Title: Feeling Bodies of Architecture: Towards an Incommensurable Pedagogy

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Abstract: What it might mean for an architectural pedagogy to center the body and its senses, not simply as the recipient, the user, the client, the public, the crowd, the appropriator, the intended, but also as the body and bodies that draw drawings, sketch sketches, model models, imagine imaginings? This is a call to center the body, bodies – their senses, their sensations, their inarticulable feeling – in the methods, the ways, the modes, the metaphors, the sites, the attentions, the outcomes of spatial pedagogy. To work through this proposal, I turn to a discussion at the intersection of decolonial thinking and queer theory, explore spatial metaphors of knowledge production and suggest architectural pedagogy must dwell in the incommensurate.

In architecture, it is easier to talk about the end of the world, than it is to talk about bodies and their feelings.

A gathering of bodies

I go to my laptop this evening – a Thursday evening – in order to participate in a meeting

hosted by faculty of color in the School of Architecture at the Royal College of Art. The

meeting is attended by architectural students of color and is focused on experiences of

racism.iii It's a meeting that has been held before, and has been created and held in order

1

to hold space for students to sit together, to support each other, to laugh, and to talk about instances of racism in their architectural journey and in their daily life. This particular meeting is the first meeting that is open for allies to join, but to join in listening. I click the Zoom link in my Google calendar from what Paul B. Preciado (2020) has called "the soft prison" conflating the realms of labor's production and its reproduction. A square of my own face emerges, and I agree to its relative verifiable representation of my face, and so I join the large set of faces and their bodies. Bodies of students, bodies of staff. I sit. I listen. I listen to the silences. I listen to the candor and openness. I listen to embodied bodies speak about the traumas of racialized bodies. I listen to the ways in which bodies speak about these sensations, feelings, orientations in response to racism, racism within the institution in which I work, with colleagues and students, and administrators and technicians I work with.

I realize this is the first time since joining the School of Architecture in 2017 that a formal pedagogic space has been created to center not just the *body*, but these *bodies*. While this weekly forum organized and hosted by the Dean Professor Adrian Lahoud emerged as a response to a tripartite of a pandemic, of a resurfacing in the mainstream media of the Black Lives Matter movement globally and of the failures of an institution to respond. What I heard was a profound awareness and an attunement to the atmospheres and materialities of white supremacy, of structural and lived racism, and of intersections of class, of gender, of sexuality, of language, of ability, of geography.

In this chapter, I ask how might we allow space for bodies to read as bodies in the architectural studio, to reflect and sense and feel, and bring that reflection and sense and feel into their work? I am minded about the value of the singular story, or feeling body through Maggie Nelson remarks in "What's Queer Form Anyway?" an interview with Annie DeWitt (2018) in the Paris Review: "paying attention to a singular person or thing can be a way of expressing love, of paying homage to their uniqueness, their difference from everything else that exists. And that paying that kind of attention can be a way of understanding difference as something that holds us together rather than signifying our apartness." This is perhaps something of what José Esteban Muñoz (2000, 67), following the work of Norma Alarcón, terms "identity-in-difference." In short, "an identity-in-

difference is one that understands the structuring role of difference as the underlying concept in a group's mapping of collective identity" (Muñoz 2000, 67). This is also perhaps something like what Kathleen Stewart (2007, 5) terms ordinary affects, or "a continuous, often maddening effort to approach the intensities of the ordinary through a close ethnographic attention to pressure point and forms of attention and attachment." Building from Nelson, Muñoz and Stewart, this close attention to difference as a binding practice is, I argue, a form of *love as pedagogy* and this feels like what is precisely at stake in any architectural future.

This is a call to center the body, bodies – their senses, their sensations, their inarticulable feeling – in the methods, the ways, the modes, the metaphors, the sites, the attentions, the outcomes of spatial pedagogy. As Preciado (2020) writes, "It is precisely because our bodies are the new enclaves of biopower and because our apartments are the new cells of biovigilance that it is more urgent than ever to invent new strategies of cognitive emancipation and resistance." But it is also because bodies, quite simply, are present. Bodies are sensate, are touching feeling thinking. This is a call for a commitment to a collective conjuring of embodied presence, a conjuring in slow time, a time of allowing feelings to be, to emerge, to dissipate, to undo, to connect, to become sociological, to rest historical, to abstain, to feel less, to feel same, to feel different, to feel.

