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# idea journal

fiction, fantasies, and fabulations:  
imagining other interior worlds

vol. 19, no. 01

2022

the journal of IDEA: the interior design +  
interior architecture educators association





# idea journal

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**the journal of IDEA: the interior design +  
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**this issue's provocation**

While the world reels, reconfigures, and recovers from the drama and trauma of 2020, wishing to thwart the effects of grief and comprehend what was once incomprehensible, there is all good reason to turn our imagination to 'what ifs', dreams, and other speculations as an antidote to hopelessness. This issue, *Fictions, Fantasies, and Fabulations*, calls for contributions that consider the unlikely, improbable, or downright impossible in spatial design. In recent history, fictions, fantasies, and fabulations have offered productive opposition to the rampant instrumentality of pragmatism and functional planning. Their impact has instilled optimism, sparked alternative visions, and been sites of countless critiques of conformity and the status quo. Loosely defined impulses towards the unrealisable and the most illogical of things approached in the most logical of ways have led to unparalleled episodes of creativity in drawings, poems, and material production. From Piranesi, Peter Greenaway, Kurt Schwitters, Dora Maar, Hans Op de Beeck, Ursula Le Guinn, John Hejduk, to Daniel Libeskind, explorations of the impossible have led to new interpretative frontiers that move the limits of interiority and spatial practices. Lest we forget or become complacent with the contributory and often unrecognised impact of contemporary social media, advertisement, and technological surveillance that continues to shape interior worlds, experiences, and values. In many ways, there is as much focus on unpacking, making sense of, and disproving the dangerous impacts of fictions, fantasies, and fabulations as there is on setting the scene for dreams and magical realities.

This issue recognises the complex story of fictions, fantasies, and fabulations in spatial design, not as counter-productive forces, but as the necessary counter-balances that offer liberty from convention, propriety, and rational assumptions about behaviour, space, time, and material — the core elements of interior worlds. Far from retreating into solipsistic escapism, fictions, fantasies, and fabulations serve as crucial sites for speculative invention, futuring, and critical reflection. Resistant to the reductive inertia of pragmatism, these generative properties reign in that mercurial shadow world of meaning and value not directly associated with cause and effect.

This call for papers and projects is intended to frame an open examination and exploration of the fictions, fantasies, and fabulations in spatial and interior practices. It prompts us to draw, write, perform, and record the critical edge of the unrealisable in an era that has literally experienced the limits of reason. As described by poet Franny Choi, there is no more time for poetry without stakes because 'people are literally dying'. There is no more time for creative practices that don't ask questions that we 'truly don't know the answer to'.<sup>01</sup> Choi's sentiments air a sense of urgency for relevance as much as they point to the value and agency of poetic meaning and making in artistic, spatial, and interior practices.

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01 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PLYUdgQtOLXlc7HWlc3nBH7VNNvt5hDTA&v=iwoS-CB7k8&ab\\_channel=PBSNewsHour](https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PLYUdgQtOLXlc7HWlc3nBH7VNNvt5hDTA&v=iwoS-CB7k8&ab_channel=PBSNewsHour)



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# whakapapa plotting: an aotearoa-specific method of spatial communication

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## abstract

Aotearoa New Zealand has a rich history of pre-colonial architectural design embedded in Indigenous Māori knowledge — a unique oceanic cultural spatial sensibility. Whenua (land) activates a metaphysical exchange between people, ocean, and atmosphere to grow the spatial sensibility into an intangible interconnected blueprint for design.

Despite possessing a vast body of environment-specific knowledge embedded in centuries of experience, the dynamic spirit of existing Māori architecture stands in sharp contrast to the hermetic design systems brought ashore during the nineteenth-century British colonisation of Aotearoa that inhibited further development of our Māori spatial kaupapa (approach).

How can Aotearoa designers uphold the mana (prestige) of Māori cultural spatial sensibilities when designing within the dominant Pākēha (New Zealand European) industry today?

This visual essay has been created from the perspective of a Māori spatial designer. It foregrounds the need for all Aotearoa designers to honour the philosophical spatial mātauranga (knowledge) crafted by our tīpuna (ancestors). We have a responsibility to breathe life into these skills so our tamariki (children) can thrive in spatial environments without Indigenous erasure.

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## keywords:

drawing; spatial design; Māori; whakapapa; visualisation



Whakapapa plotting is a conceptual drawing tool developed to re-imagine the common spatial design processes and methods of communication used in Aotearoa today. Whakapapa plotting explores the intersectional opportunities of two existing communication techniques: cognitive mapping and strategic plotting. The first is a philosophical Māori approach to locate metaphysical environmental experiences. The latter is an architectural storytelling technique developed by University of Michigan academic Perry Kulper. Both techniques oscillate between embodied action and relational eruptions of metaphysical spatial possibility.

