. The Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel (GRAV), for instance, constructed kinetic and luminous environments such as *Labyrinthe III* (1963), which destabilised the viewer's perceptual faculties. The Zero group, in works like Otto Piene's *Lichtballett* (*Light*

Ballet, 1961), used ephemeral materials like smoke and light to alter the gallery into a dynamic environment. The organisers of the first Nove Tendencije exhibition (1961) presented programmed and kinetic art that treated the artwork as a field of visual research. The art collectives created participatory environments where the artwork was incomplete without the viewer's physical presence and movement (Huysen, 1986; McDonough, 2004; Rutsky, 1999; Sutton, 2015; Zinman, 2020). The participatory approach contested the static nature of the traditional art object and the conventions of Renaissance linear perspective, which renders space as a fixed, measurable container (Friedberg, 2009; Panofsky & Wood, 1991; C. Ross, 2012; Zinman, 2020).

The relationship between the spatial turn and the Situationist International (SI) exemplifies these intellectual dynamics. Lefebvre's work provided a primary theoretical impetus for the SI's early development. From 1957 to the early 1960s, Lefebvre developed a relationship with the SI that was irreducible to academic liaisons, and the group's adoption of his concept of "moments" and his critique of social space demonstrates his influence on the group's foundational ideologies (Bunyard, 2017c; K. Ross, 2004). The key concepts of the Situationists, including "situations" and the "spectacle", existed in nascent form in Lefebvre's *Critique de la vie quotidienne: I* (1958, 2008). The philosopher's analysis informed the SI's approach to urbanism and revolutionary potential. The SI drew upon these concepts, but the group's application often adapted the ideas, leading to interpretations that diverged from Lefebvre's original arguments. The divergence included revolutionary strategy and the nature of transformative change. While the SI acknowledged Lefebvre's notion of the "situation", the group's objective shifted from interpretation to the construction of new situations (Bunyard, 2017b). The group's emphasis on the "situation" as a vehicle for transformation, a focus reflective of their artistic orientation in contrast to Lefebvre's academic approach, however, resulted in a narrower analytical focus. The group's critique of urbanistic ideologies began to take precedence over a direct interaction with the material and social conditions of urban life. The Situationists' polemical stance, which employed the avant-garde tactic of exclusion reminiscent of Surrealist practice, produced a form of dogmatism devoid of a clear foundational ethos (K. Ross, 2004). Debord's influence led the SI to define all urbanism as a bourgeois ideology, a position that bypassed the contradictions of urban existence (Bunyard, 2017a; Hemmens & Zacarias, 2020; Higgins, 2022; McDonough, 2004).

The theoretical deviation produced consequences that became evident during occurrences

like the May 1968 student movement. While the SI's interventions had an effect, the group's departure from Lefebvre's foundational tenets constricted the movement's transformative scope and contributed to the onset of the SI's dissolution (Knabb, 2006; Lefebvre, 2009). The development of the SI's Paris-based faction produced a change in rhetoric, shifting towards an increasingly polemical and confrontational discourse. The group's propensity to contest and denounce contemporaries demonstrated this change in rhetoric, a strategy that emphasised the faction's perceived prominence in significant events. Lefebvre, observing the assertiveness in the SI's polemics, criticised the group's confrontational *modus operandi*, arguing the approach was a deviation from a comprehensive understanding of spatial theory and the quotidian (Bunyard, 2017a; Elden, 2004; Lefebvre, 2008; Soja, 1989).

Scholarly narratives identify the proliferation of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and telecommunication advancements as foundational to the spatial turn's development (Bodenhamer et al., 2010, 2021; Harris et al., 2015). The 1960s, however, witnessed GIS in the system's nascent stages, with military and cartographic endeavours driving the system's development. The 1970s provided the genesis for computer mapping and analytical tools, while a shift towards commercialisation in the 1980s expanded GIS software to a wider audience. The importance of GIS grew in the 1990s as scholars developed new critical methodologies that adapted the technology for humanistic inquiry, reframing GIS as an exploratory tool for heuristic analysis (Bodenhamer, 2010; Bodenhamer et al., 2010; Hayles, 2012). The convergence between the adapted GIS methodologies and the new capabilities of the "digital turn" enabled scholars to integrate diverse datasets within a unified spatial framework, prompting a new field of inquiry known as the Spatial Humanities (J. Fisher & Mennel, 2010; Lünen & Travis, 2015).

Historical precedents, such as the work of the Annales School, also informed the intellectual climate for the spatial turn; Annales scholars questioned the scholarly tendency to privilege time over space by treating geography as an agent in historical development (Elden, 2004; Lünen & Travis, 2012; Soja, 1989; Weigel, 2009). Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis (1894), for instance, argued that the continuous westward expansion into the American frontier was the primary force shaping American national identity and democratic institutions. The demonstration that scholars could analyse a specific geographical condition, the frontier, as

a decisive factor in historical development provided a foundational model for later spatial history (Bodenhamer, 2012; Carey, 1992; Lünen & Travis, 2012). Similarly, in the religious domain, the work of figures like Mircea Eliade articulated the dichotomy between sacred and profane space. Theorising sacred space as a qualitatively distinct centre of meaning provided a conceptual precedent for later geographers that refuted the modern conception of space as a neutral void and established a framework to analyse space as an inherently heterogeneous site imbued with meaning and power (Foucault, 1986; Germain, 2017; Lefebvre, 1992; Tuan, 1977). The second spatial turn redefined space as an active social product. The dialogues between thinkers like Lefebvre and Debord, the rise of humanistic geography, and the development of spatial technologies contributed to an understanding of spatial intricacies. The intellectual developments of the period established a foundation for subsequent inquiries, and the influence of the developments persists, prompting today's scholars to reassess and broaden the scope of spatial discourse.

3.2.3 Phase III –The Unfolding of Deepening-Narrativisation (1990s to the Present)

The third spatial turn is a movement from the 1990s to the present founded upon socio-technical relational networks that comprise the interplay between social institutions and techno-mediated infrastructures, including the internet and mobile communication systems (Chun & Keenan, 2006; Conley, 1993; Falkheimer & Jansson, 2006; Kellerman, 2012). The intellectual framework of the third spatial turn remains contingent upon a convergence of theoretical developments from the 1960s to the 1980s, which include post-structuralism, postmodernism, feminism, and the cartographic, geographic, cultural, linguistic, and pragmatic turns that altered academic inquiry (Biernacki, 1999; Soja, 1989; Tally, 2013). A confluence of the intellectual shifts of the 1960s to the 1980s represents a reconfiguration of intellectual paradigms, which scholars theorise through the recursive concept of a “turn of turns” (Döring & Thielmann, 2008; Lvy, 2015). The analytical framework of a ‘turn of turns’ understands the third spatial turn as a synthesis that integrates and re-evaluates the third spatial turn’s intellectual predecessors.

Grasping the “knowledge grid” of this period’s deepened narrativisation, which involves the construction of multi-layered accounts that integrate complex spatial and temporal data, requires articulating the conceptual genealogy of “depth”. An examination of the conceptual genealogy of “depth” involves tracing the intellectual lineage of the term as scholars adapted

the term from ideas such as Foucault's analysis of the underlying conditions of knowledge and Chomsky's linguistic concept of "deep structure" (2020). A central issue in spatial studies stems from the appropriation of structuralist concepts into post-structuralist frameworks. An incongruity emerges, for instance, from the intellectual genealogy of Chomsky's "deep structure" and the concept of the "deep map". The notion of "deep structure" originates from a structuralist framework that posits universal, hierarchical rules governing language, which Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (2007) describe as an arborescent model. In contrast, the "deep map" represents an intellectual extension of a postmodern genealogy that provides a perspective beyond universalism in favour of multiplicity, contingency, and the layering of often conflicting narratives, and the practice employs the rhizomatic mode (D. Berry & Dieter, 2015; Bodenhamer et al., 2021; Zdebik, 2019). The appropriation of a structuralist concept into a post-structuralist framework creates a conceptual paradox, compromising the theoretical coherence of the "deep map" by embedding an epistemologically antithetical term to the deep map's principles of non-hierarchical and contingent knowledge.

Least Heat-Moon's work *PrairieErth* (2014) enriched the lexicon of spatial humanities with the term "deep map". The term defines a cartographic method that superimposes diverse data forms, such as historical records, cultural narratives, and personal accounts, onto geographical representations. The superimposition of diverse data forms demonstrates how layered relationships produce the contingent and often conflicting meanings of a place. The deep map's conceptualisation of mapping offers a critique of conventional cartography's foundational premises (Barrows, 2016; Maher, 2014; Warf & Arias, 2008). Conventional cartography's use of technical procedures, such as geometric grids and coordinate systems, projects a rhetoric of scientific objectivity that effaces the cultural and historical dimensions of a place by reducing the locale to an abstract, instrumental space. The deep map recasts the conception of space as a neutral, pre-existing void that contains historical events. The method demonstrates how competing social forces, such as power relations and cultural narratives, produce the material form of space and contest its meaning (Lefebvre, 1992; Soja, 1989). Least Heat-Moon's narrative of a single Kansas county provides a practical demonstration of the critical approach to spatial production. An organisation of locale-specific descriptions of Chase County captures the complex assemblage of the place's history, culture, and ecology, which counters cartography's limited emphasis on physical topography. Least Heat-Moon's method

refuses to break the world into a “genuine physical reality set off against our mere human inventions”, instead showing how cultural rituals constitute a human effort to participate in the specific dynamics of place (Levin, 2000). The deep map concept draws characteristics from a postmodernist ideology that questions grand narratives and embraces a multiplicity of voices (Lyotard, 1984). The postmodernist ideological framework delineates a foundational distinction for the deep map, separating the deep map’s generative, composite method from the structural analyses of formalism or the deconstructive impulse of post-structuralism.

Following Heat-Moon’s demonstration, scholars in the spatial humanities began to develop a systematic articulation of “deep mapping”. Trevor M. Harris and David J. Bodenhamer (2010, 2021; 2015) advanced the articulation of “deep mapping” by proposing a conceptual framework that integrates the qualitative inquiry of the humanities with the analytical capabilities of computational methods to examine multifaceted spatial narratives. Harris (2015) and Kalin (2009) argue that technologies such as GIS, techno-mediated cartographies, and Web 2.0 applications provide an analytical framework integral to the spatial humanities. Technologies such as GIS, techno-mediated cartographies, and Web 2.0 applications advanced the development of new interdisciplinary methodologies that combine computational analysis with humanistic interpretation, enabling a detailed investigation into how social and cultural forces construct space (Bodenhamer et al., 2010; Lünen & Travis, 2015). GIS, in this context, collects, analyses, and interprets geographical data, including both spatially explicit information, such as satellite imagery and cartographic layers, and spatially referenced qualitative sources, such as historical texts and oral narratives. The use of the technology also shapes the politics of spatial production, as GIS determines which actors possess the authority to define spatial realities, control geographical information, and influence decision-making processes. The imprecision of the terms, as Harris (2015) also notes, stems from the need for “deep mapping” and “spatial narrative” to represent the ambiguous and multivalent nature of humanistic evidence that resists the predefined data structures of quantitative technologies. Scholars can reimagine the fluid designations of “deep mapping” and “spatial narrative” to overcome the linguistic shortcomings of technical terminology. A technical lexicon often reduces the multiplicity of connotations and affective resonances of narrative traditions into abstract data or linear sequences. The fluidity of the terms “deep mapping” and “spatial narrative” is a feature that scholars can leverage when developing mapping approaches tailored to the epistemological requirements of the humanities, which

accommodate experiential, ambiguous, and open-ended forms of knowledge. Sally Bushell and Rebecca Louise Hutcheon (2025; 2003) advocate for particular analytical methods and propose “literary topology” as an approach that shifts the focus from absolute geolocational accuracy to the interconnections, shapes, and relative positioning of elements within a literary world. The methodological commitment to “literary topology” necessitates adopting deep mapping and spatial narratives as an intellectual architecture to examine spatial constructs through dialectical scales of macro-level scope and micro-level detail.

The specific problem of conceptual incongruity illustrates a broader pattern where scholars examining spatial context have, over time, incorporated concepts like “deep structure”, “deep map/mapping”, “deep learning”, and “deep processing” from linguistics, literature, and computer science. The academic realm, however, has not systematically elucidated the interrelations among these concepts, nor charted their development into the contemporary interpretations of “deep map/mapping” and “deep narrative” (Bodenhamer et al., 2010; Malpas, 2012). An ambiguity contributes to the difficulty of tracing the chronological trajectory of the “spatial turn”, as a primary difficulty lies in the absence of a defined knowledge framework that delineates the interrelations of the borrowed concepts. An approach that overlooks the significant inconsistencies between intellectual constructs, such as the conflicts between competing disciplinary ideologies, the in-commensurabilities between different theoretical frameworks, and the gap between conceptual models and the realities the models purport to represent, results in limited comprehension.

3.3 Synthesis: From Turns to Tactics

The historical progression of intellectual turns suggests that contemporary knowledge production regards spatial literacy as a, though contested, mode of interpretation. Where earlier epistemes treated location as context or backdrop, the spatial turn positions emplacement as a condition of possibility for meaning, memory, and power. The preceding genealogy demonstrated how cultural and ontological turns destabilised certainties about reference and being; analysis could no longer treat space as an inert container. The destabilisation of space as an inert container necessitates theoretical frameworks capable of analysing how arrangements of movement and layered spatial configurations produce affective-symbolic atmospheres. Arrangements of movement include meandering garden promenades, metropolitan transit loops, and cloud-borne data currents, while layered spatial configurations encompass scenic hierarchies and void-solid arrangements that

organise viewing angles, perceptual depths, liminal thresholds²⁵, and mediative pathways²⁶. The epistemic shift toward spatiality also redefines what counts as a rhetorical trace. Geocoded datasets, walk-through narratives, ambient atmospheres, zoning maps, dashboards, logistics corridors, and smart city interfaces now join textual artefacts like diaries as objects of rhetorical analysis.

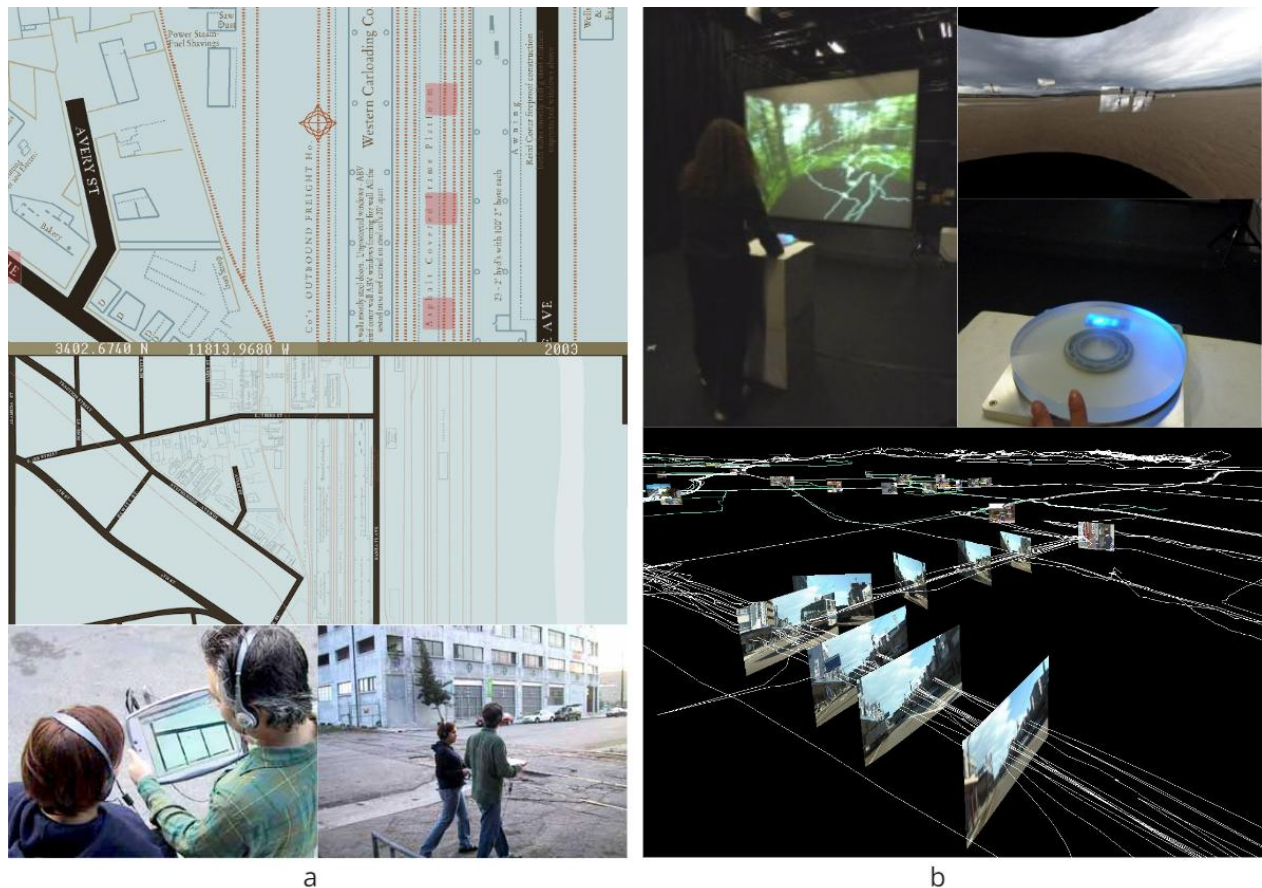


Figure 7. (a) *34 North 118 West* (2002), a locative narrative project. Top: Interface of the interpretive engine linking GPS coordinates to historical audio narratives of Los Angeles' former Central Rail Yard. Bottom: Field documentations showing artists deploying site-specific geolocate triggers. Source: Project Archive, <https://34n118w.net/>. © 2025 34N Collective; (b) Iterations of *Field-Works* (1992-2012). Top: *Simultaneous Echoes* (2009), a GPS-video-music hybrid premiered at ISEA Belfast. Bottom: *Tsumari* (2000), participatory workshop with students exploring velocity-based cartography. Source: *Field-Works* Documentation, <https://field-works.net/>. © 2025 Masaki Fujihata.

²⁵ This concept refers to concrete or symbolic transitional zones that include doorways, gates, interfaces, horizon lines, or momentary pauses. In these spaces, customary categories become suspended, established identities experience blurring and novel possibilities materialise through the dissolution of fixed boundaries.

²⁶ The analysis pertains to concrete or symbolic transitional thresholds, including doorways, gates, interfaces, horizon lines, or momentary pauses. Transitional thresholds suspend conventional categories, established identities become indistinct, and the reconfiguration of fixed boundaries constitutes new possibilities.

Juxtaposing dashboards with travel diaries, or satellite imagery with Shanshui paintings, is an approach within contemporary spatial rhetoric that generates trans-medial interpretative frameworks, which locative art practices exemplify. Practitioners use networked, location-aware devices to overlay individual narratives, embodied data, or historical memory onto satellite-derived coordinate systems. The overlaying of individual narratives, embodied data, or historical memory onto satellite-derived coordinate systems juxtaposes the abstract data of a dashboard interface with the situated experience of a diary-like account of place. Projects such as Jeff Knowlton, Naomi Spellman, and Jeremy Hight's *34 North 118 West*²⁷ (Figure 7-a), which activates historical audio narrative through Global Positioning System (GPS) coordinates, or Masaki Fujihata's *Field-Works*²⁸ (Figure 7-b), which juxtaposes video documentation with GPS traces, exemplify a framework that links objective mapping with subjective experiential geographies. The artworks reposition place from a background context to an argumentative substrate. The repositioning of place from a background context to an argumentative substrate reframes rhetoric as a remediated practice. The creators who navigate and shape locative art environments function as a new form of rhetorician and must adopt cartographic, visual, and embodied sensibilities alongside textual methods to construct persuasive arguments.

Because spatiality combines quantitative location with qualitative lived experience, no single method can address the multiple facets of spatiality. An interdisciplinary approach becomes a methodological necessity. Researchers must combine methods: Critical GIS can supply metrics, while ethnographic walks and sensory *dérives* document situated perception. Narrative analysis, including computational approaches, examines how communities integrate heterogeneous data into lived meaning. Following Peirce and later de Certeau, scholarly inquiry proceeds through the iterative formulation of a spatial narrative. The iterative formulation of a spatial narrative alternates between addressing spatial irregularities and developing provisional theoretical models, a sequence that entails evaluation against new empirical evidence to achieve refinement at each iteration. An iterative approach is suited for hybrid places, like mixed-reality installations or data-heavy streetscapes because hybrid places are often complex and unpredictable for predefined plans or fixed categories of address. Practice-led experimentation gains legitimacy

²⁷ Comprehensive documentation regarding the project's methodology and historical layering, including access to its locative engine, is available on the official website: <https://34n118w.net/>

²⁸ Further details regarding the project's technical implementation and the specific historical narrative employed are accessible through its documentation portal: <https://field-works.net/>

through the iterative approach; an interactive map or a choreographed *dérive* constitutes a hypothesis about spatial rhetoric, which audience participation tests, replacing laboratory replication. The methodological framework develops a tactical inflection, requiring researchers to move between code, walk, and archive while treating each as a partial cartography of rhetorical dynamics.

The emphasis on plurality within the spatial turn also facilitates the re-integration of non-Eurocentric spatial logics that earlier, dominant narratives marginalised. The reconstruction of the trajectory stretching from positivist geography to Massey's simultaneity of stories reveals a history that has never been completely isolated. East Asian spatial arts, for instance, offer alternative ontologies that question universalist claims. *Shanshui* painting reconfigures landscape from a static object into a dynamic mediative event. *Zaojing* organises viewing positions into rhythmic sequences. *Pingfeng* and *chongping* logic creates layered vistas through iterative recession. Employing the aforementioned East Asian idioms constitutes a critical strategy, not decorative multiculturalism. The critical strategy demonstrates the contingency of dominant spatial theories and expands the repertoire of spatial rhetorical tactics available to artists and scholars. Combining the East Asian spatial logics with GIS narrativisation, for instance, questions unidirectional histories of the spatial turn and provides rhetoric with a comparative vocabulary. The methodological experiment of cross-cultural transcription demonstrates analytic and aesthetic potentials, involving the interpretation of GIS layers through *Zaojing*, or the configuration of mixed-reality installations as moving *pingfeng* and *chongping* multi-dimensional narrative screens.

The synthesis of intellectual turns and practical applications establishes a methodological framework for analysing spatial rhetoric. The methodological framework mandates a transition from historical study to embrace practice-led methods, where experimentation is a requirement. The coming chapters assume a broadened evidential field, asking how spatial art practices alter the grammar of rhetorical appeal. The next chapter, in particular, embarks on an investigation into the concept of the "deep map". The investigation will scrutinise how deep maps attempt to capture multifaceted realities by integrating historical strata, ecological factors, cultural narratives, individual experiences, and artistic practices, pulling on analyses of works like *PrairyErth*. A connection between artistic methods and the conceptual framework of the deep map supports the inclusion of artistic practices. The work of artists like Robert Smithson, for example, who integrated cartographic materials into his land art to explore stratigraphic temporalities, and John

F. Simon Jr., whose algorithmic art creates “cartographies of abstractions”, demonstrates the synthesis of artistic methods and conceptual frameworks. Scholars note that contemporary artists exhibit a “special sensitivity to novel forms of marriage between mapping and landscape painting”, while artists use methods such as montage to reinvent history-making by placing diverse human and nonhuman actors in new proximities. To form a theoretical foundation for the ideas of deep mapping and artistic practice, the next chapter also investigates related concepts, examining the notion of “deep structure” as it originated in linguistics and developed through semiotics, alongside the geological and philosophical implications of “deep time”. The examination intends to propose an understanding of methodologies for navigating the complex, layered spatialities central to the dissertation’s inquiry.

4. Time, Memory, and Identity: Toward a Deep-Mapped *Shanshui*

In the preceding chapter, I charted the intellectual genealogy of the spatial turn, an exploration that revealed the need for new analytical approaches to address a reconfigured understanding of space in contemporary discourse. This chapter, accordingly, shifts from that broad theoretical survey to develop specific methodologies for analysing post-technological experimental art. My primary aim is to forge a cohesive framework that can address the spatial and temporal dimensions of artistic practices. I will construct this framework using deep time, deep mapping, and deep media, which I have selected for their ability to interrogate layered phenomena. I will further inform these “deep” methodologies with the cultural aesthetics of *Shanshui*, a traditional Chinese art form and philosophical concept concerning the relationship between mountains, water, and the human spirit. My methodological orientation in this chapter, therefore, explores how historical strata, material conditions, and cultural narratives constitute post-technological artworks, advancing from surface readings to interrogate their underlying structures of meaning.

This analysis continues the cross-cultural inquiry initiated in Chapter 1 by employing the *Shanshui* worldview as a primary cultural and aesthetic stance. A perspective rooted in Chinese art and philosophy developed from the Tang (c. 7th – 9th centuries) through the Song (c. 10th – 13th centuries) (Guo R., 2003; Wu, 2018; Zong, 1987, 2011), the *Shanshui* worldview offers a specific conceptual framework for interacting with notions of space, time, and representation. I believe that this framework provides a conceptual tool to counter the limitations of certain analytical models often applied to contemporary art, particularly those grounded in formalism (Benjamin, 2008; C. Ross, 2012) and technological determinism (Elsaesser, 2016; Holbraad & Pedersen, 2017c). Formalist approaches, for example, may contend that an artwork’s meaning resides within its specific medium (Lind & Steyerl, 2008). Analyses grounded in technological determinism often focus on the material conditions and production of “cultural technologies” (Herzogenrath, 2012) or centre on the technical relations between “human and machines” (Elsaesser, 2016). An analysis of a digital work, for example, might privilege the technical architecture of its underlying software and hardware, overlooking the artwork’s emergent properties (Belisle, 2024; Munster, 2025; Zuboff, 2019). By adopting such a formalist lens, an analysis of this kind overlooks an artwork’s capacity to generate relational and experiential meaning, such as the way an installation shapes a viewer’s sense of place and identity.

The *Shanshui* worldview provides a counter-methodology by conceptualizing space as a dynamic field whose nature is defined by energetic flows and transformations. This perspective treats the artwork, the viewer, and the environment as co-constitutive elements within a continuous process, rather than as discrete entities. The application of this framework allows for a cross-cultural inquiry that reconfigures the oppositional paradigm in East-West comparative studies, which enforces a dichotomy between holistic, relational thought and object-focused, analytic reasoning. This analysis therefore uses the *Shanshui* perspective to re-examine contemporary artworks, focusing on their capacity to generate relational meaning irreducible to their material form.

The *Shanshui* sensibility emphasises two key concepts. The first, *qiyun* (氣韻), refers to relationality and atmospheric resonance. The second, *yijing* (意境), describes the spectator's imaginative co-creation. *Qiyun* signifies the harmony generated by the interplay of brushwork and composition, while *yijing* describes an artistic conception in which the depicted scene suggests a reality irreducible to its literal form (Zong, 1987, 2011, 2023).

Viewing an artwork through the *Shanshui* lens, whether a traditional painting or a piece of post-technological experimental art, reveals it as a dynamic field of forces and meanings. The artwork in this view constitutes a fluid and changing “world” in itself.

I propose that Pierre Lévy's conceptualisation of the virtual can further illuminate the artwork's dynamic field. Lévy (1998) defined the virtual as a non-illusory mode of being that expands creative possibilities and generates significance distinct from immediate physical reality. A philosophical framework for understanding the virtual, following Deleuze, distinguishes the virtual from the possible. The possible is a pre-formed reality that only lacks existence, whereas the virtual is a real but non-physical field of potential forces and relations that demands a creative act to take form (Lévy, 1998; Munster, 2006). The virtual is therefore contrasted not with the real but with the actual, which is the concrete outcome of this creative act. The actual represents the emergent world produced through the process of actualisation and transcends the physical. Drawing on the distinction between the virtual and the possible, I contend that the *Shanshui* sensibility, with its focus on the interplay between the tangible and intangible, cultivates an interaction with the artwork as a dynamic between the virtual and the actual. A convergence of material, conceptual, and experiential forces generates the “world” emerging from the interaction between the virtual and the actual. The creative act of the world's emergence is a process of

actualisation, a transformation that generates novel meaning by reconfiguring existing potentials, distinct from passive representation (Holbraad & Pedersen, 2017c), which functions as a directed and simplified depiction of a world whose meaning is assumed to be pre-established and fixed (Carey, 1992; Conley, 1993; Vesna, 2007). I posit that this very process of actualisation constitutes the spatialities of contemporary experimental practices, which are the complex, lived environments that emerge from the interplay of physical, social, and experiential forces. The artwork establishes a virtual field of potential, and the viewer's interaction actualises this potential, generating a unique spatial experience.

Furthermore, the dialectical relationship between *shui* (水, water/liquid) and *shi* (石, stone) constitutes the central guiding metaphor for the inquiry in this chapter. The *shui-shi* or water-stone metaphor encapsulates a tension between fluidity and the search for permanence, a dynamic that I propose is central to post-technological art. In my analysis, fluidity signifies multiple phenomena. First, the concept of fluidity refers to the altered, non-linear experience of time that techno-mediated systems can produce. The fragmented, looping temporality of a video installation, for example, contrasts with the linear progression of a traditional film, an idea I explore later in the analysis of Dan Graham's work (see Section 5.2.2). Second, fluidity signifies the asynchronous transmission of techno-mediated media advanced by code and extensive networks. Third, the term posits the volatile and abstracted nature of data reconfigured by expansive techno-cultural memory systems.

Permanence, in turn, manifests in several key areas. First, it appears in the fragmented presence of both lived and artificial memories. Second, it is located in the material specificity of places, which I understand as sites formed by complex social interrelations. Third, permanence is located in the endurance of cultural identity, which persists as a site for reconfigured inscription that individuals and communities continuously negotiate within techno-mediated contexts (Biernacki, 1999). I argue that the interplay between ephemeral processes, such as the flow of data, and enduring anchors, like historical sites, reconfigures the post-technological artwork into a hybrid, porous system where the boundaries between material and virtual realities become negotiable. Contemporary artworks frequently address this dialectic. In Jeffrey Shaw's augmented reality installation *Pure Land: UNWIRED* (2015), viewers use a tablet to overlay fleeting digital animations and soundscapes onto a physical replica of the Dunhuang caves, prompting reflection on the relationship between contemporary data flows and historical permanence. By using

ephemeral techno-mediated means set into play with notions of enduring presence, artworks like this directly explores the tension between fluid and fixed elements (Asselin et al., 2008; Barker, 2012; Rutsky, 1999; Vesna, 2007).

The water-stone metaphor forms a conceptual thread throughout the following discussion, aiming to illuminate how creators navigate and give form to different aspects of experience.

4.1 Fluid Temporalities in Art and Media

Through my analysis, I contend that conceptualisations of time within artistic media practices can move beyond a linear or uniformly progressive model with one that incorporates multiple, co-existing temporal structures. Geologists use the term “deep time” to describe vast, layered timescales, a concept famously articulated in with James Hutton’s eighteenth-century geological theories, which John McPhee later popularised. Media theorists have since adapted this geological concept to analyse the layered history of technology. Media-archaeological analysis reveals that every screen, codec, and protocol embeds accretions (and atrophies) of dormant layers, a palimpsest where earlier signals influence the present (Zielinski, 2006a). For example, decades of technological development, from cathode-ray tubes to liquid crystal innovations, underpin the seemingly instantaneous display on a contemporary screen, whose pixel retains the conceptual logic of the raster scan that defined earlier cathode-ray tube technology (Elsaesser, 2016). Similarly, current software protocols evolved from earlier programming languages and hardware architectures; for instance, the hierarchical file system structure and command-line syntax of UNIX²⁹, developed in the 1970s, remains as a foundational subsystem within many contemporary operating systems. Each new technological iteration, while enabling new possibilities, also inherits a technical lineage from its predecessors that shapes its present form and function.

Post-technological artworks employ methods such as sampling archival footage, streaming live sensor data, or inviting generative recombination to construct a complex temporality. The use of archival footage and generative recombination makes historical strata perceptible within a contemporary experience (Barker, 2012; C. Ross, 2012). An artwork employing these methods invokes cultural memory, using the audience’s familiarity with historical materials to explore the relationship between past and present. Douglas Gordon’s video installation *24 Hour Psycho*

²⁹ This influential, multi-user operating system introduced a modular design philosophy that has shaped the development of many subsequent systems.

(1993) provides an example of radical temporal intervention in cinema. Gordon appropriated Alfred Hitchcock's film *Psycho* (1960) and deliberately slowed its projection to extend the viewing experience across a full twenty-four hours. The resulting large-scale, silent video installation uniformly stretches the original thriller's narrative suspense, disrupting the conventional temporal expectations of cinema. Extreme duration constitutes a strategic device in the work, directing attention to each gesture and cut within the historical film while rendering familiar moments strange through temporal expansion. The methodical deceleration of footage re-examines concepts of cinematic authorship and memory. The work thwarts a conventional narrative experience, instead inviting a stratigraphic reading where material and temporal layers supersede familiar plot points (Uroskie, 2014). An experience of visual archaeology is offered as an alternative to narrative consumption, presenting the possibility for viewers to excavate meaning from the slowed footage, confronting cinema's materiality, and bypassing its storytelling mechanisms.

I define fluid temporalities as the co-existence of multiple, non-linear timescales generated by the interaction of human, machinic, and/or network processes within a single artistic or media experience. Time in these contexts does not flow uniformly but appears as interwoven layers, sometimes moving slowly and at other times rapidly. My investigation into fluid temporalities examines how historical layers, cultural logics, and material inscriptions shape the perception of time in art. Models of time predicated on linear succession and narrative progression do not fully account for the complex temporal arrangements frequently produced in post-technological art. To address this limitation, I develop a new analytical framework termed a "chrono-topographic rhetoric". The development of this framework begins with an exploration of geological and media-archaeological theories of "deep time" to understand how non-human timescales have been conceptualized. The inquiry then turns to non-Greco-Roman concepts of time, or chrono-poetics, such as those found in Chinese Shanshui landscape painting (Wu, 1996, 2018, 2021a; Zong, 1987, 2011, 2023), to formulate a comparative basis. The final chrono-topographic rhetoric synthesises these distinct conceptual traditions to provide a method for exploring the layered temporalities of post-technological art.

4.1.1 The Geological and Media-Archaeological Precepts of "Deep Time"

An exploration of "deep time" begins within the domain of geology. The geologist James Hutton first described a new understanding of Earth's chronology that superseded previous conceptions of history (J. Hutton, 1785, 2009; Parikka, 2015, pp. 49–54; Repcheck, 2008). Hutton's work

inaugurated the principle of uniformitarianism as a new geological framework. This framework asserted that the geological processes observable in the present have persisted consistently throughout Earth's history, unfolding as a cycle of erosion, deposition, and uplifting (Huhtamo & Parikka, 2011; Zielinski, 2006b). The primary implication of this principle was the necessity of a timescale that vastly exceeded previous biblical interpretations. This expanded chronology reoriented human understanding of its place within planetary history by decentring anthropocentric views of time (Gould, 1988; Parikka, 2015, p. 19; C. Ross, 2012). The concept of geological deep time later entered a wider public consciousness through the prose of John McPhee. McPhee's writing translated complex geological narratives into accessible language for a non-specialist audience. His descriptions of "vertiginous eons" allowed readers to grasp the immense scale of Earth's history. This popularisation helped to embed the cyclical nature of the planet's formation and erosion into a broader cultural understanding.

The development of an awareness of vast, non-human timescales has its roots in early modern science's scrutiny to traditional chronologies. Astronomical investigations into celestial time provided the initial framework for this conceptual shift. Figures like Nicolaus Copernicus and Galileo Galilei revealed a cosmic clockwork whose movements and cycles, though measurable, hinted at a duration that dwarfed human history (Friedman, 1990, p. 7; Gould, 1988; C. Ross, 2012). Geology's subsequent development, however, offered the most direct and material conceptualization of this immense temporality (Parikka, 2015, p. 19). Hutton's (1785, 2009) principle of uniformitarianism asserted that geological processes observable in the present have persisted consistently throughout Earth's history. This framework revealed a planetary history written in the material strata of the Earth, a history unfolding as a cycle of erosion, deposition, and uplifting (Parikka, 2015; Zielinski, 2006a). Charles Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection later provided a biological corollary to this expanding temporal awareness. His work redefined biological history by emphasizing long-term evolutionary processes that dwarfed recorded human experience, further decentring anthropocentric views of time (Darwin, 1859; Foucault, 2002; Gould, 1988).

Additionally, Hutton's geological insight into an Earth history independent of human observation proved uniquely portable for conceptual migration reconfigured the natural sciences. The geological model provides a method of stratigraphic analysis for cultural artifacts. This approach treats an artifact as a layered formation composed of technological innovations,

cultural inscriptions, and forgotten alternative paths. An analysis of these strata allows scholars to uncover the non-linear histories embedded within the object. Scholars in the humanities and media studies later adopted this geological understanding of “deep time” to analyse technological objects (Huhtamo & Parikka, 2011; Parikka, 2015; Zielinski, 2006a). Siegfried Zielinski, for example, adapted and reconfigured the concept to explore the “deep time of the media” (2006b). Zielinski argues that media technologies are entities whose archaeological strata reveal a complex, non-monolithic nature. These layers embody a history of technical innovations, forgotten alternative paths, and socio-cultural inscriptions that reach and complicate their immediate surface functionalities. Zielinski’s concept of “Variantology” (2019; 2005) dismantles technological narratives that posit an inevitable or singular progression by identifying these diverse and non-linear developmental trajectories.



Figure 8. Kate Crawford and Vladan Joler, *Anatomy of an AI System*, 2018. Composite image showing the map (left) and the installation view at the Frankfurter Kunstverein, 2019 (right). Lithographic print; dimensions: 200 cm × 600 cm. Original image source: Frankfurter Kunstverein (<https://www.fkv.de/en/kate-crawford-vladan-joler-anatomy-of-an-a-i-system/>). © 2025 Kate Crawford and Vladan Joler (for the artwork). Installation photograph © 2025 Norbert Miguletz.

Jussi Parikka’s “geology of media” applies a media archaeological framework to ground the historical strata of media in material entanglements of media technologies with Earth’s geological resources. (2013, 2015). This approach grounds media history in the planetary-scale supply chains that enable the existence of technological devices. The concept of media’s “deep time” connects the operational lifespan of a device to the planet’s geological deep time. This geological perspective encompasses processes of mineral extraction, energy consumption, and electronic waste, which together constitute

the obscured material history of media technologies (Cubitt, 2017; Gabrys, 2011; Maxwell & Miller, 2012; Parikka, 2014, 2015). Contemporary artistic practices have adopted this geological framework to render these invisible material networks perceptible (Buckley et al., 2019; Drucker, 2013; Eckersall et al., 2017). Kate Crawford and Vladan Joler's artwork *Anatomy of an AI System* (2018) exemplifies this artistic method (Figure 8). The large-scale map visualises the planetary network required for a single Amazon Echo by tracing its lifecycle from mineral extraction to its disposal in e-waste landfills. My collaborative project, the *Digitalised Biology* series, adopts a comparable narrative strategy to investigate these material entanglements. The project traces the lifecycle of digital organisms to reveal their own deep time, connecting the virtual to its material substrate. A detailed analysis of this project, as part of the larger *Post-Bits Human Universe* system, will follow in Chapter 6 to further explore this artistic methodology.

The artworks by Crawford, Joler, and my own collaborative project provide key case studies for the analytical method I employ in this dissertation and my artistic practice. My analysis of the “deep time of the media”, informed by both Zielinski's Variantology and Parikka's media geology, therefore involves tracing the material conditions, technical affordances, and epistemological breaks that constitute the histories of how humans have seen, heard, and calculated by technical means. Artistic practices that render material networks perceptible demonstrate how contemporary media are complex assemblages carrying the sedimented traces of their past, incorporating earlier artistic and scientific practices alongside the physical remnants of resource extraction and geopolitical struggles. A media-archaeological perspective reveals that the “newness” of any medium is a relative concept, as each medium emerges from and remains in dialogue with a frequently obscured “deep time” of technical culture and planetary material transformation. Media archaeology, when combined with a materialist ecological consciousness, thus provides a method for analysing societal memory regimes and the artistic practices that, like the examples above, delve into these layered media histories.

Zielinski's media-archaeological project, combined with Parikka's materialist critique, offers a perspective for re-evaluating media studies. This combined approach rejects a surface-level understanding of contemporary technologies as novel or ahistorical phenomena. Instead, it interrogates the narratives of inevitable progress that surround technology. Zielinski's concept of “variantological paths” exemplifies this method. His analysis illuminates the specific historical junctures and socio-political forces that determined why certain technologies

became dominant while others were marginalised, exposing the contingent nature of technological development. Applying this “deep time” lens to media fosters what I term a “slow media” perspective, which prioritises historical depth and critical inquiry over the immediacy celebrated in many contemporary technological interfaces. This method examines the material histories of technological artefacts, the socio-economic conditions of their emergence, and the labour and resource extraction involved in their production (Gottlieb & Karatzogianni, 2018; Maxwell & Miller, 2012).

Media-archaeological analysis examines the material and infrastructural underpinnings of media systems. These fundamentals, often invisible in everyday use, determine a system’s operation and societal impact through resource exploitation and geographical power dynamics (Chun & Keenan, 2006; Franklin, 2012; Parikka, 2015). This approach counters technologically determinist narratives by demanding an understanding of the technological present that is historically and materially grounded. Following Parikka, this understanding accounts for the lifecycle of media from mineral extraction to electronic waste. By rejecting a teleological view of technological progress, media-archaeological analysis creates possibilities for developing alternative media futures. While the archaeological exploration of Western media temporalities provides a foundation for my argument, a full understanding of fluid temporalities requires an exploration of non-Greco-Roman chrono-poetics, which conceptualise time as layered, experiential, and spatially embedded. I will exemplify this exploration in the subsequent discussion through an examination of Shanshui aesthetics.

4.1.2 Non-Western Chrono-poetics: *Shanshui* and Now-ness

Many non-Greco-Roman traditions conceptualise time as an embodied and experiential flow. This conceptualisation informs specific spatial arrangements and offers alternative interpretations of temporality. The Chinese aesthetic system of Shanshui provides an example of this approach. It manifests across painting, landscape, and architecture, defining its temporal dimension through the process of *you* (游, aesthetic roaming). The principle of *you* prioritises an unfolding, imaginative journey over a single, captured moment. I contend that the *Shanshui* system has a specific relationship with two distinct nineteenth-century Western phenomena: it exerted cultural influence on the urban stroller, or *Flâneur*, and it shares a technological resonance with the panorama. The historical context for my argument of influence is the late nineteenth-century

European and American avant-garde. The movement broke with tradition and interacted with new technologies and external forms of mass culture. Its interaction included a pronounced fascination with Chinese and Japanese art and philosophy (Trodd, 2011; Uroskie, 2014), which created a channel for the ‘transference’ of aesthetic concepts. Wu (2006) defines transference as the adoption and reinterpretation of ideas within a new cultural context. Within this environment, the figure of the *Flâneur* emerged from nineteenth-century urban modernity (Presner, 2010). The *Flâneur*’s defining characteristic was a peripatetic interaction with the city, a mode of movement that functioned as an interpretive ‘reading of the streets’ (Hessel, 2017). I contend that East Asian ideas concerning durational and interpretive experience, particularly the novel perspectives on urban life found in Japanese *ukiyo-e* (浮世絵) prints, which circulated within this intellectual climate, influenced the development of the *Flâneur*.

In contrast, the panorama offers a parallel technological response to a similar aesthetic problem. I adopt Walter Benjamin’s (2008) concept of “correspondence” to define a relationship, distinct from direct influence, wherein one medium addresses a similar cultural issue to another without direct derivation. The nineteenth-century immersive medium of the panorama exemplifies such resonance (Crary, 2001; Grau, 2002). Its shared demand for “spectatorial labour of imagination and perambulation” (Uroskie, 2011) constitutes a functional parallel with the principle of *you*, or aesthetic roaming, central to the *Shanshui* tradition. The concept of *you* (aesthetic roaming) implies duration, sequential revelation, and an interpretive exploration of the environment over time (Gu K., 2020; K. Li, 2014). Zong Baihua (1981, 2011) Through this interaction, the stroller cultivates a multisensory perception of space and time, which in turn fuses the *jing* (景, external landscape) with the stroller’s *qing* (情, inner experience). Zong considers the act of strolling connects the observer with *qiyun shengdong* (氣韻生動, rhythmic vitality) (1987), a principle he identifies as central to Chinese aesthetics. The principle of *qiyun shengdong* imbues the landscape with a sense of life and temporal flow that animates static representation.

The stroller’s embodied movement and heightened perception co-create this connection to *qiyun shengdong*. In this process, the landscape, in forms such as pictorial representation, a physical architectural garden, or an imagined literary construct like the *Wuyou Yuan* (烏有園) (Liu S., 1935), becomes a medium, and its potential for *qiyun* is actualised in the event of the stroll. I interpret the landscape’s immanent potentiality through Lévy’s (1998) concept of the virtual,

which he defines as a fertile mode of being, not an illusion. The stroll then unlocks this virtuality, transforming the latent dynamism of the landscape into an experience of rhythmic vitality. A media-archaeological interpretation, following Zielinski (2006a), frames this encounter as an interaction with the landscape's "dormant layers" of natural energy and cultural memory. Furthermore, as Parikka (2015) explains in his work on the geology of media, the physical and depicted elements of the landscape, from the geological strata of a mountain to the ink traces on silk or paper, become conduits for this resonance. Durational interaction with these medial and material strata allows the "strolling" subject to participate in a generative process that brings forth the *qiyun* from its potential state into an immediate, lived reality, which in turn allows the subject to perceive the environment as imbued with meaning and vitality.

Xishan Xinglütu 谿山行旅圖



Figure 9. Analytical diagram of Fan Kuan's *Xishan Xinglü Tu* (谿山行旅圖), illustrating the viewer's orchestrated upward visual journey and the experiential construction of the landscape. Original scroll: National Palace Museum, Taipei. Diagram accessible at: <https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVJeWoOAK=?moveToWidget=3458764634572876343&cot=14> (accessed 16 September 2025). Analytical diagram © 2025 Racelar Ho; drawn by Racelar Ho with assistance from Gwyn (Qiange) Huang and Dingjie Zhou.

Within *Shanshui* painting, the principle of *you* is paramount, manifesting differently according to the format. An exemplary case is Fan Kuan's Northern Song dynasty hanging scroll, *Xishan Xinglütu* 谿山行旅圖ⁱ (Figure 9). The composition is structured to invite the viewer's gaze on an upward journey, a vertical *you*. Unlike the handscroll, which a viewer physically unrolls to reveal a moving picture section by section, the hanging scroll is a static medium that presents

its entirety at once; what moves is the viewer's gaze across the pictorial surface, not the object itself. Art historical analysis suggests that Kuan orchestrates a potential viewing sequence within this static frame through a structured spatial hierarchy (Barnhart et al., 1997; Wu, 1996, 2010; Zong, 1987, 2011). A conventional reading, informed by Chinese aesthetic principles, commences at the scroll's base, where textured boulders and a caravan of travellers with their mules provide a human scale and a point of entry into the landscape. From this foreground, the artist employs compositional elements, such as the winding path and the stream, to encourage the gaze upward toward the central massif. The resulting ascent can be interpreted as a guided progression that the artist constructs as a visual narrative. The artist therefore offers a framework to structure the viewer's temporal and spatial experience within the pictorial world.

The upward trajectory suggested by the composition's winding path and stream leads the eye past a dense, rocky outcrop on the right, then into the mist-filled middle ground where a temple is partially concealed amongst wooded peaks, offering a momentary pause and a shift in scale before the central mountain comes into view. The mountain, a colossal peak occupying the upper two-thirds of the scroll, represents the culmination of the visual journey; its sheer face and textured surfaces demand sustained attention. To elucidate this orchestrated visual progression, Figure 9 deconstructs the upward visual journey. The diagram shows two layers of experience. The bottom row, aligned with the 'TIME' axis, depicts the visual narrative by showing how the view expands as the gaze moves upward. The top row isolates the key elements the viewer encounters in sequence: the foreground boulders, the mid-distance temple, and the central mountain.

The top row of Figure 9 illustrates the viewer's cognitive act of identifying and processing these sequentially encountered focal points. Taken together, the two layers in Figure 9 demonstrate how the viewer, by progressing temporally along the horizontal axis and vertically along the "HEIGHT" axis, mentally integrates the accumulating visual elements. The viewer's integration of these components co-creates an immersive and expanding spatio-temporal experience of the depicted world that mirrors a physical ascent. The artist's orchestration of the viewing sequence, from the tangible details at the base to the large scale of the summit, allows the viewer to comprehend the landscape's grandeur and depth over an imagined duration. The *shenyuan* (深遠, deep distance) achieved in the painting is therefore also a temporal distance, a journey into the heart of the landscape that takes time to absorb and comprehend (Bing & Wei,

2016; Cahill, 1982; Zong, 1981).

Fucun Shanju Tu 富春山居圖

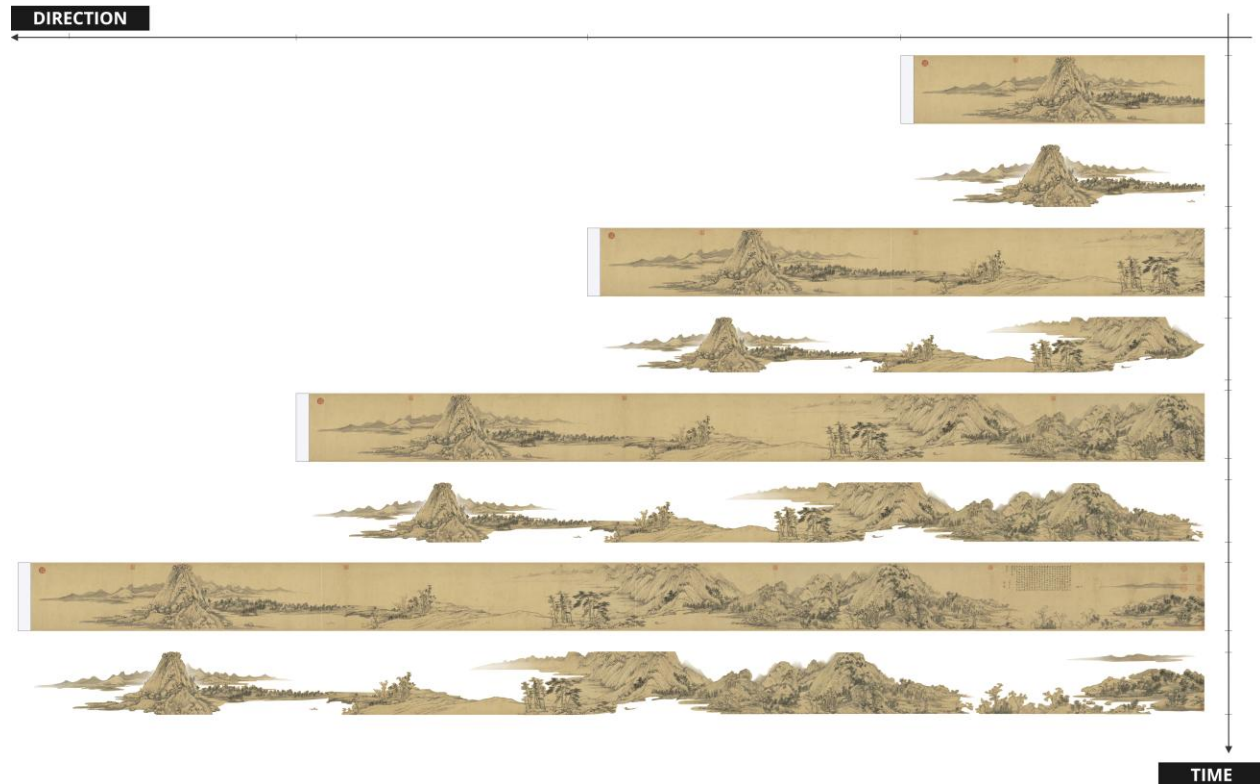


Figure 10. Analytical diagram illustrating the sequential unrolling and experiential construction of Huang Gongwang's *Fucun Shanju Tu* – Ziming Roll (富春山居圖-子明卷) (Yuan Dynasty). Original scroll: National Palace Museum, Taipei. Diagram accessible at: <https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVJeWoOAK=?moveToWidget=3458764634572876343&cot=14> (accessed 16 September 2025). Analytical diagram © 2025 Racelar Ho; drawn by Racelar Ho with assistance from Gwyn (Qiange) Huang and Dingjie Zhou.

In contrast to the hanging scroll, the handscroll format facilitates a horizontal *you*, a principle illustrated by Huang Gongwang's Yuan dynasty painting, *Fucun Shanju Tu* 富春山居圖 (Figure 11). The physical act of unrolling the scroll from right to left dictates the viewing progression and initiates a continuous visual and imaginative voyage. In *Fucun Shanju Tu*, the journey begins with an expanse of calm waters and distant, hazy mountains, creating a serene opening. As the viewer proceeds, the experience unfolds sequentially, with different sections revealing varied scenes, ranging from gentle riverbanks and a fishing village to undulating hills and denser mountain ranges. Each segment, therefore, embodies a distinct yet interconnected

scene within a continuous narrative that unfolds over time. While this principle of creating an immersive narrative through durational interaction also appears in other historical forms, such as narrative tapestries, it finds a particularly strong technological parallel in the nineteenth-century Western panorama. The technological correspondence between the handscroll and the panorama are stronger than their apparent formal differences might suggest. While many panoramas were static 360-degree paintings, some European rotundas employed moving panoramas that were, in effect, massive, mechanically operated scrolls (Grau, 2002; Huhtamo, 2023).

Both the hand-operated Chinese scrolls, and the Western panorama immerse the viewer by requiring them to construct a narrative through participation. The spectator generates the experiential journey by physically walking around the panorama or manually unrolling the handscroll. The handscroll and the panorama thus represent two distinct technologies that achieve the same goal of narrative immersion. The panorama's capacity for narrative, however, distinguishes it from the panopticon, which, as the work of Foucault (1995) reminds us, is a tool of surveillance.

The artist exercises a degree of control over the initial encounter, setting the pace and mood. As the viewer unrolls the scroll leftwards, new vistas are revealed: scattered trees give way to denser groves, dwellings appear, and the terrain becomes more complex and elevated. Wu (1996, 2018) suggests that this controlled revelation transforms viewing into a temporal experience, where the viewer traverses space over time in a manner akin to a journey. My analytical diagram in Figure 10 provides a visualisation of this process, illustrating two interconnected layers of landscape experience. The diagram presents the planar visual narrative in continuous segments (odd-numbered rows from top) as the scroll is physically revealed to the viewer.

Alternating with the narrative segments, the even-numbered rows deconstruct the revealed scroll portions, highlighting key landscape themes and compositional components as they are encountered. The layered representation in Figure 10 demonstrates how the viewer might mentally integrate the accumulating visual elements. By progressing temporally (indicated by the right vertical axis) through the act of unrolling (indicated by the top horizontal axis), the viewer co-creates an immersive and developing spatio-temporal experience of the depicted world. The power to determine what is seen, and in what order, lies with the artist's design and the format of the handscroll, though the viewer retains agency over the duration of their gaze on any particular

section. The depiction of figures, such as a solitary scholar in a pavilion or fishermen on their boats, further punctuates the temporal journey, creating moments of narrative focus or quiet contemplation that modulate the rhythm of the *you*.

The sequential progression of the unfolding scenery creates a dynamic that I propose is analogous to the flow of lived experience, a core tenet of “aesthetic strolling”. As each new section builds upon the last, the preceding section is rolled up and recedes from immediate view, which becomes a metaphor for the continuous and ever-changing nature of time. The viewer’s interaction with the scroll constitutes an imaginative reconstruction of a spatio-temporal experience, in which the continuous format becomes a metaphor for the ceaseless flow of time and the journey through it. The viewer controls the pace of this “journey” by lingering on certain details or moving swiftly through others. This control allows the viewer to co-create a personal temporal experience of the depicted world. Compositional techniques such as the moving vantage point are integral to advancing the experiential journeys in both handscrolls and panoramas. A moving vantage point allows for the representation of multiple temporal moments and diverse perspectives to coalesce within a single, continuous visual field. This coalescence transforms time from a singular point on a linear trajectory into an expansive, co-existent realm. This technique allows artists to capture the essence of different moments and perspectives, which the viewer then synthesises during their imaginative *you* to create a layered temporal experience. The viewer, in navigating the scroll, participates in the construction of its temporal narrative, experiencing a “time of viewing” that is a form of *you*.

He Yuan 何園

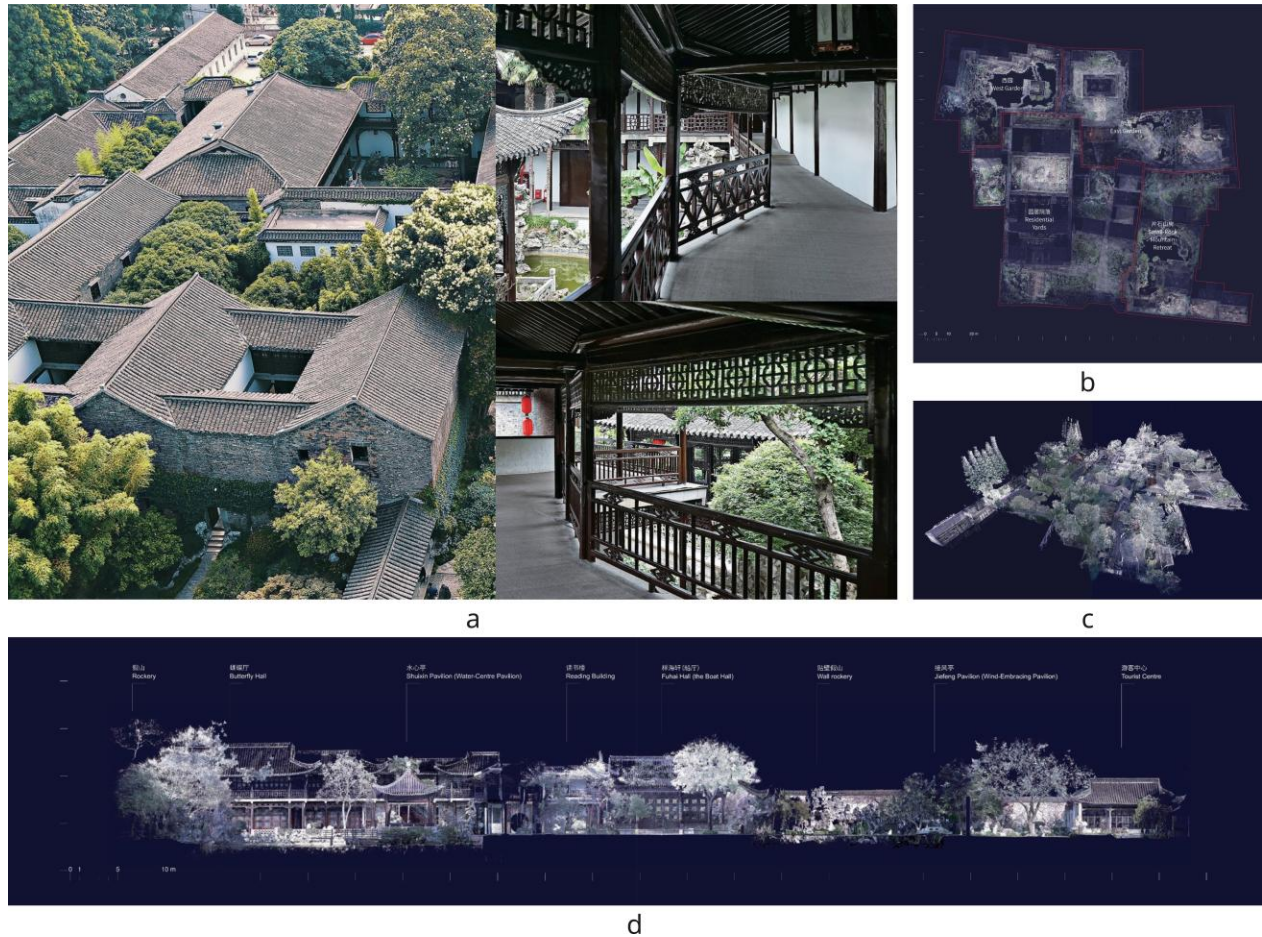


Figure 11. Various digital representations of Heyuan Garden, Yangzhou: (a) Aerial photography (December 2018); (b) Orthographic point cloud map of Heyuan Garden; (c) Perspective view of point cloud model of Heyuan Garden; (d) The overall section of the northern part of Heyuan Garden. Source: Chen, Y., & Shutter, L. (2022). 数字化园林遗产图录: 扬州何园 [Garden Heritage Digital Document: Heyuan Garden/ Yangzhou]. Shanghai: Tongji University Press. © 2025 2022 Tongji University Press.

Furthermore, the concept of *you* informs other manifestations of the *Shanshui* aesthetic, notably in the design and experience of classical Chinese gardens, where the landscape becomes a medium for this aesthetic roaming. In the late-Qing garden *He Yuan* 何园 (see Figure 11), the architect designs the visitor's encounter from the moment of entry. The visitor first advances from a modest entrance through a series of antechambers and narrow passages, a design that defers the full revelation of the garden's expanse. A controlled sequence of entry, a characteristic feature of many classical Chinese gardens, orchestrates a temporal rhythm that compels the visitor to slow their pace and heightens their anticipation. The garden architect, much like the painter of a handscroll, therefore, controls the visitor's initial spatio-temporal trajectory.

The visitor then proceeds along double-storey covered corridors, which wind through

the garden connecting various pavilions and halls and offering rising and shifting perspectives onto the composed scenes below. These corridors, along with lattice windows and strategically placed rockeries, constantly reframe the visitor's views. The visitor does not apprehend the garden in a single glance; instead, the garden unfolds sequentially, requiring temporal interaction. Each turn or change in orientation along the corridors might reveal a new vista, perhaps a secluded courtyard, a view across a pond, or an example of *zaojing* 造景, the art of creating scenic compositions with symbolic meaning. The memory of past scenes informs the perception of the present, and anticipation builds for what lies ahead. This choreographed movement through space, advanced by the structure of *He Yuan*'s corridors, constitutes a physical enactment of *you*, where the visitor feels the passage of time through the body's traversal and the sequential revelation of these scenic compositions.

The garden's layout and circulation routes predetermine the visitor's physical path, although the design presents choices at certain junctures. The garden's layout and circulation routes predetermine the visitor's physical path, although the design presents choices at certain junctures. The mental and imaginative "scroll" this journey generates weaves together perceived scenes, literary allusions, and personal reflections into a composite experience that reconfigures the physical path. This method of producing a subjective narrative from a structured environment can be seen to parallel the experience of the nineteenth-century European Flâneur, who constructed a personal narrative by navigating the pre-existing cityscape. The process is also analogous to the imaginative journey Liu Shilong invents in his textual construction of the *Wuyou Yuan Ji* 烏有園記 (1935) where the reader follows a prescribed narrative path yet fills it with their own imaginative depth. The network of covered walkways in *He Yuan* mediates the spectator's experience and perception, interweaving layered perspectives and, by extension, temporalities. This expedition through the landscape, much like the immersion of a handscroll, facilitates a durational interaction where multiple moments, including the memory of a previous view, the anticipation of the next, and the present experience, become layered and co-existent.

Oh the bite 哎呀被咬了



Figure 12. Zhiai Chen, *Oh the bite* 哎呀被咬了. Ink on paper, mounted on wood panel, 145 × 210 cm, 2014. The diagrammatic overlay shows potential, non-linear spectator pathways through the artwork. Courtesy of the Artist. © 2025 Zhiai Chen. Analysis and diagrammatic overlay Diagram accessible at: <https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVJeWoOAK=?moveToWidget=3458764634573337246&cot=10> (accessed 16 September 2025) © 2025 Racelar Ho; drawing assistance by Gwyn (Qiange) Huang and Dingjie Zhou.

The principle of *you* and its temporal complexities finds a contemporary parallel in the ink drawing *Oh the bite* 哎呀被咬了 (Figure 12) by Zhiai Chenⁱⁱ. At first glance, the work presents a dense amalgamation of figures, mythical creatures, and fragmented scenes laid out across a single plane, eschewing conventional perspectival depth. However, this apparent flatness belies a sophisticated interaction and communication with spatio-temporal narration, activated by the viewer's own *you*. In contrast to the prescribed sequential unfolding of a traditional handscroll, *Oh the bite* presents its entire visual field simultaneously to the spectator. The artist does not dictate a singular starting point or a fixed directional path from right to left or top to bottom. Instead, the power to activate the visual expedition and chart its course is ceded to the viewer. Yet, this is not to say the artist relinquishes all influence; rather, a subtle orchestration of the viewing experience is formed through the deliberate placement and scale of its myriad elements.

The composition presents the viewer with several potential focal points, such as one of the larger, more defined serpentine forms snaking across the composition, the centrally located architectural structure, or the anthropomorphic sun radiating in the lower portion. These visually prominent elements can constitute initial entry points for the viewer's *you*. From any chosen point, the artist invites the viewer to wander and to connect disparate elements, such as a figure whose heart is a candle flame or another representing a transformed, disliked acquaintance. This connection allows the viewer to forge individualised trajectories of meaning. The nature of these trajectories, which I have illustrated with overlaid blue dashed lines in my analytical representation of *Oh the bite*, reveals a divergence from the viewing protocols of traditional Chinese landscape painting. Unlike the orchestrated viewing journeys in works such as *Fucun Shanju Tu*, where unrolling the handscroll leads to a linear discovery of scenery, or *Xishan Xinglütu*, whose compositional hierarchy guides an upward visual pilgrimage, the pathways in *Oh the bite* represent the viewer's idiosyncratic and dynamic experience of the pictorial field. These pathways are characteristically scattered, initiated by a viewer's spontaneous attraction to a particular form, colour, or visual cluster. This attraction leads to non-linear explorations that might leap across the composition, double back upon themselves, or pause on a specific detail.