Bodies of architecture

Rather than renouncing desire by learning to desire *less*, we can, then, learn new ways of imagining and enacting desire. (Hume and Rahimtoola 2018, 141)

To move from the oral to the written is to immobilize the body, to take control (to possess it). (Glissant 1992, 123)

It is easier to talk about the end of the world, than it is to talk about bodies and their feelings.ⁱⁱⁱ In architectural studios and courses, briefs are tackling urgent social and spatial frames like the climate emergency and climate justice, like housing inequity and accumulation as dispossession, like the violence of aspirational aesthetics within

architectural representation, like the racial capitolocene and the endurance of colonial systems of powers through the institutions and technologies of modernity. And yet it is rare, difficult, uncomfortable even, to talk radically of desire. To talk not of the body, but of bodies, their tenderness, their trauma, of skin and leakages, of pleasure and abjection, of aged bodies, historic bodies, of raced classed and gendered bodies, of maimed bodies, of crip bodies, of lesbian, trans, gay, intersex, bisexual, asexual and two-spirited bodies, of bodies that labor, of sex-working bodies, of spent bodies, of dead bodies, of loose or tight bodies, of emotional bodies, of feeling bodies, of sensate bodies.

Confronting the minimalist tropes in eco-criticism that posits desire, or an unfettered desire (of more), as a culprit in consumptive emergencies and relations to extractive economies and climate crisis, Angela Hume and Samia Rahimtoola (2018) argue the opposite. Shifting from a dichotomous argument of desiring more or desiring less, Hume and Rahimtoola (2018, 141) propose that we "should learn new ways of imagining and enacting desire." A first step in learning these new ways would be to begin to make space for the articulation of desire, of what a body desires, of what the bodies of architecture desire. There is also something of the orality of the project, or perhaps, if not orality, but also movement, sense, bodily comportment, and atmosphere, then to talk about bodies and their feelings, is, perhaps, an attempt to wrest bodies from their immobilization and possession in written form, as Édouard Glissant (1992, 123) writes.

What happens in the pedagogies of architecture, happens in, on through and between bodies – bodies of radical difference, but often within institutional arrangements rife with heteronormative atmospheres, languages, feelings. I should state that the kinds of briefs I opened this section with – on climate justice, on housing inequity, on the racial capitolocene, on urgencies of scale – are not a set of mutually exclusive possibilities to the kind of touching feeling, to use Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's (2002) term, of the body. However, this oft scalar division between body, or bodies, sensation and affect, and the cumulative, scalar, transhistorical, or planetary, might itself be a cognitive dimension of what María Lugones (2010, 369) terms the "gender modern/colonial system." I want to explore what it might mean for an architectural pedagogy to center the body and its senses, not simply as the recipient, the user, the client, the public, the crowd, the

appropriator, the intended but also as the body and bodies that draw drawings, sketch sketches, model models, imagine imaginings.

In my attempt to explore these inarticulate bodies of architecture, and their implication for pedagogy, I turn to two critical friends. The first is the decolonial and critical pedagogic scholarship of Boaventura de Sousa Santos, and specifically The Cognitive End of Empire (2018). The second is the work in performance studies and critical race scholarship of queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz, and specifically their posthumous work The Sense of Brown (2020), and previous book Cruising Utopia (2009). I do this as an experiment to read a decolonial and a queer theorist alongside each other, to work through them as incommensurable, and as a kind of difference-in-common. To be incommensurate and yet in common is, perhaps, a referential encounter between these vast, and diverse fields. iv This perhaps finds resonance in Muñoz's (2009, 1) claim that "queerness is not yet here" and in the project of Santos (2018, 120) of "building the epistemic anti-imperial South" – both vested in a not yet that implies a temporality of futurity, but alternatively a temporality conditioned on its spatiality. Queerness and a decolonial cognitive justice may be elsewhen and elsewhere, but they are not yet here. The insistence of their non-arrival is, for Muñoz (2009, 99), to contribute to its utopian possibilities, "its indeterminacy and its deployment of hope...against capitalism's ever expanding and exhausting force field of how things 'are and will be."

