

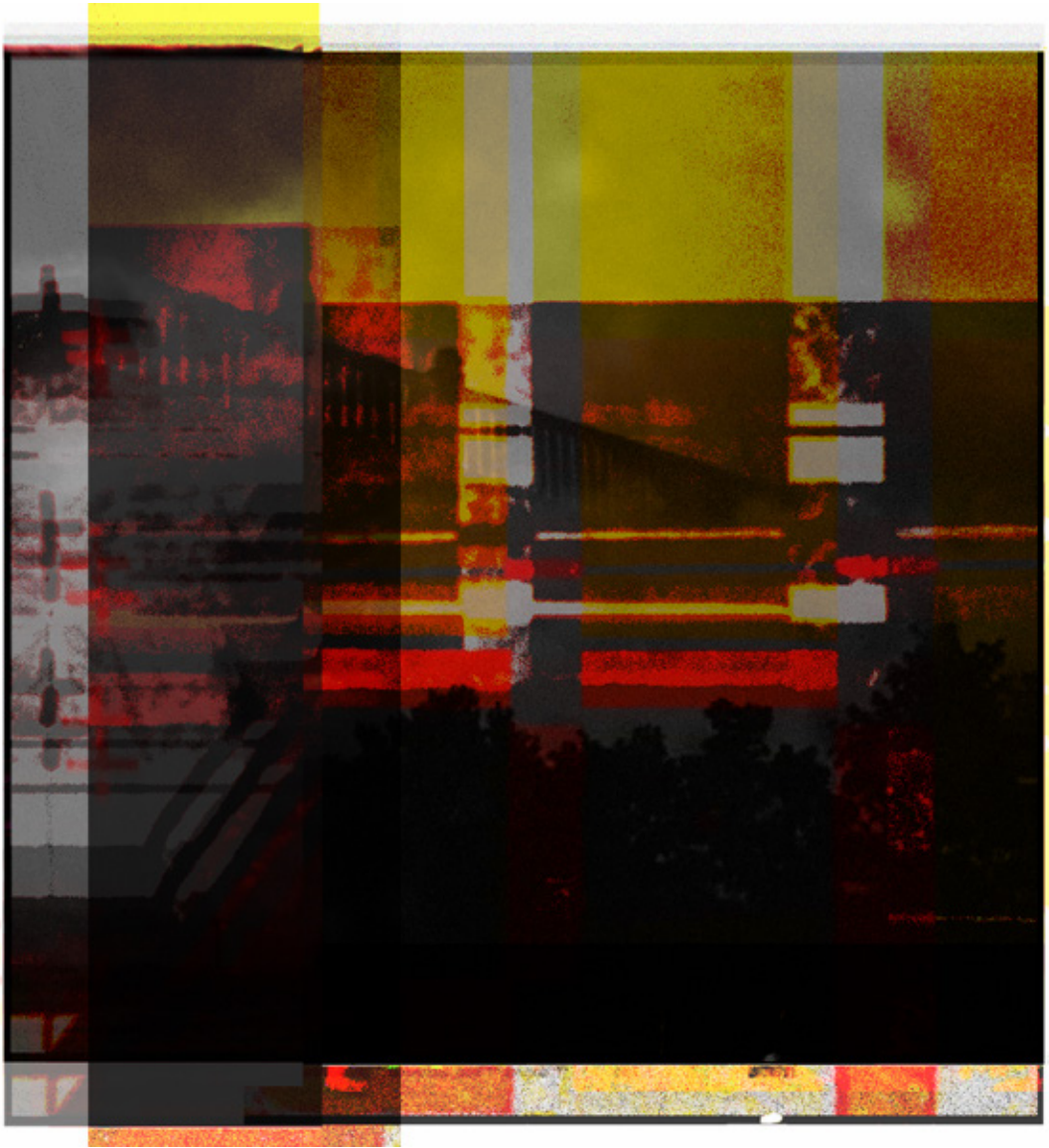
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Care and Critical Action

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# To make is to care

**Lee Ivett**  
**Ecaterina Stefanescu**

## Introduction

This essay argues that the act of making forces one to simultaneously care about oneself, the places within which we exist, and the other people that we share ourselves and our places with. We find ourselves working and living within a social, economic and cultural condition that is fearful of ideas and agency, and where the general public have been conditioned to consider and believe acts of making are either lifestyle or spectacle, or something done by others to create things for us to consume out of either need or desire. Even acts of care and repair – acts that are essential to sustaining ourselves emotionally, physically and mentally and essential to the sustenance of collective life – are more often consumed as services or products from others rather than generated by oneself.