Associative logic guides viewers to forge non-linear trajectories through dense visual fields. Memories or emotions evoked by specific elements create meaningful connections to other parts of the artwork. Personal experiences and individual impulses drive this interpretive process, superseding any narrative structure the artist might have imposed. Visual traversal might begin with following a serpentine creature's sinuous curve, shift toward a distant figure through recognition of textural similarities, and culminate in discovering thematic connections to symbolic motifs based on individual interpretation. This trajectory-forging process manifests a recursive and rhizomatic viewing experience, where perception circles back upon itself while branching in multiple directions simultaneously. Active processes of connecting, disconnecting, and re-connecting disparate elements within the simultaneously presented visual field enable viewers to construct complex mental landscapes.

The recursive and rhizomatic, self-directed navigation, where the onus of constructing coherence and narrative falls to the spectator, contrasts with the artist-led temporal and spatial unfolding of classical scroll formats, transferring agency to the viewer for the co-creation of meaning and the experiential fabric of pictorial time. While the artist populates the plane with a constellation of personal allegories, dreamlike vignettes, and reinterpreted symbolic forms, this constellation of allegories, vignettes, and forms is offered as a field of co-existing possibilities rather than a linear sequence. Each visual cluster can become a starting point for a micro-narrative that unfolds as a "temporal event" whose significance the viewer constructs in relation to other elements encountered during the visual journey. The viewers shifting attention maps the spatial and temporal coordinates of this journey. The experience of viewing *Oh the bite* is a process of organising and interpreting a field of co-existing moments and potential stories, an experience that reflects a contemporary decentring of narrative authority.

The work's strength lies in this interplay: the artist provides a rich, multi-layered field of potential, whereas the spectator, through their imaginative *you*, actualises specific narrative threads and temporal experiences, layering personal interpretations onto the artist's own sedimented personal history and subconscious expressions. The co-creative process, arising from the interplay between the artist's provision of a multi-layered field and the spectator's actualisation of narrative threads, generates a temporal experience that is both expansive and acutely subjective, echoing, in a contemporary idiom, the *Shanshui* ideal of a co-created *yijing* (意境). The spectator's process of *you*, whether through a classical painted scroll, a physical garden, or a contemporary drawing,

ultimately strives to evoke a *yijing*. The *yijing* emerges as a dynamic quality, co-created through the audience's durational and imaginative contemplation, their *you*, which allows them to perceive the interplay of permanence and flux, of the momentary and the eternal, embodied in the *Shanshui* worldview (Lai, 2009; Zong, 1981, 1987, 2023).

The traditional Chinese aesthetic concept of a co-created *yijing* (意境) embodies a *Shanshui*-derived understanding of time. It defines time as an unfolding and co-created experiential field, grounded in embodied perception. The *Shanshui*-derived understanding defines time as an unfolding and co-created experiential field, grounded in embodied perception. The experiential model of time provides a counterpoint to dominant linear or technologically determined temporalities and informs the analytical framework of a chrono-topographic rhetoric, which I develop in the following section.

4.1.3 Toward a *Chrono-Topographic Rhetoric*

My preceding exploration into deep time and diverse chrono-poetic traditions led me to formulate a specific analytical framework, which I term chrono-topographic rhetoric. I designed this as a conceptual model to elucidate how temporal experiences are constituted through and inscribed within specific spatial, material, and medial configurations. This framework avoids the understanding of time and space as separate containers for events, proposing instead their fundamental co-constitution in the production of artistic meaning and experiential depth. The co-constitution I propose arises from a dynamic encounter where the viewer's embodied and culturally situated interaction animates the affordances of spatio-medial arrangements. These arrangements, which can include material textures, formal structures, and symbolic cues, provide potential temporalities that the viewer's interaction can transform into lived experiences. As such, my concept of chrono-topographic rhetoric investigates the persuasive and expressive power that can emerge from the interplay of temporal structuring and spatial articulation within an artwork or mediated environment. The framework queries the ways in which time is "written" or "mapped" onto place, and conversely, how place imparts form and texture to temporal perception. My framework highlights how the mutual inscription of time and space can embed cultural logics, historical sedimentations, and material affordances within the very process of the mutual inscription of time and space.

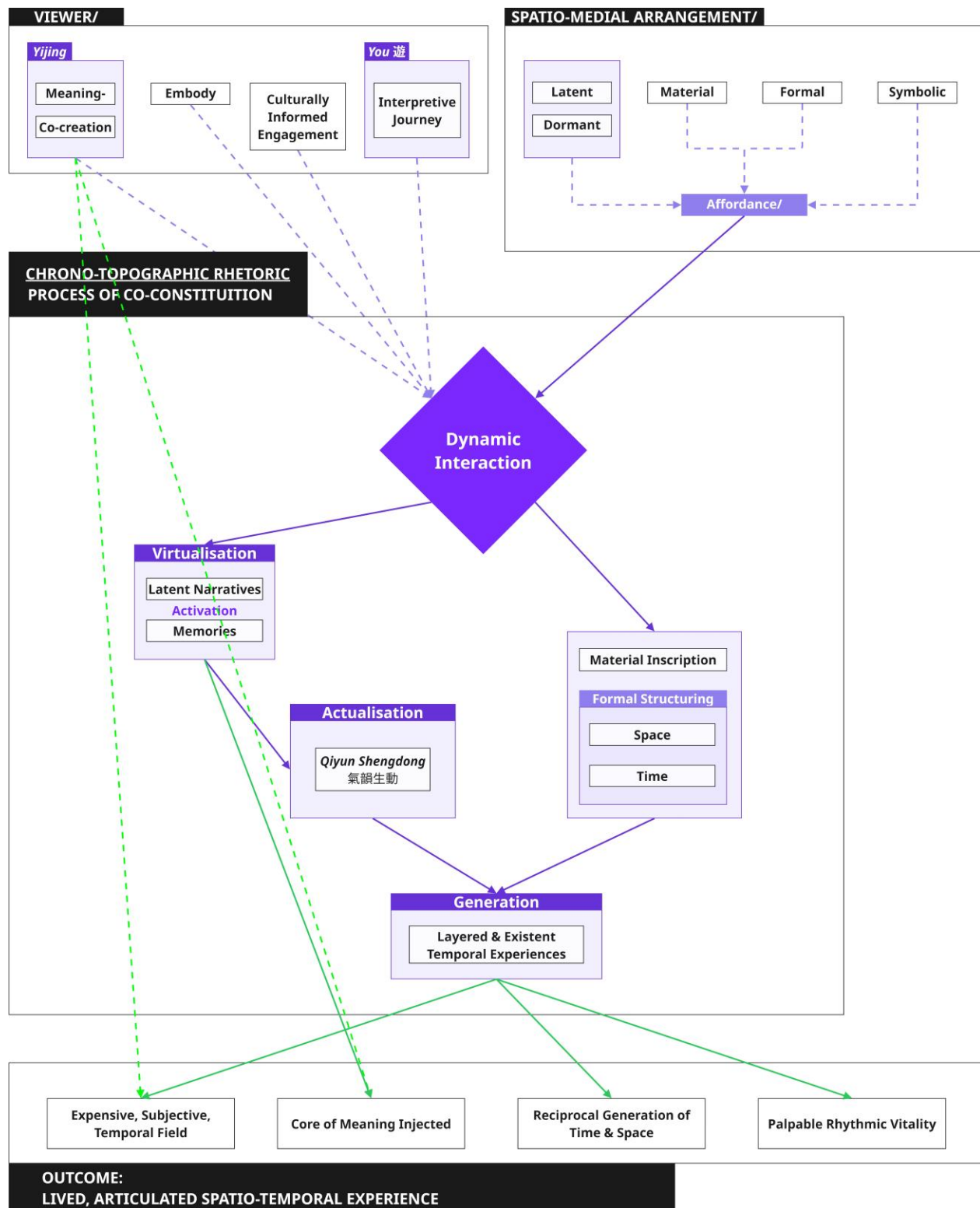


Figure 13. Operational Flow of Chrono-topographic Rhetoric. The diagram shows that a dynamic interaction between the spectator's embodied and culturally informed perception (Viewer/Subject) and the affordances presented by the spatio-medial arrangement (Spatio-Medial Arrangement/ Landscape-Medium). The resulting interaction initiates a process of co-constitution, triggering latent temporalities and ultimately generating a lived, manifest spatio-temporal experience (Outcome).

I chose the term “chrono-topographic” to signal a conjoined threefold focus. “Chrono-” refers to the multifaceted nature of time, which encompasses diverse and complex temporalities, including the durational, embodied experience found in the Shanshui aesthetic. “Topo-” pertains to place, site, or landscape. I interpret this concept as a physical location imbued with cultural and historical saturation; it is a space that becomes a medium, carrying traces of past events and influencing present interactions. Finally, the “-graphic” suffix implies a process of inscription, representation, or mapping. The suffix suggests that time and space are deliberately configured and made legible through specific artistic or medial strategies. In my framework, “rhetoric” detaches from its traditional association with verbal persuasion. Instead, I use the term to refer to a broader understanding of rhetoric as a fundamental phenomenon of communication. I contend it is an intrinsic characteristic of how beings and environments structure and generate meaning through their organisation and interaction, as I explored in Chapter 2. Chrono-topographic rhetoric, therefore, investigates how spatio-temporal configurations intrinsically “speak” or manifest their potential for making meaning. Figure 13 below schematises the operational dynamics of this framework. The diagram illustrates the interplay between the viewer, the spatio-medial arrangement, and the process of co-constituting spatio-temporal meaning.

Within the process of co-constitution, the “graphic” dimension represents the artist’s intervention. I define this dimension as the conscious act of configuring or “writing” space and time across diverse media, from the material strata of a landscape to the coded architecture of a techno-mediated environment. An artist’s act of inscription makes perceptible the temporalities inherent in the artwork’s materials and site by articulating latent “chrono-” elements such as the deep time of sedimented histories, potential futures, and anachronic juxtapositions within the “topo-” of the artwork’s materials and site (Benjamin, 2008; Wu, 1995). The resulting rhetoric stems from the organisational logic that emerges from the interplay between the artist’s design and the inherent properties of the chosen materials and environment. The arrangement of forms and materials creates a system of affordances that suggests or “invites” particular modes of viewer interaction and interpretation (Buckley et al., 2019; W. J. T. Mitchell, 2018; Thomsen et al., 2020). The artwork’s rhetorical power, therefore, lies in its capacity to structure a viewer’s potential experience. For example, the fluid, reconfigurable architecture of

a virtual environment constantly redefines spatial boundaries, which in turn generates new narrative possibilities for the user to explore. Chrono-topographic rhetoric, in short, investigates how the deliberate integration of spatial and temporal elements produces meaning that emerges from the viewer's interaction with the work's structure.

The operational premise of chrono-topographic rhetoric, additionally, hinges upon an understanding of the “topo-” component of the rhetoric, distinguishing the component from conventional mathematical or geographical topology while acknowledging certain conceptual intersections. Traditional topology concerns the abstract properties of space, such as which parts of a structure are connected, that remain invariant under continuous deformations. Within the framework, however, the “topo-” refers to a “place-being” that constitutes an intrinsically mediated and experienced reality. While the concept of “place-being” shares with Martin Heidegger's concept of *Wohnen* (dwelling) (1971) an emphasis on place as integral to existence, the concept diverges significantly. Heidegger's concept often implies an authentic, less techno-mediated mode of being. In contrast, the proposed “place-being” forms explicitly through technological, cultural, and historical mediation, saturated with cultural logics and material affordances that structure temporal experience. Lévy (1998) defines the actual as the physically present landscape or interface, the potential as what could be or happen within that space, and the virtual as the dynamic complex of forces. The rhetorical power of the “topo-” arises from how the specific arrangement of the actual, potential, and virtual realities structures a viewer's experience and invites particular modes of interaction and interpretation.

My formulation of chrono-topographic rhetoric also provides a specification of and an analytical deepening for spatial rhetoric. Where spatial rhetoric posits that any configuration of space fundamentally possesses rhetorical force and constitutes an agent in meaning-making (see Chapters 2 and 3), chrono-topographic rhetoric focuses on the mechanisms by which the temporal dimension is inextricably woven into, and manifested through, these spatial configurations. My framework addresses the necessity of a dedicated lens to unpack the interrelated and layered temporalities that are consciously generated and mediated through the material, formal, and symbolic organisation of space. I therefore propose that chrono-topographic rhetoric offers a detailed methodology to enrich spatial rhetoric. My methodology investigates how the “chrono” (time) and “topo” (place) elements collaboratively construct a distinctive dimension of spatial expression and experience through their “graphic” (inscription). This process represents

a deliberate examination of time's role within and as spatial rhetoric. The development of chrono-topographic rhetoric is one of my key contributions in this dissertation. I aim for the framework to provide a new tool for analysing the temporal complexities of post-technological art.

4.2 Enduring Traces: Material Memory and Conceptual Anchors in the Water-stone Metaphor

The previously outlined exploration of fluid temporalities and layered characteristics in media and artistic practices necessitates a complementary inquiry into endurance, memory, and cultural continuity. To further elucidate the interplay between enduring traces and fluid processes within chrono-topographic rhetoric, I introduce the “water-stone metaphor”. I intend for this dialectic to constitute a metaphorical lens to refine and extend the analytical application of the rhetoric to spatio-temporal phenomena. Drawing its conceptual foundation from long-standing philosophical and aesthetic contemplations of elemental forces and their cultural interplay, the dialectic provides a tangible, evocative language to explore the core tensions that I investigate in this dissertation.

Thinkers from Heraclitus to Gaston Bachelard offer conceptual resources for understanding the elemental interplay that informs my proposed “water-stone metaphor”. Heraclitus posited the ceaseless flux of existence with the analogy “You cannot step twice into the same river, for other waters and yet others go ever flowing on” (1979, p. 53). Heraclitus’s analogy stresses a paradox central to the water-stone metaphor: the permanence of a river, which represents the stability of the “stone” principle, is composed by the unrelenting flow of water, which embodies the fluidity of the “water” principle. This Heraclitean understanding of permanence arising from flux provides the theoretical rationale for the water-stone metaphor. For chrono-topographic rhetoric, this Heraclitean perspective allows for an analysis where seemingly stable cultural forms or enduring spatial configurations (the “stone” aspect) are revealed as being continuously (re)produced and re-signified through the ceaseless “water” of temporal processes, material transformations, and fluid social interaction. The analysis outlines a co-constitutive relationship that is central to the dialectic’s explanatory power in understanding how artworks and mediated environments embody spatio-temporal experiences.

Furthermore, Gaston Bachelard’s extensive explorations of the material imagination provide a vocabulary for elucidating the symbolic resonances of elemental qualities. His elemental analyses of air (2002a), earth (2002b), and water (2002c) provide the conceptual foundation for this inquiry.

Bachelard's examination of water illuminates its evocative power as "truly the transitory element" and an "essential, ontological metamorphosis between fire and earth" (2002c, p. 6), capturing its fluid, ever-changing nature. His work on earth, in turn, highlights how its enduring solidity stimulates the imagination. This quality informs the "stone" aspect of my proposed dialectic, which draws on Bachelard's (2002b, pp. 17–18) perception of earth as a "mirror of our energies". Bachelard's focus on how material elements directly generate human imagination and shape our understanding of existence provides a methodological grounding for the water-stone metaphor to interpret the composition of spatio-temporal phenomena and their configuration within chrono-topographic rhetoric, complicating purely structural or semiotic analyses.

This line of inquiry finds distinct yet complementary parallels in other philosophical traditions. Within the East Asian and Southeast Asian cultural interaction system, the concepts of "water" (*shui* 水) and "stone" (*shi* 石) are rooted in their elemental properties. The concepts find their fuller expression as a dialectical pairing embedded in artistic practices like *Shanshui* painting and garden design, and in aesthetic principles like *yijing*. In these contexts, "stone" is often manifested as "mountain" (*shan* 山). "Water" symbolises flow, change, and the Daoist notion of *xū* (虛). *Xū* represents an emptiness of pregnant potentiality, embodying *qi* (氣), which is a dynamic energy or air, and the ever-changing rhythms of nature. These qualities reflect a Heraclitean sense of constant becoming (Wu, 2023; Zong, 1987, 2011). Alternatively, "stone" signifies stability, permanence, and a connection to deep time, offering a conceptual anchor similar to Bachelard's idea of earth's enduring solidity stimulating the imagination.

Drawing on a Deleuzian framework, I conceptualise the relationship between water and stone as a dynamic of relative speeds and slowness within a shared field of intensities, where one element's status as stone or water is contingent on its relation to another. As Zong (1987) suggests, Chinese cosmology involves a unity of time and space where the formless void of water enables the manifestation of stone's solidity, and stone is perceived within a larger cosmic, rhythmic flow. This perspective from the East Asian cultural interaction system extends a counterpoint to any simplistic binary, enriching the water-stone metaphor by illustrating how apparently opposing forces are regarded as interconnected and mutually generative. The concept's utility lies in its capacity to analyse the multidimensional temporal and spatial dynamics in chrono-topographic rhetoric. The principle is reflected in the deliberate design of Chinese gardens and architecture to create a "flowing space" (Wu, 1995, 2021b; Zong, 2011).

The aesthetic experience of *Yijing* arises from this evocative tension and harmonious interplay, where permanence is comprehended through flux, a dynamic that recalls the Heraclitean river.

Japanese *karesansui* (枯山水) distils the elemental dialectic into its most abstract form. In these gardens, arranged stones and raked gravel are utilised to evoke the essence and dynamism of water without its physical presence. In *karesansui*, “stone” is made to represent the conceptual qualities of “water”, such as its fluidity, its patterns, and its life-giving nature, demonstrating a sophisticated understanding of how material can reconfigure its literal properties to awaken what Bachelard would term the material imagination (Nishi & Hozumi, 2012; Tschumi, 2020; Weiss, 2013). The practice of *karesansui* highlights the capacity of “stone” to enhance the experience of the fluidity and vastness of “water” through symbolic transformation. The aesthetic interest in both Chinese and Japanese traditions therefore derives from the interdependent relationship between these elements, where the enduring “stone” provides the framework for perceiving and understanding the ceaseless “water” of change. The perspectives from Chinese and Japanese traditions, which emphasise the mutual implication and even interchangeability of opposites, enrich my concept of the water-stone metaphor. The resulting concept of a generative interplay, where each element contains the potential of the other, provides a crucial analytic for the framework of chrono-topographic rhetoric.

The water-stone metaphor, therefore, informs the application of chrono-topographic rhetoric as a metaphorical and analytical heuristic. In addition, the dialectic provides a tangible language for identifying and analysing the “chrono” and “topo” elements within my framework. The “chrono” element relates to temporal flows and ephemerality, which I associate with water. The “topo” element relates to enduring places, material anchors, and sedimented memory, which I associate with stone. These elements are graphically inscribed and rhetorically configured within artworks and mediated environments. By employing the dialectic, my chrono-topographic framework analyses how the “fluid temporalities” (as I discussed in Section 4.1) interacts with material and conceptual structures, and how the interdependence of these elements generates the spatio-temporal experiences that constitute the subject of the rhetoric.

Under the water-stone metaphor that guides this chapter, water represents the ceaseless flow of time, data, and ephemeral experience, while stone signifies elements of relative permanence, such as material sites, enduring objects, foundational texts, and core cultural concepts, that constitute anchors, reference points, or sites of inscription within this current. These stone elements

are not impervious to change, as even geological formations erode over deep time; rather, their significance lies in their capacity to condense and carry temporal depth, offering a measure of stability against which fluidity can be perceived and comprehended. This section, therefore, will construct the conceptual category of stone by examining how material memory and textual or conceptual permanence constitute enduring traces within the flux of cultural and technological environments.

Physical sites and material objects anchor collective memory in the landscape. Those crafted from enduring substances like stone provide tangible points of reference, condensing cultural time into a stable form. For example, classical gardens in Suzhou or the *karesansui* of Kyoto painstakingly position stones and other landscape elements as mnemonic devices, encoding philosophical principles, historical allusions, and cultural narratives that persist across generations (Takei & Keane, 2011; Tschumi, 2020). The materiality of ancient stone in such gardens, or in architecture, becomes an index of historical strata, bearing the physical marks of time and human interaction, illustrating a connection to past epochs and the values they represent (Wu, 1995; Zong, 2011). Through their persistent physical presence, enduring material elements like stones in gardens and architecture resist the ephemerality of immediate experience, providing stable points of reference around which cultural memory can coalesce and be transmitted. These stable points of reference become sites where the cultural formation across deep time is made palpable, allowing present generations to connect with sedimented experiences of the past. The selection and placement of stones in a Zen Garden, for instance, can evoke vast landscapes and philosophical concepts, their enduring forms inviting sustained contemplation and a sense of timelessness that contrasts with the fleeting nature of daily life.

Unconfined by ancient materialities, even modest physical configurations can embody stones in the cultural current, accumulating and radiating meaning over time. Consider the presence of specific urban layouts, pathways worn by generations, or vernacular architectural forms that, through their continued use and adaptation, carry the communal life and everyday practice of deep time. When specific urban layouts, pathways, and vernacular architectural forms are maintained and reinterpreted, their material forms provide a persistent framework for ongoing cultural narratives and social interactions. The way a city street retains its medieval footprint beneath layers of modern development demonstrates this material memory, forming a “stone” foundation that influences contemporary urban experience even as new watery flows of traffic and information

surge across it. The concept of material memory posits permanence as a slower rate of change in relation to absolute stasis. This slower rate of change allows certain forms and sites to accumulate historical and cultural associations, providing reference points within a context of wider societal change.

Alongside material manifestations, foundational texts and core cultural concepts can also become stones or conceptual anchors, providing stability and points of orientation for cultural identity and artistic reinterpretation across time. Historical garden texts exemplify this textual permanence. For example, Liu's Ming Dynasty *Wuyou Yuan Ji* 烏有園記 (1935) describes a fictional garden. Although the garden is non-existent in a physical sense, the text endures as a conceptual blueprint that inspires imaginative spatial experiences and artistic reinterpretations centuries later. This notion of a conceptually enduring yet physically non-existent space finds a contemporary parallel in artistic and architectural interventions that mediate with historical memory and site-specificity. The literary construction of place is a principle demonstrated in the fictional cartographies of Jorge Luis Borges, where textual worlds acquire their own ontological weight by establishing their own causal laws and poetic truths.

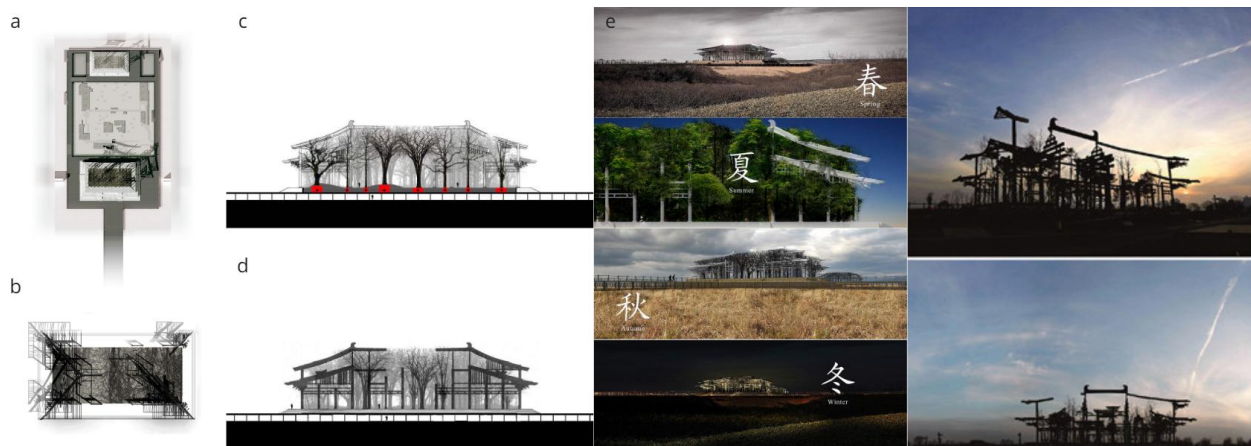


Figure 14 Feng Feng and IAPA Design Consultants, *Palace of Time*, 2010. (a) Site plan overview. (b) Axonometric view of conceptual structure. (c) Front elevation. (d) Side elevation. (e) Renderings depicting the installation across the four seasons, illustrating the project's concept. Spatial experimental art installation for the Xuan Zheng Hall and Zi Chen Hall, National Heritage Park of Tang Xi'an Daming Palace. Source: IAPA Design Consultants (https://www.iapa.net.au/images/projects/2010_XA_XZD.php) © 2025 Feng Feng and IAPA Design Consultants

In Borges's story *The Aleph* (1970), for example, the character Carlos Argentino Daneri attempts to construct such a world through a "literature of exhaustion", a poem intended to describe and thus contain the entire world, demonstrating a will to saturate the field of the real through text.

A pertinent example is the *Palace of Time* (Figure 14), a 2010 collaborative project by artist Feng Feng ⁱⁱⁱ and the Australian architectural firm IAPA for the National Heritage Park of Xi'an Daming Palace. The project *Palace of Time* was originally conceived as an art display device for the Xuan Zheng Hall and Zi Chen Hall. The project demonstrates a vision of architecture conceptualised as a continually evolving structure where the passage of time and seasonal change compose its building materials. The project renders the historical palace's framework as a subtly visible structure amidst the presence of trees, offering an interpretation of time's passage. The visual interplay between the incomplete architectural outline and the ever-changing arboreal forms allows the mark of time to be perceived as inscribed within both the historical remnants and the mutable natural setting. The physical stone of the historical palace is largely absent, yet its conceptual and historical stoneness, which encompasses its significance and cultural memory, is evoked and re-materialised through a contemporary artistic language that embraces temporality and vitality.



Figure 15. Feng Feng, *Spacetime-Symbiosis*, 2023. Interactive light projection and public art installation for the 10th Guangzhou International Light Festival. The images show the installation at night, creating a dialogue between the historical form of the palace and the contemporary Guangzhou city skyline. Source: Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts



Figure 16. Feng Feng, *Spacetime-Symbiosis*, 2023. A sequence of video stills from the public installation at the 10th Guangzhou International Light Festival. The images document the moment the projected historical facade dematerialises, parting to create a frame for the physically present Canton Tower in the background. Source: Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts (https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/Cf4_8rIDnDd9xwrAFyhvow) © 2025Feng Feng.

The project *Spacetime-Symbiosis* (Figure 15), an iterative development of the *Palace of Time* project, was presented as a larger-scale interactive light projection and public art installation at the 2023 Guangzhou International Light Festival and exhibits how a “non-existent” garden or palace, similar to Liu’s textual *Wuyou Yuan*, can constitute a conceptual stone. As a public art installation, the project performs a temporal gesture. The projected walls of the palace structure slowly part, embodying a solid facade and a dynamic, permeable screen. The opening of the projected walls creates a visual and conceptual superimposition, revealing the Canton Tower through the historical silhouette (Figure 16). The artwork thus stages a dialogue between two forms of different temporalities and scales: the ephemeral, historically referenced palace and the physically present, contemporary skyscraper. The former, a conceptual “stone” representing cultural memory, becomes a gateway that frames and recontextualises its modern counterpart, challenging any stable distinction between past and present.

The resulting interplay transforms the projection surface into what Christine Ross might describe as an “interface—a surface of exchange of temporal information” (C. Ross, 2012), where historical depth and present-day reality are shown in a process of mutual revelation. In this way, the conceptual stone of the non-existent palace provides a framework that connects historical memory with contemporary experience, generating new spatio-temporal narratives. Textual and conceptual precedents, through their philosophical underpinnings and cultural values, therefore, constitute stones that preserve and transmit ideas about space, nature, and human experience. Similarly, philosophical or aesthetic concepts within a cultural convention, such as the principle of *Shanshui* or the concept of *yijing* in Chinese aesthetics, provide conceptual

frameworks. Artists and thinkers continually revisit, reinterpret, and extend these frameworks, ensuring continuity amidst innovation. These textual and conceptual stones construct a sense of lineage and shared understanding, anchoring cultural identity in an intellectual and artistic heritage.

In essence, my formulation of stone as a conceptual category that encompasses material memory embodied in physical sites and objects, as well as the textual permanence of foundational narratives and the conceptual anchors of core cultural principles, is indispensable for an application of the water-stone metaphor. These diverse representations of stone collectively provide the reference points of stability, endurance, and sedimented meaning against which the watery flows of fluid temporalities, ephemeral data, and transient experiences (explored in Section 4.1) can be perceived, measured, and understood. As conceptualised, the dialectic is therefore one of reciprocal formation in which the enduring stones offer the sites and frameworks upon which the waters of change inscribe their passing traces, even as these flows gradually reshape and recontextualise the stones over deep time. Recognising these enduring traces and material anchors is fundamental for the practice of deep mapping which I will explore in the subsequent section. These layered histories, cultural memories, and material realities of place constitute the *ground* that deep maps excavate and represent. The method of deep mapping relates the material ground to experiential phenomena. It relies on the framework of chrono-topographic rhetoric.

4.3 Deep Mapping as Methodological Intervention

The preceding exploration of the water-stone metaphor elucidates the dynamic between fluid temporalities and enduring anchors. Aesthetic traditions like *Shanshui*, which ground this dialectic, pose a fundamental methodological question for experimental art: how can one investigate and represent such layered spatio-temporal phenomena? This section, therefore, introduces deep mapping as a methodological intervention that operationalises the theoretical insights of chrono-topographic rhetoric and the water-stone metaphor, elevating pure description.

The material constraints of paper-based media have historically limited conventional cartographic representations, fostering a pragmatic tendency to present a singular, ostensibly objective view of a location. In contrast, deep mapping interprets place and its narratives from multiple perspectives and through direct experience. Drawing on the layered complexities embedded in both the water-stone metaphor and the *Shanshui* aesthetic, deep mapping offers a way to excavate and interweave diverse strata of historical, cultural, personal, and material information. As I argued in Section 4.1.2, the *Shanshui* principles of *you*, *qiyun*, and *yijing* offer

insights into spatio-temporal interaction that inform this approach. The method reveals the multifaceted nature of spatio-temporal experience and also presents as a potential heuristic for artistic practices that utilise time and space. To complete the analytical and methodological toolkit for this research, I aim in this section to introduce deep mapping as its third major component, complementing chrono-topographic rhetoric and the water-stone metaphor by providing a concrete methodological pathway for translating their theoretical insights into practice.

To understand the methodological contribution of deep mapping, I will first examine its conceptual foundations and intellectual lineage. This examination is necessary because the idea of delving into “deep” layers of meaning or structure, while intuitively appealing, requires clear definition to avoid becoming an overly broad or ambiguous academic trope. Therefore, tracing the specific historical trajectory and epistemological topography of deep mapping becomes an essential step. My analysis involves situating its development in relation to advancements in cartographic practice, the broader spatial turn within the humanities, social sciences, and critical theories of space and place. This contextualisation will clarify the specific characteristics of deep mapping and illuminate its potential as a methodological tool for experimental art research that explores interwoven spatio-temporal realities.

4.3.1 The Genealogy of Deep Map: From *PrairyErth* to Spatial Humanities

Following the imperative to examine the conceptual foundations and intellectual lineage of deep mapping, this section commences its genealogical exploration with the foundational text of William Least Heat-Moon’s *PrairyErth: A Deep Map* (2014), a work that, in many respects, offers an early, powerful demonstration of what a deep map can achieve. Deep mapping is a modern scholarly approach that embraces multiplicity, complexity, and subjectivities, presenting a fragmented, provisional, and contingent argument with multiple voices. The embrace of multiplicity, complexity, and subjectivity offers a counterpoint to the pragmatic singularity of conventional cartography, whose claims to objectivity can obscure the constructed nature of representation. Least Heat-Moon’s *PrairyErth* demonstrates the principles of multiplicity, complexity, and subjectivity. Using the American prairie as a case, the narrative argues the landscape becomes a dynamic entity in which the observer's framework generates meaning, creating multiple perspectives. Secondly, Least Heat-Moon’s narrative strategy fractures monolithic conceptions of the American prairie by highlighting the prairie's profound diversity. The book recasts the region as a complex interweaving of disparate historical, geographical, and

cultural threads, revealing a terrain where the author juxtaposes expansive grasslands with forests and wetlands, while harsh environmental conditions mark breathtaking beauty. Lastly, Least Heat-Moon posits that modernity homogenise landscapes by imposing an abstract, reproducible order which erodes cultural richness. The decimation of herds, displacement of populations, and alteration of land culminate in a uniform, exploited landscape that supplants the prairie's unique attributes and erases the people without history.

The Foundational Deep Map: William Least Heat-Moon's *PrairyErth*

In *PrairyErth*, Heat-Moon encapsulates Chase County as an encyclopaedic cartography, aiming to amalgamate the human and non-human experiences and phenomena that transpired within its geographical confines. His deployment of the grid as both a central metaphor and an organisational schema allowed Least Heat-Moon to pioneer a modality of information dissemination and travel narrative, engendering a bifurcated narrative structure. The author partitioned the work into fourteen narrative segments, each corresponding to a designated area on Least Heat-Moon's cartographic survey of Chase County. The narrative partitioning circumvented limitations of linear storytelling. Each grid sector represents an uncharted archaeological stratum, poised for scholarly excavation. Least Heat-Moon constructed this framework to probe the land's concealed intricacies and the sedimented histories the land holds. The cartographic framework, moreover, intended to present the prairie as a fluid, multifaceted, and dynamic expanse. Heat-Moon's depiction suggests a landscape in which geological underpinnings interact with human lives and natural events, and in which human lives and natural events reshape the underpinnings that leave their mark upon the surface. An observer can compare the author's approach to the methodological approaches of archaeologists who demarcate their excavation sites into discrete, potential loci of discovery. Heat-Moon's methodological approach also constitutes a form of deep ecology by encompassing a spectrum of considerations, both physical and metaphysical. Least Heat-Moon employs a spatial rhetoric design that synthesises textuality and geographical space, thereby inviting reader exploration of the book's spatial and geographical texts.

Heat-Moon's narrative method in *PrairyErth* shares certain characteristics with postmodern literary theory, such as fragmentation, an accentuation of localism, and a seemingly chaotic structure. I contend, however, that a distinction lies in the book's overarching purpose.

The book's ecological perspective advocates for a holistic view, focusing on the symbiotic relationships between organisms and their environments as an organic unity. Postmodern literary theory, conversely, often employs fragmentation to challenge totalising narratives and accentuate multiplicity. The dialectic between the text's holistic theme and its fragmented method is both deliberate and instructive. Amidst this dialectic, *PrairyErth* (Least Heat-Moon, 2014) demonstrates the postmodern aesthetic of fragmentation through its kaleidoscopic shifts in narrative focus and abrupt thematic transitions. The text's fractured narrative method, while appearing to conflict with its holistic ecological focus, enables an exploration of the multifaceted meanings of geography and place that reveals how the experience of the landscape interweaves perceptions of permanence and transience. The author's chaotic and interconnected narrative style is akin to a jigsaw schema. Least Heat-Moon orchestrates within a subversive textual/spatial grid, blurring and warping demarcations and following fluid trajectories between illusion and reality.

In a concerted effort to dismantle the observational paradigms of what he terms the "Jeffersonian perfection" (Least Heat-Moon, 2014, p. 364) of the topography imposed by the Homestead Act; he seeks to unveil latent vitality and pluralism that the grid's conceptual boundaries obscure. Each compartment of the grid in Least Heat-Moon's deep map becomes a lens that refracts the reader's perception of a specific "place". Each individual and living entity traversing this cartographic grid is as a nodal point within the grid, where each entity executes its distinct role whilst reciprocally influencing other nodes as other nodes reciprocally influence it.

In *PrairyErth*, Least Heat-Moon treats geographical space as a synthesis of physical location and a discursive intellectual domain where cultural, linguistic, and spiritual factors interact. The metaphor of "geography as text and text as geography" (Least Heat-Moon, 2014, pp. 13, 157) articulates the author's dual endeavour of deciphering the landscape's signs while fabricating a new textual geography. The physical landscape functions as a legible document under the metaphor's framework, and the book becomes a navigable territory for the reader. The book *PrairyErth* synthesises a physical form with the function of an interactive text; a reader's non-linear navigation of the book's sections constructs a conceptual space by weaving topographical features, historical anecdotes, and local folklore into a personal narrative. The author furnishes the interpretive map by structuring the book according to a geographical grid, yet the reader determines the map's final application because

the book's non-linear design necessitates a personal journey of construction.

Moreover, Least Heat-Moon articulates how language exerts authority. Acts of nomenclature and inscription are primary tools for imposing order upon the world. His deep map scrutinises a nexus between language and "place", as well as linguistic dimensions of travel. In this regard, language functions dually, both as a framework for perceiving the environment and as a means of generating knowledge that can inform environmental stewardship. Least Heat-Moon underscores the centrality of language through a triad of arguments. First, he posits language as an instrument of power, capable of asserting dominion through the act of naming (2014). He exemplifies the assertion of dominion through naming by European colonisers who sought to subjugate Native Americans by imposing colonial nomenclatures. The imposition of colonial nomenclatures, Least Heat-Moon argues, severed the intrinsic link between indigenous knowledge and language, leading to the perilous attrition of both (2014). Second, Least Heat-Moon asserts the inextricable connection between language and the historical-cultural fabric of a "place", where language becomes a repository for collective memories and cultural identities (2014). The colonial obliteration of indigenous languages, he illustrates, consequently led to a cultural and identity void among Native Americans in Kansas, demonstrating the loss when this linguistic repository is destroyed. Finally, Least Heat-Moon contends that language is fundamentally tethered to our cognitive frameworks and shapes our worldview (2014). He demonstrates the principle of language shaping worldview by inviting readers to name two distinct plants, "larkspur" and "toad flax", an exercise designed to illuminate how the very act of linguistic denomination influences environmental perception.

By inviting readers to participate in nomenclature, the deep map empowers them to designate personal interpretive trajectories and accentuates the interweaving of geographical, cultural, and personal memories. Inviting readers to participate in nomenclature cultivates a textual concept akin to the "writerly" text posited by Roland Barthes (1974), which transmutes the role of readers from content consumers to context providers. Least Heat-Moon adopts a Barthesian posture in *PrairyErth*, empowering readers to transition into agents in the semiotic process; for instance, by inviting them to name plants such as "larkspur" and "toad flax", the author positions them as active participants who assign meaning to the landscape. A reader attains a book's authentic meaning, according to Least Heat-Moon, only by entering into

a communal “dreamtime” and forging a symbiotic rapport with the text. Nevertheless, in a departure that stands in stark contrast to Barthes’ conceptualisation of the ideal text as a “galaxy of signifiers”, devoid of rigid symbolic linkages, Least Heat-Moon implores the audience to undertake a meticulous examination of the symbols intricately woven into their immediate surroundings. The amalgamation of Least Heat-Moon’s innovative grid system, which partitions the book’s narrative into sections corresponding to a cartographic survey of Chase County, with a broad spectrum of textual diversity furnishes a fertile platform for manifold realities. A fertile platform for manifold realities grants readers the latitude to traverse and dissect various layers of interpretation within the special construct.

Deep Mapping in Spatial Humanities: Concept and Methods

In my analysis of the deep map concept, as exemplified by Least Heat-Moon’s *PrairieEarth*, I will identify the principles that guide its approach to representing and understanding place. I contend that the foundational principles of this deep map approach are a commitment to multi-layered representation, an emphasis on narrative in constructing place-based meaning, an embrace of subjectivity rather than a singular objective truth, and my view of the map as a processual tool for inquiry. I propose that the deep map, as exemplified by Least Heat-Moon, is a tool for deciphering the complexities of place and experience that directly addresses the concerns of the spatial turns.

I recognise the tendency for terms like “deep structure” to become an “academic overgrowth” in some disciplines, obscuring specific meanings. Therefore, I believe it is crucial to clearly delineate the distinct historical trajectory and epistemological foundations of the deep map. To achieve this, I will trace the deep map’s intellectual genealogy through its interconnections with diverse layers of thought and the chronological advancements in cartographic practice. My analysis of this genealogy aims to illuminate the unique contours of its intellectual topography. The analysis also aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of how deep mapping developed as a distinct approach capable of exploring the chrono-topographic complexities and the water-stone metaphors I previously outlined.

Following Heat-Moon’s demonstration, scholars in the spatial humanities began to develop a formal articulation of deep mapping. Trevor M. Harris and David J. Bodenhamer (2015) contributed to the formal articulation of deep mapping while also arguing for the integration of

the concept's framework with other "deep" phenomena, such as deep learning and spatial narratives. The analysis in the present dissertation uses the integrated approach to explore the implications of geographic and topographic variations for humanistic inquiry. Harris (2015) and Jason Kalin (2009) both identify GIS, digital cartographies, Web 2.0 applications, and mobile technologies as central to both the genesis and the elucidation of the spatial humanities. Although GIS, digital cartographies, Web 2.0 applications, and mobile technologies are important, Harris (2015) also acknowledges the indeterminacy and imprecision in terms like "deep mapping", "spatial storytelling", and "spatial narratives". The author re-conceptualises the fluid designations of terms like "deep mapping", "spatial storytelling", and "spatial narratives" as a methodological strength suited to encapsulate the connotations and affective resonances of narrative traditions in the humanities. The fluidity of the designations for terms like "deep mapping", "spatial storytelling", and "spatial narratives" becomes a feature that researchers can leverage when developing mapping approaches tailored to the epistemological requirements of the humanities, approaches that must accommodate experiential, ambiguous, and open-ended forms of knowledge.

Without striving for absolute correspondence with pre-existing geographical frameworks, mapping in the humanities can explore relative modes of representation. Sally Bushell and Rebecca Louise Hutcheon (2025) advocate for particular analytical methods. For example, Bushell and Hutcheon propose "literary topology" as one such approach, which shifts the focus from precise geolocational accuracy to the interconnections, shapes, and relative positioning of elements within a literary world. The "literary topology" method visualises and interprets non-referential or internally-focused spatio-temporal dynamics of fictional and poetic texts. The advocacy for literary topology builds on Johanna Drucker's (2014) earlier argument that visualisation tools in the humanities should become "knowledge generators" capable of provoking new interpretations and insights through the dynamic and open-ended nature of the tools. The acknowledged indeterminacy of "deep mapping" invites the cultivation of mapping practices that are processual and iterative. A processual mapping approach prioritises the act of mapping and the resulting visualisations to generate multiple understandings while rejecting singular cartographic interpretations. For complex literary texts involving subjective or imaginative geographies, mapping achieves a distinct critical function through integrated tools and visualisations that bridge textual criticism with interpretive multiplicity; for instance, mapping

the overlapping and contradictory timelines in William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1992) would not produce a single, definitive map of Yoknapatawpha County, but a series of layered visualisations that make the novel's narrative fragmentation a tangible object of analysis. My adoption of deep mapping and spatial narratives as intellectual architectures stems from a commitment to a processual and multi-perspectival mapping methodology for examining spatial constructs through a dialectic between broad contextual patterns and specific textual details.

GIS technology provides an operational framework for spatial analysis founded on positivist principles of quantitative analysis and pattern identification. The positivist principles of GIS make the technology and the technology's associated tools effective for managing spatial data within scientific disciplines that share the same epistemological framework. However, an emphasis on quantitative precision limits GIS-based tools for inquiries in the humanities because the tools' emphasis cannot represent the qualitative and narrative dimensions that constitute place as a culturally layered phenomenon. For instance, a standard GIS map can show the coordinates of a public square, but the map cannot easily represent the conflicting historical memories, personal stories, and fictional depictions that make that square a site of cultural contestation. To address the representational gap, scholars in the spatial humanities like Bodenhamer and Harris developed the concept of "deep maps" (2010, 2021; 2015). Bodenhamer and Harris conceptualise a deep map as a representational approach that represents the complexity of a place by integrating quantitative data with qualitative evidence, such as historical narratives and personal accounts. The deep map's integration of the diverse sources makes the visualisation of ambiguity and multiple perspectives possible. I first implemented the concept of deep mapping in an artistic practice in 2017 with the *Silhouette of the Illumination* project, as detailed in Chapter 6 (see Section 6.1).

Harris (2015) contended that deep maps facilitate an investigative and interpretive approach that shifts analysis from observation to embodied experience. He argued that a deep map achieves the shift from observation to embodied experience by integrating different forms of data: unconstrained by the static perspective of a single historical map, a researcher can synthesise textual descriptions from novels, historical photographs, and 3D architectural models. This synthesis can foster a critical awareness of how knowledge is constructed from varied sources. The integration of varied evidence can enable the exploration of multiple, contested narratives within a single representation of space and time. Bodenhamer develops the idea of the deep map

as an interpretive approach, arguing that despite the positivist constraints of the underlying technology, a GIS-based deep map can provide an “ideal storyboard for scholars in the humanities” (2015, p. 23). He suggests that a deep map creates an experiential knowledge base because it augments a static, two-dimensional surface to represent the “contradictions and complexities” (Bodenhamer, 2012, p. 12) of a place. The map’s dynamic framework integrates multiple, ambiguous voices and memories, remains open to reinterpretation, and compels the researcher to navigate conflicting evidence.

Drawing upon the work of scholars like Roberts (2016, 2018), I contend that deep mapping offers a good methodology for my analysis of post-technological art because it foregrounds narrative, layered representation, as well as embodied experience. For example, deep mapping’s focus on narrative allows one to analyse how an artwork can layer personal audio diaries onto the GPS coordinates of a site and represent the contested memories of that place in a way that quantitative data cannot. Furthermore, the capacity of deep mapping for multi-layered representation enables a “thick description” that I apply to post-technological experimental art, analysing it not as a single image but as a composition that, like a *Shanshui* scroll, weaves together historical maps, ecological data, and literary texts. Finally, deep mapping’s orientation towards embodied experience provides a framework for me to analyse interactive installations where a spectator’s physical navigation through a gallery helps co-create the artwork’s meaning, generating an encounter that functions reconfigure simple visual representation. By employing the methods of narrative analysis, multi-layered representation, and embodied experience, my research uses deep mapping to ground spatial analysis in specific, layered evidence, revealing how post-technological art reconfigures the relationship between place, memory, and technology.

The “Cultural Syndrome” and the “Shanshui Lens”: A Methodological Dialectic for Deep Mapping

Synthesising these scholarly perspectives, I conceive of a deep map as a multi-layered, multimedia, and detailed depiction of a place, encompassing its inhabitants and their daily lives. A deep map is experiential and embodied, aiming to capture tangible elements together with the intricate relationships with intangible substances, diverse narratives, memories, and the interplay of discourse and ideology from multiple, often contested, perspectives. Deep maps are dynamic and

processual, fostering critical reflexivity. Through their performative and descriptive nature, they produce more-than-representational artefacts. This understanding of deep maps as dynamic platforms is theoretically comparable to what Marko Juvan terms the “cultural syndrome” (2012, pp. 318–320). Juvan’s concept, as elaborated by Vanesa Matajc (2014), addresses the constitutive dynamic existing between material realities (matter) and the symbolic, discursive, and ideological frameworks (meaning) that shape human experience within a given locale.

I introduce the cultural syndrome because of its explicit theorisation of the co-production of tangible place and intangible cultural narratives. Juvan’s framework offers a structured understanding of this co-production dynamic by identifying discursive layering, material sedimentation, and “affective resonance” as key interlinking processes through which physical environments and symbolic meanings mutually constitute each other. This structured approach helps theorise how deep mapping aims to represent this co-constitution. For instance, the concept of discursive layering within the cultural syndrome provides a specific theoretical lens for understanding deep mapping’s aim to incorporate diverse textual, oral, and visual narratives. The process of layering meaning onto place is conceptually similar to the Shanshui aesthetic, where the landscape is a repository of cultural memory and poetic sentiment, continuously enriched by human experience and artistic interpretation. Similarly, the notion of “material sedimentation” within the cultural syndrome, describing the physical shaping of the environment, interacts with the stone aspect of the water-stone metaphor, representing the enduring yet developing material basis upon which fluid narratives and cultural meaning are inscribed. The cultural syndrome, as detailed by Matajc (2014), theorises the kind of multi-vocal and layered narrative environment that deep mapping intends to represent, a goal Harris and Bodenhamer’s emphasis on integrating multiple voices and memories reinforces.

An understanding of this multiple and layered environment, mediated by the “cultural syndrome”, allows me to reveal how deep maps strive to embody the relationships between tangible and intangible elements, and the interplay of discourse and ideology. For instance, Wu’s analysis of the Mancheng Han tomb illustrates this co-production: the tomb’s physical architecture, including its doors and secret chambers, was designed to facilitate the soul’s posthumous journey, a tangible structure shaped by the intangible cultural tradition of *youxian* (游仙, wandering immortals) (2018). The mutual constitution of the material and the symbolic, central to the “cultural syndrome”, embodies a principle of reciprocal interaction that

is also fundamental to the core tenets of the water-stone metaphor, where the seemingly fixed stone of material place is constantly shaped by and gives form to the flowing “water” of human experience, memory, and discourse.

The “affective resonance” identified by Juvan, describing the emotional bonds to place, also connects to the *yijing* or poetic resonance sought in Shanshui aesthetics, where the landscape evokes emotional and intellectual responses through the interplay of seen and unseen, tangible and intangible elements. A specific dynamic shapes the relationships arising from the interplay of seen and unseen, tangible and intangible elements: intangible elements are multiple and contested, interacting with the fixed, yet still developing, material world. Furthermore, language, stories, and representational systems mediate the constant state of negotiation between intangible and material elements, as do the underlying power structures and belief systems of ideology that influence which narratives are privileged or suppressed. The “cultural syndrome” framework, therefore, provides a conceptual basis for recognising and analysing the previously described interdependencies, suggesting that the material and the symbolic, the experienced and the narrated, are inextricably linked and mutually formative. The theoretical grounding provided by the “cultural syndrome” framework is necessary because deep mapping aspires to integrate a depth of complexity that superficial representations typically exclude, by capturing this depth of complexity and rendering it navigable.

The “Either Side of Delphy Bridge” Project

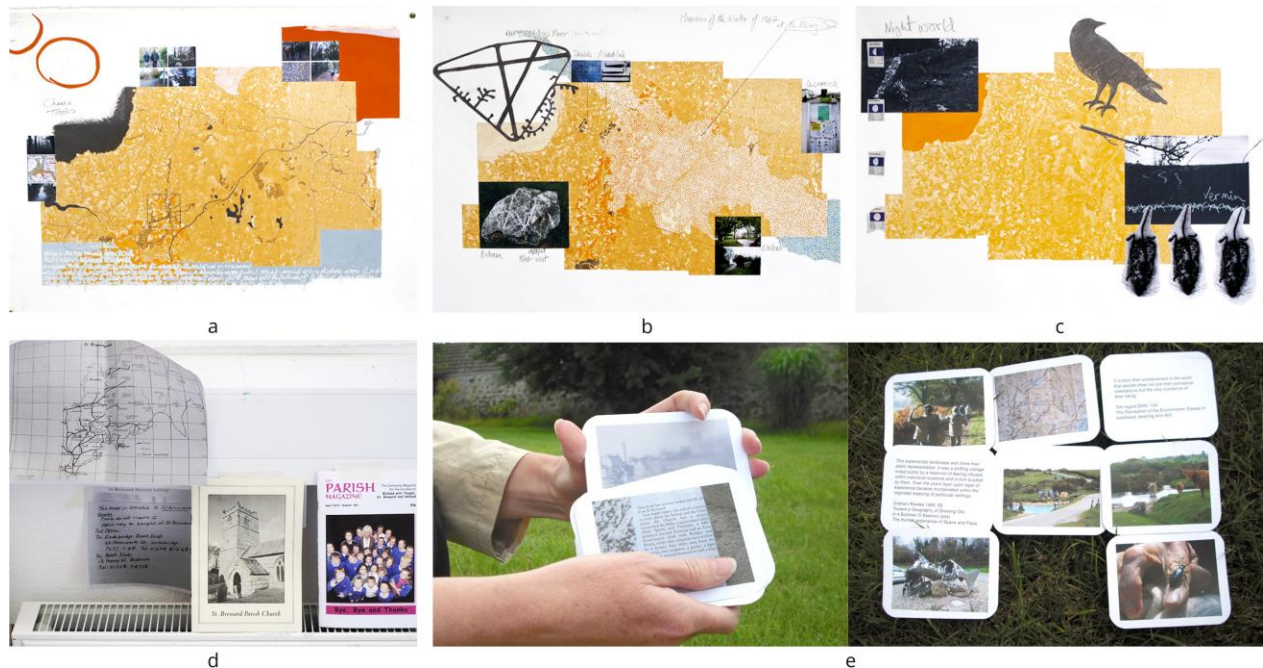


Figure 17. Methodological Artefacts from the “Either Side of Delphy Bridge” (ESDB) Deep Mapping Project. This figure illustrates (a-c) examples of Iain Biggs’s development worksheets used for layering diverse data, and (d-e) examples of archival materials and participatory tools employed within the project. Sources: Figure a-d, <https://www.iainbiggs.co.uk/either-side-of-delphy-bridge/>, © 2025 Iain Biggs; Figure e, <https://janebaileycreativepractice.water.blog/either-side-of-delphy-bridge/>, © 2025 Jane Bailey.

Demonstrating the principles of co-production theorised through the “cultural syndrome”, the “Either Side of Delphy Bridge” (ESDB) deep mapping project (Figure 17), as proposed by Jane Bailey and Iain Biggs (2012), exemplifies the ambition to capture complexity through its methodology. As part of the project, the research team conducted “offline” mapping sessions, physically manipulating and layering images, quotes, concepts, and various other forms of material within a shared space to investigate their interconnections. Iain Biggs’s developmental worksheets visually express this process (Figure 17a-c), where base maps are overlaid with photographic details of landscape, handwritten annotations reflecting personal narratives or thematic exploration, historical sketches, and symbolic marks.

The worksheet *Listening and Speaking (Power)* (Figure 17a) combines cartographic elements with experiential photographs and textural reflections to explore the concept of power within a specific locale. Similarly, *Memories of the Winter of 1947 at the Rising Sun* (Figure 17b) layers specific locations with historical memory, visually linking tangible places to

intangible recollections of a significant past event. *The Night world worksheet* (Figure 17c) further illustrates the layering technique, utilising stark visual contrasts and symbolic imagery, such as a crow and representations of “vermin”, to investigate less conventional or unsettling dimensions of the rural environment, embodying intangible affective responses to place. The methodological exploration of diverse elements utilised tangible items, among them maps, photographs, and the physical arrangement of materials, as representations for intangible phenomena. The 1947 winter narrative illustrates these specific historical recollections, personal stories captured in textual annotations across the worksheets, and probes of power or community identity evident in parish materials suggest potentially local ideologies (Figure 17d). The exploration aimed to reveal emergent patterns and forge new understanding between these components.

Complementing these individual and researcher-driven investigations, the *Pack o’ Cards* dialogue tool (Figure 17e), developed by Jane Bailey, introduced a distinctly participatory and co-creative dimensions to elicitation and interweaving of narratives. The set of fifty-two hand-size cards, featuring a mix of photographic images (some taken by participants themselves), quotes from conversations, and excerpts from academic text, was designed as a tangible, playful means to stimulate dialogue and explore connectivity within a collaborative setting. The potency of the cards, as Bailey and Biggs (2014; 2012), lay in their interactive use: participants would shuffle, reveal, and physically arrange the cards in relation to one another, creating a temporary, shared “site” for storytelling and meaning-making based on the visual and textual prompts.

The methodological process involving shared interpretation and the physical juxtaposition of the cards facilitates expression of individual narratives and experiences, allowing them to be woven together. The resulting online, multimedia presentation aimed to embody these co-constructed understandings and to foster further insights through user participation with the interactive deep mapping platform; for example, a user might add a personal memory of a local flood, which, when integrated into the platform, reveals an unexpected correlation with historical accounts of industrial pollution in the same area, prompting a new line of inquiry into the landscape’s environmental history. The online, multimedia presentation is an interactive artwork. It is a practical attempt to represent the co-constituted nature of place by weaving together a multilayered array of distinct experiential threads, diverse genres, varied knowledge frameworks, and multiple narrative viewpoints.

In the project's representation, the physical elements become imbued with, and inseparable from, the diverse intangible narratives and experiences of its older adult inhabitants. The methodological assemblage, encompassing the layered worksheets, collaborative card sessions, and the online multimedia presentation, mirrors how a “cultural syndrome” might manifest with the discursive layering of personal, collective, and co-created memory, arising from both individual reflection on worksheets and collaborative card sessions, onto the “material sedimentation” of the Delphy Bridge environment and its representations, fostering an “affective resonance” for both participants and eventual users of the deep map.

Tarek Atoui's *Inner Garden*

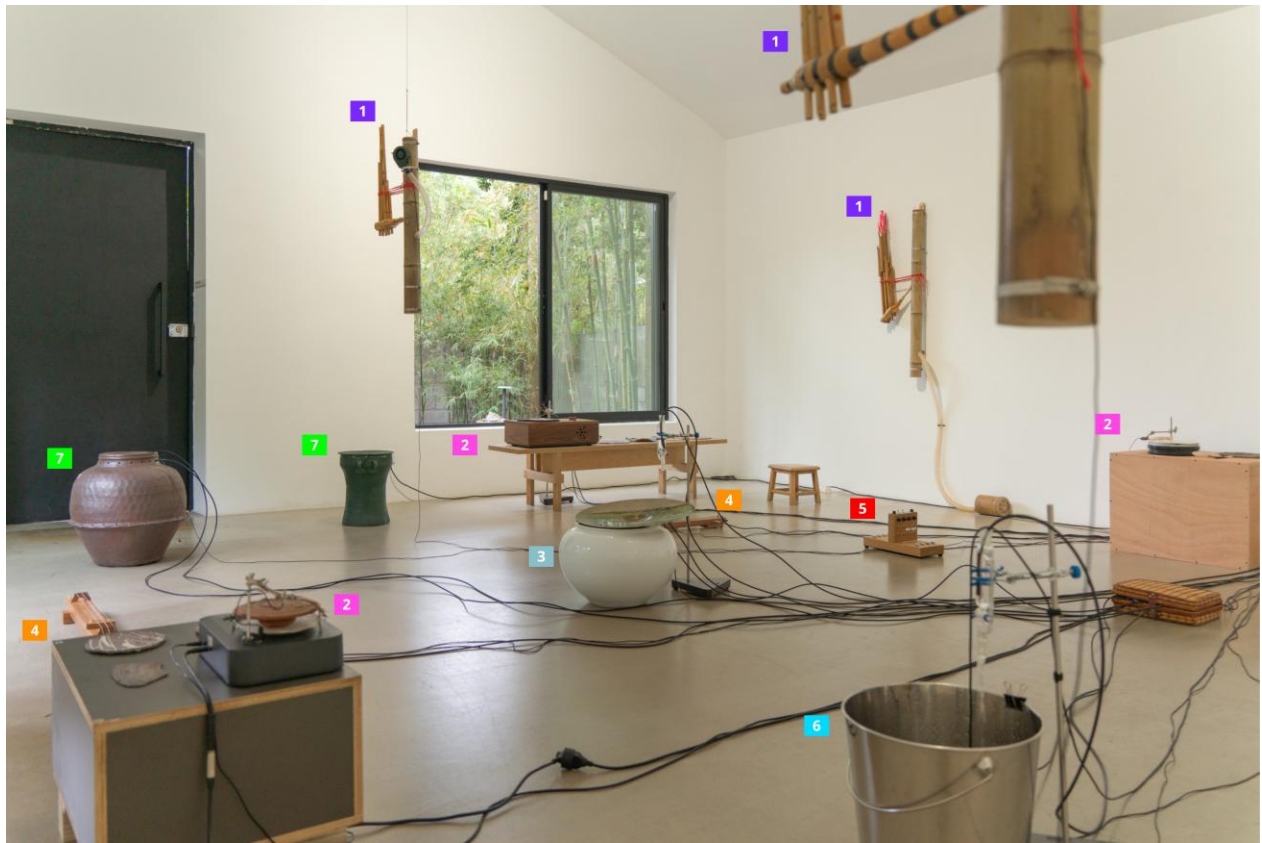


Figure 18. Tarek Atoui, *The Ground Septet*. Installation view from the exhibition *Inner Garden*, 2025, Mirrored (an independent art space founded by Vitamin Creative Space in 2002), Guangzhou, China. The numbered labels highlight various custom-designed instruments and sound-producing apparatuses that constitute this art installation, including components such as “The Wooden Drone”, “The Spin”, “The connected Ponds”, “The Trichord”. “The Spin Collector”, “The Duofluctus”, and “The Spin Library”. A video recording of the complete live performance of the musical work can be accessed at: <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/J6u84Ld-qowdawOff0AuUQ>. Image source: Vitamin Creative Space (<https://vitamincreativespace.com/en/?work=tarek-atoui-inner-garden>). © 2025 Tarek Atoui and Vitamin Creative Space.

Tarek Atoui's exhibition *Inner Garden* (Figure 18) further exemplifies principles of deep mapping and the dynamics of a cultural syndrome within a contemporary artwork. Atoui's work usually involves the meticulous collection and transformation of sounds of human activity, industrial processes, or natural phenomena originating from specific locales, which are then rendered through custom-designed sculptural instruments, creating an immersive sonic environment. In *Inner Garden*, the methodology culminates in the constitution of a poetic, almost liminal, garden space among virtual (evoked and constructed by sound), the physical (the tangible instruments) and the exhibition venue. Here, sound becomes a narrative component of a deep map. Sonic textures from local recordings, the material qualities of the instruments, and the interactions of visitors with these instruments represent analogues for the narratives, experiential data, and voices that deep maps seek to capture and interweave. The auditory cartography constructs an experiential site that embodies representation of a place, where the intangible (sound, memory, evoked emotion) imbues the tangible (instruments, physical space) with developing meaning, inviting an embodied interaction from the listener-participant.

Within the experiential site, a central component of the exhibition, *The Ground Septet* further refines the auditory cartography; its seven distinct instruments, developed from research into the soundscapes and traditional instruments of the Pearl River Delta³⁰, collectively participate in a sonic form of *zaoyuan* (造園). From this septet, specific instruments such as "The Connected Ponds" present the "water" elements of the water-stone metaphor through fluid sonics contributing to a *yijing* or organic dynamism and layering discursive environmental narratives. In contrast, other components of the septet, namely its rotational and archival instruments like "The Spin" and "The Spin Library" (Figure 18, instrument 2) embody cyclical time and the "material sedimentation" of collected sonic memories, offering rhythms and curated soundscapes that enrich the garden's depth. Further elements of this septet, the melodic interventions from "The Trichord" (Figure 18, instrument 4) and the atmospheric grounding of "The Wooden Drone" (Figure 18, instrument 7) then deepen the garden's "affective resonance" with particular cultural voices and a *yijing*. A computer-programmed sequence orchestrates these diverse sonic agents within *The Ground Septet* into an evolving score, a complex,

³⁰ The Pearl River and its tributaries empty into the South China Sea, forming a vast delta in southern China. This delta has become a highly urbanised global economic hub, renowned for its manufacturing and encompassing major cities such as Guangzhou (Canton) and Shenzhen. The region's history of maritime trade, distinctive agricultural practices, and cultural traditions have influenced its local art forms and architectural styles.

post-technological narrative structure that redefines the experience of place. Through such intricate interplay, the septet transforms the Mirrored Garden, an independently funded art institution fostering an experiential “field” where contemporary art, quotidian life, and nature-oriented practices converge, by weaving an intangible tapestry of local histories and sensory experiences onto its physical fabric. The process cultivates an “inner garden” wherein the listener navigates and co-creates meaning within a multi-layered, chrono-topographic soundscape. What Atoui’s installation demonstrates is sound’s capacity as a significant deep mapping medium to represent the co-constituted nature of place, memory and perception, forging a unique experiential narrative.

The preceding discussion has positioned deep mapping as a representational technique as well as a critical methodological intervention capable of addressing the multi-scalar and multi-perspectival nature of place and experience. My inclusion of the cultural syndrome further enriches the understanding by offering a theoretical lens to elucidate how deep maps navigate the complex interplay between local manifestations and broader ideological currents. The conceptual pairing clarifies the topological connections and mutual embedding trajectories that exist between the local and global. Deep maps, by their very design, strive to make these intricate connections legible. The ESDB project, for instance, while rooted in its specific Cornish locale, consciously aimed for its online deep map to possess “potential global online reach” (Bailey & Biggs, 2012, p. 328). Bailey and Biggs (2012) suggest this ambition was to be realised through mechanisms such as user-designed “narrative threads of connectivity” that could be “woven into online mapping”. Drawing on the “cultural syndrome”, I understand this endeavour as an attempt to demonstrate how local narratives and material sedimentations (the Delphy Bridge environment and its community stories) are nodes that enter into a dialogic relationship with, and are reciprocally shaped by broader, potentially global, networks of experience and discourse. The “cultural syndrome”, thus, helps to theorise the ESDB project’s aspiration to reconfigure its immediate geographical boundaries, illustrating how local specificities can inform and be informed by wider socio-cultural dynamics.

The capacity of deep maps to bridge scales is further underscored by Bodenhamer’s (2021) articulation of their ability to integrate entities across macro, meso, and micro levels. He characterises deep mapping as a method involving the amalgamation of impersonal, often data-intensive information concerning a specific location with the subjective understanding

acquired through direct, personal interaction with the place; or, to put it another way, the synthesis of objective, factual data with the rich, qualitative insights that emerge from lived experience. An interactive deep map that facilitates user navigation from specific, local narratives, such as an oral history tied to a particular building or a personal memory evoked by a landscape feature, to broader historical, social, or ideological context like regional economic data or national policies impacting the community, constitutes a practical demonstration of this local-global embedding. The “cultural syndrome”, in the context, provides the necessary theoretical language. The framework allows for my description of the dialectical interplay between the local instantiation of global discourses and the capacity of local practices to contribute to, reflect, or contest these wider currents. Deep maps, especially those designed with interactivity and user participation in mind, are thus uniquely positioned to explore and represent this dynamic, reciprocal relationship between the particular and the universal, the tangible and the ideological.