If the bodies^v of architecture are to be centered in any future pedagogy, then for the remainder of this chapter I want to explore what it might be for those bodies to acknowledge, explore, and make visible the "what" and "how" they feel and sense as a forever companion in their teaching, learning and practice. It is presented in two parts. The first examines built metaphors of the gated community and the ghetto in in the writing of Santos and of the prison house in the writing of Muñoz. It does so to suggest that what is at stake in an embodied architectural pedagogy is not just new forms or shapes in the environment "out there," but equally the possibility to imagine new spatial metaphors for the ways in which we construct our understanding of knowledge, of the cognitive. The second examines feeling in its noun and verb form – the difference between the semiotic translation of a sense – a feeling – and the act of sensing itself – to feel. It does so to argue

that the bodies of architecture are feeling bodies and that the sense of sense should be centered. I conclude with a call to explore what it might mean for an embodied architecture to become both Santos' (2018) "ecology of knowledges" and Muñoz's (2013, 112) "commons of the incommensurate," that is to resist the politics of equivalence as an aim.

Building architecturevi

Without radical cognitive democracy, the avatars of conformity and scapegoating will go on building small gated communities for the fearless hope of the few, and large wretched ghettos for the hopeless fear of the many. (Santos 2018, 295)

The here and now is a prison house. We must strive, in the face of the here and now's totalizing rendering of reality, to think and feel a *then and there*. (Muñoz 2009, 1)

I start here with a line from Santos that figures the gated community and the ghetto as spatial metonyms for the epistemic traps that await unless the project of cognitive decolonization becomes a commitment. Such an invocation of the built environment as metonymic ciphers of the cognitive suggests that new spatial imaginaries are fundamental to the possibility of "building the epistemic anti-imperial South" (emphasis mine, Santos 2018, 120). I do not simply mean spatial imaginaries for and through practice – the imaginaries of what might be "out there," but quite literally imagining alternative metaphors for understanding cognitive processes, knowledge formation and ideation itself. What does it mean to "build" an epistemic anti-imperial South? With what tools, materials, in which orientation, site, and for what use? How expansive can we shift the semantic constraints of a word like "build" before we need new language to express what an alternative spatial practice of knowledge might be? What alternative meanings of, or alternatives to, fundamental spatial metaphors like the foundations of knowledge, like the spatial imaginary of a view or a perspective about something, but equally out a window, in a city, of a landscape (Kaasa 2018) might we need? What new spatial orientations, relations, senses would an epistemic South, anti-capitalist and anti-patriarchal, allow for through an expanded notion of "building?" Of course, Santos' phrase can also be read literally – that the spatial effects of a colonial, capitalist and patriarchal cognitive empire is one that produces a striation of the world into ghettos both rich and poor.

For Muñoz the warning is not of a future probable, one that would extend the present diagram of gated community or ghetto, but rather that of a static present condition – the prison house. The prison as spatial metaphor for the cognitive present is, perhaps astute. The prison operates within an imprisoned / freedom dichotomy. The prison is not somewhere we want to be, it is somewhere we want to escape from. The prison is a place from which we imagine other places, other lives, other worlds. But the prison is also something we were put into. The prison is not a natural condition, but a spatial organization of surplus bodies into carceral states to manage and control populations. As Jackie Wang (2018, 84) writes from the perspective of the USA in *Carceral Capitalism*, "[a]t the dawn of the carceral era, the United States chose the path of divestment in social entitlements and *investment* in prisons and police. There was nothing inevitable about this policy path." The power of presenting a spatial metaphor of entrapment that is an arbitrary social and political construction suggests, perhaps, Mark Fisher's "glimmers" – a small register of hope. If violent, but arbitrary, then its endurance falters. If we can imagine the beginning of something, understand its coming into being, register the decisions, philosophical, political, spatial, or other that brought it about, then we might also imagine the end of something, project its coming out of being, the decisions, eco-poetic, corelational, queer, or other that brought it down. That hope is the possibility of resisting the totality of the here and now towards a then and there – or possibly a polyvocality of thens and theres. Muñoz's claim here is that the never was of queerness opens a vast potential for the imagination in that it itself is in a constant process of becoming. We glimpse, we sense, we catch sight of the possible worlds that the present and presence of queerness' not yet offers, and by extension can build trust in a "concrete possibility for another world" (Muñoz 2009, 1). Perhaps in this faith in the endurance of hope, architecture's temporality might have affinities with queerness, one that is "nothing like an escape from the social realm" (1), but equally nothing like the irresolvable entrapment of the prisoner.

