

Offerings and Inheritances: Reconstructing Family Altars for Queer Vietnamese Kin

By

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Abstract

My architectural thesis explores the spatial incongruencies of queer, Vietnamese, and diasporic communities living in Canada by reconstructing new ancestral altar practices. Since the influence of patrilineal Confucian ideologies, domestic altars (bàn thờ) have been created to practice ancestor veneration within Vietnamese households across the homeland and the diaspora. However, queer and trans Vietnamese youth are often excluded and displaced from the patriarchal home, as it is assumed that embracing queer identity is an act of dishonouring tradition and lineage.

To seek wholeness among displaced familial, sexual and racial identities, I offer this spatial exploration to reconstruct and reimagine queer altar practices. I investigate multiple “sites of exchange” through the design of three altars for three scales of intimacies: bodies, streets and clubs. Through this process, I invite designers and architects to engage in new practices of belonging for our ancestors, kin, and our multi-adjectival selves.

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A Mutable Glossary

This is an incomplete, unstable, ever-shifting list of terms and their definitions that I use throughout the thesis. Language reflects our personal and political views, forms identities and creating cultures of belonging. Using words in both English and Vietnamese throughout this thesis have allowed me to explore and communicate how these complex issues of identity, offering and belonging underpin how people experience space. The ways we communicate through words – inwardly and outwardly – carry multiple histories and meanings that I embed into my framing of the work.

| Word | Definition | Cited from |
|----------|---|---|
| Queer | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. (adj) differing in some way from what is usual or normal 2. Etymology: Originally from the Indo-European word for “twist.” Translated from a spatial term to a sexual term.¹ 3. (v) to go about another direction than normally prescribed, a vector 4. (n) (adj.) Non-normative, often outside of a path traditionally followed (such as heterosexuality). Traditionally derogatory, it has been reclaimed to encompass a myriad of sexual and gender identities. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Merriam-Webster; (2,3) Sara Ahmed; (4) Author definition, |
| Diaspora | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. (n) the movement, migration, or scattering of a people away from an established or ancestral homeland 2. (n.) a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity.² 3. Etymology – Greek ‘diaspeirein’ – to disperse, as in seeds to sow. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1,3) Merriam-Webster; (2) Stuart Hall; |
| Offering | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. (n.) an object or gift offered, or contributed 2. (v.) the act of one who offers; as in a ritual such as prayer or fasting, or the labour performed 3. (n.) a space, time, event, to remember and connect, to ancestors through an altar | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1,2,3) Author definition, paraphrased from Merriam-Webster |

| | | |
|-----------------------|---|---|
| Settler-colonial | 1. (n.) an on-going process of (often) European imperial colonies claiming indigity and ownership over a land that did not originally belong to them. Typically involves eliminating indigenous peoples, their languages, and cultures as well as bringing enslaved people and indentured labourers to build the colony. Gregory Smithers describes it as: “the engineering of demographically stable, homogenous populations” through civilized structures (including morality and sexuality) within a nation state. ³ | (1) Paraphrased and quoted from Gregory Smithers, <i>Settler Sexualities</i> |
| Family (genealogical) | <p>1. (n.) the basic unit in society traditionally consisting of two parents rearing their children*</p> <p>2. (n.) a spouse and children*</p> <p>(adj.) of or relating to a family; designed or suitable for both children and adults*</p> <p>3. (n.) a group of persons of common ancestry</p> <p>(etymology) Middle English <i>familie</i>, from Latin <i>familia</i> household (including servants as well as kin of the householder), from <i>famulus</i> servant</p> <p>4. (n.) The people I was born into relating with, and have grown indebted to through ongoing investment and, of course, love.</p> | <p>(1,2,3) Merriam-Webster*</p> <p>(*note the very heteronormative and gendered definitions)</p> <p>(4) Author definition</p> |
| Chosen Family | <p>[Chorus]</p> <p><i>We don't need to be related to relate</i></p> <p><i>We don't need to share genes or a surname</i></p> <p><i>You are, you are</i></p> <p><i>My chosen, chosen family</i></p> <p><i>So what if we don't look the same?</i></p> <p><i>We been going through the same thing, yeah</i></p> <p><i>You are, you are</i></p> <p><i>My chosen, chosen family</i>⁴</p> | (1) Rina Sawayama's track 'Chosen Family,' was released as a duet with Elton John in 2021; an anthem for queer kinfolk in a time of disconnection |
| Kinship | 1. (n.) the quality or state of being kin; relationship. | (1) Merriam-Webster |
| Orient | <p>1. (v) to face or to be directed toward, as in one's gaze or subject of study, 'to orient towards'</p> <p>2. (n.) related to the Eastern world, that is in relation to the Western world and what is deemed Eastern and 'Oriental'</p> | <p>(1) Sara Ahmed;</p> <p>(2) Merriam-Webster</p> |

| | | |
|--------------|--|--|
| Altar | <p>1. (n.) a usually raised structure or place where sacrifices are offered or incense is burned in worship —often used figuratively to describe a thing given great or undue precedence or value especially at the cost of something else</p> <p>2. (n.) typically refers to a place of worship within an interior space, often within the home of individuals and family members to commemorate ancestors related to those living nearby</p> | <p>(1) Merriam-Webster;</p> <p>(2) paraphrased from Heonik Kwon (2006).</p> |
| Shrine | <p>1. (n.) a case, box, or receptacle – often to hold sacred relics</p> <p>2. (n.) a receptacle (such as a tomb) for the dead</p> <p>3. (n.) a niche containing a religious image</p> <p>4. (n.) Heonik Kwon describes shrines for ghosts or non-relatives in the case of Ha My and My Lai in Vietnam to have a relation to the “street” or external to the home. This contrasts the ancestral altar which is held within the family home.⁵</p> | <p>(1,2,3) Merriam-Webster</p> <p>(4) Heonik Kwon (2006)</p> |
| Vietnamese | <p>1. (adj.) to describe someone as ethnically Vietnamese, particularly in a Western context. It could commonly describe the Kinh majority, but it also includes over 50 ethnic groups including the Hoa, Hmong, Tai, Muong, Cham, Khmer, and so on.</p> <p>2. (n.) the Vietnamese language</p> | <p>(1,2) Author definitions</p> |
| Pan-Asianism | <p>1. (n) the idea or advocacy of a political alliance of all the Asian nations.</p> | <p>(1) Author definition</p> |
| Heterosexual | <p>1. (adj.) of, relating to, or involving sexual activity between individuals of the opposite sex</p> | <p>(1) Merriam-Webster</p> |
| Confucian | <p>1. (adj.) of or relating to the Chinese philosopher Confucius or his teachings or followers</p> | <p>(2) Merriam-Webster</p> |
| Care | <p>1. (n) suffering of mind; GRIEF</p> <p>2. (v.) to feel trouble or anxiety</p> <p>3. (v) to feel interest or concern</p> <p>4. (v) the labour that is essential to spatial practices. Includes emotional labour and ‘care’ -related work.⁶</p> | <p>(1,2,3) Merriam-Webster</p> <p>(4) Paraphrased from Menna Agha (2020)</p> |

| | | |
|------------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| Ritual | 1. (n.) the established form for a ceremony 2. (n.) ceremonial act or action 3. (n.) an act or series of acts regularly repeated in a set precise manner | (1,2,3) Merriam-Webster |
| Tradition | 1. (n.) an inherited, established, or customary pattern of thought, action, or behavior (such as a religious practice or a social custom) 2. (n.) cultural continuity in social attitudes, customs, and institutions | (1,2) Merriam-Webster |
| Convention | 1. (n.) a general agreement about basic principles or procedures 2. (n.) a set of rules, standards, codes, language, norms to follow agreed by a certain group, subculture, body of practice | (1) Merriam-Webster, (2) author |
| Notation | 1. (n.) the act, process, method, or an instance of representing using a system or set of marks, signs, figures, or characters 2. (n.) a system of characters, symbols, or abbreviated expressions used in art, science, mathematics or logic to express technical facts or quantities | (1,2) Merriam-Webster |
| Migration | 1. (n.) the act, process, or an instance of <u>migrating</u> | Merriam-Webster |
| Migrate | 2. (v) to move from one country, place, or locality to another. | Merriam-Webster |
| nước | 1. (n.) English translations: water; country 2. Often used to refer to someone's nationality, or country of origin (người nước Việt Nam / người nước Canada) | Google Translate, Author definition |
| người | 1. (n.) English translation: people; person; human; individual | Google Translate, Author definition |
| người nước ngoài | 1. (n.) English translation: foreigner Composed of the words "person", "country", "outside" | Google Translate, Author definition |
| người trong nước | 1. (n.) English translation: people in the country; nationals Composed of the words "person", "inside", "country" | Google Translate, Author definition |

(More Vietnamese words and their translations are included as cue-cards within the body of the text.)

Endnotes

- 1 Sara Ahmed, “Sexual Orientation” in *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), p.67
- 2 Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” Chapter in McDowell, Linda *Undoing Place? A Geographic Reader*. (London, 1997) p.235
- 3 Gregory Smithers, “Settler Sexualities: Reproducing Nations in the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.” In C. Shields and D. Herzog, *The Routledge Companion to Sexuality and Colonialism*, (Abingdon: Routledge.)
- 4 Rina Sawayama and Elton John, “Chosen Family,” Track 2 on Disc 2 of *SAWAYAMA (Deluxe Edition)*, Dirty Hit, 2021, Digital Stream.
- 5 Heonik Kwon, “Introduction” in *After the Massacre: Commemoration and Consolation in Ha My and My Lai*. (2006), p.6
- 6 Menna Agha, “Emotional Capital and Other Ontologies of the Architect. in *Architectural Histories*, 8(1): 23, 2020. pp.1-13, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5334/ah.381>

Preface

There is an anguish tied to following traditions.

To offer, to sacrifice -

To follow the line ---

--- A resentment builds, something is taken from me. It is lost.

I cannot see the value. I cannot see the benefit in proceeding.

I need to find a break in the line, to escape the pressures of building expectations.

To escape what is expected of me as a child of Vietnamese refugees,

to seek the belonging I crave as a queer Asian man,

to construct a fulfilling practice as an architect-in-training,

to make amends as a citizen within settler colonial Canada ...

-

[I must find my own way.]

- A reflection on offerings by the author, 2021-22



Looking back, facing
forward, moving slowly -

- did I do this right?

Fig. 1. Collage of offerings and hands. By author, 2021.

Introduction



Fig. 2. Panorama of a large cemetery in the periphery of Haiphong, Vietnam. Photo by author, 2016.

Returning Home from the Altar and Cemetery

In 2016, I visited several cemeteries with my parents and extended family in their home city of Haiphong, Vietnam. Having only visited Vietnam once when I was a toddler in 1994, this was my first trip back as an adult. As the youngest of four in my family, and the only one lucky enough to be born with Canadian citizenship, there is a lot I am still learning about Vietnam, kinship, and the legacies I have inherited.

During this 5-week trip, we visited several ancestors buried in sites across Haiphong's urban core and periphery. My experience of the city was marked by different scales of worship, intimacies, and ceremonies. As we arrived at each ancestral shrine, we stopped to perform memorized rituals and give offerings in exchange for spiritual protection. We visited relatives from 5 generations before us, cleaning their shrines, burning paper money and incense, replacing vases with fresh flowers, refilling small porcelain cups with fermented rice spirits, and plastic dishes and bowls with fresh fruit.

This was a familiar practice for my cousins, who were born in Vietnam and engaged in these rituals of care daily. Growing up in suburban Mississauga – close to Toronto - I had only observed altar practices for ancestor worship but I did not actively participate in them. Ancestor veneration was something my parents saw as *their* responsibility to uphold and did not impart this knowledge to me or my siblings.



Fig. 3. Photo of offerings on an ancestor's gravesite in Haiphong, Vietnam. Photo by author, 2016.



Fig. 4. Thompson praying to his parents' ancestral altar in Mississauga, ON. Photo by author, 2021.

While honouring their sacrifices, my curiosity to reconnect to these unfamiliar filial practices has led me to this work.

Not knowing how to carry on these traditions brings me a sense of guilt and loss. As a queer person who is not expected to replicate the same cultural norms, I feel particularly anxious in my lack of knowledge of how to appropriately honour my parents, siblings and loved ones when they pass on. I am perhaps already in a process of mourning and grieving my (seemingly failed) expectations as a queer child of diaspora as I contend with my lack of proximity to my ancestral traditions, cultural identity, and trajectory of filial belonging.

Many questions surfaced when reflecting on my relationship to my identity, family and the dead. Who is responsible for continuing altar practices when these traditions were never taught to me? How do I make space for these practices in my daily life? And how should I continue the lines of tradition, as a queer, diasporic, architect-in-training in settler-colonial Canada?

In the five chapters that follow, I document a year-long design process of stumbling through questions of identity, kinship, and care through the stories I tell, the drawings I make, and the transformative conversations I have had with professors, colleagues, friends and family. My work focuses on “offerings” and its multiple meanings and iterations displaced across various contexts. From the altar practices rooted in Vietnamese culture, to the stewardship by diverse urban communities in places of belonging, this thesis is a testament to the constant struggle being asked of us when we choose to be vulnerable to our true selves.

In Chapter 1, I share my research on the historic context on the making of Vietnamese and queer diasporic identities in so-called Canada. I discuss how deviating from imposed norms, either from China’s export of Confucianism or settler-colonial borders, may be what connects and strengthens these two converging identities.

In Chapter 2, I discuss the origins around ancestral altars in the Vietnamese diaspora and my orientation to study three altars within my biological family line. While taking stock of various aspects of ancestral worship through cataloguing, I focus on how each iteration of the altar follows or diverts from the traditional ‘lines that direct us’¹.



Fig. 5. 'sức nhớ' - memory, Cue card note by author, 2022.

'sức nhớ' is composed of the words 'strength' and 'remember'. Vietnamese synonyms on the bottom right.

In Chapter 3, I examine words in Vietnamese and English that hold dual and multiple meanings in various contexts. I ground my analysis in the work of thinkers and writers, including Sara Ahmed and her close reading of “orientation” in *Queer Phenomenology* (2006), Ocean Vuong’s novel *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous* (2020), Mimi Thi Nguyen’s concept of “refugee debt” in *The Empire of Freedom* (2012), and Heonik Kwon’s “bipolarity of death” in *After the Massacre* (2008). Each writer dissects key words and holds the multiplicity of meanings in the analysis of their work. I continue this practice in my thesis by centering on the word “offering.”

In Chapter 4, I consider the many sites where offerings are exchanged for queer and Asian diasporic individuals across various scales of intimacies. I explore these dynamics through an incomplete atlas of multiple “Sites of Exchange” using a queer method of moving in such a way that forms, deviates and shifts space. These “Sites of Exchange” will be broken up into three categories: Bodies, Streets and Clubs.

Finally, in Chapter 5, I present three new altar practices that are designed to each scale of intimacy categorized from the Sites of Exchange. I propose new altar practices scaled for private, public, and collective spaces in a dorm room, on the street and within the body. Through hand-crafted architectural drawing, model making, digital collage and animation I explore new altar practices that work with and against architectural conventions to make visible the multiplicity of many selves.

Throughout the making of this thesis, I have struggled with navigating how to simultaneously work against and within the conventions of architectural and spatial representation. I try to accept the ways in which the messiness of queerness, altars, diaspora, and identities disrupt, and rupture the clean, white, digital, and paper spaces that architects often design within. Through this process, I work to unlearn and break through the limits of these conventions through acts of experimentation and play. Through the acceptance of this messiness, I find opportunity to build upon the rich and valuable context of identity-making that architectural design practices must fully embrace.

Completing this during the second and third year of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is an added challenge in processing numerous accounts of anti-Asian racism, homophobic and transphobic



Fig. 6. 'gia đình' - the word for family and domestic. Cue card note by author, 2021.

violence seen on the news and in the daily lives of those close to me. This destabilizing environment is one full of grief, amongst so much more we have experienced. I try to make space for this loss in the background of my work.

While contending with mess and loss, I embrace a multimodal approach to making space. Through personal narrative, hybrid drawing, and designing spaces for me and my community, I tackle a universal question: what do we do with the practices and legacies that we have inherited? I hope that this thesis begins to invite designers, future architects, and citizens existing in the world to ask similar questions in the work. I offer this to you.

Endnotes

- 1 "[O]ur work will in turn acquire a new direction, which opens up how spatial perceptions come to matter and be directed as matter"; Sara Ahmed, "Lines That Direct Us, Introduction" in *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations*. (Duke University Press: 2006), p.12

Chapter 1: Making Queer and Vietnamese Diasporic Identities

Converging Lines and Identities

7

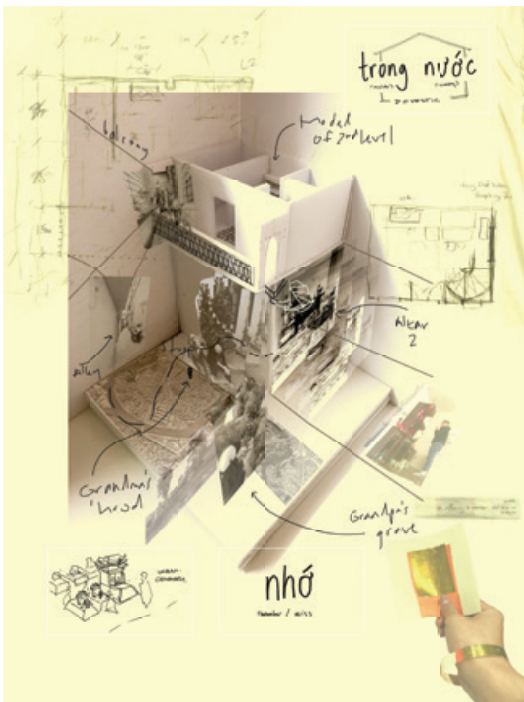


Fig. 7. Hybrid Drawing diptych 1 of 2: Remembering Grandmother's House. By author, 2022.

Identification is a messy process. It relies on rituals, performances and practices that follow scripts of collective norms. It is difficult to try to capture something that shifts constantly, and redefines, expands, and contracts itself around differing definitions and pluralities. Because of this dynamism, I seek to explore the transgressive potentials of the intersection between queerness, diaspora, and architectural design.

The possibility of liberation from imposed conventions and forms attracted me to place my own queer and Vietnamese identities as a core research subject. I am a product, a body, a mind, and a desire made through histories and times that are shaped by the forces of heteropatriarchal societies and refugee displacement. My focus on ancestral altars, and queer iterations of them, is my attempt to transcend these oppressive systems that we are implicated in.

In this chapter I discuss the thinking and history that shaped queer and Vietnamese diasporic identities, and how inherited practices such as ancestral worship were translated and transported across oceans, empires, and generations.

Thinking about Queer Diaspora

Queer Diaspora studies is a hybridization of two separate fields in the humanities: Queer studies and Diaspora studies. Diaspora studies looks at the migration of bodies implicated by the laws of citizenship, international borders, and global capitalism. Queer studies' focus is on non-normative expressions of gender, sexuality, eroticism, and conflicting desires in a heterosexual world. The intersection of these two fields exposes their blind-spots: early discussions about diaspora had often erased queer subjects, and the development of queer theory often leaves out colonialism and race. As feminist scholar Meg Wesling states in 'Why Queer Diaspora?' (2008): "[q]ueerness disrupts normativity like globalization disrupts national sovereignty."¹



Fig. 8. Hybrid Drawing diptych 2 of 2: Creating rituals of belonging. By author, 2022.

The term ‘Queer Diaspora’ emerged in the early 2000s, with scholars such as Cindy Patton and Benigno Sanchez-Eppler proposing “the queer diasporic subject as the paradigmatic body of a mobile, transitory postmodernity.”² The intersection of queerness and diaspora studies was (and still can be) an exciting, new promise to transgress heterosexuality, borders and capitalist norms. Like many individuals who find resonance in identifying as queer and diasporic, claiming this identity that was unconceivable to the state, family members and broader publics offered me new spaces of belonging.

I tread carefully with these ideas, as privileging mobility over stasis disregards cissexist, classist and racial biases. The people who are able to be “mobile” are often white, middle-class gays and lesbians while those who are “static” and left at “home”³ are often trans folks, sex workers, or undocumented racialized labourers.⁴

As diasporic individuals, we must negotiate multiple ways of looking: to reflect on the nostalgia of returning home and to face forward while settling oneself elsewhere⁵. For me, this includes not only reclaiming a home in a ‘liberated’ queer diasporic identity but also to understand what it means to belong.

But does ‘diaspora’ mean the same thing across diasporic communities? The etymology⁶ of the word ‘diaspora’ comes from the Greek word ‘diaspeirein’ which means to disperse. From the root words ‘dia-’ (across) and ‘speirein’ (scatter)⁷, the term has historically referred to peoples who have ‘sown over’ lands far from their homes of origin due to the (often violent) forces of migration. Many communities claim the term diasporic (African, Jewish, Filipino, etc.) which is often in reference to an ethnicization and racialization that resulted from colonialism and displacement. Because of this, displacement and diaspora are terms that vary in each context.

In Vietnamese, the term ‘diasporas’ translates⁸ to ‘người hải ngoại’ which consists of the words ‘people’, ‘sea’ and ‘outside.’ Foreigners from the waters of elsewhere, this may refer to a burdensome (and out of fashion) term for ‘overseas Vietnamese’ known as ‘Việt Kiều’⁹. However, I find this translation to be an interesting, spatialized understanding of Vietnamese identity, place and belonging. As the term for ‘foreigner’ in Vietnamese is similar to ‘người nước ngoài’ – with the word for ‘sea’ replaced by the same word for ‘country’ and ‘water’ – people often

It is not that I want to deny the violent history, but I don't want it to be the focus.

This thesis is not about that past - it is about how I contend with it today.

introduce themselves in reference to their *position* to and from ocean and land or nations and geography. In both terms for displaced peoples, a few historic references come to mind: the mass exodus of refugees in 1975 following the violent departure of American military from South Vietnam, the hundreds of thousands of boat people fleeing Vietnam in the 1980s, or even the diasporic history of Vietnam's Confucian empire across Southeast Asian seas.

The terms 'diaspora' and 'foreigner' hold many meanings for me as a queer Asian man in Canada, and a Westerner in Vietnam. Because the two terms are essentially the same in Vietnamese, being asked if I am 'người nước ngoài' is more of an uncomfortable reminder of how I am seen as 'belonging outside' of Vietnam (and the privileges that implies). In Canada, being read as a 'foreigner' and an Asian male situates my body within histories of indentured labourers, emasculated gender stereotypes, racist gay dating profiles, and a quiet fury that comes with negotiating queer and racialized identities.

Despite the pain that exists in the identification and reading of being 'queer' and 'diasporic', there is still a great deal of beauty and creation that is present. This beauty is often a result of trying to negotiate all these ways of looking – between past and present, domestic and foreign, who is family and who is stranger – and this shows up in the homes of queer diasporic individuals in ways that carry multiple timelines and geographies in one place. One might have a place to remember the past, perhaps not only ancestors and relatives but of a life that was left behind.¹⁰

Altars provide a space for Vietnamese diasporic communities, queer and non-queer, to look backwards and forwards in time and place. In a way, altar-making is already a queer and diasporic practice: they are queer as they can form our identities in parallel or opposition to dominant normative regimes (such as model minority narratives or Western religious practices), and they are diasporic through repeating and duplicating practices across histories and geographies. The connections between diaspora, queerness and altar practices directed me to discover the origins and histories of their spread in Vietnam.



Fig. 9. 'nước ngoài' - foreign, composed of the words 'country' and 'outside'. Cue card note by author, 2021.

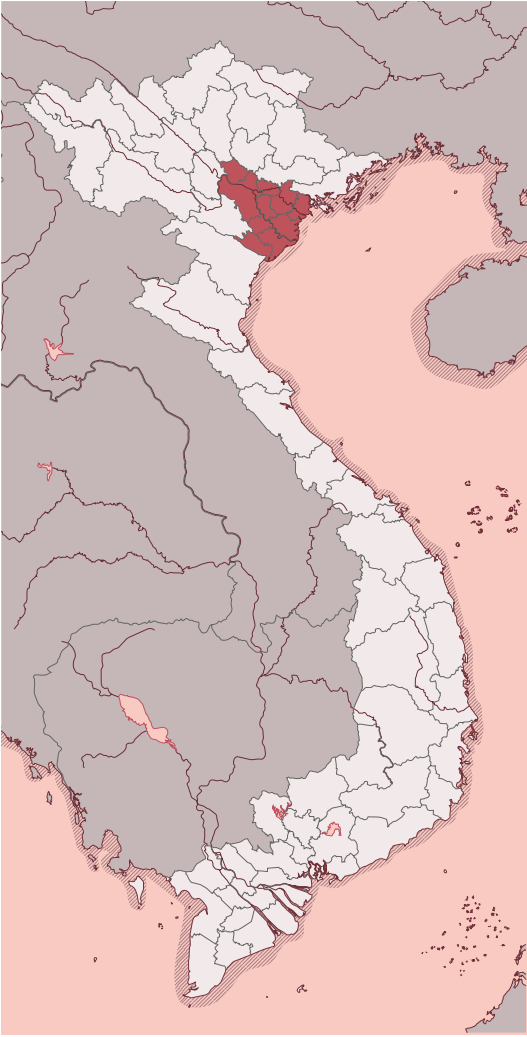


Fig. 10. Vietnam, the Red River Delta region highlighted. Map formatted by author, 2021.



Fig. 11. 'nước' means both water and country in Vietnamese, linking place, identity, ocean and land to people. Cue card note by author, 2021.

Vietnam: A construction of adjacencies

It was difficult learning about altar practices and their Vietnamese and diasporic origins. Western, institutional anthropology made me question the authenticity of my local work. Vietnamese governmental documents, on the other hand, may be more “authentic,” but have an agenda to centralize ceremony and religion¹¹. Despite my skepticism, I take these worlds and their texts and begin to position my findings in a way that grounds readers within a global and historic framework. The goal is to sketch out lines that connect seemingly disparate ideas, rather than raster a high-fidelity historical timeline.

My understanding of Vietnam as a sought-after site of exchange and imperial conquest is because it is a country shaped by land and water. Its borders are shaped inland by Southern China to its North, Laos and Cambodia along its West, and the Gulf of ‘Bắc Bộ’ (colonially ‘Tonkin’)¹² leading to the South China Sea along the Eastern coast. Each neighbouring nation’s diverse languages, ethnicities, and spiritual practices have influenced the formation of a non-monolithic Vietnamese cultural identity.

Perhaps the most influential factors that affect ritual practice and ancestral worship are Vietnam’s neighboring and oceanic adjacencies. The Han Chinese empire, and the making of a patriarchal Confucian society, formed the ideological basis for ancestral altar practices in Buddhist and Daoist traditions.¹³ These traditions were then exported to other Asian nations such as Korea and Vietnam. The forming of a Confucian civil society dictated norms around morality, patriarchal filial piety, gendered labour, state education systems and religion¹⁴. Ancestor worship, from Chinese Confucian civil religion, continues to organize religion, homes, altars, cemeteries, and the (mostly female) bodies who care for them to this day.

Ancestral worship rites were imposed onto many Vietnamese subjects through Confucian imperialism, but variations across the country and diaspora have made this practice their own¹⁵. Thus, the reconstruction of unique, placed-based altar practices is folded in the forming of Vietnamese identity.

Confucianism and ancestral worship are rooted in heteropatriarchal structures, when historically men of the family unit were the only ancestors venerated upon home altars¹⁶.

Although these narratives may support an image of gender equity in Vietnam, this is culturally not the case in both public and spiritual life. Today in the homeland and the diaspora, men (particularly the eldest son) are expected to carry on filial duties such as reproducing the family unit (getting married and having kids) as well as housing the ancestral altar. In this heteropatriarchal society, it is expected that the son's spouse (typ. wife) would maintain the altar. Although I caution flattening these experiences, I want to acknowledge how the gender binary is imposed in the home and in the public. The dutiful wife serving the noble son – though not uniquely Vietnamese – reproduces dynamics I wish to challenge.