The genealogy of deep mapping, from the work of Least Heat-Moon to its evolution within the spatial humanities and its conceptualisation through the “cultural syndrome”, has produced a methodological intervention suitable for this research by providing the capacity to address the multi-scalar and multi-perspectival nature of place and experience. In contrast to conventional mapping, deep mapping incorporates qualitative data, narrative, and experiential accounts. Deep mapping offers a method to put the theoretical frameworks developed in the preceding sections into operation. The multi-layered architecture that deep maps allow supports visualising and narrating “fluid temporalities” and “deep time”. The structures that deep maps allow support the juxtaposition and interweaving of temporal strata, ranging from the geological and media-archaeological deep time to the experiential and embodied “now-ness”, as found in *Shanshui*’s concept of *you*, all within the context of a specific place.

Furthermore, I contend that deep mapping provides an ideal arena for investigating the “water-stone metaphor”. It enables the mapping of both the “watery” flows of data, discourse, and experiences, and the “stony” anchors of material sites, cultural memories, and conceptual frameworks. Deep mapping facilitates the representation of how elements interact, co-constitute, and leave traces upon one another within a given locale, rendering the abstract dynamics of the water-stone interplay concrete and analysable. By foregrounding the layered nature of place and the interplay of diverse voices and materialities, deep mapping thus provides a framework for analysing the complex, chrono-topographical spatial narratives central to my study. Its capacity for

multi-perspectival representation connects with the *Shanshui* aesthetic principle of *sandian toushi* 散點透視 (moving vantage point or multiple perspectives), which, as discussed in Section 4.1.2 in the context of Fan Kuan and Huang Gongwang, allows for the depiction of a landscape as if viewed from multiple points experienced sequentially.

Deep mapping, similarly, encourages the integration of various viewpoints and narrative threads, creating an understanding of place that mirrors the dynamic interaction fostered by *you*. The emphasis of deep mapping on capturing the affective and atmospheric qualities of a place also reflects a principle central to the *Shanshui* pursuit of *qiyun*: the conveyance of a subject's intangible spirit and experiential depth. Just as *qiyun* imbues a painted landscape with a vitality irreducible to representation, deep mapping conveys the lived experience of a location through multiple media and narrative forms. The method's connection to the concept of *yijing* lies in its capacity for co-creation. *Yijing* emerges from the spectator's imaginative interaction with an artwork, allowing for a perception of the interplay between permanence and flux. Interactive and participatory deep mapping similarly invites the audience to co-construct meaning, fostering data representation toward an understanding of place.

5. Post-Technological Screens and Reflective Spaces

In this chapter, I investigate post-technological screen-based art, focusing on how specific artistic practices explore and reconfigure notions of deep time, material and cultural memory, and layered spatiality. To conduct my investigation, I employ the deep-*shanshui* lens, an analytical apparatus I developed in preceding chapters. The deep-*shanshui* lens I have constructed integrates chrono-topographic rhetoric, the water-stone metaphor, and Shanshui-informed deep mapping. I combine the components of this lens with key theories concerning the screen as a dynamically charged “empty space” to provide a critical framework for examining selected artworks. I adopt Deleuze’s (1986) conceptualisation of the screen as an omni-directional table of information. His framework re-frames the screen as a dynamic field of perpetual reorganisation, where new images and spatial relations can constantly emerge from any point on its surface. Contemporary techno-mediated screens in artworks like Hito Steyerl’s reshape information and perception through this Deleuzian application, whereas, within many Western frameworks, traditional screens have often been regarded as passive displays. Wu’s (1996) *Double Screen* and Anne Friedberg’s (2009) *Virtual Window* provide foundational concepts of screen-mediated spatial representation that inform the deep-*shanshui* lens perspective. My methodology integrates their analyses of the frame and virtuality to construct a method for examining contemporary screen practices.

In the following sections, I propose a three-part typology of screen practices, which I categorise based on distinct modes of spatial organisation and interaction. The first category I explore through the deep-*shanshui* lens is rhizomatic networks. Rhizomatic networks are as defined by their non-hierarchical, acentred, and interconnected structures. The operational logic of such networks exemplifies the displacement of the sequential narrative, characteristic of traditional cinema, by the database model that defines new media, a transition prefigured in Deleuze’s film philosophy and theorised within new media studies. A conventional, arboreal hierarchy, exemplified by a linear film narrative, contrasts with a rhizomatic network like the internet or Nam June Paik’s *TV Garden* (1974), a video installation whose acentred and non-hierarchical spatial arrangement of monitors and plants physically permits multiple, simultaneous points of entry and exploration. My typological investigation later addresses artistic practices that employ double or doubled screens. Through diverse post-technological approaches,

these screen configurations generate mirrored, layered, or hybrid realities that constitute virtual windows, or *ping* 屏, and create nested spatial architectures. Dan Graham's installations use video feedback to create doubled realities that confront the viewer with multiple, simultaneous versions of the self. In such installations, the ego is "liable to 'recognize' in the 'other'" (Lefebvre, 1992, p. 185) as an inverted image, which represents the ego. Subsequently, I will identify layered visualities as a third category of screen practice and distinguish these artistic practices by their integrated presentation of multiple strata of visual information, a method of spatial construction that explores complex notions of depth, palimpsestic accumulation, and coexisting spatio-temporal realities.

Wu's (1996, 2010) framework for the Chinese *pingfeng* 屏風, or screen, reveals a foundational aesthetic of layered representation that sets a key historical precedent for my methodology. The *pingfeng*'s simultaneous existence as an architectural object dividing physical space, a medium for pictorial representation, and a representation of space generates a complex and ambiguous spatial dynamic.³¹ The traditional principle of *kuangjing* 框景, or framed scenery, in Chinese garden design offers another crucial antecedent for these contemporary spatial configurations. Chinese gardens employ architectural elements like *kongchuang* 空窗, or empty windows, are employed to deliberately structure views, transforming the environment into a composed representation of space and creating a sense of layered depth. A *kongchuang* in a Suzhou garden, for instance, might frame a distant pavilion that in turn contains its own distinct view, producing a "scene within a scene". These historical techniques of spatial layering and nested framing therefore provide a specific conceptual framework for analysing the recursive and multi-layered architectures explored in post-technological art. The aesthetic strategies of historical forms provide a "cultural interface" for interacting with new media environments.

³¹ The screen's capacity to be an object, a medium, and a representation gives it a multiple reference. While the English term "screen" also includes environmental functions such as partitioning, filtering, and concealment, Wu's analysis of the *pingfeng* (1996, 2010) provides a model where the architectural and pictorial functions are integrated, prompting a re-examination of theoretical frameworks that have historically privileged the screen's optical or representational role.



Figure 19. Haru Ji and Graham Wakefield, *Archipelago*, 2013–. Image source: artificialnature.net (<https://artificialnature.net/>). © 2025 Haru Ji and Graham Wakefield.

A defining characteristic of post-technological experimental art is the technological transformation of the screen into an interactive virtual window, or *ping* 屏 (screen-as-frame), that opens onto complex, nested realities (Friedberg, 2009; Jones, 2008; Munster, 2006; Wu, 1996, 2010). The first approach transforms physical materials into interactive interfaces by projecting computationally generated, real-time visual information onto them. For instance, in the *Archipelago* (2013–) (Figure 19) by Haru Ji and Graham Wakefield (2016), an interactive projection onto a malleable sand landscape transforms the material into a dynamic interface where the topography, shaped by participants, as well as their movements and shadows, alters

the projected visuals.



Figure 20. Bill Seaman, *The World Generator / The Engine of Desire*, 1996–97. Image source: Bill Seaman Studio (https://billseaman.com/works/1997_world_generator.html). © 2025 Bill Seaman

The second approach involves constructing layered realities within computer-generated three-dimensional environments. A virtual reality artwork, for instance, might allow a user to touch a panel that opens into a new, self-contained world, creating a recursive spatial experience. Bill Seaman's *The World Generator / The Engine of Desire* (1996–97) (Figure 20) exemplifies this approach by enabling a participant to interact with a computer-mediated mechanism that generates a complex virtual world from the combination and recombination of media elements, creating a recursive spatial experience.



Figure 21. Isaac Julien, *Ten Thousand Waves*, 2010. Composite image showing installation views (left) and architectural diagrams (right). The multi-screen installation generates a nested, non-Euclidean architecture that layers virtual constructs over the physical exhibition space. Image sources: (left) The Museum of Modern Art (https://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2013/11/25/behind-the-screens-installing-isaac-juliens-ten-thousand-waves/); (right) Isaac Julien Studio (<https://www.isaacjulien.com/projects/ten-thousand-waves/>). © 2025 Isaac Julien.

The third approach employs spatial projections to foster complex dialogues between different orders of space, such as the virtual and the actual. Isaac Julien’s multi-screen installation *Ten Thousand Waves* (2010) (Figure 21), for example, generates nested and often non-Euclidean architectures that layer virtual constructs over physical environments. This layering can involve altering spatial coordinates to deliberately disorient the viewer’s vision. In such works, the resulting effect can produce a recursive layering of spaces, generating a “space within a space” that transgresses conventional perceptions of dimensionality. The use of video feedback loops, for instance, can produce a mirror effect where the screen becomes a surface that is both imaginary and concrete, challenging the viewer to apprehend a flat plane that simultaneously contains temporal depth.

5.1 The Rhizomatic Screen: Navigating Fragmented Network and Heterotopic Spatial Terrains

This section analyses post-technological screen environments characterised by fragmentation,

acentred networks, non-linear navigation, and distributed presence. To understand these complex screen-based phenomena, my investigation employs Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome (2007), Lefebvre's theories of social space (1992, 2009), and Foucault's concept of heterotopia (1986). I interpret and mediate these theoretical applications through the deep-*Shanshui* analytical toolkit that I developed in Chapter 4. My core objective is to demonstrate how contemporary screen practices reconfigure spatial and temporal experiences, shifting from hierarchical modes of interaction to post-technological terrains where navigation is non-linear, systems are interconnected, and conventional spatial coordinates are deliberately destabilised. I focus on how spectators navigate fragmented and acentred environments, and how they produce meaning within such interconnected landscapes. The following discussion will demonstrate how the deep-*Shanshui* lens, which I ground in a cross-cultural dialogue that draws from critical theories and diverse spatial philosophies, dissects the multifaceted nature of rhizomatic screen encounters.



Figure 22. Nam June Paik, *TV Garden*, 1974 (2000 version). Installation view. Colour video with sound (29 min.), minimum of 30 television sets, and live plants; dimensions variable. Source: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation (<https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/9537>). © 2025 Estate of Nam June Paik.

Nam June Paik's installation, *TV Garden* (1974/2002) (Figure 22), is a key case study for my exploration. The work exemplifies how these theoretical concepts manifest in post-technological experimental art. The enduring influence and conceptual relevance of Paik's vision are demonstrated by contemporary reinterpretations such as Keith Lam's *TTTV Garden* (2022-2023), which translates Paik's foundational ideas into the current technological environment. This section introduces the work of other artists to demonstrate the breadth of these thematic explorations. I will provide detailed analyses of their specific contributions to layered and doubled screen concepts in subsequent sections.

5.1.1 Nam June Paik's Garden as Rhizome



Figure 23. Nam June Paik, *Global Groove*, 1973. Video stills. Color video with sound (approx. 28 min.). Source: Internet Archive (<https://archive.org/details/1973namjunepaikglobalgroove720>). © 2025 Estate of Nam June Paik.

I contend that Paik’s *TV Garden* exemplifies how Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the rhizome offers an effective analytical tool for interpreting the structure and experience of many contemporary post-technological spaces. In their formulation, the rhizome stands in contrast to arboreal or tree-like structures, which are characterised by a central root, hierarchical organisation, and linear pathways (Deleuze, 2007; Zdebik, 2019). For example, a traditional book is often arboreal, with a clear beginning, middle, and end, and chapters that follow a linear sequence. In contrast, the internet, multi-window interfaces, hyperlinked environments, and networked art installations exhibit rhizomatic characteristics that augment hierarchical structures of knowledge and experience. In *TV Garden*, Paik dispersed numerous television monitors amongst live plants, each displaying Paik’s video *Global Groove* (1973) (Figure 23), which is a rapid-fire collage of disparate cultural performances and images. The installation lacks a central focal point or a prescribed viewing sequence; spectators wander through the “garden”, encountering screens from various angles, some facing upwards, others nestled sideways. The spatial arrangement of *TV Garden* connects any point—a screen, a plant, a spectator’s position—to any other, fosters multiple, non-hierarchical entryways and exits in

contrast to arboreal structures, and embodies the rhizome's principles of acentred connectivity and multiplicity.

My analysis illuminates the layered complexity of *TV Garden* by examining the rhizomatic relationship between its physical installation and the video content of *Global Groove*. This rhizomatic structure arises from the video's dynamic and heterogeneous composition: a vibrant collage that rapidly interweaves artists' films, television commercials, and Paik's earlier pieces, presented as constantly changing channels of media entertainment drawn from around the world. The video's compositional strategy resists a singular narrative focus, offering instead a multiplicity of cultural fragments and media forms that encourage a non-linear, interconnected, and ultimately rhizomatic mode of interaction from the spectator. For the spectator, interaction with *TV Garden* unfolds as a process of *you* (aesthetic strolling), which I discussed in Section 4.1.2. This process involves an embodied and self-directed navigation through the rhizomatic arrangement of television monitors and organic flora. Applying Friedberg's theorisation of the screen as a "virtual window" (2009), which constitutes a framed aperture mediating between the spectator's space and the represented world, reveals each monitor as demonstrating fragmented glimpses of *Global Groove*'s equally rhizomatic video stream. In doing so, each monitor multiplies perspectives and invites the spectator to navigate and synthesise meaning from these disparate, yet interconnected, visual and temporal portals. Following a Marshall McLuhan-esque logic (McLuhan, 1964), the fundamental mechanism of the techno-mediated screens in *TV Garden* involves presenting fragmented portions of a larger, implied whole, a process that prompts the spectator's synthesis of a coherent and personal experience.

A spectator undertakes a peripatetic journey through *TV Garden*'s rhizomatic arrangement of television monitors and organic flora, which constitutes a hybrid techno-cultural environment. Within this hybrid setting, I argue that the spectator's perception of the conventional distinction between natural and artificial elements, and between physical and mediated realities, becomes fluid and subject to reconfiguration. The artwork's dynamic extends the interrogation of physical and mediated realities found in early theories of cyberspace (Barlow, 1996). Where early conceptualisations of cyberspace often posited a disembodied virtual realm founded on a distinction between information and materiality, Paik's installation grounds the ontological questioning in a physical environment, creating what Faßler and Halbach term

a topological ambiguity between “inside” and “outside” through the interplay of the body, technology, and space (1994). A spectator’s physical navigation and sensory perception of the intermingled screens and plants instigates a continuous process of negotiating the spectator’s sense of presence and synthesising a personal narrative from the juxtaposition of organic and techno-mediated elements. Viewing the CRT monitors through a media-archaeological lens (Zielinski, 2006a) which uncovers the “deep time of the media”, reveals them as technological artefacts defined by their histories and materialities. An awareness of the monitors as historical artefacts, each with its own technological deep time, may thus inform a spectator’s journey, adding another layer to the installation’s rhizomatic network and highlighting a temporal contrast between the geological lifespan of media hardware and the biological rhythms of the surrounding flora.

TV Garden manifests Paik’s stated aim to “humanise technology” (Hanhardt, 1982, p. 101) and foster a more holistic, less rigidly structured interaction with media. I propose a comparative analysis of the installation’s acented structure through specific East Asian conceptions of time-space perception. For instance, scholarly work on traditional East Asian landscape appreciation consistently emphasises experiential journeys and embodied understanding (Tschumi, 2020; Wang X. & Jin, 2014, 2017). Although I do not claim direct causal links, Paik’s documented engagement with his Korean and Buddhist heritage in other works provides a productive context for placing *TV Garden* in dialogue with East Asian philosophical and aesthetic traditions. The aforementioned philosophical and aesthetic traditions prioritise fluidity, interconnectedness, and the spectator’s role in shaping experience. As a tool from the deep-*Shanshui* framework, chrono-topographic rhetoric incorporates these East Asian time-space sensibilities and facilitates the mapping of fluid spectator pathways within *TV Garden*’s immersive environment. A chrono-topographic analysis, therefore, augments a purely spatial analysis of navigation to reveal the installation’s layered temporalities, specifically the contrast between the geological deep time of the electronic hardware and the cyclical, biological time of the living plants.

5.1.2 Produced Space and Layered Visuality

TV Garden transforms the museum or gallery space into a hybrid techno-natural territory that functions as a heterotopia, wherein nature and technology, the organic and the electronic, initiate a distinct dialogue. Within Paik’s installation, the specific arrangement of techno-mediated screens produces this contemporary heterotopia. Different rules govern heterotopias that exist within

society, reflecting, contesting, and sometimes reconfiguring prevailing power dynamics and social interactions. Paik's installation creates a heterotopic "other space" where the integration of television into a garden setting defamiliarizes the familiar technology. The resulting heterotopic environment constructs a specific *yijing*, that affords a re-evaluation of the spectator's relationship with media and nature.

If we apply Lefebvre's theories of social space production (1992, 2009) and Foucault's concept of heterotopia (1986), we see fragmented techno-mediated environments as produced social spaces and "other spaces". The functional void of a techno-mediated screen constitutes a site for the production and reproduction of meaning. Daoist concepts of *xū* (虛) and *wu* (無), as developed by thinkers like Laozi and Zhuangzi, can be used to elucidate the screen's functional void (Zong, 1981, 1987, 2011). An interpretation of the screen's functional void through the Daoist understanding of emptiness re-frames this apparent absence as a dynamic potentiality for perception and generation. The application of Lefebvre's concept of space as a social product and the interpretation of the concept through a Daoist perspective render the screen as a field of potentiality that inhabits absence. Data, images, and spectator interactions fill and reconfigure the field. Through the deep-*Shanshui* lens I analyse the dynamic interplay on the screen between presence and absence and find that it contributes to the social production and experiential qualities of *TV Garden*'s hybrid techno-natural realm. In the dynamic between presence and absence, informed by a cross-cultural dialogue between Lefebvre and Daoism, I find presence to be the actuality of the electronic images and plants, and absence to be the potentiality of the conceptual space between screens and the monitors' off-air state. The screen reconfigures the screen's role from a conduit for broadcast content into an agent in the production of spatial and social meaning.

Moreover, the screen interfaces in *TV Garden* and other post-technological art manifest as dispersed and fragmenting mechanisms. While not AR, VR or MR in the contemporary sense, I contend that Paik's work prefigures the layering and interpretation of different realities. The multiple television screens acquire a status of being "virtual windows", conceptually framed apertures onto other worlds that offer a glimpse into the fragmented, globalised cultural landscape presented in *Global Groove*. Viewing these multiple, angled screens simultaneously, interspersed with physical plants, disrupts a singular perspectival view and creates an experiential field that is both fragmented and interconnected. The screens are surfaces or zones where different realities

(the artificial garden, the electronic imagery), information layers (disparate cultural clips), and perceptual modes intersect and interact. Wu's (1996, 2010) analysis of the Chinese *pingfeng* (屏風, screen) and *chongping* (重屏, double screen) provides an East Asian perspective for interpreting the layered spatial configurations in *TV Garden*. The *pingfeng*, as a physical object, divides and defines space, while also providing a surface for representation. The array of television sets creates multiple, shifting visual planes within the garden, a strategy functionally analogous to a proliferation of modern *pingfeng*.

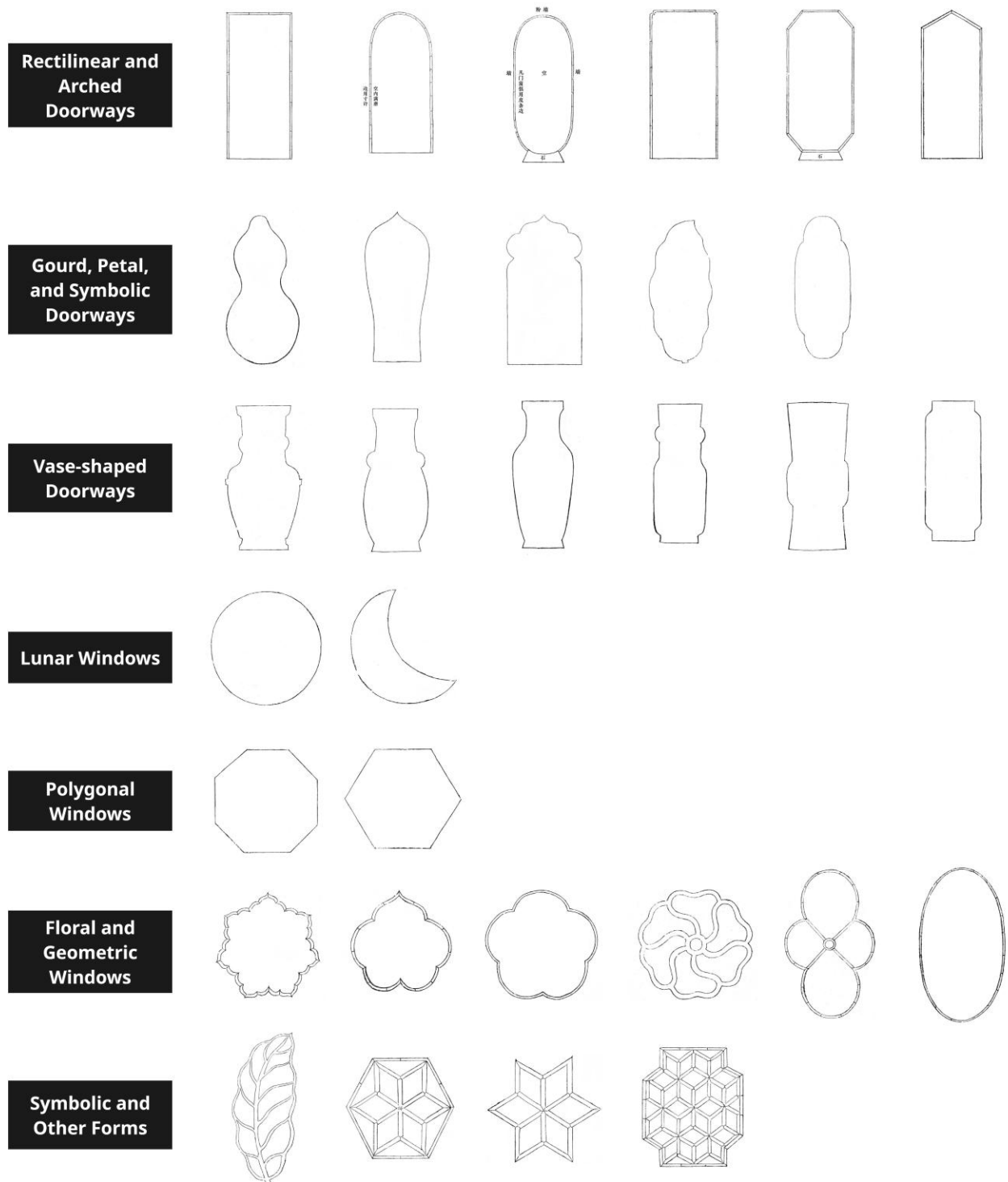


Figure 24. Typology of *Kuangjing*. The diagrams illustrate various forms of doorways and windows used to create *kuangjing*.
 Diagram accessible at:
<https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVJeWoOAK=?moveToWidget=3458764634691797501&cot=14> (accessed 16 September 2025). Source: Ji, C. (2021). *Yuan Ye* 園冶. Annotated by Z. Zhang. Sanqin Publishing House.



Figure 25. Application of *Kuangjing* in Classical Chinese Gardens. This collage demonstrates the practical application of *kuangjing*, where apertures function as framing devices to *jiejing* and transform the landscape into a series of living paintings, inviting an experience of *you*.

The viewing experience thus exhibits aesthetic qualities comparable to the layered representation in Chinese *pingfeng* painting and the principle of *kuangjing* (框景, framed scenery) in Chinese gardens. The classical treatise *Yuan Ye* 園冶 (Ji C., 2021) provides a comprehensive typology of the apertures used for this technique, which function as framing devices to *jiejing* (借景, borrow scenery), and transform the landscape into a series of living paintings. As illustrated in Figure 24, these forms range from rectilinear and arched doorways, such as the *quanmen shi* (圈門式, Round Doorway) and *zhigui shi* (執圭式, Ceremonial Tablet Doorway), to symbolic shapes including the *hulu shi* (葫蘆式, Gourd-shaped) and *lianban shi* (蓮瓣式, Lotus Petal) doorways. The treatise also details various window designs, from the simple *yuechuang shi* (月窗式, Full Moon) and *pianyue shi* (片月式, Crescent Moon) windows to more complex floral and geometric patterns like the *meihua shi* (梅花式, Plum Blossom) and *linghua shi* (菱花式, Diamond-flower) windows. Each form is designed to structure the gaze and mediate the relationship between interior and exterior, creating layered depth and inviting an experience of *you*. Figure 25 demonstrates the practical application of these principles. The installation thus invites spectators into a form of *you*, where the television monitors, functioning as 'virtual windows,' structure a hybrid landscape of nature and media.



Figure 26. Keith Lam, *TTTV Garden*, 2022-2023. Installation views from “Hylozoism: An Arts & Technology Exhibition” at HKDI Gallery (top four images) and screenshots from 24/7 Twitch livestream (bottom four images). Mixed media installation including overhead LED screen, computer simulation, real-time news analysis, indoor vertical farming system, live plants, and 24/7 social media livestream; dimensions variable. Source: Keith Lam (<https://keithlyk.net/TTTV-Garden>) and YouTube (<https://youtu.be/DZnmIvC6Mg0>). © 2025 Keith Lam.

Paik’s *TV Garden* demonstrates how early post-technological art began to explore the spatial complexities that emerge from a rhizomatic treatment of screens, combined with the heterotopic potentials of media environments. A continuation of Paik’s artistic inquiries is evident in contemporary works such as Keith Lam’s *TTTV Garden* (Figure 26). Lam’s piece is explicitly inspired by Paik’s *TV Garden* and reinterprets the garden-screen hybrid for contemporary audiences. *TTTV Garden* features an overhead screen that embodies an artificial “sky”. This screen displays a computer simulation of light and colour spectra derived from a real-time analysis of 24-hour news broadcasts. The installation’s techno-mediated sky provides information and emits LED light designed for indoor vertical farming, nourishing the live plants within the installation. The work is also streamed live 24/7 on social media platforms like Twitch, projecting its presence from the physical gallery into the post-technological networked

realm.

Lam's *TTTV Garden* creates a contemporary heterotopic space where a "sky" of mediated information sustains the "neo-nature" of cultivated plants, blurring the lines between virtuality and reality, nature and technology. In a critical reinterpretation of Paik's work, Lam's installation departs from a rhizomatic structure of synthesis by establishing a hierarchy; a unidirectional informational flow from a single screen to the plants below defines the hierarchy, recasting the artwork as an analytical model that illustrates the power of a centralised information source to shape a physical environment. However, the exploration of heterotopic media environments is not confined to Paik's installations or their direct reinterpretations, as numerous artists have employed diverse technological means and conceptual frameworks to expand the implications of such artworks. I will examine the specific ways in which the artistic practices of Dan Graham and Toshio Iwai explore layered visualities, doubled realities, and the phenomenology of the screen in greater detail in subsequent sections.

5.2 Doubled Screens, Mirrored Worlds: Virtuality and Embodied Experience

This section argues that the ancient Chinese concept of *chongping*, or the double screen, provides a specific historical and conceptual lens for understanding contemporary post-technological art. The analysis centres on the manifestation of the *chongping* as the doubled screen to examine the spatial dynamics, layered visualities, and mediated embodied experiences within artworks. Wu's (1996, 2010) analysis of the *chongping* reveals its function as a pictorial device that structures space and generates complex representational layers, a concept that prefigures the nested realities of contemporary screen practices. My analysis brings Wu's framework into a cross-cultural dialogue with Western theories to construct a new analytical model that integrates several theoretical perspectives. The new model incorporates Lévy's distinction between virtual and actual to understand the ontological status of screen-based realities (see Section 4.1.3) to understand the ontological status of screen-based realities (1998, 2001). Lefebvre's theory on the production of representational spaces, which I examined in Chapter 3 as the social production of space, provides a basis for analysing how, in my re-interpretation, screens create socially and experientially charged environments (1992, 2009, 2013). W.J.T. Mitchell's insights into the image-interface and the operations of the gaze inform the examination of spectatorship and the power dynamics operative in screen-based interaction (2012; 1986, 2018).

Anne Friedberg's notion of the "virtual window" offers a critical genealogy for the screen as a framed aperture onto other worlds (2009). I will employ the theoretical dialogue, mediated by the deep-*Shanshui* lens, to examine how diverse artistic strategies of doubled screens interrogate core phenomenological themes. The examination will address strategies such as literal reflection, metaphorical mirroring, the generation of parallel virtualities, and the construction of layered visual structures. The discussion will demonstrate how these strategies question self-perception, the nature of reality, and the intricacies of spectator reception in the post-technological milieu. The resulting cross-cultural and transhistorical analysis will identify both shared phenomenological concerns and distinct cultural inflections in the use of the doubled screen.

5.2.1 The Chinese Screen as Spatial Agent

To investigate the spatial dynamics and layered visualities immanent in contemporary post-technological screen-based art, my analysis begins from a foundational precedent in the traditional Chinese screen, or *ping* 屏. My examination of the *ping* in Section 2.1.1 revealed its capacity to structure physical space, generate layered pictorial representations, and mediate the act of viewing. The screen's historical functions provide conceptual precedents for understanding analogous operations within today's techno-mediated interactive environments. I argue that contemporary screen-based art practices engage with a "memory of film" (Bruno, 2014), whereby artists re-materialise cinematic aesthetics and viewing conventions on new techno-mediated surfaces, an act that reveals a conceptual lineage from both artistic and cinematic precedents. To bridge these historically discontinuous traditions, my analysis offers a theoretical application of the traditional *ping* to the modern interactive computer display, revealing a persistent, shared inquiry into the screen's capacity to organise space and mediate perception.



Figure 27. *Caiqi Bianzuo Qian Diancui Wan Hua Xian Rui Tu Pingfeng* (彩漆邊座嵌點翠萬花獻瑞圖屏風, Folding screen with coloured lacquer frame and kingfisher feather inlay of 'Myriad Flowers Presenting Auspiciousness'), Qing dynasty (1644-1911). Folding screen, twelve panels; dimensions: height 174 cm, width 390 cm. Source: The Palace Museum, Beijing (<https://www.dpm.org.cn/collection/gear/210732.html>). © 2025 The Palace Museum, Beijing.



Figure 28. *Mubao Jinbian Qianlong Yuzhi Chuan-Yang Shuo Seiping* (木包錦邊乾隆御製穿楊說圍屏, Brocade-bordered wooden folding screen with Emperor Qianlong's imperial writing on "Chuan-Yang Shuo"), Qing dynasty, Qianlong reign (1752). Folding screen, twelve panels; dimensions: height 282 cm, width 54 cm (per panel). Source: The Palace Museum, Beijing (<https://www.dpm.org.cn/collection/furniture/229077.html>). © 2025 The Palace Museum, Beijing.



Figure 29. Yuan Yao, *Lishan Bishu Tuping* (驪山避暑圖屏, Screen of Summer Retreat at Mount Li), Qing dynasty. Painting on silk, mounted as screen panels; dimensions: height 237 cm, widths 31.7 cm and 57.4 cm. Source: The Palace Museum, Beijing (<https://www.dpm.org.cn/collection/paint/228480.html>). © 2025 The Palace Museum, Beijing.



Figure 30. *Zitan mu Biankuang Xiu Huaniao Tu Guaping* (紫檀木邊框繡花鳥圖掛屏, Zitan-framed hanging screen with embroidery of flowers and birds), Qing dynasty (1644-1911). Hanging screen; dimensions: length 111.5 cm, width 69.8 cm. Source: The Palace Museum, Beijing (<https://www.dpm.org.cn/collection/paint/234509.html>). © 2025 The Palace Museum, Beijing.

The traditional Chinese screen possesses a complex identity, functioning simultaneously as a tangible architectural object, a surface for artistic representation, and a pictorial image embedded within another representational field (Wu, 1996, 2010). The Chinese term *ping* broadly refers to screen-like objects that distinguish space. The term encompasses diverse forms, including the *Weiping* 圍屏 (a folding screen) (Figure 27, Figure 28), the *Tuping* 圖屏 (a painting mounted as a screen panel) (Figure 29), and the *Guaping* 掛屏 (a decorative hanging screen) (Figure 30). The screen's multifaceted identity transforms the *ping* into an agent that shapes both spatial perception and social interaction. The physical materiality and placement of the screen directly structure social life by demarcating boundaries, creating private enclosures, or constituting a formal backdrop for significant events, functioning as what Wang Ning (2024b) has termed an “architectural pivot” that organises the scene. The screen's dynamic role reconfigures the *ping* from a decorative object into a mediating apparatus. The screen becomes a “virtual window”

opening onto another depicted or implied world, constituting an interface that mediates between different realms of existence and perception (Friedberg, 2009; Saether & Bull, 2020). The screen's capacity for mediation enables a "repertoire of latent actions" for the viewer (Lefebvre, 1992), prefiguring the interactive potential of contemporary techno-mediated interfaces.

My analysis of the *chongping* draws upon Wu's (1996, 2010) identification of the concept as a pictorial strategy that involves embedding a secondary painting onto the surface of a screen depicted within a primary artwork. I propose that this strategy offers a heuristic analytical tool for the present investigation. The embedding of a secondary painting creates nested layers of imagery, which in turn foster intricate visual and semantic dialogues between the different representational planes. The composition fuses the picture-within-a-picture structure with a self-conscious reflection on the screen's nature to create a complex pictorial space. The resulting pictorial space reveals the screen's dual capacity to divide physical space and present visual worlds.

Han Xizai Yeyan Tu 韓熙載夜宴圖



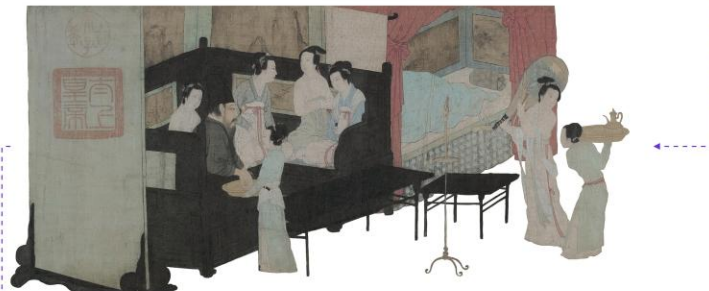
SCENE-01



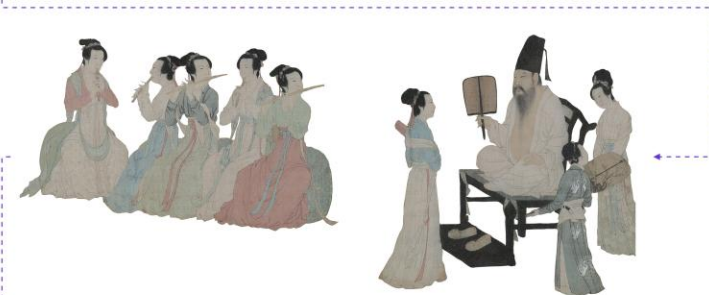
SCENE-02



SCENE-03



SCENE-04



SCENE-05



Figure 31. Gu Hongzhong (attributed), *Han Xizai Yeyan Tu*, Southern Tang Dynasty, 10th century. Handscroll, ink and colour on silk; dimensions: 28.7 cm × 335.5 cm. The Palace Museum, Beijing, Collection. Original image source: The Palace Museum (<https://www.dpm.org.cn/dyx.html?path=/Uploads/tilegenerator/dest/files/image/8831/2009/2138/img0003.xml>). © 2025 The Palace Museum (for the original painting). Diagram accessible at: <https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVJeWoOAK=?moveToWidget=3458764634783534626&cot=14> (accessed 16 September 2025). Diagrammatic analysis © 2025 Racelar Ho.

The *Han Xizai Yeyan Tu* 韓熙載夜宴圖 (Figure 31), a handscroll attributed to Gu Hongzhong of the Southern Tang dynasty, demonstrates the application and significance of both *chongping* characteristics and the specific phenomenon of the “doubled screen” through its use of *pingfeng* 屏風. Applying Lefebvre’s theory on the production of space, my *chongping* framework demonstrates how each *pingfeng* depicted in Gu’s *Hanzaixi Yeyan Tu* functions as both a physical divider and a producer of representational space. My analysis further posits that social practice and visual interpretation imbue this space with cultural significance and lived experiences. As the spectator progresses through the scroll, the painter intentionally employs various types of *pingfeng*, including the bed-enclosure in Scene-03 of Figure 31 and other standing *pingfeng*, to carve out increasingly intimate zones and to manage the transitions between different phases of the revelry. The deployment of these *pingfeng* structures both the visual rhythm and the social dynamics of the depicted events, creating what Lefebvre would term distinct “representational spaces” within the overall composition, each with its own atmosphere and implied social rules. Many of the diegetic *pingfeng* depicted are not blank dividers but are themselves painted.

The surfaces of the diegetic *pingfeng* frequently display landscapes, evident in Scene-01 and Scene-05 of Figure 31, or intricate patterns. The landscapes and patterns displayed on the *pingfeng*, depicting serene natural scenes, stand in stark contrast to the lively human activities unfolding before them. The serene natural scenes potentially offer a symbolic commentary on the transience of worldly pleasures or provide a conventional backdrop signifying the cultivated status of the banquet’s host, Han Xizai. The painted landscapes and intricate patterns on the diegetic *pingfeng* transform the *pingfeng* into “double and doubled screens” whose secondary visual narratives or symbolic commentary add layers to the main depiction of Han Xizai’s life. In Gu’s application of *pingfeng* in the *Han Xizai Yeyan Tu*, the screens delimit the depicted architecture and carry their own imagery. The screen’s dual function of delimiting architecture and carrying imagery underscores its role in the painting. The use of *pingfeng* in

the *Han Xizai Yeyan Tu* structures the unfolding narrative and its spatial settings, while concurrently staging sites for layered representation and meaning-making. For example, a larger painted *pingfeng* typically separates groups of figures and marks a transition between different activities. The *pingfeng* partitions the depicted architectural interior and carries its own imagery, which sometimes subtly comments on or enriches the main narrative. In the context of *Han Xizai Yeyan Tu*, the depicted screens instantiate Mitchell's "metapictures" (2022; 2018), images that self-reflexively comment on the act of representation. Through these layers, the painting prompts spectators to look at the screen-object, to perceive the screen as a framing device that opens onto another depicted realm in a manner comparable to Friedberg's concept of the "virtual window" (2009), and to interact with the images depicted upon the screen. The spectator's multifaceted interaction structures the spectator's gaze and complicates the relationship between pictorial depth and surface reality, prompting a mode of viewing that deciphers the interplay between different representational levels.

***Han Mawangdui T-shaped silk banner* 馬王堆一號漢墓T形帛畫**



Figure 32. T-shaped silk painting from Tomb No. 1 at Mawangdui, Changsha, Hunan Province. Western Han Dynasty, early 2nd century BCE. Silk, dimensions: length 205 cm, top width 92 cm, bottom width 47.7 cm. Hunan Museum Collection. Original image: © 2025 Hunan Museum (Source: <https://www.hnmuseum.com/zh-hans/content/t-%E5%BD%A2-%E5%B8%9B-%E7%94%BB>). Diagram accessible at: <https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVJeWoOAK=?moveToWidget=3458764634784593180&cot=14> (accessed 16 September 2025) Diagrammatic analysis: © 2025 Racelar Ho.

To further understand the screen's agency and its relevance to post-technological experimental art, I will examine the historical precedent of the *Han Mawangdui T-shaped silk banner* 馬王堆一號漢墓T形帛畫 (Figure 32). The *Han Mawangdui T-shaped silk banner* defines a visual and symbolic interface within its funerary context. This interface divides the banner's surface into distinct cosmological realms: Heaven, the Human World, and the Underworld. This division constructed a layered representational space that mediated the soul's transition. As an image-bearing object, the banner embodies the *chongping* principle

through its dual constitute both a physical medium and a representation of passage between these different states of existence. The banner features distinct pictorial zones that compose a series of nested visual narratives upon its primary surface. These zones include the celestial ascent of Lady Dai towards the sun and moon attended by deities, the depiction of her earthly existence with attendants and ritual paraphernalia, and the portrayal of underworld deities and creatures. This nested narrative structure is analogous to the “doubled screen” phenomenon where one representational plane contains and organises others, each contributing to an overarching cosmological narrative. The arrangement of these zones, with Heaven at the top, the human world in the middle, and the underworld at the bottom, articulates a visual hierarchy and a narrative of ascent, guiding the spectator’s, and presumably the soul’s, conceptual journey.

The *Mawangdui banner*’s deployment of layered imagery upon a single interface highlights the screen’s capacity to construct and mediate between different realities and modes of perception. The ability of these early screen-like forms to create representational spaces, manage transitions between distinct conceptual realms—the earthly, the celestial, the chthonic—and layer visual information constitutes a conceptual lineage for contemporary experimental art practices. Lévy’s notion of the virtual, which he defines as a potent, problem-solving field of forces rather than an illusion, provides the conceptual framework for this section. The central question for my analysis is how the *Mawangdui banner*’s iconographic elements and compositional structure narrate a virtual journey for the soul. This analysis provides a diachronic perspective on the screen as a dynamic interface that shapes perception, mediates realities, and generates layered meaning. The principles of mediating realities and layering meaning, evident in the function of early screen-like forms such as the *Mawangdui banner*, are now reconfigured through the diverse forms of contemporary post-technological media.

5.2.2 The Techno-Mediated Mirror

The double screen concept, which I have forged through a dialogue with theories of the virtual window, representational space, and the image-interface, originates from my analyses of the previously discussed examples of pre-modern Chinese art. I argue that artworks featuring layered visual information, nested techno-mediated windows, or interactive installations with multiple interfaces reconfigure the principles of the traditional double screen. While the doubled screen concept originates from an analysis of physical screens and painted representations, contemporary contexts re-articulate the concept’s core ideas of spatial layering,

the interplay of presence and representation, and the constructed nature of the viewing experience.

Multichannel video installations, where different visual narratives unfold concurrently across an array of monitors, can be interpreted as a modern equivalent of the layered spatiality embedded in traditional screen arrangements. The artworks prompt spectators to navigate multiple focal points. A mechanism comparable to Friedberg's conceptualisation of multiple, fractured "virtual windows" allows the installations to disrupt singular perspectives and immerse the spectator in a complex, mediated reality. The nested windows of a techno-mediated interface or the layered information in extended reality (XR) applications present new instantiations of the screen within a screen motif. My application of the deep-*Shanshui* lens analyses how contemporary artistic iterations, despite their technological distinctions, explore phenomenological and conceptual concerns regarding layered realities and meaning-making. The deep-*Shanshui* analysis reveals that the artworks prompt a form of *you* (aesthetic strolling) through visual and informational landscapes, a mode of contemplation central to traditional Chinese landscape appreciation.

Artists manifest doubled screens in one of the most direct ways through the incorporation of literal mirrors within installation pieces. Scholarship in Western art history, including Hubert Damisch's (1994) exploration of the mirror's foundational role in painting, identifies the incorporation of mirrors as a practice with a long lineage, evident in the works of artists ranging from Tiziano Vecellio, or Titian, to Édouard Manet. Chinese art exhibits a similar practice, where, as Wu discussed, mirrors and "mirror screens" feature, for instance, as interior design elements in Qing palatial settings and as depicted elements in paintings (2022; 2021b). While both literal mirrors and the "double screen" motif address layered visibility, I draw a distinction based on the primary mode through which the reflective or depicted surfaces generate a secondary "screen" image. Physical literal mirrors such as traditional mirrors and mirror screens generate the secondary image through direct, unmediated optical reflection, presenting an immediate, though reversed, duplication of the spectator and the surroundings.

Many contemporary doubled screens, by contrast, including technologically simulated mirrors or camera-and-projection systems, construct their reflective or layered imagery by relying on photography computational processes, sensor-derived information, or programmed representations. While an artist-authored, static image characterises a painted "double screen", and interactive, programmed content defines techno-mediated "doubled screens", a traditional optical

mirror presents a dynamic image contingent upon the real-time presence of the spectator and the spectator's actual surroundings. The difference in these methods of image generation correlates with varied modes of spectator implication. The interpretative analysis a painted "double screen" demands or the programmed interaction typical of technologically constructed "doubled screens" contrasts with the direct, embodied confrontation and immediate self-perception within the artwork's actual space that a traditional mirror provokes. The confrontation with a mirrored image can be both affirming and unsettling to the spectator's sense of self. In post-technological contexts, early works by artists such as Dan Graham and Toshio Iwai employ cameras and projections to create interactive systems that capture and reflect the spectator's image, often transformed or mediated, onto a screen surface. The capture and reflection of the spectator's image within such interactive systems implicates the spectator within the artwork. Mitchell's theories on the gaze and the power of the image offer a framework for analysing how these camera-based systems implicate the spectator, particularly in works that use camera-based reflection to construct a viewing experience where the act of looking is itself the subject of the artwork.

Dan Graham's Present Continuous Past(s)

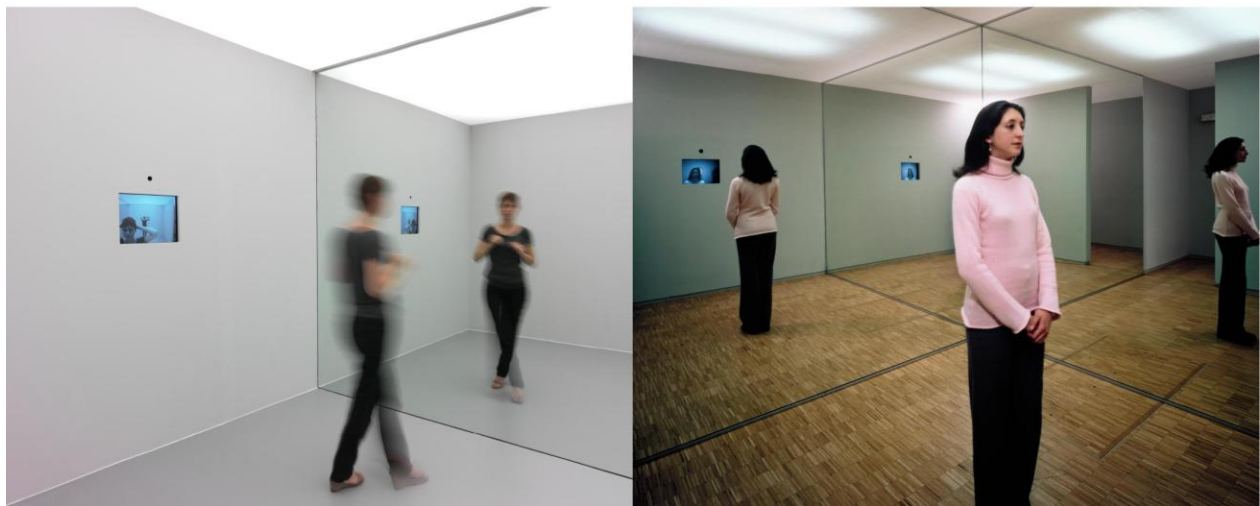
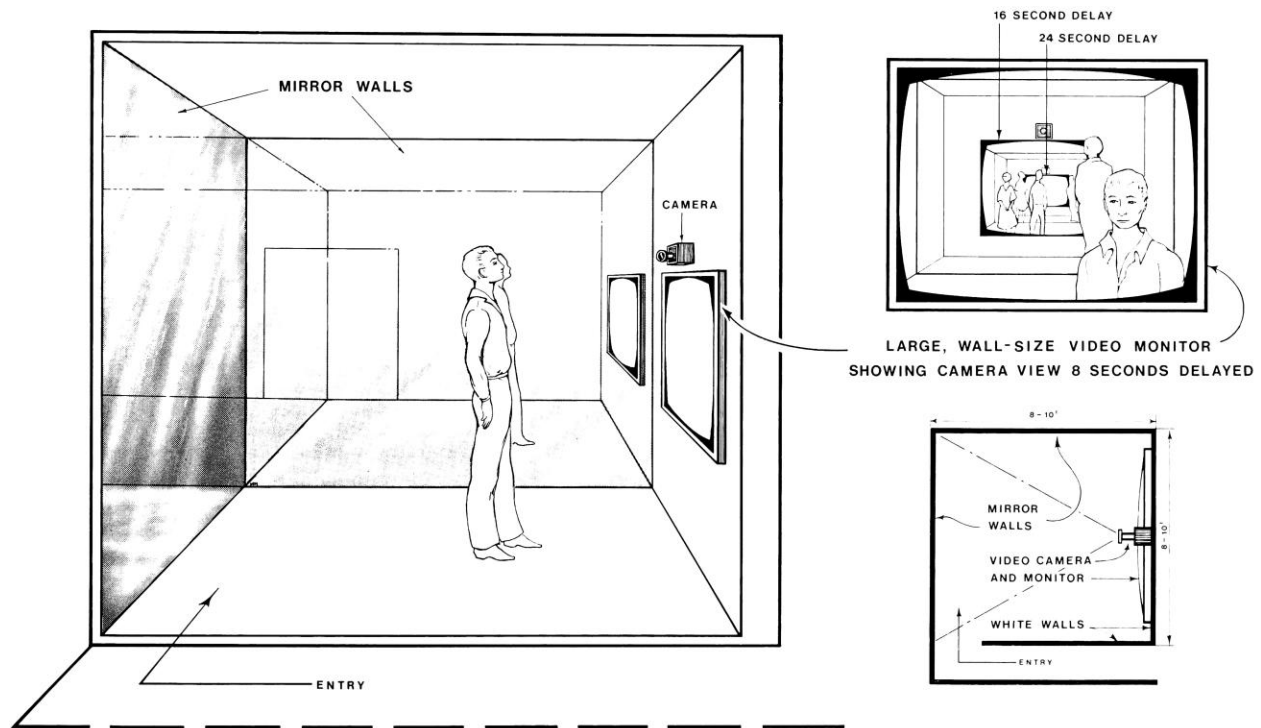


Figure 33. Dan Graham, *Present Continuous Past(s)*, 1974. Top: Diagram of the installation, reproduced from Dan Graham, *Video – Architecture – Television* (New York: New York University Press, 1979), 8. Bottom: Installation views at Centre Pompidou, Paris. Mixed media installation including mirrors, video camera, video monitor, and wooden structure; dimensions variable. Bottom images source: Centre Pompidou (<https://www.centrepompidou.fr/fr/ressources/oeuvre/cEebaM>). © 2025 Dan Graham.



Figure 34. Peter Campus, *Three Transitions*, 1973. Stills from single-channel video, colour, sound, 4:53 min. ZKM | Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe Collection. Image source: (<https://zkm.de/en/artwork/three-transitions>). © 2025 Peter Campus.

Dan Graham's installations frequently utilise closed-circuit video and mirrors to construct systems that generate what can be termed "mirror screens" or "doubled screens". His work *Present Continuous Past(s)* (1974) (Figure 33) captures the spectator's image and projects it with a temporal delay onto a video monitor. A specific configuration of video feedback and physical mirrors compels the spectator to simultaneously confront multiple, temporally distinct versions of themselves. The work of Peter Campus provides a parallel exploration of the relationship between technology and self-perception; his closed-circuit video installations frequently present the spectator with a doubled, divided, or magnified image of their own body, sometimes concurrently with a mirror reflection. The strategy of presenting a fragmented, techno-mediated body disrupts the viewer's sense of a cohesive self through a direct confrontation. His 1973 video, *Three Transitions* (Figure 34), exemplifies this method of disrupting the self through a series of technologically mediated acts of self-mutilation. In one sequence, Campus uses video superimposition to create the illusion of cutting through his own back and emerging from the resulting opening. Another sequence uses a cross-fade to show the artist appearing to wipe away his own face to reveal an identical one beneath. A third transition shows the artist setting fire to a photograph of his face, which functions as a "paper mirror". Each transition employs video's capacity for layering and illusion to present the self not as a stable entity, but as a divisible and reproducible image, a surface that can be technologically penetrated, effaced, or destroyed. The viewer sees a present self in the mirror's direct, real-time reflection, which produces a "mirror screen" effect, alongside a just-past self that

the video monitor displays, which creates a technologically generated “doubled screen”.

The video image, as the “doubled screen” element, appears to “look back” and embodies W. J. T. Mitchell’s notion of an image. Mitchell defines an image as an entity possessing the agency to generate a circuit of visual and psychological interaction, compelling the spectator to observe themselves as an observed object and to reconcile the differing self-perceptions that arise from the process of reciprocal looking (2022; 1986, 1995). The techno-mediated agency of the “doubled screen” image disrupts the spectator’s conventional sense of immediate presence and stable self-perception. The disruption of stable self-perception forces a confrontation with the mediated nature of self-representation and the temporal fragmentation of experience, precluding any unified or singular understanding of the self.

The temporal mechanism in *Present Continuous Past(s)* instantiates the concept of fluidity that I introduced in Chapter 4. The system’s eight-second delay does more than record and replay the past; the mechanism disrupts a linear experience of time. The spectator confronts a continuous loop where the artwork perpetually re-presents their present actions as recent history, creating a non-linear, fragmented temporality. The artwork thus constructs a specific chrono-topography where past and present cease to be sequential points on a timeline and instead become co-existent, layered realities within the same experiential field. Looping temporality, a core component of the work’s fluid nature, is fundamental to the deconstruction of a stable self, as the spectator must navigate not only a doubled image but also a fractured and recursive experience of time.

The feedback loop in *Present Continuous Past(s)* generates a cascading temporal regression that structures this confrontation. This system’s camera captures the spectator observing the monitor, which in turn, displays the camera’s feed with an eight-second delay. This projected image, therefore, shows the past self from eight seconds prior, observing what was on the monitor sixteen seconds in the past. An infinite regression of receding temporal selves materialises on the screen, with each layer separated by this fixed interval. The installation’s physical mirror compounds this temporal fragmentation by reflecting the spectator’s present-moment reaction to these past selves. A circuit of self-perception thus emerges, where the present, embodied self in the mirror continuously responds to the techno-mediated, historical selves on the monitor. The “doubled screen” transforms the presentation of a past image into a re-presentation of the spectator’s own history of viewing

within the installation. The spectator becomes both the subject and the object of the gaze, caught in a loop of observing and being observed across multiple, concurrent temporalities. The interplay between the immediate “mirror screen” and the delayed “doubled screen” constitutes the core mechanism through which the artwork deconstructs a stable, unified sense of self. This process transforms the spectator’s body into a site where the past is made actual, perpetually influencing the experience of the present.

Toshio Iwai’s Piano - As Image Media

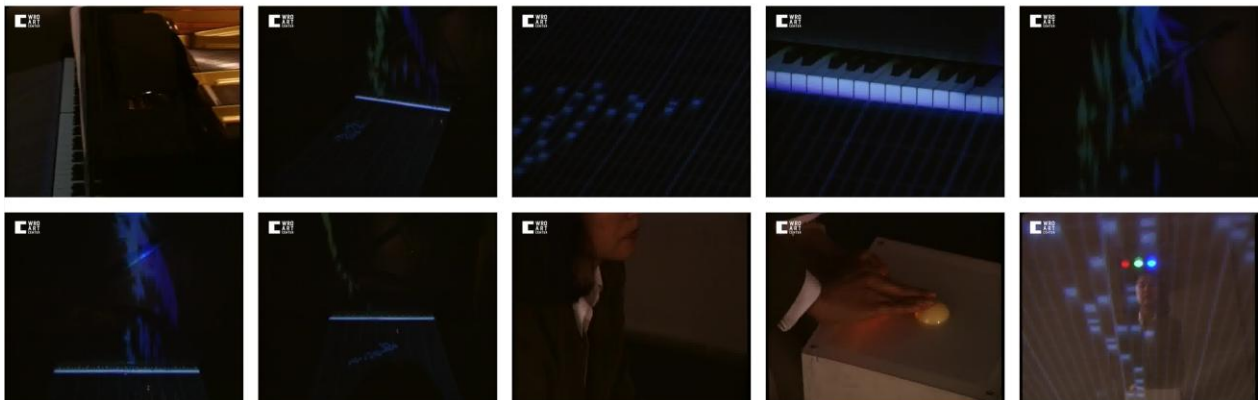


Figure 35. Toshio Iwai, Piano - As Image Media, 1995. Interactive installation views (top image) and video stills from WRO Art Center documentation (bottom nine images). Mixed media installation including piano, trackball, computer,

projector, and screen; dimensions variable. Top image source: Artscape Japan (<https://artscape.jp/artscape/eng/ht/2209.html>). Bottom images source: WRO Art Center (https://video.wrocenter.pl/en/wideo/dca_europeana/piano_image/). © 2025 Toshio Iwai.

Toshio Iwai's installation *Piano - As Image Media* (1995) (Figure 35) exemplifies the creation of a dynamic screen through a process of interactive translation. When a spectator interacts with the installation by pressing a key on its piano or drawing with its trackball, the system converts these physical actions into a synthesis of visual and auditory outputs. A key press, for example, generates a circle that begins to move upwards across the projection screen positioned above the keyboard. Simultaneously, a virtual playhead traverses the screen as a scanning horizontal line. The interactive loop culminates when the ascending circle's trajectory intersects with the playhead, an event that triggers a new layer of synthesised sound and animation.

The installation's projection screen realises a doubled screen by presenting a techno-mediated, algorithmic representation of the spectator's creative inputs, which distinguishes it from a mirror screen that would offer a direct optical reflection of the spectator's physical form. The system's capacity to have its visual elements react to both initial inputs and subsequent systemic processes enables a reciprocal gaze. A continuous feedback loop emerges wherein the spectator observes their inputs transformed into an evolving audiovisual display, which in turn informs and prompts their subsequent interactions. This process draws the spectator into the artwork's operational logic, altering the established artist-artwork-spectator hierarchy. The spectator becomes a conscious agent and co-creator, fostering a sense of embodied agency in the co-construction of the aesthetic experience.

5.2.3 Co-Constituting Representational Space

From a deep-*Shanshui* perspective, the time-delayed, reflective, and responsively generated screens in the works by Graham, Campus, and Iwai create what I would characterise as temporal echoes rather than simple doubled images. Techno-mediated surfaces within the artworks of Graham and Campus foster an interplay between the substantial and the insubstantial, the actual and its technologically processed counterpart. This interplay between the substantial and the insubstantial parallel the Daoist interplay of *you* 有, or being/presence, and *wu* 無, or non-being/absence, which often characterises the aesthetic experience of Chinese landscape painting.

The techno-mediated process in the works of Graham, Campus, and Iwai modifies

the interplay between the substantial and the insubstantial. The spectator's physical embodiment contrasts with an electronically captured, processed, and re-presented other, prompting a reflection on presence and representation that complicates direct optical mirroring. Lefebvre's concept of representational space provides a framework for understanding the operation of environments featuring mirrors or reflective technologies. I argue that Lefebvre's framework applies to the works of Graham, Campus, and Iwai, as the spectator's interaction with a techno-mediated image transforms the physical installation into a lived, representational space that holds complex perceptual and social meanings. Interactive installations by Graham, Campus, and Iwai, which constitute "mirror screen" or "doubled screen" configurations, exemplify specific types of environments that embody produced, non-neutral spaces that shape social and perceptual experiences. The "mirror screen" or "doubled screen" apparatuses in the installations of Graham, Campus, and Iwai facilitate an interaction that governs the production of a spatial and perceptual experience. The interaction with a techno-mediated image prompts a form of "embodied roaming", or *you*, through such technologically constructed spaces, where the spectator navigates and interprets the layered realities the artwork presents. In the context of the production of representational space, technology and the spectator's responsive presence co-constitute the artwork's space.

This section demonstrates that the phenomena of "doubled screens" and "mirrored worlds" in post-technological art, whether achieved through literal reflection or through complex technological mediation, complicates simple visual duplication. By drawing connections between historical precedents such as the Chinese *ping* and the *chongping* framework, and contemporary theories of virtuality, representational space, and the image-interface, the investigation I conducted in this section has highlighted how artistic strategies involving "doubled screens" and "mirrored worlds" reorient and destabilise the spectator's embodied experience, their perception of self, and their understanding of reality. The interplay between the substantial and insubstantial, the actual and the virtual, fostered by the post-technological artworks I analysed here, underscores the screen's developing role as a central site for negotiating presence and representation in the post-technological era. The discussion in the next section will further explore the diverse manifestations and implications of these concepts of "doubled screens", "mirrored worlds", virtuality, and embodied experience across a broader spectrum of contemporary post-technological artistic practices.

5.3 Expanding Horizons: Diverse Manifestations of the Doubled Screen

This section's examination of post-technological experimental art in this section demonstrates how emerging media reconfigure the "doubled screen" paradigm. I argue that in artworks employing techno-mediated reflection, the screen transforms into an interface for co-producing dynamic, layered representational spaces. Distinct from physical mirrors, artworks employing techno-mediated reflection feature reflective screens that generate complex visual and spatial feedback loops that implicate the spectator. The computationally mediated reflection of a dynamic "mirror screen" delineates and intertwines a primary physical layer—the installation space—with a secondary, responsive virtual layer that the screen's image forms.

The feedback loop between a spectator's action and the screen's response constitutes a form of spatial rhetoric. The reciprocal exchange between a spectator's action and the screen's response contrasts with other interactive art because the spectator's own techno-mediated image becomes a primary agent in the work, promoting a mode of co-authorship grounded in the act of self-perception. Lévy's framework of the virtual and actual (1998) helps to analyse the process of co-authorship. For example, in Graham's *Present Continuous Past(s)*, the actual consists of the spectator's body and the physical installation of mirrors and cameras. The virtual represents the potential through the temporal displacement inherent in the system's eight-second delay. The feedback system actualises the potential for temporal displacement, generating an emergent reality where the spectator confronts the spectator's present self in the mirror and the spectator's past self on the screen simultaneously. Similarly, in Campus's *Three Transitions*, the analysis shifts from temporal displacement to bodily transformation. The actual is Campus's physical body before the camera, while the virtual is the video medium's inherent potential to layer, dissolve, and manipulate images. The work actualises the video medium's potential by showing the artist appearing to cut through his back or wipe away his face, generating an emergent reality that presents the self as a divisible and reproducible surface that technology can penetrate and destroy. In both cases, the process of actualisation renders the boundary between the spectator's actual presence and virtual representation porous and negotiable. The embodied experience presents one of causally-linked, though not always immediate, consequence, where physical movement translates into visual transformation. The translation of physical movement into visual transformation prompts a re-evaluation of the self by transforming the spectator's immediate presence into

a techno-mediated “other” on screen.

Applying the deep-*Shanshui* lens to the emergent realities that the feedback systems in the works of Graham, Campus, and Iwai generate indicates a contemporary form of *jiejing* 借景 (borrowed scenery). Just as a traditional Chinese garden borrows and frames views of the surrounding landscape (see Section 5.1.2), the installations of Graham, Campus, and Iwai “borrow” the presence of either the spectator’s or the artist’s body, transforming the body’s presence into a central element of the artwork’s composition. The strategy of borrowing the human body blurs the boundary between the spectator and the mediated environment, making the spectator a constitutive part of the mediated environment. The *you* encompass physical navigation of the exhibition space with a perceptual journey. Specifically, the spectator must navigate the various ways the artworks fracture and re-present the self, whether as a temporally displaced “other” in Graham’s work or as a technologically deconstructed surface in Campus’s. The navigation of the fractured and re-presented self develops into a perceptual journey into a hybrid, co-created spatiality where the spectator’s actions shape the visual and, often, auditory landscape.

5.3.1 Jeffrey Shaw: Navigating Textual and Simulated Worlds



Figure 36. Jeffrey Shaw, *The Legible City*, 1988-1991. Interactive installation; dimensions variable. Composite image showing various installation views with participants interacting via stationary bicycles and large-scale projections of text-based virtual cities. Image source: Jeffrey Shaw Compendium (<https://www.jeffreyshawcompendium.com/portfolio/legible-city/>). © 2025 Jeffrey Shaw.

MR, VR, and AR represent a contemporary manifestation of “doubled screens” and “layered realities”. A function of MR, VR, and AR technologies is to generate parallel or superimposed experiential planes that interact with, or overlay, the physical world. To extend my inquiries from Section 5.2 regarding the screen’s shifting material and immaterial presence, I will examine how these technologies create immersive portals. Jeffrey Shaw’s *The Legible City* (1988-1991) (Figure 36) provides an early example, utilising spatial projection and interactive navigation. As Oliver Grau’s (2002) analysis of virtual art suggests, immersive works like *The Legible City* aim not to enable interaction, but to reduce the critical distance between the spectator and the image. Creating a totalising visual environment that seeks to integrate the observer into the artwork itself reduces the critical distance and reconfigures the established relationship between the spectator and the work.

The Legible City



Figure 37. Jeffrey Shaw, *The Legible City*, 1988-1991. Detail or specific view of the [Manhattan/Amsterdam/Karlsruhe] version, showcasing the textual architecture and interface elements. Interactive installation; dimensions variable. Image source: Jeffrey Shaw Compendium (<https://www.jeffreyshawcompendium.com/portfolio/legible-city/>). © 2025 Jeffrey Shaw.