While each of these spatial metaphors point to the possibility of new spatial imaginaries to affect the ways in which we can imagine spatial and cognitive forms of liberation, they are also specifically racialized spatial metaphors. The gated community is now a global typology responding to narratives of fear and centered on physical architectures of segregation enabling a false comfort to capital and its accumulation in private property. Not withstanding its global particularities, the gated community remains intimately tied to intersections of race, caste, and class. The ghetto arrives as a transnational artefact linked to spatial segregation, reduced access to urban infrastructures, targeted racialized violence and oppression from the state, and under precarity of demolition. The prison is another spatial organization of race. As Michelle Alexander (2010, 10-12) writes, "the primary targets of [the penal system's] control can be defined largely by race." The warning of Santos, and the horizon of Muñoz, then, are orientations from structural and physical manifestations of the organization and control of racialized bodies, towards an emancipatory spatial future.

Feeling architecture

Knowledge is not possible without experience, and experience is inconceivable without the sense and the feelings they arouse in us. (Santos 2018, p. 165)

In lieu of viewing racial or ethnic difference as solely cultural, I aim to describe how race and ethnicity can be understood as "affective difference," by which I mean the ways in which various historically coherent groups "feel" differently and navigate the material world on a different emotional register. (Muñoz 2020, p. 11)

What does it mean to argue for feeling to be centered in architectural pedagogy? The word itself does a double service, acting as both a noun and a verb. In its noun form, feeling accounts for a feeling or feelings, the sense that we bring into sense through a semantic translation into a cultural coded linguistic term: love, anger, hate, disgust, sadness, joy, and so on. It is a thing, whose thingness is made possible through the loose agreement and connections we build up over time and through relation of the meaning of

these sensations in the world. A feeling is something intimate and personal, and something shared and structural. But feeling is also the verb to feel. Here we can feel sad, or feel happy, or feel loved. In short, we can feel feelings. But we also feel things, that is, we might feel the wind, or pick up a rock and feel its texture, its coolness, or its weight in our hand, and feeling these things might make us feel a certain way. I can feel another, not in an empathetic state of feeling another's pain, but quite literally to trace my hand on theirs, to touch and in so doing, to feel. These might not be such separate spheres and so it somehow comes to make sense that this word, at least in English, does double work. For feeling (v.) is co-constitutive of feeling (n.).

The grammar of feeling supports in some way Santos' equation in the quote above, that sense = feelings = experience = knowledge. But perhaps Santos' framing, limited as writing and language can be with the power of its own direction as we read a sentence, does the equation a disservice. Staying with the direction of the writing leads us to think of it as a building of parts. The quote moves from small parts we might call senses, to larger agglomerations we might call feelings, to some kind of edifice we call experience, and finally to some spatial foundation we call knowledge. And here we are again, limited in the spatial imaginaries of the connective parts and labor of our ontology. Instead of part to whole, perhaps we might imagine knowledge, experience, and sense in some other form of relation. Perhaps a metaphor of liquid dissolution where feelings and senses, experiences and knowledge pool together, the particles irreducible and their causality unmappable, except to say that the liquid requires them all, and is of them all. This allows, then, at least the reverse equation to be true, that our knowledge can create or cause experiences, that produces in us sensations, and embodied feelings.

In their edited volume *Feelings of Structure* editors Yoke-Sum Wong and Karen Engle (2018) invert the title of the essay "Structures of Feeling" by the Marxist literary scholar Raymond Williams (1977) because "[they] understand *structure* and *feeling* as entangled, relational, and shifting terms rather than fixed binaries" (Engle and Wong 2018, 6). In their words, this inversion "privileges the intangible, ineffable, and evocative aspects of the complex feelings we glean from structures" (6). It is not enough for an embodied architectural pedagogy to imagine the relation between senses, feelings and knowledge

to move in one direction, but rather to allow for the intimate and the biographic to wrest in grammatic equivalence with the structural, the political, the historical.