Despite its patriarchal roots in China, Vietnam distinguishes its expression of Confucian ideals as less publicly gendered than its counterpart. Alexander Woodside, a scholar of Asian history, notes how in the 1800s, Vietnamese women had an important presence in palace courts, such that they were able to write critically about society and were celebrated in public life.¹⁷ This stood in high contrast with China and other nations that had adopted Confucian ideals (such as Korea), where male-dominated hierarchies were enforced.

Valorizing women has been folded into Vietnamese ancient folklore, including the celebration of the Trung Sisters who turned back Han Chinese invasions in North Vietnam in 40 CE¹⁸. Historic narratives about women's participation in multiple Indochina Wars are shared in the curation of the Vietnam Women's Museum in Hanoi¹⁹. These stories and institutions reveal a Vietnamese collective identity that embraces narratives of transcending patriarchal male-domination... at least when it works for the state.

The altar: a site for Vietnamese identity-making today?

The narrative of overcoming oppression repeats itself in the making of Vietnamese identities through history. Various occupations by China, France, Japan and more recently the United States, resulted in violent economic and political upheavals that pushed Vietnamese diasporic communities across different time periods and geographies²⁰.

Today, ideas around authenticity, the local and the global add to the confusion of claiming identity in the Vietnamese diaspora. Within these communities are many contemporary scholars, writers and artists that work through this perplexity through their writing, critique, poetry and songs about the *queer* conditions of forced migration, sexual and racial identities, and grief and loss in diaspora²¹. Their work carries unique stories, languages, and commemorative practices that create a new understanding of being Vietnamese.

Can the altar be a site where queer, diasporic Vietnamese identities are re-imagined in new forms? What differentiates the next iteration or generation of a queer altar? Although altars carry with them the histories, duties and norms that are archived

and repeated in our daily lives, can they be a site of liberation from oppressive norms? I offer the next chapter to examine the iterations of altars and worship practices within my own family, and how they have interrogated, challenged and re-defined the forming of the offerings and inheritances that come with our sexual and racial identities.

Endnotes

1 Meg Wesling, 'Why Queer Diaspora?' in *Feminist Review* 90, 2008, p.31

2 Meg Wesling, "Why Queer Diaspora?," 2008, p.31.

3 Meg Wesling refers to this dynamic of stasis and mobility when referring to the impacts of global sex tourism around the world.

4 Meg Wesling, "Why Queer Diaspora?," 2008, p.34.

5 The concept of "home" is fraught with many meanings, as discussed by many theorists of diaspora studies. Gayatri Gopinath, Martin Manalansan IV, Meg Wesling, and Nael Bhanji.

6 Going back to the etymology of 'diaspora' might be a conventional way that scholars have talked about the term. I must credit diasporic queer writers such as Gayatri Gopinath (2005) and Nael Bhaji's texts (2011) for their readings of the term.

7 'Diaspora' in Oxford Languages as per Google Dictionary. Accessed March 2022.

8 I am often using Google Translate for my translations. The insights and interpretations of the translations (however inaccurate it may be to a true native speaker), are my own and have helped me make sense of a language I have lost fluency in.

9 I've been told other young Vietnamese friends that the term 'Viet Kieu' is offensive in some contexts, as it reinforces certain narratives of class and mobility privileges of those overseas.

10 Reference to Roland's "guilt corner" and family altar discussed in Manalansan IV, Martin F. "Migrancy, Modernity, Mobility: Quotidian Struggles and Queer Diasporic Intimacy," 2005.

11 Heonik Kwon in *After The Massacre*, 2006: "the apparatus of the unified Vietnamese state put great emphasis on centralizing and controlling commemorative practices." Movement away from the home and to the state is a trend.

12 Nam Kim, “Social Change and Emergent Complexity in Bac Bo.” in *The Origins of Ancient Vietnam*. (Oxford University Press: New York, 2015) p.106

13 Vu Hong Van, Nguyen Trong Long. “Identify the Values of Ancestor Worship Belief in the Spiritual Life of Vietnamese People,” *International Journal of Philosophy*. Vol. 7, No. 4, 2019, pp. 160-166. doi: 10.11648/j.ijp.20190704.14

14 Alexander Woodside. “Territorial Order and Collective-Identity Tensions in Confucian Asia: China, Vietnam, Korea” (1998) p.195-200

15 Several Western anthropologists have documented the variations of ancestor worship practices in Vietnam and across the diaspora. I appreciate the detailed and sensitive work recorded by Heonik Kwon (2006), Kate Jellema (2007), Mark Maguire and A. Jamie Saris (2007).

16 “Ancestor worship [...] has generally been associated with the male-oriented model and is often understood as the ritual reinforcement of a patriarchal, patrilineal kinship system, marking the double submission of son to father and individual male to the corporate lineage.” from Kate Jellema. “Everywhere Incense Burning: Remembering Ancestors in Đổi Mới Vietnam.” In *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Oct., 2007, p. 471.

17 It was common that elite Vietnamese women could write poetry critiquing the patriarchy, and that female subjects such as wet nurses were honoured in royal courts. Alexander Woodside, 1998, p.197

18 Patricia M. Pelley, “Chronotypes, Commemoration” in *Postcolonial Vietnam: New Histories of the National Past* (Duke University Press, 2002) pp.179-182

19 Bảo tàng Phụ nữ Việt Nam. “Women in History”, from Bảo tàng Phụ nữ Việt Nam (Vietnamese Women’s Museum in Hanoi, Vietnam), Accessed March 2022, <https://baotangphunu.org.vn/en/women-in-history/>

20 My attempt to summarize centuries of war and invasion in and around Vietnam. I must also acknowledge Vietnam’s own imperialist histories, particularly with Cambodia in precolonial and postcolonial French Indochina.

21 I reference Mimi Thi Nguyen, Ocean Vuong and Thao Nguyen. These queer-identified Vietnamese-American thinkers have shaped a great deal of my world.

Chapter 2: Origins and Orientations; Three Altars

The lines we follow between altar and cemetery



Fig. 12. Three generations of altars. Left: Grandma's Altar in Haiphong, Vietnam;

Middle: Mom and Dad's altar in Mississauga, ON;

Right: Thompson's sort-of altar in Ottawa, ON.

Photos by author, various dates: 2016, 2021

Reproducing filial piety

Rituals to honour the dead have been in practice in ancient Vietnam for millennia¹ but what we know today as ancestral worship is a result of reappropriated Chinese civil religion². Since the 2nd century BCE, colonization by the Han Chinese empire spread Confucian values and rites across Vietnam, which influenced religious practices for living and dead human subjects in Northern, Central, and Southern regions.³ As a facet of Chinese imperial statecraft (as well as Vietnamese state-forming), venerating ancestors upon home altars (*bàn thờ*) have been practiced within households in Vietnam and across the diaspora for centuries.

My arrival to the altar as a site of identity, offerings and belonging may be influenced through repeated moral teachings of filial piety passed down from ancient Vietnamese Confucian state officials, but I'm not so sure that fully explains my story in Canada.

Personally, my exposure to Vietnamese traditions were limited to what I learned in the confines of my parent's suburban house in Mississauga. Although the Greater Toronto Area is home to a large Vietnamese community, my family was not engaged



Fig. 13. 'bàn thờ' - altar, composed of the words 'table' and 'worship'. Cue card note by author, 2021.



Fig. 14. Edited image of Thompson with mom, grandparents, sister and uncle in Vietnam, c. 1994. Collage by author, 2021

with larger community, religious or political Vietnamese associations. Instead, my parents my siblings and I roles that we were expected to perform. Their plan was for us to do well in school in the hopes that we would earn a lot of money in the future. The scripts given to us were to excel in school and ascend into white-collar jobs with high incomes. This would allow our refugee family recognition as ‘model minorities’ and succeed at performing ‘Canadian exceptionalism.’

Thao Nguyen captures this Western diasporic trope eloquently in her 2020 song ‘*Temple*’ when she sings in her mother words: “*But we found freedom, what will you do now? Bury the burden baby, make us proud.*” My parents indeed found the ‘gift of freedom’ in Canada that is not offered to them in Vietnam, and it is their children’s task to figure out what to do with it. The scripts my siblings and I were given are hybrids of various moral philosophies my parents believed from Southeast Asia, as well as the Canadian script of what constitutes a good refugee. To acknowledge rather than bury the burdens that both scripts impose onto us, I turn to three generations of altars in my life to examine how they help us transcend these norms.

Mom and Dad’s Altar, and The Lines that Direct Us

The dynamic of observing my parents perform ancestor worship yet feeling distant from own relationship with practicing these rituals myself is an instance of the queer diasporic condition. To make sense of how queer and diasporic theories deepen the understanding of traditional altar practices, I looked at one of the many ‘lines that direct us.’⁴ In Sara Ahmed’s book *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed states that “lines are both created by being followed and are followed by being created.” These lines are performed. They “depend on the repetition of norms and conventions, of routes and paths taken,” and the rituals and traditions that are inherited in “familial and social space.”⁵ One of these lines is care and labour, which are followed and performed through maintaining the altar.

In the replication of these altar practices, from my grandmother’s house in Haiphong to my parents’ house in Mississauga, displacement has shaped the way the altar is formed and cared for. In Vietnam, the altar is a common fixture in most family homes. In Mississauga, this altar room orients the suburban, immigrant home as ‘oriental.’ As a place to connect living family



Fig. 15. An oblique view of my parents’ altar in Mississauga, photo by author, 2021

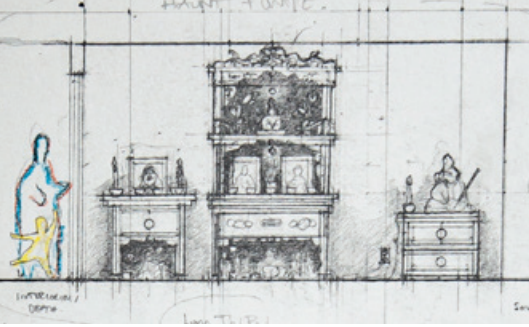


Fig. 16. Drawings of my parents' altar sketched by memory in Mississauga, by author, April 2021

to the deceased in the homeland, maintaining these practices may only be relevant for those who care to strengthen traditional familial bonds.

My parent's altars sit in the center of their altar room – which was originally one of two 'living' rooms that are typical in suburban homes built in the 1970s and 80s. In the middle stands my dad's altar: a towering, six-foot, three-tiered piece dedicated to my paternal grandparents. Its height was always something I feared as a child, as I imagined the weight of its burdens toppling over me. To the left of my dad's altar is my mom's shorter altar commemorating my late uncle. Both pieces offer spaces for my parents to practice their own altar rituals

Although I lived with these altars for many years, it was a distant object for me to relate to. It was not until my second visit to Vietnam as an adult that I was able to understand how I could connect to it. By being exposed to a lifestyle where altars were not rarefied but central to the everyday lives of society, I could draw the lines between Mississauga and Haiphong that have always been there, but I've never seen.

Grandma's Altar

When I finally visited Vietnam as an adult with my parents in 2016, I felt a flurry of emotions: excitement, confusion, and mostly grief. It was a gift to meet with and learn about my family in Vietnam, the places they frequented, and the rituals that make up their daily lives, but I had to make up for the loss of not knowing how to belong with them as a Vietnamese person born overseas.

Losing fluency in the Vietnamese language as well as lacking knowledge of cultural norms intensified how much of a foreigner I was to this nation. However, moments where my family would come together for meals, excursions to cemeteries and flower markets, and prayer at altars allowed me to feel included. Thus, it was the altar that linked us together and held the unspoken emotional weight that had occurred in the past, to where we are in the present.

The form of Vietnamese altars is similar across the diaspora and homeland. It can span horizontally a few feet or more and is often carved with decorative motifs on the front and sides. It can also be narrow in footprint and tall with two to three tiers, with the altar to the ancestors in the middle.



Fig. 17. Grandma's altar in Haiphong, photo by author, 2016



Fig. 18. The second level balcony leading to grandma's altar and bedroom in Haiphong, photo by author, 2016

The altar linked our activities between private and public excursions. Altars connected Vietnamese families to public spaces such as cemeteries, temples, war memorials, and museums, while local archives of genealogical histories are dispersed in households throughout the city.

Grandma's altar is one of the main altars I would frequent in Vietnam. We often took a motorbike to get us from the main street, through the narrow alleyway to her home, and park the bike in the courtyard. This courtyard transition space between city and home. The altar was on the second floor of her house. It was a dark, rectangular wooden table with carvings. It faced the doorway that opened to the balcony. Orienting the altar to the doorway invites ancestors and descendants to easily locate this space to perform rituals.

Thompson's Altar? / Offerings for 'Other' Orientations

While reflecting on three generations of altars – my grandmother's, my parents and my own – in Vietnam and Canada, I trace out the ways my family's traditions and migrations will shape my own commemorative practices. Growing up I notice how my mom would place the fruit on her altar in the middle of the month as offerings to my uncle. My dad would have us pray and light incense on Lunar New Year or the death anniversary of his parents. And my grandma's altar would have colourful flowers and fruit replaced and incense lit almost every day as family members visited. I look to my elders and their altar practices to understand what will work for mine.

I begin to wonder if altars are only limited to normative family structures. My understanding of family extends beyond genealogy, as my queer (and non-queer) chosen family members in Canada and abroad contribute to my sense of across many places and beyond places. The possibility for family beyond heterosexual and state-sanctioned norms is the kind of lineage that I want to continue and remember.



Fig. 19. Objects for ancestor worship rituals on my parent's altar in Mississauga, photo by author, 2016

Fig. 21. photo of Thompson's altar in Ottawa, photo by author, 2022



As queer architect and theorist Aaron Betsky writes in *Queer Space* (1997), we find comfort within queer spaces as they reflect beauty and images of who we are or the beauty we desire closeness to⁶. I would add that this desire for beauty is also motivated by queer kinship and authentic belonging that is necessary for diasporic Asian queers living in white, Western nations. The beauty I wish to replicate in my altars includes the traditions of my family members, the ones I chose and the ones I was born into.

As I struggled to understand traditional altar practices, I instead focused on the essence of the practice: the offering. The material and action of the offering was a constant in both queer and heteronormative families, as well as in Vietnam and in the diaspora. These offerings could be of one's labour, body, material goods or time.



Fig. 20. 'offerings' and a sketch of bánh trung or bánh tét (sticky rice dishes). Cue card notes and sketches by author, 2021.

Endnotes

- 1 In Vietnam's bronze age, burial practices, adorning higher society individuals, have been linked to the finding of bronze drums in the Red River Delta region. The origins of this history been contested and claimed by Chinese and Vietnamese archaeologists, and the nation states that they represent. Xiaorong Han details this in 'Who Invented the Bronze Drum? Nationalism, Politics, and a Sino-Vietnamese Archaeological Debate of the 1970s and 1980s.' (2004)
- 2 Vu Hong Van, Nguyen Trong Long. "Identify the Values of Ancestor Worship Belief in the Spiritual Life of Vietnamese People." In *International Journal of Philosophy*. Vol. 7, No. 4, 2019, pp. 160-166. doi: 10.11648/j.ijp.20190704.14
- 3 Vu Hong Van and Nguyen Trong Long, p.160-66 (2019)
- 4 "Lines are both created by being followed and are followed by being created. The lines that direct us, as lines of thought as well as lines of motion, are in this way performative: they depend on the repetition of norms and conventions, of routes and paths taken, but they are also created as an effect of this repetition."; Sara Ahmed. "Find Your Way, Introduction" in *Queer Phenomenology*, (Duke University Press, 2006), p.16
- 5 Sara Ahmed. "Find Your Way, Introduction" in *Queer Phenomenology*, p.17
- 6 Aaron Betsky, "Closet Cases and Mirror Worlds", in *Queer Space: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire*. (New York, 1997), pp. 16-54

Chapter 3 - Offerings and Inheritances

A noun, a verb, a relationship

20



Fig. 22. Offerings such as fruits, flowers, spirits and incense are gifted upon an ancestor's shrine. Photo by author in Haiphong, Vietnam, 2016

In Vietnam and across the diaspora, families following Confucian ancestral rites believe that those disengaged from cultural practices of veneration — endemic of contemporary Vietnamese youth — will experience hauntings for the debt of their ancestors and long-lasting spiritual disconnection¹.

To re-engage myself into the practice of ancestor worship, I began reflecting on altars and shrines I have visited in Vietnam and Canada to try to understand the places, forms, geographies, and scales in honouring the dead. By cataloguing various worship typologies (shrines and altars), I began to focus on the rituals and objects that would be performed and given upon these commemorative sites. I saw how these actions and materials were a constant that traveled across these worship spaces, which I understood as ‘offerings.’

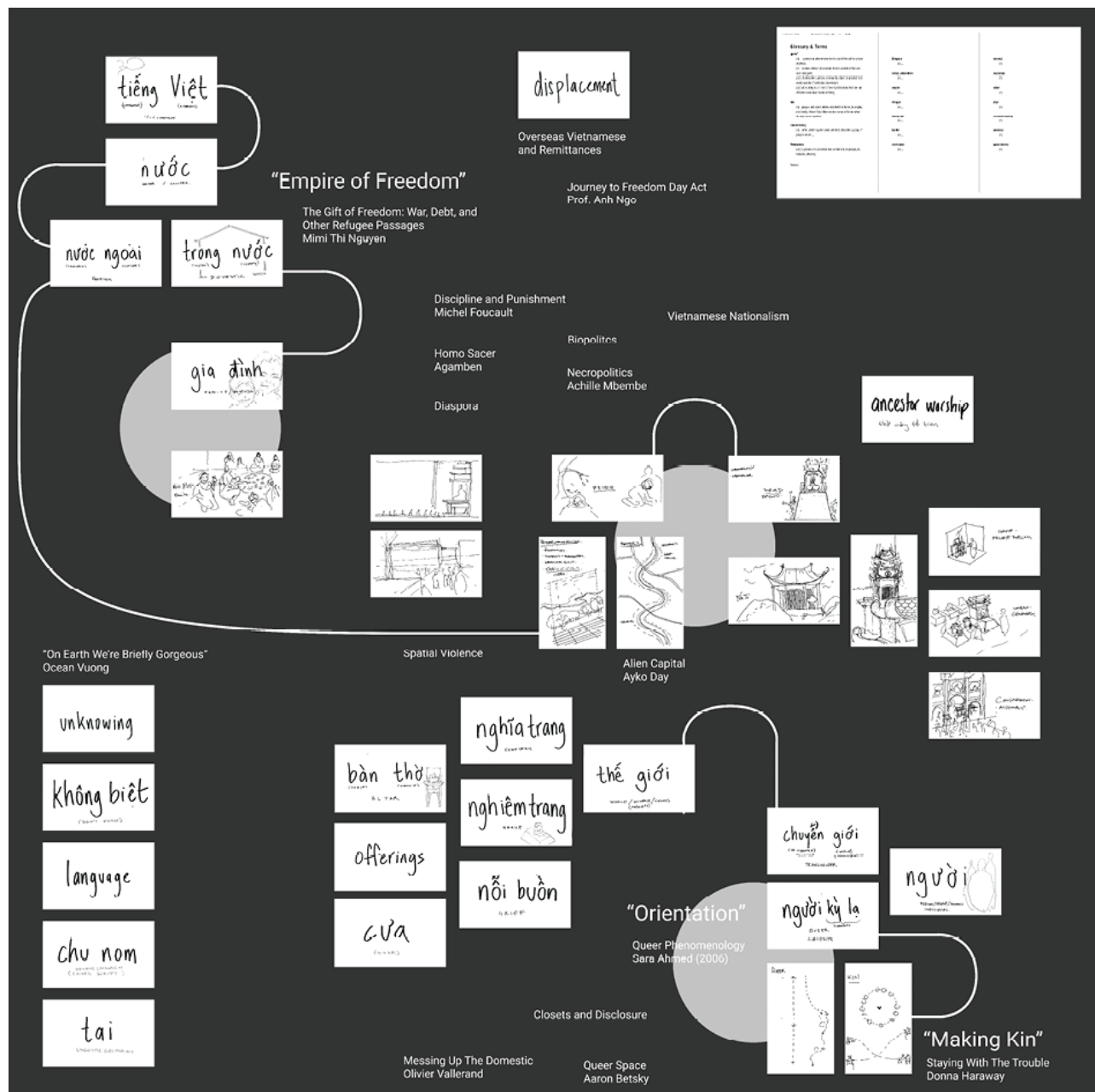
The spaces between languages

In this incomplete literature map and glossary, I look to Sara Ahmed’s philosophy, Ocean Vuong’s poetry, and Heonik Kwon’s texts on Vietnamese death practices. Each of them embraces dual and multiple meanings of words. I continue this line of thinking to hold the many definitions of ‘offerings’ for the framing of my thesis.

Translating Vietnamese words to English and vice-versa was and still is an important for me to communicate with family members. There is a difficulty and shame in not being proficient in one’s mother tongue that is common to children of a diaspora. The cue cards I have drafted showcase the building of a Vietnamese glossary for my project. Queer, Vietnamese poet Ocean Vuong discusses the “stunted mother tongue”² in his novel ‘On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous.’ In relation to a disappearing mother tongue, he asks “can one take pleasure in loss without losing oneself entirely?”³



Fig. 23. ‘nghĩa trang’ - grave. Cue card note by author, 2021.



To practice my mother tongue, as stunted as it is, is a pain and a pleasure that I learn to carry throughout this work. By embracing the dualism and multiplicity of these words, I begin to assess a key word in the project, which is the 'offering' and its many forms.



Fig. 25. Photos of burning joss paper to ancestors, an exchange of ghost money between worlds. Photos by Flickr and Buk It Brown Experience.

Source: <https://www.chineseamericanfamily.com/how-to-buy-and-burn-joss-paper/>



Fig. 26. 'ritual' and a sketch of joss paper burning. Cue card notes by author, 2021.

What is an Offering?

Offerings are donated physical things or actions, used to strengthen the relationship between descendent and ancestor. This can take the form of giving fruit, burning paper money, or replacing flowers on the altar or shrine. These offerings pay tribute to ancestors by transforming material into ceremony.

As Marcel Mauss' discusses, gifts (and I add, offerings) exist under obligations within an economy of exchange valued by giver and recipient⁴. This exchange value is mediated by space, as offerings and the altars they are placed on are connected to various geographies.

The act of burning votive money, paper cellphones and even paper house models, is an offering that is commonly performed at Vietnamese altars⁵. Often referred to as 'hell money,' descendants make contributes to what anthropologist Heonik Kwon calls 'the bank of hell.'⁶ It is believed this act helps repay the debts that grandparents have offered to their descendants, and puts forward a credit system that helps ancestors exist comfortably in the afterlife.

In our globalized world, these economies of exchange are further complicated to include conditions of transnational debt and credit between ancestors and descendants. For Vietnamese diaspora, offerings take the form of remittances, international money transfers or gifts, that is sent to families left behind to restore their homes, altars and shrines⁷. Ivan Small, an American sociocultural anthropologist of Southeast Asian studies, notes how these gifts given from overseas relatives in the West make up for their absence to their families and communities in Vietnam⁸. It is interesting to note how the offering can act as stand in for the absent body to a place. Is it the diasporic body, its labour or its productive value that must be offered up to enjoy this moment we have inherited?

Does offering money, whether in the afterlife or on earth, make up for the labour of care, of the hand that gives, prays, and offers itself up to its ancestors and descendants? How equitable is this for relatives who cannot provide this kind of 'care' through capitalist production? What can a non-normative, non-productive, 'queer' descendant offer instead?

To tackle these questions around what I am expected to sacrifice and offer, I propose my own architectural work and research as an offering to honour my ancestors, kin, and communities.

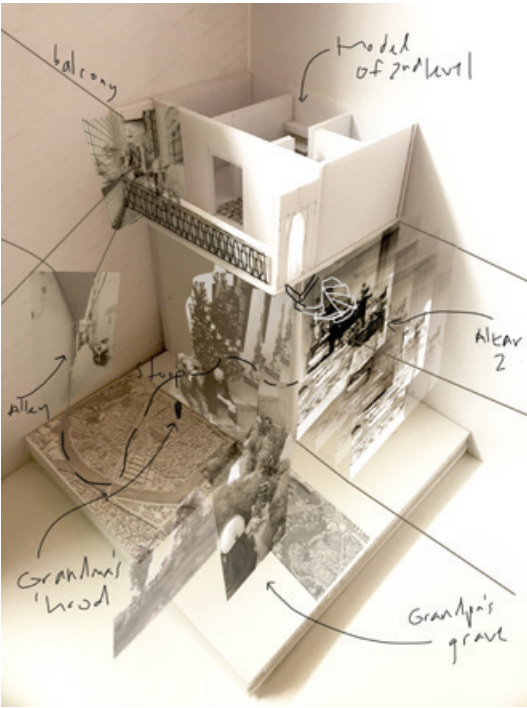


Fig. 27. Hybrid drawing of grandma's house. The journey from the altar to the cemetery. Drawing by author, 2021



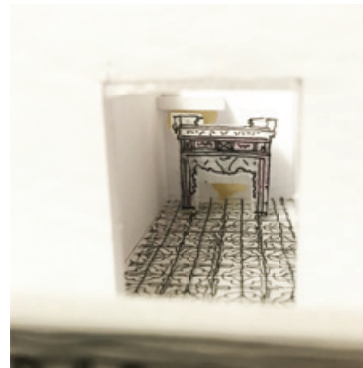
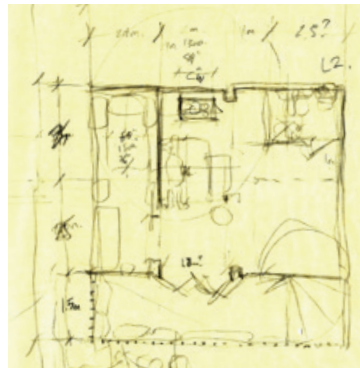
Fig. 28. Photos, sketches and sketch models of Grandma's altar room in Haiphong, Vietnam. By author, 2016, 2021.

An offering for ba ngoai's altar

Altars and offerings upon them are connected to various geographies, which I visualize in this hybrid drawing of my grandmother's house in Haiphong. From my grandmother's altar room to the gravesite where my late grandfather rests, my family and I travel through Haiphong's markets to pick up fresh fruit, flowers, and joss paper, following the lines of exchange and labour to continue our relationship between the living and dead.

Working from archived photos from my visit in 2016 and memories of what the space felt like, I laboured a foamcore sketch model that was photographed, drawn on top of and collaged with imagery of Vietnam, the altar, cemeteries and my family taken from my smartphone and Google Maps.

I have always been enamored by my grandmother's house, as my memories as a toddler to my time surveying it as an adult, it is a strange and familiar space that I have wanted to document through memory and making.



Reflecting on making this drawing in my dorm room at Carleton, I acknowledge how my grandmother's house is within me wherever I go. In this institution, I carry these relations to my family, their homes and their altars in what I draw and make. This process to move back and forth between Haiphong, Mississauga and Ottawa through memory and making displaces how I conventionally understand altars and offerings. In making sense of these multiple sites, I embark on a method to understand my own unique way of offering while embracing my queer identity.