TEXT EXAMPLES

Manhattan: 34th street, ninth avenue, broadway, 66th street, eleventh avenue

MY NAME IS NOAH WEBSTER, LEXICOGRAPHER AND AUTHOR. I GREW UP IN THIS CITY OF WORDS, AND I CAN REMEMBER THE OLD WORDS. FOR INSTANCE, THAT WORD JUST UP AHEAD OF WHERE YOU ARE NOW. CAN YOU SEE IT? IT SAYS OBE NCE. BUT IT USED TO SAY OBEDIENCE. RIGHT THERE AT THAT SAME SPOT. IT WAS A BEAUTIFUL WORD BEFORE THEY TORE PART OF IT DOWN. YOU'VE NOTICED THAT THERE WERE THREE MISSING LETTERS - D I E. WELL THAT'S WHERE I USED TO HAVE MY OFFICE, UP THERE ON THE THIRD FLOOR OF THE E. THE E (OF ELEGANCE, OF ELOQUENCE, OF ELUCIDATE) WAS THEN CONSIDERED TO BE A VERY COLD AND ARROGANT LETTER. BUT I ENJOYED THE TIME I SPENT LIVING IN OBE-DI-ENCE. (THREE SYLLABLES). IT'S IN MY BOOK, JUST LIKE PATIENCE AND PASSION AND DEDICATION. NOW THEY'RE BUILDING ALL THESE NEW WORDS LIKE PROLIFIC, JOINT- VENTURE, CONCEPTUAL, EGOMANIA, UNFRIENDLY TAKE-OVER, CRACK... QUITE HONESTLY I DON'T UNDERSTAND HOW PEOPLE CAN LIVE AMONGST THOSE WORDS. I MUCH PREFERRED PROVIDENCE, RESILIENCE AND POLYSYLLABIC. THEY'RE ALL STILL IN MY DICTIONARY AND I GO AND VISIT THEM REGULARLY. TRUMP CAUGHT MY ATTENTION THE OTHER DAY: 1A; ANY OF VARIOUS CARDS AND USUALLY ALL THE CARDS OF A SUIT DESIGNATED BY CHANCE OR BY AN ACTION OR DECLARATION THAT IF LEGALLY PLAYED WILL WIN OVER A CARD THAT IS NOT A TRUMP. 1b; TO GET THE BETTER OF: OUTDO, TOP. IT WAS NICE TALKING TO YOU. IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS CONCERNING THE MEANINGS OF ANY WORDS OR PHRASES WHILE YOUR VISITING OUR CITY, JUST LOOK ME UP. I HAVE A VOCABULARY OF OVER 450.000 WORDS.

Figure 38. Jeffrey Shaw, *The Legible City*, 1988-1991. Composite image showing (left) architectural sketch for the Amsterdam version with handwritten annotations and (right) a map detail of the Manhattan version alongside example texts used in the artwork. Interactive installation; dimensions variable. Image source: Jeffrey Shaw Compendium (<https://www.jeffreyshawcompendium.com/portfolio/legible-city/>). © 2025 Jeffrey Shaw.

Within Shaw's installation *The Legible City*, participants ride a stationary bicycle. Their pedalling and steering control their movement through a large-scale projection of a virtual city. By design, the interactive system aims to create a totalising experience. The system seeks to minimise external sensory input to intensify the observer's perceptual focus on and immersion within a dynamic, navigable image space. The virtual city projected in *The Legible City* substitutes traditional architectural forms with an urban landscape built from three-dimensional letters that form words and sentences along the "streets" (see Figure 37). These textural streets represent actual city plans like Manhattan, Amsterdam, or Karlsruhe. Figure 38 shows examples of the source materials Shaw used for these textural representations, including manuscripts, documents, and city-specific text from local archives or literary sources. The virtual city, composed of textural architectures, constitutes a secondary, deeply layered "screen" or representational space. Each textual building is an individual information surface that becomes a micro-screen within the larger navigable textscape.

I propose that the installation functions as a conceptual "mirror screen". The system generates this effect not through literal optical reflection, but by mirroring the spectator's navigational intent back to them as a transformed, textual reality. A real-time manifestation of the spectator's physical input on the bicycle constitutes the virtual journey, making their embodied actions the primary force of the experience. The spectator's interaction with the bicycle actualises the virtual environment. Shaw's installation produces a representational space with its own rules of navigation, legibility, and experience, distinct from both the physical exhibition space and the cities the installation references. When I view *The Legible City* through the deep-*Shanshui* lens, I can articulate a distinct dimension of the work, which analyses that only focus on its semiotics or interactivity do not typically articulate. The lens allows me to analyse the work's production of a specific chrono-topography, where the fixed, archival "stone" of the city plan is subsumed by the fluid "water" of the spectator's personal, temporal journey. *The Legible City* facilitates a form of *you* that is both a navigation of text and an act of co-creating a spatio-temporal event. An exploration and interpretation within a techno-mediated environment that integrates reading, navigating, and inhabiting a city of information defines the embodied experience.

Nature Time: Shared Immersion



Figure 39. Jeffrey Shaw and Sarah Kenderdine, *Nature Time*, 2023. Installation view showing participants interacting with stationary bicycles in front of three large, curved projection screens displaying an immersive simulation of the Gardens of Versailles. Interactive installation; dimensions variable. Image source: Jeffrey Shaw Compendium (<https://www.jeffreyshawcompendium.com/portfolio/nature-time/>). © 2025 Jeffrey Shaw and Sarah Kenderdine.

A sustained exploration of interactive virtual environments and layered realities distinguishes Shaw's artistic practice. Building upon works such as *The Legible City*, Shaw's artistic investigations have examined how participants navigate and derive meaning from techno-mediated spaces. The 2023 installation, *Nature Time* (Figure 39), co-authored with Sarah Kenderdine, exemplifies Shaw's investigation. The reemployment of the stationary bicycle for embodied interaction builds upon the interactive logic of *The Legible City*, where the bicycle interface translates physical exertion into virtual locomotion. While employing a familiar immersive paradigm, the installation introduces a social dimension to the experience of the doubled screen. The environment shifts from the textual cityscape of *The Legible City* to a simulation of the Gardens of Versailles, which three large, curved screens present. The enveloping configuration of three large, curved screens aims not to create an immersive portal for an individual, but to establish a shared viewing space for multiple participants.

The multi-screen setup in *Nature Time* extends the notion of the "doubled screen" by placing the spectator's individual immersion in direct relation to the collective experience of the shared viewing space. The installation's design facilitates an experience that simultaneity and co-presence characterize. Within the installation's design, multiple cyclists navigate the virtual Versailles independently yet remain peripherally aware of each other's presence and journeys, as the multiple bicycle stations visible in the images suggest. The peripheral awareness of other participants' explorations constitutes another layer of the "screened" experience. The observational layer contrasts with the visual content of one's own navigated virtual world and

superimposes a social dimension onto the individual's immersive journey. *Nature Time* introduces an element of shared spectatorship and indirect social interaction, even as the spectator's physical activity continues to actualise the spectator's personal virtual space.

I found a new application of Lefebvre's theory of the production of space in *Nature Time*. The installation produces a space that is both representational of Versailles and social and experiential within the exhibition space. The interplay of individual immersive experiences and the collective awareness of other participants navigating their own virtual paths defines this space. The rules of navigation remain tied to physical input, but the "legibility" of the space shifts. Instead of interpreting textual architecture as in *The Legible City*, participants in *Nature Time* experience a simulated historical and natural landscape through their embodied traversal. The comparison between the two works demonstrates how the deep-*Shanshui* lens can distinguish between different modes of techno-mediated *you*. The syntactic and semantic relationship of text generates meaning in *The Legible City*. In *Nature Time*, by contrast, meaning arises from the spectator's phenomenological interaction with the simulated environment's paths, vistas, and the temporal unfolding of the garden's design.

I analyse the trajectory from *The Legible City* to *Nature Time* to illustrate a specific development within the "doubled screen" paradigm that informs my research, distinguishing this focus from a history of techno-mediated art. A shift from a model of individual immersion grounded in textual interpretation to one that incorporates shared experience within a simulated pictorial space defines the development. The comparison between the two works provides a concrete example for my argument of how techno-mediated environments have been reconfigured to produce individual perceptual realities and complex social spaces. My subsequent VR and AR investigations explore the social dimensions of the doubled screen, for which the shift from a solitary, linguistic space to a collective, pictorial one offers a structural model.

5.3.2 Anderson and Huang: Immersive Narratives

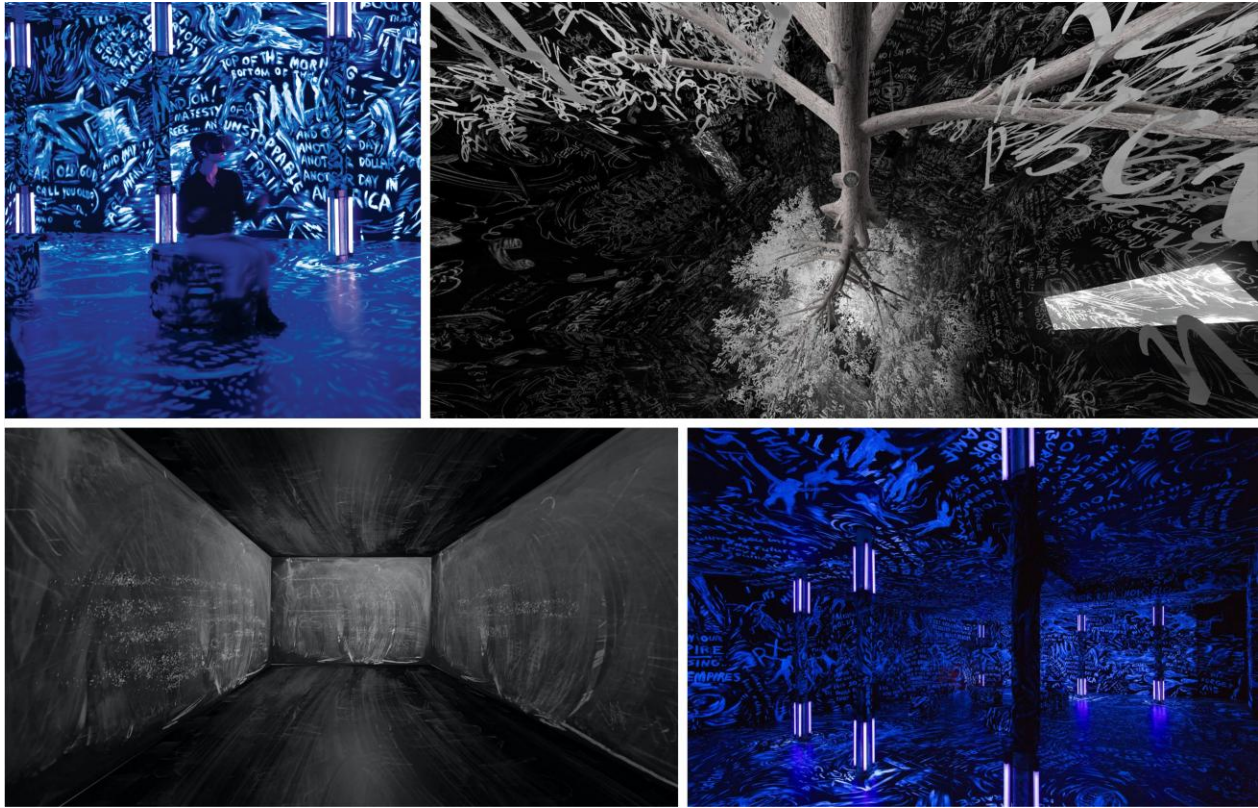


Figure 40. Laurie Anderson and Hsin-Chien Huang, *La Camera Insabbiata* (also known as *Chalkroom*), 2017. Composite image showing (clockwise from top left): a spectator wearing a VR headset seated in a physical installation space with projected chalk-like drawings on surrounding surfaces; an internal view from the VR experience depicting a tree-like structure and floating textual elements in a dark, abstract environment; an immersive room with blue light and projected textual elements on all surfaces; and an internal view from the VR experience showing a corridor-like space with chalk drawings on the walls. Interactive VR installation; dimensions variable. Image sources: Hsin-Chien Huang official website (https://www.hsinchienhuang.com/pix/_3artworks/i_laCameraInsabbiata/p0.php?lang=en) and Laurie Anderson official website (<https://laurieanderson.com/?portfolio=chalkroom>). © 2025 Laurie Anderson and Hsin-Chien Huang.

Laurie Anderson and Hsin-Chien Huang’s collaborative VR installation, *La Camera Insabbiata* (also known as *Chalkroom* 2017) (Figure 40), presents an alternative mode of aesthetic roaming and spatial production that expands upon existing approaches to immersive environments and the “doubled screen”. In contrast to the bicycle-mediated navigation of simulated physical locations in Shaw’s works, *La Camera Insabbiata* plunges the spectator, through a VR headset, into a vast, dream-like, and labyrinthine structure. Anderson and Huang compose this structure from hand-drawn chalk lines, words, stories, and symbols. The VR headset is the primary, all-encompassing screen, generating a totalising visual and auditory environment that largely supplants the physical exhibition space. This virtual world, a sprawling, dark architecture of language and memory, constitutes the immersive secondary screen.

Within this screen, Anderson and Huang grant participants the agency to fly, explore, and even leave their chalk marks. These activities contribute to the ever-evolving textual landscape. The spectator's act of flying, a form of disembodied navigation synthesizing multiple sensory modalities, redefines *you* as an untethered journey through abstract, narrative, and mnemonic spaces. For instance, a spectator navigates through a chamber constructed from Anderson's anecdotes, then ascends into a void filled with floating textual fragments, experiencing a sense of liberation from conventional physical constraints.

The doubled screen in *La Camera Insabbiata* manifests through the spectator's individual experience and phenomenological interaction. The virtual occupies the spectator's direct visual field, while their embodied actions—head movements determining gaze, hand controllers enabling flight and drawing—actualise this ethereal world. The work produces a distinct representational space, a type of conceptualisation Lefebvre examined. The immateriality of language and ephemeral chalk marks explicitly build this space to become a realm of stories, to the exclusion of simulated cities or gardens.

The layered realities here are visual, conceptual, and narrative. Spectators navigate through rooms made of text, corridors of symbols, and voids filled with Anderson's spoken-word poetry. Each layer presents textual and visual information that invites interpretation and personal connection. The aesthetic experience involves traversing what I describe as a hybrid cognitive-perceptual space, where the boundaries between reading, listening, seeing, and spatial exploration dissolve.

The application of the deep-*Shanshui* lens to *La Camera Insabbiata* moves the analysis beyond a standard focus on the artwork's interactive mechanics. The lens indicates that the work's layered textual and visual elements, which critics previously understood as a collage of information, function as a form of *cengci* (層次, layering) that structures a specific mode of *you* through a conceptual, rather than navigable, landscape (Zong, 1987, 2011). The analytical method presents a different understanding of the artwork's aesthetic function, shifting the focus from the simulation of physical space to the construction of a contemporary *yijing*. The lens also makes visible a previously unexamined spatial dynamic by identifying the external monitors as a contemporary *chongping*. The identification of the monitors as a contemporary *chongping* articulates the tension between the spectator's private, immersive journey and its conversion into a shared, public spectacle. The lens extends its role as

a mapping tool by functioning as a generative heuristic. The generative heuristic synthesises the spatial logic of *cengci* and *chongping* with the methodology of deep mapping, creating a cross-cultural model.

The principal contribution of the cross-cultural model is a capacity to articulate how the artwork's post-technological environment corresponds to pre-digital aesthetic philosophies and how the philosophies clarify the environment, an interpretation that the integration of the lens's theoretical parts make possible. The display of the spectator's journey on the external monitors convert the individual's immersive experience into a shared, albeit vicarious, spectacle. The conversion of the immersive experience into a shared spectacle foster, like in Shaw's *Nature Time*, a social dynamic by situating multiple spectators within a single, shared environment. However, *La Camera Insabbiata* uses this collective context to decentralise narrative authority, vesting it in individual interpretation. The foregrounding of individual subjective experience as a sharable, mediated event indicates the purpose of the artwork's shift in focus. The artwork's emphasis on a sharable, mediated event questions previously held notions of solitary artistic contemplation.

5.3.3 Hito Steyerl: Critical Mirroring

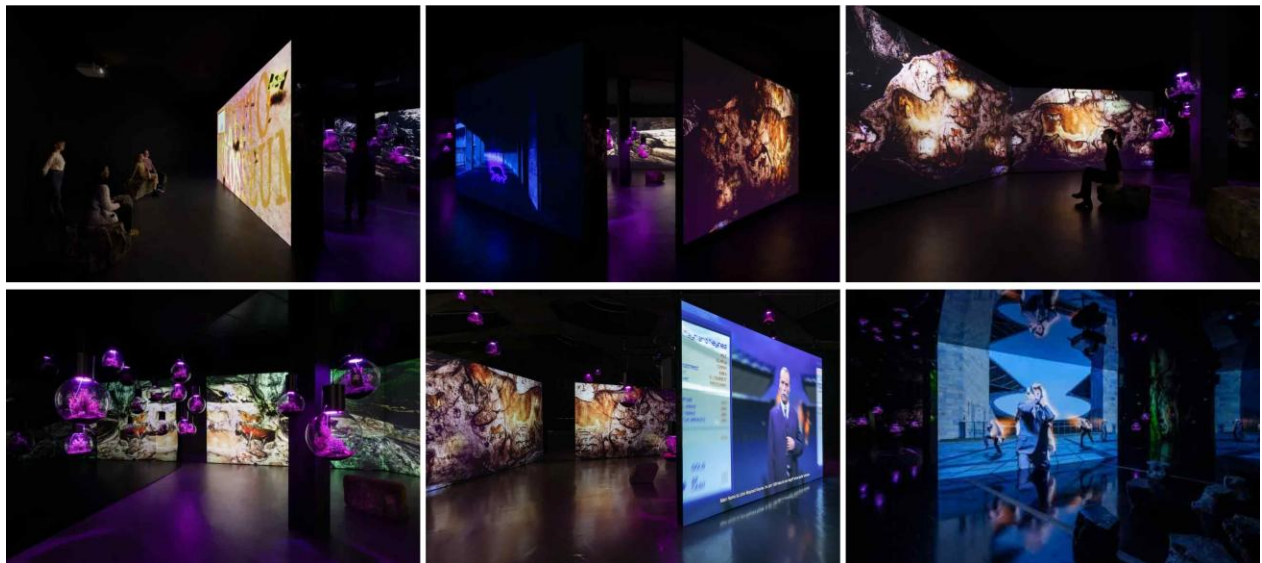


Figure 41. Hito Steyerl, *Animal Spirits*, 2022. Composite installation view showing multichannel video projections on large, encompassing surfaces within a gallery space, depicting a collage of CGI “animal spirits”, digital landscapes, found footage, and textual overlays. Immersive video installation; dimensions variable. Image source: Lucas Gutierrez Studio (<https://lucasgutierrez.com/hito-steyerl-animal-spirits/>). © 2025 Hito Steyerl and K21, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen.

Further advancing these concepts, Hito Steyerl's immersive video installation *Animal Spirits* (2022) (Figure 41) exemplifies how she utilises spatial projection to explore conceptual themes of techno-mediated virtuality and the metaverse, creating intricate "doubled screen" experiences. *Animal Spirits* employs multichannel video projections across large and encompassing surfaces within the exhibition space, transforming the physical space into a dynamic and disorienting environment. The work interrogates the burgeoning realms of the metaverse, Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs), and decentralized finance, presenting a fragmented and satirical narrative through a collage of computer-generated imagery (CGI), found footage, digital interfaces, and performative elements. In this installation, the physical projection surfaces constitute the primary screens, while the projected content forms multiple, layered secondary screens. This configuration creates a "doubled reality" where the exhibition space becomes an interface to, and a critique of, these emergent virtual economies and their socio-political implications.

The "mirror screen" aspect in *Animal Spirits* manifests as a critical mirroring of contemporary society's speculative manias, its anxieties surrounding post-technological value, and the often-absurd nature of virtual existence and ownership. The techno-mediated "animal spirits" can be interpreted as distorted reflections of collective human desires and fears projected into and amplified by these new technological ecosystems. Steyerl's work thus reflects the viewer's entanglement within these pervasive digital and economic systems. *You* are central to experiencing *Animal Spirits*. Viewers navigate the physical installation, encountering different visual and auditory information from multiple projections, piecing together the work's complex critique. This process is an immersive, spatialized essay that demands interactions. Steyerl's work demonstrates the relevance of several key theories. Her construction of a unique "representational space" that interrogates and deconstructs other produced spaces, such as the metaverse, applies Lefebvre's concept of the production of space (1992, 2009). Her exploration of how abstract financial instruments and virtual entities are actualised and exert influence illustrates Lévy's ideas on the virtual (1998, 2001). The work's constant reflection on the nature, circulation, and power of digital images confirms the applicability of Mitchell's notion of the "metapicture" (2018; 2010). Through the deep-*Shanshui* lens, the layered, fragmented, and immersive environment of *Animal Spirits* invites a contemporary form of *you* (aesthetic roaming) through

a technologically mediated “landscape” of critique and information, evoking a sense of *jingzhongjing* (景中景, scene-within-a-scene) (Jiang J., 2020; Zhang Y. et al., 2018; Zong, 1987) through its nested and often contradictory realities, prompting viewers to navigate and question the very nature of value, presence, and image in the post-technological age.

5.4 Theoretical Synthesis for Artistic Practice

In this chapter, I argued that the post-technological screen has shifted from a passive surface for representation into an interface for co-producing reality. In my typological investigation, I traced the screen’s transformation from a passive surface to an active interface, beginning with the rhizomatic networks of Paik’s *TV Garden* to propose a baseline for non-linear, acentred screen experiences. I then examined the techno-mediated reflections in the works of Graham, Campus, and Iwai, where I showed how the screen functions as a mirror that creates a feedback loop with the spectator. To conclude my analysis, I examined immersive XR environments by Shaw, Anderson and Huang, and Steyerl, in which I demonstrated the screen’s capacity to generate inhabitable, co-produced realities. I therefore contend that in the post-technological artworks I have examined, the screen functions as a dynamic interface that facilitates the co-production of reality in direct dialogue with the spectator.

I synthesise my analysis of the screen’s shift from a surface for static representation to an apparatus for computational and phenomenological interaction into the deep-*Shanshui* lens, which is a theoretical framework that repositions the spectator from a passive observer to a co-constituent of the artwork’s meaning and spatiality. The lens connects post-technological practices with historical precedents of layered visibility, such as the Chinese *pingfeng* and *chongping*, by integrating the concept of *you* with theories of virtuality and spatial production. Through my synthesis of these cultural and theoretical perspectives, I provide an interpretive framework to argue that embodied interaction in post-technological art can be understood through historical precedents of layered visibility, such as the Chinese *pingfeng* and *chongping*. As I will demonstrate through the specific artistic methodologies detailed in Chapter 6, this framework reveals insights into the co-constitution of spatio-temporal experience that techno-centric accounts often overlook, validating the lens’s contribution by showing how it enabled me to overcome creative blockages and produce new hybrid artworks. In the next chapter, I show how my application of the framework informs and contextualizes

my creative methodologies and artistic practice.

6. Spatial Rhetorics: Praxis and Synthesis in Post-Technological Art

In the preceding chapters, I developed a cross-cultural theoretical framework (the deep-Shanshui lens) for analysing spatial rhetoric within post-technological experimental art. My inquiry stems from a problem: I found theoretical models derived predominantly from Western academic traditions insufficient for interpreting the layered spatial and temporal dynamics embedded in certain contemporary artistic practices. The particular characteristics of post-technological experimental art, however, expose certain limitations within these models, suggesting the need for a complementary analytical approach. Techno-mediated processes produce the spatio-temporal dynamics in such works, reconfiguring experiences of physical and temporal parameters through compression, fragmentation, and networked transmission. A live-streamed video, for instance, compresses geographical distance into the immediate space of the screen, while the non-linear editing of the same video fragments and reorders its temporal sequence, disrupting a linear progression of events. The emergence of deterritorialised domains in techno-mediated spaces, and networked environments composed of data flows and virtual interfaces, requires new modes of interpretation and interaction from spectators, who must navigate a fluid system of interconnected information.

To address the analytical difficulty I encountered, in the previous chapters, I developed the concepts of Spatial Rhetoric, Chrono-topographic Rhetoric, and the Water-Stone metaphor. These concepts were developed in the context of my practice-led research. My inquiry began with the founding of the *Independent Various Art Space* (IVAS)³², an international collective I co-founded in 2017, with Xiaolong Zheng^{iv} and Sharon Zhang Yiying^v to investigate the hybridity of space through artistic and curatorial experiments. The collective constructed hybrid sites that spanned both sanctioned gallery settings and unsanctioned public spaces in its initial exhibition, *Silhouette of the Illumination* (2017-2018).³³ In these early projects, I examined how integrating physical objects with techno-mediated elements could reconfigure audience experiences across these contrasting sites of institutional authority. The artistic and

³² IVAS was hosted as a section on my personal website (<https://www.racelarho.com/ivas>). The new official IVAS website is <https://www.ivas.cc/>, and the official project website is <https://ivas.cloud/>. Data migration from the old site to the new sites is ongoing.

³³ See the early version of the IVAS panel at my personal website (<https://www.racelarho.com/ivas>) for the founding statement and the exhibition system of IVAS, which details the tripartite structures of exhibiting in unauthorised public spaces, sanctioned galleries, and virtual environments.

curatorial experiments demonstrated to me the inadequacy of pre-existing theoretical concepts, which often failed to account for the material and cultural textures of the installations. The practical difficulties of articulating the conceptual work these exhibitions performed, which I conceived as integrated spatial narrative systems as opposed to collections of objects, motivated the development a precise analytical framework. Chapters 2 and 4 detail the resulting theoretical structure. The framework serves the dual purpose of interpretation and generative guidance for artistic and curatorial practice.

The intellectual progression of my research has been one of movement between praxis and analysis, where each artistic experiment constitutes a method for testing, challenging, and expanding my theoretical framework. In this process, I formulated the concepts presented in Chapters 2 through 5 as tools to understand and frame the phenomena I encountered in my practice. The methodology, which I describe as a form of practice-led theory generation, aims to produce knowledge grounded in the material, cultural, and technological specificities of contemporary art. The current chapter applies the theoretical apparatus developed in the preceding chapters to an analysis of the *Post-Bits Human Universe* and *Post-Lingnan School of Painting* series. My analysis will examine how the theoretical toolkit makes legible the ways in which these artworks construct meaning, offering a culturally aware mode of interpretation for post-technological art.

6.1 A Locus for Hybridity: Independent Various Art Space

I founded the exhibition system I conceived, which informs the practice of IVAS, on the principle that all communities, regardless of class, culture, or race, possess an equal right to participate in cultural production. The principle of equal participation later guided the *Post-Bits Human Universe* series, a project exploring interaction and exchange among audiences from diverse locations, aiming to address physical geographical limitations and fostering cross-cultural dialogue. I defined the objective for IVAS to produce and exhibit artworks that examine the intersections of virtual, physical, and techno-mediated realities. To structure these investigations, the founding statement of IVAS³⁴ outlined an exhibition system that I designed as a research tool. The exhibition system provides a repeatable method for examining how different spatial and institutional contexts alter an artwork's meaning and reception.

³⁴ Please access <https://www.racelarho.com/ivas> or <https://www.ivas.cc> for more information.

6.1.1 Tripartite Structure Performance System

My primary objective in developing this alternative structure is to analyse how the institutional and material status of a space shapes an artwork's narrative and an audience's interpretation. The sequence from an unsanctioned to a sanctioned and finally to a virtual site constitutes a controlled experiment in spatial rhetoric. Each stage prompts a re-evaluation of the relationship between the artwork, its environment, and the viewer.

The IVAS exhibition system is organised around a tripartite structure to examine the concept of hybridity across different contexts. This structure, which I term the “A Year Project” due to its annual cycle, presents artworks across contrasting dimensions and in specific spatial and legal contexts. The terms “legal” and “illegal” define an artwork's position relative to the established institutional art system. An “illegal” exhibition, therefore, situates outside the sanctioned venues and validation processes of the conventional art system, a position from which it participates in and extends avant-garde traditions of political and institutional critique.³⁵

The “Original Exhibition” section constitutes an “illegal” intervention action in an unsanctioned public space. I deliberately limit the operation to an ephemeral 24-hour cycle. The intervention action represents the base, initiating a process that moves from the physical to the virtual and aims to demonstrate the practical potential for artistic dialogue outside institutional control. I stage the second section, the “Duplicate Exhibition”, within a sanctioned, “legal” exhibition space such as a gallery or museum, where the artworks are presented as physical objects. The duplication and re-contextualisation of the Original Exhibition represents a deliberate action to interrogate and problematise the “legal” identity and initiative. Institutional validation, in this context, confers a “legal” identity and perceived legitimacy upon the exhibition. The third section, the “Virtual Exhibition”, transitions to a non-physical form. I present the exhibition within a techno-mediated, “illegal/legal” virtual space, such as an interactive application.³⁶

³⁵ My definition of “illegality” constitutes a conceptual and political positioning against the constraints and hegemonies of the “legal” or sanctioned art world. Discussions of art that operates in opposition to or exists outside institutional norms provide key examples. Site-specific and interventionist art practices circumvent conventional gallery systems to occupy public or unconventional spaces (Guo S., 2017, pp. 139, 182; Jackson & LaFarge, 2024, pp. 1, 2). Wu's (2000; 2002) analysis of Chinese experimental art provides a specific instance, examining practices that alternated between official and unofficial spaces.

³⁶ In my initial formulation of this exhibition system, I employed the term “computer game” for this third section.

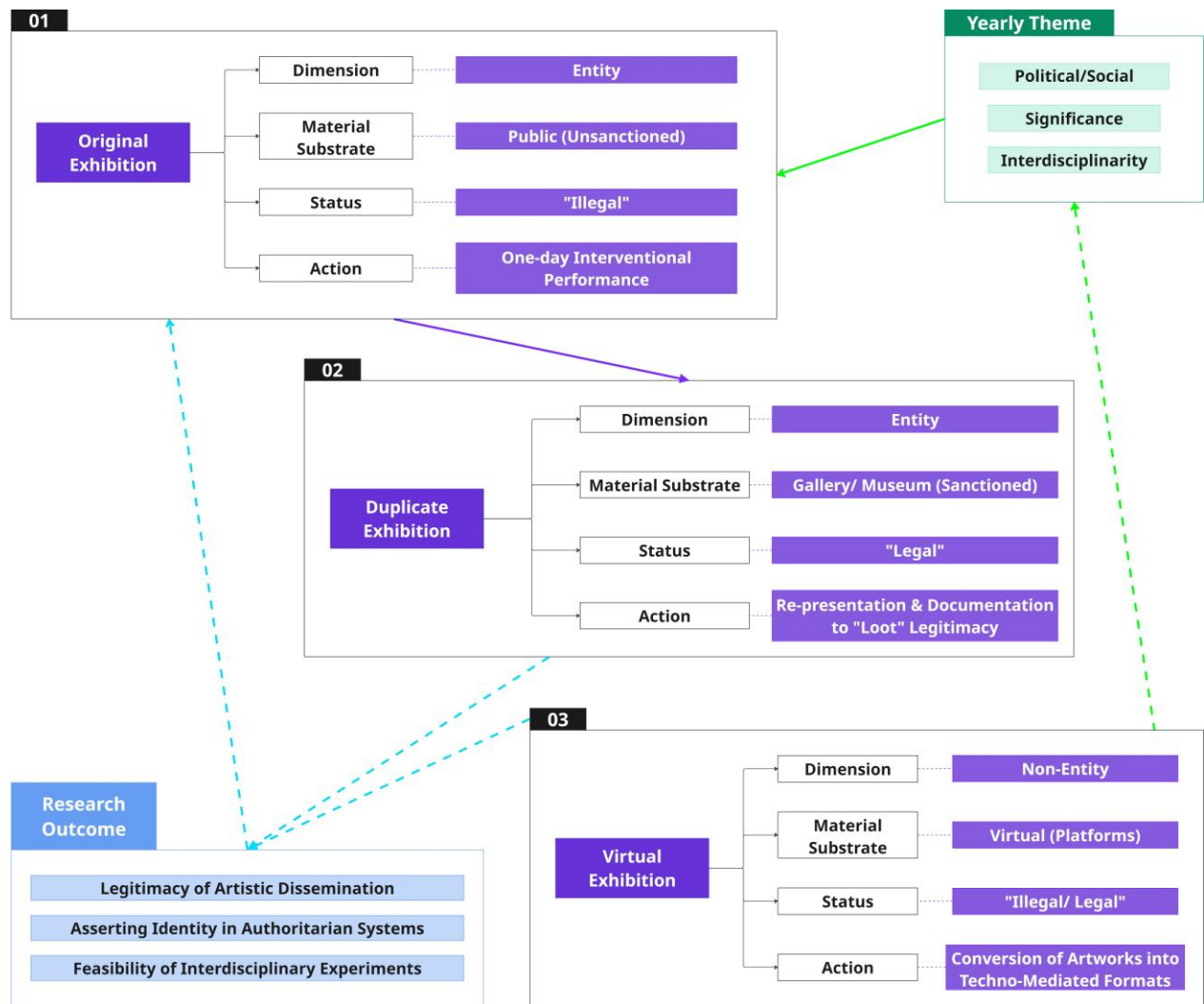


Figure 42. IVAS “A Year Project” Performance System Diagram. The diagram outlines the system’s tripartite structure. It shows the progression through “Original”, “Duplicate”, and “Virtual” exhibition stages. The diagram also details each stage’s dimension, material substrate, legal status, and artistic action. The overarching yearly theme and the system’s research specimens are also indicated. Diagram accessible at: <https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVJeWoOAK=?moveToWidget=3458764634803783392&cot=14> (accessed 16 September 2025). Diagram © 2025 Racelar Ho.

In this setting, the transformation of artworks into interactive techno-mediated forms, allowing different artists to create distinct levels or experiences based on their original physical works, enables a reciprocal exchange in which audience interaction co-creates the artistic experience (Figure 42). I designed this three-part process to offer

The term “computer game” reflected the common classification of interactive techno-mediated environments at that time. However, as my research into post-technological interactive systems and their forms advanced, I have since adopted “techno-mediated interactive application” as a descriptor. The descriptor “techno-mediated interactive application” more accurately encompasses the scope of interactive experiences relevant to contemporary experimental art, which incorporates the domain of the gaming genre.

an alternative to the conventional, uniform exhibition format, which can confine art within a single, authoritative institutional context.

The system allows for a comparative analysis of how an audience interprets and responds to issues of authenticity, authority, and access in different spatial conditions. The IVAS exhibition system provides the mode of analysis that I argue is required for post-technological art: one grounded in the specific conditions of its production and presentation.

6.1.2 Initial Implementation: Silhouette of the Illumination



Figure 43. Ruyifang Neighbourhood, Guangzhou, China. Photographs taken during site research between February and April 2017. Further images are available on the IVAS Facebook community page: <https://www.facebook.com/ivartspaceo/photos>. Photographs © 2017 Racelar Ho.

The conceptual architecture of the exhibition system I designed, as detailed in Section 6.1.1, provides a practical context for examining the affordances of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the "rhizome" (2007), while also exposing the need for a complementary framework to address its cross-cultural dynamics. The exhibition system weaves a non-hierarchical network connecting disparate points. My selection of spaces—a formal gallery (Art Space O Gallery) in Seoul, South Korea; a deterritorialised virtual space; and a two-storey, red-brick residential building in the Ruyifang (如意坊) neighbourhood (Figure 43) in Guangzhou, China—articulates a deliberate contrast between the sanctioned space of the institutional art world and the unsanctioned spaces of everyday life.



Figure 44. Ruyifang exhibition site, Guangzhou, China, showing characteristic architectural features (collage, left and centre) and floor plan (diagram, right) illustrating its organic and porous spatial network. Further project details: <https://www.racelarho.com/silhouette-of-the-illumination-17-1>. Photographs and diagram © 2017 Racelar Ho.

The Ruyifang site is a product of informal, organic social forces. The site is a low-income community dwelling for former railway workers. Adjacent to the old Guangzhou South Freight Station, it is characterized by spontaneously constructed additions. The proximity of these red-brick buildings, coupled with resident's self-built extensions of their ground-floor front and backyards, created an interconnected network of second-floor platforms that forms the primary exhibition area (Figure 44). Two open staircases and corridors flanked the selected building. Resident-constructed stairways also led from private ground-floor yards to the communal second-floor platforms, providing multiple points of access to the area. Resulting from organic community development, the architectural porosity afforded multiple, non-predetermined entry points, which fostered diverse, non-linear pathways of exploration. The exhibition system becomes a form of mapping. A cartographic practice traces connections across heterogeneous territories. The rhizomatic structure of the system is integral to my understanding of hybridity, as the creation of a complex, interconnected network spanning multiple planes of existence at once.

My rhizomatic approach applies Lefebvre's (1992) argument that social and political forces produce space. Within the IVAS exhibition system, I treat each exhibition site as a distinct "production of space", and analyse the specific socio-political dynamics embedded in each location. A Foucauldian analysis views the unsanctioned public corridor in the Ruyifang residential building as a "heterotopia" (1980b, 1986). The heterotopia represents a counter-site that simultaneously contests and inverts the sanctioned gallery space by replacing the gallery's logic of formal display and controlled access with the corridor's conditions of public transit and ephemeral encounter. I selected this site for its controlled disorder and

transformed a place of transit into a site for temporary aesthetic encounters. This project by IVAS intervenes in socially produced space to illuminate the implicit codes and power dynamics that govern environments. The intervention transforms artistic practice into a method of spatial analysis and initiates an investigation into the production of space.

Original Exhibition – Ruyifang Neighbourhood (June 2017)



Figure 45. *Silhouette of the Illumination*, Ruyifang Neighbourhood, Guangzhou, China, 15-20 June 2017. Selected images documenting the collaborative installation process with residents. Photographs © 2017 Racelar Ho.

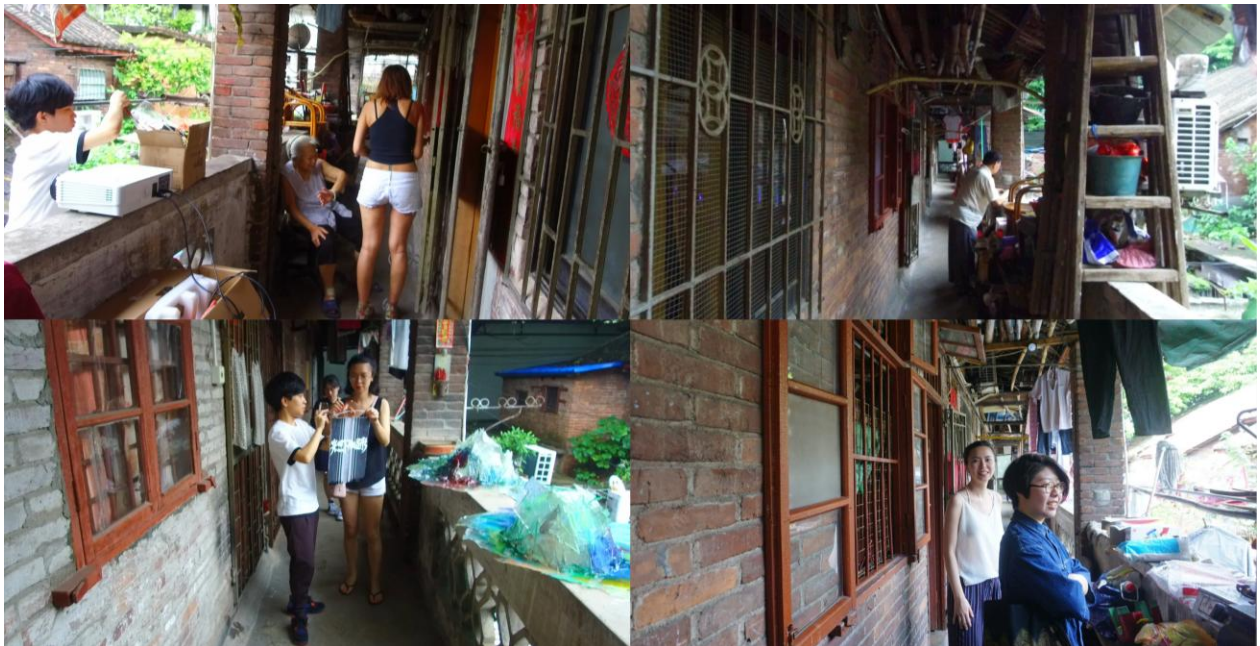


Figure 46. Collaborative Curation and Installation Process for *Silhouette of the Illumination* in Ruyifang, May 2017. The upper photographs document discussions regarding exhibition arrangements with residents.

The lower photographs show IVAS-collaborating artists Dan Yu and Yuet Ho, along with Ling Wen who assisted with the installation, during the on-site setup of artworks. Photographs © 2017 Racelar Ho and Ling Wen.

Silhouette of the Illumination (2017), the first project actualising this conceptual framework, served as the initial test for these spatial and relational ideas within the Ruyifang neighbourhood. The “Original Exhibition” (Figure 45) took place across the neighbourhood’s ambiguous public and semi-public areas. I chose these areas for their status as spaces accessible to outsiders yet under the persistent, informal surveillance of inhabitants. The exhibited artworks consisted of cyanotype prints and small sculptures. The initial artistic elements from the Ruyifang exhibition had included mixed-media installations, video art, and a VR artwork. I placed the objects within the recesses and apertures of the building’s plant floor and second-floor corridor. I installed the artworks to appear as integral components of the building’s existing material fabric. I installed and de-installed the exhibition within a single day, without formal announcement or official permission. IVAS and the residents undertook a collaborative process for this formally unsanctioned curation, testing how an artistic intervention functions when lacking institutional legitimacy and reliant on community interaction for its audience and co-creation (Figure 46).

The exhibition at Ruyifang provided a practical test for the developing ideas concerning the interplay of time, space, and meaning that I later developed into the chrono-topographic rhetoric framework. Within this framework, I posit that the encounter between a viewer’s embodied interaction and the affordances of spatio-medial arrangements co-constitutes artistic meaning, a process where temporal conditions and spatial contexts intertwine. My specific approach, based in the chrono-topographic rhetoric framework, repositions meaning away from a static property embedded within the artwork: the viewer’s temporal experience constitutes meaning as an event. The artworks’ placement in constricted corridors and inaccessible recesses compelled viewers to navigate the space physically, shifting the mode of engagement from detached observation to embodied exploration. A viewer’s temporal experience of the installation generates significance as an unfolding event, foregrounding the process of interpretation. Artworks provide a field of discrete elements, and the viewer’s navigational path constructs a distinct set of connections between these elements, generating a meaning contingent upon the specific sequence of that viewer’s encounters. The art intervention in the Ruyifang neighbourhood exemplified viewer-constructed meaning. A reliance on ephemeral, site-specific encounters determined the project’s function in

demonstrating how viewers construct meaning. The project's meaning was contingent upon its temporal precarity. The exhibition's announced one-day duration framed the artworks not as stable objects in a permanent collection, but as components of a singular, unrepeatable event. Consequently, the artworks' semiotic significance synthesises their formal properties as authored objects with the interactions prompted by their temporary integration into the Ruyifang neighbourhood.

In addition, the ephemerality of this one-day intervention shaped the affective conditions of the encounter for both the participating artists and collaborating residents. A shared awareness of the work's transience fostered a mode of engagement that recast the involvement of both artists and residents into a lived experience of the artwork's temporary insertion into the community's daily life and created a shared sense of a singular event. I defined chrono-topography in Section 4.1.3 as a physical location containing cultural and historical references and a space carrying traces of past events. The artworks modified the site's existing spatial fabric through temporary insertions, establishing a dialogue with the chrono-topographic medium that generated their significance. The conscious act of artists configuring or "writing" new temporal elements onto the existing "topo" (places) of the site constituted the artworks' "graphic" dimension. This insertion into the ongoing life and accumulated narratives of the building contributed a crucial contextual layer to the artworks' meaning, which was then generated through the viewer's experience. The insertion highlighted how ephemeral interventions can actualise a site's latent potential for new social and aesthetic encounters and alter the perception of a specific place by introducing new meanings and relations, aiming to demonstrate how spatio-temporal configurations "speak" or manifest their potential for making meaning.

Duplicate Exhibition – Art Space O Gallery (August 2017)



Figure 47. Exhibition view, *Intersection of Parallel Lines*, Art Space O Gallery, Seoul, 2-12 August 2017. Photograph courtesy of Art Space O Gallery. Artworks © 2017 Racelar Ho, Sharon Zhang, Dan Yu, Yonjin Chang, and IVAS, and residents of Ruyifang neighbourhood.

Yonjin Chang
The exhibition shows three young artists whose from different countries, different experiences and cultures make them have different perspectives and perceptions on their creative production and motivation, and also the research direction for them is not nearly the same as well. Their works seem to be created more intuitively. However, the exhibition has brought them together to show their works, we can see how they thought about the world, and how they respond to it. From the same generation they have something in common, which could be considered as an intersection of parallel lines.

Racelar Ho
Made by sunbathing, Autobiography is trying to define me as a social individual in a more reasonable way. Getting rid of the limits of those summer beds, the work without being by capturing the trace of the artists' feet every day, with the risk, suggest, medicine, the bags even my body. These objects embody the experience I had in the certain place and tell as much more about who and how under we are.
The technical process of my work is Cyanotype prints, which is a photographic process that using the sunlight to produce a function print. Besides, I arranged the objects into the format of the newspaper, which I took as a symbol of collective memory, that is the reason why I am calling my work Autobiography.

Dan Yu
Project statement:
Pursuit and embracing a spiritual utopia, artists persist in exploring the creative into their thinking and practice even though it is a challenge. Besides, there are some realistic factors against them. Therefore, we constructed a unique demonstration form for independent artists in which artists would amplify the power of their sounds in this performance system, where they would enable the vision of their creation at two different dimensions - an entity and a non-entity.
The performance system is comprised of three sections: first exhibition (legal space), duplicate exhibition (right space) and virtual exhibition (computer screen). Presenting works of three different type demonstrates ways to depicting a dialogue which between an entitator and a non-entitator of space-time. This system is flexible rather than rigidly which giving a unique demonstration way to be work of print and trying to harness a particular resonance toward an audience.
The concept about "Situations of Resonance":
For those distant creatures, cross between it not only accompanied by a satisfaction which coming from a new experience, and also often bring on solitary and humble of perfection like lonely in dust. Therefore, these complicated and blurry atmosphere make their artworks to have some kind of mysterious and elusive strength. It is these factors make creator to express some sort of spiritual redemption which lighting an intense passion for creative production rather not being a self-enclosure negative emotion. Creator who chase themselves like that, the correction between them and their artworks have some sort of loving and rough results. It not only cause a series of intense chemical reaction in the heart of the audiences, and also bringing a unique and deeper resonance of spirit to them.

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INTERSECTION OF PARALLEL LINES
2017.08.02(WED)-08.12(SAT)
11:00AM-06:00PM

2017 아트스페이스오 작가공모

DAN YU
RACELAR HO
YODJIN CHANG

WWW.ARTSPACEO.COM
서울특별시 서초구 신반포 55 181 / 070-7558-4994

Figure 48. Leaflet for the exhibition *Intersection of Parallel Lines*, Art Space O Gallery, Seoul, 2-12 August 2017. Design by Yonjin Chang. Leaflet © 2017 Yonjin Chang, Racelar Ho, Dan Yu, and IVAS.



Figure 49. Installation view of the archive of documentary materials from *Intersection of Parallel Lines*, Art Space O Gallery, Seoul, 2-12 August 2017. Photograph courtesy of Art Space O Gallery. Artwork © 2017 Racelar Ho, Sharon Zhang, IVAS, and the residents of Ruyifang neighbourhood.



Figure 50. Floor plan layout created with white tape, *Intersection of Parallel Lines*, Art Space O Gallery, Seoul, 2-12 August 2017. Photograph courtesy of Art Space O Gallery. Artwork © 2017 Racelar Ho, Sharon Zhang, IVAS, and residents of the Ruyifang neighbourhood.

The second iteration of the project, titled *Intersection of Parallel Lines* (2017) (Figure 47 and 48), implemented the Duplicate Exhibition stage of the exhibition system at Art Space O Gallery in Seoul. In this exhibition, I presented an archive (Figure 49) of documentary materials that documented the collaborative curatorial process from the initial Ruyifang neighbourhood project

and its spatial implications. The collection contained video records of the month-long curatorial activities in Ruyifang and textual records of our communications with residents. Concurrently, my collaborator Zhang and I reproduced the architectural floor plan of the Ruyifang residential building on the Seoul gallery floor using white tape (Figure 50). This spatial transposition and archival presentation constituted my first practical application of the deep mapping methodology. In the Seoul exhibition, the taped floor plan offered a base cartographic layer, while the video and textual records provided narrative and experiential strata. Together, these elements formed a deep map of the art project in the Ruyifang neighbourhood.

My deep mapping approach enacts a specific methodology for community interaction that positions residents as collaborators and co-producers of meaning. I propose that local community spaces are complex “topos”; my framework of chrono-topographic rhetoric defines these spaces through its specific analytical terms. The numerous historical and cultural layers of these complex “topos” form an influential medium for social interaction and meaning-making; through this medium, the locations generate aesthetic and political discourse. I founded the exhibition system I conceived, which informs the practice of IVAS, on the principle that all communities, regardless of class, culture, or race, possess an equal right to participate in cultural production. The principle of equal participation later guided the Post-Bits Human Universe series, a project exploring interaction and exchange among audiences from diverse locations, aiming to address physical geographical limitations and fostering cross-cultural dialogue.

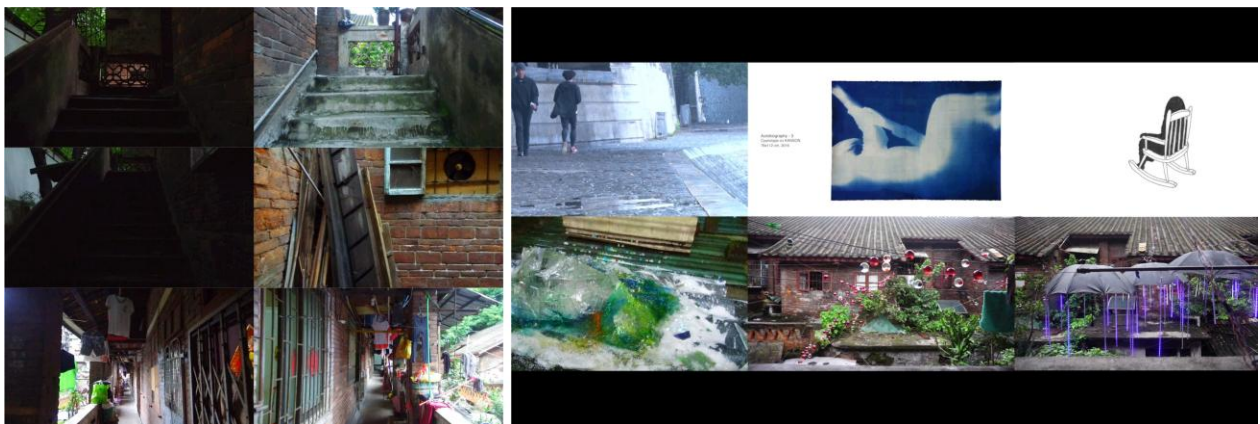


Figure 51. Composite image. Left: Video screenshots from documentary footage of the Ruyifang exhibition, May 2017. Right: Video compilation of participating artists' works displayed in a looping sequence on an iPad (listed

top to bottom, left to right: Hao Liu, Dan Yu, Yonjin Chang, Racelar Ho, Sharon Zhang, Yuet Ho). Video stills and compilation © 2017 Racelar Ho, respective artists, and IVAS.

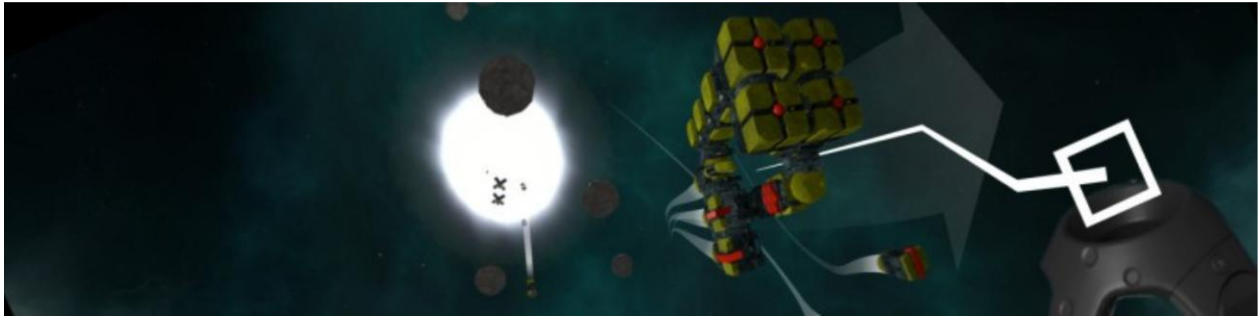


Figure 52. Klaus Bruegmann, *void LINK Sneak Peek*, 2017. Image courtesy by the artist. Further information is available for download at https://store.steampowered.com/app/560550/void_LINK/. Artwork © 2017 Klaus Bruegmann.

However, spatial and temporal constraints at the Ruyifang site meant these techno-mediated works, which address concepts of layered visibility and virtuality, were first presented only through video projections. Limitations in equipment and curatorial funding at this exhibition additionally hindered their full realisation in the Seoul exhibition. For presenting the concept of “virtual window”, I therefore employed an iPad as an alternative, which is a nascent form of the “doubled screen” (see Section 5.2), to display all participating artists’ works in a looping sequence (Figure 51 and 52). Placing these materials within the established gallery context altered their rhetorical function. The unsanctioned, unstable, and collaborative activity in the Ruyifang neighbourhood became a sanctioned, stable object of aesthetic reflection in Seoul. Photographs that in Guangzhou documented a process were transformed into principal artworks in Seoul, conveying the narrative of the initial project. The gallery’s white walls and standard lighting imparted a different authority and value upon the objects, shifting their meaning from interventional activity and community collaboration towards institutional critique (Groys, 2008).

Moreover, the dialectic between the Ruyifang and Seoul exhibitions illustrates a preliminary version of the Water-Stone dialectic framework, which I articulated in Chapter 3 and developed in Chapter 4. The Ruyifang exhibition was fluid and transient, and its meaning was dispersed within the social currents of the neighbourhood and the collaborative process, reflecting the watery flux of lived experience and ephemeral data. The Seoul gallery, conversely, functioned as the stone. It was a fixed, solid container providing a stable basis for interpretation and

institutional validation and acted as an anchor of material site and archival memory. Placing the documentation of the fluid activity of the Ruyifang site within the static Seoul gallery generated a notable tension. The gallery did not only display the past activities of the exhibition in the Ruyifang neighbourhood. The re-contextualisation changed its meaning and highlighted the role of institutional frameworks in shaping an understanding of artistic practice.

My practice of generating meaning through the interaction of space, time, collaboration, and feeling, exemplified by this exhibition, also applies the aesthetic concept of *yijing* (意境). It aims to develop an experiential world that fuses objective scenery with subjective feeling. The objective of *yijing* is to create a space for the viewer to roam spiritually (*you*, 遊), experiencing noticeable movement and imaginative freedom. The concept of *you* and the co-creation of *yijing* are fundamental to my articulation of chrono-topographic rhetoric, with its emphasis on embodied interaction with spatio-medial arrangements (discussed in Chapter 4). The exhibition system I designed intended to create a contemporary form of *yijing* by enabling a journey for the artwork and exhibition as well as its documentation across various spatial, institutional, and collaborative topographies. I intended that the meaning of this exhibition materialises in the viewer's mind through the imaginative process of connecting the fluid, collaborative Ruyifang event with the static, archival Seoul documentation. The imaginative process of connecting these elements fosters an understanding of the political and aesthetic implications of this transposition.

Practical limitations encountered during both the Ruyifang and Seoul exhibitions, regarding the presentation of techno-mediated artworks, provided a catalyst for subsequent theoretical and practical developments in my research. The necessity of projecting video documentation of detailed installations in the Ruyifang site, and the additional compromise of using an iPad as a “Virtual Window” in the Seoul gallery, illuminated the constraints of realising and disseminating the spatial and interactive narratives of such works within conventional exhibition formats and given resource limitations. My later *Post-Bits Human Universe* series, which explores VR exhibition environments hosted on platforms like Mozilla Hubs, resulted from the conceptualisation and prototyping that these experiences guided; I will discuss this series in the following Section 6.2.1.

Virtual Exhibition – Unimplemented exhibition

The *Silhouette of the Illumination* exhibition, encompassing both the Ruyifang and Seoul exhibitions, possesses the cornerstone for my research. Although the project exhibited few post-technological components in its material execution, its significance resides in its foundational role. The challenges of representing techno-mediated experiences within these physical constraints, alongside the project's unrealised "Virtual Exhibition" stage, informed the theoretical and practical explorations of my later work. The inquiries initiated by *Silhouette of the Illumination*, particularly its unmaterialised virtual dimension, were therefore extended and elaborated in the *Post-Bits Human Universe* and *Post-Lingnan School of Painting* series, guiding my research towards the screen-centric and layered realities that define this dissertation.

6.2 Case Study I - Navigating Nested Realities: Post-Bits Human Universe series

The practical limitations I encountered during the *Silhouette of the Illumination* project (2017), in the Ruyifang and Seoul exhibitions regarding the presentation of techno-mediated artworks, provided an impetus for subsequent theoretical and practical developments in my research. The necessity of projecting video documentation for the Ruyifang installations, and the compromise of using an iPad Air as a "Virtual Window" in the Seoul gallery, highlighted the constraints on realising and disseminating the spatial and interactive narratives of the works within conventional exhibition formats and resource limitations. These experiences underscored the need for hybrid spatial strategies and prompted the conceptualisation and prototyping that led to my later *Post-Bits Human Universe* (PBHU) series. This series, which explores VR exhibition environments and other post-technological platforms, emerged from the unfulfilled potential and internalised questions of the *Silhouette of the Illumination*'s planned Virtual Exhibition stage, guiding my research towards screen-centric and layered realities.

The PBHU series, however, represents more than a reactive development; it is the outcome of a collaborative exploration with Zheng, initiated in 2012. During the period between 2012 and 2020, preceding the formal founding of IVAS and the *Silhouette of the Illumination* project, Zheng and I pursued distinct yet complementary lines of inquiry under the broader theme of the post-bits-human universe. My research focused on space as a narrative medium and a context provider for aesthetic experiences, investigating the poetics of spatio-temporal architectures, the phenomenological experience of *you* between audiences and

space, and the complex implications of surveillance where individuals become observable subjects within both visible and invisible frameworks. Concurrently, Zheng's work centred on pre-anthropology and posthumanism, examining the biotechnological possibilities between human and technology, and the potential societal issues arising from technological development. These parallel investigations, though distinct in their immediate focus, converged on the shared ground of understanding human existence within contemporary techno-mediated environments. The later formation of IVAS in 2017 and the implementation of the *Silhouette of the Illumination* project, which first realised the Tripartite Structure Performance System (Section 6.1.1), provided a practical and collaborative framework to synthesise these individual research trajectories. A specific intellectual imperative shaped the focused and techno-mediated explorations that characterise the PBHU series in this dissertation.

The PBHU series represents a practice-led inquiry, developing from the foundation laid by *Silhouette of Illumination* and these earlier explorations. It is one of the primary case studies in this dissertation, demonstrating the practical application and iterative refinement of the theoretical frameworks I have developed to address the complexities of the post-technological media. These frameworks are essential to understanding the series' position in post-technological experimental art. Each iteration of PBHU explores how virtual, physical, and techno-mediated spaces can be interwoven to create hybrid experiential systems. This addresses this dissertation's research questions regarding the reconfiguration of spatial rhetoric in post-technological art, particularly how such art facilitates new modes of navigating composite realities, co-constituting meaning, and mediating cross-cultural and trans-spatial interaction. The progression of PBHU is structured across three stages, each marking a conceptual and technical advancement in the exploration of these themes, and each stage further advancing my theoretical inquiries into "nested and layered space and realities" (Chapter 5) and the necessity for methodologies like deep mapping to analyse these multifaceted spatial temporal formations.

6.2.1 Genesis: 3D Scanning, AI Philosopher, and Early Virtual Prototypes (2020-2021)

The first phase of the *Post-Bits Human Universe* series centred on the development of a virtual prototype that integrated 3D scanning technology with an artificial intelligence (AI) program I independently developed, termed the *AI Philosopher* (AIP). The prototype resulted from a 3D scan of my apartment, converting a known physical environment into a point-cloud model.

The 3D scanned models of my apartment offered the basic virtual space, hosted on the Mozilla Hubs platform³⁷, making it accessible through standard web browsers across various devices (smartphones, tablets, and computers) and through VR headsets. This conversion of a physical space into a navigable virtual environment was an initial exploration of hybrid space, where the digital representation and the memory of the physical space began to combine for the viewer.

The point-cloud rendering, as seen in Figure 53, produces a dematerialised and recognisable version of the apartment. Within this version, walls exhibit permeable qualities and are inscribed with textual narratives, aesthetically reconfiguring my known domestic setting into a rhizomatic screen environment that, I found, prompted a desire for exploration. The process of digitising a personal space and overlaying it with interactive artworks that function as interfaces contributes to the ongoing examination of the boundaries between the physical and the virtual, a concern central to understanding our current technological epoch.

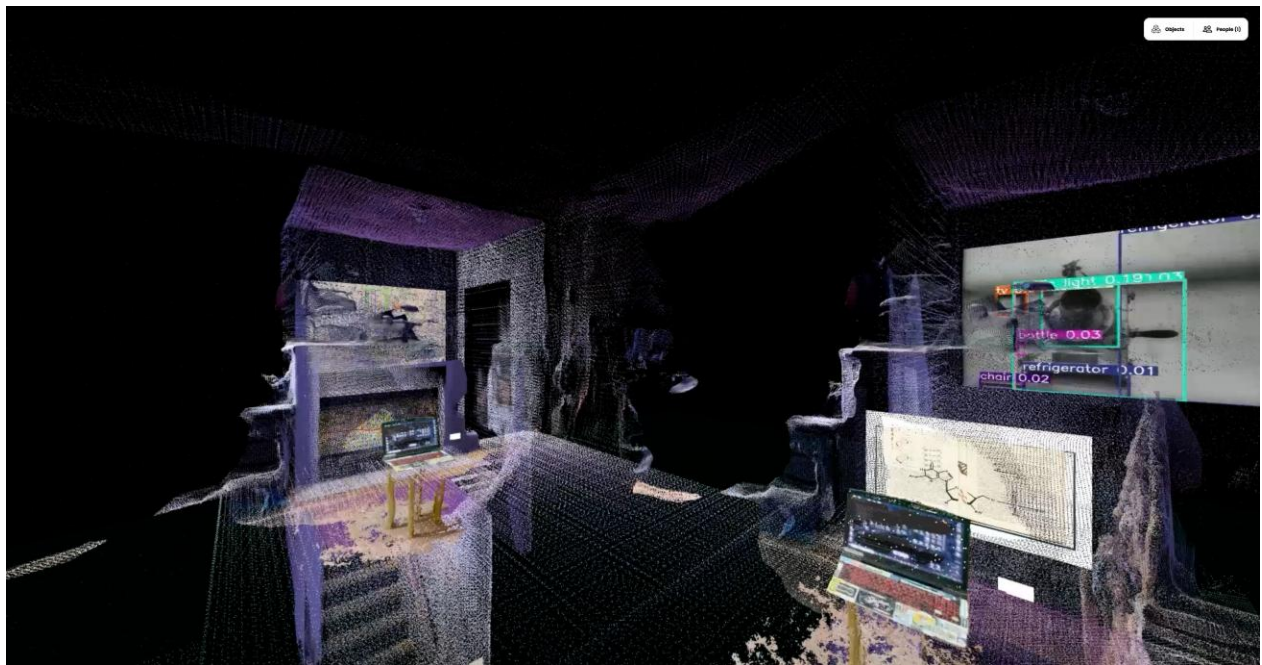


Figure 53. *Post-Bits Human Universe* (2021), Mozilla Hubs WebXR prototype. Interior view of the 3D scanned apartment, showing point-cloud walls inscribed with textual narratives and an interactive “open link” element, illustrating the hybridisation of physical memory and virtual interface. Artworks: *Post-Bits Human Universe* WebXR

³⁷ Mozilla Hubs is an open-source WebXR platform that allowed users to create and share social virtual reality experience accessible through a web browser, without requiring specialised software downloads. It supports the import of 3D models and permitted real-time voice and text communication between avatars. As of May 31st, 2024, while Mozilla has ended its support for the Hubs.

prototype © 2021 Racelar Ho and IVAS, *Interface Syndrome (AIP)* © 2021 Xiaolong Zheng and Racelar Ho
Oh the Bite (AIP) © 2021 Zhiai Chen and Racelar Ho, *AI Philosopher* © 2021 Racelar Ho.