Production and the act of making need not only be the preserve of the professional, the artisan or the hobbyist. We see it as an activity of well-being or care, with the act of making as the means through which we enact agency and manifest change in ourselves and the places where we live. Acts of making should not only be judged by the intent or the outcome, but through the applications and manifestations of care generated by participating in the act itself.

We suggest that these particular instances of making as care are most identifiable within the following modes of making: 1. Representation, 2. Intervention, 3. Transition

The conceptual context in which making as care is situated is within the broad field of participatory design, an area of practice and theory that has been extensively explored over the decades since its conscious formulation and application in the mid-1960s. Even then however, participation in development was contested and analysed in terms of its capacity to do good. Sherry Arnstein in her seminal paper 'A Ladder Of Citizen Participation' recognised that much participation tended towards the lower rungs of her ladder, and did not therefore function to satisfy the basic precept of participation, which was the redistribution of power towards more just societies, but instead often fell into the trap, either by intention or accident, of manipulation and therapy, or tokenism (1969, 216)

## Representation

Within architecture, scale models play roles of proposition, speculation, and fiction. As a means of observation and documentation, we also see the model as a tool to engage with individuals and communities that have, for various reasons, been marginalised. By representing everyday spaces and objects through scale models that do not focus on speculative design but on the existing, lived realities, care and attention is given to communities and conditions which can often be overlooked.

Models, as material vectors and scaled representations, can move conversation and community

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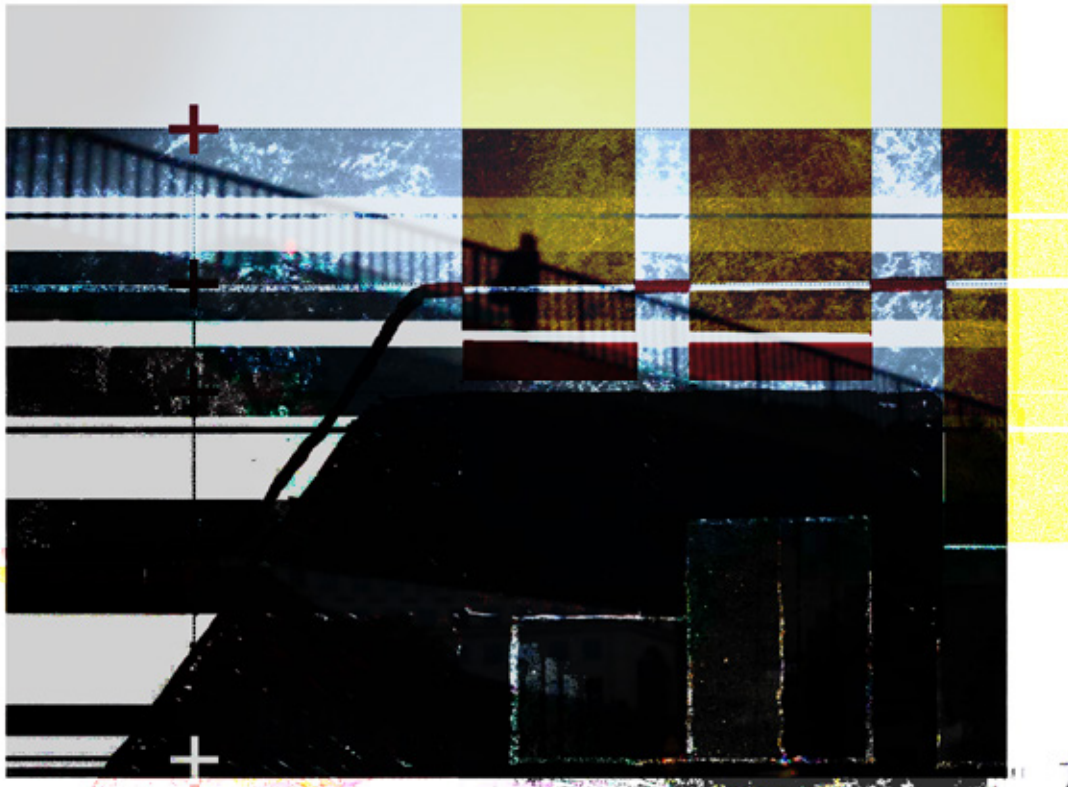
His work is concerned with the establishment of alternative and sustainable forms of public space that create opportunities for experimentation, capacity building and prototyping for grassroots organisations, individuals and collectives within their own communities.