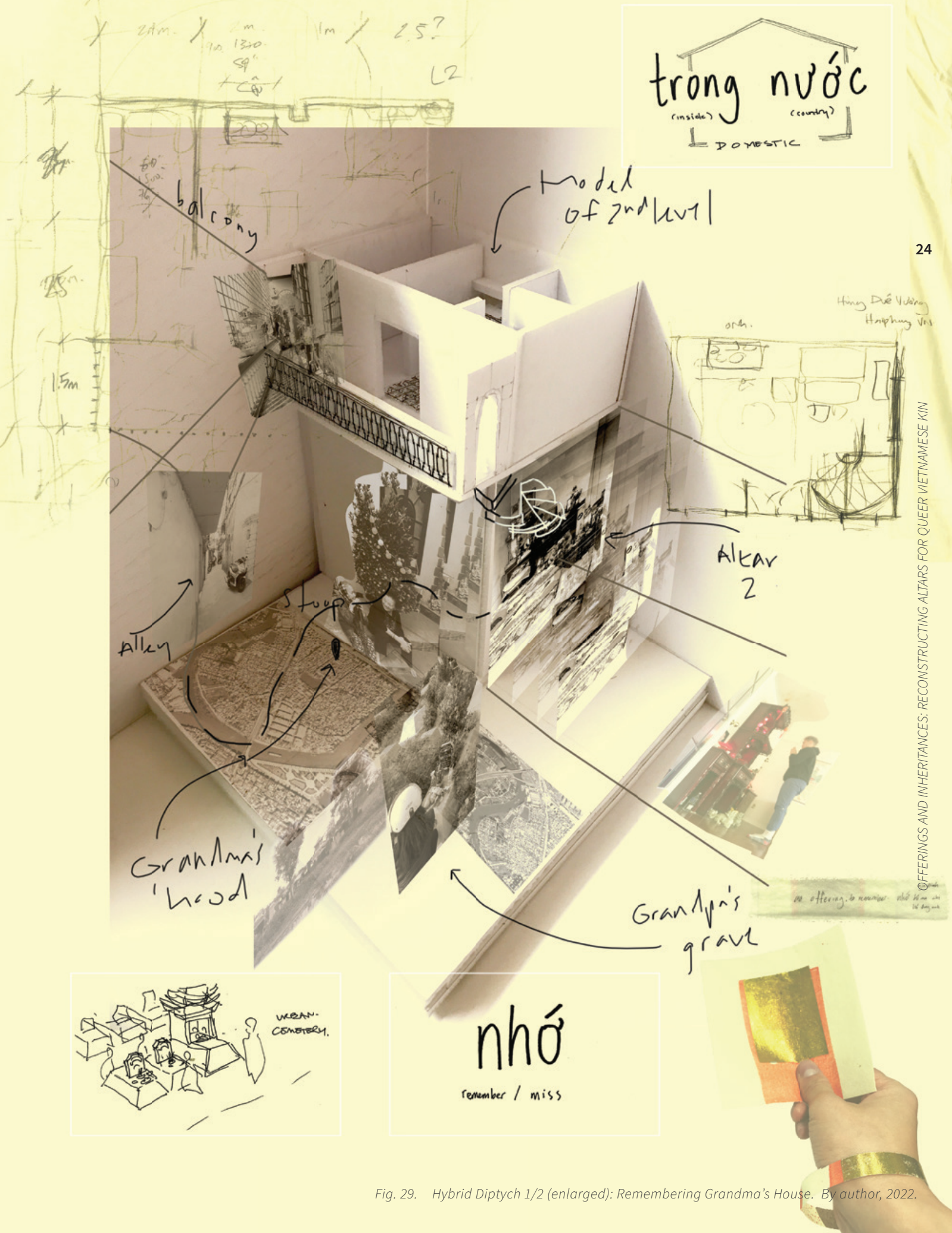


Fig. 29. Hybrid Diptych 1/2 (enlarged): Remembering Grandma's House. By author, 2022.

First, an apology

I'm sorry but -

How did we get here and how do we remain here?

"I'm sorry" is an effective offering, perhaps far too effective for people like us.

In Ocean Vuong's debut novel, *'On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous,'* "sorry" was one of the most important English words that Little Dog and his mother, Rose, learned in Hartford, Connecticut. An apology is an offering from the refugee to the nation, as a "passport to remain" in America, and as a racialized labourer.

He explains that "sorry" helped Little Dog and his mother continue serving white patrons at the Vietnamese nail salon. After working with the toxins used to beautify the hands and feet of mostly white women, any imperfections in their work could be remedied with "I so sorry ma'am!" and "I fix for you, no problem."

"Sorry" allows me to stay closer to whiteness. It allows me to appear smaller to others, to hide, to remain "hard to read," or so "Zen like!" To play a role that is expected of me due to my race.

"Sorry," is what my parents taught us to embody as a means of survival. Is it being humble, or are we lacking self-confidence?

"Sorry, my mistake. I will repeat myself." I said to the architecture professor, after it was clear that she wasn't really going to listen to what I had to say anyway.

"Sorry, I don't understand." I say, when I really did understand every word my colleague said about suppliers from China bidding for our project - but I was shocked that he had the audacity to mimic them in 'Asian accent.'

"Sorry, what do you mean by a Vietnamese perspective in architecture?"

"Sorry," I would ask sheepishly to my advisors, - "is this academic enough?"

"Sorry," I would say to my friends, "that you have to reassure me so much."

"I'm sorry, Ông Bà" I say to my altar, "Did I make you proud?"



Endnotes

- 1 “Those who do not worship their ancestors so that their ancestors have to become miserably hungry souls are considered extremely undutiful. Therefore, worshipping ancestors is more important than showing gratitude to parents who give birth to and nurture us.” ; Tran Van Huan. “The Tradition of Ancestor Worship in Vietnamese Families from the Beginning to the Present Day and Some Current Problems” in *International Journal of Research in Sociology and Anthropology (IJRSA)*, Vol 5 Issue 4 2019: 14, <http://dx.doi.org/10.20431/2454-8677.0504002>
- 2 Ocean Vuong. *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous: a novel*. (Penguin Press: New York, 2019), p.31
- 3 Ocean Vuong. (2019), p.31
- 4 “The connection of exchange contracts among men with those between men and gods explains a whole aspect of the theory of sacrifice.” ; Marcel Mauss, “Gifts and return gifts” in *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*. Translated by Ian Cunnison. (London, 1966), p.13
- 5 Gertrund Hüwelmeier, “Cell phones for the spirits: ancestor worship and ritual economies in Vietnam and its diasporas.” In *Material Religion*. Sep2016, Vol. 12 Issue 3, (Berlin, Germany: Humboldt University of Berlin, 2016), pp. 294-321
- 6 Heonik Kwon, “The Dollarization of Vietnamese Ghost Money.” In *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Mar 2007, Vol. 13, No. 2. (Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 2007), pp. 73-90
- 7 Ivan Small, “‘Over There’: Imaginative Displacements in Vietnamese Remittance Gift Economies” in *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 3, (Berkeley CA, 2012), pp. 157-183.
- 8 Ivan Small, (Berkeley CA, 2012), pp. 157-183.

Chapter 4 - Reconstructing a queer method

Migrating across multiple sites of exchange



Photo of young Thompson in Vietnam in 1994. By author, 2021.

Stickers and cards from VietQ, a conference I attended on Feb 29, 2020 in Seattle for queer Vietnamese folks in the Pacific Northwest. I was one of five Canadians visiting, and it felt super affirming to be in this space. I hold these memories dear.



Fig. 30. 'người kỳ lạ' Google's translation for "queer"; Cue card note by author, 2021.

'người kỳ lạ' is not necessarily used colloquially for 'queer.' Words for queer identities in Vietnamese are shifting as LGBTQ+ issues take shape in the homeland/diaspora. I find it interesting that this translation is composed of the words 'person' and 'strange'. A synonym for 'curiosity.'

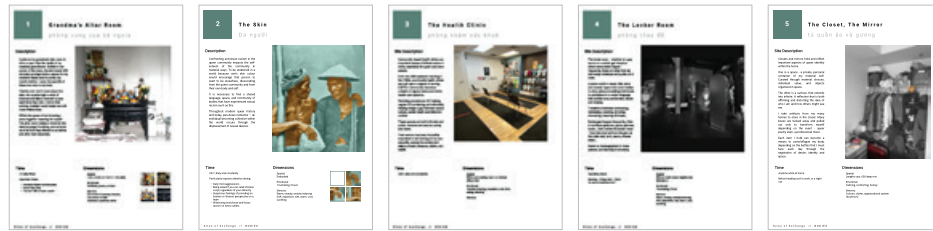
Queer and trans Vietnamese youth experience a unique internal familial displacement where it is assumed that embracing queer identity is an act of disconnecting from inherited cultural practices. In Vietnam and in the diaspora, homophobia and transphobia towards queer and trans Vietnamese kinfolk have often been reported within the nation¹ and within the home². Queerness and non-normativity are something that nation states, and families cast out as a "Western disease"³ or "social evil"⁴ as these identities disrupt the conventional trajectory for Vietnamese genealogy.

Even the term '**queer**' is disconnected from its origins. Sara Ahmed notes its etymology, which comes from the Indo-European word for "twist". Queer is a *spatial* term, which was translated into a sexual term, a term for twisted sexuality that does not follow a "straight line".⁵

I am here today as a result of many twists and turns along various lines of migration. As a child of refugees from Vietnam, one of 110,000⁶ boat people from Southeast Asia that immigrated to Canada in the 1980s, I have inherited my family's histories and artifacts of displacement. Also, as a queer Asian Canadian from Toronto, I belong to chosen family members with similar inherited histories. My queer kinship ties include friends displaced or uprooted from Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia, China, Malaysia, the Philippines, South Korea, and beyond the Asia-Pacific. In my altars, I desire to honour both families of blood and choice.

The movement, displacement, and migration of queer Vietnamese and pan-Asian community members in Toronto can be traced throughout history and the present day. The negotiations between multiple spaces foreground an incomplete catalogue I have titled as multiple 'Sites of Exchange.'

Bodies
(Tolerance)



Streets
(Visibility)



Clubs
(Movement)

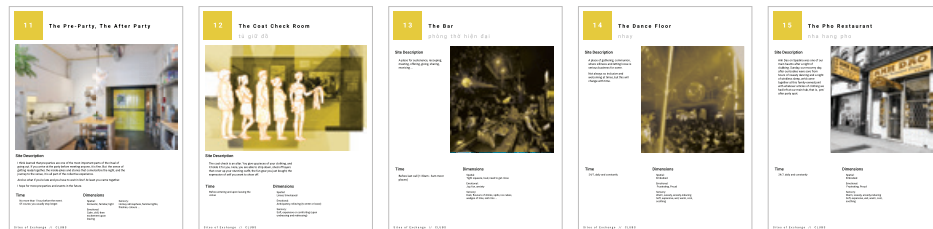


Fig. 31. 15 Sites of Exchange: everyday altars and offerings. By author, 2021.

See Appendix 1 for the detailed atlas.

Sites of Exchange

The 'Sites of Exchange' are a catalogue of spaces where identities are negotiated through offerings, either gifted or performed. It is an incomplete atlas of spaces pertaining to different scales of intimacy: bodies, streets, and nightclubs. These sites are identified as conditions where queer and racialized bodies mediate the spiritual with the spatial.

In this project I selected fifteen sites, five sites pertaining to each of the three scales of intimacy. This atlas is intentionally left incomplete. Many more sites could be added to encompass the various ways that queerness and diasporic identities are offered, exchanged and negotiated in space. This is to say – there are endless sites of exchange when undertaking the feat of finding ones identity in the built environment, and these sites do not conform to a singular set of rules. These sites outline my personal encounters and engagement that have identified and underpinned my experiences with geographies of queerness.

Many of these sites contend with mundane, everyday lived spaces where messy identity-making is performed and reinforced. As scholar Martin Manalansan IV discusses in his ethnographic study of gay Filipino mens' daily lives in New York City, "everyday life is the space for examining the creation and rearticulation of queer selves in the diaspora."⁷ Thus, these everyday sites are a fertile ground to investigate how identities and rituals are negotiated.



Fig. 34. 5 Sites of Exchange of the Body. By author, 2021.

Summary of the Sites of the Body (Individual)

The Sites of Exchange of the Body deal with intimate spaces as they pertain to an individual's physical and spiritual body. These sites are often seen as private, or deal with the interior lives of individuals, from their internal physiological systems at a medical clinic to the reflection of their outward image in a mirror.

Sites of the Body (Individual)

1. The Altar Room
2. The Skin
3. The Health Clinic
4. The Locker Room
5. The Closet, The Mirror

Offerings for the body can range from anti-retroviral medication to prevent HIV transmission or the yellow, brown and black skin that signifies one as *other* in a white world. These sites at their various scales were selected to discuss how the physical, queer, diasporic, Vietnamese body confronts individual bodily needs and desires in everyday life. Each pertains to different aspects of identity: ancestral lineage, ethnicity and race, internal bodily health, eros and pleasure, and domestic extension.



Fig. 32. Top: Showers in the Tokyo Pod Hotel (2018), Photo by Nacasa & Partners Inc. / Atsushi Nakamichi.

Fig. 33. Bottom: Two Chinese Workers. (1871-1872), Photo by John Thomson, Wikimedia Commons.

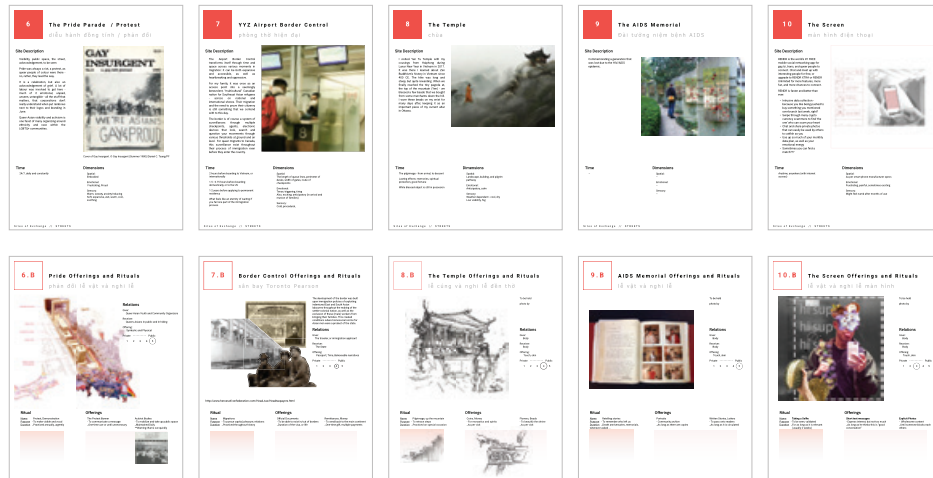


Fig. 36. Five Sites of the Street. By author, 2021.

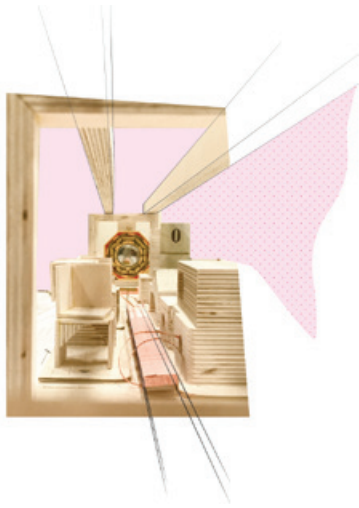


Fig. 35. Collage with a conceptual model of Pride on Yonge Street. By author, 2021.



Fig. 37. Queer Asian Youth march at Toronto Pride Parade. By Shawn Goldberg/ Shutterstock, 2017.

Summary of the Sites of the Street (Public)

The Sites of Exchange of the Street deal with public institutions and spaces as they pertain to the broader queer and Vietnamese community's interface with infrastructure, legal systems, and collective memory. These sites include religious institutions, government technologies (such as immigration and legal systems), memorials or digital spaces and the many individuals in the city. These sites reveal the frictions where queer Asian individuals relate to and interact with national and global LGBTQ2S+ activism, citizenship, and publicly visible sexuality.

Sites of the Street (Public)

1. The Pride Protest
2. Border Control
3. The Temple
4. The AIDS Memorial
5. The Screen

Offerings for the street can take the form of legal documents, passports, money, a selfie, and basically anything that signifies you are a person existing in capitalist Canadian society.

As these sites operate in the public domain (in the city, or to wider communities), there are different rules and norms to abide by as opposed to in the private and semi-private realm.

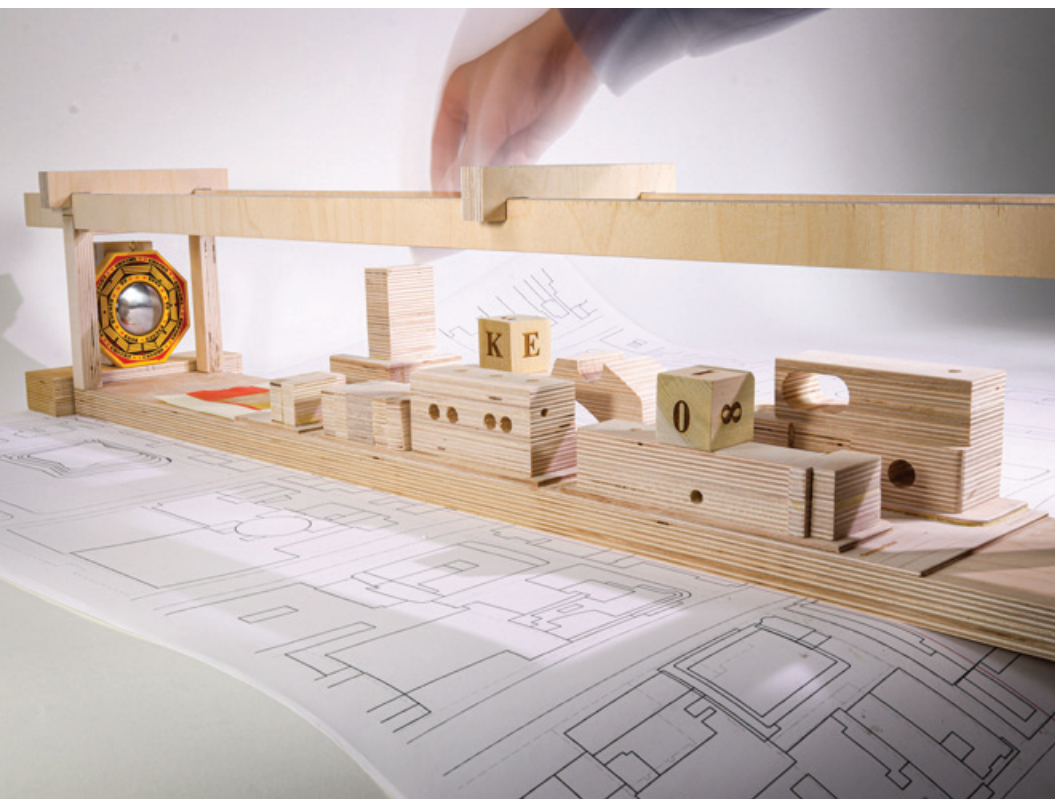


Fig. 39. Early site models of a conceptual reading of Yonge Street. By author, 2021



Fig. 38. Placing altars along Yonge Street - a conceptual study in movement and play. By author, 2021



Fig. 40.
Distributing,
stacking, and
rebuilding
altars along
Yonge Street.
By author,
2021

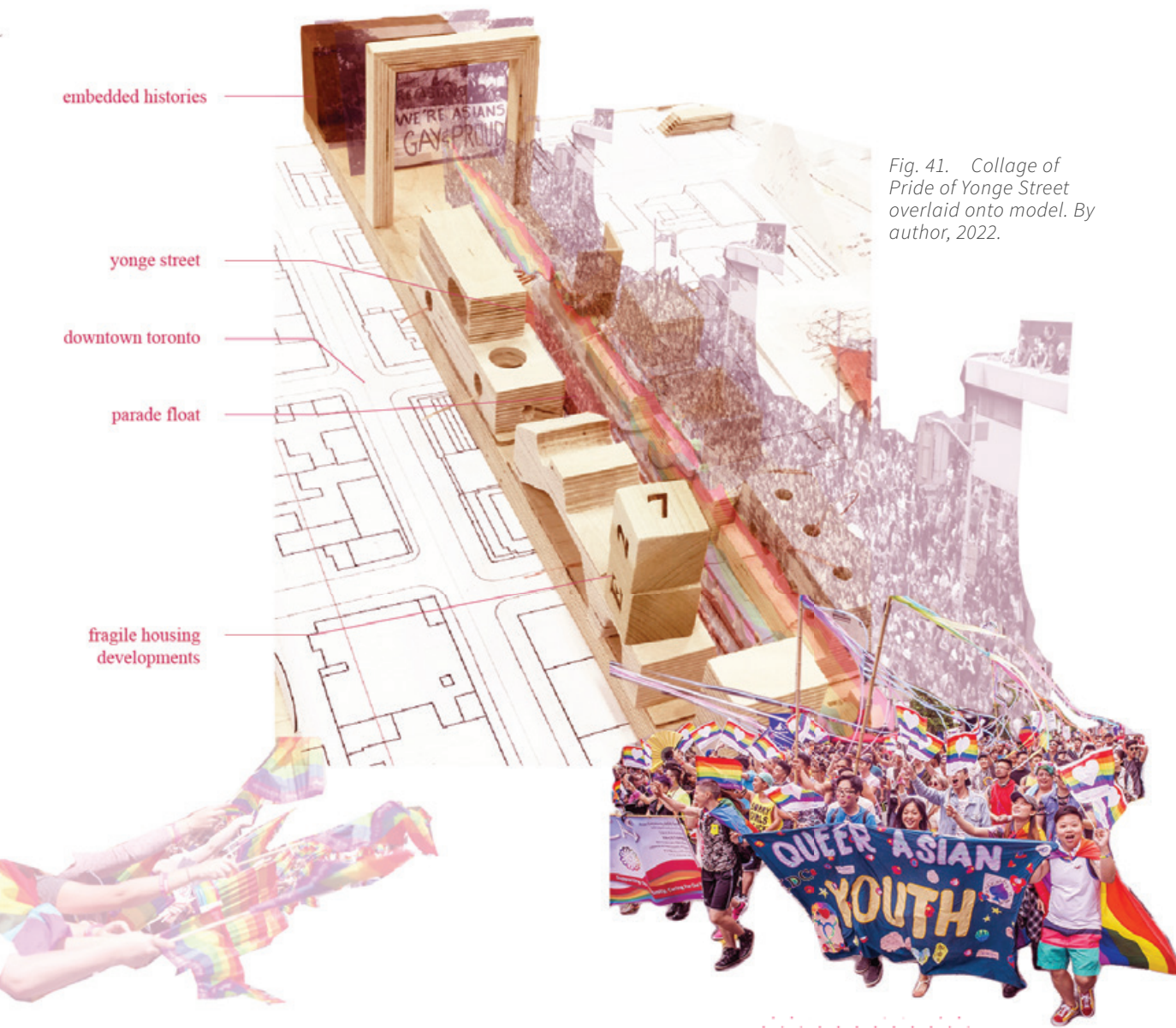


Fig. 41. Collage of Pride of Yonge Street overlaid onto model. By author, 2022.

33

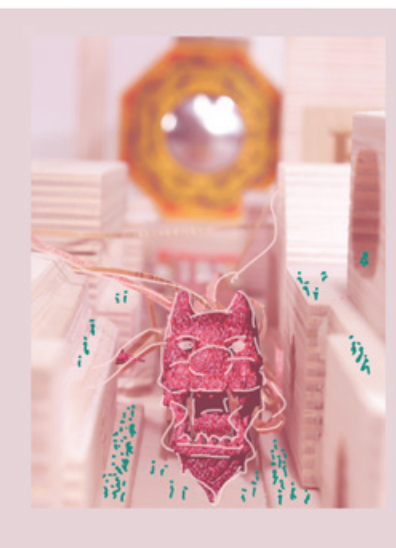


Fig. 42. Collage of a rough, pink dragon float at Pride. By author, 2021.



Fig. 43. Collage of the pink sandpaper float along Yonge Street. By author, 2021.



Offerings in the public realm have limitations. What is considered an acceptable form of exchange often has to do with adhering to certain class, gender, and racial norms.

These sites were picked to look at how an individual is collectively othered through racial (Asian) identities in public life throughout history and today.

Clubs

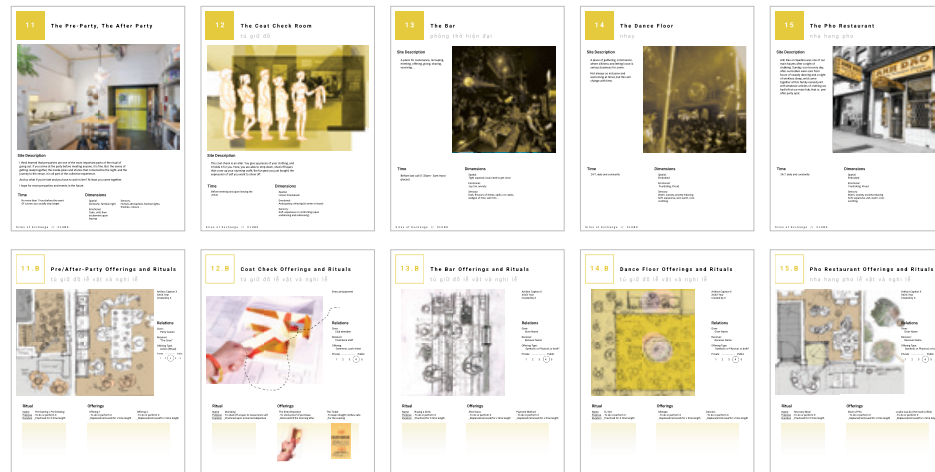


Fig. 45. Sites of Exchange of the Club.
By author, 2022.

Summary of the Sites of the Club (Collective)

The Sites of Exchange of the Club deal with the sequence of spaces for queer, Vietnamese and fellow pan-Asian bodies as they practice the rituals tied to going out to a nightclub together. These sites involve a subculture in the queer Vietnamese diaspora, one that I am intimately connected to. The care takers of the space are party goers, ravers, artists, DJs, and their many friends. The exchanges within these sites are rooted in celebration, joy, creativity and release from holding loss and displacement daily in the queer diasporic body.

Sites of the Club (Collective)

1. The Pre-Party
2. The Coat Check
3. The Bar
4. The Dance Floor
5. The Pho Restaurant



Fig. 44. Photograph of DJ Station, a popular gay nightclub attended in Bangkok, Thailand.
source: DJ Station, 2016.



Fig. 46. *Exchanging a ticket at The Coat Check.*
By author, 2021.

Offerings in sites of the nightclub can take the form of a coat check ticket, a piece of clothing, a wrist to place a stamp on, a bowl of pho, or a shot of alcohol. These items are tied to rituals of sustenance, enjoyment, and the creation of a space that frees people to the burden of traumatic histories, the pain of anti-Asian racism, and an outlet to feel seen and whole in a space built for them.

These sites were selected as the rituals and offerings reveal the spaces and ways in which new generations of queer, Vietnamese and pan-Asian millennials create new practices of care and belonging for one another through celebration and creative joy.

This work pays tribute to the queer Asian family who raised me on the evenings, weekends and parties that brought us together. I am fortunate to be supported by chosen family members who help affirm a sense of belonging by offering who I am to them.

Endnotes

1 Mai Thảo Yên, “Constructing the Vietnamese Queer Identities: A Hierarchy of Class, Gender, and Sexuality.” Thesis, (University of Helsinki, Faculty of Social Sciences, 2016), pp. 1-5.

2 Thy Vo, “A Hard Silence to Break: LGBT Vietnamese Struggle for Understanding,” Voice of OC, July 9, 2021, <https://voiceofoc.org/2016/02/a-hard-silence-to-break-lgbt-vietnamese-struggle-for-understanding/>.

3 Thy Vo, “A Hard Silence to Break,” Voice of OC, 2021.

4 Mai Thảo Yên, Thesis, (University of Helsinki, 2016), p.1.

5 Sara Ahmed, “Chapter 2: Sexual Orientation” in *Queer Phenomenology*, (Duke University, 2006) p.67

6 Radio Canada International, “‘Boat-People’: A Refugee Crisis - Vietnamese-Canadian History,” Radio Canada International, 2014, <https://www.rcinet.ca/patrimoine-asiatique-en/le-mois-du-patrimoine-asiatique-au-canada/les-refugies-de-la-mer-la-communaute-vietnamienne/>, accessed May 7 2022.