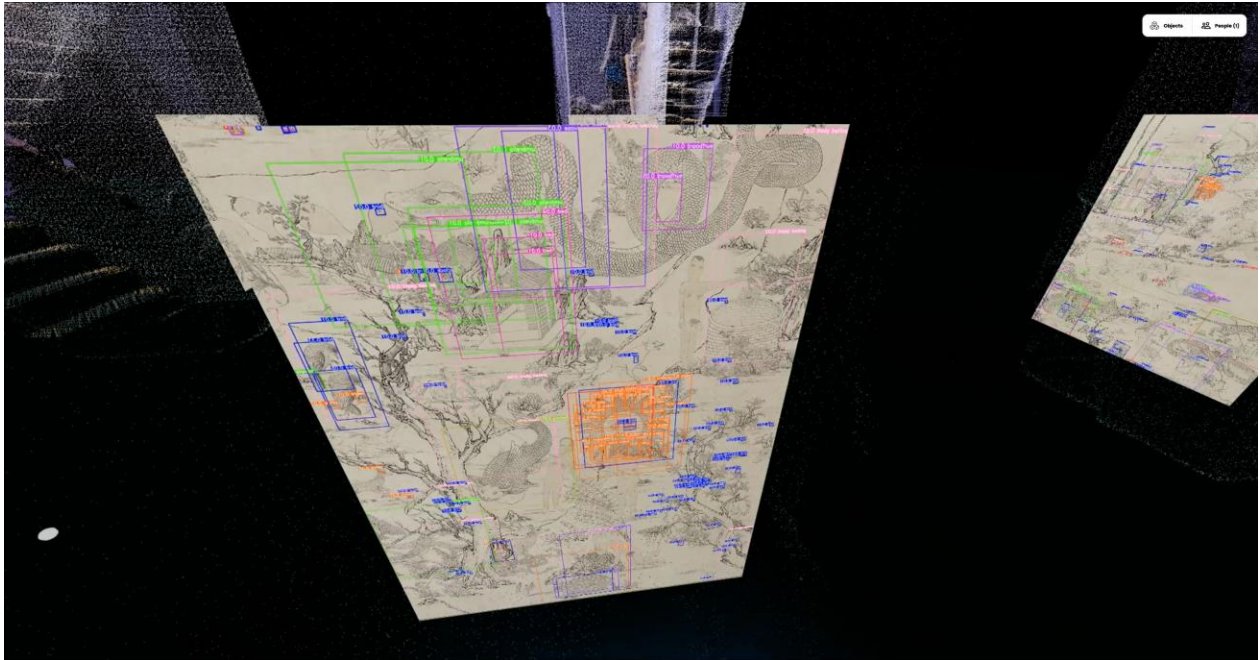


Figure 54. *Post-Bits Human Universe - Oh the Bite (AIP)* (2021), Mozilla Hubs WebXR prototype. Zhiai Chen's *Oh the bite* (2012) presented as an interactive interface within the point-cloud space, overlaid with AI-generated textual tags from the *AI Philosopher*. Artworks: *Post-Bits Human Universe* WebXR prototype © 2025 Racelar Ho and IVAS, *Oh the Bite (AIP)* © 2021 Zhiai Chen and Racelar Ho, *AI Philosopher* © 2021 Racelar Ho.

A key component of the artistic system I developed for this prototype was the *AI Philosopher*. I obtained the AI entity's intellectual framework from a curated corpus of human-authored art texts and philosophical writings; a significant portion of this corpus consists of postmodern and post-structuralist philosophical texts. The *AI Philosopher* is a cloud-based system and a multifunctional machine learning program.³⁸ I developed the system with reference to theories of animate and inanimate intelligence and a Zen-influenced ideology. Natural Language Processing (NLP) allows the *AI Philosopher* to interpret these texts. The *AI Philosopher's* NLP component utilises the *Generative Pre-trained Transformer 2*

³⁸ The *AI Philosopher* undergoes ongoing development; its current trained model dates to March 2025. Between December 2024 and February 2025, I deployed an online platform, assisted by Emily (Ju) Huang and Qiange Huang. This platform allows IVAS artist members and collaborators to conduct model training and pre-process training data, including semantic segmentation and classification, completing three months of internal testing. Previously deployed for network testing, this platform was later taken offline from the IVAS project website (<https://www.ivas.cloud>) after the March 2025 model update, pending further cyberattack and security strategy assessments.

(GPT-2)³⁹ open-source framework; its image recognition capabilities are based on the *You Only Look Once Version 4* (YOLOv4)⁴⁰ algorithmic architecture, and its voice synthesis function employs the open-source project *Transfer Learning from Speaker Verification to Multispeaker Text-To-Speech Synthesis* (SV2TTS)⁴¹. The *AI Philosopher*'s core function is to process and reinterpret its curated knowledge base to generate poetic expressions and philosophical responses rather than to achieve predictive accuracy. I therefore position the *AI Philosopher* as a heuristic apparatus; its operational method distinguishes it from conventional machine learning systems that are optimised for classification or data retrieval. A primary objective of the system is to facilitate a dialogue between human intelligence and machine interpretation, exploring the heterogeneous nature of both rational and irrational thought.

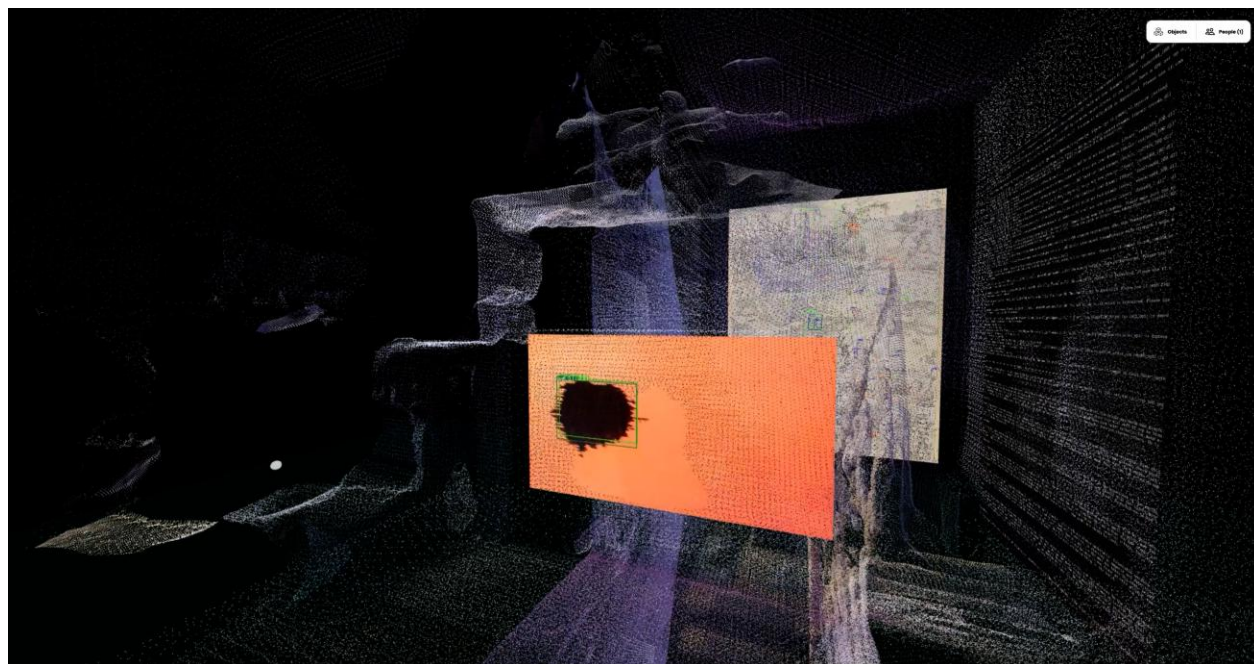


Figure 55. *Post-Bits Human Universe - Interface Syndrome (AIP)* (2021), Mozilla Hubs WebXR prototype. Xiaolong Zheng's *Interface Syndrome* (2012) presented as an interactive interface within the point-cloud space, overlaid with AI-generated textual tags from the *AI Philosopher*. Artworks: *Post-Bits Human Universe* WebXR prototype © 2021 Racelar Ho and IVAS, *Interface Syndrome (AIP)* © 2021 Xiaolong Zheng, *AI Philosopher*

³⁹ The language model generates human-like text by calculating the most probable text word in a sequence based on the preceding context. OpenAI, GPT-2, GitHub repository, <https://github.com/openai/gpt-2>.

⁴⁰ The algorithm functions by analysing an entire image in a single instance to identify and locate multiple objects, which allows for immediate processing suitable for live video.

⁴¹ This text-to-speech system generates new, artificial speech in the voice of a specific individual from only a short audio sample of that person speaking. CorentinJ, Real-Time-Voice-Cloning (SV2TTS), GitHub repository, <https://github.com/CorentinJ/Real-Time-Voice-Cloning>.

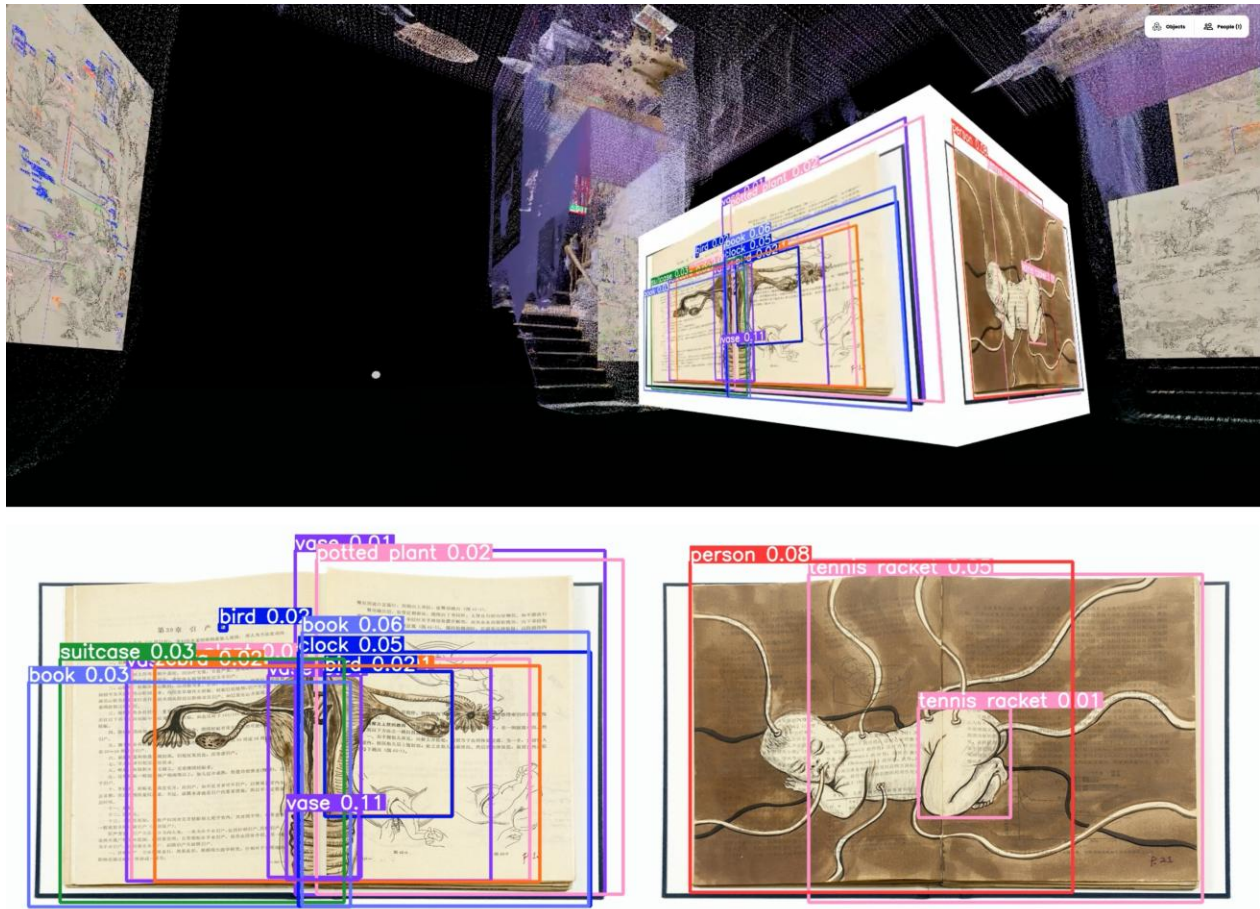


Figure 56. *Post-Bits Human Universe - Pre-Anthropology (AIP)* (2021), Mozilla Hubs WebXR prototype. Xiaolong Zheng's *Pre-Anthropology* (2012) presented as an interactive interface within the point-cloud space, overlaid with AI-generated textual tags from the *AI Philosopher*. Artworks: *Post-Bits Human Universe* WebXR prototype © 2021 Racelar Ho and IVAS, *Pre-Anthropology (AIP)* © 2021 Xiaolong Zheng and Racelar Ho, *AI Philosopher* © 2021 Racelar Ho.

Figure 57. *AI Philosopher*, Google Colab hosted program accessed from the *PBHU* - WebXR application on the Mozilla Hub (archived at 2021), 2020-2025. Access available: https://colab.research.google.com/drive/1A3FxFHNCzds_gmVkbP_BRyx7yI1_hZK3?usp=sharing. Artwork: *AI Philosopher* © 2021 Racelar Ho.

To integrate the *AI Philosopher* with the virtual prototype, I positioned three artworks, Zhiai Chen's ink drawing *Oh the bite* (discussed in Chapter 4.1.2, Figure 12) and Xiaolong Zheng's video art pieces *Interface Syndrome* (Figure 55) and *Pre-Anthropology* (Figure 56), as interactive interfaces at distinct locations within the 3D scanned point-cloud environment of my apartment. I then used the *AI Philosopher* to augment these artworks with new narrative strata. I deployed the *AI Philosopher* on Google Colab's page⁴², which provided the interactive platform for its trained model (Figure 57). For this prototype, the *AI Philosopher* analysed the three artworks and produced textual labels and tags derived from its training data. The resulting AI-generated texts functioned as new semantic sequences, which I presented as additional narrative layers to augment the artworks' interpretive possibilities.

In this prototype, I constructed a composite virtual environment by inserting three artworks—*Oh the bite*, *Interface Syndrome*, and *Pre-Anthropology*—into the 3D scanned model of my apartment and layering them with AI-generated text. This process adapts the deep mapping technique of layering narrative strata to produce a synthetic, rather than holistic, representation of place. The 3D scanned model represents a base cartographic layer (the “topo”). The selected artworks and the AI's textual interventions provide narrative and interpretive strata, adding depth and facilitating a multi-layered reading of the virtualized site. The *AI Philosopher* is a techno-mediated mirror. The mirror's reflection shows not a visual likeness but an algorithmic interpretation of cultural objects, prompting a re-evaluation of their meaning. Algorithmic reflection contributes to a “deep aesthetic” experience. Computational processes within this work generate novel sensibilities and ways of understanding an artwork such as *Oh the Bite*. Interaction with an AI of this kind is not limited to a functional task; the interaction forms part of an aesthetic encounter, which shapes how observers perceive and co-create meaning. For instance, a viewer's specific navigational path might trigger the *AI Philosopher* to generate a unique poetic fragment that re-contextualises an artwork,

⁴² This program (2021 archived version) is at https://colab.research.google.com/drive/1A3FxFHNCzds_gmVkbP_BRyx7yI1_hZK3?usp=sharing

a meaning that emerges only from that particular interaction. The *AI Philosopher*, in this context, is an agent in the narrative of human-machine co-creation that this project explores.

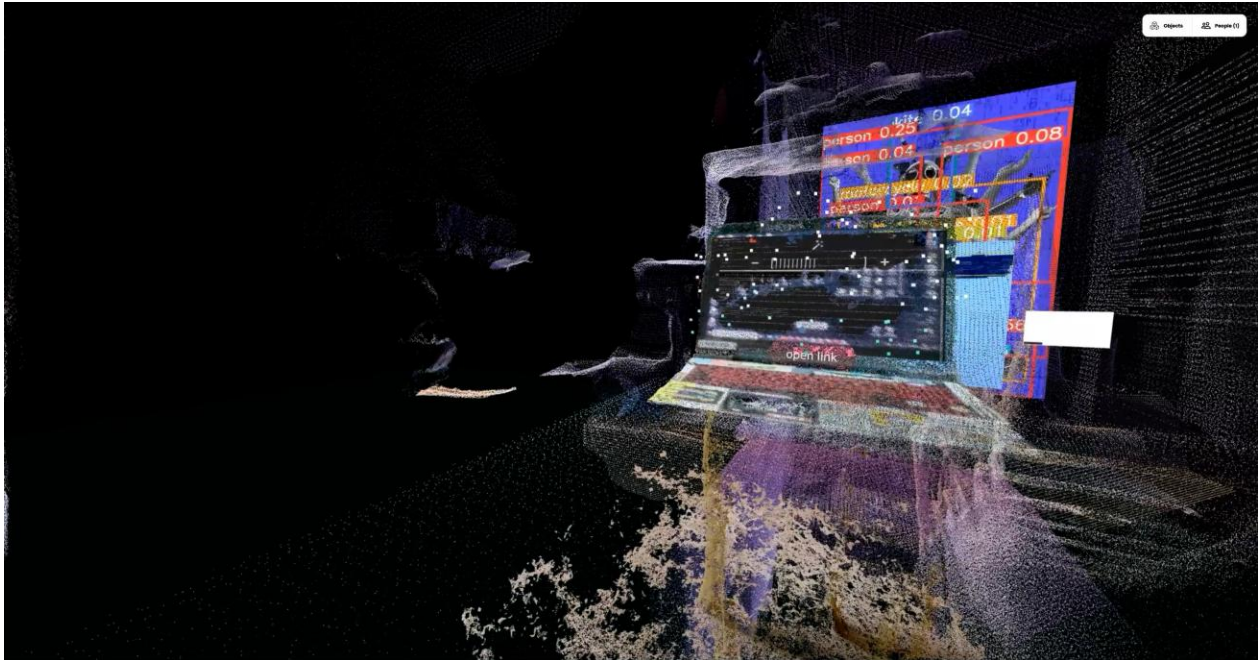


Figure 58. Screenshot, *The Post-bits Human Universe (PBHU) WebXR Prototype*, 2021. The virtual laptop interface functions as a screen within a screen, displaying the live interaction with the *AI Philosopher*. Screenshot by Racelar Ho. Artwork © 2021 Racelar Ho, Xiaolong Zheng, Zhiai Chen, and IVAS.

This PBHU prototype explored the concept of nested interfaces, a key theme in my analysis of post-technological screens (see Chapter 5). Within the primary virtual space (the scanned apartment), I placed a secondary virtual object, which was a point-cloud model of a laptop computer. The screen of this virtual laptop provided another interface, with a virtual screen (Figure 58). Upon this virtual laptop screen, I displayed a pre-recorded video, which documented an audience member's real-time textual interaction at the OX Warehouse exhibition with the *AI Philosopher* through the Google Colab interface it hosted. Moreover, audiences navigating the Mozilla Hubs WebXR site could click on the virtual laptop's screen, and their browser would be redirected to the *AI Philosopher*'s Google Colab project page. This redirection allowed them to have their own real-time dialogue with the *AI Philosopher*.

The resulting arrangement provides a demonstratable example of double and doubled screens. The Mozilla Hubs environment constitutes the primary screen and the virtual laptop screen, which I embedded within this environment, provides the secondary, “double” and

“doubled” screen. The Colab interface, accessible through hyperlink, signifies a tertiary layer of mediated interaction. The nesting of interfaces creates a rhizomatic screen environment. Although a user can follow a linear path from the virtual room to the laptop and then to the Colab interface, this trajectory is not singular or unidirectional. The system also allows users to explore other interactive artworks within the primary space or to observe the recorded interaction without proceeding to the live dialogue, establishing a network with multiple, non-hierarchical points of engagement. The facility of transitioning between these layers reconfigure a user’s sense of presence by juxtaposing their live navigation with the observation of a recorded past interaction and the potential for a future, co-creative dialogue with the AI Philosopher. The system’s capacity to layer multiple temporalities of interaction—live, recorded, and potential—and to shift engagement from navigation to dialogue with a non-human agent distinguishes its function from that of a standard hyperlinked environment.

The arrangement of scanned point cloud, virtual interfaces of other artworks and the AI philosopher, clickable to jump to the Google Colab live interface, exemplifies the concept of “layered visualities” and “doubled screens” which was discussed in Chapter 5. The Mozilla Hubs environment instantiates a primary post-technological screen. Within this space, the virtual laptop screen presents a “screen within a screen” (Figure 58), mediating access to a further layer of techno-mediated reality through the Google Colab interface.

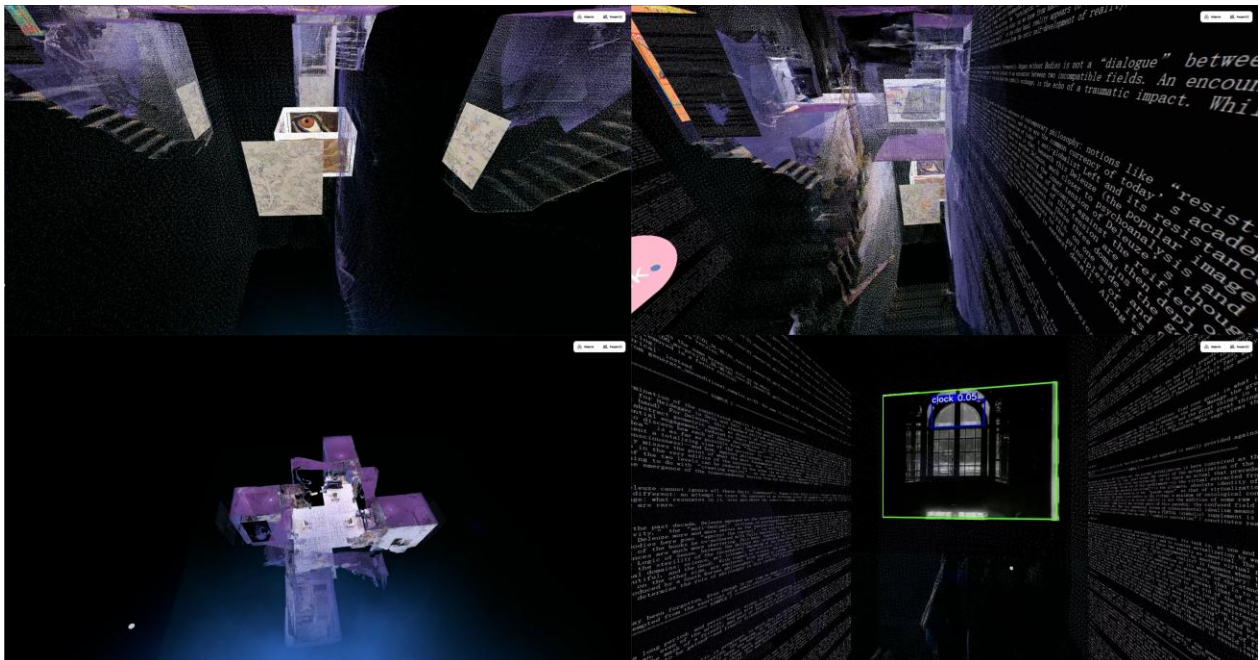


Figure 59. Composite image showing four views of *The Post-bits Human Universe (PBHU) WebXR Prototype*, 2021. Top left: the lower level with its central cube. Top right: the staircase area with video panels. Bottom left: an aerial view of the complete structure. Bottom right: the text-lined corridors. Screenshot by Racelar Ho. Artwork © 2021 Racelar Ho, Xiaolong Zheng, Zhiai Chen, and IVAS.

The resulting layered structure provides a practical demonstration of how post-technological systems reconfigure spatio-temporal experience and construct nested realities. A viewer navigates the environment, clicks through layers of interface, and transitions between the pre-recorded interaction and live dialogue with the *AI Philosopher*. This process of embodied interaction activates the work's chrono-topography, where the viewer's physical actions transform the work's network of potential connections into a singular, experienced trajectory, giving concrete form to the abstract dataspace of all possible paths. The 3D scanned space provides the stable "topo" (place). The object detection tags generated by the AI Philosopher and the interactive potential of the Google Colab links then contribute dynamic "chrono" (temporal) and "graphic" (inscriptive) elements. The principle of *you* (aesthetic roaming) is realised in this process. Unlike the goal-oriented navigation typical of video games, the significance of *you* lies in the poetic and conceptual juxtapositions created by the viewer's sequence of choices. For example, the meaning of the *AI Philosopher's* commentary on *Pre-Anthropology* is shaped by whether the viewer has just ascended from the *Oh the Bites* portal or approached from another direction. The theory of chrono-topography thus provides a framework to analyse how the artwork makes the active construction of spatio-temporal meaning an aesthetic experience, distinguishing it from more instrumental forms of interaction.

In this work, I argue that the experience of interacting with such a computational system constitutes an aesthetic category that supplements representation. The primary aesthetic object is no longer the static, represented content, such as the point-cloud model or other embedded artworks. Instead, the aesthetic object becomes the dynamic, processual experience that emerges from a viewer's unique interaction with the system.

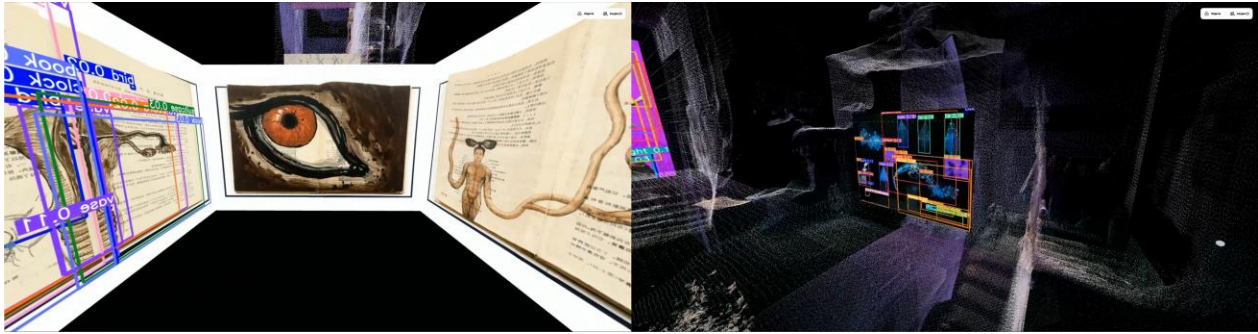


Figure 60. Composite image showing two works by Xiaolong Zheng after being reinterpreted by *AI Philosopher* (2021). Left: *Pre-Anthropology* - *AI Philosopher*. Right: *Electronic Biology* - *AI Philosopher*. Both are displayed within *The Post-bits Human Universe (PBHU) WebXR Prototype*. Screenshot by the author. Artwork © 2021 Racelar Ho, Xiaolong Zheng, and IVAS.

A viewer who fails to acknowledge how this configuration of software and algorithms shapes their perception risks misinterpreting the work's interactive logic by attributing computationally generated phenomena to an unmediated, objective truth. The *AI Philosopher*'s responses, for example, might appear as authoritative interpretations and conceal their nature as probabilistic outputs of programming. Similarly, the requirement to click on the virtual laptop to access the *AI Philosopher* may appear as a necessary, unalterable rule of the world's logic. An interpretation of the work's logic as a set of unalterable rules overlooks the fact that I, as the artist, intentionally structured this sequence to guide the viewer through distinct layers of mediation, thereby making the concept of a nested reality an experiential one. The *AI Philosopher* demonstrates a new artistic model, where the artwork supplements its traditional role as a static object for contemplation with the functions of a co-creator and an interlocutor. As a co-creator, it generates customised textual interpretations that supplement the original artworks, while as an interlocutor, it participates in dialogue based on user input (Figure 60). The uniqueness of this interaction lies not merely in the blurring of authorship, a common feature of generative art, but in how the AI uses its philosophically-trained model to generate textual responses that actively re-contextualise the human-made artworks within the environment. This re-contextualisation, in turn, informs the viewer's subsequent interpretation and navigation, creating a feedback loop where meaning is continuously co-constructed between the viewer, the AI, and the artworks.

As my first post-technological experiment within the PBHU series, I exhibited this prototype in three contexts between 2020 and 2021, allowing for an examination of its reception across different exhibition platforms. The first exhibition took place as an online

presentation within the *Mundane Future Pavilion*⁴³, curated by Flounder Lee^{vi}, as part of *The Wrong Biennale*⁴⁴. The organisational structure of *The Wrong Biennale*, a decentralised global initiative, relies on a distributed network of online “pavilions” and physical “embassies”. This framework facilitates the open-access presentation of techno-mediated and networked art, producing a structured analogy for the PBHU’s investigation into nested realities. The second exhibition context involved the prototype’s participation in *Re[New]All 2021: A Sensorium Exhibition*⁴⁵, an online event hosted by the Society for Literature, Science, and the Arts (SLSA) Annual Conference, in collaboration with York University. For the third context, OX Warehouse (牛房倉庫) in Macao, China, held an offline, physical exhibition *PRD Contemporary Art Exhibition - Symbiosis: Imagery and Aptitude* 珠三角當代藝術展：圖像與上手⁴⁶.

⁴³ *Mundane Future Pavilion*, archived exhibition, accessed 16 September 2025: <https://mundanefutures.art>.

⁴⁴ *The Wrong Biennale*, official website, accessed 16 September 2025: <https://thewrong.org/>

⁴⁵ *SLSA 2021 34th Annual Meeting*, official and archived website, accessed 16 September 2025: <https://litsciarts.org/slsa2021/>

⁴⁶ *PRD Contemporary Art Exhibition – Symbiosis: Imagery and Aptitude*, official website, accessed 16 September 2025: https://www.facebook.com/events/4458529950929907/4458529954263240/?active_tab=about. Related article about this exhibition, accessed 16 September 2025: <https://macaulifestyle.com/event/symbiosis-imagery-and-aptitude-prd-contemporary-art-exhibition/>.



Figure 61. Installation view, *The Post-bits Human Universe (PBHU) WebXR Prototype*, PRD Contemporary Art Exhibition - *Symbiosis: Imagery And Aptitude*, OX Warehouse (牛房倉庫), Macao, China, 2021. The monitor (top right) displays the real-time Mozilla Hubs environment, with the laptop and VR headset positioned on the plinth below. Photograph courtesy of OX Warehouse. Artwork © 2021 Racelar Ho, Xiaolong Zheng, Zhiai Chen, and IVAS.

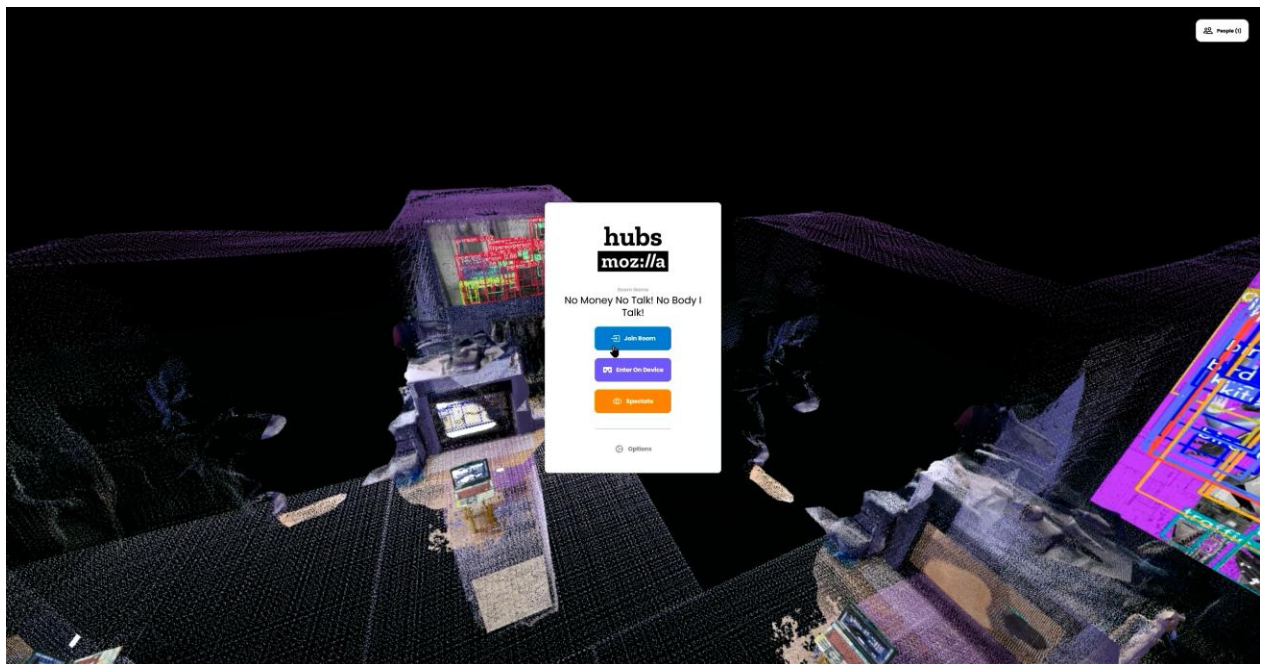


Figure 62. Screenshot, *The Post-bits Human Universe (PBHU) WebXR Prototype*, entry scene on the Mozilla Hubs platform, 2021. Screenshot by the author. Artwork © 2021 Racelar Ho, Xiaolong Zheng, Zhiai Chen, and IVAS.

At the Ox Warehouse, I presented the PBHU's Mozilla Hubs world on a laptop connected to a VR headset and an external monitor (Figure 61). The technical configuration created a form of hybrid space where on-site audiences could immerse themselves in the virtual world through the VR headset, while others could observe this interaction on the monitor. Simultaneously, global audiences could access the same Mozilla Hubs (Figure 62) world through their personal devices through a web browser, creating multiple "virtual windows" onto the same shared and individually navigated, chrono-topography. Furthermore, another laptop at the exhibition site allowed interaction with the *AI Philosopher* through its Google Colab interface. I live-streamed the screen of this interaction to IVAS's YouTube channel, displaying the feed on the virtual laptop screen within the PBHU Mozilla Hubs world. The live-streaming process produced a feedback loop and another instance of doubled and layered screens, where the system broadcast the physical act of interacting with the *AI Philosopher* in Macao globally and re-inserted the footage into the virtual environment. A multi-layered mode of access and interaction occurred during a period when Macao and Guangdong Province had partially lifted COVID-19 restrictions, while many other parts of the world remained in lockdown.

Observing audience interactions with these nested virtual environments yielded specific insights that informed later iterations of the PBHU series. For instance, I noted that viewers often expressed disorientation within the fragmented point-cloud renderings in Mozilla Hubs. This observation led to my decision in a later development process to integrate the Unity game engine, which provided more robust computational tools for creating graphically stable and navigable virtual platforms. The fundamental character of these hybrid artistic systems necessitates ongoing adaptation and refinement of both the artistic tools and the theoretical frameworks that researchers use to conceptualise them (Munster, 2025). The work's post-technological nature is therefore defined by its operational complexity and its distribution of creative agency between the artist, the audience, and the AI, a process that dissolves traditional boundaries of authorship and experience.

In this initial stage of PBHU, I adapted the methodology of deep mapping (Chapter 4) to chart a personal artistic territory; the 3D scan of my apartment provided the base cartographic layer, upon which I overlaid strata of my creative life, including the artworks and

the *AI Philosopher*'s textual interpretations. The project began to investigate the “posthuman” condition by situating a dialogue, albeit mediated, between human creativity (the original artworks, the audience interaction) and artificial intelligence (the *AI Philosopher*'s interpretations and responses). The architecture of the experience, requiring navigation through layers of virtuality, embodied my research interest in how technology redefines spatiality and compresses or transmutes space-time, creating hybrid experiential systems. The hybrid rhetoric at play here results from the blending of visual and experimental art, AI-generated text, virtual environments, and interactive hyperlinks, demanding a mode of interaction from the audience. The audience interacts with a computationally driven environment, generating an aesthetic experience from the feedback loop between human perception and machinic processes, wherein the viewer's navigation activates the system's algorithmic outputs that, in turn, shape subsequent interpretation.

This project aimed to critically examine the technology's role in shaping our reality and our understanding of it. The *AI Philosopher*, as a system designed for ongoing dialogue and modification through human interaction, exemplifies a post-technological stance. This stance is defined not by the use of open-ended processes, but by the project's critical reframing of technology away from a purely instrumental role; the AI functions as a non-human agent that introduces ambiguity, thereby resisting the technological drive for transparent and controllable outcomes. Applying the deep-*shanshui* lens reveals the work's specific chrono-topography: the viewer's navigation (the “topo”) through the nested screens (the “graphic”) generates a layered temporal experience (the “chrono”) that juxtaposes a recorded past, a navigable present, and a potential future dialogue. Computational layers add semantic and procedural dimensions to *you* in the post-technological era, where the “natural” and the “artificial” are increasingly indistinguishable and co-constitutive.

6.2.2 Consolidation: BITS Post-Human (2021-2022)



Figure 63. Exhibition view *The Post-BIT Human* 比特後人類, 2021. Digital poster. Exhibition held at the No.7 Space, Guangdong Museum of Art (GDMoA), Guangzhou, 15 December 2021 – 8 January 2022. Artwork © 2022 Racelar Ho, Xiaolong Zheng, and IVAS. Photograph © 2022 Xiaolong Zheng and Racelar Ho.



Figure 64. Exhibition view. *The Post-BIT Human* 比特後人類, No.7 Space, Guangdong Museum of Art, 2021. Artwork © 2022 Racelar Ho, Xiaolong Zheng, and IVAS. Photograph © 2022 Xiaolong Zheng.

The *Post-BIT Human* ⁴⁷ 比特後人類 exhibition (Figure 63 and 64) at the No.7 Space of Guangdong Museum of Art (GDMoA) between December 15, 2021, and January 8, 2022, presented the second stage of the *Post-Bits Human Universe* (PBHU) series, marking a consolidation and expansion of the concepts prototyped in the initial phase. This iteration of PBHU furthered the exploration of human-posthuman relations by creating a more complex, multisensory, and interactive environment that examined the interplay between physical and virtual realms, algorithmic processes, and human creativity. Research questions concerning the nature of post-technological spatial rhetoric, the co-constitution of meaning in hybrid environments, and the role of the screen as an agent in shaping experience formed the foundation for the.

⁴⁷ In a related publication, *The Post-bit Human Universe: An Experiment on the Evolutionary History of Human-Posthuman Relations* (Ho & Zheng, 2022), I adjusted the exhibition's English title to "BITS Post-Human" to provide a more grammatically conventional phrasing for English-speaking readers. In early 2022, Xiaolong Zheng and I established "Post-Bits Human Universe" as the official English title for the project's Chinese name 比特後人類宇宙. We have used this designation for the project since that point.

The multimodal project, commencing in 2015, sought in this iteration to depict a narrative path of a developing universe of post-bit humans, charting a course from the inception of the Anthropocene to a speculative post-Anthropocene. This depiction was achieved through a range of artistic approaches and expressions, in collaboration with the *AI Philosopher*.

The exhibition comprised multimodal works that diverged from conventional post-technological art strategies that rely on generic machine learning algorithms and large-scale datasets. This PBHU version instead foregrounded the potential of a human-machine hybrid creator, realising a symbiosis of biological and artificial intelligence. Critical reflection upon, and contemplation of, the process of creation between human artists and the *AI Philosopher* formed a central focus. The design of the *AI Philosopher* enabled the generation of the narrative output of deep aesthetic. Content from its iterative training, conducted between 2020 and 2021, provided an interface for communication with biological intelligence. Each constituent artwork within PBHU featured this characteristic of communication. The exhibition project revealed the implications of a passive emphasis on technology. Functionalism, technicism, and technocentrism drive the pervasive emphasis on technology, which can lead to the dissipation and disintegration of the independence and heterogeneity of human intelligence and thought. A core proposition from the exhibition posited that the validity of physical existence is diminishing. Techno-mediated existence, in this view, becomes the primary basis for the identity of organisms.

The Exhibition as a Hybrid System: Deep Mapping and Spatial Rhetoric

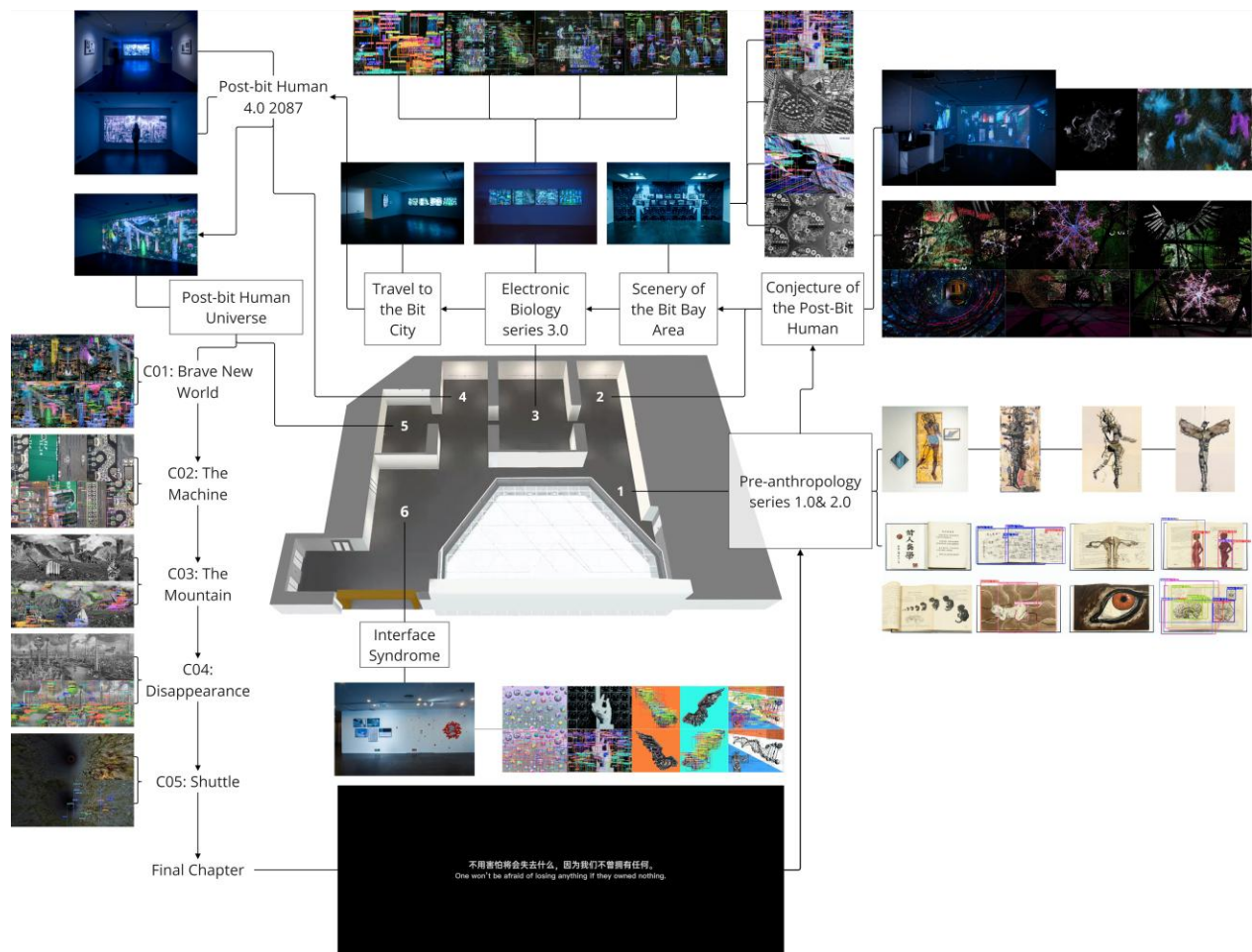


Figure 65. Diagram of the Exhibition Structure and Narrative Path, 2022. Digital diagram. An earlier version of this diagram was published in: *Post-bit Human Universe: An Experiment on the Evolutionary History of Human-Posthuman Relations* (Ho & Zheng, 2022). Diagram accessible at: <https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVJeWoOAK=?moveToWidget=3458764634805253519&cot=14> (accessed 16 September 2025). Exhibition concept © 2022 Xiaolong Zheng, Racelar Ho, and IVAS. Diagram © 2022 Racelar Ho.

To achieve this, Xiaolong Zheng and I employed a deep mapping methodology (Figure 65), which involved integrating AI-driven reinterpretations of films, existing artworks, and environmental elements to stress the dynamic exchange between algorithmic processes and human creativity. The museum space provided a site for layering diverse forms of evidence—visual, auditory, textual, and interactive—to construct a multifaceted narrative. The interconnected information within this layered structure reveals new connections, while conceptualisations of the map-image illustrate how cartographic representations can shape understanding. Curatorial practices in hybrid environments often employ such multi-layered information to create detailed, navigable experiences for the audience. A deep-*shanshui* lens informed the layering of digital information onto the physical space. This synthesis of digital and physical elements created

a contemporary *shanshui* experience, guiding the viewer's perception through a constructed, multi-sensory landscape. The application of a *shanshui* framework to techno-mediated-physical hybridity reconfigures embodied experience through informational overlays, altering the perception of the environment as a stable, objective reality. The traditional *Shanshui* aesthetic prioritises the viewer's experiential journey and the cultivation of a particular mode of seeing, which the techno-mediated augmentation in the exhibition sought to emulate and extend.

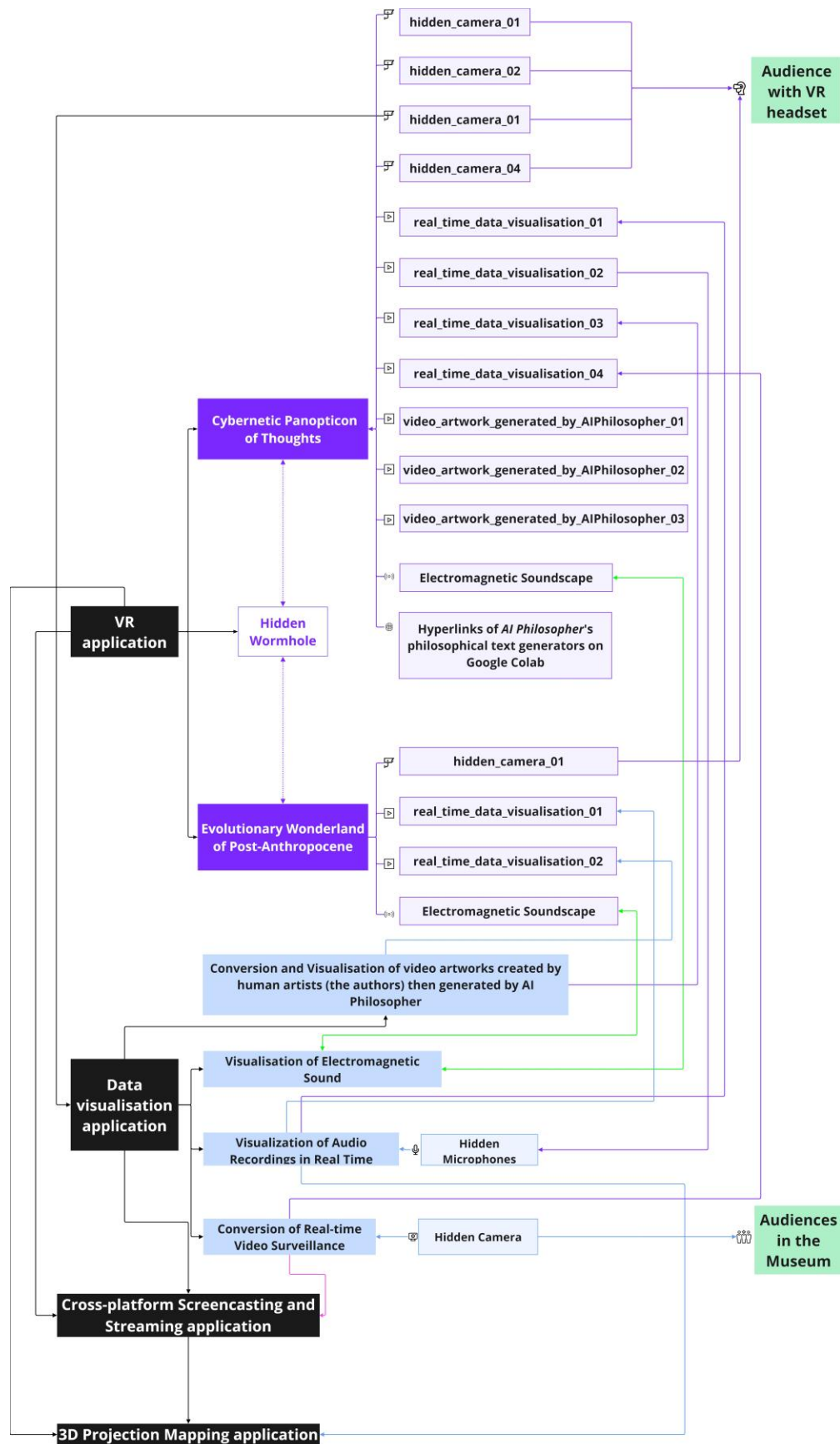


Figure 66. *Diagram of the Interactive Mixed Reality System*, 2022. Digital diagram. Diagram accessible at: <https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVJeWoOAk=/?moveToWidget=3458764634805444445&cot=14> (accessed 16 September 2025). Diagram © 2022 Racelar Ho.

Technologically, this iteration marked an advancement from the WebXR prototype (Section 6.2.1). I developed an independent, interactive mixed reality system comprising a VR application and a spatial projection system (Figure 66). As the diagram illustrates, this system was designed to create a feedback loop between the physical and virtual realms, comprising a VR application, a data visualisation module, a cross-platform streaming application, and a 3D projection mapping application. Sensors, including hidden microphones and concealed cameras, were deployed within the physical exhibition site to capture real-time audio-visual data from the audience and the environment. This data was then processed and visualised, feeding into both the VR world and the spatial projection. For instance, real-time video from the hidden cameras was converted and streamed, while ambient audio recordings were transformed into visualisations. The system's operation generated two interconnected realities for the audience.



Figure 67. Installation view of the interactive mixed reality system at *The Post-BIT Human* 比特後人類, No.7 Space, Guangdong Museum of Art, 2021. Artwork © 2022 Racelar Ho, Xiaolong Zheng, and IVAS. Photograph © 2022 Xiaolong Zheng and Racelar Ho.

A spatial projection onto three walls of a semi-enclosed area within the museum created a “space within a space” (Figure 67). Within this projected environment, I positioned several virtual interfaces that served a dual purpose as both double and doubled screens. These interfaces articulated the projected space while also displaying content streamed from the VR world. The resulting arrangement enacted a further subdivision, creating “spaces within the space of the space” and intensifying the nested, layered visualities. An understanding of digital environments often relies on this concept of nested realities, where multiple interfaces coexist to frame different layers of information. The exhibition thus translated the principle of the traditional *pingfeng* (screen) into the techno-mediated realm. Screen technologies, by layering information onto physical reality, interact with contemporary discussions on how screens mediate and reconstruct our perception of space.

The installation introduced multi-layered narratives shaped by both physical presence and the potential for remote participation. An overarching narrative path guided visitors through six thematic areas, charting a trajectory from the Pre-Anthropocene to the Post-Anthropocene (Figure 64). As visitors progressed, a speculative landscape of this post-Anthropocene universe unfolded. Within this landscape, human artists (Dragon Zheng and I) and the *AI Philosopher* united in symbiosis as a single post-bit being—an “organ-less” creator. This symbiotic entity reflects contemporary explorations of the posthuman condition, where the boundaries between human and machine blur, leading to new forms of creative subjectivity. The term “organ-less” creator here signifies a creative agency that emerges from the distributed network of human and algorithmic processes and moves beyond the constraints of a singular, biological body. The journey navigated a space where the human race seems to have left reality and history behind, blurring distinctions between the true and the false.

This design demonstrates how distributed agency emerges through hybrid forms of communication. Posthumanist thought identifies distributed agency, where cognition is spread across a human-machine network, as a central concept. The mediation of experience through digital and physical interfaces in such hybrid environments reconfigures agency, distributing it among human participants, technological systems, and the designed environment. By blending physical and virtual interactions, hybrid communication creates new possibilities for collective meaning-making that transcend traditional sender-receiver models.

Nested Realities: The VR Worlds of the Cybernetic Panopticon and Evolutionary Wonderland

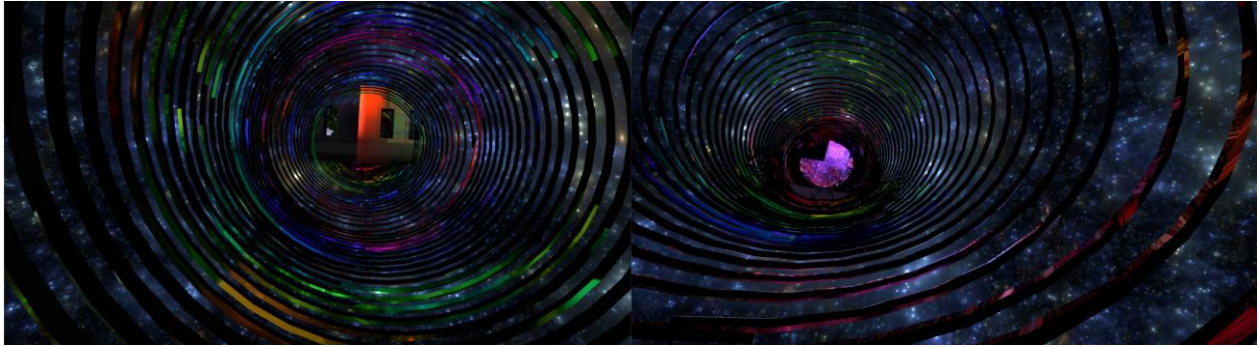


Figure 68. Views from the Wormhole in *The Post-BIT Human*, 2022. Diptych of screenshots from VR application. The images show the view from the centre of the mirrored wormhole, looking towards the portals of the two interconnected zones. Artwork © 2022 Racelar Ho. Screenshot © 2022 Racelar Ho.

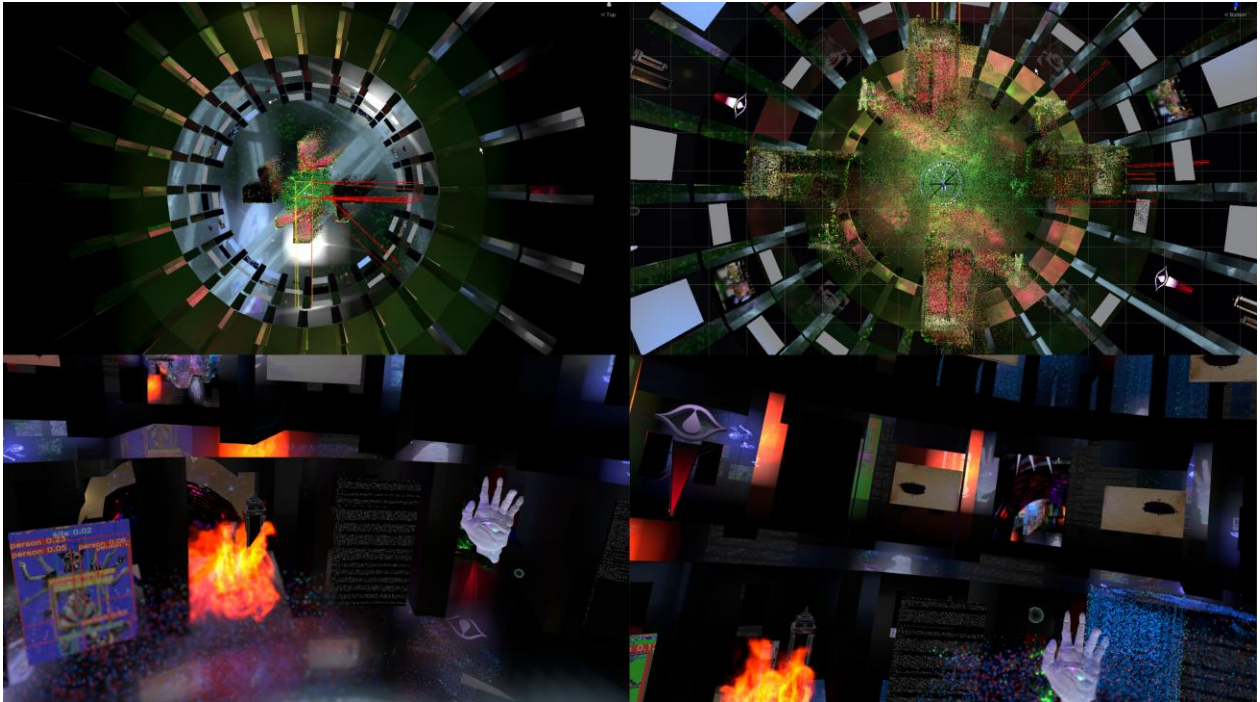


Figure 69. Views of the “Cybernetic Panopticon of Thoughts” Zone in *The Post-BIT Human*, 2022. Composite of screenshots from VR application. The top images show top-down views of the mirrored space and the rotating Panopticon structure, with panels displaying multiple video sources. The bottom images show a corner of the Panopticon, where models of a hand and an eye conceal virtual tracking cameras. Artwork © 2022 Racelar Ho, Xiaolong Zheng, and IVAS. Screenshots © 2022 Racelar Ho.

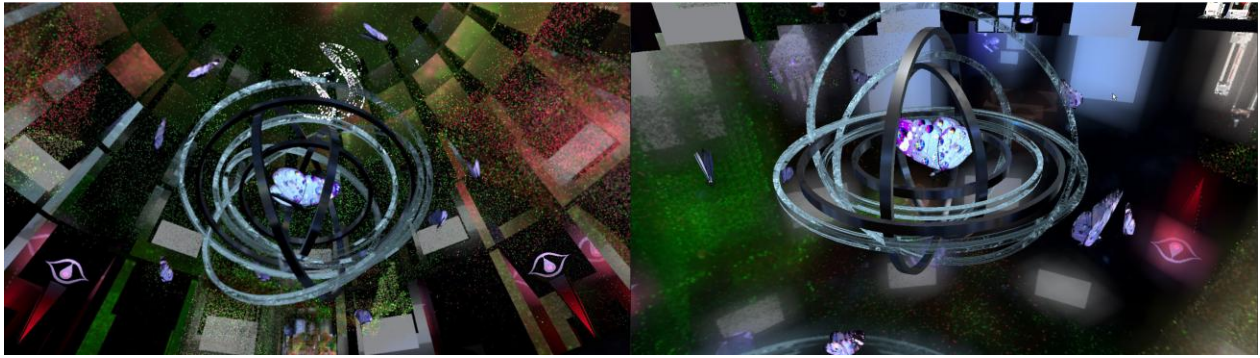


Figure 70. Upward and Downward Views within the *Mirrored Panopticon*, 2022. Diptych of screenshots from VR application. The images show the view from the ground-floor centre of the “*Cybernetic Panopticon of Thoughts*”, looking directly up (left) and down (right). The real-time rendering of the mirrored floor and ceiling destabilises spatial orientation. Artwork © 2025 Racelar Ho, Xiaolong Zheng, and IVAS. Screenshots © 2025 Racelar Ho.

My primary aim here is to demonstrate how the described configurations instantiate the theoretical frameworks of the techno-mediated mirror, doubled realities, and the production of hybrid space developed in Chapters 2, 4, and 5. A wormhole linked two distinct, interconnected zones within the VR world. The passage of this wormhole was rendered with a mirrored texture, creating a disorienting transitional space that reflected the portals at either end (Figure 68). The first zone, *Cybernetic Panopticon of Thoughts*, featured a continuously rotating, multi-levelled Panopticon structure (Figure 69). The Panopticon structure enveloped a dynamic, four-sided composite model of my 3D-scanned residence. The particle model appeared to be in a state of flux, mediating between form and formlessness. Each face of the tetrahedral residence model featured a staircase leading to an upper level. An invisible portal was concealed within each entrance. When a VR participants’ avatar entered one of the portals, the system would randomly teleport the avatar to another staircase entrance, disrupting linear navigation and forcing exploratory navigation (Figure 70). The mirrored Panopticon, with its reflective floor and ceiling, produced a mirrored space. To achieve the mirrored effect, I programmed specific material shaders in the OpenGL Shading Language (GLSL) to simulate reflective surfaces. The programming process involved setting up virtual cameras that capture and re-project the environment from multiple perspectives. This technique embedded a form of programmed observation within the virtual architecture. The rotating mirrored prison and the unstable representation of a domestic space constituted a recursively nested and layered environment. The resulting virtual world provided an example of double space (the physical gallery and the VR world) and doubled space (the screen-within-screen logic).



Figure 71. Views from the Concealed Camera in “*Cybernetic Panopticon of Thoughts*”, 2022. Composite of screenshots from VR application. These screenshots show the real-time surveillance footage from the virtual camera concealed within the eye of the hand models, which tracks the VR participant’s avatar within the Panopticon. Artwork © 2022 Racelar Ho, Xiaolong Zheng, and IVAS. Screenshots © 2022 Racelar Ho.

I placed multiple virtual interface panels within the Panopticon. Some panels displayed other video artworks from the PBHU series, such as *Interface Syndrome*. Cameras within the physical exhibition space at GDMoA recorded surveillance footage, which other panels then streamed. A further set of panels visualised the outputs of a voice interaction program, responding to auditory input from microphones at the exhibition site. Concealed virtual cameras within the Panopticon tracked the VR participant’s avatar and streamed the avatar footage back to the virtual interface panels within the real-world spatial projection (Figure 71). The system generated a feedback loop, a multi-layered arrangement of double, doubled, and mirrored screens. The feedback loop interconnected the virtual viewpoint and the physical position, making the two components mutually visible.

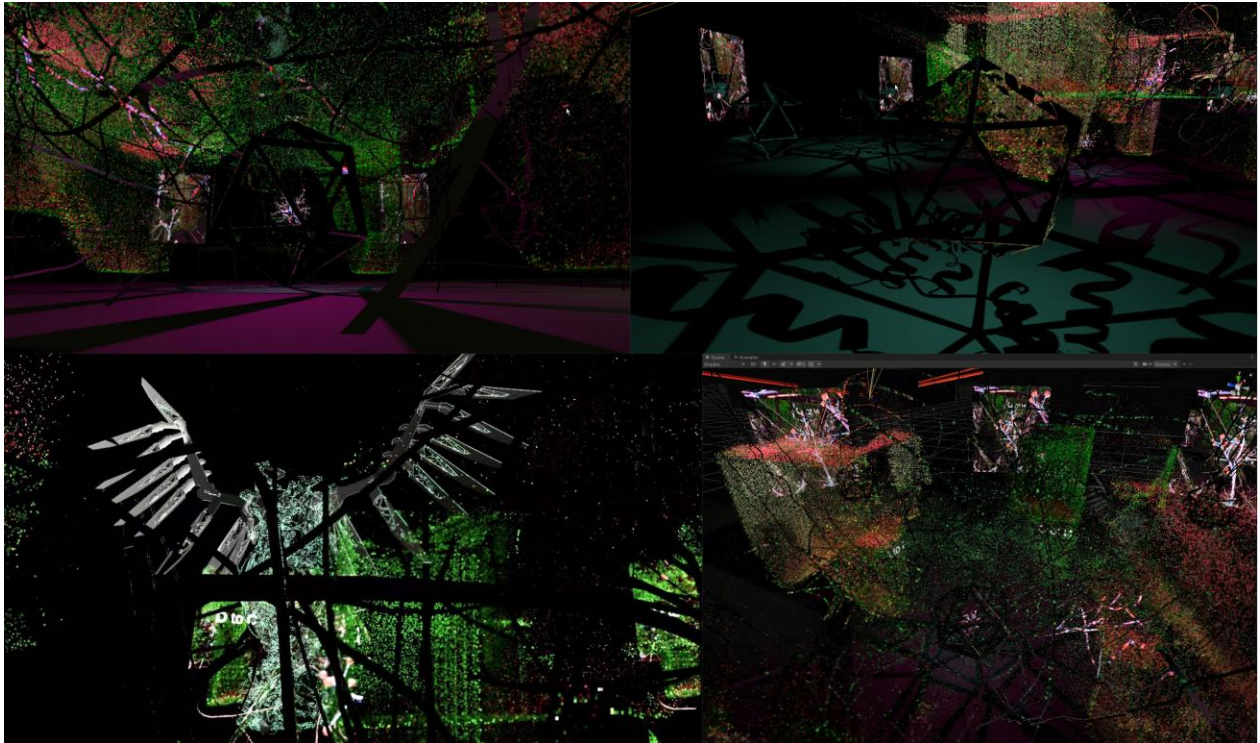


Figure 72. Views of the “*Evolutionary Wonderland of Post-Anthropolog*” Zone in *The Post-BIT Human*, 2022. Composite of screenshots from VR application. Artwork © 2022 Racelar Ho, Xiaolong Zheng, and IVAS. Screenshots © 2022 Racelar Ho.

The second zone, *Evolutionary Wonderland of Post-Anthropology*, featured a circular array of continuously rotating canvases resembling a carousel. The circular array also encircled a particle model of my scanned residence. At the centre of the array, I placed a model of a central object, programming the object to appear as if confined within an invisible enclosure and to alternate between states of visibility and obscurity depending on the avatar’s viewing angle. Techno-mediated artefacts resembling pixelation or mosaics obscured the central object from some perspectives; from other angles, the object became invisible, with only the object’s pulsating sound audible; yet from specific viewpoints, the central object appeared (Figure 72).

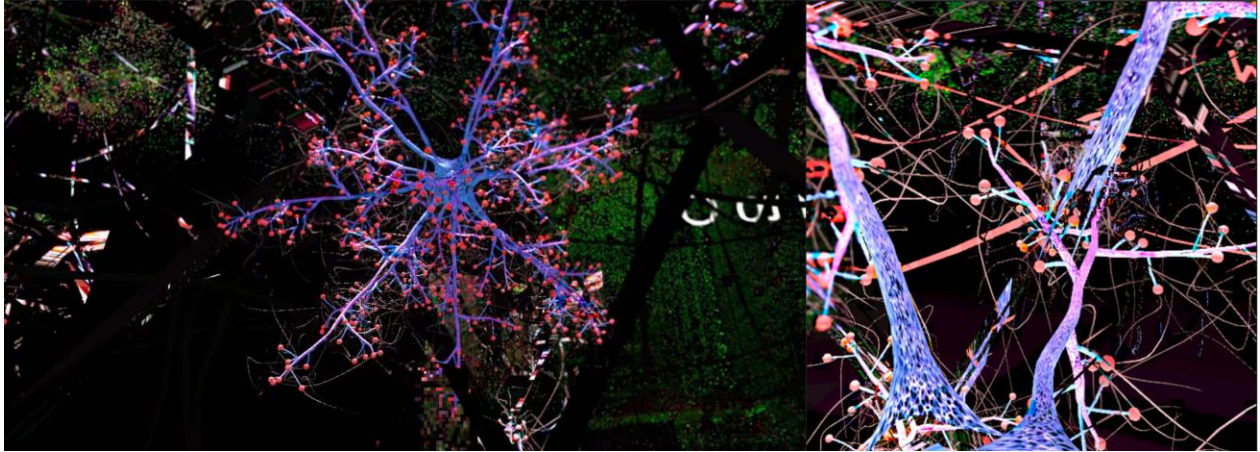


Figure 73. View from the Central Object's Camera in "*Evolutionary Wonderland of Post-Anthropology*", 2022. Diptych of screenshots from VR application. The images show the viewpoint from the concealed camera within the central object, looking out at the rotating canvases. Artwork © 2022 Racelar Ho, Xiaolong Zheng, and IVAS. Screenshots © 2022 Racelar Ho.