In their edited volume *Stories of Cosmopolitan Belonging* Hannah Jones and Emma Jackson (2014) address this relation between structure and feeling within the language of migration. They term this the experience of being moved. The works in the volume attempt to draw relations between the feeling of movement, of migration, of the earth, land, air, of the borders, of the transportation, of the hugs no longer possible, of the difference of smell, taste and sound, and emotional register. For Jones and Jackman (2014, 2) being moved is, "[l]iterally, the experience of a passage from one place to another, but also the experience of passage from one emotional state to another that can accompany motion – being moved to tears, moved to laughter, moved to hate, love, pride of fear."

This relation of movement emerges in Muñoz's (2020, 11) writing on the brown commons that suggests ways in which "various historically coherent groups 'feel' differently and navigate the material world on a different emotional register." In his chapter on "Brown Commons," Muñoz articulates a manifesto-like exploration of a thinking around alternately brownness as a "being-in-common" and yet, one that is not reducible to any one thing in common. It is less an equation and more a feeling-with, or an affective relation. But this feeling is rooted in and of the world – constituting and constituted. Mirroring the language of Jones and Jackman of being moved, for Muñoz (2020, 2),

first and foremost, I mean "brown" as in brown people in a very immediate way, in this sense, people who are rendered brown by their personal and familial participations in South-to-North migration patterns. ... I mean a brownness that is conferred by the ways in which one's spatial coordinates are contested.

Here, Muñoz speaks to migration, a movement, movement itself as a condition of a rendering brown, a movement-in-common. If in the previous section both Santos and Muñoz offered a sense of directionality – the horizon, the alternative, queer futurity – here, they root in the presence of sense, of the felt, of the feeling body, of feeling bodies.

An embodied architectural pedagogy then must account for what is already here, before it can begin to recast the horizon of what is possible.

Conclusion: incommensurate architecture

the existence of multiple objective and subjective life-worlds does not create insurmountable incommensurability. (Santos 2018, 39)

A brown commons I am attempting to sketch here is an example of a collectivity with and through the incommensurable. (Muñoz 2020, 2)

Until the body itself, its institutions and histories, its cellular structure and ecopresence, its hydro-feminist entanglement, its desiring fluids, and its fleshy failure, its sexual drives, and atmospheric holes becomes the geopolitical site on which an architectural register of speculative design attends, and until this site of the body is sited on *the* body within which the capacities and faculties of an architectural imaginary are taking place, then, perhaps, any attempt at imagining a future pedagogy is destined to fail. Building on this proposition, and in conclusion, I want to turn to explore what this centering of the body means with regards to these same bodies' incommensurability.

A project of embodied architectural pedagogy, of a centering of the bodies of and in architecture must resist, in equal and oppositional force to the way it may support, the drive for a "politics of equivalence" (Muñoz 2013, 112). As this chapter closes, I should make it clear that these are not mutually exclusive pedagogic aims – the one of increasing and improving representation, of working hard so different bodies and different histories enter into the spatial coordinates where architectural pedagogy happens – and the other a project of centering bodies, their sensations and feelings, in an effort to make visible constrictive structures of feelings of the gender modern/colonial system through a scalar investigation of desire as architecture. Both require a centering of bodies. I want to explore by way of a conclusion what taking the incommensurate as a necessary conceptual register might allow for the reorientation of architectural pedagogies. That is, to move beyond a "politics of equivalence" (112) and to imagine, to cite Muñoz (2013,

112) again, "this experience of being-in-common-in-difference." What would it mean to not shore up the lines of difference, but rather to sit within incommensurate perspectives, ideations, worldings, to be "with, between, across, and alongside each other in various positions of striving, flourishing, and becoming" (Chambers-Letson and Tavia Nyong'o 2020, xxxi)? What would it mean for architectural pedagogy to be in Alexandra T. Vazquez's words, "a place of fractured togetherness" (qtd in Muñoz 2020, xxxii)?

To explore this, I want to quote at length from Muñoz's chapter on "Brown Worldings" and specifically the relation to the idea of the methetic, Muñoz (2020, 119) writes:

I want to think about a capacious sense of brown that is, in its very nature, methetic. "Methesis" is the aesthetic term that describes how the particular participates in a larger form; in Greek tragedy, it literally means group sharing, accounting for the way in which an audience takes part in a drama, adding to it, augmenting it. Brownness is an efficacious alternative because it permits us to think about how some people's sense of brownness may potentially touch other people's sense of brownness. Brownness is not so much a singular understanding of self as fundamentally additive, knowing that singularities are always part of vaster pluralities.