7 Martin F. Manalansan IV, “Migrancy, Modernity, Mobility: Quotidian Struggles and Queer Diasporic Intimacy,” in *Queer Migrations : Sexuality, U.S. Citizenship, and Border Crossings*, edited by Eithne Luibhéid and Lionel Cantú Jr, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 146-60.

quên

forget

belonging

thước kẻ
và
nhà

THINGS -
PRIVATE DWELLING

Fig. 47. Hybrid Diptych 2/2 (enlarged): Rituals of belonging on Yonge Street. By author, 2022.

Fig. 48. Words to remember when designing (Part 1). By author, 2022.



Within this space of not knowing,

37

of misunderstand-



-ing how I fit into this mess,

preoccupied by



how I am seen or

unseen in this work,

jumping between



the many places my people call home,

if you, too,



are in a similar space with me,

then I offer these altars to you.



Chapter 5 - Duties and Desires: New Altar Practices

Working with and against inherited conventions

38



Fig. 49. 'belonging'
Vietnamese translation:
composed of 'thuộc' (belong)
and 'về' (home). Cue card
note by author, 2021.

By investigating multiple sites of exchange, I have engaged in a multimodal method of making connections across geographies, timelines, and conventions that have allowed me to deepen my personal understanding of the lines of displacement that are imprinted onto the bodies and spaces where queer, Vietnamese and Asian diasporic communities navigate.

Within the embrace of my own familial displacement, I reflect upon my inheritances as a queer, Vietnamese diasporic designer to construct three altars that connect my filial duties and queer desires to scales of the individual, the public and the collective.

My new altar practices are in the form of three design proposals at three scales of intimacies identified as 'Altars of the Body', 'Streets' and 'Clubs.' These three altars reflect the three scales outlined in the Sites of Exchange, and explore three spatial design aspects: tolerance, visibility and movement (respectively).



Fig. 50. Early concept
sketches of the three
altars. By author 2021.

Fig. 51. Left to right:
Bodies, Streets and
Clubs. By author, 2021.

Introduction to the three altars

Vietnamese altar practices are implicated in traditions such as the repetition of norms, morality, conventions, and cultural histories from the homeland and diaspora. My three altars queer these traditions, reconstructing new forms of offerings at individual, public and collective scales of engagement.

By queering the altar and its origins, I propose a reclamation of the rituals and patriarchal philosophy that has been implemented with the intention to control and even shame queerness.

The practice of constructing these altars through a queer lens builds new rituals, habits, and creates space to envision a kind of possibility where queerness, Vietnamese diaspora and conventions can coexist.

Through each altar, I aim to weave a narrative shifting from each scale of intimacy: to the individual body, the bedroom, the city, the store, getting read for a dance, and heading to the nightclub space, mediated through digital screens. Through each space a world is made, with altars in each one that connect and disconnect at different scales through various offerings. These imagined worlds and altars are constructed with a range of different techniques including, analytic drawings with physical models, urban site plan and section drawings, as well as dance and animation.

The relationships to bodies, objects and rituals are underscored by offerings in the work. They break the traditions and scripts that we are expected to follow, skewing from the lines of familial investments we make, while offering new gifts to repay a debt back to ourselves.



Fig. 54. *The Altar of the Body in a suitcase.*
By author, 2022.



Fig. 53. *The Altar of the Street Plan Drawing.*
By author, 2022.



Fig. 52. *The Altar of the Club, stills from a music video.*
By author, 2022.



Fig. 55. Plan, section, elevation sketches of the suitcase in my dorm room in Ottawa.
By author, 2022

Altar of the Body: The Deployable Altar in a Suitcase

The altar of the body provides a space designed “to fit” my individual material world and spiritual practice as an architecture student. The altar is contained within a suitcase found in Ottawa, storing objects from my dorm room on Carleton University’s campus. This altar honours the migrations and labour that stem from the histories of forced displacement in Southeast Asia and Turtle Island (North America). From Vietnam, Mississauga, to the Leeds House residence room, I use this temporary living space to orient myself within the multiple lines that I follow as a queer, Vietnamese graduate student. This suitcase altar provides a purpose-built space for my collected objects.

As people (especially people of a diaspora) we tend to collect the things that matter to us and bring them with us to where we will settle. The items we carry and the containers they are transported in are important design considerations in the arrival to and from places of dwelling. Arriving to Ottawa, I had packed my parent’s van full of my belongings within boxes, bags, and suitcases. These objects have arrived, lived, and will be leaving with me during my thesis year in Ottawa.



Fig. 56. Sketch of the items I will carry in my suitcase altar.
By author, 2022

The suitcase also acts as an archive for my thesis work, as a storage for drawings created throughout the year. It is modified with compartments to tightly fit delicate, permanent altar objects in transport. Ritual items that change frequently are designed with a looser fit.

At the start of the school year, I had brought with me photographs, books, personal artifacts from Toronto and Vietnam, which were unpacked and placed around the standard dorm room. I have used the stock furniture, walls, closets, hooks, surfaces, and storage spaces as the infrastructure to settle my home and create an altar dedicated to my family.



*Fig. 57. Thompson's closet, red suitcase and special altar objects highlighted.
By author, 2022*

Made of a collection of items that I hold dear, this altar in Ottawa has become an important reminder of the culture I have inherited, and the people I hold dear to me. How I take this with me remains undetermined, and perhaps the suitcase can provide a home for these memories in the interim.

The queer, diasporic body must constantly address aspects of constraint and tolerance within spaces of everyday life. In the **'Sites of Exchange'** for Bodies, I identified many sacred, domestic, and physiological spaces that act as storage, infirmary, and sanctuary in the bedroom, at the health clinic, and at the altar room. Considering comfort and personalization through dimensional tolerances scaled to my body can constrain and free up the ways I feel safety and desire in these spaces.

Fitting my personal altar within the generic dimensions of the hard-shell suitcase aims to unload the burden of migrating and moving through space, as a queer, Vietnamese designer. How will the suitcase make impressions onto my body as I hold it, carry it with me in my travels? How might this impact the way I travel, move, and think of a space for dwelling? How might the portable, non-permanent altar allow for a grounding, non-linear temporal custom-fit place made for me, wherever I go?

Altar of the Body: Drawings

1. Site Plans – Campus Plans
2. Suitcase and Body Plan, Section, Elevation
3. Suitcase Animation



Fig. 58. Campus Site Plan.
Leeds residence building
highlighted.
By author, 2022.

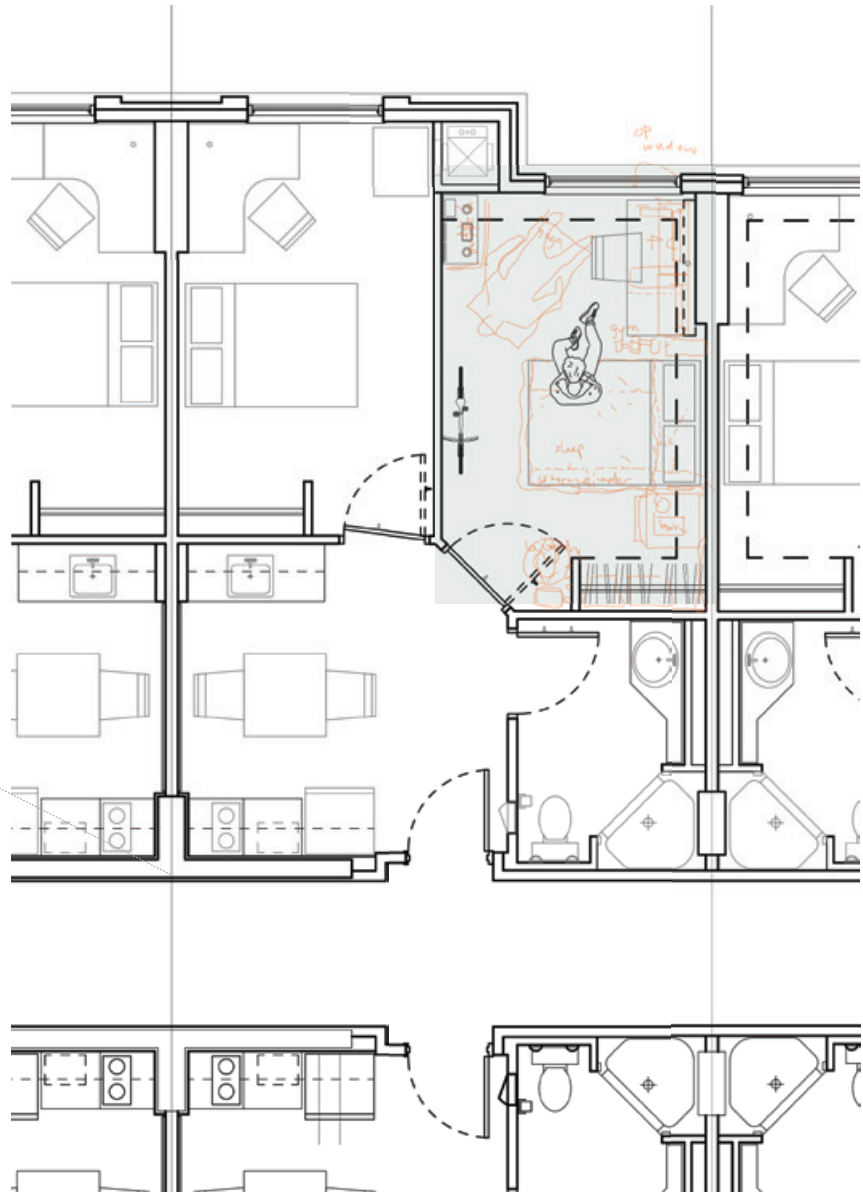


Fig. 59. Leeds Sixth Floor
Plan, and the dorm room
and suite plan sketch. By
author, 2022.



*Fig. 60. Suitcase drawings (plans, elevations, sections).
By author, 2022.*



Fig. 61. Opening, unpacking, expanding the suitcase altar. By author, 2022

Fig. 62. *Opening the suitcase altar to my body.* Collage by author, 2022

Altar of the Body: Moving Forward with the Suitcase

This collage illustrates how the suitcase altar will move with me and transform my relation to this thesis work, and my queer and Vietnamese identities. Much will be further explored in terms of the alterations to the suitcase, the design for tolerances, as well as the storage and display of this altar within the spaces of dwelling I have and will carry with me. The transnational and transient nature of Western and diasporic life in and out of a suitcase, as well as the symbols that a suitcase carries for ascending middle-class Canadians - an expectation informed by my family's Southeast Asian refugee history - all layer onto my future considerations of this altar.



Fig. 63. *In progress elevation of the columbarium at 8 Wellesley Street East. Drawing by author, 2022*

Altar of the Street: Queer Asian Toronto's Columbarium

The altar of the street deals with the public realm, and how spaces for grief and grieving can be embedded into civic infrastructure. My proposal offers public spaces for commemoration, archive, and exchange to make visible the loss of queer, diasporic communities being policed, displaced and forgotten in the city.

In Canadian cities, places to grieve tragic histories and collective loss are often contained within single-use landscapes or memorials. For the queer community in downtown Toronto, common 'acceptable' places to grieve are the AIDS memorial at Barbara Hall Park, or St. Jamestown Cemetery near Castle Frank Station.

In Haiphong, altars and their various forms shape private and public life and thus the infrastructure of grief in the city. Rather than one necropolis pushed at the edges of the urban core, multiple scales of cemeteries, pagodas, shrines, and altars shape the paths, nodes and edges of urban centers.

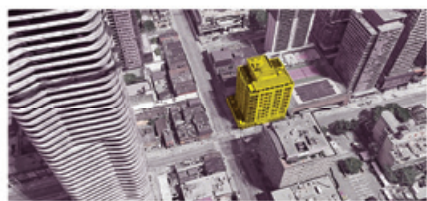


Fig. 64. Site Plan and existing photos of the site at 8 Wellesley Street East. Photos by author, Google Streetview 2022

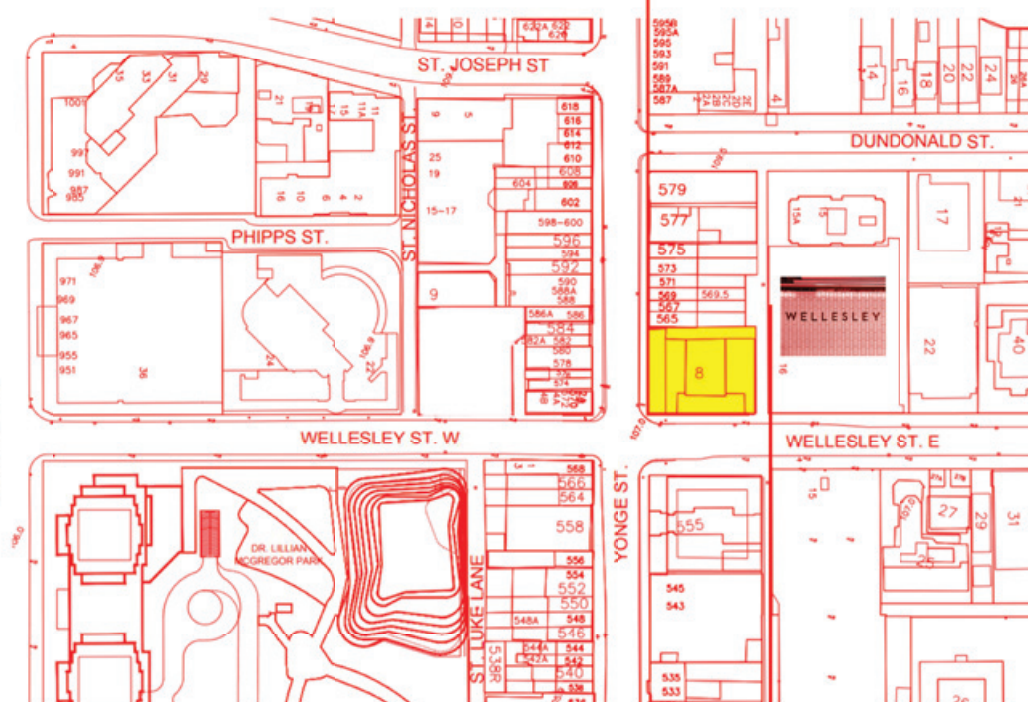




Fig. 65. Asian Community AIDS Services 2019 Pride Float, celebrating the 25th year of the organization operating. Photo by community member, 2019



Fig. 66. Archival photos of marchers for Gay Asians Toronto during Pride in the 1980s. Photo by community member, 2017

The altar for the street is a commemorative space that reappropriates five retail units at the corner of Yonge and Wellesley Street. This is a site of great movement and connection between Toronto's historic Gay Village, and the paths that queer people have made between this space in the city.

It sits at the base of 8 Wellesley Street East, an 11-storey condominium built in 1997 that is adjacent to the Wellesley TTC subway station. This public altar situates itself between public and private, living and dying, memory and forgetting, breaking the repetition of exchanging capital and excess in the city.

By transforming this corner, this urban altar restores the store for queer diasporic Asian communities to publicly grieve together. Generations of younger and older queer Asian folks can commemorate those who migrated but were unable to stay, those who have left and will not return, and to share both joy and pride for shared histories together.

Altar of the Street: Transforming the Street Corner

The intersection at Yonge and Wellesley is a highly trafficked area, as a threshold between major public, market, and historic queer urban precincts. From the civic and legislative buildings West of Bay Street to the shops along Yonge Street, as well as the queer nightclubs and apartments along Church Street, the 8 Wellesley Street East site straddles each of these lines of downtown Toronto, being a site of multiplicities all at once.

The street corner can be many things at different times of the day for different users. Geographically, this corner is an important intersection to enter and to leave the Church Wellesley Village, although the racial demographics and politics of who is welcome has only shifted slightly.

During late June, it is site where queer Asian communities gather to participate in Pride festivities as early as the 1980s, where burgeoning community groups such as Gay Asians Toronto and the Asian Lesbians of Toronto were visible in predominantly white gay and lesbian spaces. I imagine many of these early organizers traversed this intersection to get to the many bars and clubs that were once along Yonge Street¹.

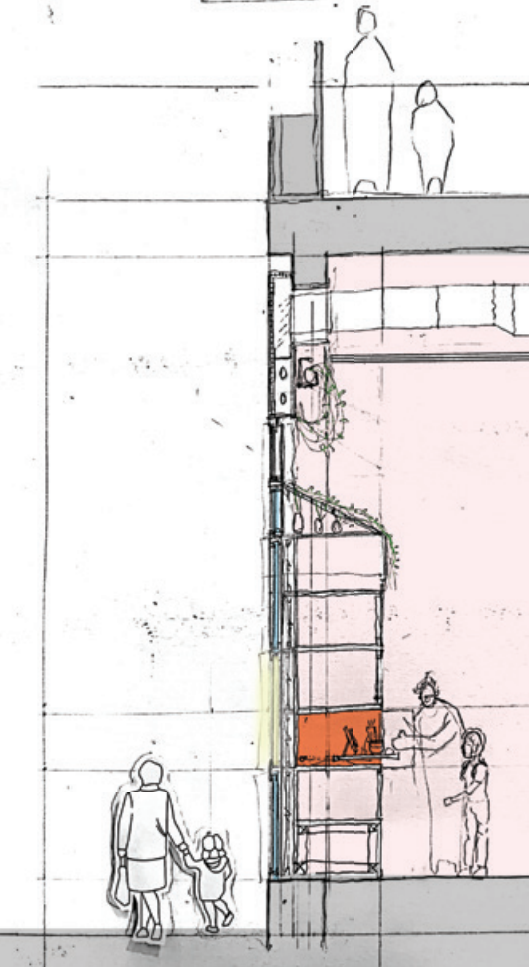


Fig. 67. Section of the columbarium shared altar in use, lighting up the facade. By author, 2022.



Fig. 68. Community zines and photo albums on exhibit during Invisible Footprints 2017: a queer East/Southeast Asian community exhibit in Toronto at OCAD U. Photos by Tony Chen, 2017.

The Yonge Wellesley corner was once a nexus to visit many AIDS Service Organizations from the 1990s to 2000s, servicing folks affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic, including Toronto's Asian Community AIDS Services (ACAS), until high rents dispersed both these services and the people who accessed them.

The street corner, as an infrastructural unit, offers a hard surface to witness the many frictions and forces that displace, unearth, and obscure the true complexity of the city. Through gentrification, shifting business ownerships, and large-scale redevelopment, the accessible city for the young, queer, diasporic individual gets smaller and compressed. These frictions are at odds with those with the agenda to cleanse messy and ambiguous urban conditions. Where can one go to grieve these inequities?

Altar of the Street: Program and Design

This design is composed of two programs: the 'Columbarium' and the 'Memory Exchange Centre.' The columbarium is situated along the façade and the three northern bays of the podium, lit by a porous storefront. Repetitions of cloudy, off-white glass panels wraps itself around the building's elevations, with openings to invite patrons at the corner of the intersection. In the interior, rows of stackable and shared altars can be accessed by dedicated community members. As altars are in use, glass panels on the exterior elevation will change color and translucency.

Queer Asian friends and family can leave objects that are significant in their daily lives, connecting to private altars in their homes or elsewhere. Multiple generations of queer Asian diaspora can commemorate community members who are distant and gone, to remember their impact on the city and our community.



Fig. 69. Photo of a community member opening a shared altar in the columbarium. By author 2022.



Fig. 70. Photo of a potential community exhibit in the memory exchange centre. By author, 2022.



The second program component, titled the Memory Exchange Centre, serves as a shared facility for artifacts that can be accessed by community members. These items can be held or taken by others to bring back to their home altars. Suitcases, bags, and boxes of items can be stored and exchanged. It is a moving, public archive of queer, diasporic, racialized family in the city.

Altar of the Street: Layered Drawings and Design Rituals

In the layered drawings that follow, I studied this prominent building corner with a practiced drawing rituals to cycle through architectural possibilities. I sketched options for accessible entry, flexible community exhibition and collections, and a space for community teatime to anchor and enliven the solemn columbarium niches in the centre's rear.

I layered trace paper, acetate, cut out scaled figures and furniture pieces, and shared altar niches modeled with paper and wood. Playing with material and scale, I filmed my process of how I consider transforming this building corner. I perform a series of design rituals upon this drawing of the street corner, an altar itself, that can hold the many offerings of programming, building assembly, and user experience.

Altar of the Street: What is centered?

Through the Columbarium and Memory Exchange Centre, I question: how can we embed new practices of belonging and grieving in the city? What happens when we center community loss and ritual in our civic infrastructure? How can the urban block become an offering or altar for citizens?

Fig. 71. a cue card with 'xin lỗi', the Vietnamese word for 'sorry'. Written by author, 2022.

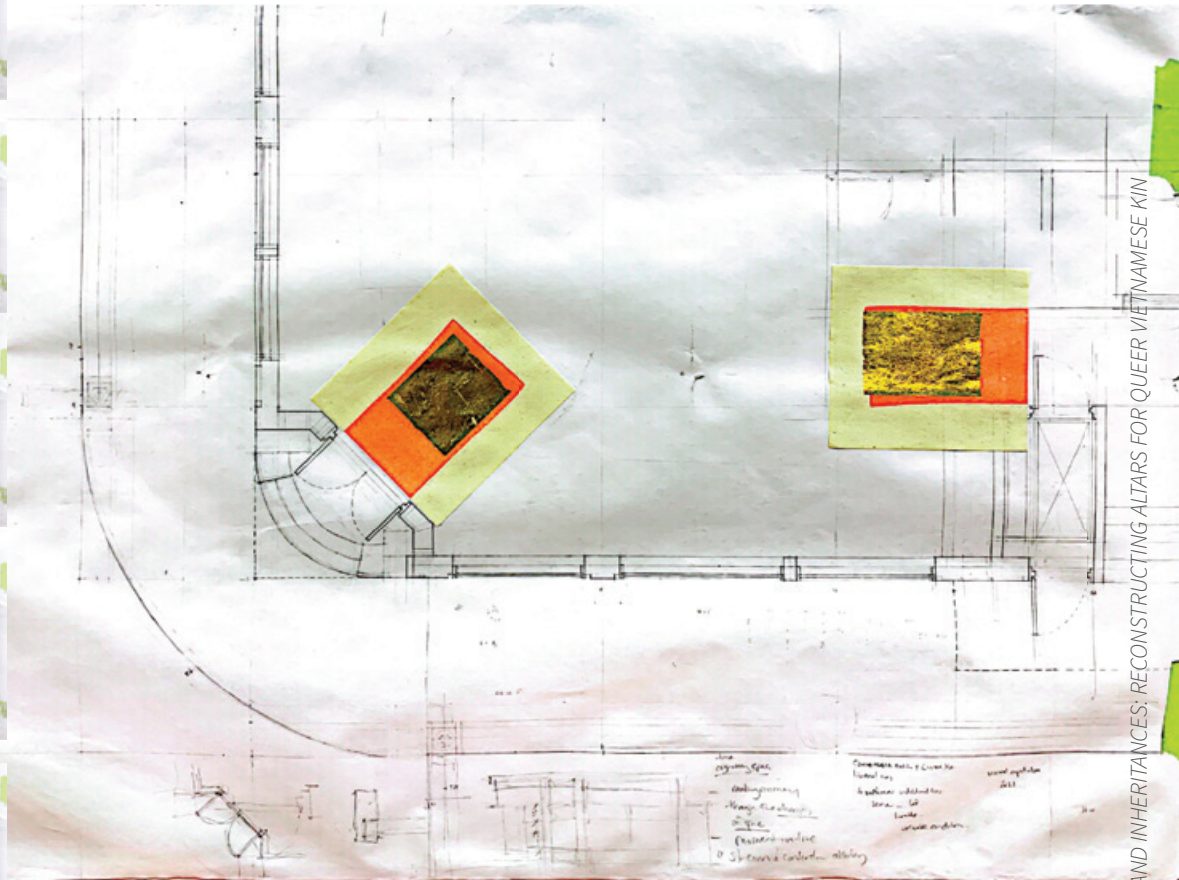


Fig. 72. Drafted floor plan of the columbarium within 8 Wellesley St E. Existing plan of former coffee shop. By author, 2022

Fig. 74. Drafted floor plan of the columbarium within 8 Wellesley St E. Second intervention layer - new access points, new facades and niches for commemoration. By author, 2022

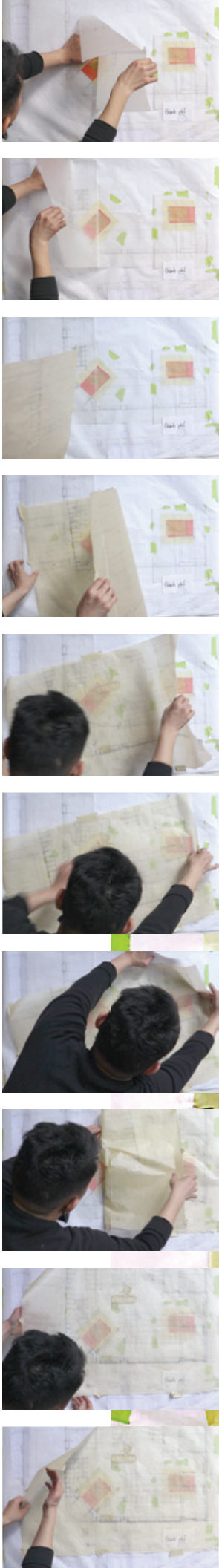
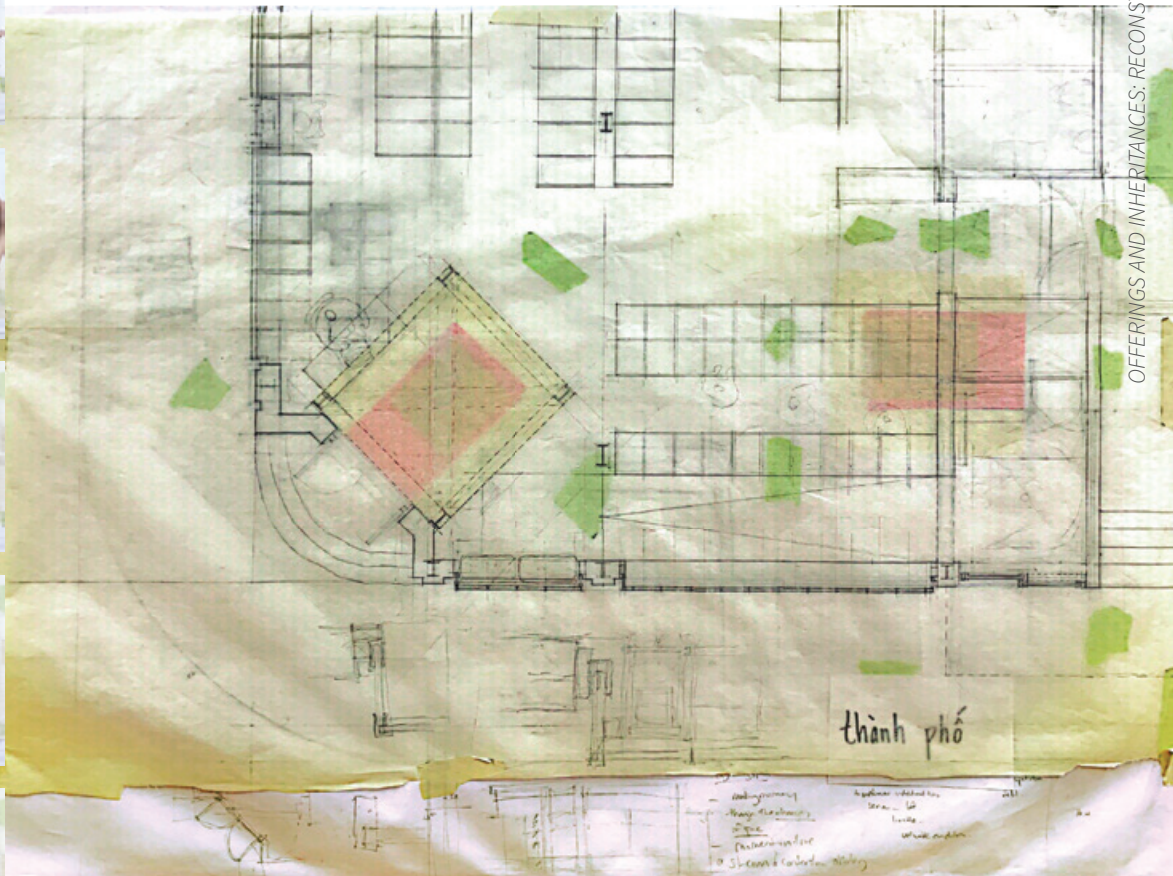