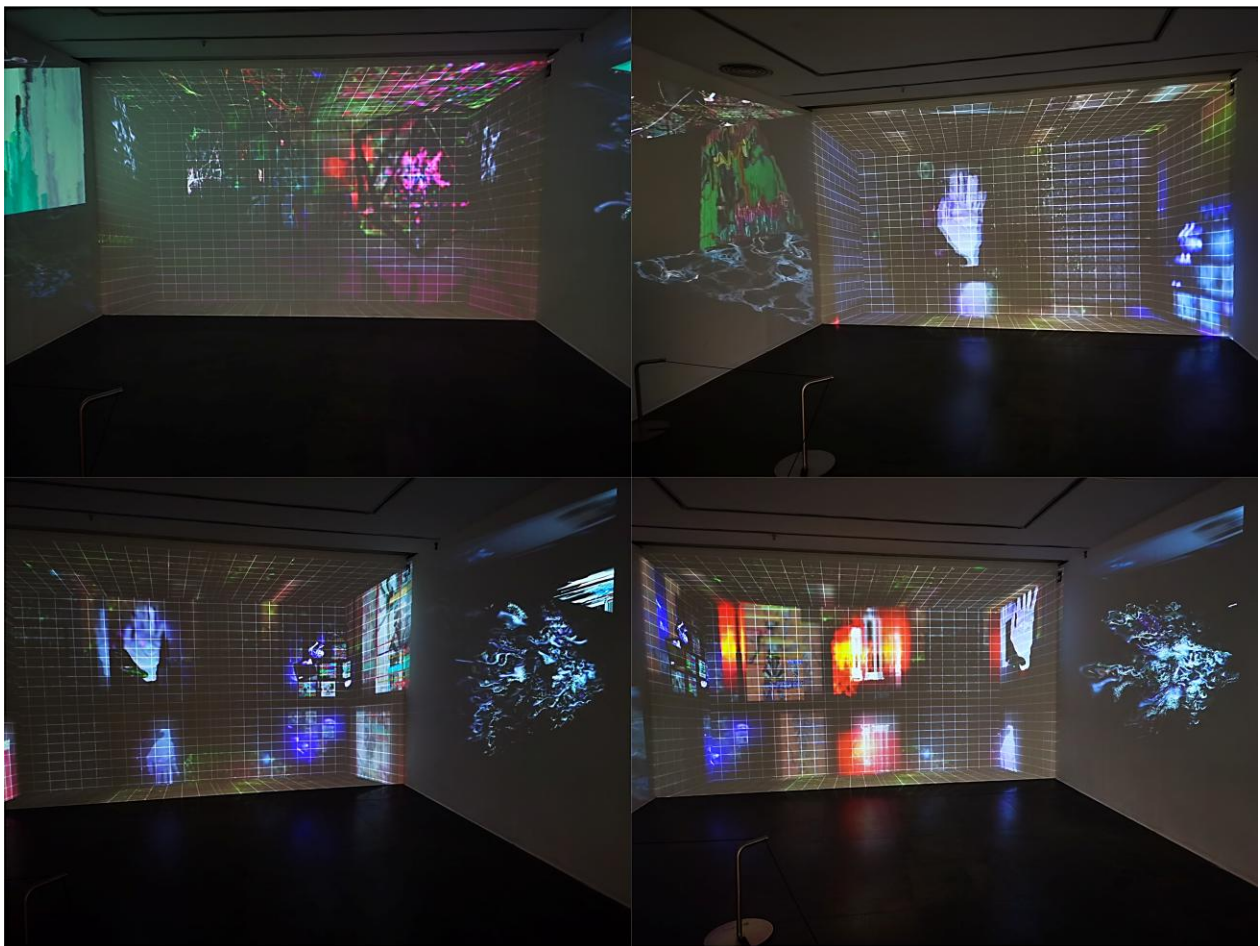


Figure 74. Installation Views of the *Hybrid Reality System* at *The Post-BIT Human*, 2021. Composite of digital photographs. The images show the "space within a space" created by 3D projection mapping, illustrating the layering of virtual and physical realities where footage from both concealed physical cameras and in-game virtual

cameras is projected into the same environment. Artwork © 2021 Racelar Ho, Xiaolong Zheng, and IVAS. Photographs © 2022 Xiaolong Zheng.

The central object model contained another concealed virtual camera that tracked the VR participant's head movements (Figure 73). I then projected the footage from the head-tracked camera onto the rotating canvases within the VR carousel and simultaneously streamed the footage to another virtual interface panel within the real-world spatial projection. The system of perspectives and re-projections fragmented and layered perception, positioning the viewer's own observation as a constitutive element of the artwork. The system also doubled and layered the roles of the audience members: the system projected the virtual activities of VR participants, embodied as avatars, into the physical museum's "space within a space", while concealed cameras and microphones simultaneously surveilled the activities of physical gallery and museum attendees, including their voice interactions, making the activities visible to those immersed in the VR world (Figure 74). The reciprocity of observation and exhibition made the roles of spectator and spectacle interchangeable.

Narrative Trajectories and the Post-Technological Landscape



Figure 75. The sound collection process for the VR environment on Guangzhou International Bio Island, 2021. From left to right: recording sounds from a bamboo grove, an electrical substation, and a police motorcycle's warning light. Composite of digital photographs. Collected Sound © 2025 A2surd. Artwork © 2022 Racelar Ho, Xiaolong Zheng, and IVAS. Photographs © 2022 A2surd.



Figure 76. Installation views showing the interaction between VR participants and physical museum attendees at *The Post-BIT Human*, 2021. Composite of digital photographs. Artwork © 2022 Racelar Ho, Xiaolong Zheng, and IVAS. Photographs © 2022 Xiaolong Zheng.

My approach sought to create a post-technological aesthetic landscape where the viewer's navigation and interaction with layered systems of representation and algorithmic agency generate meaning. This iteration of the PBHU series further developed the AI-driven interactions from the initial WebXR prototype within an expanded interactive system. The AI Philosopher continued to utilise the GPT-2 model as the foundational architecture for text-based dialogue generation. SV2TTS technology then rendered the text-based dialogue as audible speech, enabling real-time auditory interactions with the AI Philosopher. In addition, the collaborating Sound Effect (SFX) artist A2surd supplemented the auditory interactions by collecting electromagnetic wave sounds from various sources within prohibited zones on Guangzhou International Bio Island for use in the VR environment (Figure 75). The custom software I developed using TouchDesigner then processed and visualised the sounds in real-time, creating an audiovisual representation of the electromagnetic landscape. The AI Philosopher continued to employ the YOLOv4⁴⁸ architecture and its foundational pre-trained model to provide real-time object recognition within the physical museum. Meanwhile, Kinect cameras located in different places at the exhibition site captured participant movements and gestures, translating physical actions into techno-mediated inputs that modulated

⁴⁸ The specific model is the yolov4.weights file, pre-trained on the COCO dataset, available from the official Darknet project repository. GitHub repository, https://github.com/kiyoshiiriemon/yolov4_darknet (accessed 16 September 2025).

the generative visuals and triggered specific textual responses from the *AI Philosopher*. Data transmission within this interactive mixed reality system, which included Kinect motion data from the physical space and camera perspectives from the virtual world, utilised the Network Device Interface (NDI)⁴⁹ and Open Sound Control (OSC)⁵⁰ protocols to create a feedback loop where actions in the physical gallery were translated into the VR environment, and events from the VR environment were projected back into the gallery, a process characteristic of doubled screen experiences (Figure 76).

I employed spatial projection mapping to project interactive visuals throughout the exhibition space, structuring the area as a narrative environment, and utilised TouchDesigner to generate real-time visual responses to participant movements, gestures, and voice commands. The spatial projection began with the mapping of a white-line perspective grid onto the gallery walls (Figure 74); I then projected live feeds from the VR world's virtual cameras into this grid, creating the "space within a space". The projection of visuals that responded to participant input demonstrates the concept of the screen as an agent and the creation of layered visualities. The museum walls functioned as rhizomatic screens because they simultaneously displayed multiple, non-hierarchical data streams from the VR world, the physical cameras, and the *AI Philosopher*, without a central narrative focus. An audience member could navigate this information by physically moving through the space and shifting their attention between projections and could assemble a personal narrative by mentally connecting the disparate visual and textual data. I facilitated remote participation through Google Colab, continuing a method from the PBHU prototype to enable remote users to submit textual input for the *AI Philosopher*. In this expanded version of the PBHU application, Google Colab functioned as a critical intermediary that relayed these remote textual inputs for integration into the live projections at the physical exhibition site. The system's increased scale and integration of remote participants intensified the complexity of the relationships between audiences across different spatiotemporal coordinates and their intermingling with

⁴⁹ Network Device Interface (NDI) is a royalty-free software standard developed by NewTek to enable video-compatible products to communicate, deliver, and receive high-definition video over a computer network. See: <https://ndi.video/> (accessed 16 September 2025).

⁵⁰ Open Sound Control (OSC) is a protocol for communication among computers, sound synthesizers, and other multimedia devices that is optimized for modern networking technology. See: <https://opensoundcontrol.stanford.edu/> (accessed 16 September 2025).

the project's interconnected physical and virtual worlds.



Figure 77. Composite image showing the *Pre-Anthropology* (2015-present) in its exhibition setting (left) and details of its meta-images and pages from the version integrated with the *AI Philosopher* (right). Composite of digital photographs. Artwork © 2022 Racelar Ho, Xiaolong Zheng, and IVAS. Photographs © 2022 Xiaolong Zheng.

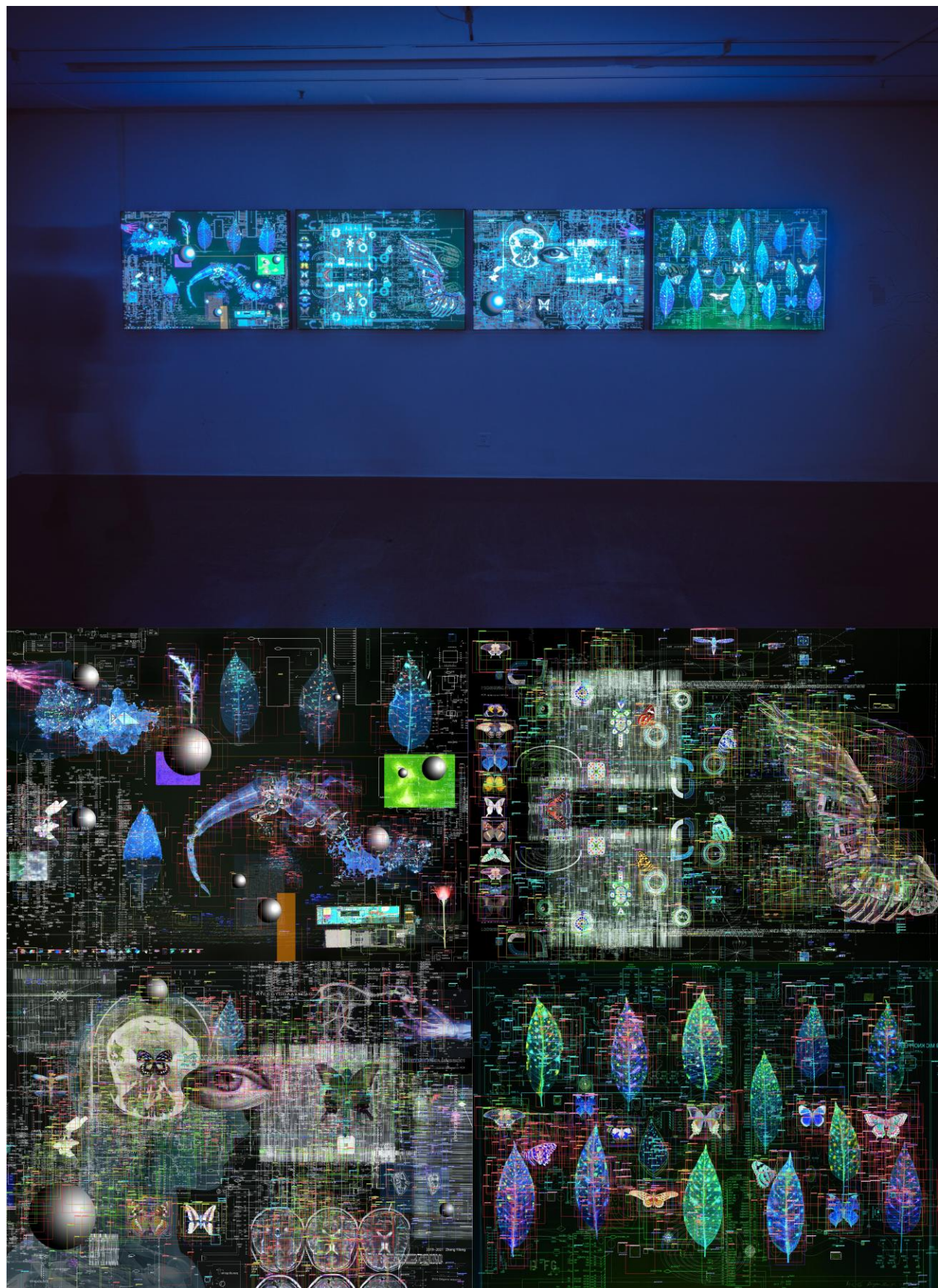


Figure 78. Composite image showing an installation view of the *Digitalised Biology* series (top) and four detailed views of the works (bottom). Composite of digital photographs. Artwork © 2025 Racelar Ho, Xiaolong Zheng, and IVAS. Photographs © 2025 Xiaolong Zheng.

The narrative of the PBHU exhibition presented the development from human to posthuman, prompting participants to reflect on how AI and human intelligence can co-create meaning within hybrid spaces. Xiaolong Zheng and I structured the complex and multidimensional narrative of PBHU through a series of interconnected works. The *Pre-anthropology* series (2015-present) (Figure 77), for instance, speculates on the development of organic life and the potential for the utopia state of the technologically networked consciousness termed neurotopia. The series forms a conceptual starting point for the exhibition's progression. The *Digitalised Biology* series (Figure 78) further develops this theme by using photographs of e-waste and circuit diagrams to create unconventional new species; the *AI Philosopher* then recognises and labels the species, completing a process of machine-validated creation. The co-creative act demonstrates human-machine symbiosis, wherein Xiaolong Zheng and I construct new species from non-organic e-waste, and the *AI Philosopher*'s validation of their existence destabilises the conventional definition of life as an exclusively organic phenomenon.

As a work of post-technological experimental art, the PBHU project attempts to reconfigure traditional human-centric perspectives by displacing the human artist from the role of sole creator and creating a decentralised system where the interaction between an artist's designs, an AI's algorithmic interpretations, and a viewer's interactive navigations co-constitute meaning. The project's VR application and interactive spatial projections allowed participants to navigate and *you* between *pre-Anthropocene* and *post-Anthropocene* scenarios, exploring blurry boundaries between physical existence and digital identities. This exploration of boundaries was realised through a system of nested realities, where the physical gallery contained a projected virtual space that, in turn, provided a portal to an immersive VR world.

The GDMoA iteration of PBHU extended the curatorial concept outlined in Section 6.1, which posited the exhibition as a systemic spatial artwork. The WebXR prototype was an online, browser-based experience; the GDMoA version realised a complex and immersive hybrid space. A dedicated mixed reality system, integrated sensors, spatial projections, and additional interactions with the *AI Philosopher*, including speech and gesture recognition, created a multi-sensory environment that addressed the initial curatorial aim of exploring

post-human perception and nested realities in a more embodied and interactive manner. The individual artworks and interactive zones within the exhibition, such as the projected “space within a space”, the VR Panopticon, the VR carousel, and the interactive short film, functioned as distinct but interconnected *jingguan xiaopin* 景觀小品 (landscape vignettes)⁵¹, each contributing to the exploration of post-technological existence within the larger-scale *yuanlin* 園林(garden)⁵² of the overall exhibition narrative.

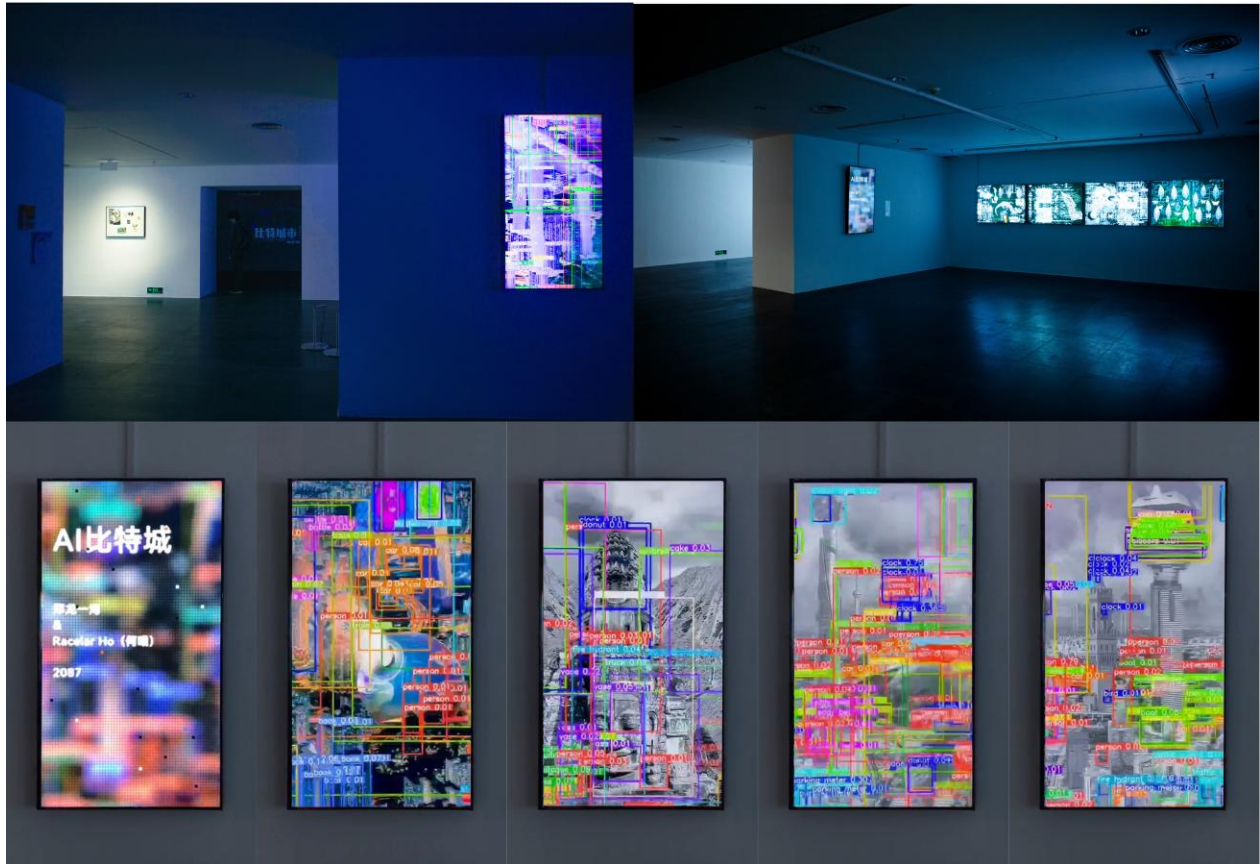


Figure 79. Composite image showing installation views of the interactive film *Travel to Bit City* (top) and five detailed stills from the work (bottom). Composite of digital photographs. Artwork © 2025 Racelar Ho, Xiaolong Zheng, and

⁵¹ In traditional Chinese garden design, *jingguan xiaopin* 景觀小品 refers to the small-scale, composed elements that create specific views. These vignettes integrate natural elements like rocks and plants with architectural features such as pavilions, bridges, or latticed windows. The careful arrangements of these features guide the viewers’ experience and contributes to the garden’s overall narrative and aesthetic effect (Jin, 2015).

⁵² Unlike many Western gardens that emphasize geometric order and a singular, commanding viewpoint, the *yuanlin* 園林 (Chinese garden) is conceived as a microcosm of the larger natural world, prioritising asymmetry and winding paths. The design encourages a mode of *you* (aesthetic roaming) through a series of interconnected scenes, fostering an imaginative and philosophical dialogue between the viewer and the landscape (Wang X., 2015b). In this tradition, architecture integrates with nature to frame views and guide the narrative experience.



Figure 80. Installation views of the corridor projection signifying the spatiotemporal shift from 2021 to 2087. Composite of digital photographs. Artwork © 2025 Racelar Ho, Xiaolong Zheng, and IVAS. Photographs © 2025 Xiaolong Zheng.



Figure 81. Composite image showing an installation view of the cinematic pentalogy *Post-bit human 4.0-Year 2087* (left) and five stills from the work (right). Composite of digital photographs. Artwork © 2025 Racelar Ho, Xiaolong Zheng, and IVAS. Photographs © 2025 Xiaolong Zheng.

Xiaolong Zheng and I presented the interactive film *Travel to Bit City* (Figure 79) on a separate interface on the wall beside the *Digitalised Biology* series installation, guiding viewers through a narrative portal into the conceptual world of the “post-Bits Human universe”. After viewing the film, the audience proceeds into an empty corridor where a projection onto the white wall on the right (Figure 80) signifies the spatiotemporal shift of the “post-Bits human universe” from 2021 to the 2087. The corridor then leads into a black room for the screening of the cinematic pentalogy, *Post-bit human 4.0-Year 2087* (Figure 81), which immerses

the audience in the accelerated temporality of the post-Bits human universe. The cinematic work employed the *AI Philosopher* to co-construct its narrative, while the visual composition of the work emulated the unfolding temporality and shifting perspectives of Chinese long scroll paintings, an approach which encouraged a form of *you* that is both spatially and narratively driven.

6.2.3 Evolution: 24/7 Worldlessness and Asynchronous Signal Transmutation (2022-2023)



Figure 82. Promotional image for the *Post-Bits Human Universe: 24/7 Worldlessness and Asynchronous Signal Transmutation* sub-series (2022-2023). Artwork © 2025 Racelar Ho, Xiaolong Zheng, and IVAS. Design © 2025 Racelar Ho.

The third and most recent stage of the PBHU series represents a conceptual and practical development. In this iteration, I introduce the framework of “worldlessness”, reinterpreting the philosophical concept, often associated with a loss of a shared world (Végső, 2020), as a condition that enables the emergence of new historical and spatio-temporal relations, such as the asynchronous connections formed between participants in different time zones who interact through mediated data traces. The “worldlessness” framework I propose provides a practical ground upon which to respond to my research question concerning the nature of

codependent mediations between human and non-human agents, allowing me to substantiate my theoretical propositions of hybrid rhetoric and the rhizomatic screen (as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5) and test them through a networked system. Within this system, I also develop the concept of *Bits* as it further functions within our invented “post-Bits human universe” framework, extending the term beyond its initial definition. Previously, I defined *Bits* as the static, numerically encoded sequences of information that constituted the content of the artworks. I now redefine *Bits* as the dynamic, asynchronous signals that are transmuted across the network’s distributed, nonhuman temporalities (Figure 82).

Through this project, I also seek to assign the term “world” a new implication and value in the Anthropocene and post-Anthropocene. I oppose a dominant ideology which, under the influence of capital, equates the “world” with the physical globe and views it as a singular, unified market to be conquered. This prevailing view deprives human existence of a common phenomenological experience by erasing the irreducible differences between the constructed world and the empirical globe. In response to this premise, I propose a new value by defining any world as a constructed community that is simulated by stabilising apparatuses and is never a natural, given unity. The implication of this definition is that the existence of multiple, constructed worlds, separated by difference and interruption, creates a site of potential for new forms of community and relation to emerge.

Drawing on philosophical frameworks of “worldlessness”, including the work of Roland Végso (2020), I propose an artistic and experimental approach that treats worldlessness not as a loss, but as a generative condition. The generative condition of worldlessness creates the potential for new relations to emerge because it is free from the constraints of a single, totalising world. My artistic system produces new historical and spatio-temporal relations that only become perceptible once a totalising worldview is abandoned. I realise this concept of a positive worldlessness through a 24/7 structured space system, allowing the PBHU artwork to exist in real-time as a “worldless” universe that parallels, overlaps, and transmutes between physical and electronic worlds on different space-time dimensions.

Whereas the previous iteration at GDMoA demonstrated a model of hybrid space within a closed-loop system, it was limited in its capacity to sustain interaction beyond the immediate, co-present audience by its reliance on synchronic interaction. The objective of this new work was to overcome this synchronic constraint. By developing an open, asynchronous ecosystem,

I sought to test my research's central hypothesis that the absence of a shared, synchronous environment creates a condition I term "worldlessness" which enables the formation of new spatio-temporal relations through the accumulation of asynchronous data traces, thereby demonstrating a practical application of the "deep-*Shanshui*" lens by showing how a contemporary *Shanshui* landscape can be co-created from the layered, asynchronous actions of its multiple, geographically separate participants in a global, post-technological context. The convergence of physical and virtual inputs creates a dynamic structure that shifts audience participation between presence and remote, asynchronous interaction, generating a fluid, hybrid experience that transcends conventional exhibition formats.

The rhizomatic screen structure represents a substantive update to the version exhibited at GDMoA. The previous system formed a closed-loop network. This structure confined interactions to the singular, synchronic context of the exhibition space and its immediate virtual participants. The current iteration transforms this model into an open, living, ecosystem where the network's connections emerge and mutate through the continuous, asynchronous input of all participants across multiple, non-hierarchical nodes. The living, asynchronous universe presents an instance of worldlessness by demonstrating a new form of being-together that emerges from the inherent and multi-vocal relations between human and non-human agents across a distributed network, transcending the prediction on a singular, shared world. Thus, I extend the deep-*Shanshui* lens and applied it here to articulate how this iteration's asynchronous, trans-local network produces a contemporary *Shanshui* landscape.

I continued to utilise the *AI Philosopher* for the technological framework of the iteration, implementing upgrades and refinements the program's integrated AI tools for text, speech, and vision. The project's core AI-driven interaction capabilities, such as GPT-2 for fragmented text-based dialogues, SV2TTS for speech output, and YOLOv4 for real-time object recognition, all embedded within the *AI Philosopher*, underwent fine-tuning and model updates. For the spatial and visual design, I maintained the use of Mad-Mapper for interactive projections and TouchDesigner for real-time visual responses. The introduction of asynchronous frameworks and the expanded use of VR environments built with Unity marked the key technical shift. I also utilised NDI, OBS, and Proxifier to facilitate live-streaming and data exchange across multiple international physical locations, enabling 24/7 operational structure to the "post-Bits human universe".

The technological assemblage enabled the YOLOv4 models within the *AI Philosopher* to live-detect the exhibit scene at the exhibition sites in China; I then streamed the resulting data, alongside VR scene from China, through NDI, OBS, Proxifier to the Toronto-based computers located at the Alice Lab (York University, Toronto, Canada). From my home computer in Toronto, I remotely controlled the two computers at Alice Lab, managing data transmissions from devices at both the exhibition sites in China and the lab in Canada, and directing the integrated final stream to YouTube, Bilibili⁵³, and the IVAS's Facebook page to create a hybrid public presence across boundaries. The stream of these media platforms formed another layer of the doubled screen, a public-facing virtual windows onto the artwork's distributed activities.

Mountain as Mountain, Water as Waters – The 1st Guangxi Experimental Art Biennale (2022-2023)

⁵³ Bilibili is a Chinese video-sharing platform that distinguishes from globally oriented platforms such as YouTube through a focus on animation, comics, and games (ACG) culture and a characteristic real-time commentary overlay system.

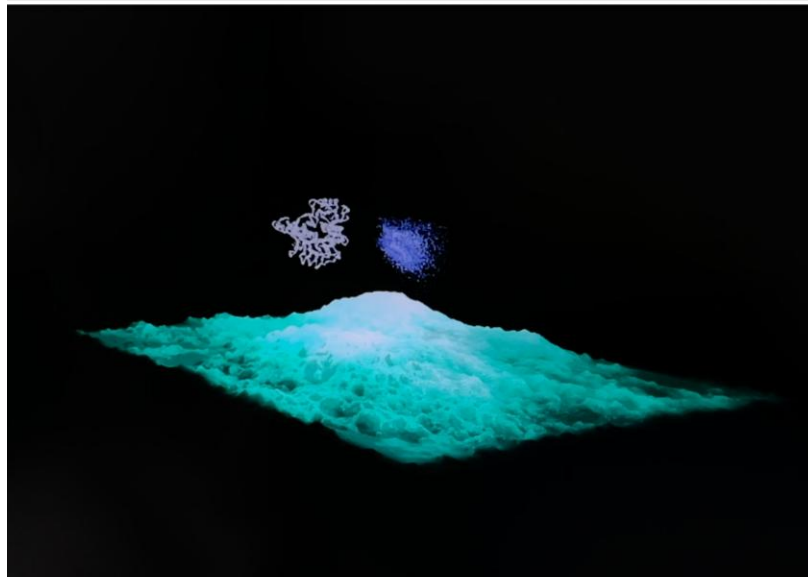


Figure 83. Composite image showing the PBHU installation for the *Mountain as Mountain, Water as Waters – The 1st Guangxi Experimental Art Biennale* (2022-2023). From top to bottom: installation view at Alice Lab, York University; a detail of the central projection showing the dynamic terrain and archaeoglobus fulgidus models; installation view at the Guilin Art Museum. Composite of digital photographs and screenshot. Artwork © 2022-2023 Racelar Ho, Xiaolong Zheng, and IVAS. Photographs © 2022-2023 Racelar Ho (left and middle), Xiaolong Zheng (right).

A development in this phase was the collaboration between the Guilin Art Museum (Guilin, China) and the Alice Lab at York University (Toronto, Canada) for the *Mountain as Mountain, Water as Waters* 看山是山，看水是水 – *The first Guangxi Experimental Art Biennale* (2022-2023). This exhibition provided the first testbed for the 24/7 worldlessness concept, a notion I first applied to PBHU’s practice within this specific iteration. The project’s continuous 24/7 operation was conceptually necessary to investigate the non-stop, asynchronous temporality of global networks.⁵⁴ The 12-hour time difference between Guilin and Toronto allowed the project to braid together two distinct data streams⁵⁵, forming a conceptual “dual-parallel 24-hour world”⁵⁶ from the asynchronous yet interconnected activities at both locations. The temporal structure incorporated real-world spatio-temporal dynamics into PBHU, creating a pseudo-real-24-hour cycle through the asynchronous and interconnected activities at both locations, which formed the initial conceptual basis for the 24/7 worldlessness. The project further deepens the chrono-topographic rhetoric framework by integrating and making the temporal and spatial disjunctions and connections between these sites a component of the artwork’s context and narrative. The artwork existed as a distributed, ongoing process across these networked locations and the iteration’s spatial rhetoric presented one of flux and transmutation, reconfiguring fixed notions of place and presence (Figure 83).

⁵⁴ My artistic inquiry engages with the condition of relentless, machine-driven time that Jonathan Crary (2014) identifies as a defining feature of late capitalism, where networked systems operate continuously, independent of human biological rhythms. The 24/7 operation was therefore a core method for staging and examining this post-human temporality.

⁵⁵ The system’s architecture treats the asynchronous data from each site as distinct yet related temporal layers. The continuous operation allows for what Susan Stewart describes as the “braiding together of several separate data streams” (2015) into a single, complex experiential field that is always in the past yet perceived as present.

⁵⁶ The project tests the hypothesis that asynchronous interactions can produce a new, “useful configuration.” The dual 24-hour cycle is the structure that allows these non-simultaneous inputs to accumulate and generate a collective, evolving artwork, demonstrating that a shared world can be constructed from one-sided and time-lagged discussions.

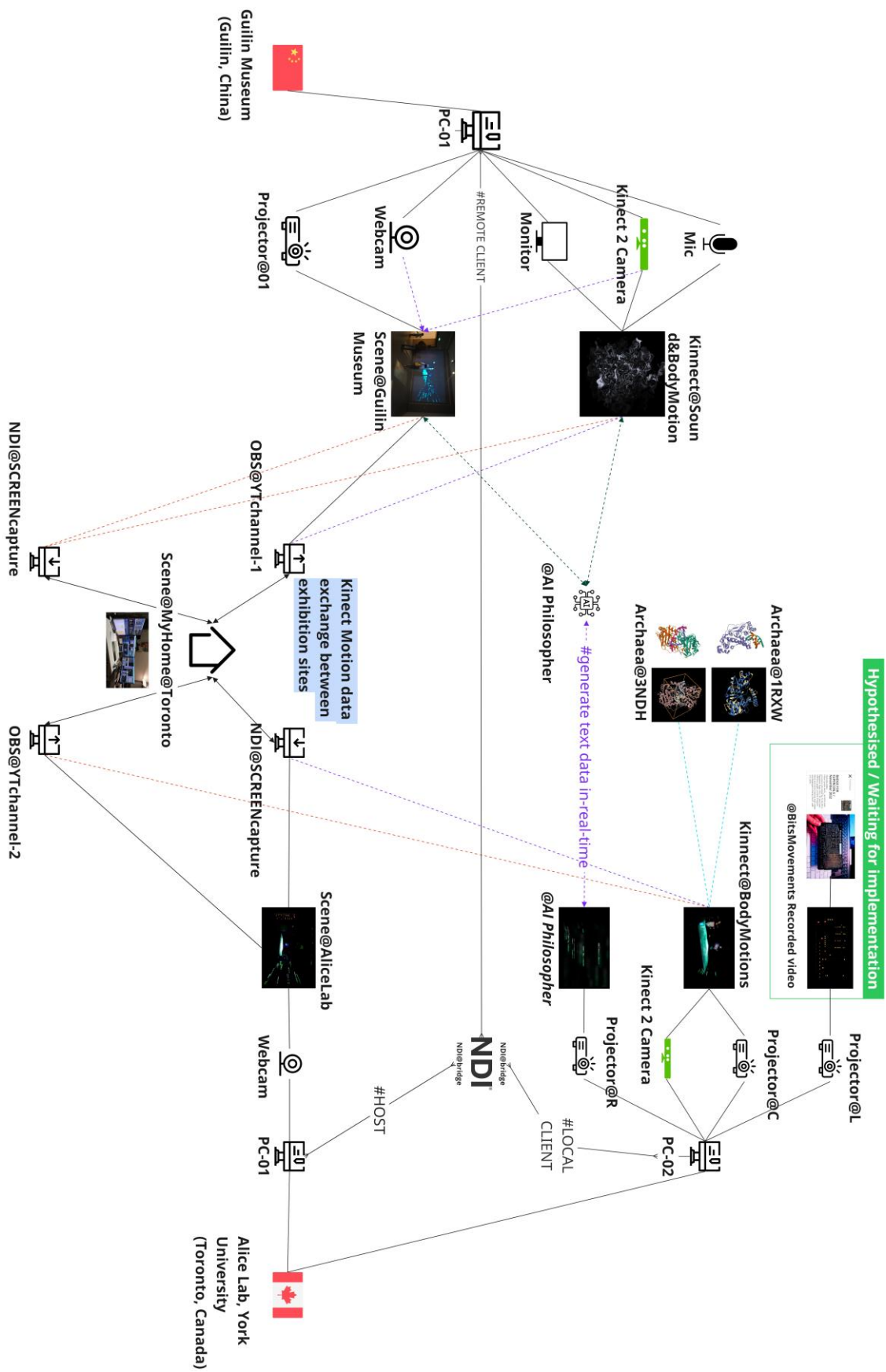


Figure 84. System architecture diagram for the PBHU iteration at *Mountain as Mountain, Water as Waters biennale* (2022-2023). The diagram details the flow of motion, environmental, and AI-generated data between the Guilin Art Museum and Alice Lab through a central data hub (the workstation at my apartment) in Toronto. Diagram accessible at: <https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVJeWoOAK=?moveToWidget=3458764634806425520&cot=14> (accessed 16 September 2025). Diagram © 2022-2023 Racelar Ho.



Figure 85. Composite image showing the development and operational environment for the PBHU iteration (2022-2023). Top left: testing the trans-local projection in my Toronto studio. Top right: testing the interactive projection at Alice Lab. Bottom: the data relay and monitoring interface at the Toronto hub. Artwork © 2022-2023 Racelar Ho. Photographs © 2022-2023 Racelar Ho.

To extend the *pan(marco) rhetoric* introduced in Chapter 2 and to examine the layered, nested spaces and the indirect, intersecting “observing/observed” and “surveillance” dynamics between audiences from previous PBHU interactions, I developed a system for

trans-local data exchange. The trans-local data exchange system enabled the translation, exchange, and transmutation of multiple data types of motion movements, sounds, and real-time climate platforms, such as TouchDesigner and NDI, alongside streaming technologies. My Toronto-based computer equipment and Google Home Hub formed a data relay centre, managing information flow between the Guilin Art Museum and Alice Lab. Assessing the feasibility of asynchronous signal transmutation for the 24/7 worldlessness concept defined the focus of the PBHU iteration; the project did not develop or exhibit the VR application from the prior PBHU versions. I placed the emphasis on achieving asynchronous multiple data exchange for the interactive spatial projection across national borders. The diagram (Figure 84) illustrates this process, detailing how sensor data, such as Kinect motion capture, microphones, from each exhibit site, along with outputs from the *AI Philosopher*, were channelled through the central Toronto hub. This hub processed and relayed the data through NDI and OBS to drive the interactive projections and outline streams, creating a reciprocal data feedback loop between Guilin and Toronto. The operational management of this data feedback loop relied on the central control hub located at my Toronto studio, from which I conducted tests and monitored the live system (Figure 85).

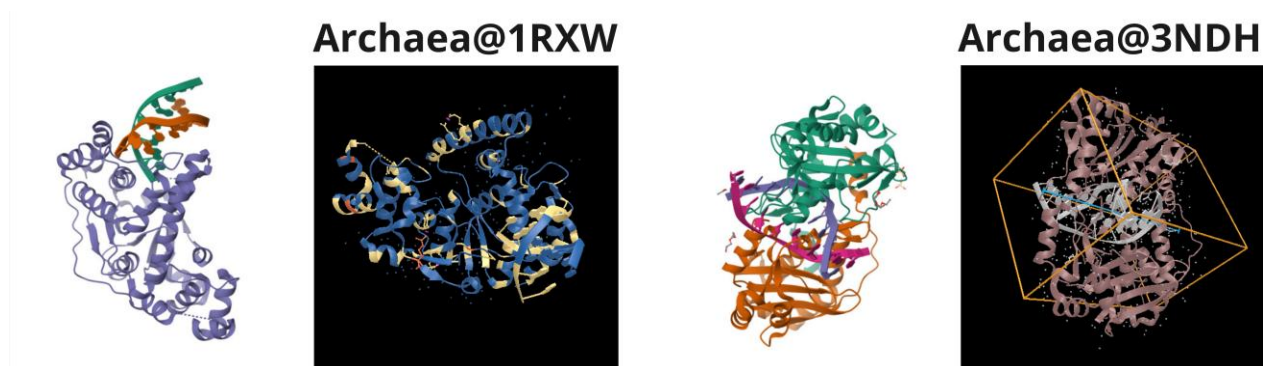


Figure 86. Visualisation of *Archaeoglobus fulgidus* DNA protein models (PDB IDs: 1RXW, left; 3NDH, right) as utilised in the PBHU interactive projection (2022-2023). DNA Protein Models and Images © 2022-2023 RCSB-Protein Data Bank.

The interactive design centred on a 180-degree, three-screen projection space at the Alice Lab (Figure 83-top). The central projection displayed a dynamic terrain formed from the real-time meteorological data of Guilin and Toronto; audience motion and ambient sounds from the alternate exhibition site also influenced the terrain's morphology. For the data exchange of this element, I utilised both Google Cloud Platform (GCP) and Alibaba Cloud services; a 2012

laptop formed an intermediary data exchange hub due to regional internet policies. Two *archaeoglobus fulgidus* DNA protein models (PDB IDs: 3NDH⁵⁷ and 1RXW⁵⁸) floated above the terrain; the movements and orientations of the models also responded to audience motion data from the remote site (Figure 86). I chose the specific extremophilic archaea because their existence in extreme environments provides a biological instance of the persistence of life and informational in post-technological, potentially “worldless conditions, which is a central exploration within PBHU’s examination of non-anthropocentric agencies. The terrain model rotated clockwise. The rotation symbolised the forward passage of processed data and the progression of the techno-mediated world, irrespective of human observation. Motion data from the geographically separate participants also modulated the speed, direction, and altitude of the archaea models’ rotation and suspension (Figure 85-top right).



Figure 87. Composite image illustrating the “Aliencaret” font and its application in the PBHU installation (2022-2023). Left: specimen of the “Aliencaret” typeface (public domain). Right: screenshot of the projected output displaying AI Philosopher-generated text rendered in “Aliencaret” font. Artwork and screenshot © 2022-2023 Racelar Ho.

The *AI Philosopher* produced real-time philosophical text fragments. Audience motion data from both sites then triggered and shaped the display of the fragments on the right-hand projection (Figure 87-right). I hosted the trained version of the *AI Philosopher* on GCP and configured the program for autonomous 24/7 text generation. A data filtering mechanism selected text segments from a local JSON database for visualisation in TouchDesigner; categorised ranges of

⁵⁷ RCSB PDB, “3NDH: Crystal Structure of AF2073 from Archaeoglobus Fulgidus”, accessed 16 September 2025, <https://www.rcsb.org/structure/3NDH>.

⁵⁸ RCSB PDB, “1RXW: Crystal Structure of AF0305 from Archaeoglobus Fulgidus”, accessed 16 September 2025, <https://www.rcsb.org/structure/1RXW>.

audience motion data influenced the mechanism, and the *AI Philosopher* fed the database. The system displayed the selected text segments using the “Aliencaret” font (Figure 87-left). The design of the typeface makes the font difficult for human eyes to decipher and highlights the non-anthropocentric and potentially alienating nature of communication within the *post-bits human universe*. In the project’s universe, data flow may operate according to logics not transparent to human understanding.



Figure 88. Composite image showing Antonic’s microcomputer iterations and its manual operation process. Left: the redeveloped Antonic’s microcomputer (original design © 2025 Voja Antonic, redeveloped by Ao Wei, 2024; physical board property of Racelar Ho). Right: screenshot of Randy Glenn manually “drawing” the Chinese version of the *AI Philosopher*-generated sentence by manipulating *Bits* on the original microcomputer’s LED panel, December 2022 (original microcomputer design © 2022 Voja Antonic, physical microcomputer property of Randy Glenn; artistic and aesthetic concept © 2022 Racelar Ho; electronic engineering and programming concept and execution © 2022 Sarah Vollmer and Randy Glenn).



Figure 89. Video stills from pre-recorded material illustrating the microcomputer’s operation (2022). Left: screenshot of the microcomputer’s operational interface. Right (top and bottom): screenshots showing the *AI Philosopher*-generated philosophical text fragments (English, top; Chinese, bottom) displayed on the microcomputer’s LED panel by “drawing” with *Bits*. Video recordings by Racelar Ho, November 2022. Video © 2022 Racelar Ho and Sarah Vollmer.

The left-hand projection presented a video recording; the recording illustrated the operation

of BITS on a microcomputer⁵⁹ Voja Antonic developed.⁶⁰ I chose to adopt the microcomputer as one of the context providers and medium for this PBHU iteration. My artistic and aesthetic concept aimed to represent *Bits* as a non-human being and to transmute the operational syntax of *Bits* into an aesthetic language. The hardware materialises the binary operations constituting techno-mediated environments the PBHU series investigates, the microcomputer grounds abstract data processes in a tangible form. The manual manipulation of BITS executed and assisted by Sarah Vollmer and Randy Glenn on the device displayed a philosophical sentence generated by the *AI Philosopher*, in both Chinese and English, through its 16×8 LED panel (Figure 88). The interface questions authorship and control within post-technological systems. I planned to implement a real-time data exchange between the microcomputer and the *AI Philosopher*. The exchange intended to produce the motion of *Bits* on the device’s LED panel and create an in-real-time aesthetic scene that transmuted abstract data into visual symbols. This experimental prototype, however, did not successfully implement the aforementioned real-time data exchange functionality. I pre-recorded three videos showing the microcomputer’s LEDs indicating an “alive” state for *Bits*, and the display of the *AI Philosopher*-generated sentence (Figure 89). My commissioning of electronics engineers Ao Wei in January 2025 to redevelop the microcomputer’s hardware supports my plan to attempt the real-time data exchange between *Bits* and the *AI Philosopher*.

⁵⁹ The open-source project for Voja Antonic’s microcomputer (Supercon.6 badge) is available on GitHub: <https://github.com/Hack-a-Day/2022-Supercon6-Badge-Tools>, accessed 16 September 2025.

⁶⁰ The Voja Antonic-developed microcomputer was recommended by Vollmer after her understanding of the underlying post-technological philosophical and aesthetic framework of the PBHU series in the late 2022; Vollmer also explained the operational mechanics of BITS on the device. I led the artistic and aesthetic concept for the microcomputer component. Vollmer provided the hardware feasibility assessment and led the execution of the prototype based on my creative and aesthetic requirements, with Glenn assisting in prototype testing.

participants experience the “others” through data-ghosts rather than co-presence. To mitigate the described sense of worldlessness, webcams at both physical sites streamed 24/7 live feeds to Bilibili, Facebook, and YouTube (Figure 90). The PBHU iteration constructed a 24/7 worldless *post-bits human universe* that appeared unpopulated, resembling the post-technological heterotopia the GDMoA *Bits City* film depicted; within the aforementioned universe, human and cultural exchanges became indirect and mediated, as the datafication of presence and interaction created a sense of distance and abstraction from the embodied other.

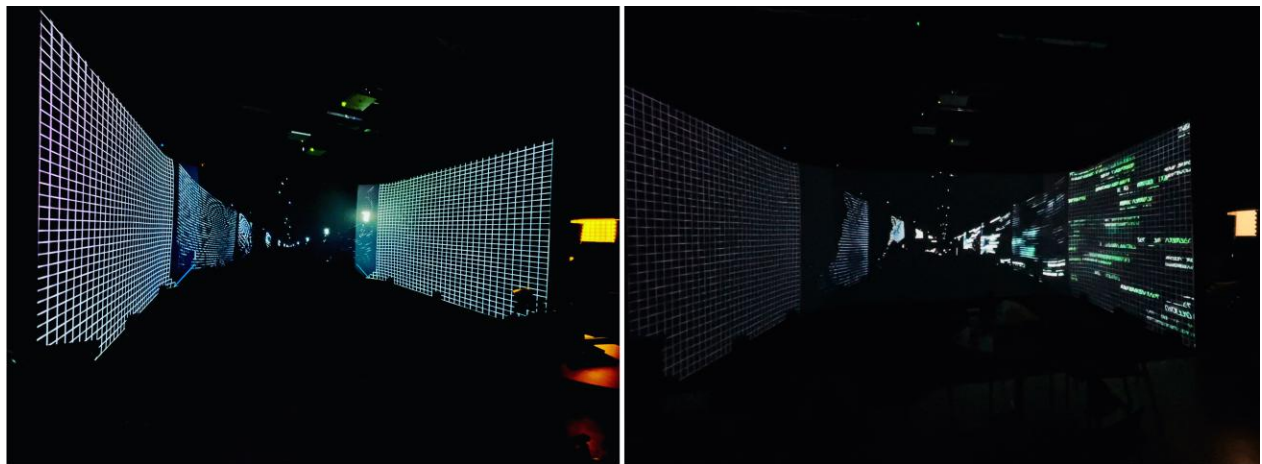


Figure 91. Experimental tests of the “mirrored space” projection at Alice Lab (November-December 2022). Left: test of the nested and layered “mirrored space” structure using TouchDesigner, MadMapper, and NDI via webcam projection. Right: updated projection result incorporating Kinect camera-captured motion data interacting with the *AI Philosopher*-generated text fragments within the mirrored space. Photographs and artwork © 2022-2023 Racelar Ho.

I further developed and applied the “mirrored screen” strategy at this PBHU iteration. A Razer Kiyo Pro 4K wide-angle webcam, positioned to capture the frontal view of each exhibition site, transmitted a live feed; the feed underwent superposition onto the respective projection surfaces. Layering created a recursive visual loop; the loop reflected the observer back into the observed techno-mediated landscape. The technique constructed a “space within a space”. The construction blurred the distinction between the physical site of viewing and the virtual content, implicating the viewer within the artwork’s emergent, nested reality (Figure 91). A method of this nature heightens the experience of a hybrid environment. Within the environment, the boundaries between physical space and data-driven representation become fluid and interpenetrating.

The system enabled participants at one location to observe, influence, and respond to

the actions of participants in other locations, facilitating collaborative creation through hybrid communication. The system's dynamics reflected PBHU's narrative of distributed agency and human-machine collaboration, decentring the traditional notion of the artwork and authorship. The PBHU iteration's significance was the iteration's capacity to substantiate the theoretical frameworks that preceding chapters developed. The project validated the feasibility of asynchronous signal transmutation for the 24/7 worldlessness concept and demonstrated how the updated spatio-temporal framework could apply to my propositions of hybrid space and hybrid rhetoric within post-technological experimental art practice, revealing the framework's aesthetic potential to translate abstract data processes into tangible, experiential forms and its narrative potential to articulate themes of distributed agency and human-machine co-creation within hybrid environments.

Conceptual Expansion: The “Translator” and a New Class of Participant (2022)

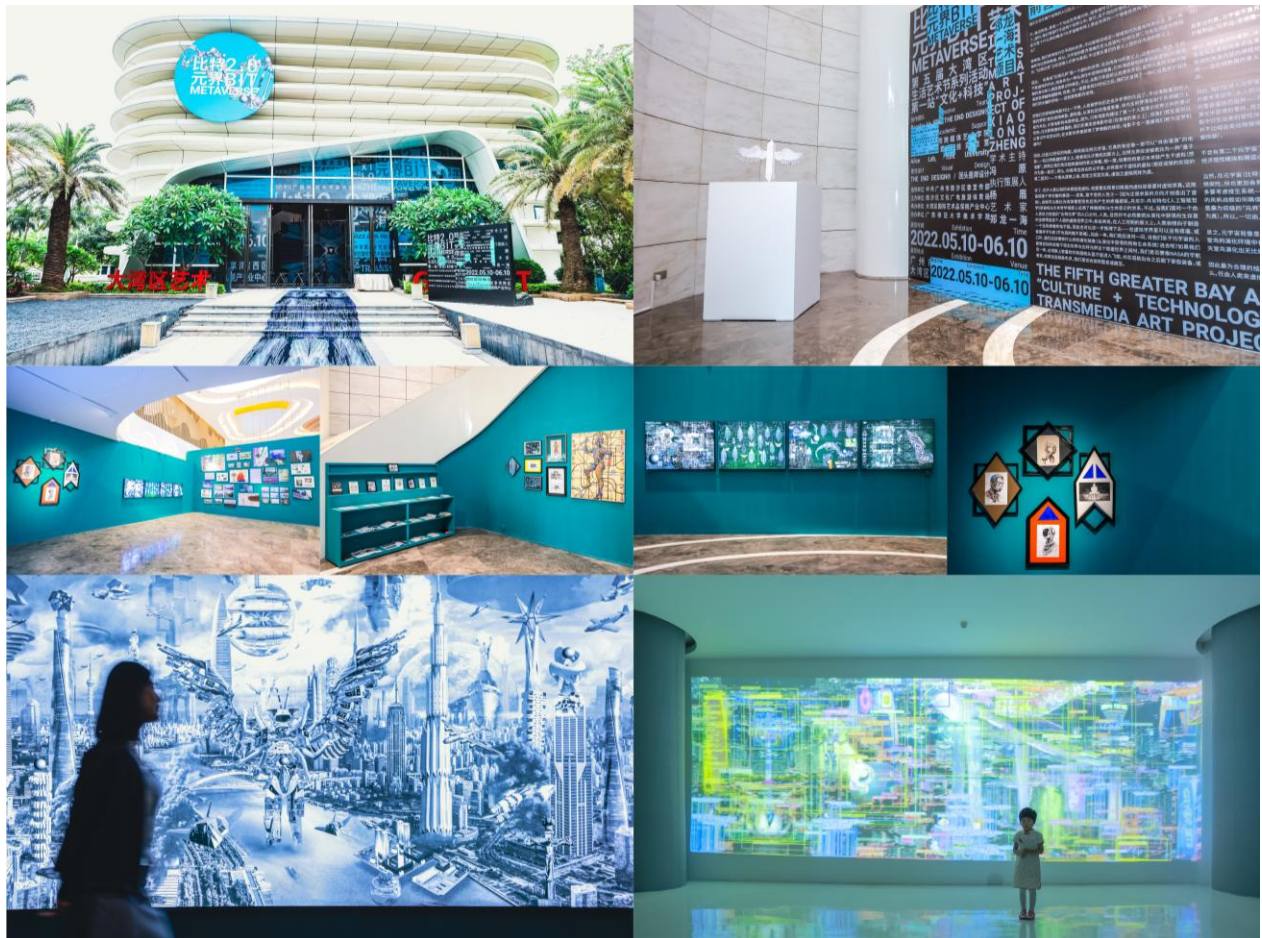


Figure 92. Installation views of the PBHU iteration at the *BIT Metaverse 2.0* exhibition, 2022. Artwork © 2025 Racelar Ho, Xiaolong Zheng, and IVAS. Photographs © 2025 Xiaolong Zheng.

The iteration of the PBHU series at the *BIT Metaverse 2.0 × The 5th Greater Bay Area (GBA) Art Festival – Cultural + Technology*, hosted by The Greater Bay Area International Art bonded Industry Center (Guangzhou, China) in 2022, marked a further conceptual expansion (Figure 92). In collaboration with Xiaolong Zheng, I adapted the curatorial framework of *you* design from our 2021 GDMoA exhibition to a configuration of reduced scale. Within this context, I furthered the PBHU's investigation of 24/7 worldlessness by reinterpreting the roles of the “translator” and introducing a “new class” of participant through a modified deployment of the *AI Philosopher*.

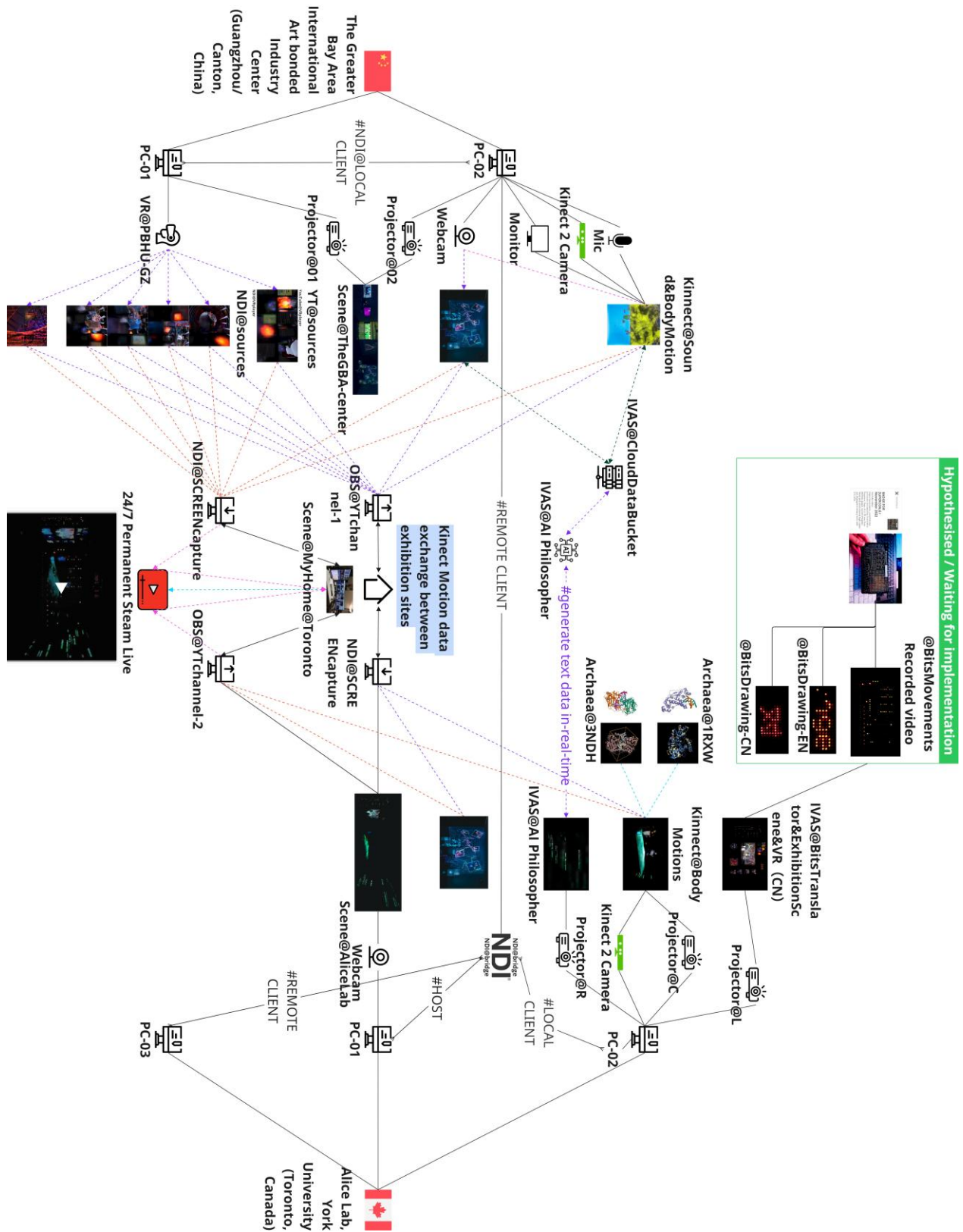


Figure 93. System architecture diagram for the PBHU iteration at *BIT Metaverse 2.0* exhibition (2022). The diagram illustrates the trans-local data flow and processing between The Greater Bay Area International Art bonded Industry Center (Guangzhou, China), a central data hub in Toronto (my residence/studio),

Alice Lab (Toronto, Canada), and online streaming platforms, detailing the integration of Kinect data, webcam feeds, VR perspectives, and AI Philosopher operations. Diagram accessible at: <https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVJeWoOAK=?moveToWidget=3458764634806845412&cot=14> (accessed 16 September 2025). Diagram © 2022 Racelar Ho.

In this PBHU iteration, I expanded the *AI Philosopher*'s function to be the primary "translator". The *AI Philosopher*'s redefined function imbued the concept of translation with a new layer of narrative, moving the concept away from code or language conversion to the interpretation of multimodal experiential data. I programmed the *AI Philosopher*, utilising the *AI Philosopher*'s embedded YOLOv4 capabilities, to perform real-time object detection on diverse live visual feeds and present related textual labels. The visual feeds originated from Kinect cameras and webcams at both the GBA exhibition site (Guangzhou, China) and the Alice Lab. A development involved the *AI Philosopher* processing the first-person perspective. Participants in the GBA exhibition site wore the VR headset. The *AI Philosopher* translated and transmuted the immediate, subjective visual experiences within the virtual world, alongside data from the physical sites, into a continuous layer of non-human narrative. The process of techno-driven interpretation of lived experiences, I argue, constitutes a conceptual expansion of the "translator" role, modifying the *AI Philosopher* into an agent that deciphers and re-articulates the hybrid realities of the exhibition (Figure 93). The conceptual expansion addresses my research into how post-technological systems construct meaning, decentring human authorship and introducing a persistent, algorithmic interpretive voice into the artwork's ecosystem.

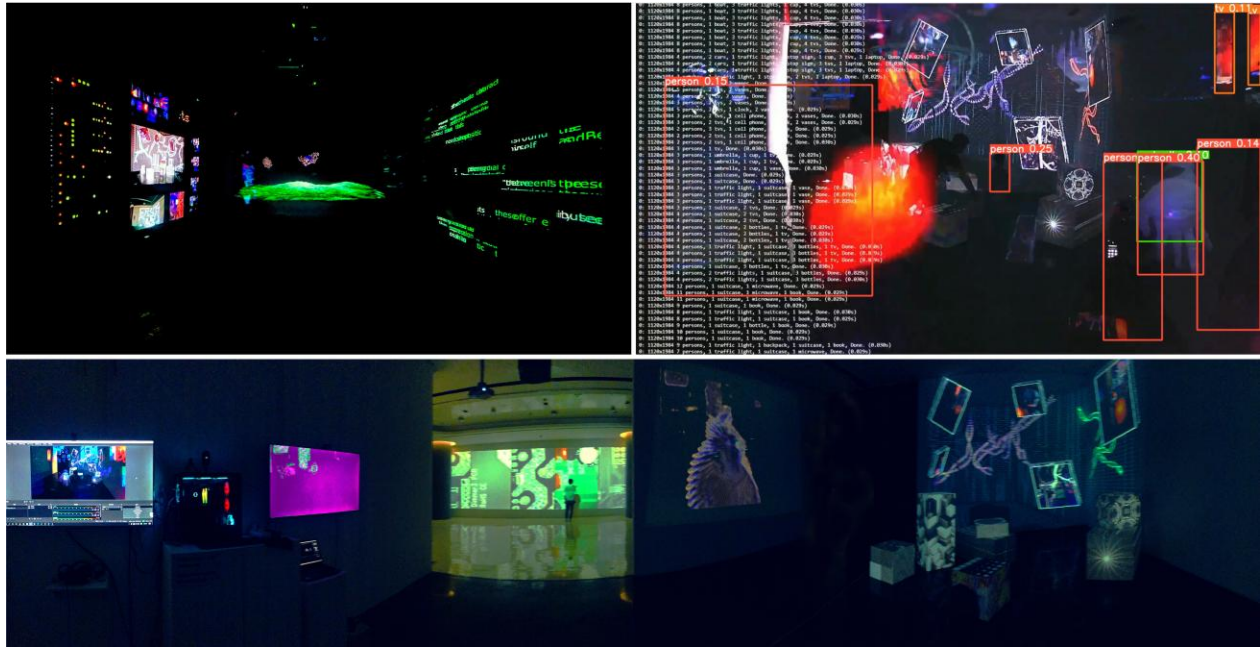


Figure 94. Composite image of the Post-Bits Human Universe (PBHU) interactive mixed reality installation for *BIT Metaverse 2.0* exhibition (2022). Bottom: installation view at The Greater Bay Area International Art bonded Industry Center (GBA site), Guangzhou. Top left: installation view at Alice Lab, York University, Toronto. Top right: screenshot of the YouTube live stream featuring AI Philosopher-processed narrative overlays. Photographs: GBA site by Wongwai; Alice Lab and YouTube screenshot by Racelar Ho. Artwork © 2022 Racelar Ho, Xiaolong Zheng, and IVAS.

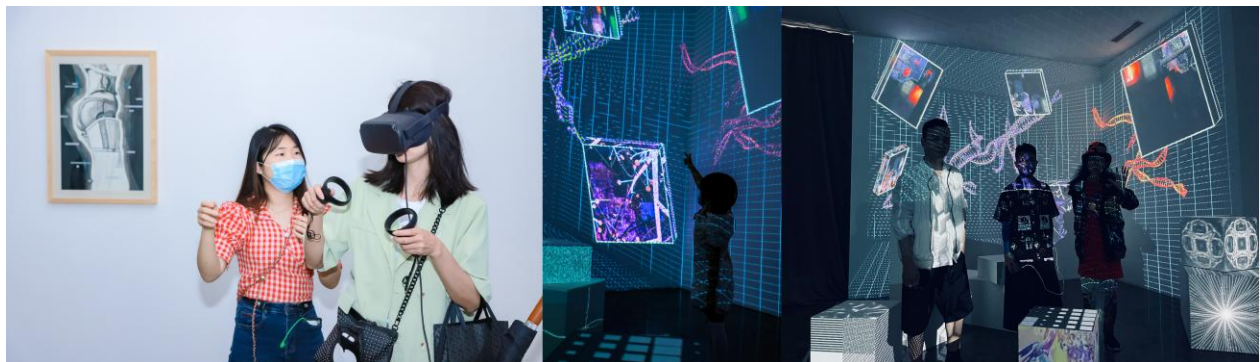


Figure 95. Audience interaction with the PBHU installation at the *BIT Metaverse 2.0* exhibition, 2022. Left: a visitor engages with the VR application under the guidance of museum staff. Middle and right: visitors interact with the interactive spatial projection installation. Artwork © 2022 Racelar Ho, Xiaolong Zheng, and IVAS. Photographs © 2022 Xiaolong Zheng.

The operational shift also constituted a new class of participant (Figure 94). Firstly, a capacity for real-time perception and narrative creation based on live events moved the *AI Philosopher* beyond a status as a tool. The *AI Philosopher* became an autonomous, non-human participant, shaping the audience's understanding of the unfolding artwork. Secondly, the VR user in the GBA exhibition site participated in a distinct capacity (Figure 95).

The *AI Philosopher* captured, processed, and publicly narrated visual experiences from the VR users. Individual inquiries and subjective viewpoints from the VR user became direct inputs and raw material for a publicly disseminated, AI-generated commentary. The *AI Philosopher* played as a “translator” amplified and simultaneously mediated the agency of the VR user and contributed to a distributed form of meaning-making. The previously outlined dynamic stands as central in my examination of hybrid rhetoric and the co-constitution of experience in networked environments. An interpretative layer driven by the *AI Philosopher*, through continuous operation independent of human co-presence across the two sites, effected the formation of 24/7 worldlessness (Figure 94-top-right). The *AI Philosopher* populated the state of 24/7 worldlessness with a persistent stream of observations and interpretations. Its activity ensured the artwork remained “active” and changing even during periods of asynchronous participation or when physical venues were closed. I posit that worldlessness exists as a generative condition for new spatio-temporal and narrative formations.