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engagement further, negotiating between the different actors involved: researchers, participants, external observers and the maker. But more so than this, modelling everyday spaces, as an artistic act of making, has the potential to give a sense of value and recognition to the lived realities of the individuals and communities depicted. This is achieved through the dedication required to realise this form of three-dimensional representation, which reveals ordinary spaces as objects of beauty and atmosphere.

Material objects often emerge as symbols of stability for individuals, especially those with a migration background or a precarious existence. Sociologist Maurice Halbachs identifies domestic spaces occupied by an individual as bearing the inhabitant's imprint, through furniture, decorations, and objects (1980, 129).

In ethnographic research, the value of "visual research methods" as described by Gillian Rose lie not only in their potential ease of dissemination, but also in producing insight that simple interviews, for example, cannot. Furthermore, by concentrating on the ordinary and the mundane, valuable but otherwise overlooked experiences are revealed in everyday actions (2014, 27–28). Combining model-making with ethnographic, situated research, also turns the maker/observer into a participant within the spaces they are studying and hoping to affect.

Although model-making is often a one-side activity, it allows for a deeper study and documentation of the spaces and the rituals associated with them. Gaston Bachelard talks about the condensing of value within miniatures. He suggests that the scaled-down version of the object is richer and more packed with insight than the real object, and by creating something small and gazing upon it, one generated insight and understanding that would not be possible by simply studying the real thing. But more so than this, the miniature increases the importance and value of the object being depicted, revealing it as a 'refuge of greatness' (1994, 150–55).

The care employed in the making of miniatures implies an engagement that goes beyond the ordinary, which therefore emphasises their importance. The scaled model allows viewers to examine, think about and imagine more readily the volume, objects, light and atmosphere of a place, and therefore force an empathetic response and an appreciation for the real space and people depicted.

Modelling formal, informal, domestic and communal spaces not only produces a visual representation of place, but also explores the identities of individuals and collectives on a deeper level. The models recognise and acknowledge the feelings experienced by the community and their experience within this transitory condition. But more than that, the models become the vectors through which instances of care — our own and the care that the community has for their own identities, stories and narratives — are communicated.

### **Intervention**

Through the act of making, anthropologist Tim Ingold argues that the Maker at once exists as observer and participant, and there is no differentiation between implicit knowledge and told, articulated knowledge (2013, 5). Through practice and experience, the transfer of knowledge between the different actors involved in this process takes place and the Maker, through the vector of the thing they create, simultaneously observes, documents and analyses (Ingold, 2013, 5).

At the scale of 1:1, making employed as a form of activism and advocacy generates a sense of belonging through a participation within and a subversion of existing social, cultural and power dynamics of society and space. As a performative, provocative and propositional act in public space, making becomes an opportunity for enacting agency and empowerment through a sustained and visible public presence; a live, active demonstration of care. A display of the belief that we care about our own potential to influence change in the spaces and the society within which we exist, and in the

particular and specific dynamics of a place and its people. Making at this scale and in this way gives us agency of proposition, but, as opposed to scaled model-making, is also a methodology that invites active participation. And a desire to participate is in itself evidence of care: to extend care towards others, or to care about the outcome of a particular instance or activity.

This active and organic mode of participation borne out of curiosity and interest in the actions of another situates the passive as maker — an actor as well as an observer, a producer rather than a consumer. This example of making creates a scenario in which the participant is compelled to experience other behaviours and their impact, caring deeply about the way in which their own and other people's desires, frustrations, conflicts, oppression, agency and ideas might be utilised to physically make change. Acts of making in this way provide an opportunity to manifest modes of change that are immediate and tangible; they are an opportunity to display agency, amend a condition and shift and evolve one's own sense of place and identity.

Society and space are reimagined as a continuous and ever evolving register of life and experience: the marks, scars, reactions and interventions created by the actions of individuals, collectives and institutions shifting and evolving the dynamics of a place.

### **Transition**

Richard Sennet talks about the "evolutionary dialogue between the hand and the brain" (2009, 151). He writes that the information received through the hands is richer, more sensate than through the eye, and argues for the tacit knowledge created by "hand habits" (Sennett, 2009, 10).

Habits, and particularly good habits, are the result of repeated behaviours with a specific focus. We consider that acts of making need to be habitual behaviours inherent in the practice of everyday and ordinary life. In the same way that Sennet articulates the potential, through making, for the individual to gain knowledge and insight, communities of people and place might collectively acquire and retain knowledge through shared, collaborative, situated and participatory making. The collaborative aspect of this process reveals the tacit knowledge present in everyday actions.