Fig. 75. Third layers, or programmatic offerings over the drafted floor plan at 8 Wellesley Street East. Laying over the columbarium. By author, 2022



Fig. 76. Laying over the rotating exhibition in the memory exchange centre. By author, 2022

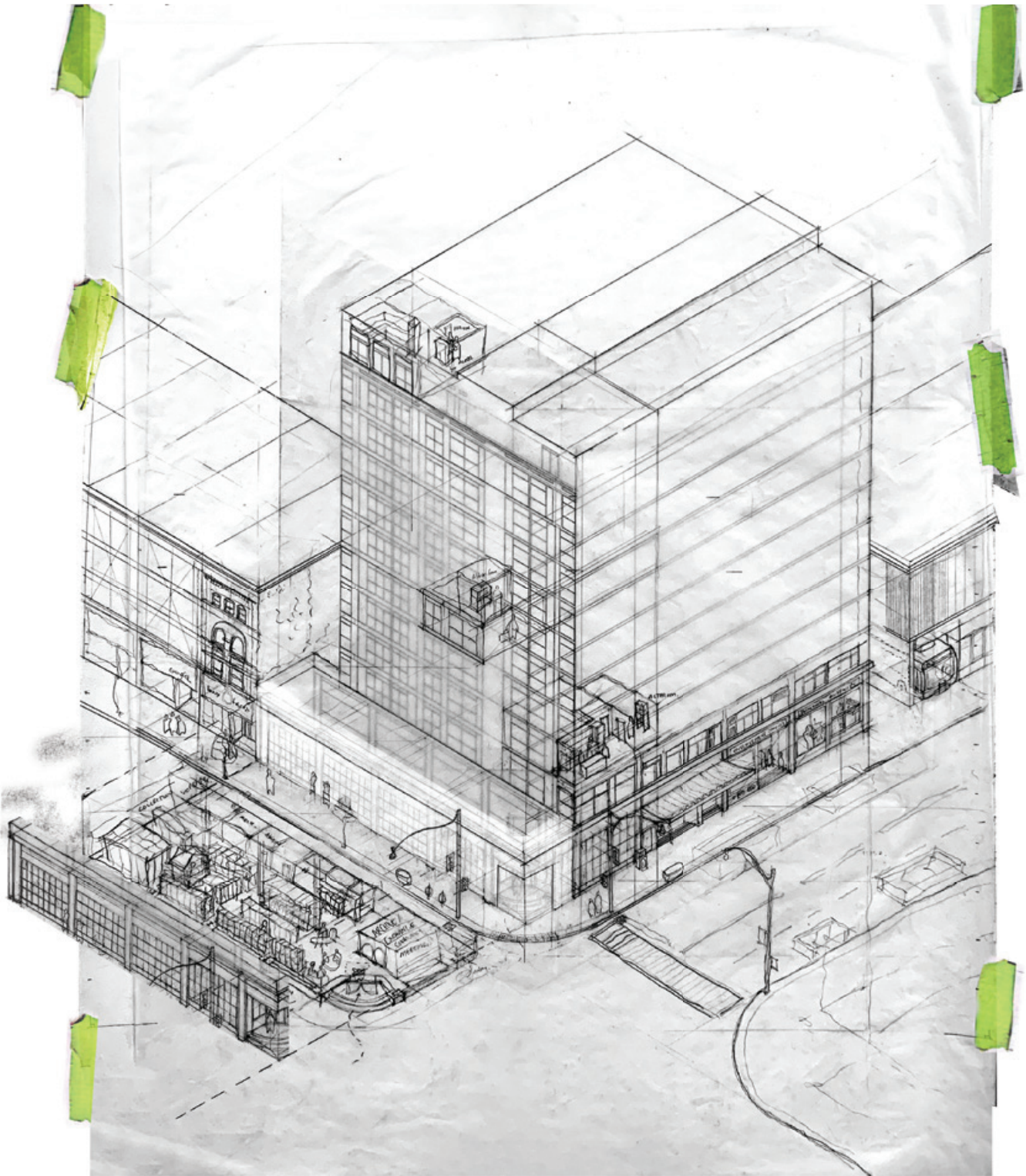
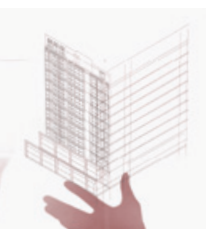


Fig. 78. Isometric drawing of the columbarium at 8 Wellesley Street East. By author, 2022.



Hold

Fig. 77. Three images: playing with the printed drawing and the shadow of my hand. Photos by author, 2022.



Peace



Push

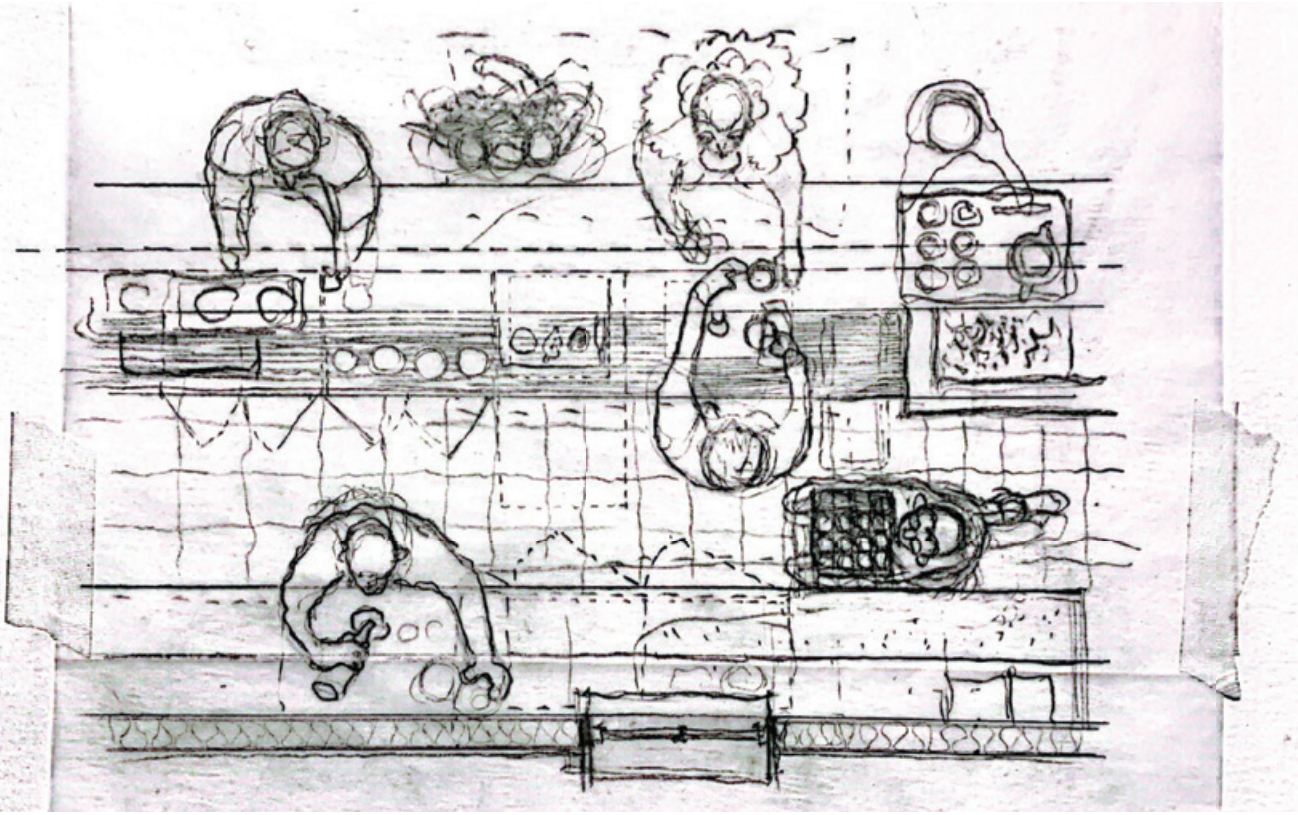


Fig. 79. Drafted floor plan of bar service with workers and patrons. By author, 2022

In Vietnam, Tet (lunar new year) is the year-end holiday where workers receive weeks off to spend time with their families, similar to the Christmas holidays in the West. During that time, mass movements of people are traveling back home, wherever that may be.

I was lucky enough to visit my family in 2017 during Tet while living in Southeast Asia for six months. I could see, feel, and experience what a difference this holiday meant in Vietnam in comparison to the West.

Altar of the Club: A queer dance for Lunar New Year

The final altar of the club is an animated collage that embodies the migrations, rituals and practices explored on a night out with queer Asian kinfolk in Toronto. Layering drawings, photographs, videos of performers and myself dancing, edited to the beat of an iconic 1970s Vietnamese funk track, I piece together parts of everyday movements of friends and family heading to a fictional lunar new year party for queer and Vietnamese folks.

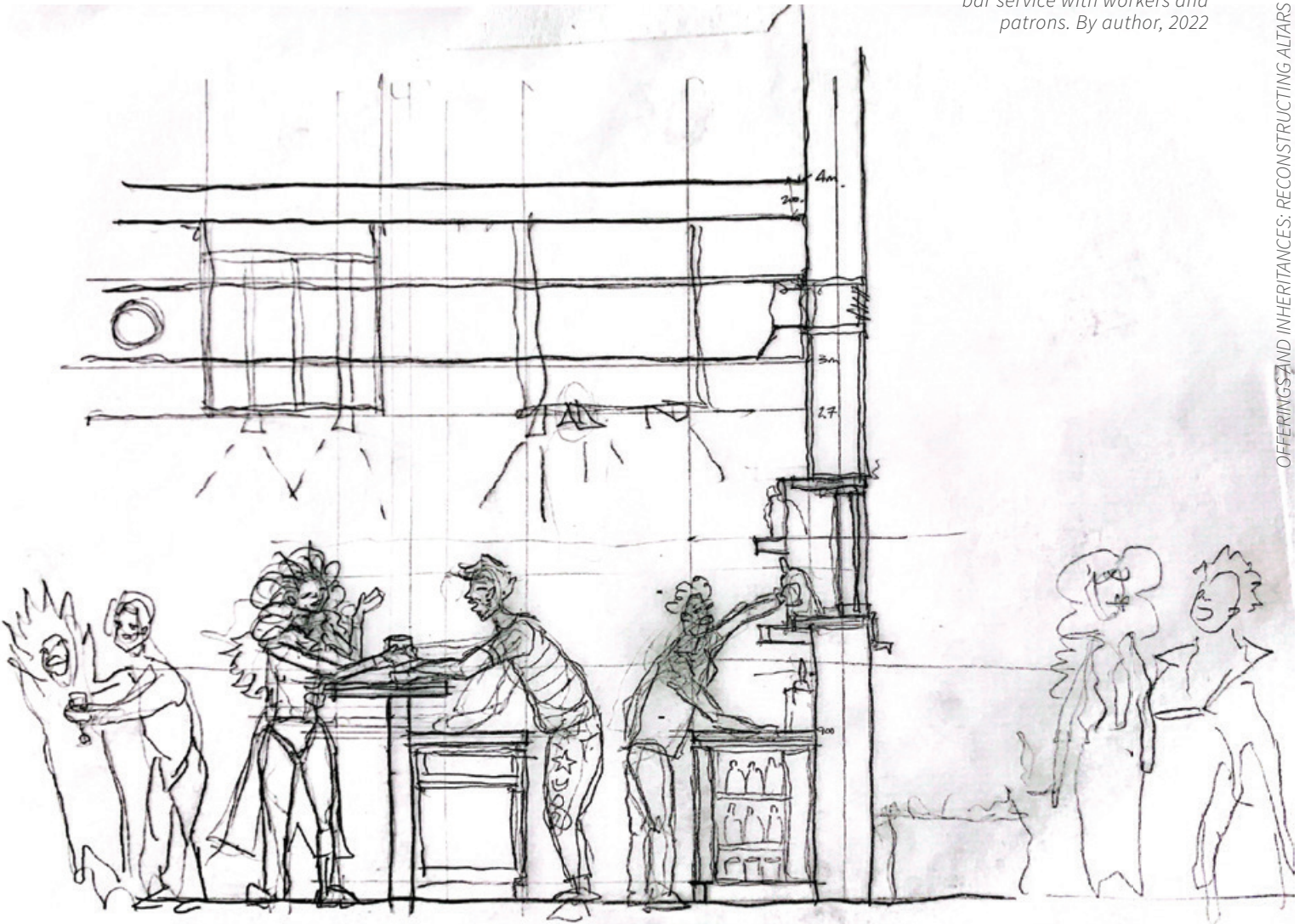
Lunar New Year, or Tết, is a holiday that celebrates the beginning of a new lunar calendar and for many Vietnamese folks across the diaspora, it is a time to return home. Many queer parties for lunar new year have been hosted in the past in Canadian and American cities, which have offered a powerful space for queer Asian diasporas.

Reclaiming, remixing, and reconstructing traditional holidays of East and Southeast Asian culture to queer events and parties has taken new forms in the age of social media. Multi-disciplinary, design-savvy artist collectives such as 'Bubble T' in New York, 'New Ho Queen' in Toronto, and the 'House of Rice' in Vancouver output new visual, sonic, and electrifying events

for contemporary queer, Asian, and diasporic urban youth². These events are offerings where queer and racial identities can be explored together through audacious queer Asian drag performances, DJ sets of nostalgic anime theme songs remixed to club dance anthems, and the confronting labour involved in producing a safe, inclusive, and representative nightclub event for the community. Organizers of these events have been known to find kinship and production design influences from many other QTBIPOC³-led collectives in other cities, such as ‘Papi Juice’ in New York, and even ‘Club Quarantine’ online.⁴

This animated collage, paired with music from a playlist I have been curating during this thesis, is an invitation to showcase how I understand the ways queer, racialized bodies move with their collective grief and joy through the ritual of the lunar new year party.

Fig. 80. Drafted section of bar service with workers and patrons. By author, 2022



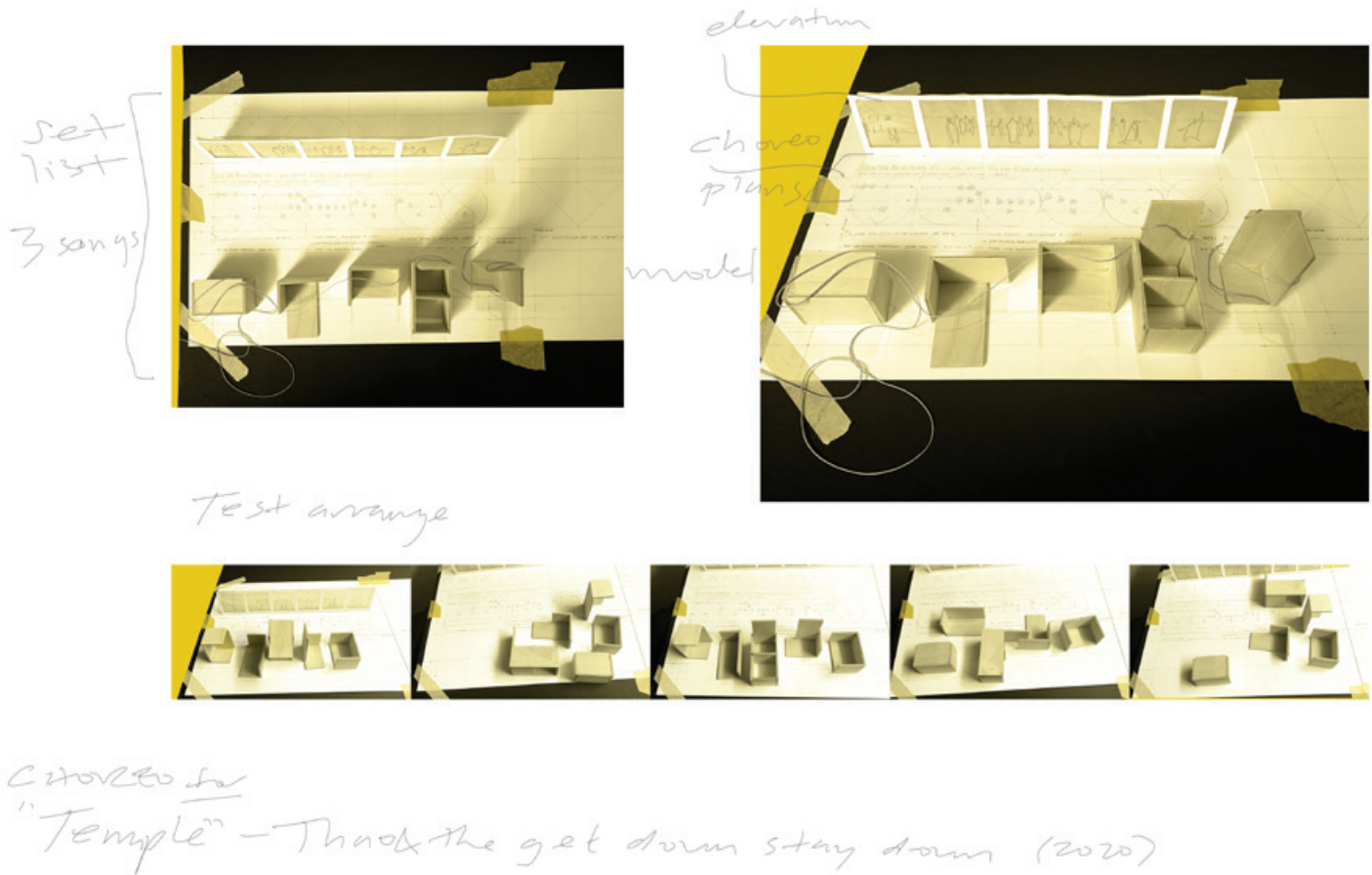


Fig. 81. Drawings and models to choreograph a performance. By author, 2022

Altar of the Club: The Choreography – Drawings

These initial sketches of a choreographed dance to three songs as a set list at the fictional queer lunar new year party. Initially I thought to explore a mix of physical modeled elements with layered drawings. This was one step in the process to explore architectural representation tools with dance and movement. However, I decided to experiment with the animated collage as the temporal, layered, sonic and visual nature of the lunar new year event could be more readily integrated in the making.



Fig. 82. *Animated collage video stills by author, 2022*

Altar of the Club: The Performance – Video and Stills

In this animated collage, I showcase the subculture and the collective of queer Asian diaspora moving through various sites of exchange. I allow viewers and myself to shift modes and scales in how bodies arrive, enter, dance, and depart from semi-public spaces through a mix of photography, video, music, and architectural drawings.

A link to the video can be found here:
<https://youtu.be/GIW6ywMwSUK>



Fig. 84. At the pre-drin.,
Animated collage still by
author, 2022



Fig. 83. Arriving at the coat
check. Animated collage still by
author, 2022



Fig. 86. Arriving at the coat
check, animated collage still by
author, 2022

Being queer and diasporic is an existence that is never stagnant. There are conditions in space that require queer and racialized bodies to either conform to, move through, or push against imposed norms and conventions. The body translates these shifts into coded gestures, actions and daily habits that are performed. These performances are offerings and exchanges that take place throughout the ritual of a night out with queer family.

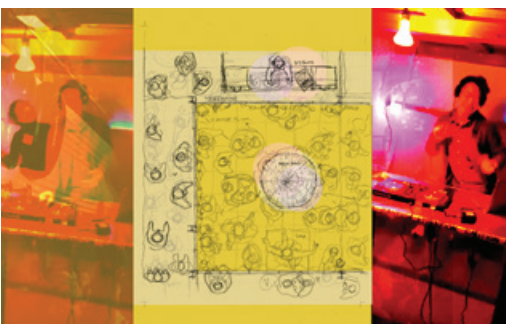


Fig. 85. DJing at the bar,
Animated collage still by
author, 2022

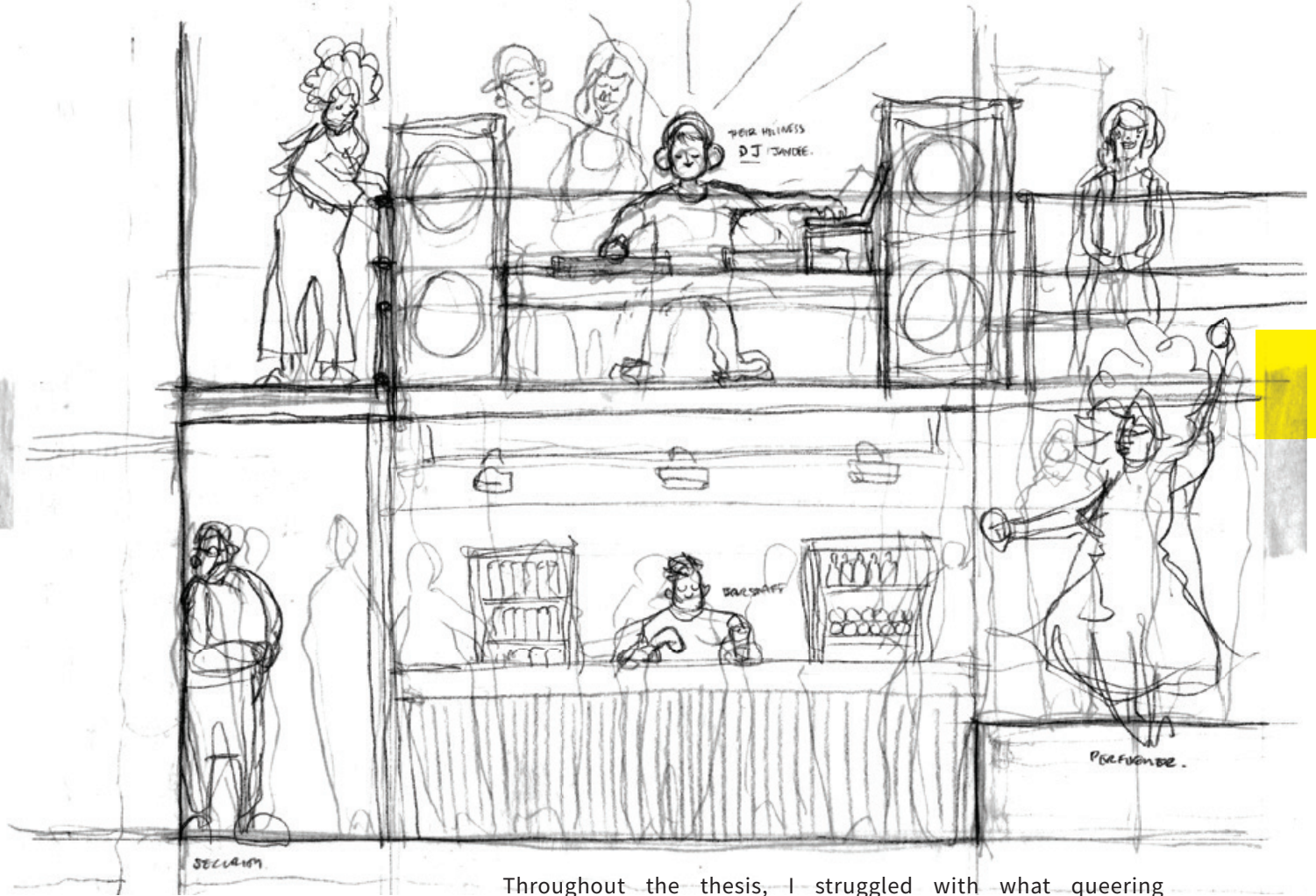


Fig. 87. A sketch of (fictional) DJ Jaydee at the Club. By author, 2022

Throughout the thesis, I struggled with what queering representation meant in the making of these altars – in what ways working within and against conventions could privilege whiteness, cleanliness, precision, imposed instruction, and top-down control in my work?

The collage and the animation could capture the messiness of queerness and Vietnamese-ness colliding in the nightclub. I offer this animation to hear and view the ever-shifting, dynamic, chaotic nature of queer, diasporic, and Vietnamese identities. How can the ways we create space together, with our communities, be communicated in what we draw?



Fig. 88. Album cover of Saigon Rock & Soul (Classic Vietnamese Tracks 1968-74). Released by Sublime Frequences, 2010

This animated collage is paired with the song ‘*Con Tim Và Nước Mắt*,’ originally performed by Bich Loan and CBC Band in 1974. The title translates to “Heart and Tears.” I had first heard this song from an online stream of the album ‘*Saigon Rock & Soul: Vietnamese Classic Tracks 1968-1974*’⁵. This album was released October 2010, though it was something I arrived to sometime in 2015-16. There is something electrifying and powerful to these tracks that draws you in. It is what many young artists to create cover albums and bands, such as ‘*Saigon Supersound*,’ and ‘*Saigon Soul Revival*,’ many of which I have included in a Spotify playlist that I curated during my thesis year⁶.

Endnotes

1 Many of these folks were documented in Richard Fung's 1984 film 'Orientations' (and some again in the 30-year return in the 2016 film 'Re:Orientations'); see: Richard Fung, "Re-Orienting Queer Asian Identities, 30 Years Later," CBC Arts (CBC/Radio Canada, May 27, 2016), <https://www.cbc.ca/arts/re-orienting-queer-asian-identities-30-years-later-1.3599970>.

2 Ethnospecific queer parties are not new ('Asian Xpress' in Toronto, or 'Gameboi' in San Francisco) – but this new generation is powered by social media, the self-taught design nature of the Internet and YouTube, and the circulation and influence of queer (mostly black and POC) artists and event planners in the late 2010s.

3 QTBIPOC – an acronym for queer, trans, black, indigenous and people of colour folks (self-identified).

4 The links between Papi Juice and Bubble T were discussed by Adam R., at a Zoom lecture at the GSD during Fall 2021; Harvard Graduate School of Design, "Black in Design 2021: "Black Matter," Designing for Black Queer Pleasure, Joy, and Intimacy." YouTube video, 1:27:51. October 25, 2021. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kCPvWtkjM80&ab_channel=HarvardGSD

5 Bich Loan and CBC Band. "Con Tim Và Nước Mắt [Heart And Tears]." Sublime Frequencies, Bandcamp. June 8, 2021. Accessed May 9, 2022. <https://sublime-frequencies.bandcamp.com/track/con-tim-v-n-c-m-t-heart-and-tears>

6 A link to my playlist can be found here: <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/6ZlziXHx4ZlTcYlhG9Umbw?si=9d442f48311d4f26>

Fig. 90. Words to remember when designing (Part 2). By author, 2022.



66



Notes to Future Me

...and to other 'lost' students of architecture:

It is rigorous enough.
It is spatial.
It is architectural.



There is space for
you here.



Just look at where
your curiosity led
you -



- and take stock
of who you met
along the way.



Thank you, for your kinship and support.

Conclusion: The queer alterity of Vietnamese altars

Honouring all of which we inherit

67

Throughout this work I have traced out conceptual and material links between diaspora, queerness, altars, family and belonging across multiple spatial scales. I have spoken about the altars I have encountered in my life, and discussed the rituals, care and labour to create and maintain them. This labour in making space to remember is an offering.

This thesis itself has been an altar and an offering for myself (and perhaps to others who find kinship in my work). Like offerings, my thesis holds many meanings: as a rite of passage to complete my graduate studies, as an opportunity to distinguish my identity as a queer, diasporic, Vietnamese architecture graduate student, and as a time and place to transform my relationship to the histories I have inherited.

The offering takes something from you, and I believe it is something you must be willing to part with. In this gift-giving exchange, something changes and transforms. The time and effort it requires to collect and share what I can uniquely offer is a daily practice in bravery and vulnerability.