The technical architecture of the interactive mixed reality installation facilitated the conceptual expansion. I designed the system to project visual information derived from virtual cameras within the VR application at the GBA exhibition site into both physical exhibition spaces. A data exchange hub I managed in Toronto transmitted the feed and live videos relayed the data to the Alice Lab for projection (Figure 83). The GBA exhibition site, the main spatial projection, situated in a corner, presented five virtual interfaces displaying discrete virtual camera views. I also streamed the VR headset feeds from the GBA exhibition site to the Alice Lab’s projection and to online platforms. Seven white boxes in the GBA exhibition site provided additional interfaces, displaying real-time visualisations of audio data sourced from the VR environment and local microphones. I integrated models for four DNA structures into the projected “space within a space”, adding a layer of symbolic content; these models represented the foundational code of biological life, creating a visual metaphor for the artwork’s central argument regarding the equivalence of biological information and digital data as the generative codes of existence in the *post-bits human universe*. The system continued the spatio-temporal framework of the preceding *Mountain as Mountain, Water as Waters* exhibition, linking Guangzhou and Toronto across a twelve-hour time difference and operating 24/7 to facilitate the flow of data for the *AI Philosopher*’s interpretive processes and maintain

the persistent, developing nature of the 24/7 worldless environment. The installation's iteration demonstrates how software and networked systems can expand the conceptual roles of "translator" and "participant", providing a practical implementation of the theoretical frameworks concerning distributed agency, non-human perception, and the construction of hybrid realities central to my theoretical research and art practice.

Post-Bits Human Universe: Signal Transmutation at Guangzhou Museum (2023)

The concluding iteration of this developmental phase resulted in the work *Post-Bits Human Universe: Signal Transmutation*, a continue collaboration between the Guangzhou Museum (Guangzhou, China) and the Alice Lab in 2023. This version represented a comprehensive of the 24/7 worldlessness and asynchronous signal transmutation concepts I investigated. In this iteration, I formally conceptualised the work's distributed structure into two primary nodes: the "*motherly incubator*" and the "*nomadic hub*". I define the Alice Lab as the motherly incubator because it houses the permanent, stable base for the core system and the physical and technical origin point that informs the work's continuous development. The temporary exhibition sites, such as the Guangzhou Museum, I define as *nomadic hubs*: transient, mobile nodes that connect to the *motherly incubator*, receiving and transmitting data while interacting with a local context before decommissioning. The incubator-hub model articulates the work's distributed and generative nature.

The term *motherly incubator* draws on scholarship on media laboratories, which functions as stable, generative environments for research and technical development, providing the necessary conditions for artistic experimentation to emerge and be sustained.⁶¹ The *nomadic hub* metaphor is informed by Arjun Appaduri's (1988) theory of the "social life of things", where an object's meaning is generated through its circulation and contextual re-inscription. Appadurai argues that commodities, like artworks, have social lives and that their meanings are produced through their circulation, exchange, and use in different social and cultural contexts. The *nomadic hub* is the site where the artwork enters a new social context, and its meaning is renegotiated. Furthermore, the hub functions as a site of

⁶¹ Scholarship on media and citizen labs, particularly within academic and artistic contexts, identifies them as sites for technical innovation, interdisciplinary contact, and the development of new cultural production (Mancuso, 2023; Vesna, 2001).

“postproduction” in Nicolas Bourriaud’s (2005) sense, where existing signals from the incubator are remixed and re-presented to a new audience, creating a localised event. Bourriaud posits that contemporary artists often emulate DJs or programmers, using existing cultural forms and data as raw material to be selected and programmed into new contexts.⁶² Thus, the *nomadic hub* replicates this process, taking the core data streams from the motherly incubator and re-presenting them in a new context. The selection and presentation of these streams generates a new work.

⁶² Bourriaud (2005) describes this artistic practice as selecting existing cultural objects and inserting them into new contexts, a process he likens to programming forms rather than composing them from scratch .

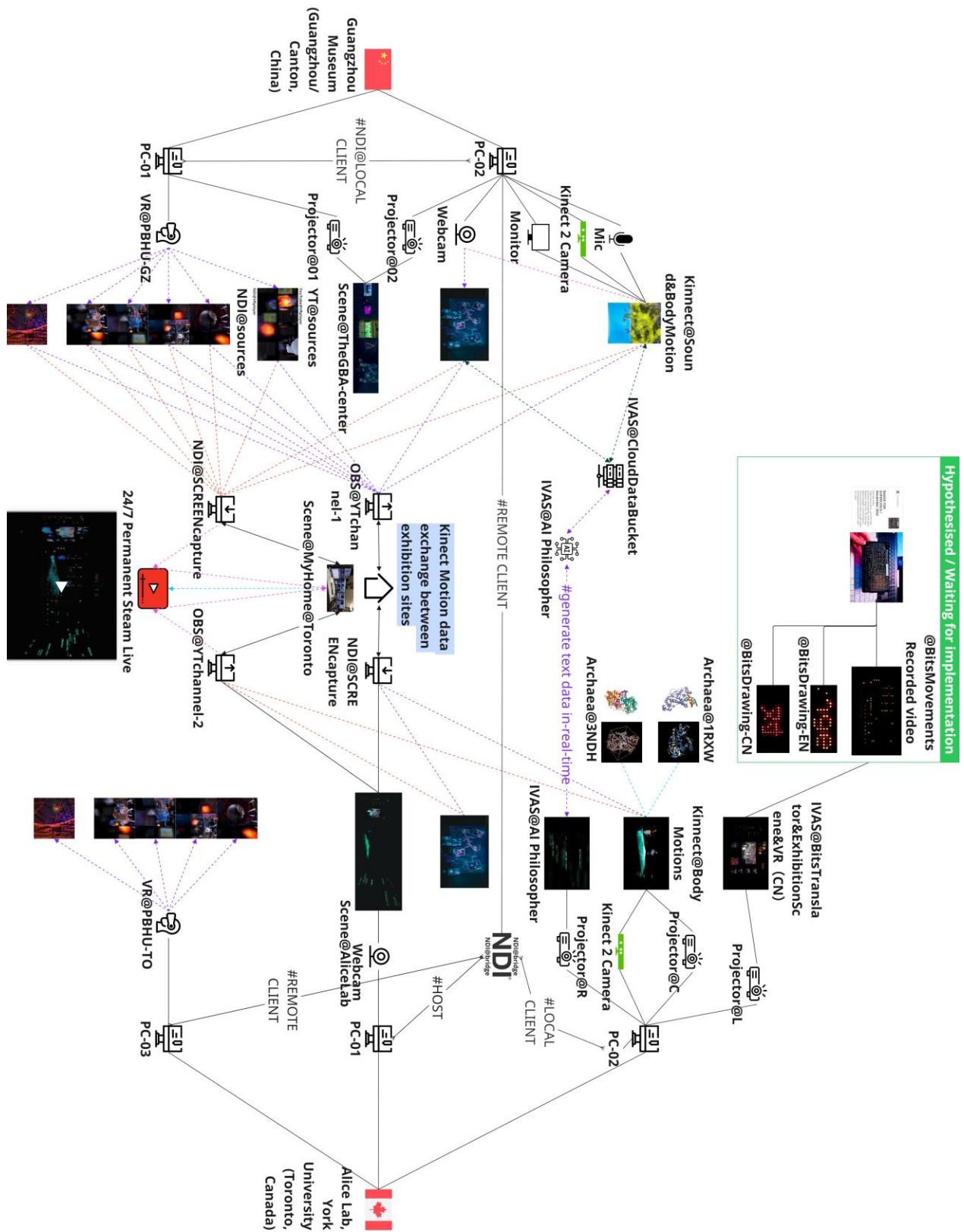


Figure 96. System architecture diagram for the *Post-Bit Human Universe: Signal Transmutation* exhibition (2023). The diagram illustrates the observational relations between audiences and the flow of data between the “motherly incubator” (Alice Lab), the “nomadic hub” (Guangzhou Museum), my home studio, and public streaming platforms.

Diagram accessible at:
<https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVJeWoOAk=?moveToWidget=3458764634807035064&cot=14> (accessed 16
September 2025). Diagram © 2023 Racelar Ho.

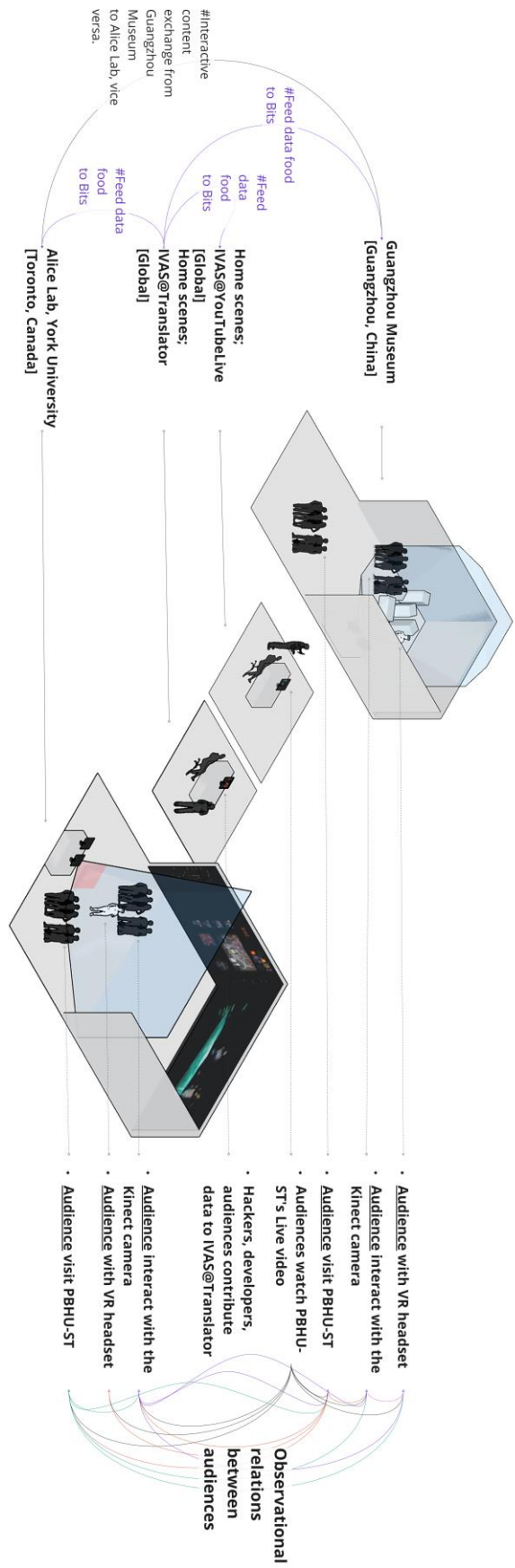


Figure 97. Conceptual diagram of the distributed exhibition sites for *Post-bit Human Universe: Signal Transmutation* (2023), showing the relationship between the Guangzhou Museum (nomadic hub), the artist's home studio (data exchange hub), and Alice Lab at York University (motherly incubator). Diagram accessible at: <https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVJeWoOAk=?moveToWidget=3458764634807117289&cot=14> (accessed 16 September 2025). Diagram © 2023 Racelar Ho.

The installation's design for the two physical exhibition sites continued and integrated the methods I developed in the previous two exhibitions. From the *Mountain as Mountain, Water as Waters* iteration, the system incorporated the principle of asynchronous signal transmutation between two geographically distant locations, using motion and environmental data from one site to influence the projected visuals at the other. From the *BIT Metaverse 2.0* version, the project expanded upon the conceptualisation of the *AI Philosopher* as a multimodal “translator” and the VR user's subjective viewpoint as a new class of participatory input. Figure 96 and Figure 97 illustrate the relationship between the motherly incubator, the nomadic hub, and my home studio, which provided a central data exchange point.

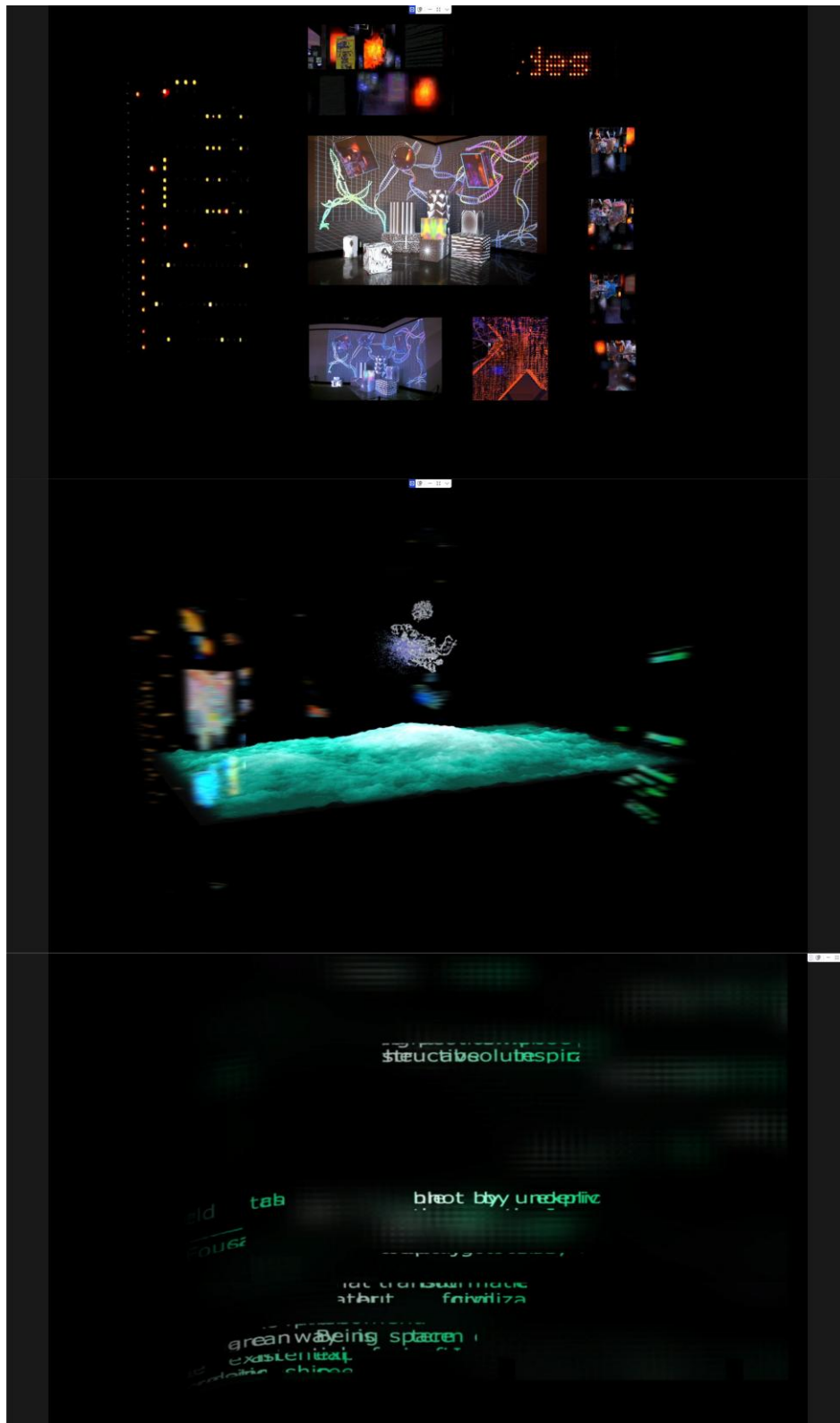
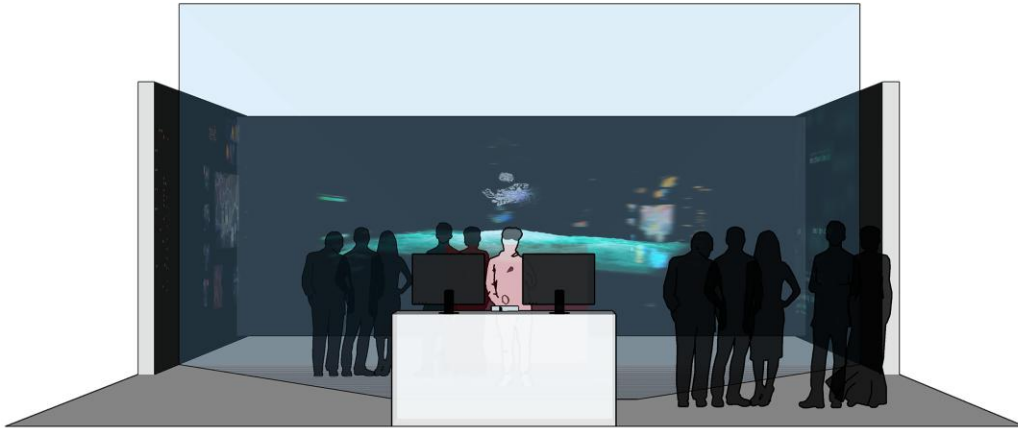
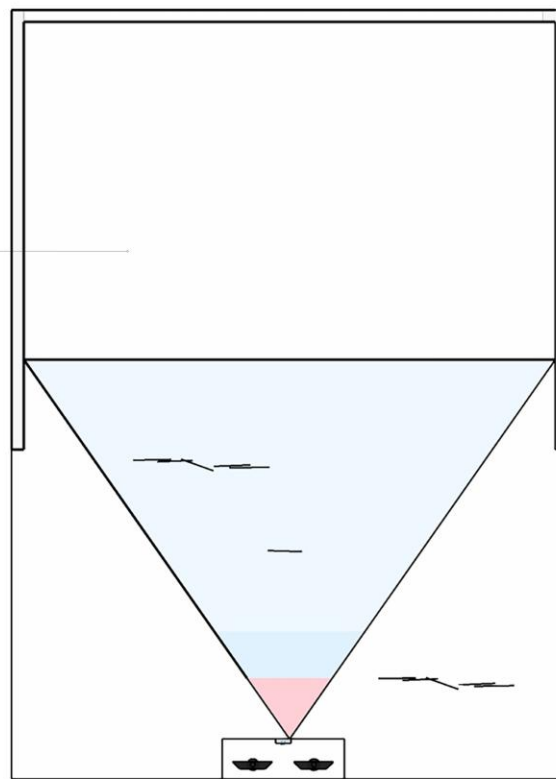


Figure 98. Installation views of the “motherly incubator” at Alice Lab, York University (2023). The images show the multi-screen projection setup displaying synthesised data from both the Toronto and Guangzhou sites. Artwork © 2023 Racelar Ho, Xiaolong Zheng, and IVAS. Photographs © 2023 Racelar Ho.



- Spatial projection
- Kinect camera sensing area
- VR app wandering area



- Monitors
- Kinect camera
- webcam
- microphone

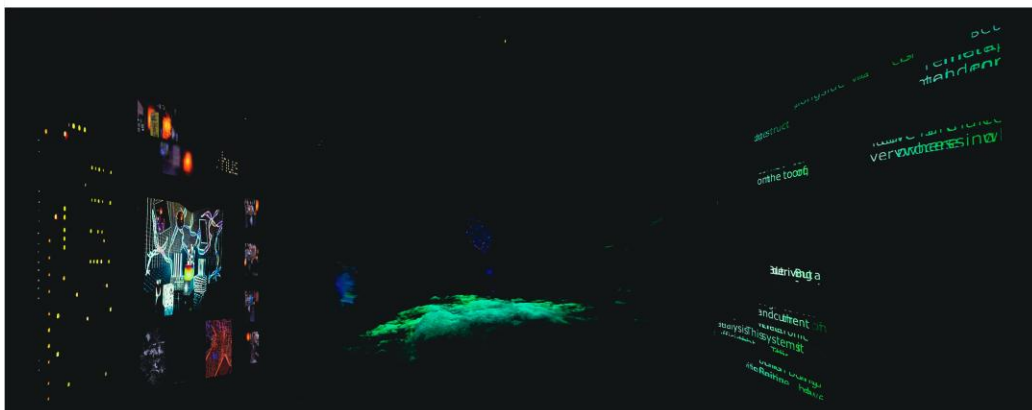
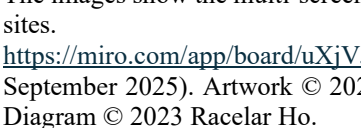
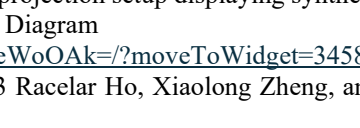
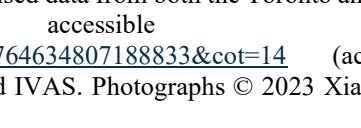
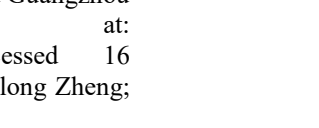


Figure 99. Installation views and diagram of the “*motherly incubator*” at Alice Lab, York University (2023). The images show the multi-screen projection setup displaying synthesised data from both the Toronto and Guangzhou sites.     accessible at: <https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVJeWoOAK=?moveToWidget=3458764634807188833&cot=14> (accessed 16 September 2025). Artwork © 2023 Racelar Ho, Xiaolong Zheng, and IVAS. Photographs © 2023 Xiaolong Zheng; Diagram © 2023 Racelar Ho.

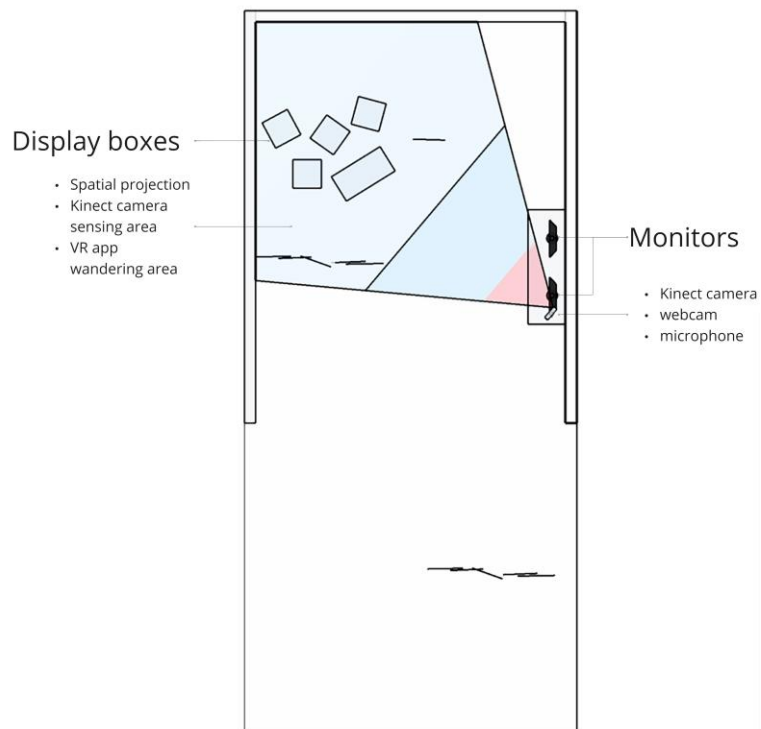
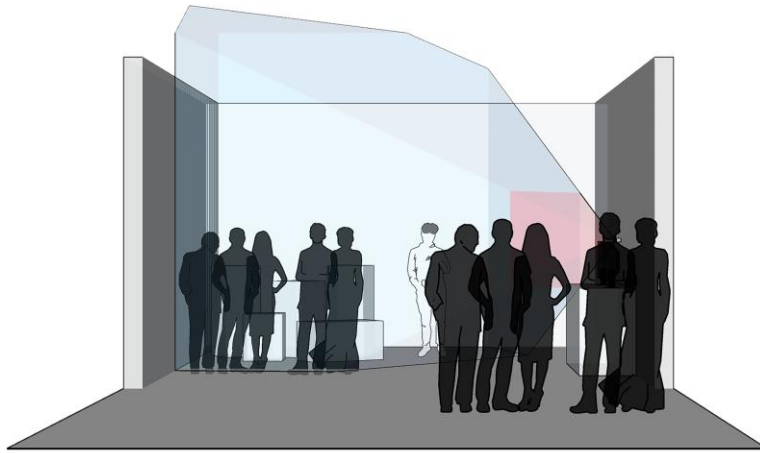


Figure 100. Installation views and diagram of the “*nomadic hub*” at the Guangzhou Museum (2023). The images show the interactive spatial projection installation and the physical interfaces within the exhibition space. Diagram accessible at: <https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVJeWoOAK=?moveToWidget=3458764634807294171&cot=14> (accessed 16 September 2025). Artwork © 2025 Racelar Ho, Xiaolong Zheng, and IVAS. Photographs © 2023 Xiaolong Zheng; Diagram © 2023 Racelar Ho.

The Alice Lab, as the *motherly incubator*, hosted the hybrid system with three computers and a real-time mixed-reality spatial projection system. One PC managed the NDI bridge for data exchange, another handled the mixed reality spatial projections, and a third hosted the meta-version of the PBHU VR system. Figure 98 shows the installation at the Alice Lab, where the projections displayed a synthesis of data streams from both the local and the remote sites. The subset system at the Guangzhou Museum formed a *nomadic hub*. The installation at the Guangzhou exhibition site displayed real-time data from the *AI Philosopher* and interactive content streamed from the Alice Lab, while also capturing local interactions to transmit back to the *motherly incubator* (Figure 99). Figure 100 illustrates the *nomadic system* at the Guangzhou Museum, where audiences interacted with the interactive projections and VR application. I argue that this nomadic system provides a practical demonstration of Hannah Arendt’s (2018) rebuttal to Martin Heidegger’s (1995) thesis of the worldless stone by showing that a techno-mediated existence is co-constituted through a physical environment and the mutual recognition of others across the network. The functionality of the system depended on the interconnectedness of these *xiaojing* (landscape vignettes).



Figure 101. Screenshot of the 24/7 composite live stream broadcast via Zoom (2023). The stream combined real-time views from the Alice Lab installation, the Guangzhou Museum installation, and the VR application, creating a multi-layered observational interface for a global audience. The full video is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=68mrgPo7a_k. Artwork © 2023 Racelar Ho, Xiaolong Zheng, and IVAS. Screenshot © 2025 Racelar Ho.

A development in the PBHU iteration involved architecting a multi-layered framework of observation. Using the established technical framework, I leveraged the central data exchange hub at my Toronto studio to converge 24/7 Zoom meeting. The feeds included the physical exhibition scene at the Alice Lab, the view of the Guangzhou Museum site, and the first-person perspectives from the VR applications at both locations. I then broadcast the composite view from the Zoom meeting to YouTube, Bilibili, and the IVAS Facebook page. Figure 101 provides a screenshot of this composite live stream, which provided a public-facing virtual window onto the artwork's distributed activities. The technical arrangement constituted a network of perspectives. The network positioned physical attendees in Guangzhou, observers at the Alice Lab, VR users in both locations, and the online audience to observe, monitor, and interact with one another. The system is a practical application of the theories of the rhizomatic screen and doubled realities I developed in Chapter 5.

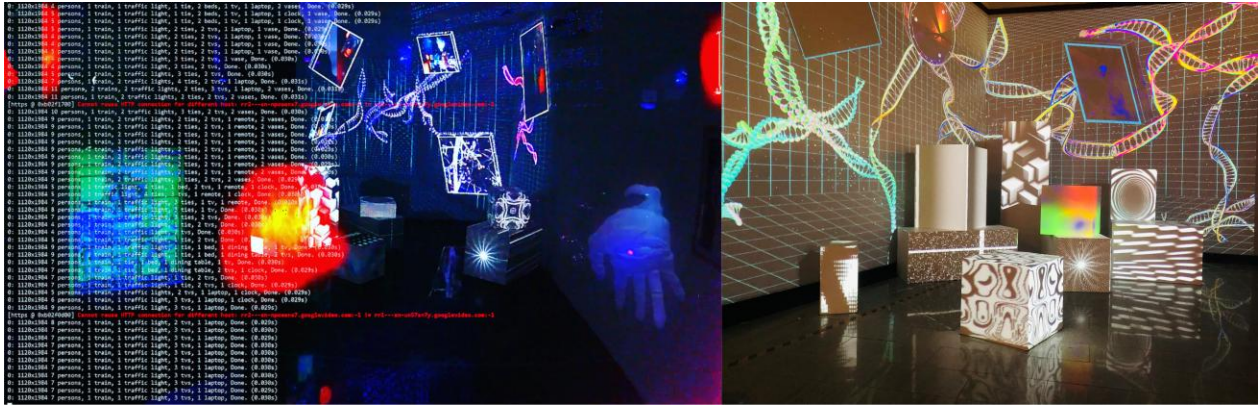


Figure 102. Composite image illustrating the *AI Philosopher's* real-time operation (2023). Left: the *AI Philosopher's* YOLOv4 object detection interface processing a live feed from the Guangzhou Museum, identifying objects and human presence. Right: the resulting interactive spatial projection at the museum, where the *AI Philosopher's* interpretations are integrated into the visual environment. Artwork © 2023 Racelar Ho, Xiaolong Zheng, and IVAS. Photographs © 2023 Xiaolong Zheng.

This PBHU version also reconfigured the mode of audience interaction. Access for remote audiences was facilitated through a temporary interface for the *AI Philosopher*, hosted on a Google Colab page. This interface enables an online audience to submit textual inputs to the system. The *AI Philosopher* processed these textual inputs alongside the sensor data from the physical sites. The resulting textual responses were then integrated into the visual projections at both locations and into the live streams. Figure 102 (left) illustrates the *AI Philosopher* processing visual data from the exhibition site, identifying objects and participants, and generating textual labels that were then transformed into the aesthetic and narrative data and broadened the participant base to include anyone with an internet connection, contributing to the work's distributed agency.

As the latest iteration of PBHU, this version continued to explore asynchronicity and multi-layered trans-locality, seeking to realise the potential of post-technological art to reconfigure spatial rhetoric. The project's contribution to the theme of Evolution is twofold. Firstly, it applied asynchronous signal transmutation as an artistic method, expanding the technique from the previous iteration's bilateral exchange into a multilateral, networked ecosystem. This system, where signals from physical movements, VR perspectives, online text inputs, and AI interpretations converge and feedback, provides a working example of the rhizomatic screen proposed in Chapter 5. Secondly, this system offers a practical example of generative "worldlessness". I propose that this artwork performs its worldlessness not as a lack, but as a productive state emerging from the multi-layered mediation of presence.

By limiting participants to experience each other through data-ghosts and mediated gazes, the work addresses my research question regarding the potential for co-creating new forms of community and meaning within techno-mediated environments, proposing that such relations can emerge within the nested, asynchronous realities of our contemporary existence. I claim that my primary artistic and intellectual contribution of this research is a hybrid rhetoric born from the constant negotiation between the physical and virtual, local and global, human and machine in these works.

6.3 Case Study II – Re-inscribing Tradition: Post-Lingnan School of Painting series

Following the exploration of global, networked systems and the concept of “worldlessness” as a generative condition, I further examine how this developed theoretical and technical framework could be applied to the dense historical archive and hybrid aesthetic doctrines of the Lingnan School of Painting 嶺南畫派. This line of inquiry led to the *Post-Lingnan School of Painting* (PLSP) series, an artistic project developed with the endorsement and support of the Memorial Hall of Lingnan School of Painting⁶³. As an extension of the PBHU, this series constitutes a methodological intervention that applies a post-technological framework of analysis and production to re-articulate the Lingnan School’s artistic lineage. I addressed this re-articulation by transforming the tradition from a canon of static, material objects into a living, computational ecosystem where historical aesthetics are continuously re-generated through human-machine interaction.

The project addresses the legacy of the Lingnan School, an art movement of the early twentieth century. The school defined its identity through its core doctrine of *zhezong* 折衷 (eclecticism) (Croizier, 1988; Ma, 2016). This doctrine mandated a synthesis of traditional Chinese *Shuimo hua* 水墨畫 (ink painting) with Western realist techniques, an approach that distinguished it from the prevailing nationalist and traditionalist art movements of its time. A dual identity therefore defines the school. The school’s spirit of rebellion transcended the conservative isolationist orthodoxies of late Imperial Chinese painting. It enacted this rebellion

⁶³ This institution is a public art museum based in Guangzhou, China. It preserves, researches, and exhibits the artistic legacy and historical materials of the Lingnan School of Painting. For further details, see the official website, accessed 16 September 2025, <https://www.lingnans.com/>.

through its pluralistic philosophy of melding Western realist techniques, such as linear perspective and *plein air* observation, with traditional Eastern aesthetic sensibilities.

As a contemporary, avant-garde spirit, the PLSP series examines the legacy of the Lingnan School. This project deconstructs the prevailing syntax of the Lingnan School's painting, which I define as the set of conventional rules governing the fusion of Chinese brushwork with Western perspectival systems and realist colouring. An artist dictates the immutable, linear narrative path of a historical scroll. I continue to reconfigure the scroll's temporal fixity by transforming the act of viewing into a mode of techno-mediated *you* (aesthetic roaming) in this project. I first employ the *AI Philosopher* to analyse and atomise the historical scrolls into a database of discrete aesthetic components, such as individual brushstrokes, colour fields, and compositional motifs. A generative algorithm then uses the database of atomised components to re-assemble novel, fluid compositions on a rhizomatic screen. The viewer's gaze and navigation on the rhizomatic screen influence the algorithmic output. The interaction between viewers and algorithm transforms the work into a deep map. The work becomes a navigable territory, where the viewer's navigation through the continuously generated visuals chart a real-time course through the project's underlying data structures. I define this deep map as a multi-layered, interactive data-space where the visual surface is linked to its constituent layers: the historical context of the original scrolls, the atomised aesthetic components (brushstrokes, colours), and the generative rules of the algorithm.

This case study documents two iterations of the PLSP series. The *Post-Lingnan School of Painting* (2024-2025) develops a methodology for the algorithmic re-interpretation of the Lingnan School's visual and philosophical archive. The *Poetic Scroll: Mountain-water Realm* (2025) extends the preceding methodology to examine the relationship between classical Chinese poetry, architectural space, and embodied interaction, further specifying the role of the *AI Philosopher* as a cross-cultural translator. With these two projects, I further deconstruct and re-configure the artistic legacy of the Lingnan School to deepen the inquiry into the nature of hybrid rhetoric and the co-constitution of meaning in techno-mediated environments.

6.3.1 Post-Lingnan School of Painting (2024-2025)

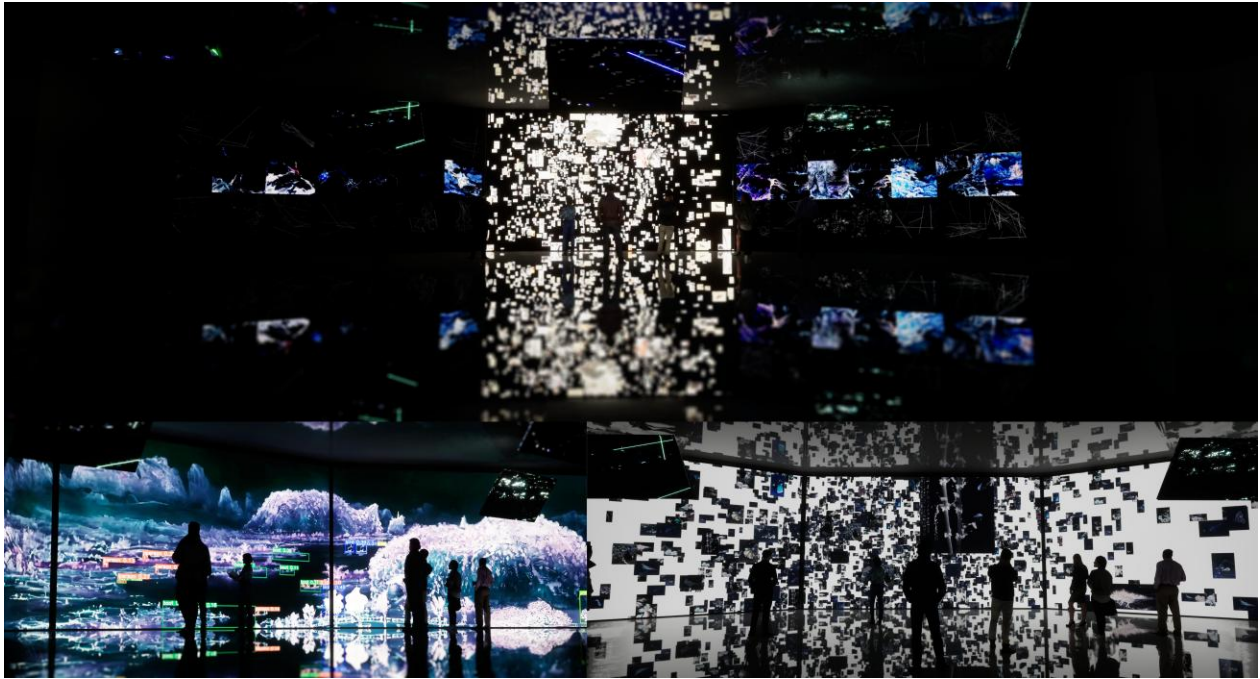


Figure 103. Preview of the *Post-Lingnan School of Painting* (PLSP) project (2024). The installation features a 270-degree immersive video display complemented by a constellation of nine overhead LED screens showing algorithmically generated images. Artwork © 2024 Racelar Ho, Xiaolong Zheng, and IVAS.

The *Post-Lingnan School of Painting* (PLSP) project extends the theoretical and philosophical framework of the PBHU series and applies the framework's principles to the continuous advancement of a hybrid artistic methodology that integrates artificial with natural intelligence (Figure 103). An integration of artificial and natural intelligences re-frames the Lingnan School's artistic legacy as a dynamic, generative system for computational re-interpretation and aesthetic co-creation. An assertion of an autonomous identity through experimental methods defines the avant-garde ethos that PLSP exhibits, although the project is not an official successor. The Memorial Hall of Lingnan School of Painting's commission and support for the project generates a tension between the institution's role as a preserver of tradition and PLSP's experimental objective, which is to inhabit the Lingnan tradition as a system of narrative and syntax rather than to replicate the tradition's visual forms. PLSP extends the innovative approach of the Lingnan School and concurrently incorporates the narratives, aesthetics, and theoretical frameworks of the progenitor project, PBHU.

Conceptual Framework: "Post-" and the Hypericon

Historical and artistic debates surrounding the Lingnan School inform any understanding of

the conceptual framework of PLSP. As the 1980s progressed, the Lingnan School changed. The dispersal of the school's original practitioner shifted the institution's status from a force to a historical entity, finding a symbolic conclusion in Hong Kong as a monument to a past movement (Croizier, 1988; Ma, 2016). The school's altered status generated discourse surrounding a perceived "demise". A younger generation of artists and critics, discontented with a perceived stagnation and decline in innovation, introduced the concept of *hou-lingnan pai* 後嶺南派 (post-Lingnan School) or *xin-lingnan pai* 新嶺南派 (Neo-Lingnan School) (Ho et al., 2024; Hu, 2009; Huang Y., 1997; Li W., 1997; Wang H. et al., 2002). Debates over the definition of the Lingnan School, whether as a style, a movement, or a concluded historical period, characterised the new artistic direction. Critics offered varied interpretations. Some, such as Huangsheng Wang and Weiming Li, viewed "post-Lingnan" as a cultural strategy for forging new identities separate from the school's legacy (Li W., 1997; Wang H. et al., 2002). Others, like Yihan Huang and Bin Hu re-conceptualised "Lingnan" through a lens of contemporary cultural criticism, challenging the school's perceived conservatism (Hu, 2009; Huang Y., 1997; Wang H. et al., 2002). The latter group of critics argued that the Lingnan School's revolutionary ethos of *zhezong dongxi* 折衷中西 (compromising East and West) has developed into a rigid adherence to stylistic imitation and technical formulas.

This historical backdrop distinguishes PLSP's use of "Post-". In contrast to the "post-/Neo-Lingnan School", where "post-" signifies a cultural strategy related to Lingnan's local and indigenous identity, the application of "Post-" in PLSP extends beyond a sequential or stylistic role to mark an ideological shift. The ideological shift moves away from the historical and geographical principles of the earlier "post/Neo-" movements by adopting the conceptual framework of the post-Anthropocene era, incorporating posthumanist theories and the concept of "worldlessness" that are principles of the PBHU. The interpretation of "Post-" with PLSP reconfigures the model of knowledge exchange. The traditional Lingnan School's reception of the West involved a unidirectional transference knowledge, where artists travelled abroad to acquire international methods before integrating them with local traditions. PLSP implements a multi-directional exchange paradigm developed in the PBHU project, facilitating a global artistic dialogue where each participant contributes to a collective body of cultural knowledge.

To structure this artistic and theoretical project, I apply Mitchell's (2012; 2022; 1986, 2018) concepts of the "hypericon" and "metapicture" to analyse the nested relationship between

traditional Chinese painting, the Lingnan School, and PLSP. A hypericon is a master image that provides the foundational models for an entire tradition of representation, while a metapicture is an image that reflects on the act of picturing. The framework of “hypericon” and “metapicture” demonstrates how PLSP deconstructs and computationally reinterprets a lineage. The analysis begins by defining the hypericon of the tradition, then examines how the Lingnan School responded to this hypericon to create its own body of meta-reflective imagery. The argument then demonstrates how PLSP defines the Lingnan School’s oeuvre as a new metapicture, analysing its syntax through a posthumanist mode of inquiry and generation. The multi-layered approach articulates the project’s position in both art history and techno-mediated artistic practice.

The *Jieziyuan Huapu* 芥子園畫譜 (JZY), an influential painting manual from the Qing dynasty, represents the foundational hypericon for the Chinese painting tradition. As a hypericon, the JZY signifies more than an instructional text; the manual represents a “picture that explains what a picture is”. The JYZ articulated a paradigmatic framework by codifying the aesthetic, technical, and philosophical principles of traditional Chinese painting, influencing the representational conventions for subsequent generations. The manual’s detailed instructions and illustrations systematised methods for depicting subjects such as rocks and trees to figures and pavilions, and artists, including the founders of the Lingnan School, used the manual as a reference. The JZY thus represents a symbolic and pedagogical reference point and provides a repository of codified traditions and principles of Chinese painting.

The “Three Masters” Gao Jianfu, Gao Qifeng, and Chen Shuren founded the Lingnan School and initiated a dialogue with the JZY, treating the manual in a dual capacity as both a foundational hypericon and transformative metapicture. They acknowledged the JZY as hypericon, for it anchored the Chinese painting tradition and provided aesthetic and philosophical principles for preservation. The artists approached the manual as a metapicture, a framework for creating new images that prompted a reassessment of inherited traditions. By integrating modern elements, Western techniques, and contemporary subjects, the school initiated a meta-reflective dialogue with the JZY’s conventional iconography, creating artworks that commented upon and innovated within the tradition. The dual approach represents a dialogue between tradition and modernity and shaped the school’s oeuvre into a series of meta-pictures about the act of re-envisioning Chinese painting.

I draw upon the historical lineage to situate the oeuvre of the Lingnan School as a new metapicture for PLSP. The project's theoretical contribution redirects the object of analysis from the original framework (the JZY) to the historical interpretations of the JZY. PLSP operates independently of the JZY's foundational rules to process the Lingnan School's artistic output as a body of work that represents a specific set of aesthetic choices, technical innovations, and historical dialogues. The Lingnan School's art constitutes a coherent visual and conceptual system for analysis and deconstruction and, as a metapicture, transcends the status of a collection of individual works. The metapictorial framework enable PLSP to generate a meta-reflective dialogue that is computational and posthumanist in nature. Instead of creating new paintings that comment on Lingnan art, PLSP treats the school's conventional iconography and methods as a formal syntax comprising a set of rules, patterns, and relationships that can be computationally analysed and re-interpreted. The project employs artificial intelligence to generate within the formal syntax, substituting a mode of generative co-creation for replication or stylistic progression. I deconstruct the visual language of the Lingnan School into the language's constituent parts, use the constituent parts as a basis for algorithmic creation, and re-examine traditional modes of artistic production and authorship. The methodology constitutes the project's experimental approach and a contribution to the discourse on techno-mediated art.

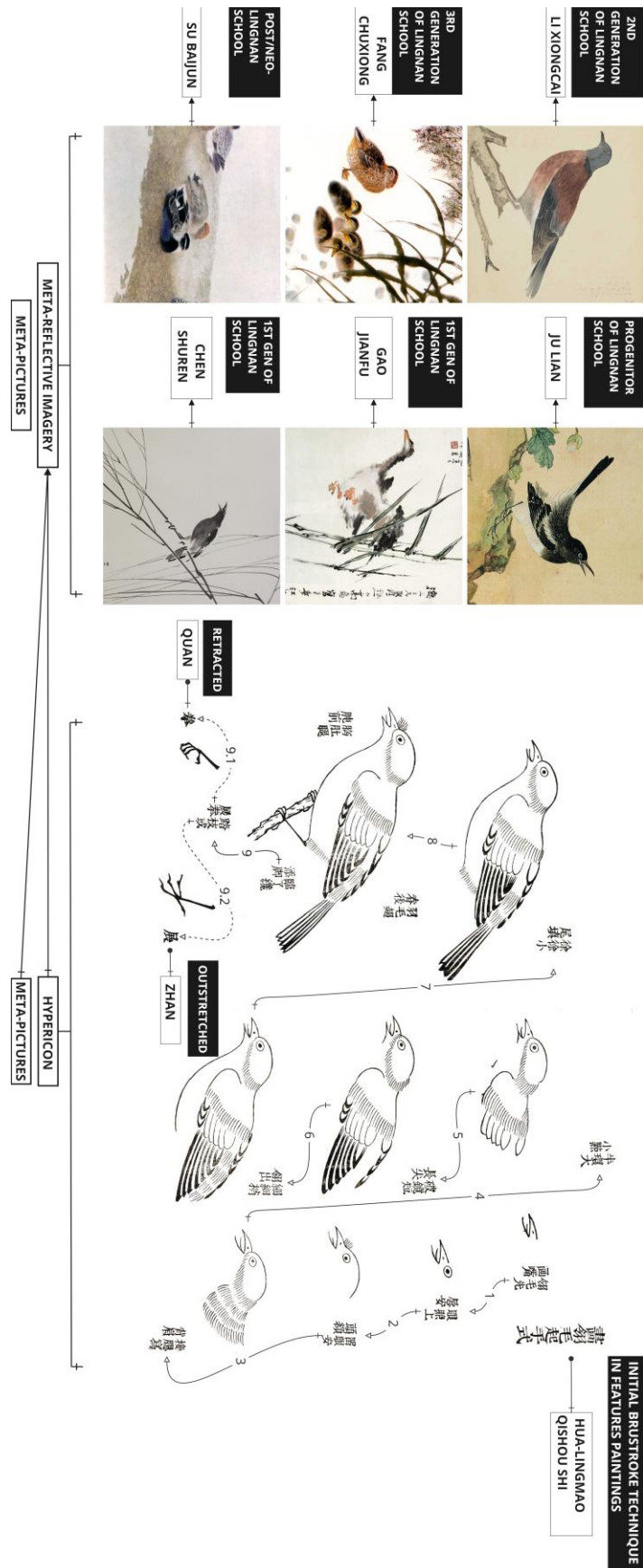


Figure 104. A diagram illustrating the conceptual framework of the Post-Lingnan School of Painting (2024). The diagram maps the relationship between the Jieziyuan Huapu (JZY) as a foundational hypericon and the Lingnan School's oeuvre as a metapicture, showing how PLSP engages with this dynamic for its experimental process. Diagram accessible at: <https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVJeWoOAk=?moveToWidget=3458764634807632175&cot=14> (accessed 16 September 2025). Diagram © 2024 Racelar Ho.

Figure 104 charts the theoretical structure, illustrating the nested, dialogic relationship between the JZY, the Lingnan School, and PLSP. On the right, the diagram presents the JZY as the foundational hypericon and as the source of the initial brushstroke techniques and compositional principles. The initial brushstroke techniques and compositional principles inform the works of the Lingnan School artists, depicted on the left. The diagram, in turn, frames the Lingnan School artworks as “meta-reflective imagery” and “meta-pictures”, signifying the artworks’ roles as both self-aware images and as the new object of analysis for PLSP. The arrow demonstrates a lineage and conceptual transformation. The JZY’s influence on the Lingnan School forged a new relationship, where the Lingnan School’s output becomes the generative metapicture for PLSP’s experimental approach. The diagram constructs a visual and theoretical narrative that connects past, present, and future, proposing a new methodology for interpreting and extending traditional artistic paradigms through a techno-cultural lens.

Subverting Syntax: A Methodological Intervention through Deep Mapping and You (Aesthetic Roaming)

To reconceptualise the established aesthetic syntax of the Lingnan School, I employ a strategy that integrates algorithmic drawing, a custom generative model, and a critical approach to computational processing. The methodological framework of deep mapping and non-Western Chrono-poetics, detailed in Chapter 4, ground the research strategy. I designed an algorithmic linear drawing program within the *AI Philosopher*, which adapts the aforementioned framework by shifting the mapping target from a geographical site to the relational trajectory between the metapicture, the original Lingnan artwork, and the large dataset of new images generated by the AI Philosopher’s customised trained model. The process treats the pixel as a locus for visual positioning, and the mapping of transformation between the original and the generated images creates a layered, chrono-topographic interaction with the source paintings.

I argue that my methodological choice to use central processing units (CPUs) over graphic processing units (GPUs) constitutes a practical act of counterpoint against the prevalent narrative

of acceleration in post-technological art production. While the processing speed of a CPU is not inherently slow in human-perceptible terms, my selection of this hardware is a conceptual gesture. It privileges a sequential processing model over the parallel-processing paradigm of the GPU, which is associated with techno-cultural demands for efficiency and immediacy. I then deliberately constrain this process, forcing the image to render progressively as a durational performance.⁶⁴ This technical choice translates the durational and processual nature of viewing a *Shanshui* handscroll into the computational environment, where the act of *you* unfolds over time. The operational slowness I impose upon the system allows the computational act to reflect the meditative pace and the concept of “now-ness” manifest in Lingnan painting. My method therefore intentionally introduces friction into the act of viewing, questioning the ideology of immediacy that underpins much techno-mediated experience.⁶⁵ This stance does not propose that all rapid techno-mediated art, such as VR, is mere consumption; rather, it asserts that for certain aesthetic goals, such as the cultivation of critical reflection, a decelerated temporality is a necessary condition.⁶⁶

The first stage of this methodological procedure entailed the creation of a custom generative model. I fine-tuned a diffusion-based generative model that is a variant of Stable Diffusion (SD), on a large-scale dataset authorised by the Memorial Hall of Lingnan School of Painting. The dataset comprised the general digital archives of the Lingnan School and high-resolution scans of scrolls offered by the Memorial Hall by prominent artists Li Xiongcai and Guan Shanyue. The specific training process yielded a model capable of generating visual outputs that integrate stylistic similarity with the specific iconographic and technical nuances of the masters.

⁶⁴ My use of a constrained CPU process is a deliberate artistic strategy of deceleration. This approach resists the normative drive towards acceleration in techno-culture and aligns with artistic practices that use “obsolete technologies” or self-imposed limitations to create a critical distance from dominant technological paradigms. The focus is not on the hardware’s “real” speed but on its conceptual role within a performative system designed by the artist to be slow (Elsaesser, 2016; Gere, 2006).

⁶⁵ This method challenges the seamlessness of the interface, making the “internal processes of computer technology” (Grau, 2002) a visible and temporal part of the aesthetic experience. The goal is to move beyond simulation and highlight the constructed, material basis of the techno-mediated image, preventing the aesthetic experience from being reduced to what Groys terms an unfavourable “temporal economy” (2008) for the viewer, where instant consumption leaves no time for contemplation.

⁶⁶ The critique is aimed at a specific mode of interaction that demands immediate intervention from the user, which can foreclose deeper aesthetic feeling. My work posits that, like the slow, complex decisions of a painter, a durational computational process can foster a different kind of engagement. The argument is not that speed is inherently problematic, but that the privileging of near-instantaneous processing in all contexts risks diminishing the temporal depth required for certain forms of critical and aesthetic reflection (Gere, 2006; Lyotard, 1984; Wang D., 2013).

I subsequently integrated the customised model as a core component within the *AI Philosopher* system. The integration provided the system with a specialised visual-generative capability.

Utilising the generative model, the project employs image-to-image translation and interpolation animation techniques to produce new, animated vignettes. I isolated and used specific scenes from the original panoramic scrolls by Xiongcai Li and Guan as Shanyue Guan as input sources for the *AI Philosopher*'s trained SD model. The system then generates animated landscapes that are algorithmically and aesthetically coherent with the source material, and I re-integrated the generated landscapes into the techno-mediated presentation of the original scrolls. The resulting animated vignettes appear as dynamic moments within the historical panorama. To add a narrative stratum, the *AI Philosopher*'s object detection capabilities analyse the animated vignettes, overlaying textual or symbolic data that re-contextualises the imagery in real-time, creating a shifting semantic field. Figure 105 illustrates the application of object detection and semantic segmentation algorithms to the panoramic scrolls of Li's *Wuhan Fangxun Tu* 武漢防汛圖 (1956) and Guan's *Jiangxia Huajuan* 江峽畫卷 (1980). The system identifies and categorises visual elements within the compositions, such as "boat", "tree", and "mountain", assigning a unique bounding box and label to each detected object. The identification and categorisation procedure generates a layer of machine-readable semantic data that forms the basis for the real-time textual and symbolic overlays.

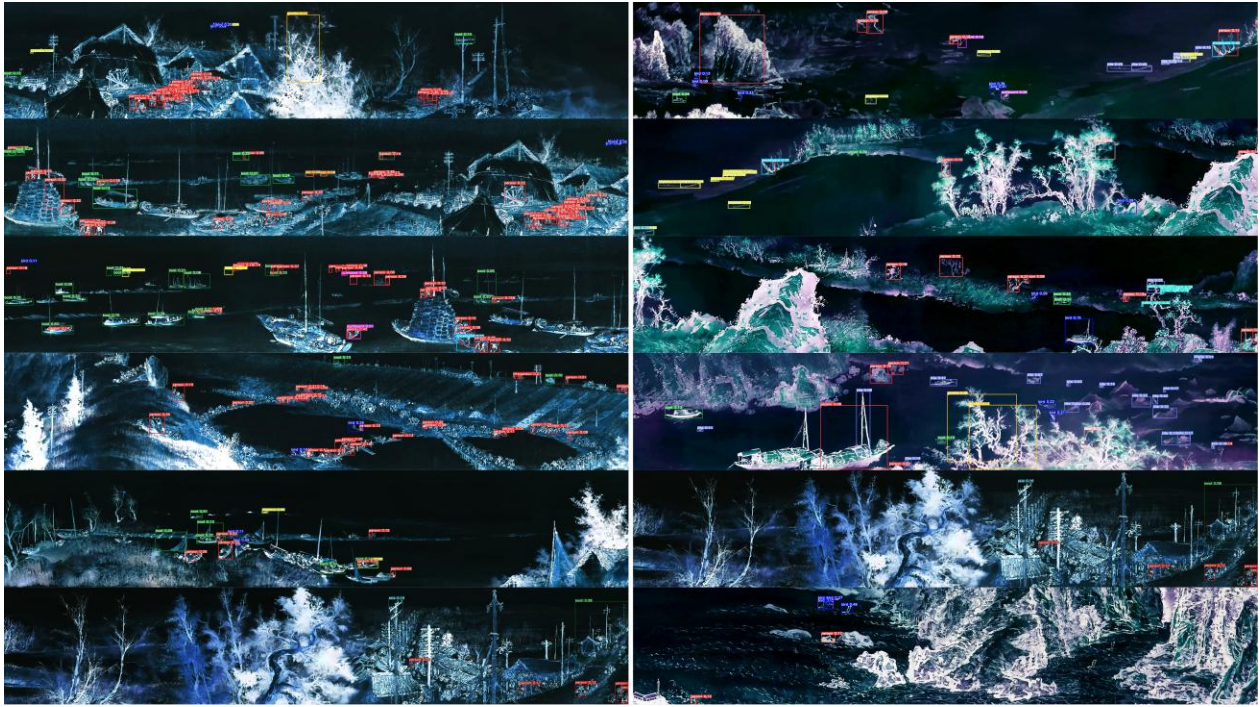


Figure 105. Semantic Segmentation and Labelling of Lingnan School Scrolls (2024). Artwork © 2024 Racelar Ho, Xiaolong Zheng, and IVAS.

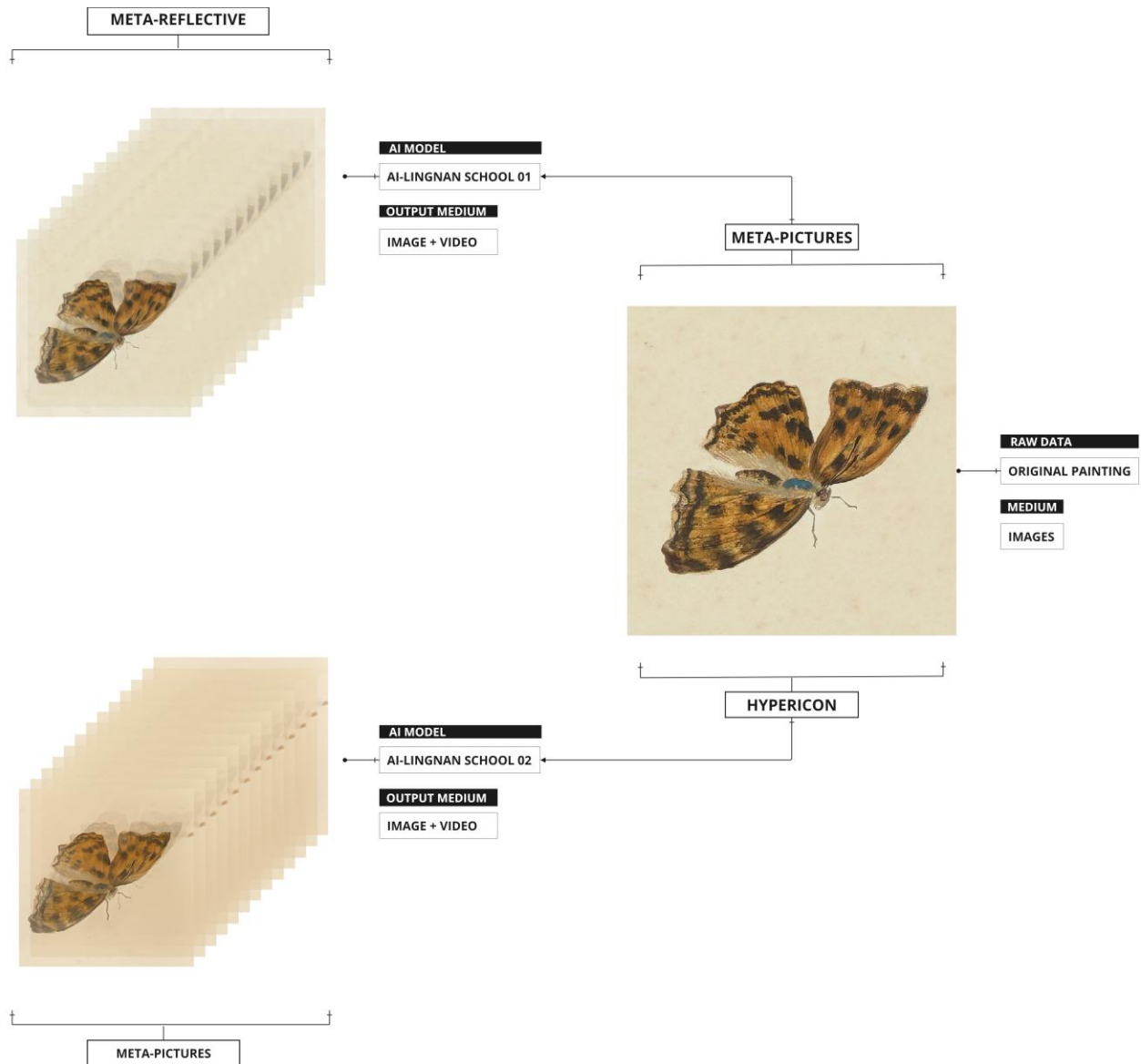


Figure 106. Step 1 -Methodological flowchart of the PLSP system, illustrating the algorithmic process for generating meta-reflective imagery (2024). The diagram details the integrated pipeline where original Lingnan School artworks, functioning as metapictures, are deconstructed through multi-level feature detection, extraction, and analysis algorithms. This computational re-interpretation of the original visual syntax results in the generation of new, dynamic visual outputs. Diagram accessible at: <https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVJeWoOAk=?moveToWidget=3458764634807731120&cot=14> (accessed 16 September 2025). Diagram © 2024 Racelar Ho.

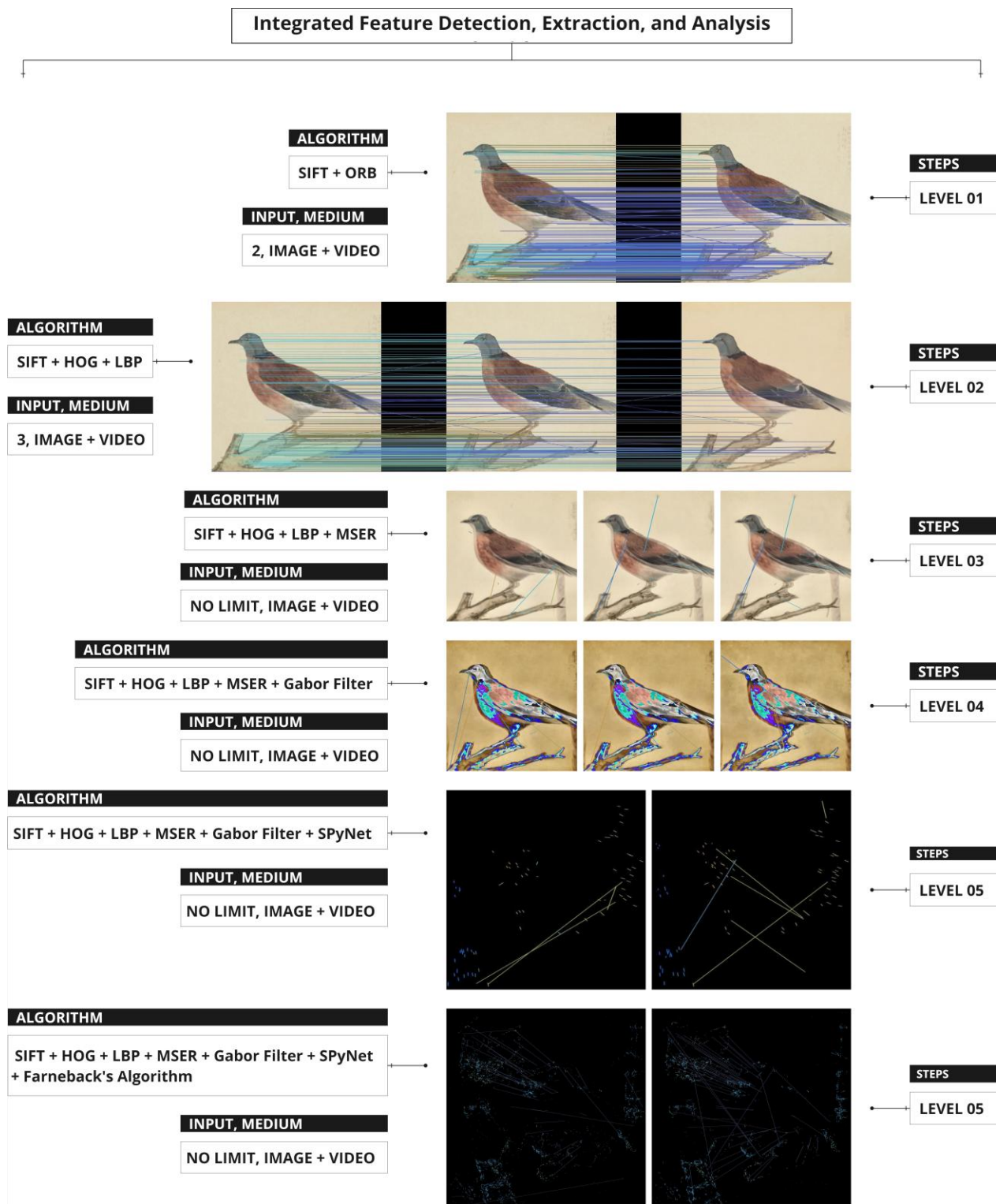


Figure 107. Step 2 - Methodological flowchart of the PLSP system. Diagram accessible at: <https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVJeWoOAk=?moveToWidget=3458764636219365467&cot=14> (accessed 16 September 2025). Diagram © 2025 Racelar Ho.