Whakapapa Plots manifest as a metanarrative of design codes visualising potential spatial sequences of lived and possible fantastical space: a koha (gift) of speculative cartography to provide foundation for all subsequent design decisions. They symbolise a commitment that the designer will stretch beyond the confines of Western design systems to protect and preserve mātauranga Māori within every thread of the design process.

## pepeha<sup>01</sup>

Ko Aoraki te maunga  
Ko Waitaki te awa  
Ko Ngāi Tahu te iwi  
Ko Ngāi Te Ruahikihiki te hapū  
Nō Ōtautahi ahau  
Ko Stokes tōku ingoa whānau  
Ko Georgina Mary tōku ingoa

## kia ora e hoa; hello my friend

Before I introduce you to our Whakapapa Plots, it is essential that you understand the whakapapa (genealogy) behind the nexuses of energy, traces of action, and murmurs of potential relationships they depict in response to the core question of this visual essay:

How can Aotearoa designers decolonise the design process to uphold and strengthen Māoritanga (Māori culture) in our everyday built environment?

Mātauranga<sup>02</sup> Māori knowledge of space is founded upon relationships between the ‘natural, spiritual and cultural landscape, and the dynamic movement in between’ to form the fields in which Aotearoa cultural spatial sensibilities are manifested.<sup>03</sup> As a core element of Mātauranga, whakapapa can be described as an imprint of all tangible and intangible layers of the past that influence our future<sup>04</sup> — from these marks we can identify who we are, where we began and how we experience the world.<sup>05</sup> Mātauranga specific



to space and interconnected with whakapapa have been passed through generations of tīpuna by way of pūrākau (philosophical narratives). Pūrākau attending to space often express complex intimate phenomenological relationships between tangata (people) and te taiao (the environment) to inspire further learning and experience of the values and frameworks ingrained in Māoritanga. The process of sharing spatial knowledge by weaving narratives of people, space, time, and culture together to sustain a distinctive Aotearoa web of belonging leads to whakapapa as an essential spatial entity at the centre of all Māori design decision making.

The preservation of historical Māori cultural spatial sensibilities in the built environment can only be realised after a meticulous process of translating whakapapa into sequences of movement is undertaken by attending to tikanga — a set of customs and values shaped over many generations in response to socio-cultural contexts.<sup>06</sup> If whakapapa frames the approach to the conceptual design, tikanga will help to lay out the steps to embed the spatial information in physical space. Māori mastery of behavioural spatial flow to develop spatial tikanga stems from the historical process of constructing imagined maps of potential space and relational whakapapa before anything physical is established — cultural cognitive mapping.<sup>07</sup>

Early evidence of this method is exemplified through our ancestors' knowledge gained by travelling the ocean in their waka (canoes). Over time, the compositional fluidity between weather, structure, interior, and exterior of a waka was developed as an 'essential memory blueprint [tikanga] for all subsequent Māori architecture,'<sup>08</sup> namely, the wharehūi (meeting house). The human inclination to make connections between symbols, materials, volumes, and memory guides an individual's interpretation of the space's sensibility. For example, the chronology of your movement in a wharehūi is strategically activated by the spatial sensibilities that encourage you to 'enter, greet, eat, meet in that order [...] you know where to go, what to do, how to behave and what to do next.'<sup>09</sup>

Visual communication of cognitive mapping preserved from 1793 shows an early brush between Māori and British spatial communication techniques.<sup>10</sup> Twenty-four years previously, British Captain James Cook travelled to survey the geographical qualities of Aotearoa using traditional western cartographic mapping techniques. This pursuit of information gathering for the purposes of colonisation sparked further British attempts to study Aotearoa geography in the decades that followed. As a result, Northland Māori chiefs Tuki Tahua and Ngahuruhuru were detained for the purposes of sharing their intimate knowledge of the land by providing the colonisers a detailed map of Aotearoa coastlines.<sup>11</sup> While it was presumed similar



Western cartographic techniques to document physical terrain used by Cook would be conformed to, Tuki instead called on his whakapapa and delineated a complex plot transcending space and time, 'a subjective distortion of scale favouring [Tuki's] local area [...] this also illustrates the primacy of experienced time in traversal of the landscape rather than the objectification of space.'<sup>12</sup> Perhaps most compelling is a large track down the centre of te Ika-a-Māui (the North Island) depicting a spiritual path of energy — acknowledging the whakapapa of tīpuna whose mauri (life force) continues to live within the whenua through cultural spatial sensibilities. The visual documentation of Tuki's knowledge of the tangible land interwoven with intangible experience within Western cartographic frameworks was a significant moment in the cross-cultural comprehension of divergent spatial worldviews.