We find, collect, and make our own altars or altar-like spaces in our daily lives. And at times, these need to be explicitly visible, and other times they can be more discreet. Questions of who belongs in the participation of the altars is negotiated through exchanges. Despite these negotiated boundaries, altars can be made available to anyone, which I think can be very powerful for individual bodies, collective families, and the public.

Through this intimate investigation on kinship, cultural lineage, sacral and secular traditions, I offer an invitation to collectively discover what spaces emerge when we return to, reject, and reconstruct our identities for our ancestors, kin, and ourselves. In this process, I hope we can make space for grief and celebration – as I believe that is how we honour all of which we inherit.



Fig. 91. Cue Card - 'cung hiến'
Google's translation for "offering"
in Vietnamese, by author, 2022.

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Appendix 1

Incomplete Sites of Exchange

70

Sites of Exchange Pages

Data will be left unfilled as they will shift and change.

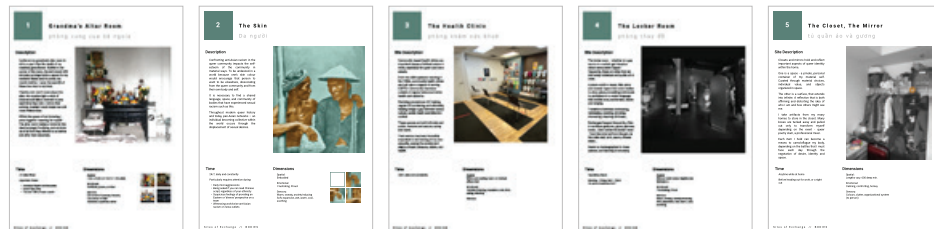
As offerings and exchanges can be very personal, variations will occur.

The following are the Sites of Exchange discussed in Chapter 3: Reconstructing a queer method.

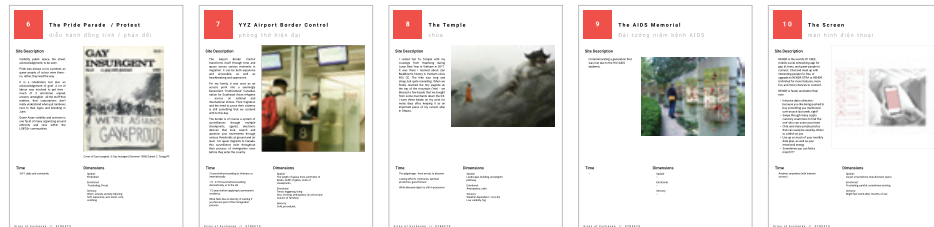
They are currently work in process!

Refer to Chapter 3 for the summaries and intentions behind their selection.

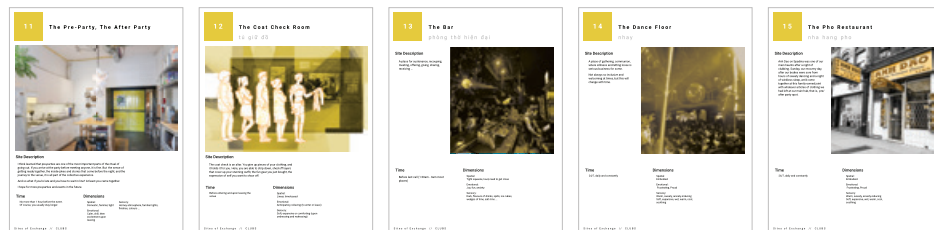
Bodies
(Tolerance)



Streets
(Visibility)



Clubs
(Movement)



Grandma's Altar Room

phòng cúng của bà ngoại

Description

I arrive at my grandma's altar room in 2016, a year after the death of my maternal grandfather. Stuffed in the corner of the room, the dark wood with intricate carvings holds a space for my mother's father and my uncle, my mom's brother. I carry the warmth of these two men in my mind.

There's a lot I don't know about the altar. My cousins light a stick of incense and take a moment to pray each time they visit. I mimic their actions, hoping it could make me a bit more Vietnamese.

Within the space of not knowing, I piece together meaning for myself. The altar room makes a home for the dead amongst the living, and reminds us of all that they offered to us before and after their departure.



Time

x1 Daily Ritual

Important Dates:

- Ancestor Death Anniversaries
- Lunar New Year
- 1st and 15th of each month

Dimensions

Spatial:
1.5m x 0.6m x 2.1m H ; 1.5m clear

Emotional:
Gratitude, peace, somber

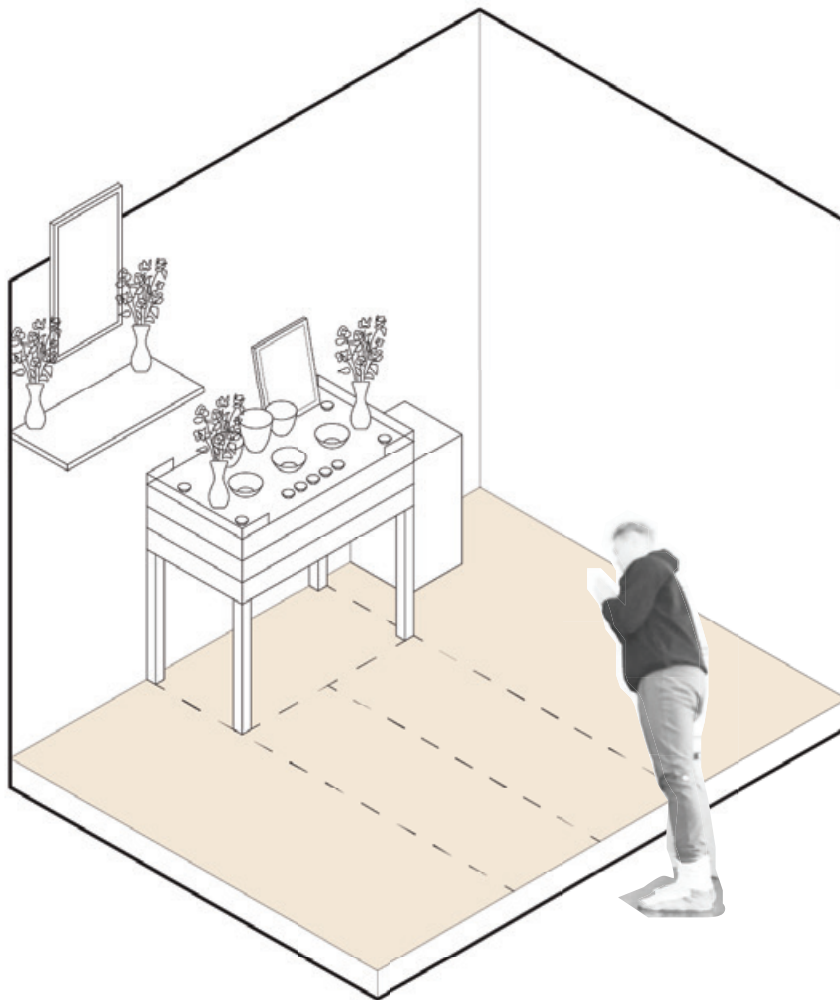
Sensory:
The smell of incense, flowers,
The colour of fruit
Cluttered, squished, tense
Tactile hard and soft: wood carvings,
symbols



1.B

Altar Offerings and Rituals

ban tho lễ vật và nghi lễ



Grandma's Altar
Haiphong, Vietnam

Photo by Thompson Cong Nguyen
(2016)

Relations

Giver:
Descendants of ancestors, of the deceased

Receiver:
Ancestors, Deities, Spirits

Offering:
Symbolic and Physical

Private ----- Public

1 2 3 4 5

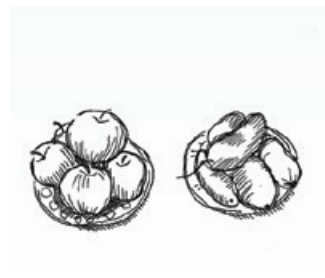
Ritual

Name Burning Incense, Prayer
Purpose - To honour ancestors
Duration _Practiced daily, or on auspicious dates



Offerings

Fresh Fruits
- To nourish spirits
_Replaced every few days



Fresh Flowers
- To beautify altar
_Replaced every few days



2

The Skin

Da người

Description

Confronting anti-Asian racism in the queer community impacts the self-esteem of the community in material ways. To be undesired in a world because one's skin colour would encourage that person to want to be elsewhere, dissociating from the queer community and from their own body and self.

It is necessary to find a shared language, space, and community of bodies that have experienced sexual racism such as this.

Throughout modern queer history and today, pan-Asian networks – an individual becoming collective within the world occurs through the displacement of sexual desires.



Time

24/7, daily and constantly

Particularly requires attention during:

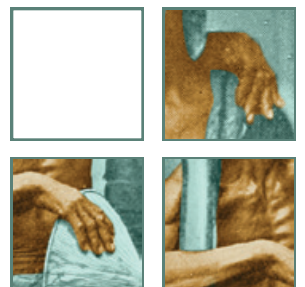
- Daily microaggressions
- Being asked if you can read Chinese script, regardless of your ethnicity
- Suspicious feelings of providing an Eastern or 'diverse' perspective on a team
- Witnessing world-wise anti-Asian racism on news outlets

Dimensions

Spatial:
Embodied

Emotional:
Frustrating, Proud

Sensory:
Warm, sweaty, anxiety-inducing
Soft, expansive, wet, warm, cool,
soothing



2.B

The Skin Offerings and Rituals

Da người lễ vật và nghi lễ



To be held

photo by

Relations

Giver:
Body

Receiver:
Body

Offering:
Touch, skin

Private ----- Public
1 2 3 4 5

Ritual

Name Embrace
Purpose - Production of oxytocin, love hormone
Duration _Whenever consent is given

Offerings

Fingers
- To begin a communication
_Placed between another's,
or upon their body

Arms
- To extend towards and pull closer to
_Placed out to or around their body

3

The Health Clinic

phòng khám sức khỏe

Site Description

Community based health clinics are important pieces of infrastructure in cities, especially for queer and trans people.

From the AIDS epidemic starting in the 1980s, community health clinics are built upon a legacy of serving LGBTQ+ community members outside of regular heteronormative health care systems.

Providing anonymous HIV testing, regular STI screening, and ultimately helping bridge a gap between sexual culture, public health and infection control.

These spaces are both intimate and public, invasive and secure, caring and harsh.

Their service has been incredibly important in the forming of my own sexuality, easing the anxiety and stigma around pleasure, desire, and health.



Time

Between 12 week window periods

Regular testing appointments

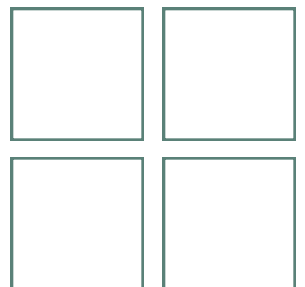
Or as per drop-in hours

Dimensions

Spatial:
Within one waiting room or medical office chair

Emotional:
Anxiety-inducing, impatient, cold, kind, caring, relieving

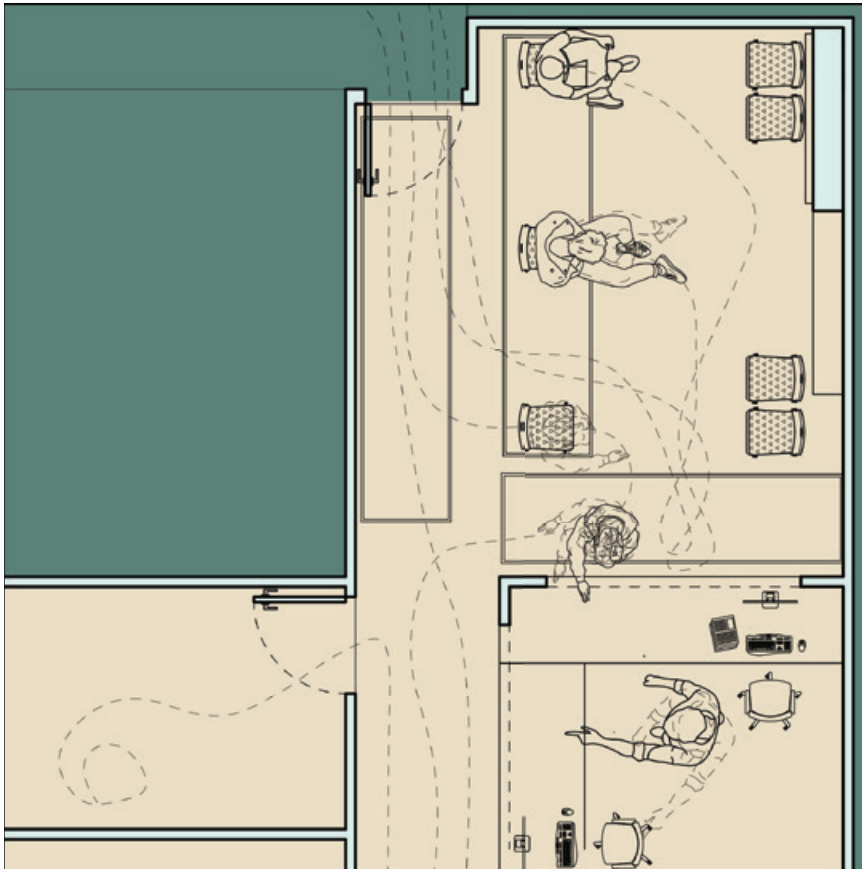
Sensory:
Bright fluorescent lights, colourful pamphlets and condoms, clinical procedures



3.B

The Health Clinic Offerings and Rituals

phòng khám sức khỏe lễ vật và nghi lễ



Plan of the Waiting Room of the Hassle Free Clinic on Gerrard Street

Social-distance floor plan

Pre-pandemic, up to 16 people would wait in queue in these plastic seats.

Relations

Giver:
Body

Receiver:
Public Health Care System

Offering:
Blood sample, swabs, time

Private ----- Public
1 2 3 4 5

Ritual

Name Regular STI Testing
Purpose - Catch, treat and screen STIs
Duration _During clinic hours, prevention daily

Offerings

Bio Sample
- To send to the lab for screening
_A few seconds to draw blood, take swabs, pass urine

Waiting
- Ensure some lab samples are accurate
_30min to 1.5hr, depending on how busy the clinic is

4

The Locker Room

phòng thay đồ

Site Description

The locker room - whether at a gay sauna or a certain gym location where encounters happen frequently, these are sites that are intimately individual and public all at once.

Lockers work to reveal, hide, store and contain layers that cover bodies to allow pleasure-seeking individuals to participate in a coded language that evokes eros, excitement, desire and longing.

Transitions between undressing, redressing, covering, showing, showering, cleaning, dirtiness...

Exchanges happen frequently, often in wordless gestures, gazes, glances, looks... Even before the locker room - from the entry to/from the gym, to the toilet stall, sink, sauna, shower stalls...

Desire is choreographed in these spaces, and dancing is voluntary.



Time

Operating Hours

Monday - Friday, 6am - 10pm
Or, some locations 24/7

Dimensions

Spatial:
300mm wide locker, heights vary

Emotional:
Frustrating, Proud

Sensory:
Warm, sweaty, anxiety-inducing
Soft, expansive, wet, warm, cool,
soothing

4.B

The Locker Room Offerings and Rituals

phòng thay đồ lễ vật và nghi lễ

photos by Steamworks Baths
(Vancouver)

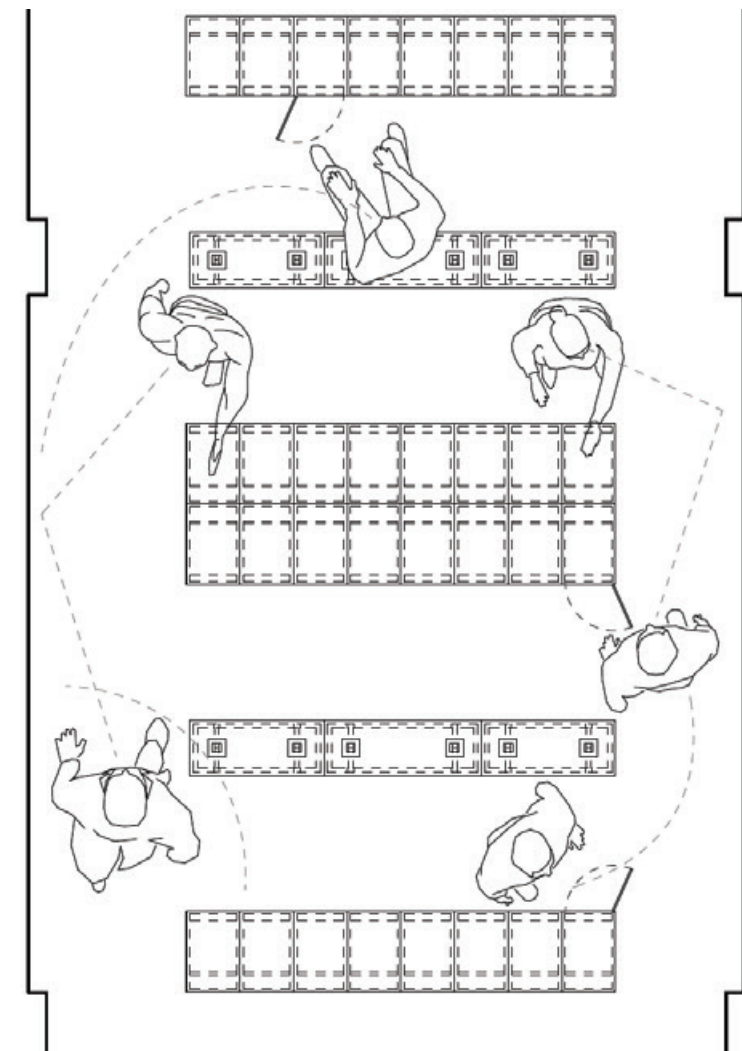
Relations

Giver:
Body

Receiver:
Body

Offering:
Touch, skin

Private ----- Public
1 2 3 4 5



Ritual

Name Cruising the Locker Room
Purpose - Production of oxytocin, love hormone
Duration _Whenever consent is given

Offerings

Fingers
- To begin a communication
_Placed between another's,
or upon their body

Arms
- To extend towards and pull closer to
_Placed out to or around their body

5

The Closet, The Mirror

tủ quần áo và gương

Site Description

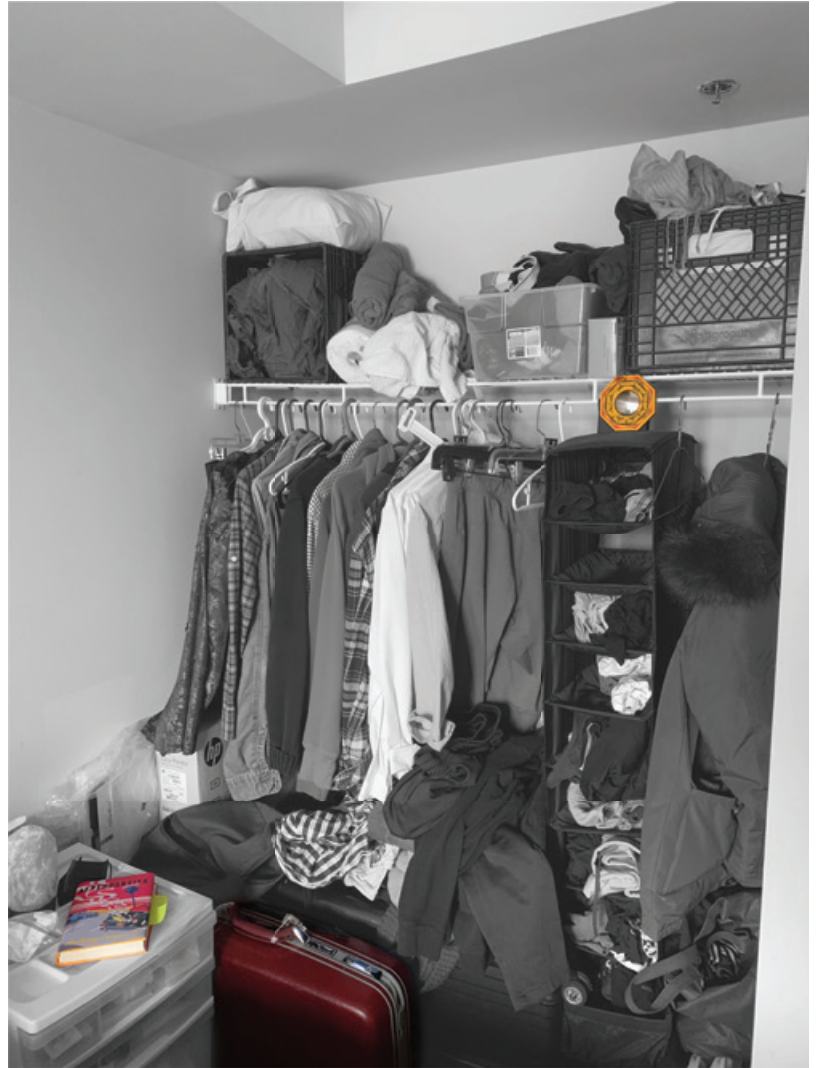
Closets and mirrors hold and reflect important aspects of queer identity within the home.

One is a space - a private, personal container of my material self. Curated through material choices, individual value, and objects organized in space.

The other is a surface, that extends into infinite. A reflection that is both affirming and distorting the idea of who I am and how others might see me.

I take artifacts from my many homes to store in the closet. Many boxes are tucked away and pulled out only to transform myself depending on the event - queer poetry slam, a professional mixer.

Each item I hold can become a means to camouflage my body, depending on the battles that I must face each day through the negotiation of desire, identity and space.



Time

Anytime while at home

Before heading out for work, or a night out

Dimensions

Spatial:
Lengths vary. 600 deep min.

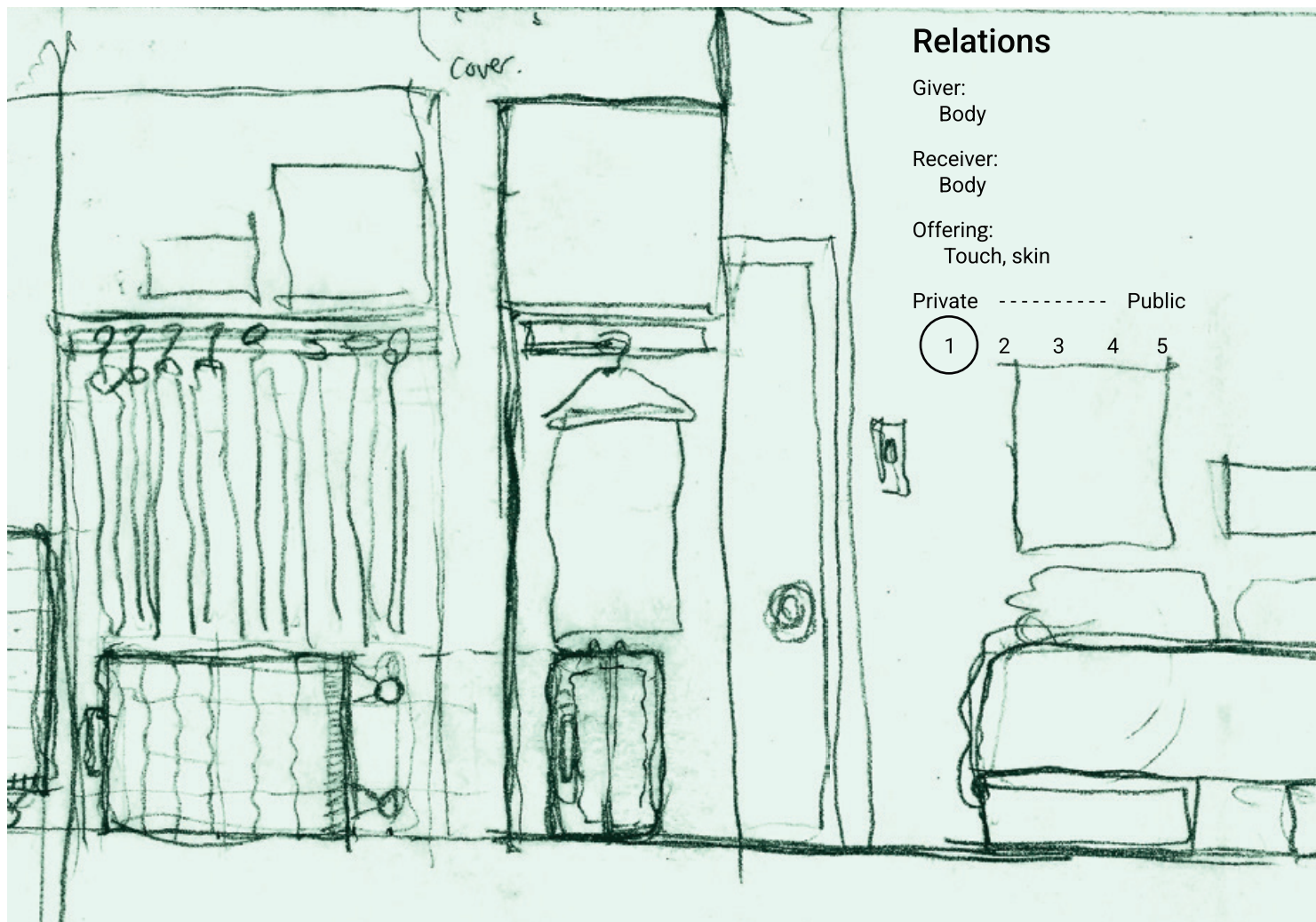
Emotional:
Calming, comforting, homey

Sensory:
Colours, clutter, organizational system
(to person)

5.B

Closet/Mirror Offerings and Rituals

lễ vật và nghi lễ tủ quần áo và gương



Ritual

Name Collecting, Storing, Reflecting
Purpose - To craft a space of one's own
Duration _However long one dwells in a space

Offerings

Suitcase
 - To hold objects for transport
 _Before and during a move

Bagua Mirror
 - To reflect bad energy out
 _During ominous days

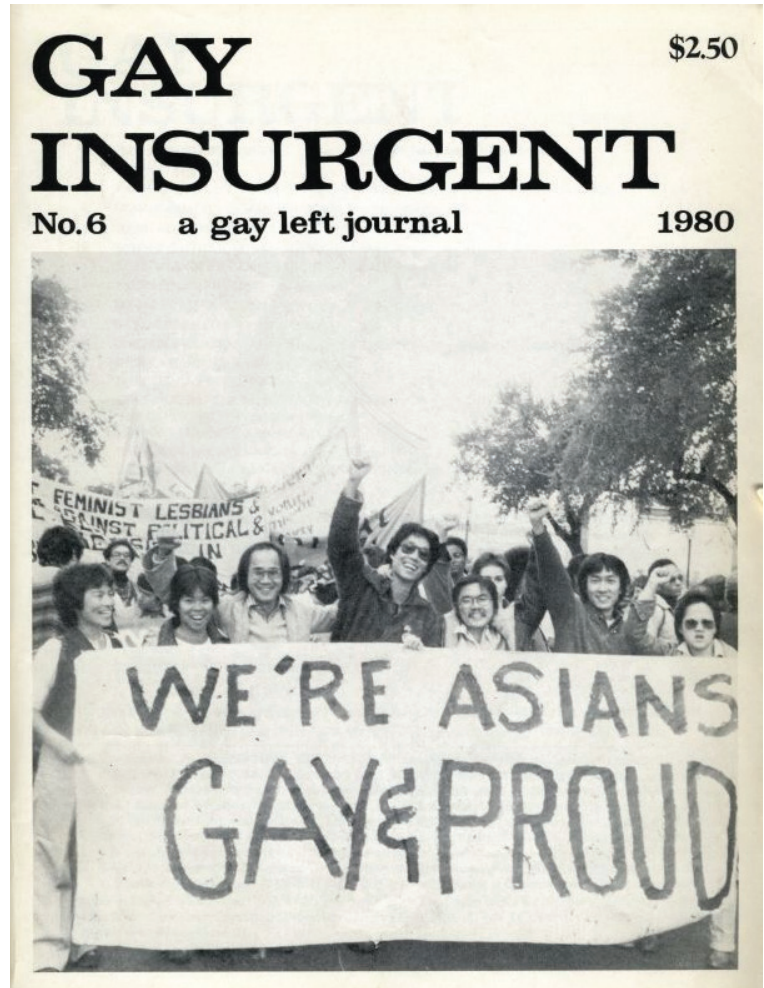
Site Description

Visibility, public space, the street, acknowledgement, to be seen

Pride was always a riot, a protest, as queer people of colour were there - no, rather, they lead the way.