The incommensurate might work through the same technology as the capacity for difference to manifest and activate a shared experience of a performance. Can we think of an architectural pedagogy that is methetic – additive, augmented, pluralities of pluralities? Space, time, energy must be made for the bodies of architecture to be present in this new pedagogic performance, for feeling in both senses of the word to happen, for bodies that have moved to be moved again, by and through each other.

This is not an easy task – as it does continue to be easier to talk of extractive capitalism as an elsewhen and elsewhere, rather than an always presence in the bodies formed of and through it sitting in the room, speaking of it together. It starts by making space and time for bodies to be – a making space and time that is politically and economically urgent within institutions constrained by both. Perhaps, then, it is time for architecture's pedagogies to allow for a multiplicity of sites, to allow for a being-in-commons of the so far incommensurate "in" and "out" of formal institutions of education, of practice, of

professional bodies. If, for Muñoz (2020, 121), "queerness is in the horizon, forward dawning and not-yet-here," and equally for Muñoz (2020, 121-122) that "Brownness is already here ... vast, present, and vital," then I cannot think of the student and staff gatherings from summer 2020 at the School of Architecture at the Royal College of Art outside of a language of both queer and brown. And perhaps there and then is a good place to start feeling the bodies of architecture.

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i I am grateful for having had the opportunity to join some of these sessions, and for the staff and students taking part. Thursday night gatherings from 6.30pm onwards began on 4 June 2020, instigated by Professor Adrian Lahoud. Over the next two months, these events would centre the experiences of racism of staff and students in the School of Architecture at the Royal College of Art, and shift in the language and approach. In essence, an opportunity, a safer space, a pedagogic centring of bodies and their experiences at a time of the isolation of a pandemic meeting protests about the killing of Black people by police, and the Black Lives Matter and the Black Trans Lives Matter movements in the USA, UK and globally. The language of the invitation changed over time from students and staff identifying as BAME and POC (3 June 2020), to Black, Arab, Asian, or other minority (11 June 2020), to black and brown brothers and sisters (17 June 2020), to tricontinental friends (25 June 2020), to members of the motley crew (2 July 2020), to members of the global majority (9 July 2020). By the end, the sessions shifted in title too, from a "meeting" to the aptly title "How to build anti-racist institutions: a users guide."

ii In relation to the title of this edited volume and the concept of a "Global South." I adopt the non-

ⁱⁱ In relation to the title of this edited volume and the concept of a "Global South," I adopt the non-geographic definition provided by Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2018, 120): "On the other hand, the South of the epistemologies of the South is the anti-imperial South, the non-geographical South made up of the struggles of numberless populations of the geographical south and north against the domination of capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy."

iii This of course references alternatively Mark Fisher, Frederic Jamerson or Slavoj Žižek and the phrase "it is easier to imagine an end to the world than an end to capitalism" (Fisher 2010, 2). Where Fisher (2010, 80) writes of a capitalist malaise, of the "oppressive pervasiveness of capitalist realism," he also ends with the anticipation of "glimmers" (80), and the hope that "[t]he tiniest event can tear a hole in the grey curtain of reaction which has marked the horizons of possibility under capitalist realism" (81). Here, perhaps, an analogue to the aims of this exploratory chapter.

iv The confrontation between queer and decolonial scholarship is the subject, in part, of the work *Queer in the Tropics: Gender and Sexuality in the Global South* by Pedro Paulo Gomes Pereira (2019).

^v Bodies are not only what we might recognize or call human. Perhaps most incisively in their anthology *Queer Ecologies*, editors Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson (2010, 5) make clear "how sexual politics and relations affect the ways we perceive, construct, and constitute nature, and vice versa." Relations and politics of desire, intimacy, sex, bodies, produce and are produced by nature.

vi Here I am indebted to the work emerging from the 2020 -2021 interdisciplinary studio "Building Research" between students from the School of Architecture and the School of Arts and Humanities on the Master of Research (MRes) programme at the Royal College of Art, London and my co-lead Dr Nicky Coutts for the expansive thinking about spatial metaphor and knowledge co-production.