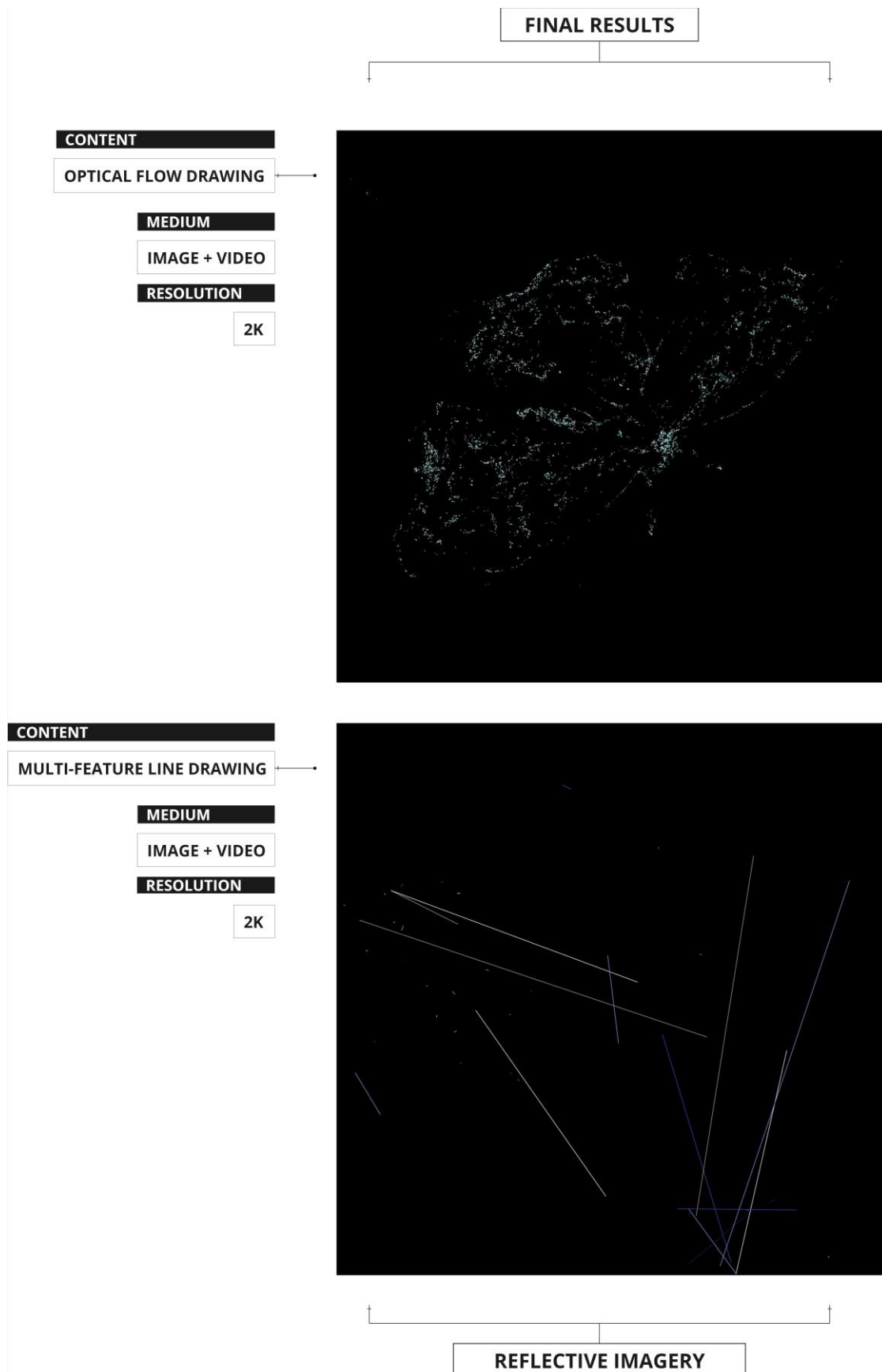


Figure 108. Step 3 - Methodological flowchart of the PLSP system. Diagram accessible at: <https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVJeWoOAk=?moveToWidget=3458764636219485411&cot=14> (accessed 16 September 2025). Diagram © 2025 Racelar Ho.



Figure 109. Algorithmic Evolution from Linear Sketch to Generative Landscape (2024). Artworks © 2024 Racelar Ho.

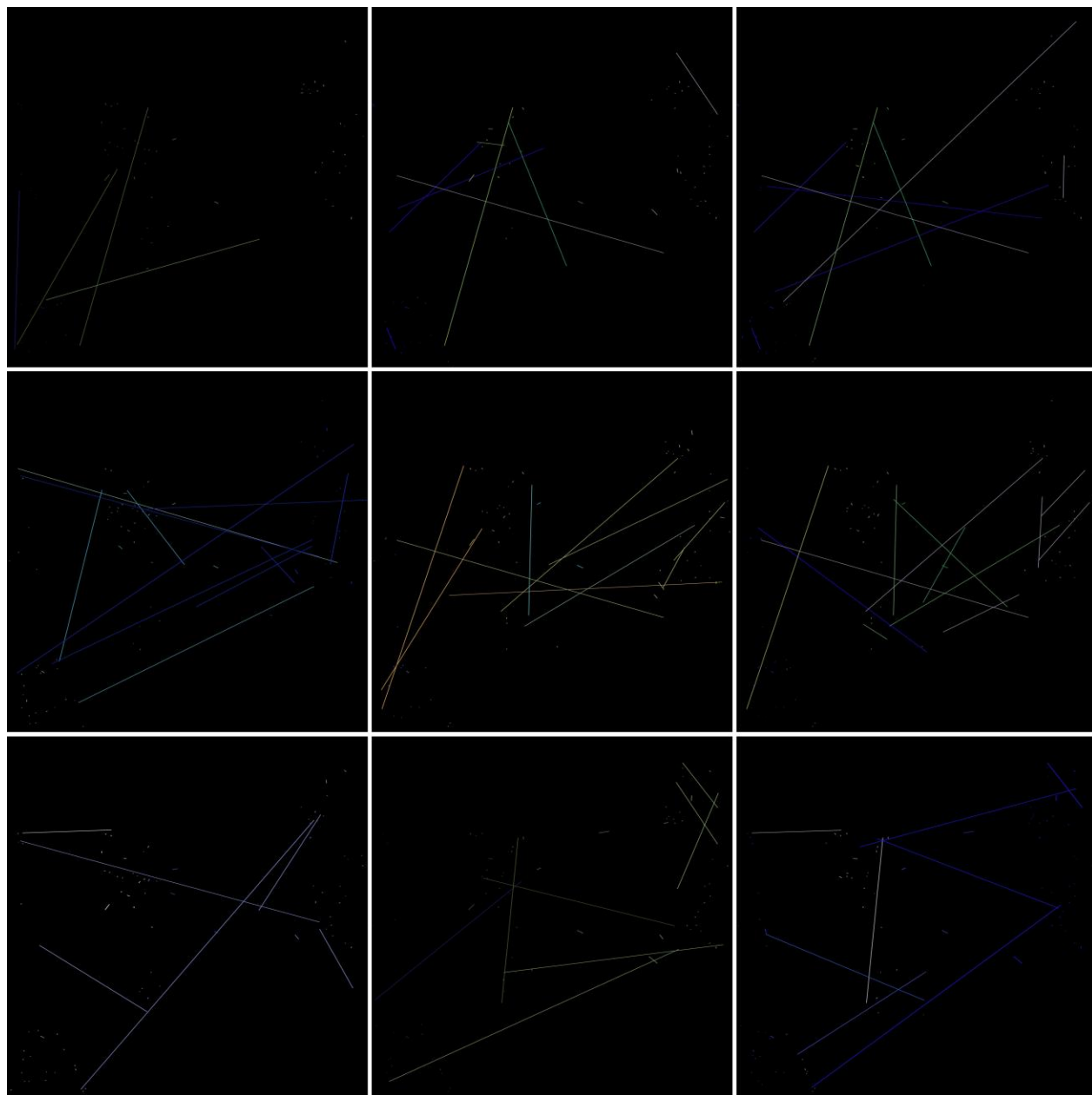


Figure 110. Algorithmic Trajectory Mapping of a Generative Sequence (2024). Artworks © 2024 Racelar Ho.

The PLSP system highlights the project's methodology and provides an integrated pipeline designed to generate meta-reflective imagery, as detailed in the flowchart in Figure 106, 107, and 108. Within the pipeline, multi-level feature detection, extraction, and analysis algorithms process original Lingnan School artworks that are metapictures. The computational re-composition of the original visual syntax results in the generation of new, dynamic visual outputs. Completing the generation of visual outputs, a separate algorithm focused on linear and optical flow drawing

decomposes the visual information on the source paintings into abstract vector fields, creating a parallel visual stream that offers a structural counterpoint to the more painterly generative animations (Figure 109). Figure 110 provides a specific output from the linear drawing program, visualising the relational dynamics between the original artwork and the generative process. The program algorithmically identifies and connects corresponding feature points across a temporal sequence of nine images, beginning with a Lingnan source image and progressing through successive AI-generated iterations. The process of chrono-mapping maps the AI's computational trajectory, translating the abstract process of algorithmic transformation into a visual, linear structure that can be analysed. It demonstrates the synthetic potential of the chrono-mapping, illustrating the algorithmic progression from the resulting abstract sketches into synthesised generative landscapes.

The project's approach synthesises generative re-interpretations and analytical deconstructions, a method that facilitates an interaction between the artwork's historical context and its potential future. The generative model uses Lingnan scrolls, as documents of cultural memory and artistic tradition, as the source material for a dynamic archive of potential futures. The process of algorithmic re-interpretation detaches the artwork from its fixed "here and now", situating the project within the long-standing discourse that interrogates the concept of an artwork's unique aura by creating a multiplicity of new, algorithmically derived iterations.⁶⁷ The creation of multiple versions introduces narrative dynamism by transforming the static, singular narrative of the original scroll into an interactive, multi-layered experience.

⁶⁷ The project engages with the complex play of de-auratisation and re-auratisation that Groys (2008) identifies, where making originals out of copies through installation restores a form of aura. This method extends the critical inquiry into the artwork's reproducible status, a foundational theme since Benjamin's (2008) analysis of the topic.

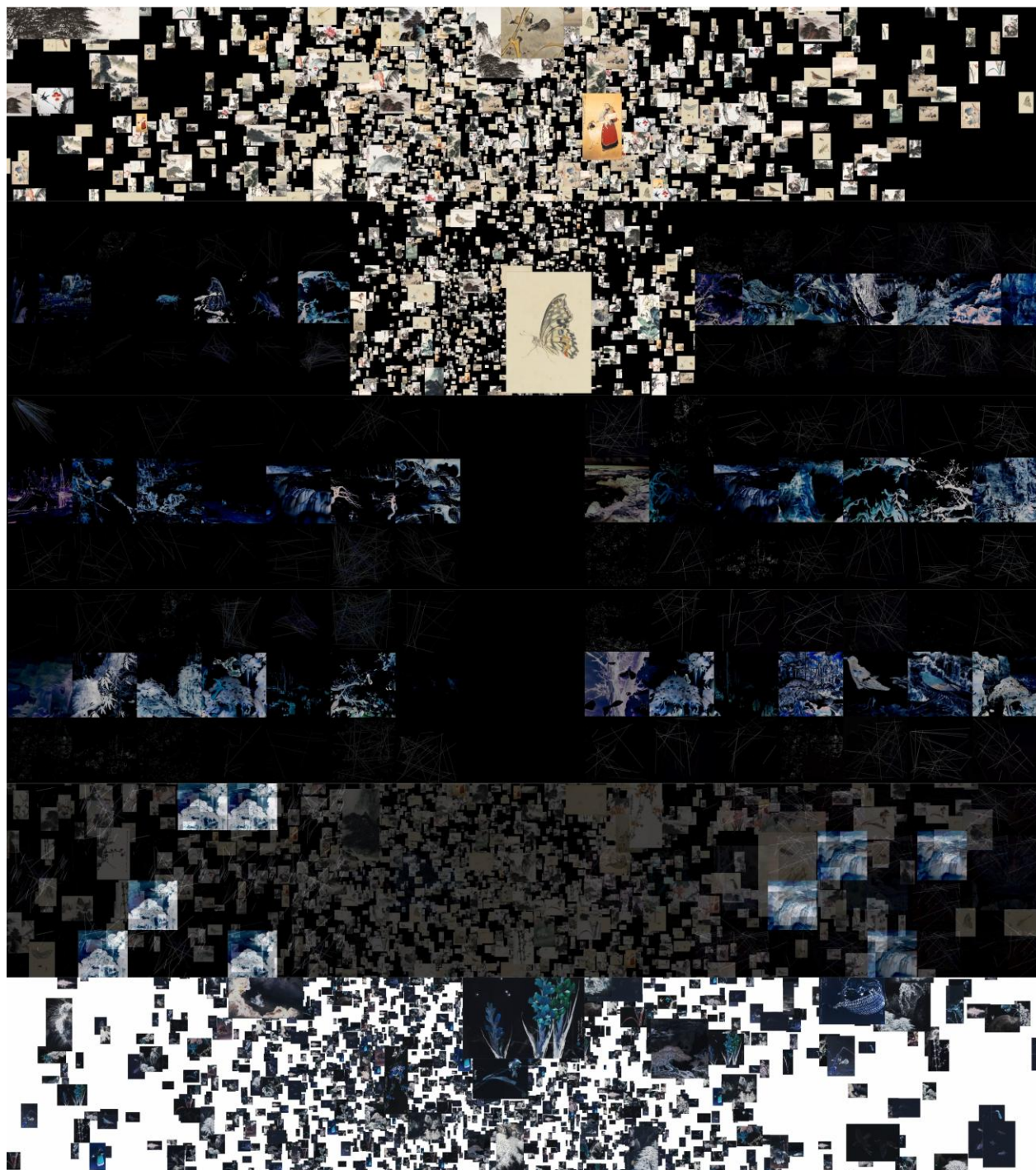


Figure 111. Immersive Projection Contrasting Lingnan School Artworks with AI-Generated Dynamic Visuals (2024).
Artwork © 2024 Racelar Ho, Xiaolong Zheng, IVAS.



Figure 112. PLSP Project at the *Surmounted with Big Strides* Exhibition (2024). Installation view of the artwork's debut at the Memorial Hall of Lingnan School of Painting, Guangzhou, China. Photograph by the staff of the Memorial Hall of Lingnan School of Painting. Artwork © 2024 Racelar Ho, Xiaolong Zheng, and IVAS.

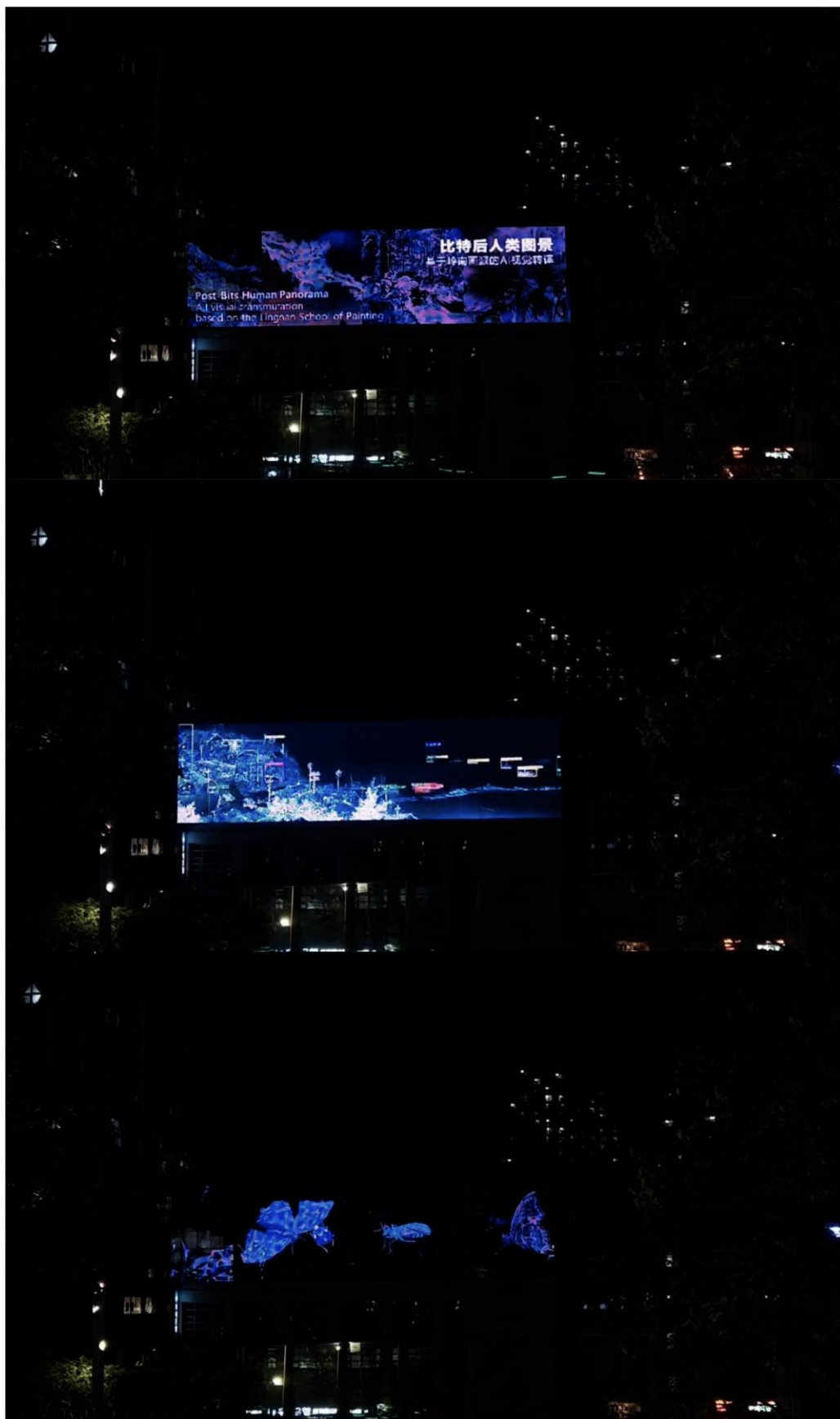


Figure 113. PLSP Project at the *The Korean Society of Media Arts (KOSMA) Spring International Invitation Exhibition - The Illusion Beyond the Screen* (2025). Photograph by Ronghua Ke. Artwork © 2025 Racelar Ho, Xiaolong Zheng, Ronghua Ke, and IVAS.

The animations set the static historical imagery into temporal motion, while the semantic overlays create a shifting field of meaning by layering contemporary data onto historical imagery. The layering of contemporary data is intended to prompt a re-evaluation of traditional artistic canons, such as the *Huihua Liufa* 繪畫六法 (Six Principles of Chinese Painting) of Xie He, which privilege the artist's hand, and *qiyun shengdong* 氣韻生動 (spirit resonance). My project, by replacing the human artist with an algorithmic process and deconstructing the visual syntax into machine-readable data, questions a canonical emphasis on lineage, individual *bimo* 筆墨 (brushwork), and interpretative modes rooted in connoisseurship that value the artist's unique hand. The system structures the spectator's interaction, or *you*; the techno-mediated scrolls unfold at a controlled pace from right to left across the screen, guiding the viewer's gaze along a pre-determined path that replicates the intended viewing sequence designed by Li and Guan in their original compositions. The unfolding of the scrolls creates an environment, a landscape, for *you* rather than presenting a finished product. The environment requires the viewer to navigate a deep map of cultural, historical, and algorithmic layers, making the synthesis of these layers the central task of the viewing process. In this way, the project addresses my research inquiry into how new forms of spectatorship emerge within post-technological art. The immersive projection environment, as illustrated in Figure 111, contrasts the historical Lingnan School artworks with the AI-generated dynamic visuals, presenting the artwork in a new interpretive context. The Memorial Hall of Lingnan School of Painting acquired the first phase of this project for its permanent collection, where the work debuted in the exhibition *Surmounted with Big Strides* in 2024 (Figure 112). The Korean Society of Media Arts (KOSMA) also invited the work for a three-month rotating exhibition from March to June 2025 as part of The Korean Society of Media Arts (KOSMA) Spring International Invitation Exhibition - *The Illusion Beyond the Screen* on the SEOULLO MEDIA CANVAS, an outdoor public screen in Seoul, South Korea (Figure 113).

6.3.2 Poetic Scroll: Mountain-Water Realm (2025)



Figure 114. Installation View of Poetic Scroll: Mountain-Water Realm (2025). Photograph by Emily Huang. Artwork © 2025 Racelar Ho, Emily Huang, Xiaolong Zheng, and IVAS.

The *Poetic Scroll: Mountain-Water Realm* 詩笈山水鏡, exhibited in Guangzhou in April 2025, extends the PLSP series by focusing on the relationship between classical Chinese poetry, traditional architectural forms, and embodied interaction (Figure 114). The work re-examines the historical practice of Chinese scholar-artists, especially from the Ming and Qing dynasties, who were often physically confined to their urban residences or *shuzhai* 書齋 (studio) and socially constrained by courtly obligations and political instability. For these individuals, poetry and painting provided meditative practices for achieving mental transcendence over their immediate environment. The scholar-artists employed the pictorial space of a painting or the physical aperture of a window as a conceptual threshold that projected their consciousness from the “inner” space of their *shuzhai* into the idealized “outer” space of the *shanshui* landscape. *You* provided a means to explore with the expanse of nature, and the interplay between physical confinement and imaginative freedom generated an emotional resonance.

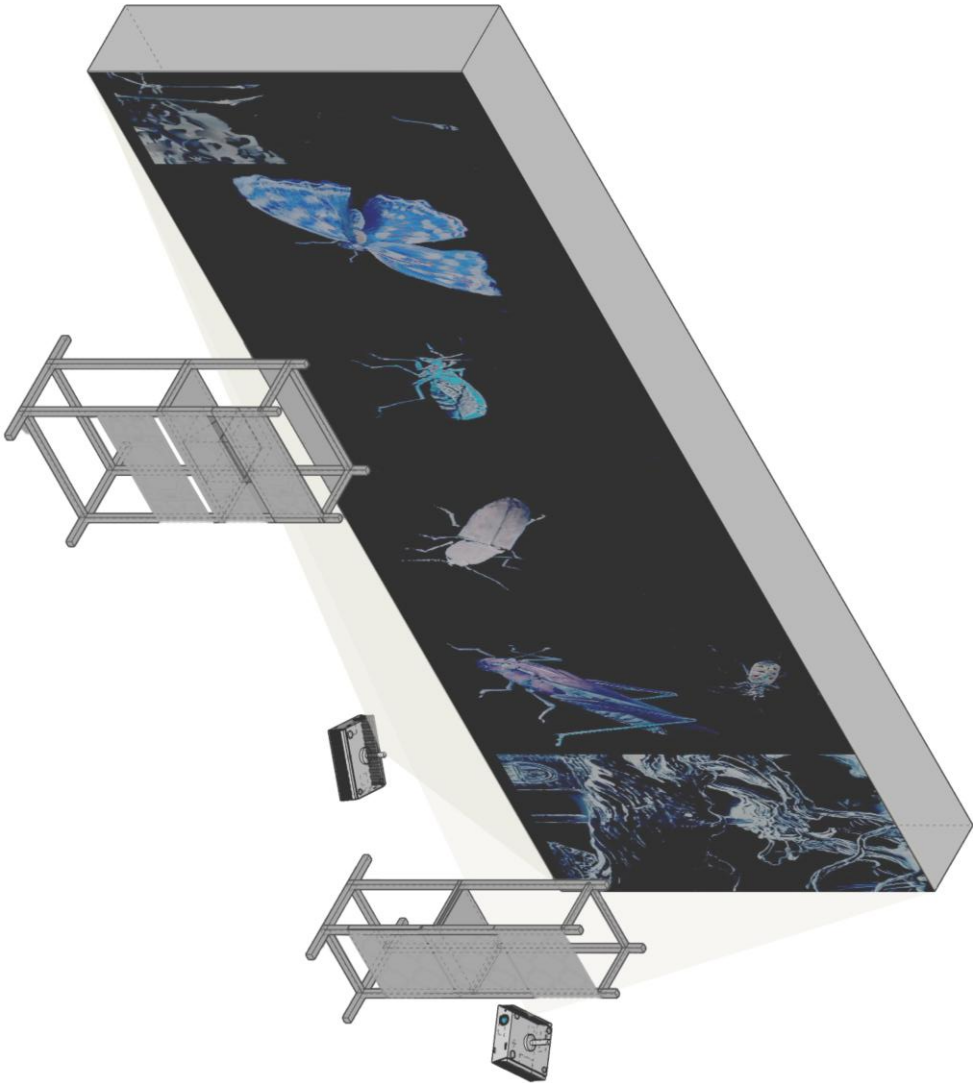
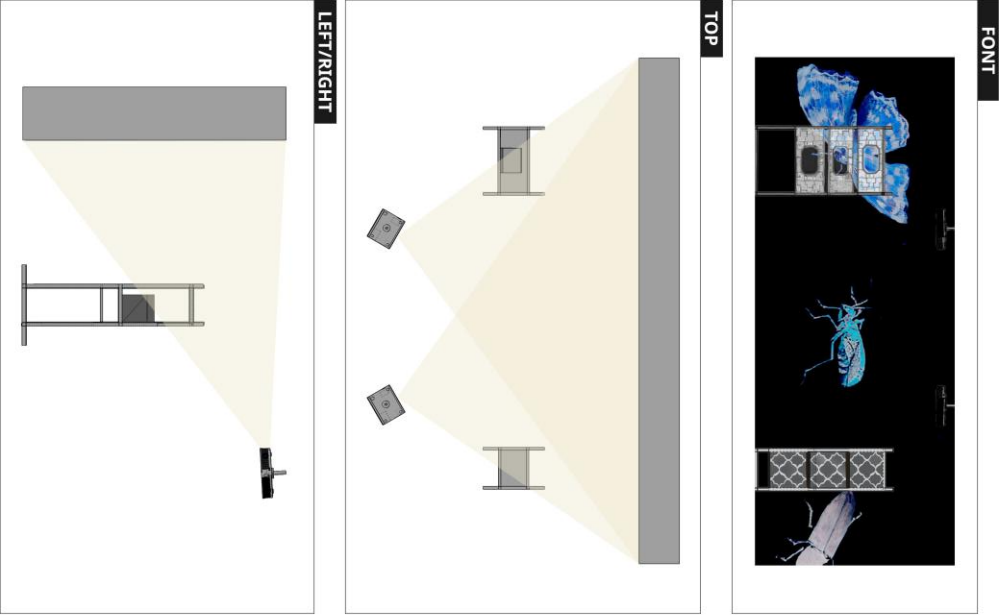


Figure 115. Technical Diagram of Poetic Scroll: Mountain-Water Realm (2025). The diagram illustrates the spatial arrangement of the installation, including the placement of projectors, the holographic display, the window frame apparatus, and the main projection screen. Diagram by Racelar Ho. Artwork © 2025 Racelar Ho, Emily Huang, Xiaolong Zheng, and IVAS. Diagram accessible at: <https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVJeWoOAK=?moveToWidget=3458764634807947270&cot=14> (accessed 16 September 2025). Diagram © 2025 Racelar Ho; drawn by Racelar Ho with assistance from Gwyn (Qiang) Huang and Dingjie Zhou.

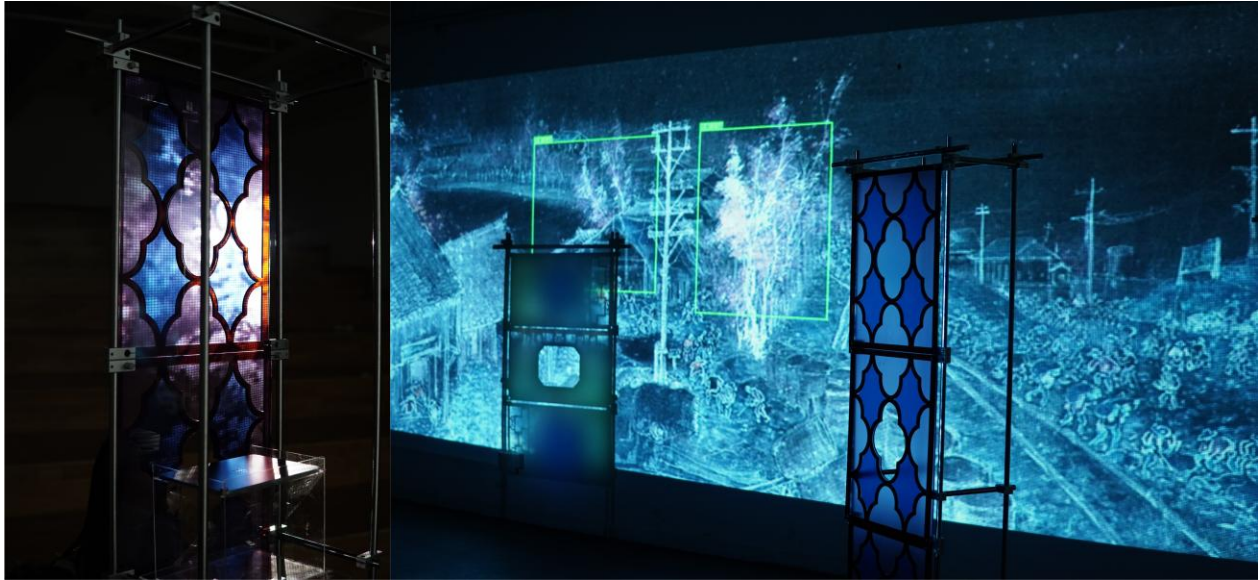


Figure 116. Installation View of Poetic Scroll: Mountain-Water Realm (2025). Photograph by Emily Huang. Artwork © 2025 Racelar Ho, Emily Huang, Xiaolong Zheng, and IVAS.



Figure 117. Installation View of Poetic Scroll: Mountain-Water Realm (2025). Photograph by Emily Huang. Artwork © 2025 Racelar Ho, Emily Huang, Xiaolong Zheng, and IVAS.



Figure 118. Installation View of Poetic Scroll: Mountain-Water Realm (2025). The image shows the layered visual effect created by the floating holographic verses appearing before the immersive *shanshui* projection, viewed through the window frame apparatus. Photograph by Emily Huang. Artwork © 2025 Racelar Ho, Emily Huang, Xiaolong Zheng, and IVAS.

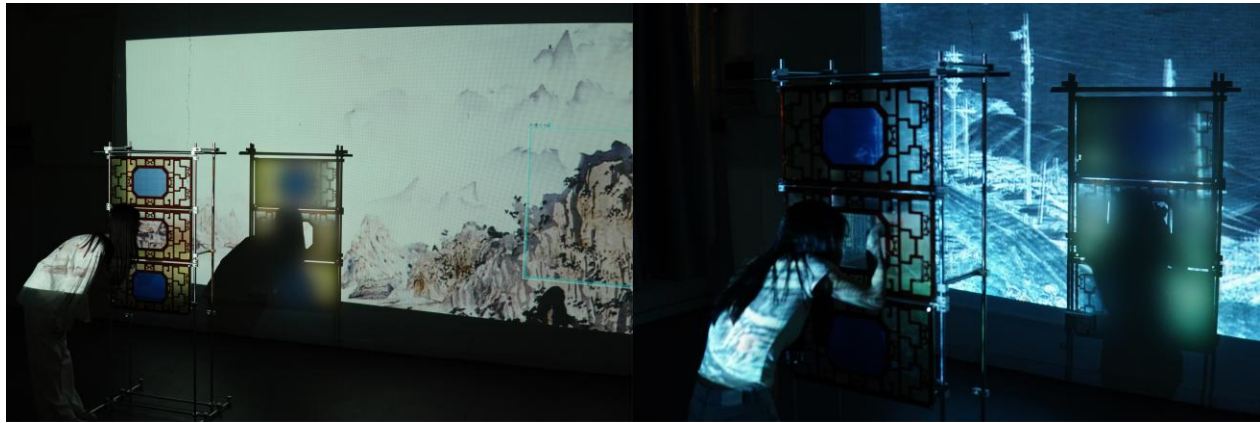


Figure 119. Installation View of Poetic Scroll: Mountain-Water Realm (2025). Photograph by Emily Huang. Artwork © 2025 Racelar Ho, Emily Huang, Xiaolong Zheng, and IVAS.

The installation replicates the historical practice of scholar-artists through a system of nested layers (Figure 115). An immersive projection of the PLSP’s virtual Shanshui landscape onto a large back wall defines the “outer” space. A physical Chinese window frames made of semi-translucent acrylic demarcates the “inner” space in front of the projection (see Figure 116 and Figure 117). The design conceals a holographic display box behind the window frame. As a viewer approaches the window, virtual poetic verses generated by the *AI Philosopher* appear within the holographic field, appearing to float in the liminal space between the physical window and the projected background (Figure 118 and Figure 119). The layering of a physical frame, immaterial holographic text, and a projected virtual landscape creates a complex, multi-layered space. The resulting space embodies the principles of the “doubled screen” I developed in Chapter 5. The holographic interface is transparent, superimposing multiple virtual layers to

produce a landscape that is visible but intangible and perceptually unstable. The interface's transparency prevents a clear separation between text and image. A sense of interpenetration emerges where the transient poetic verses mediate and re-contextualise the meaning of the landscape.

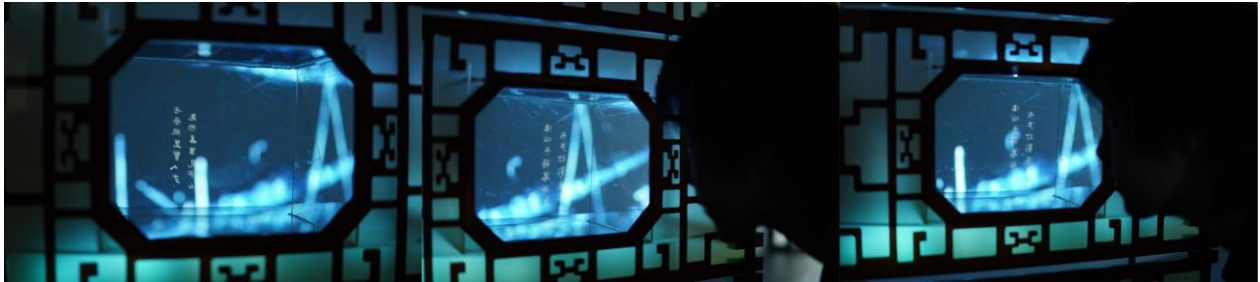


Figure 120. Interactive System Detail of Poetic Scroll: Mountain-Water Realm (2025). Photograph by Emily Huang. Artwork © 2025 Racelar Ho, Emily Huang, Xiaolong Zheng, and IVAS.

Holographic projection is central to the installation's spatial complexity. The window frame acts as a permeable threshold that both separates and connects the physical space of the viewer with the virtual space of the projected landscape. The holographic poems occupy a third, liminal space, appearing as immaterial constructs of light suspended between the viewer and the background scenery (Figure 120). The transparency of the poems allows the landscape behind to remain visible, creating a layered visual field where the boundaries between text, image, and environment become fluid. The resulting visual effect echoes the classical aesthetic principle of *biaoli ju chengche* 表裏俱澄澈. The principle describes a state where both the *biao* 表 (surface) and the *li* 裏 (depth) are rendered simultaneously clear and transparent, much like the moon and stars being reflected in clear water (Zong, 1981, 1987, 2023). The holographic text's immateriality reinforces a status as language or thought, detached from the physical world and analogous to the creators mental projection into the *xinjing* 心境 (mental landscape and state of mind) and the poetic realm. The verses do not exist on a solid surface but float in the air. The floating verses embody a state of being that is neither fully present nor entirely absent. The viewer's perceptual interaction and participation actualises the ontological status of the floating verses as entities that are neither fully present nor entirely absent.

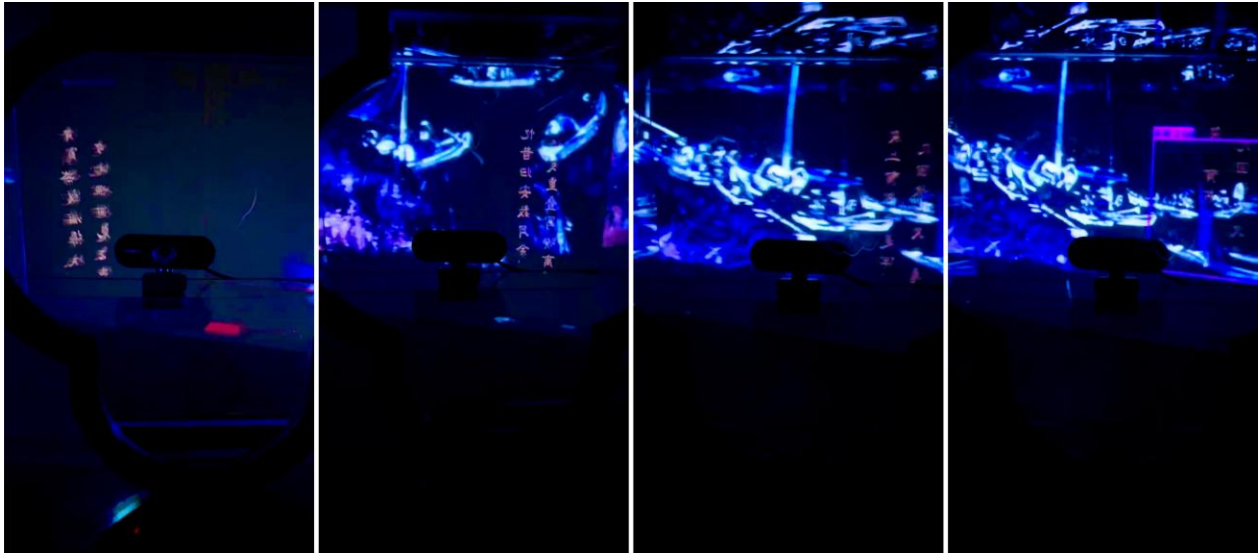


Figure 121. Interactive System Detail of Poetic Scroll: Mountain-Water Realm (2025). A sequence showing the viewer's interaction with the work. The forward-facing camera captures the viewer's presence and gaze, which triggers the dynamic appearance and movement of the holographic poetry on the transparent screen. Photograph by Emily Huang. Artwork © 2025 Racelar Ho, Emily Huang, Xiaolong Zheng, and IVAS.

Two modalities, vision and gesture, structure the interaction with the work. As a viewer approaches a window and peers through it, a forward-facing camera initiates facial recognition and tracks the viewer's eye movements (Figure 121). The holographic verses respond to the viewer's gaze, appearing and dissolving in accordance with the path of the viewer's eyes across the transparent interface. A blinking action triggers a change in the displayed poetic verse. I introduced a deliberate latency into the system's response to eye movement, prompting the viewer to interact with patience and sustained attention to find a balance between interaction and reading. The deliberate latency symbolises the subtle, contemplative *xinjing* (mental landscape and state of mind) central to classical Chinese poetics. Simultaneously, a Kinect camera captures the viewer's bodily gestures. The act of leaning forward to look through the window triggers the playback of whispered recitations of poetry. The playback of whispered recitations of poetry. The playback creates a proximate auditory environment. Minor, incidental movement—a hand raised, a touch to the head—trigger a range of ambient sounds drawn from the daily life of a traditional courtyard, such as the rustling of paper or the sound of footsteps. If the interaction persists for over a minute, the triggered sounds shift to a more emotive register, including the sound of tearing paper, sighs, or weeping. The shift alludes to the underlying tension and melancholy of a scholar unable to transcend worldly concerns despite their poetic aspirations.

7. Conclusion

This chapter consolidates the intellectual and practical inquiries undertaken in this dissertation. The chapter begins by recapitulating the arguments and findings, demonstrating how the research addressed its initial aims and questions concerning the development of a cross-cultural framework for spatial rhetoric. Subsequently, it offers a reflection on the limitations of the study, acknowledging the methodological and theoretical constraints that define its scope. I will then detail the specific contributions this research makes to the field of post-technological experimental art, outlining its practical and theoretical significance for artists, curators, and scholars. The chapter concludes with final remarks on the prospects for future research, proposing potential avenues for extending the cross-cultural dialogue initiated in this work and maintaining the dissertation's central metaphor of the garden as an evolving site of inquiry.

7.1 Findings and Contributions

7.1.1 Findings

Research Question 1: What are the key differences between Western and non-Western approaches to spatial rhetoric in terms of conceptualisation and future implications?

I found that distinct epistemological and ontological assumptions root the differences between the Western and East Asian approaches to spatial rhetoric examined in this study. Chapter 2 elucidates that Western rhetorical traditions inherited from Greco-Roman models tend to prioritise logical persuasion, analytical division, and a conception of space as a neutral, pre-existing container for objects and events. This approach leads to a focus on an artwork as a discrete object to be analysed or a text to be decoded from a position of critical distance. The act of viewing from a distance positions the viewer as a subject who analyses an object to decipher its meaning, reinforcing a subject-object dichotomy. In contrast, the East Asian traditions conceptualise space as a dynamic, relational field. Experience co-produces this relational field. Space is a medium that emerges from the interplay of material elements, energetic flows (*qi*), and the embodied perception of the viewer. The artwork is a site for an event, an encounter that unfolds over time. Synthesis and the dissolution of the boundary between the viewer and the viewed receive emphasis through principles like *yijing* (artistic conception), where the spectator's embodied perception participates in the unfolding of the artwork's meaning.

The implication of this distinction is important to my dissertation's argument. I have argued that the relational and experiential models offered by East Asian traditions provide a more adequate framework for understanding the hybrid, layered, and interactive environments produced by post-technological art. Techno-mediated systems, with their capacity to compress space, fragment time, and create networked, rhizomatic structures, produce spatial experiences that defy the logic of a static container. An interactive VR installation, for example, is a space. The user's navigation and interaction actualise that space. The East Asian emphasis on durational perambulation (*you*), the co-constitution of meaning, and the fluidity of spatial boundaries therefore offers a more suitable analytical vocabulary for these new forms. My research concludes that the future of spatial rhetoric, in a globalised and techno-mediated context, requires a move away from the limitations of a historically dominant analytical, object-focused paradigm towards a more integrated, processual understanding. The cross-cultural framework in this dissertation responds to this need, proposing a synthesis that can account for the complex spatio-temporal dynamics of our contemporary condition.

Research Question 2: What are the key philosophical and aesthetic principles underlying East Asian spatial concepts, and how do they differ from Western approaches to spatial rhetoric?

I identify three interrelated principles that underpin the East Asian spatial concepts examined herein: *you* (aesthetic roaming), *qiyun* (spirit resonance), and *yijing* (artistic conception). The aesthetics of Shanshui painting and classical garden design provide the primary derivation for the principles. The three principles constitute a philosophical and aesthetic framework for understanding and producing spatial experience. A process of imaginative and often physical navigation reveals the meaning and aesthetic significance of a landscape over time. An artist designs the unrolling of a handscroll or the choreographed path through a garden to facilitate a temporal journey. A harmonious interplay of all elements, including the artist's brushwork, the composition, and the materials, produces the relational phenomenon of *qiyun*.

The spectator's mind and imagination realise the meaning of the artwork. The artwork provides a catalyst, a set of evocative cues, for this realisation. The viewer's own memories, emotions, and intellectual investment then complete the aesthetic experience, creating a world that

transcends the literal depiction. The three principles together form a system that values process over product, experience over object, and relation over separation. The resulting system differs from many Western approaches by framing the aesthetic encounter as an event that unfolds in time and space. The aesthetic encounter, in turn, requires the embodied, and imaginative participation of the viewer. As I have demonstrated throughout this dissertation, the philosophical orientation of the three principles provides a valuable lens for analysing post-technological art. Post-technological art similarly demands new modes of active and durational participation from its audience.

Research Question 3: How do techno-mediated systems redefine traditional notions of spatiality in the context of East Asian spatial concepts?

My research concludes that techno-mediated systems redefine traditional notions of spatiality by actualising the principles of fluidity, relationality, and layered experience central to the East Asian spatial concepts examined in this dissertation. As argued in Chapters 4 and 5, technologies of virtuality, networking, and real-time computation transcend the representation of space. The technologies produce new kinds of spatio-temporal environments that are dynamic, interactive, and co-constituted by the users of the systems. The compression and layering of space-time by the systems disrupts the stable, Euclidean geometry of the physical world. A networked installation like the PBHU series connects geographically distant locations, creating a hybrid space where local actions have remote consequences. The resulting compression of physical distance and layering of multiple, asynchronous temporalities create a fluid spatiality that one can understand not as a container, but as a network of relations.

Techno-mediated systems transform the screen from a passive surface of representation into a generative interface. My concept of the “doubled screen”, developed from the traditional *chongping*, demonstrates how techno-mediated interfaces create nested realities and layered visualities. A VR environment turns the screen into the world, an immersive environment for the user to inhabit and navigate. The user’s physical movements co-create a spatio-temporal journey, actualising the principle of *you* (aesthetic roaming) in a technologically embodied form. The interactive nature of the systems redefines the relationship between artwork and spectator, echoing the co-creative principle of *yijing*. A user’s input completes the artwork in an interactive installation, creating a feedback loop of mutual influence. The *AI Philosopher* exemplifies

this process, generating distinct textual interpretations that make each interaction a distinct co-creation. I found that techno-mediated systems transcend the provision of new tools for artists, reconfiguring the ontology of space. The systems create environments that are processual, relational, and participatory. The traditional East Asian spatial concepts explored in this dissertation provide a suitable theoretical framework for analysing the new spatial conditions. The framework offers a language to articulate the fluid, layered, and co-produced nature of post-technological reality.

Research Question 4: How are East Asian spatial concepts, such as pingfeng (screen) and chongping (double screen), manifested in post-technological experimental art?

Contemporary post-technological experimental art re-articulates and transforms the traditional East Asian spatial concepts of *pingfeng* (screen) and *chongping* (double screen), moving the concepts beyond their origins as historical artefacts. As I argued in Chapter 5, the fundamental principles of spatial division, layered representation, and the mediation of the gaze within *pingfeng* and *chongping* find varied manifestations in today's screen-based practices. I have proposed the term "doubled screen" to describe a contemporary phenomenon encompassing a range of artistic strategies. Technology, in turn, enables these artistic strategies to create nested, mirrored, and hybrid realities.

In its traditional function, the *pingfeng* simultaneously divides physical space, provides a surface for images, and allows for its own depiction within an image to create layers of reality. My research shows how post-technological artworks replicate the object's underlying logic. For instance, a multi-channel video installation deploys an array of monitors that function as a series of modern *pingfeng*, fragmenting the exhibition space and presenting multiple, simultaneous visual narratives. The spectator must physically navigate the resulting field of screens, constructing an understanding from the layered information in a process analogous to the *you* (aesthetic roaming) through a classical garden. Post-technological art also explicitly manifests the concept of *chongping*, or the screen-within-a-screen. My analysis of the PBHU series in Chapter 6 detailed how a virtual reality environment contains a virtual laptop. The laptop's own screen displays a recorded interaction that links to a live, interactive AI interface, forming a tertiary screen. A nesting of interfaces creates a recursive spatial architecture that parallels the layered representational structure of *chongping* painting. This architectural structure generates

a layering of virtualities, where the boundaries between different orders of reality become porous and navigable.

The “doubled screen” also manifests as a techno-mediated mirror in the works of artists such as Dan Graham. As discussed in Chapter 5, the artist’s installations use video feedback loops to project a time-delayed image of the spectator back onto a monitor. A technologically produced doubling creates a confrontation between the viewer’s present self and their just-past, mediated self, fracturing the sense of a unified presence. The screen becomes an agent that “looks back”, implicating the viewer in a circuit of self-perception and temporal dislocation. My findings indicate the logic of the *pingfeng* and *chongping* persists and evolves in post-technological art. Artists use technologies like VR, interactive projection, and networked systems to create “doubled screens” that divide, layer, and reflect reality in new ways. Contemporary manifestations of the screen continue the historical exploration of the object as an agent for structuring space, mediating perception, and questioning the nature of representation. The deep-*Shanshui* lens, by drawing on this historical lineage, provides a methodology for interpreting the layered visualities of post-technological art.

7.1.2 Contributions

The findings of this research translate into several key contributions to the field, which are detailed below.

Practical Framework for Artists

This dissertation develops the deep-*Shanshui* lens, a practical, cross-cultural framework that provides artists with a structured, generative methodology for creating post-technological artworks. Comprising chrono-topographic rhetoric, the water-stone metaphor, and deep mapping, the framework translates abstract theory into concrete strategies for making art. It offers an alternative to creating work that either uncritically adopts technological paradigms rooted in instrumental logic and a subject-object dichotomy or resorts to stylistic borrowing from non-Western traditions. The case studies in Chapter 6, such as the PBHU and PLSP series, demonstrate this framework’s utility in designing layered spatial configurations and interactive systems that foster co-creative authorship.

Enhanced Interpretation of Hybrid Art Forms

The research provides an enhanced interpretive framework for the hybrid art forms of post-technological experimental art. The specialised vocabulary developed herein, including concepts like chrono-topographic rhetoric and the “doubled screen”, offers a more adequate language for artists, curators, and critics to analyse the layered, interactive, and processual nature of these works. By tracing the lineage of contemporary screen practices to historical precedents like the *pingfeng*, this framework provides the historical and cultural depth necessary for their critical evaluation.

Cultural Inclusivity in Artistic Practices

The dissertation promotes cultural inclusivity in artistic and theoretical practices. By placing East Asian spatial philosophies on an equal theoretical footing with Western critical theory, my research treats them as active analytical tools, refusing the implicit hierarchy that often positions non-Western thought as a regional curiosity. This theoretical rebalancing, embodied in practice-led projects like PLSP, provides a model for a more pluralistic and de-centred understanding of global art and technology, with direct implications for curatorial and institutional strategy.

Encourage Reflexivity in Artistic Practice

The research encourages reflexivity in artistic practice. By shifting the discussion from a technical or formalist focus to an exploration of the philosophical and cultural principles underpinning technology, the framework prompts artists to consider how their choices operate within broader historical and cultural narratives. This historical consciousness fosters a mode of artistic practice that is self-aware, critically engaged, and philosophically grounded.

7.2 Limitations and Potential Extensions

I acknowledge the dissertation’s limitations to situate the contributions and identify pathways for future research. The deep-*Shanshui* lens I have developed presents a theoretical construction. The framework’s specificity provides both a strength and a constraint. The framework’s grounding in Chinese aesthetic and philosophical traditions provides an alternative to certain long-established Western paradigms, and its focus on Chinese traditions means that the framework may not be applicable to all non-Western cultural contexts without adaptation. A specific East Asian

intellectual lineage provides the framework's principles. Practical constraints circumscribe the cultural scope of the dissertation. My analysis has concentrated on Chinese and, to a lesser extent, Japanese traditions as counterpoints to Western theories. As a researcher and practitioner embedded within these cultural traditions, my position and background shape my interpretation.

The era of the research determines the technological focus of the case studies. I have examined specific technologies, including virtual reality, interactive projection, and generative artificial intelligence systems like the AI Philosopher. The pace of technological innovation means that the specific hardware and software implementations discussed in this dissertation will become dated. Future research will need to test and adapt my dissertation's concepts in relation to emerging technologies that were not available or prevalent during the study. The practice-led nature of the research presents structural limitations. The artistic projects detailed in Chapter 6, while benefiting from institutional support provided by the Alice Lab at York University, the Guangdong Museum of Arts, the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts, the Guangzhou Museum, the Guangxi Normal University, and the Memorial Hall of Lingnan School of Painting, were nevertheless limited by constraints of funding, technical feasibility, and collaborative logistics. The form of each artwork reflects a negotiation between the conceptual ambition and the material realities of the artwork's production. The unrealised "Virtual Exhibition" stage of the *Silhouette of the Illumination* project highlights how practical contingencies can redirect a research trajectory. The practical constraints provided learning experiences that informed later work and also prevented me from pursuing certain avenues of inquiry to the avenues' fullest extent within the scope of this dissertation.

The theoretical framework remains provisional, while I intended the framework to be generative. I have proposed concepts such as chrono-topographic rhetoric and the water-stone metaphor as tools to analyse phenomena. The concepts do not constitute exhaustive or definitive theories. The concepts' value lies in the concepts' utility for posing questions and providing a language for analysis. Other scholars and artists may find it necessary to critique, refine, or even replace the dissertation's concepts as the field of post-technological experimental art develops.

7.3 Final Remarks

My dissertation sought to connect different cultural traditions and theoretical inquiry and artistic

practice. The research has argued for the necessity of a cross-cultural approach to spatial rhetoric and has offered the deep-*Shanshui* lens as one possible model. The conclusion of the research journey marks a point of departure for future explorations. The prospects for extending the work span comparative cultural studies, integration with emerging technologies, and the application of the framework beyond the field of experimental art. The *Wuyou Yuan* remains a site of potential. I do not map the *Wuyou Yuan* as a territory; the conceptual space invites continuous cultivation of the ongoing dialogue between cultures, the interplay of the virtual and the actual, and the negotiation between the human and the posthuman. My dissertation has offered one set of tools and one series of experiments for navigating the terrain. The knowledge the dissertation produced may provide a foundation for other inquiries, ensuring that the exploration of our hybrid spatial condition remains a conversation.

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Notes

ⁱ The character “谿” is the traditional form of “溪”, both denoting a mountain stream. While “溪” is the simplified character used in modern mainland Chinese and adopted in academic discourse outside Taiwan, “谿” is retained in traditional Chinese contexts, including Taiwan, Hong Kong, classical literature, calligraphy, and specific place names, for its historical and cultural significance. The National Palace Museum in Taipei preserves the character “谿” in the artworks’ title; this study follows this usage to maintain the integrity of the original designation.

ⁱⁱ Zhiai Chen (陳紙埃) is an experimental artist and an artists member of Independent Various Art Space (IVAS), an international art group founded since 2017 from Seoul (South Korea) and Guangzhou/Canton (China) founded by me, Xiaolong Zheng Dragon, and Sharon Zhang Yiying, holding both Bachelor’s (Chinese Painting) and Master’s (Experimental Art) degrees from the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts. Her practice is informed by ancient Chinese mythological aesthetics and primarily investigates the relationship between natural beings and the transcendental spiritual world.

ⁱⁱⁱ Feng Feng (馮峰) is a prominent figure in contemporary Chinese art and a professor at the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts, where he also is Dean of the School of Transmedia. His artistic practice is diverse, spanning painting, sculpture, installation, video, public art, and even fiction writing and fashion design. A consistent thread throughout his multifaceted work is a critical dialogue with, and deconstruction of, established norms and “common sense”, often exploring the nature of signs, knowledge, and perception through a conceptual art lens. Feng’s oeuvre is essentially characterised by a persistent questioning and deconstruction of conventional knowledge, driven by a passionate interest in language and epistemology that underpins his conceptual art approach. This conceptual drive manifest in multifaceted, boundary-crossing artistic practice across diver media, through which he aims to provoke a transformative re-evaluation of perception and reframe prevailing discourses, imbuing his work with critical force.

^{iv} Xiaolong Zheng Dragon (鄭小龍/ 鄭龍一海) is an artist and a faculty member at the School of Fine Arts, Guangxi Normal University. His practice and research focus on experimental and post-technological art, exploring posthumanist themes across virtual and physical spaces. His work has been exhibited internationally, including at the Today Art Museum in Beijing, and was selected for the 14th National Exhibition of Fine Arts (2024). His publications include *Post-Bit Posthuman: The Visual Experiments of Zheng Longyihai* (2023), and his work is held in the collections of the Guangdong Museum of Art and Huawei Group.

^v Shannon (Yiying) Zhang (張藝影) is an artist and art historian based in Hainan, China. Her work focuses on experimental art practices. She holds a B.A. in Art History (2016) and an M.F.A. in Experimental Art (2019) from the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts.

^{vi} Flounder Lee is an artist, curator, and postgraduate researcher at the University of Plymouth. His practice explores decolonial futures through various media, including photography, video, and installation. He has curated numerous exhibitions and founded the artist-run SpaceCamp MicroGallery.

Appendix A: Abbreviations

ACG	Animation, Comics, and Games
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AIP	AI Philosopher/ A.I. Philosopher
AR	Augmented Reality
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
CPU	Central Processing Unit
GAFA	Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts
GBA	Greater Bay Area
GCP	Google Cloud Platform
GDMoA	Guangdong Museum of Art
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
GLSL	OpenGL Shading Language
GMT	Greenwich Mean Time

GPT-2	Generative Pre-trained Transformer 2
GPU	Graphics Processing Unit
GRAV	Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel
IVAS	Independent Various Art Space
MR	Mixed Reality
NDI	Network Device Interface
NLP	Natural Language Processing
OSC	Open Sound Control
PBHU	Post-Bits Human Universe
PLSP	Post-Lingnan School of Paintings
SD	Stable Diffusion
SFX	Sound Effect
SI	Situationist International
SLSA	Society for Literature, Science, and the Arts

SV2TTS	Speaker Verification to Multispeaker Text-To-Speech Synthesis
VR	Virtual Reality
XR	Extended Reality
YOLOv4	You Only Look Once version 4

Appendix B: Glossary of Terms

Chrono-topographic rhetoric

A mode of analysis and artistic practice that examines the persuasive and communicative power of intertwined narratives of time (chronos) and place (topos). This rhetoric is not confined to textual or verbal discourse; rather, it analyses how the strategic arrangement of spatial and temporal elements within an artwork, environment, or text can shape perception, convey cultural values, and construct collective memory and identity.

Cultural Turn

A historical intellectual movement that emerged across the humanities and social sciences in the latter half of the twentieth century. The Cultural Turn re-evaluates culture as a primary, constitutive force that shapes human experience, social relations, and historical processes. This movement interrogates the perceived adequacy of purely social, economic, or political models of analysis and established the study of cultural meaning as a central and indispensable academic methodology.

Deep Map

A multi-layered, multi-scalar, and multi-perspectival representation of a place. Unlike a conventional cartographic map, which prioritises geographic accuracy, a deep map incorporates a dense network of information, including historical narratives, personal memories, ecological data, and cultural stories.

Deep Mapping

The methodological process of creating a deep map. Deep mapping synthesises qualitative, quantitative, objective, and subjective data to represent the temporal depth and complexity of a specific location.

Deep-Shanshui Lens

A theoretical and analytical framework developed in this dissertation that integrates the principles of deep mapping with the aesthetic and philosophical traditions of Chinese *Shanshui* 山水 (mountain-water) landscape painting. This lens employs concepts

such as durational experience (*you* 游), layered perspectives, and spiritual resonance (*qiyun* 氣韻) to analyse the complex spatio-temporal architectures of post-technological artworks and environments.

Double Screen

A concept formulated by the art historian Hung Wu (1996, 2010) to describe a screen that possesses a dual nature. It functions simultaneously as a physical, architectural object that divides and structures the viewer's real space, and as a medium that bears a pictorial representation. This duality generates a complex interplay and ontological ambiguity between the space of the viewer and the space of the image.

Doubled Screen

A specific pictorial configuration, often building upon the concept of the *Double Screen*, which involves the depiction of a screen within another representational space. This technique generates a recursive, nested structure that deliberately blurs the boundaries between different levels of reality and illusion, creating a "scene within a scene" and complicating the viewer's spatial and ontological position.

Mirrored Screen

A screen configuration that functions through reflection, duplication, or mirroring to create hybrid realities. A mirrored screen reflects, refracts, or layers spaces, physical, virtual, or conceptual, upon one another, producing complex and often ambiguous perceptual experiences.

Ontological Turn

A broad intellectual and historical movement that gained prominence in philosophy, critical theory, and the humanities during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The Ontological Turn is characterised by a fundamental reorientation away from epistemology (the study of knowledge and how we know the world) towards ontology (the study of being, existence, and the nature of reality). Within media studies, this movement interrogates the view of the media as mere tools for representing reality and posits that techno-mediated environments actively

constitute and bring into being new realities, modes of existence, and forms of experience.

**Post-technological
Experimental Art**

A term coined in this dissertation to define a specific mode of artistic practice and a corresponding philosophical position. It refers to art that has moved beyond a focus on technological novelty to instead conduct a critical inquiry into the ontological conditions of our pervasively techno-mediated world. This practice is characterised by experimental methods that seek to deconstruct and reconfigure the relationships between the human, the non-human, and the machine, thereby examining the aesthetic and political implications of what it means to exist in a post-technological state.

***Qiyun* (氣韻, spirit
resonance)**

A principle in Chinese aesthetics first articulated by Xie He (fl. 6th century). *Qiyun* refers to the vital spirit, energy, or resonance that an artwork should embody and transmit. It is considered the highest artistic goal, signifying both technical skill and the successful fusion of the artist's spirit with the subject, thereby imbuing the work with life and enabling it to create a profound connection with the viewer.

Spatial Rhetoric

Refers to the strategic use of space, whether physical, digital, or conceptual, to persuade, communicate cultural values, or influence collective identity.

Spatial Turn

A major historical intellectual movement that emerged in the late twentieth century across the humanities and social sciences. The Spatial Turn is defined by its challenge to the conception of space as a passive, inert container for social events and posits space as an active and constitutive force that shapes social, cultural, and historical processes. This movement elevated spatial analysis from a secondary consideration to a core methodological concern, emphasising the critical role of spatial arrangements, relationships, and perceptions in any rigorous study of human

experience.

**Water-stone
Dialectic**

A theoretical framework formulated in this dissertation to analyse the interplay between fluidity and permanence, change and structure. In this dialectic, “water” symbolises flow, ephemerality, transformation, and the passage of time, while “stone” represents permanence, material memory, foundational structures, and enduring cultural principles. The framework is used to examine how these two forces interact to produce complex cultural and aesthetic phenomena.

***You* (游, Aesthetic
Roaming)**

A principle of durational and interpretive experience, central to the *Shanshui* aesthetic, that priorities an unfolding, imaginative journey through a landscape (pictorial, physical, or virtual) over a single, static viewpoint. It involves the embodied co-creation of meaning through movement and perception over time.

***Zaojing* (造 景,
Scenic
Configuration)**

A classical Chinese artistic principle for crafting symbolic landscapes and composing scenes involves the deliberate arrangement of elements to create layered views, orchestrate movement, and evoke specific moods. This process imbues a physical space with cultural and aesthetic meaning.

Appendix C: The Post-Bits Human Universe series Documentation

Publications

Ho, R., & Zheng, X. (2022). *The Post-bit Human Universe: An Experiment on the Evolutionary History of Human-Posthuman Relations*. Proceedings of EVA London 2022, 142–149. <https://doi.org/10.14236/ewic/EVA2022.28>

Ho, R., Vollmer, S., & Zheng, X. (2023). *24/7 Worldlessness of Post-Bits Human Universe: Asynchronous Signal Transmutation*. Proceedings of EVA London 2023, 193–200. <https://doi.org/10.14236/ewic/EVA2023.34>

Exhibitions

1. *Post-Bits Human Universe: Signal Transmutation* 比特後人類：信號的嬗變, Guangzhou Museum, Guangzhou, China, 2023
2. *BIT Metaverse 2.0 × The 5th the Greater Bay Area Art Festival – Culture +Technology* “文化+科技”：比特元界2.0, The Greater Bay Area International Art bonded Industry Center, Guangzhou, China, 2022
3. *The 1st Guangxi Experimental Art Biennale: Mountain as Mountain, Water as Water* 第一屆廣西實驗藝術雙年展：看山是山，看水是水, Guilin Art Museum, Guilin, China, 2022
4. *BITS Post-Human* 比特後人類, No.7 Space, Guangdong Museum of Arts, 2021-2022
5. *PRD Contemporary Art Exhibition: “Symbiosis: Imagery And Aptitude”* 珠三角當代藝術展：圖像與上手, OX Warehouse Armazem de Boi, Macao, China, 2021
6. *Re [New]All 2021: A Sensorium Exhibition For The Society For Literature, Science, And The Arts (SLSA)*, SLSA Annual Conference with York University, Online, 2021
7. *Mundane Futures Pavilion*, The Wrong Biennale n°5, Online, 2021

Awards

1. *First Class Award*, Top 10 National Digital Human Themed Artwork, 2022 China

Cultural&Tourism Metaverse Innovation Contest, Unity China, 2023

2. *CIBC Fine Arts Graduate Student Awards*, York University, 2021
3. *CIBC Fine Arts Graduate Student Awards*, York University, 2020

Appendix D: The Post-Lingnan School of Paintings series

Documentation

Publications

Ho, R., & Zheng, X. (2022). The Post-bit Human Universe: An Experiment on the Evolutionary History of Human-Posthuman Relations. *Electronic Workshops in Computing*, 142–149. <https://doi.org/10.14236/ewic/EVA2022.28>

Exhibitions

1. *The 3rd Liuzhou Image Week - Reality and Illusion: Digital Media Art Exhibition* 第三屆柳州影像周 – 現實與幻象：數字影像藝術展, Liuzhou Industrial Museum, Liuzhou, China, 2025
2. *Poetic Scroll: Mountain-Water Realm* 詩箋山水境, Guangzhou Tiandi Hui Roadshow Hall, Guangzhou, China, 2025
3. *2025 The Korean Society of Media Arts (KOSMA) Spring International Invitation Exhibition - The Illusion Beyond the Screen* 2025서울로미디어캔버스: 서울로미디어캔버스 봄 전시, SEOULLO MEDIA CANVAS, Seoul, South Korea, 2025
4. *The 2nd Guangxi Experimental Art Biennial: Multiplicity New Horizon* 第二屆廣西實驗藝術雙年展：多元新鏡界, Guilin Art Museum, Guilin, China, 2024
5. *Surmounted with Big Strides* 嶺南畫派紀念館重新啟用系列展覽：從頭越, the Memorial Hall of Lingnan School of Painting, Guangzhou, China, 2024
6. *The 14th China National Fine Arts Works Exhibition – Digital Art Pavilion* 第十四屆全國(中國)美術作品展：數碼藝術, Shanghai Art Museum, Shanghai, China, 2024
7. *Honouring the Past, Shaping the Future: Lingnan, Post-Lingnan and the Posthuman Era*, the Memorial Hall of Lingnan School of Painting, Guangzhou, China, 2023

Awards

Award of Excellence, The 2nd Guangxi Experimental Art Biennial, 2024

Collection

Post-Lingnan School of Painting, mixed reality spatial projection installation, Collected by the Memorial Hall of Lingnan School of Painting 嶺南畫派紀念館, 2024

Funding

Post-Lingnan School of Painting project is fully funded and supported by the Memorial Hall of Lingnan School of Painting 嶺南畫派紀念館, 2023-2024

Appendix E: AI Philosopher

Publication

Ho, R., & Vollmer, S. (2021). Research Workshop Collected Paper: Explorations in concepts and the visual arts. *Electronic Workshops in Computing*, 268–274. <https://doi.org/10.14236/ewic/EVA2021.46>

Vollmer, S., & Ho, R. (2021). Luminiferous Funeral: Journeying in Delusional Pavilions. In E. Bisset Álvarez (Ed.), *Data and Information in Online Environments* (Vol. 378, pp. 328–347). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-77417-2_24

Awards

1. *CIBC Fine Arts Graduate Student Awards, York University, 2021*
2. *CIBC Fine Arts Graduate Student Awards, York University, 2020*