It is a celebration, but also an acknowledgement of grief. A lot of labour was involved to get here - much of it emotional, unpaid, unseen, untangible - all the stuff that matters, that corporations don't really understand when put rainbows next to their logos and branding in June.

Queer Asian visibility and activism is one facet of many organizing around ethnicity and race within the LGBTQ+ communities.



Cover of Gay Insurgent. © Gay Insurgent (Summer 1980)/Daniel C. Tsang/PF

Time

24/7, daily and constantly

Dimensions

Spatial:
Embodied

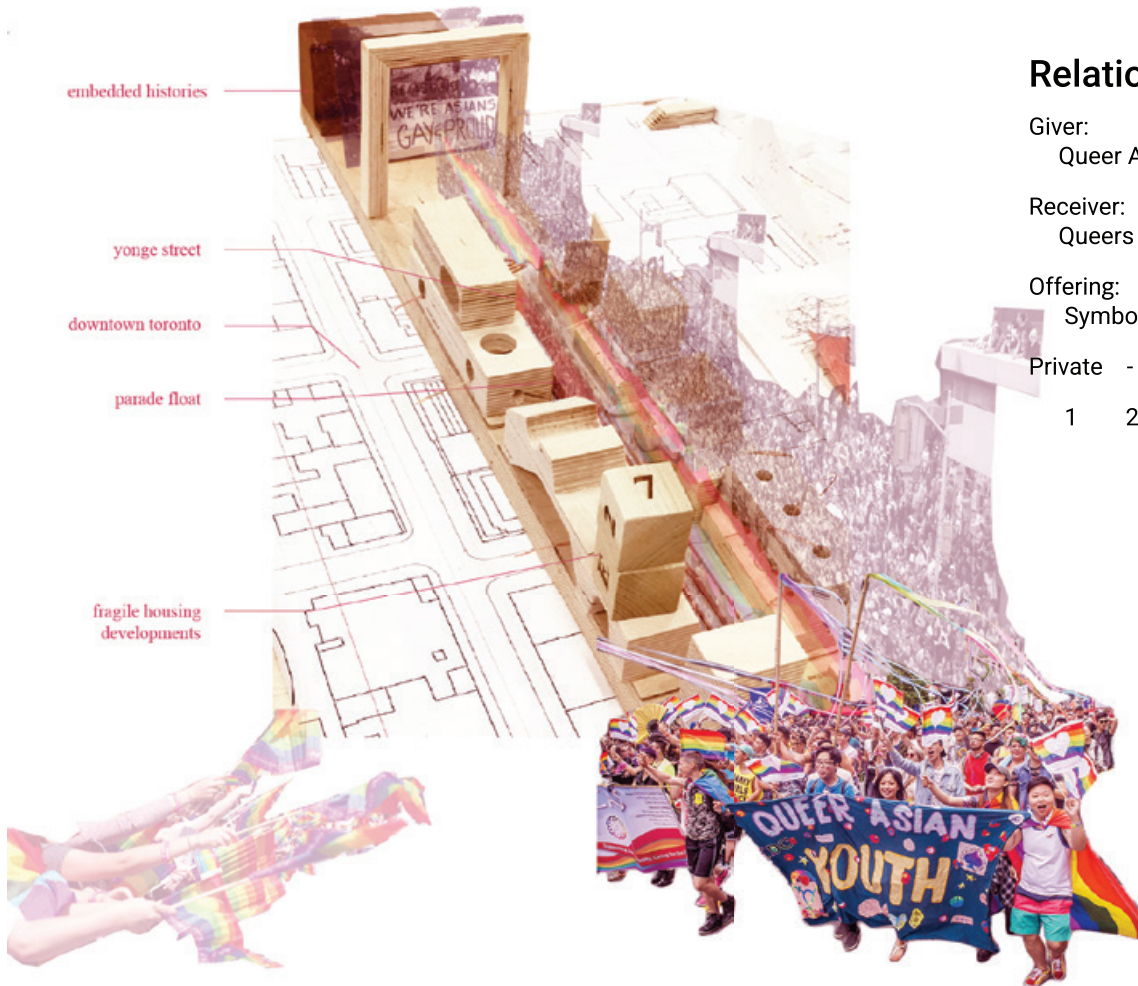
Emotional:
Frustrating, Proud

Sensory:
Warm, sweaty, anxiety-inducing
Soft, expansive, wet, warm, cool,
soothing

6.B

Pride Offerings and Rituals

phản đối lễ vật và nghi lễ



Relations

Giver:

Queer Asian Youth and Community Organizers

Receiver:

Queers Asians in public and in hiding

Offering:

Symbolic and Physical

Private ----- Public

1 2 3 4 5

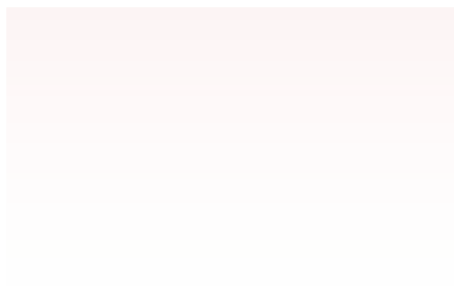
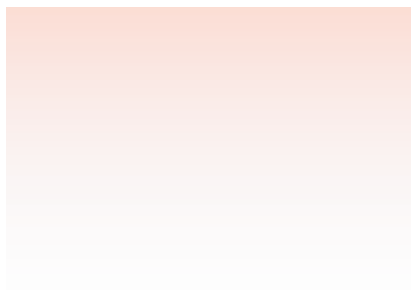
Ritual

Name Protest, Demonstration
Purpose - To make visible and vocal
Duration _Practiced annually, urgently

Offerings

The Protest Banner
 - To communicate a message
 _One-time use or until unnecessary

Activist Bodies
 - To mobilize and take up public space
 _Maintained Daily
 **Warning: Burns out quickly

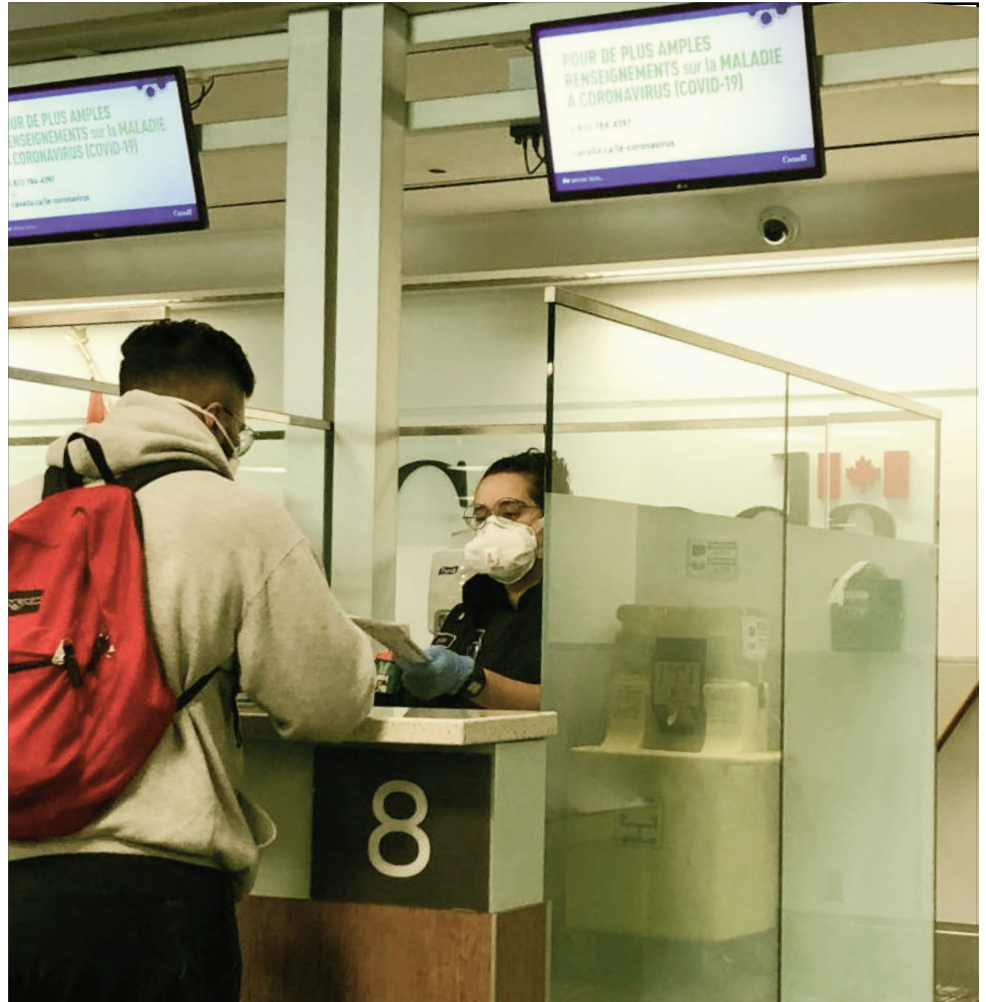


Site Description

The Airport Border Control transforms itself through time and space across various moments in migration: it can be both expansive and accessible, as well as heartbreaking and oppressive.

For my family, it was once as an access point into a seemingly benevolent, “multicultural” Canadian nation for Southeast Asian refugees - across on national and international shores. Their migration and the need to prove their citizenry is still something that we contend with to this day.

The border is of course a system of surveillances through multiple checkpoints, agents, electronic devices that look, search and question your movements through various thresholds at ground and air level. For queer migrants to Canada, this surveillance exist throughout their process of immigration even before they enter the country.



Time

2 hours before boarding to Vietnam, or internationally

1.5 - 0.75 hours before boarding domestically, or to the US

1-2 years before applying to permanent residency

What feels like an eternity of waiting if you fail one part of the immigration process

Dimensions

Spatial:

The length of queue lines, perimeter of desks, width of gates, route of checkpoints

Emotional:

Tense, triggering, tiring
Also, exciting, anticipatory (in arrival and reunion of families)

Sensory:

Cold, procedural,

7.B

Border Control Offerings and Rituals

sân bay Toronto Pearson

The development of the border was built upon immigration policies of exploiting indentured East and South Asian labourers throughout the making of the settler-colonial nation, as well as the exclusion of these (male) workers from bringing their families. This created conditions where homosocial norms for Asian men were a product of the state.

Relations

Giver:

The traveler, or immigration applicant

Receiver:

The State

Offering:

Passport, Time, Believeable narratives

Private ----- Public

1 2 3 4 5



http://www.heroesofconfederation.com/Head_tax/Headtaxpayers.html

Ritual

Name Migrations
Purpose - To pursue capital, pleasure, relations
Duration _Practiced throughout history

Offerings

Official Documents
 - To be able to exist in/out of borders
 _Duration of the visa, or life

Remittances, Money
 - To send back to the main continent
 _One-time gift, multiple payments

Site Description

I visited Yen Tu Temple with my couplings from Haiphong during Lunar New Year in Vietnam in 2017. It was there I learned about Zen Buddhism's history in Vietnam since 400 CE. The hike was long and steep, but quite rewarding. When we finally reached the tiny pagoda at the top of the mountain (Yen) - we blessed a few beads that we bought from some merchants down the hill. I wore these beads on my wrist for many days after, keeping it as an important piece of my current altar in Ottawa.



Time

The pilgrimage - from arrival, to descent

Lasting effects: memories, spiritual protection, good fortune

While blessed object is still in possession

Dimensions

Spatial:
Landscape, building, and pilgrim pathway

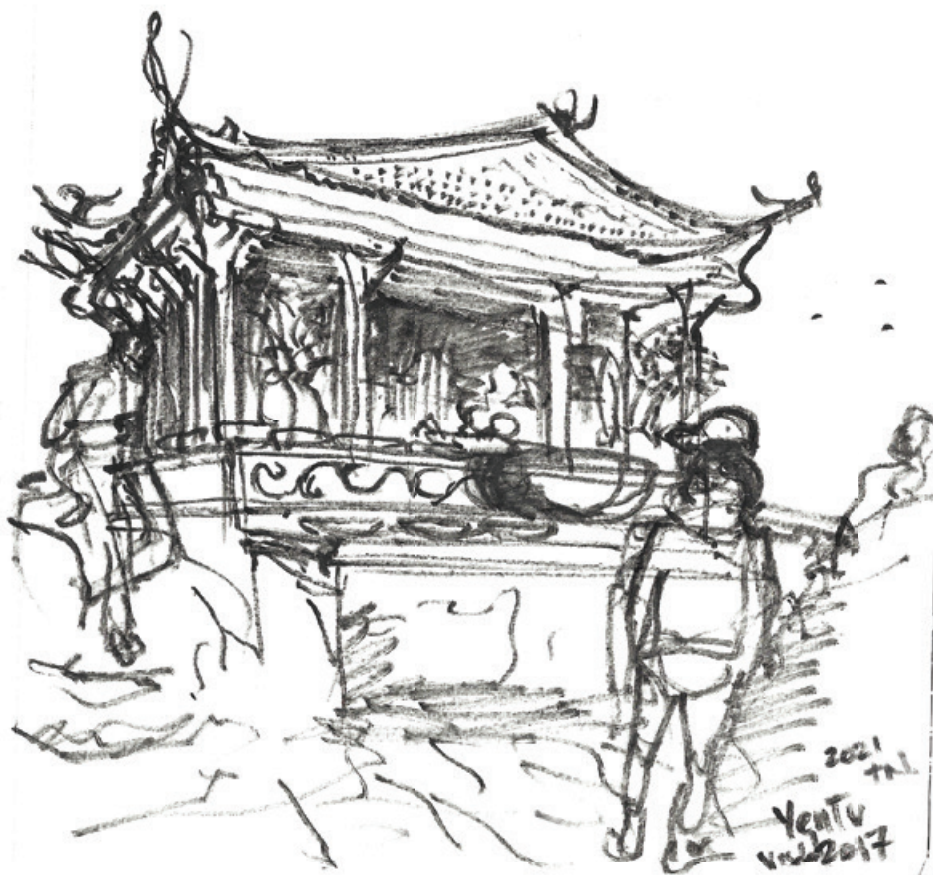
Emotional:
Anticipatory, calm

Sensory:
Weather dependent - cool, dry
Low visibility, fog

8.B

The Temple Offerings and Rituals

lễ cúng và nghi lễ đền thờ



To be held

photo by

Relations

Giver:
Body

Receiver:
Body

Offering:
Touch, skin

Private ----- Public
1 2 3 4 5

Ritual

Name Pilgrimage, up the mountain
Purpose - To retrace steps
Duration _Practiced on special occasion

Offerings

Coins, Money
- For monastics and spirits
_As per visit

Flowers, Beads
- To beautify the shrine
_As per visit



The AIDS Memorial

Đài tưởng niệm bệnh AIDS

Site Description

Commemorating a generation that was lost due to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.



Time

--

Dimensions

Spatial:

--

Emotional:

--

Sensory:

--

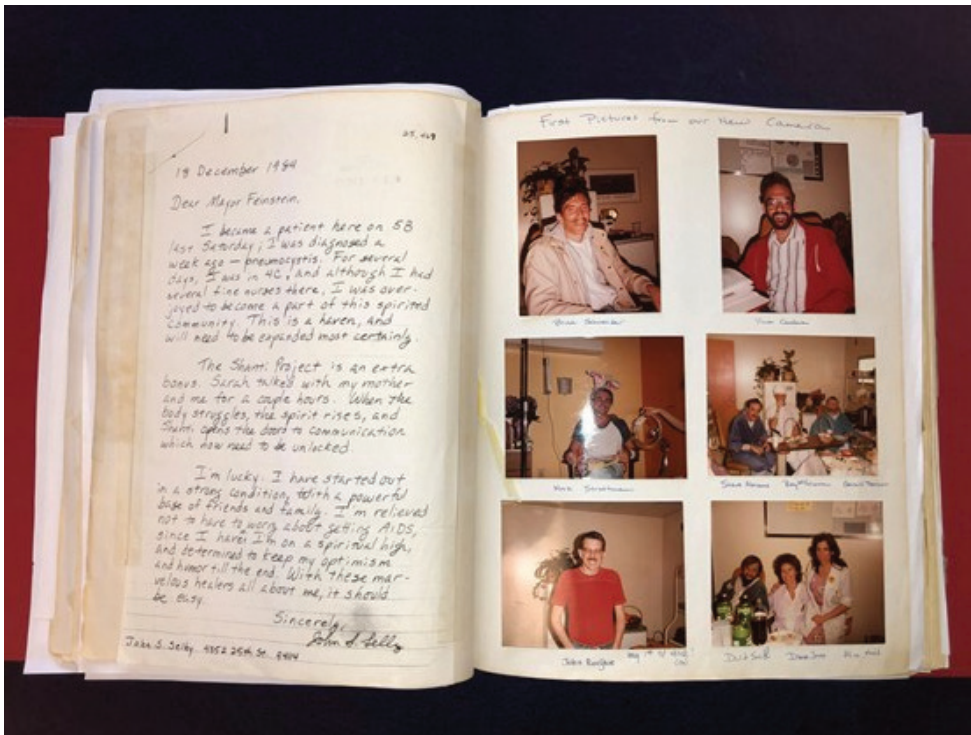
9.B

AIDS Memorial Offerings and Rituals

lễ vật và nghi lễ

To be held

photo by



Relations

Given:
Body

Receiver:
Body

Offering:
Touch, skin

Private ----- Public

1 2 3 4 5

Ritual

Name Retelling stories
Purpose - To remember who left us
Duration _Death anniversaries, memorials,
 whenever asked ...

Offerings

Portraits
 - Community archive
 _As long as there are copies

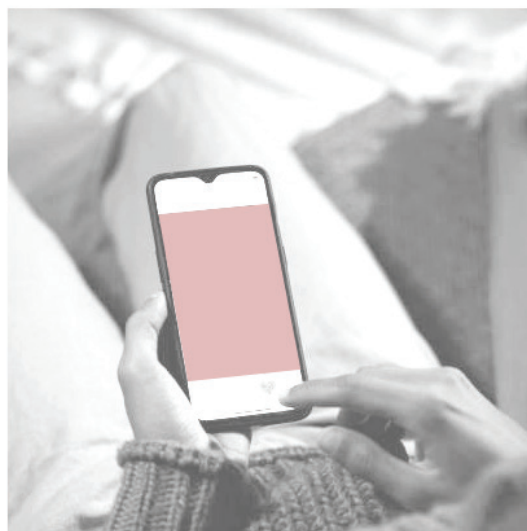
Written Stories, Letters
 - To pass onto readers
 _As long as it is circulated

Site Description

RENDER is the world's #1 FREE mobile social networking app for gay, bi, trans, and queer people to connect. Chat and meet up with interesting people for free, or upgrade to RENDER XTRA or RENDER Unlimited for more features, more fun, and more chances to connect.

RENDER is faster and better than ever:

- Intrusive data collection - because you like being pushed to buy something you mentioned over brunch last week, right?
- Swipe through many crypto currency scammers to find 'the one' who can scam your heart
- Chat and share private photos that can easily be used by others to catfish as you
- Use up so much of your monthly data plan, as well as your emotional energy
- Sometimes you can find a match???



Time

Anytime, anywhere (with internet access)

Dimensions

Spatial:
As per smart phone manufacturer specs

Emotional:
Frustrating, painful, sometimes exciting

Sensory:
Might feel numb after months of use

10.B

The Screen Offerings and Rituals

lễ vật và nghi lễ màn hình



To be held

photo by

Relations

Giver:
Body

Receiver:
Body

Offering:
Touch, skin

Private ----- Public
1 2 3 4 5

Ritual

Name Taking a Selfie

Purpose - To be seen, validated

Duration _For as long as it is relevant
(usually 2 weeks)

Offerings

Short text messages

- Express interest, but not too much

_As long as he thinks this is "good
conversation"

Explicit Photos

- Wholesome content

_Until someone blocks each
others



Site Description

I think learned that pre-parties are one of the most important parts of the ritual of going out. If you arrive at the party before meeting anyone, it is fine. But the sense of getting ready together, the inside-jokes and stories that come before the night, and the journey to the venue, it is all part of the collective experience.

And so what if you're late and you have to wait in line? At least you came together.

I hope for more pre-parties and events in the future.

Time

No more than 1 hour before the event.
Of course, you usually stay longer.

Dimensions

Spatial:
Domestic, familiar, tight

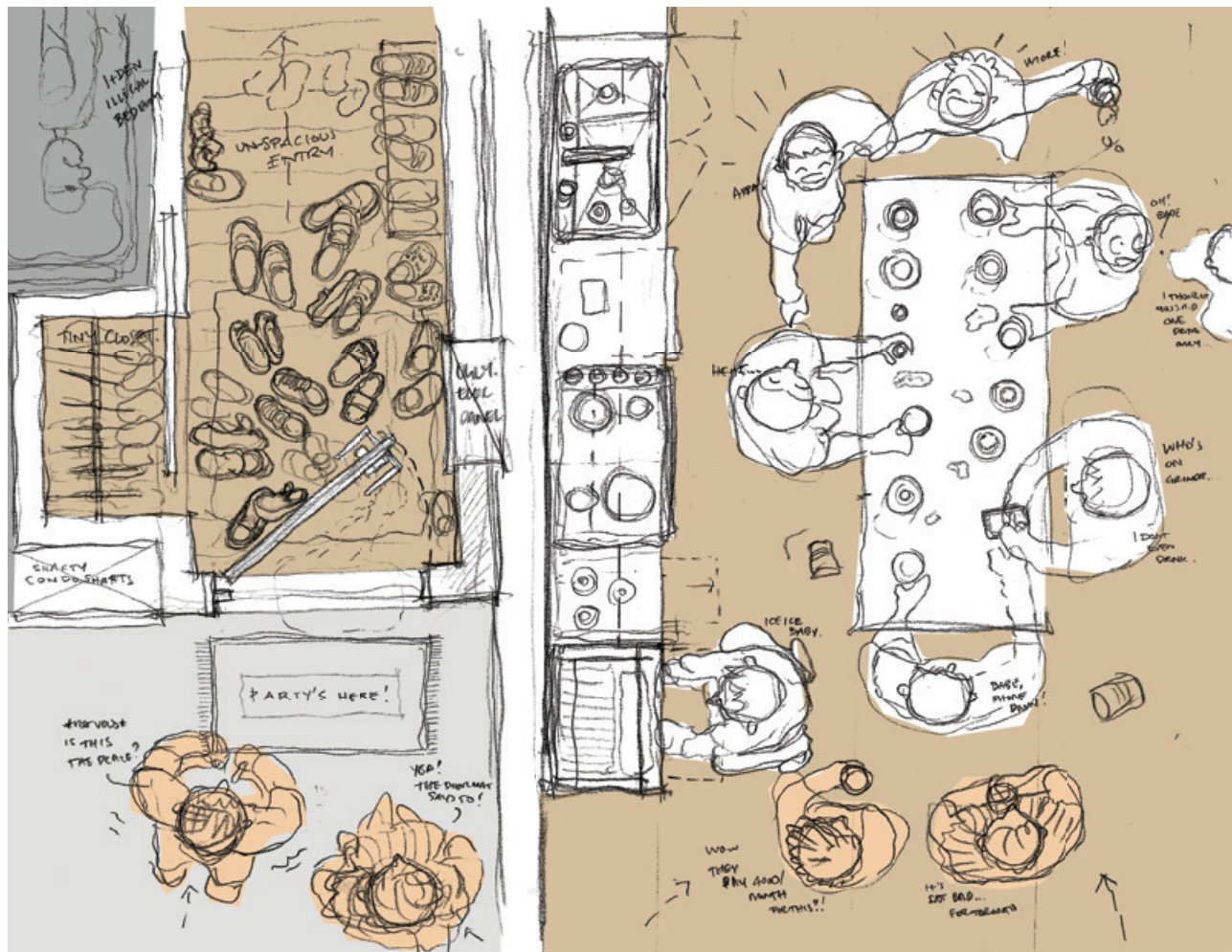
Emotional:
Calm, chill, then
excitement upon
leaving

Sensory:
Homey atmosphere, familiar lights,
finishes, colours ...

11.B

Pre/After-Party Offerings and Rituals

tủ giữ đồ lễ vật và nghi lễ



Artifact Caption X
XXXX Year
Created by X

Relations

Giver:
Party Guests

Receiver:
"The Crew"

Offering Type:
Action (Ritual)

Private ----- Public
1 2 3 4 5

Ritual

Name Pre-Gaming / Pre-Drinking
Purpose - To do or perform X
Duration _Practiced for X time length

Offerings

Offering 1
- To do or perform X
_Replaced/removed/for x time length

Offering 2
- To do or perform X
_Replaced/removed/for x time length



Site Description

The coat check is an altar. You give up pieces of your clothing, and it holds it for you. Here, you are able to strip down, shed off layers that cover up your stunning outfit, the fun gear you just bought, the expression of self you want to show off.

Time

Before entering and upon leaving the venue

Dimensions

Spatial:
Linear, time-based

Emotional:
Anticipatory, relieving (to enter or leave)

Sensory:
Soft, expansive or comforting (upon undressing and redressing)

12.B

Coat Check Offerings and Rituals

tủ giữ đồ lễ vật và nghi lễ

Entry and payment



Relations

Giver:
Club attendee

Receiver:
Coatcheck staff

Offering:
Garments, cash, ticket

Private ----- Public
1 2 3 4 5

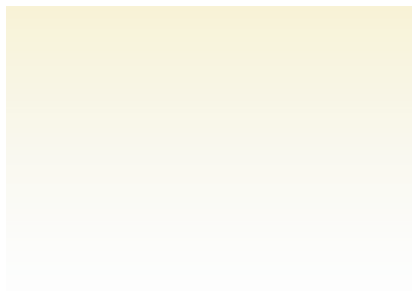
Ritual

Name Disrobing
Purpose - To shed off a layer, to reveal one's self
Duration _Practiced upon arrival and departure

Offerings

The Entry Bracelect
- To show proof of purchase
_Removed till the morning after

The Ticket
- To keep straight clothes safe
_For the evening



Site Description

A place for sustenance, recouping, meeting, offering, giving, sharing, receiving ...