Māori academic Dr Rebecca Kiddle has spoken of many historical attempts to strengthen Tuki's extraordinary communication of spatial whakapapa and protect the valuable mātauranga of Māori spatial visual communication; however, dominating Western forces in Aotearoa determined the visualisations of our environments were 'grounded in Captain Cook's cartographic pen lines, not Tuki's ever since.'<sup>13</sup>

How can we learn from our tīpuna and invite whakapapa into the ink of our pens, the pixels on our screens, when communicating space? How can we uphold the mana of Tuki and preserve historical Māori cultural spatial sensibilities within the dominant Western design systems of Aotearoa today?

'Kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua; I walk backwards into the future with my eyes fixed on the past.'<sup>14</sup>

### **e noho; sit down**

Despite our mātauranga telling us we need to stand still and listen to the whakapapa of our sites, our Westernised design systems put higher value on productivity and consistency, overriding the time needed for Māori design processes to breathe.<sup>15</sup> In response, this creative work seeks to re-imagine a kaupapa Māori approach to speculative cartography as a method of design communication that acknowledges the past before uniting knowledge of Māori and Pākēha in a safe way to design future spaces.

In this context, speculative cartography can be described as a mapping design method deployed to graphically record ephemeral relationships between phenomena. Derived from a critique of traditional Western architectural presentation drawing, speculative cartography is attuned to the potential of space within and around orthographic lines — where space for connections and 'ability to merge social, contextual, cultural



and mythological references with personal experience and intuition' are given life.<sup>16</sup> Physical space becomes secondary to the metanarrative of influence uniting relational phenomena entangled in the history and experience of space; 'the map is no longer based on an ontological, comprehensible reality but exists [...] between that which can be represented and that which will always be outside of representation.'<sup>17</sup>

Perry Kulper is an architectural academic from the University of Michigan who uses speculative cartography as a mode to critique the conceptual design restrictions and cultural power imbalances of design communication within traditional Western techniques. Kulper believes all designs must begin by gathering threads of relational matter, then delicately sewing them together to weave the 'metaphorical space from which a design brief is constructed.'<sup>18</sup> Kulper subsequently developed a method of speculative cartography dubbed 'strategic plotting'<sup>19</sup> to conduct complex expressions of possible space. Strategic plots are composed from a concoction of lines, found imagery, text, drawing conventions, and timeframes to express fields of potential spatial experiences deeply embedded in the past.

Site-specific histories, metaphors of fluctuating theoretical space, and tidal material conditions become part of the symphony of movement visualised in a Kulper plot.

Respect is given to all relational matter, as he believes that time and creative vision should have higher value than drawing conventions because, 'unlike the language of [Western] architecture, the language of representation positions material as conceptual, temporality as malleable and gravity as negotiable.'<sup>20</sup> A Kulper plot has the sustenance to draw the viewer through dark maritime histories, into the corner of museums, and back under the light of the moon to deliver a highly conceptual proposition of what the next design step could be.

Tidal fluctuations of changing conditions and scores of subjective experiences enabled by the fluidity of speculative cartography (specifically strategic plotting) draw thoughtful threads of cross-cultural communication between Western and Māori approaches to designing space. Such a multi-varied approach to visualising the relationships between matter offers the designer the ability to traverse between space and time in a technique comparable to Tuki Tahua in 1793; it upholds the mana of our Māori cultural spatial sensibilities within a western frame.

How can we ensure the layers of our history, and codified systems of space and atmosphere rooted in our whakapapa are empowered within speculative cartography to visually guide the design of future space in Aotearoa today?



## haere mai ki te whakapapa plots; welcome to whakapapa plots

A Whakapapa Plot is a visual ensemble of relational cultural-spatial thinking corresponding to an Aotearoa-based design site. Plots have infinite possibilities for representation; the outcome is deeply embedded within the spatial powers of the composer eliminating 'representational borders with the hope of sustaining a more fluid ideological, critical material amalgamation [of ideas].'<sup>21</sup> Alive with whakapapa, these plots will catapult a conceptual design into the cosmos of non-architectural material to expand beyond tangible environments into metaphysical space.

The Whakapapa Plots you will encounter in this visual essay are situated at two active design sites in Ōtautahi (Christchurch). These plots offer conversation between meta- and micronarratives in accordance with site context, design subject matter, and local iwi (tribe) gifted pūrākau to ensure mātauranga is respected throughout all design process decisions.

The first set of plots are in relation to Paparoa Street School. Under the esteemed guidance of Mātauraka Mahaanui,<sup>22</sup> Paparoa Street School is currently learning from a mātauranga-based framework to re-think the cultural spatial sensibilities of their future learning spaces. The Paparoa community have embraced te ao Māori to ensure all

tamariki (children) have space to explore their collective whakapapa and contribute to the layers of living for generations to come.<sup>23</sup>

Paparoa tamakiri have been given the responsibility of growing Aotearoa-specific design ideas for new school spaces. From listening and learning to their bursting, aroha (love) filled proposals, upholding the mana of the whenua, a series of Whakapapa Plots was born in response; they are still in production but swimming with potential.

Whakapapa Plots 02, 04, and 09 are a koha to Paparoa Street School. The drawings render connections between site-specific historical swamplands bustling with native growth, ka Tiritiri-o-te-Moana (the Southern Alps) whisking birdsong within the southwest wind, and unified streams flowing to deliver sustenance for action. The Paparoa plots form a visual language that can be unravelled and explored by involved architectural teams to support a design offering that respects and nourishes our kaupapa and Paparoa's whakapapa.

Paparoa Plots work together in the wider Ōtautahi context to frame the speculative plotting of the second site, Workplace Toru. Located on the Ōtakaro Awa (Avon River) edge, Workplace Toru is an existing space of residence for government kaimahi (workers). The current space has been designed to fit within the instructive box of 'The New Zealand Principles for Office Design,'<sup>24</sup> a compulsory



design code developed by the New Zealand Government to prescribe flexibility, uniformity, and cohesion as essential components in the spatial design formula of an Aotearoa workplace. A critique of this approach through a mātauranga lens forms the metanarrative of Workplace Toru Whakapapa Plots, questioning the absence of Māoritanga within these spaces. Whakapapa Plots 01, 03, 05, 06, 07, and 08 offer a speculative redefinition of Workplace Toru with greater respect to our Māori kaupapa — our values, culture, and sense of place by inviting and celebrating whakapapa through relationships of spatial tikanga in the interior space. Workplace Toru now lives with possibilities for archives of energy, rituals of exchange, flows of oceanic action, and divergent atmospheric conditions.

### **a whakapapa plot translation guide**

The Whakapapa Plots you will encounter and perhaps befriend in this work have many lives as they morph within the eyes of each viewer. Yet, each plot is embedded within the mind of the composer, the facilitator of spatial dialogue. They are not meant to be solved or analysed — they can only be experienced and interpreted through your lens as a way to light your imagination.

Please remember, Whakapapa Plots belong to our Māori whakapapa; give them time and space to breathe.

Whakapapa Plots are polyvocal. They empower many voices to converge within one visual field. The nine plots in this series invite you to enter inside the speculative metanarrative of Ōtautahi and journey through a series of plan, section, elevation, and experiential perspectival drawings of Paparoa Street School and Workplace Toru until the moment we might physically arrive facing the whenua with our feet touching the soil.

Each plot varies in scale and density; each page tends to a larger image that encapsulates the entire Whakapapa Plot accompanied by micro narrative fragments peppered above in smaller squares. The codified sequences reveal complexities of space and time within the generative spatial relationships.

The order of Whakapapa Plot experience moves back and forth between Paparoa Street School and Workplace Toru — the interpretive rhythm of their findings operate together to protect and sustain mātauranga Māori.

Once you have journeyed through all nine plots, the greater metanarrative will emerge.

‘Āe, mārika kua tae mai koutou; yes, you have indeed arrived.’<sup>25</sup>



## acknowledgements

I am filled with gratitude to the many people who gifted me with the support, knowledge, and dreams to create this work. I acknowledge and thank my tīpuna especially. Ngā mihi nui ki a koutou. Mei kore ake koe!

## author biography

Georgina Stokes (Ngāi Tahu) is a spatial designer and educator in Pōneke Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand. Her creative practice is centred around the visualisation of mātauranga Māori systems of cultural spatial sensibility and waiora: questioning how our built environment can better protect and care for our Indigenous values, culture, tradition, environment, and sense of place.

### Figures.

All imagery by the author.  
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Georgina Stokes, 'Paparoa Street Whakapapa Plots', digital drawing (Master's exegesis: Aroha ki ō tātou kaimahi, Massey University, 2020).  
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## notes

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