Time

Before last call (1:30am - 3am most places)

Dimensions

Spatial:
Tight squeeze, loud, need to get close

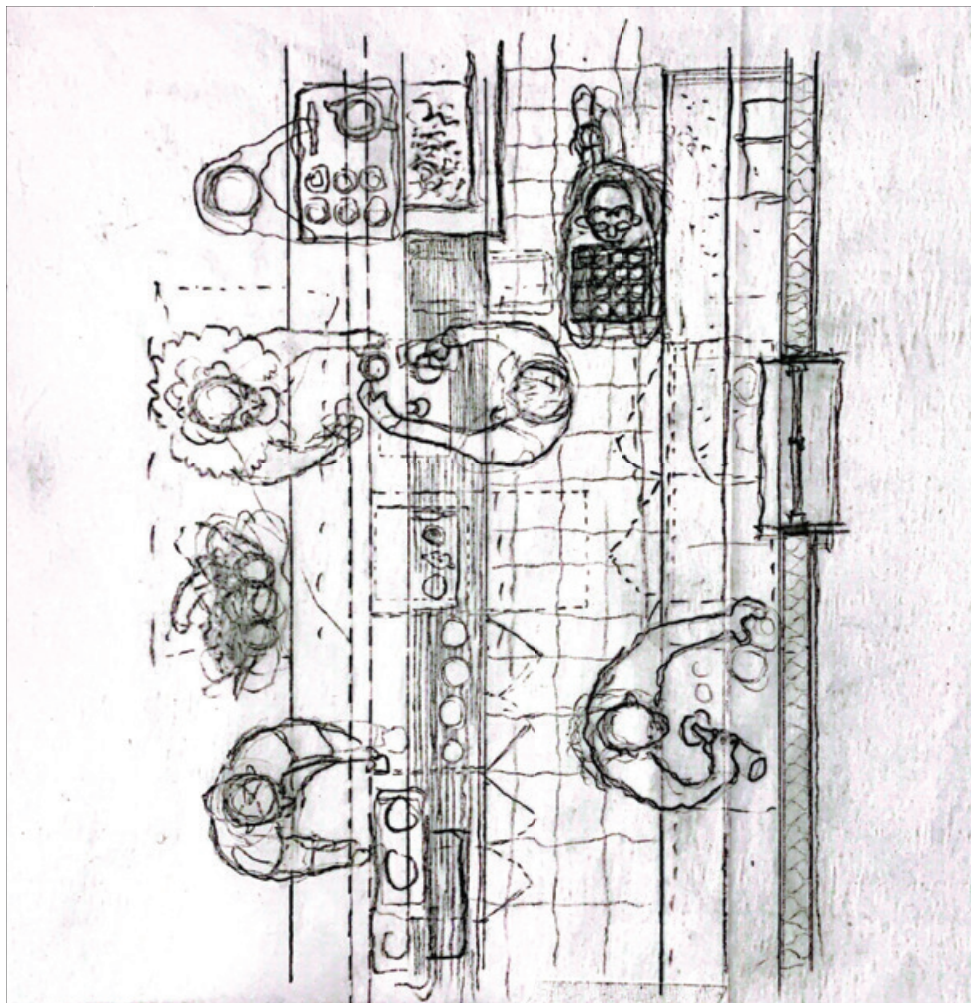
Emotional:
Joy, fun, anxiety

Sensory:
Dark, flavours of drinks, spills, ice cubes, wedges of lime, salt rims ...

13.B

The Bar Offerings and Rituals

tủ giữ đồ lễ vật và nghi lễ



Artifact Caption X
XXXX Year
Created by X

Relations

Giver:
Giver Name

Receiver:
Receiver Name

Offering Type:
Symbolic or Physical, or both?

Private ----- Public
1 2 3 4 5

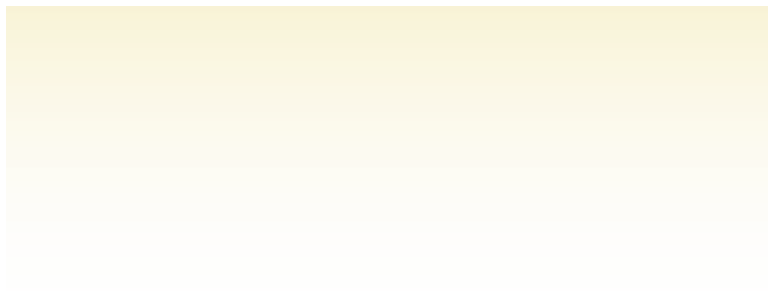
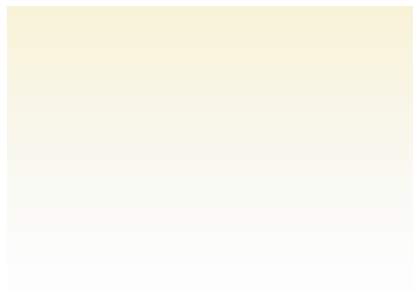
Ritual

Name Buying a Drink
Purpose - To do or perform X
Duration _Practiced for X time length

Offerings

Shot Glass
- To do or perform X
_Replaced/removed/for x time length

Payment Method
- To do or perform X
_Replaced/removed/for x time length



Site Description

A place of gathering, communion, where silliness and letting loose is serious business for some.

Not always so inclusive and welcoming at times, but this will change with time.



Time

24/7, daily and constantly

Dimensions

Spatial:
Embodied

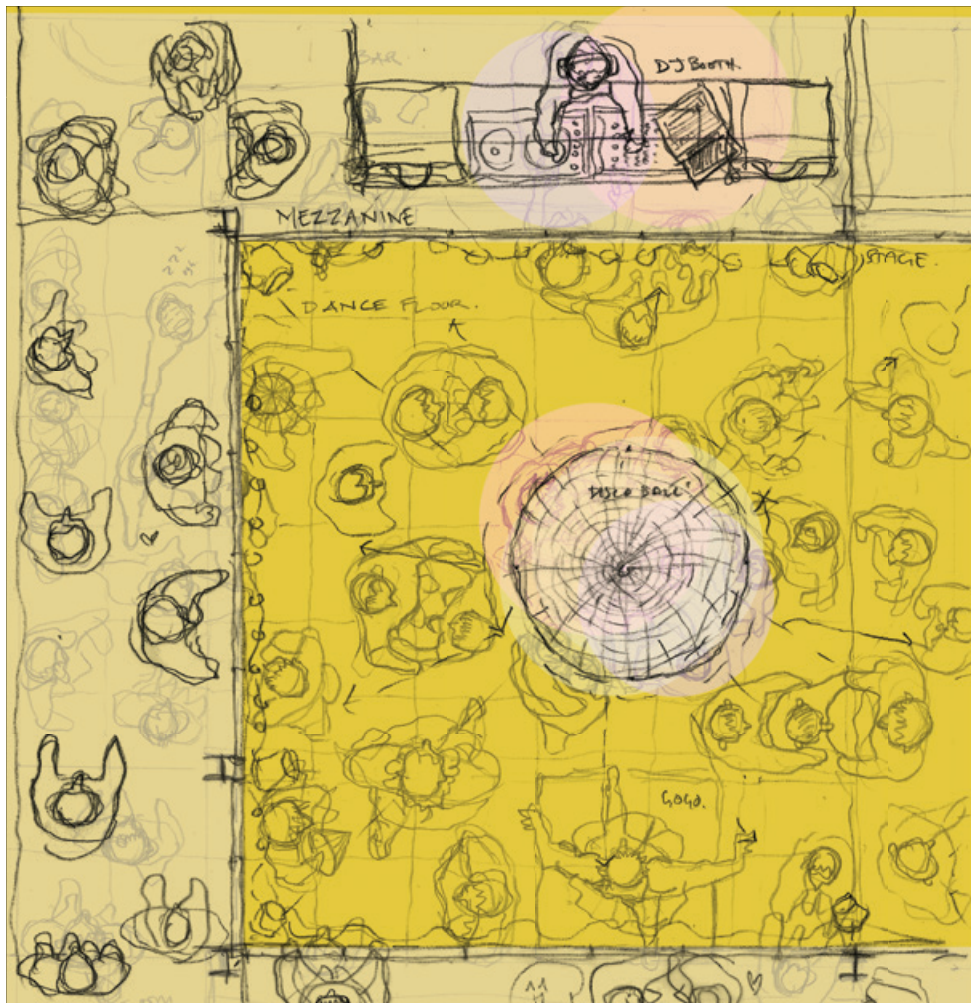
Emotional:
Frustrating, Proud

Sensory:
Warm, sweaty, anxiety-inducing
Soft, expansive, wet, warm, cool,
soothing

14.B

Dance Floor Offerings and Rituals

tủ giữ đồ lễ vật và nghi lễ



Artifact Caption X
XXXX Year
Created by X

Relations

Giver:
Giver Name

Receiver:
Receiver Name

Offering Type:
Symbolic or Physical, or both?

Private ----- Public
1 2 3 4 5

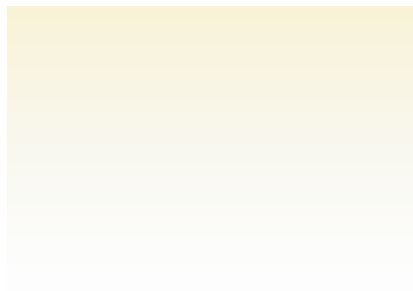
Ritual

Name DJ Set
Purpose - To do or perform X
Duration _Practiced for X time length

Offerings

Mixtape
- To do or perform X
_Replaced/removed/for x time length

Dancers
- To do or perform X
_Replaced/removed/for x time length



The Pho Restaurant

nha hang pho

Site Description

Anh Dao on Spadina was one of our main haunts after a night of clubbing. Sunday, our recovery day, after our bodies were sore from hours of sweaty dancing and a night of winkless sleep, we'd come together at this family-owned joint with whatever articles of clothing we had left at our main hub, that is, pre/after party spot.



Time

24/7, daily and constantly

Dimensions

Spatial:
Embodied

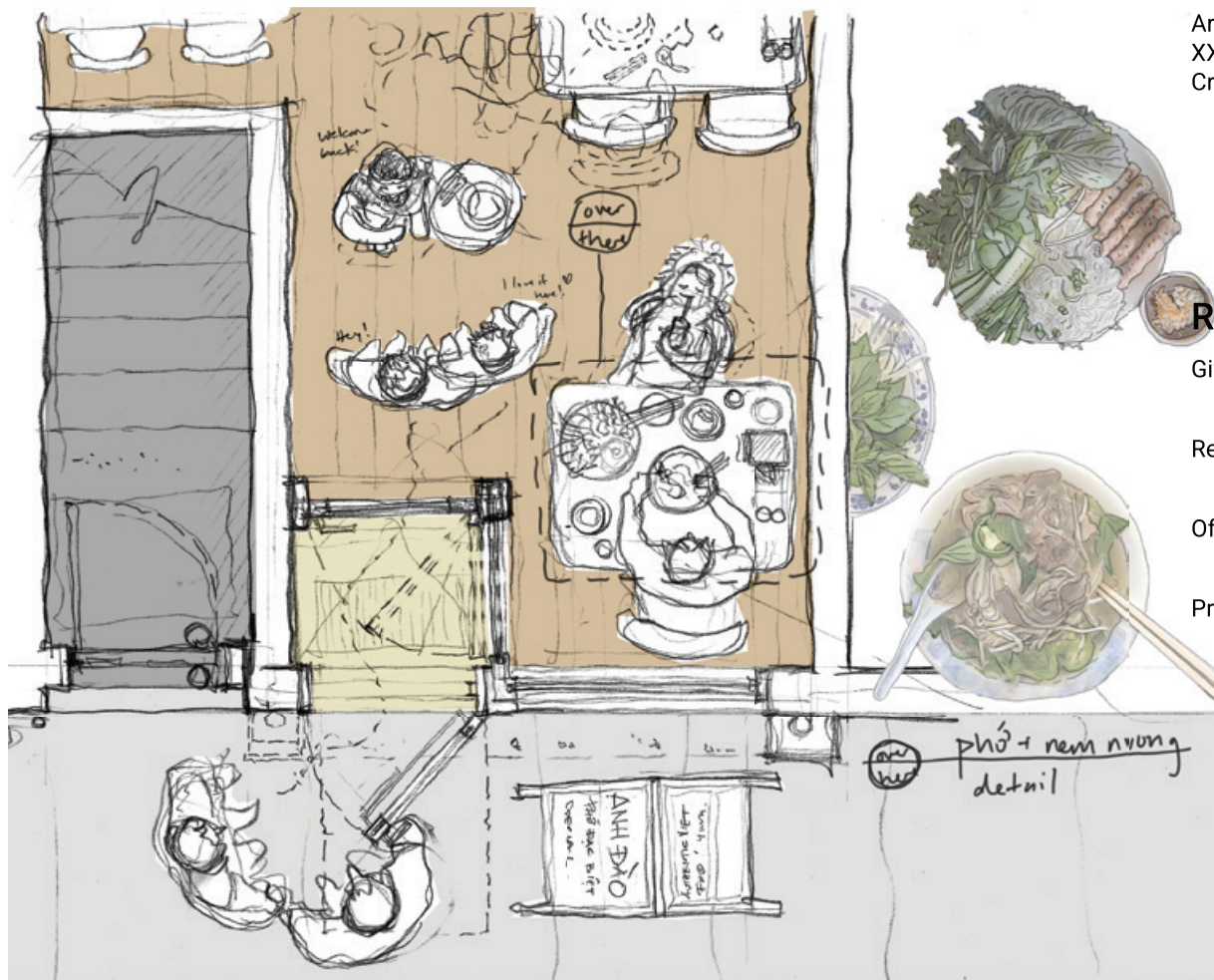
Emotional:
Frustrating, Proud

Sensory:
Warm, sweaty, anxiety-inducing
Soft, expansive, wet, warm, cool,
soothing

15.B

Pho Restaurant Offerings and Rituals

nha hang pho lễ vật và nghi lễ



Artifact Caption X
XXXX Year
Created by X

Relations

Giver:
Giver Name

Receiver:
Receiver Name

Offering Type:
Symbolic or Physical, or both?

Private ----- Public
1 2 3 4 5

Ritual

Name Recovery Meal
Purpose - To do or perform X
Duration _Practiced for X time length

Offerings

Bowl of Pho
- To do or perform X
_Replaced/removed/for x time length

ca phe sua da (Viet Iced Coffee)
- To do or perform X
_Replaced/removed/for x time length

Appendix 2

DRS Thesis Playlist

There were many songs, podcasts, stories that I have listened to at the background of my thesis work. This is a small collection of the sonic dimension of altars, offerings, and queer community. The first 12 tracks are the ones I had picked at the very beginning of the thesis year. More was added, and the playlist will continued to be tweaked. You can stream the playlist on Spotify ([link here](#)).

1. Temple
Thao & The Get Down Stay Down (Temple, 2020)
2. Có Ai Trên Đời Mà Không Yêu (Con Tim Và Nước Mắt)
Mai Lệ Huyền, Saigon Supersound (Original 1971, SS Vol.1 2017)
3. Dynasty
Rina Sawayama (SAWAYAMA, 2020)
4. U Look Asian
Maggie Tra (U.L.A., 2021)
5. Tankin
Indochine (Le Peril Jaune, 1983)
6. Cô Tây Đen
Van Son, Saigon Supersound (Original 1974, SS Vol.2 2018)
7. SOY
Maggie Tra (U.L.A., 2021)
8. Ocean Vuong reads “Not Even This”
Poetry Foundation (The Poetry Magazine Podcast, 2020)
9. Nobody Dies
Thao & The Get Down Stay Down (A Man Alive, 2016)
10. Flicker
Rina Sawayama (Flicker Single, 2018)

11. **Hold Tight**
Felix Cartal (Next Season, 2018)

12. **Sayonara**
Desired (Desired, 2016)

13. **Cathy Park Hong and Lynn Xu on the Poetry of Choi Seungla**
Poetry Foundation (The Poetry Magazine Podcast, 2021)

14. **S2 Ep6: Seeds, Grief, and Memory with Rowen White**
Prentis Hemphill (Finding Our Way Podcast, 2021)

15. **Connecting to Our Roots: Ancestors, Continuation and Transformation (Episode #5)**
Plum Village (The Way Out Is In Podcast, 2021)

16. **Urchin**
Kim Dürbeck (Urchin, 2020)

17. **Chaos**
DUSTIN NGO 春風 (Kinh Kỳ, 2019)

18. **Con Gái Của Mẹ**
Thanh Tuyen, Saigon Supersound (Original 1974, SS Vol.1 2017)

19. **Tình Ta Như Lúa Đơm Hoa**
Carol Kim, Saigon Supersound (Original 1974, SS Vol.1 2017)

20. **Sống Cho Nhau**
Hùng Cường, Mai Lệ Huyền, Saigon Supersound (1970, SS Vol.1 2017)

21. **Su Cho in Conversation with Gabrielle Bates and Jennifer S. Cheng**
Poetry Foundation (The Poetry Magazine Podcast, 2021)

22. **Chosen Family (with Elton John)**
Rina Sawayama, Elton John (SAWAYAMA Deluxe Ed., 2021)

23. **Nào Ta Cùng Dub – Sub Conscious Dub**
Saigon Soul Revival (Nào Ta Cùng Hát, 2020)

24. **Born to the Floor**
Kim Durbeck (Born to the Floor, 2021)

Appendix 3

Incongruent Intimacies

103

Incongruent intimacies

These are additional work that were integral to the process of the thesis but did not feel suitable to include in the book proper.

Family Portraits

Memories have powerful material consequences despite seemingly weighing nothing at all. This photo of my family and me in Vietnam in 1994, and I had only seen it when I visited more than 20 years after.

I would spend hours looking over my family's photo albums from when we visited Vietnam when I was a toddler.

I held on tightly to 3-year-old Thompson's recollections of Vietnam and would return to the photo album again and again to replay what I thought I knew.

I remembered exactly which photos were held in the clear, plastic inserts, studying each one, trying to connect my parents and siblings' stories to moments taken in 4x6 prints.

Seeing this photo in Vietnam - a missing moment in a set of prints we had in Mississauga - was familiar and yet disorientingly new.

I revisit the photo album less and less as I grow older and change. My memories weigh less than they used to, and I begin to allow them be altered, recoloured and open to flourish new understandings of what was once held so tightly.



Fig. 92. Thompson's first visit to Vietnam. By Hoa Nguyen, 1994.

Fig. 93. Aunties and Mom debating which ancestor to visit next, in Haiphong. By author, 2016.



Fig. 94. A cemetery nearby a rice field in Haiphong. By author, 2016.



Fig. 95. Visiting Grandpa's gravesite in Haiphong on Auntie's motor bike. By author, 2016.



Fig. 96. A family meal after visiting ancestors in Haiphong. By author, 2016.



Fig. 97. Amazed at the density of gravesites. A cemetery in Haiphong. By author, 2016.



Fig. 98. The offerings to ancestors. By author, 2016.



Fig. 99. A jade dragon figure in front of my dad's altar to his parents in Mississauga. By author, 2021.



Fig. 100. Altar objects in Mississauga. By author, 2021.



*Fig. 101. An oblique view of my dad's altar to his parents in Mississauga.
By author, 2021.*



Fig. 102. The altar room in Mississauga - plants tended to by mom. By author, 2021.



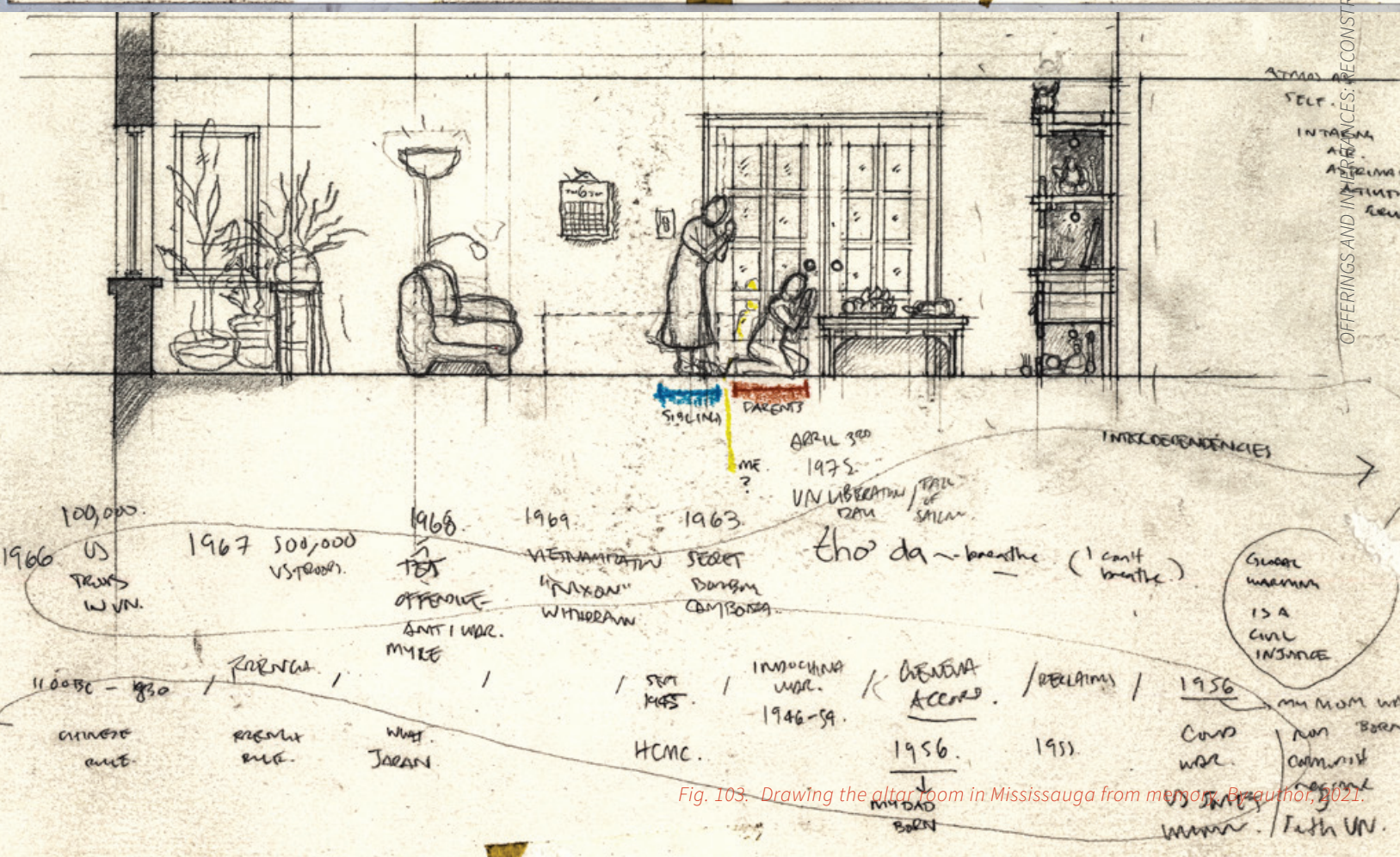
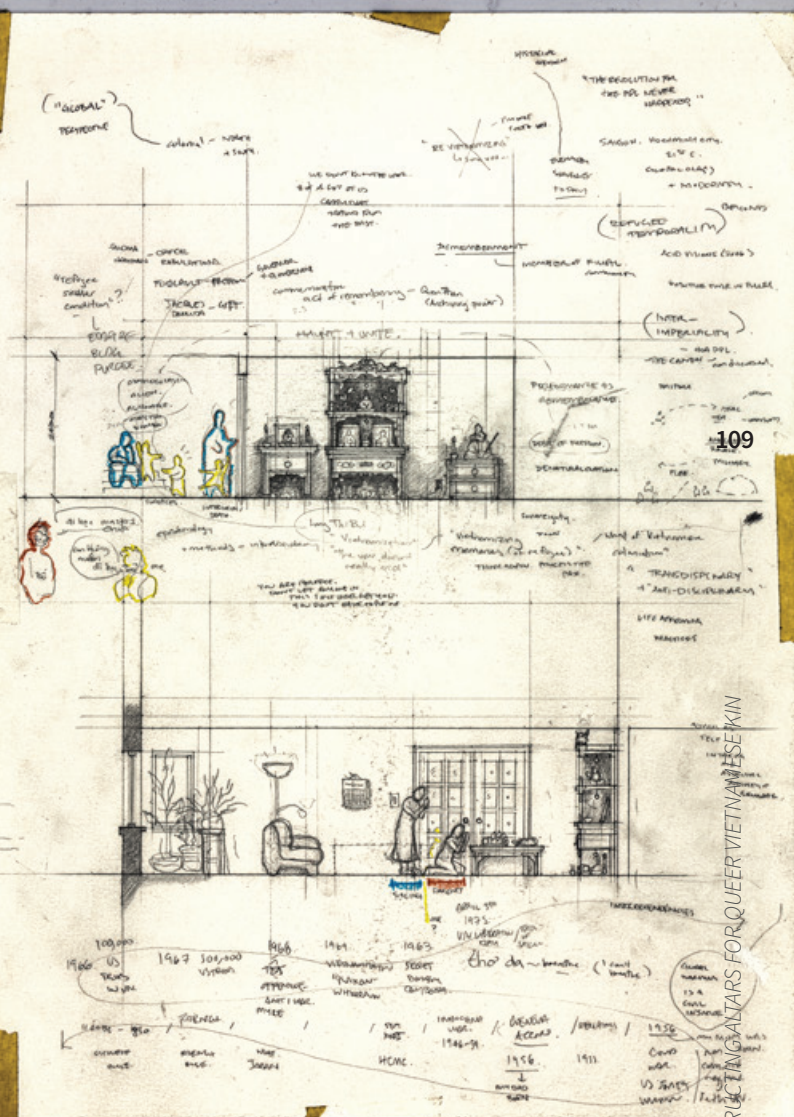
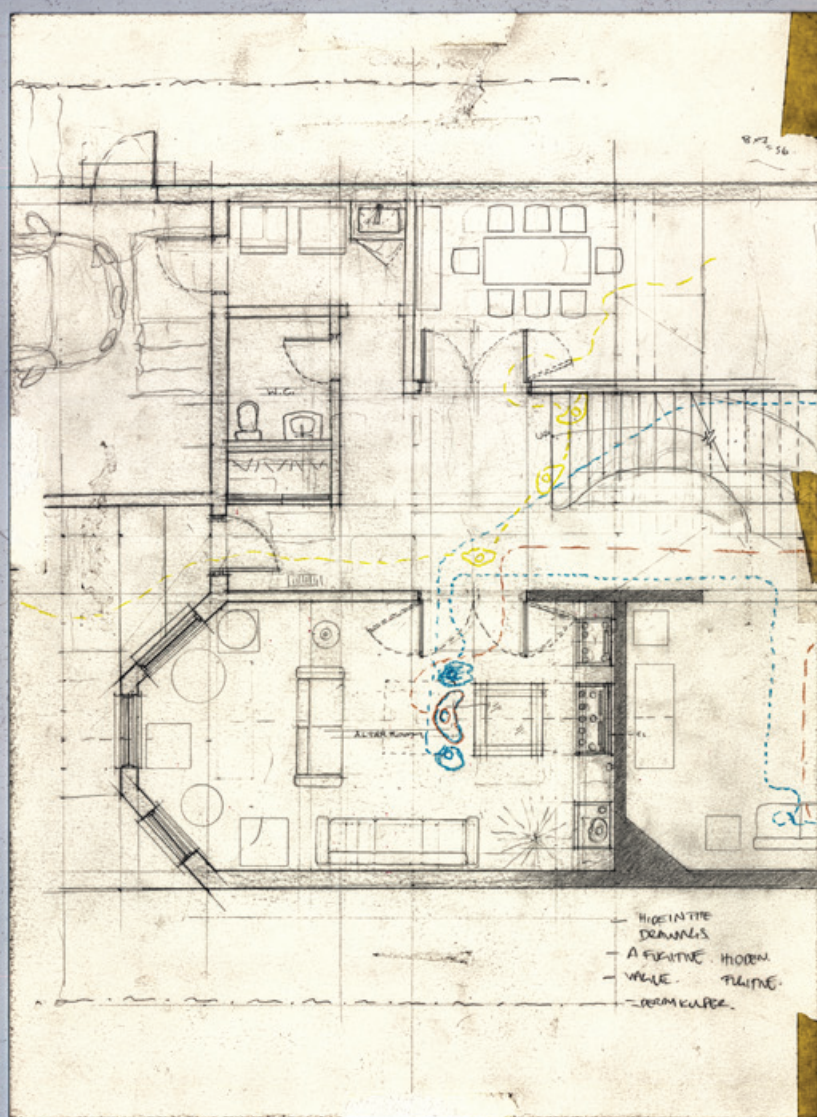


Fig. 103. Drawing the altar room in Mississauga from memory. Braauthor, 2021.



Fig. 104. Praying to the altar in Mississauga. By author, 2021.



Fig. 105. Selfies with the altar in Mississauga. By author, 2021.



Fig. 106. More altar objects. Photo by author, 2021.



Fig. 107. An electric candle for Uncle Son. Photo by author, 2021.

thank you very much

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