But more so than this, making is a demonstration of care that is intended to initiate a process of transition towards something better. When enacted collaboratively through common purpose, shared ideologies and a desire to propose and advocate for something better, collective agency and care is achieved. The act of making is then both representational and interventional, and as such becomes transitional, offering a means of suggesting and testing new possibilities which are generated by the very people of that place. What is learned from the application of these methodologies is then utilised as a mode of advocacy for further strategic and constructive acts, or as a prototype for more permanent acts of intervention. As Holm and McEwan propose, collective life needs to be constructed, continuously and incrementally, for it to be sustained — through the making artifacts, critically and collectively (2020, 3–4). Making creates the tacit knowledge and empowerment that leads to a better informed and more successful development and regeneration of a shared social and spatial condition.

### **Conclusion**

Jane Rendell writes that in Western, capitalist countries, the making and production of architecture is only carried out by specialists. When occupiers do participate in the shaping of their spaces, it is either by altering a pre-designed and built space, or in the early design consultation phase. Within this framework, she argues that "the most productive site for social sculpture would be a place or time where architectural and social structures overlap (2017, 177).

Through a "transitional" act of making, ordinary people outside of the professions of art and architecture become critical spatial practitioners. By becoming involved and taking ownership of the act of production, all people of all backgrounds and of all places can enact care of themselves, of each other

and of place, that has the capacity to progress individual and collective wellbeing.

These three instances/methodologies of making create opportunities for all people to reimagine the built environment as a continuous and ever-evolving register of life and experience, through which we learn, evolve and benefit from habitual acts of physical, mental and emotional participation. This reinforces the notion that the act of making, regardless of scale or situation, is explicitly an act of care.

Making is re-positioned not as a finite act but as a series of empathic and responsive actions that situate the actor/maker within the physical, cultural and social conditions of ordinary life. Collaborative and individual acts of making create the knowledge and empowerment that lead to a more sustainable, progressive and successful realisation of society and space. To be passive and inert is to neglect, but to make means to care.

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# For a relational understanding of care in critical urban action

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## The Introduction

We open this paper by reviewing the care paradigm in urban action and the centrality of the concept of interdependence to this work. We then move on to consider our approach to mapping caring—with practices in urban community-led initiatives. The work presented comes from a British Academy supported project, *Caring—With Cities: Enacting more care-full urban approaches with community-led developments and policy-makers*.<sup>1</sup> We use caring—with, rather than —about or —for, to move beyond understandings of care as a provision from institutions to individuals, or from individual to individual, which positions the cared-for as passive recipients. Here, we illustrate how case studies on urban practices can unravel interdependencies of care by attending to long-term engagements, taking place across sites and scales — rather than being viewed as 'bounded' examples. We close with a set of thoughts on our mapping protocol in practice and speculate on future directions that re-situate critical urban action within wider relationalities and power dynamics.

## The care paradigm in urban action

This contribution responds to current, expanded debates on urban care. It acknowledges Maria Puig de la Bellacasa's consideration of care as a 'contested concept'<sup>2</sup> and is situated in solidarity with The Care Collective's assertion that dominant neoliberal ideology is fundamentally "uncaring by design",<sup>3</sup> offering "neither an effective practice of, nor a vocabulary for, care".<sup>4</sup> While "no clear-cut definition of care in urban studies has emerged",<sup>5</sup> recent/forthcoming special issues,<sup>6</sup> monographs,<sup>7</sup> and edited volumes,<sup>8</sup> have started to assemble diverse understandings of urban caring capacities, typologies and relationalities.

In our approach, we understand the urban as the product of dynamic interrelations; as stated by

1 For more information about the project, see: [www.caringwith.city](http://www.caringwith.city).

2 Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, 'Matters of Care in Technoscience: Assembling Neglected Things', *Social Studies of Science* 41, no. 1 (February 2011): 85-106, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306312710380301>.

3 The Care Collective, *The Care Manifesto: The Politics of Interdependence* (London: Verso Books, 2020), 10.

4 The Care Collective, 4.

5 Angelika Gabauer et al., 'Care, Uncare, and the City', in *Care and the City: Encounters with Urban Studies*, ed. Angelika Gabauer et al. (New York: Routledge, 2021), 5.

6 See for example: Ilan Wiesel, Wendy Steele, and Donna Houston, 'Cities of Care: Introduction to a Special Issue', *Cities* 105 (October 2020): 102844, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2020.102844>; Zannah Matson and Tim Waterman, eds., 'Special Issue: Landscapes and Care', *Landscape Research*, Forthcoming.

7 See for example: Juliet Davis, *The Caring City: Ethics of Urban Design*, 2022.

8 See for example: Hélène Frichot et al., eds., *Infrastructural Love: Caring for Our Architectural Support Systems* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2022).

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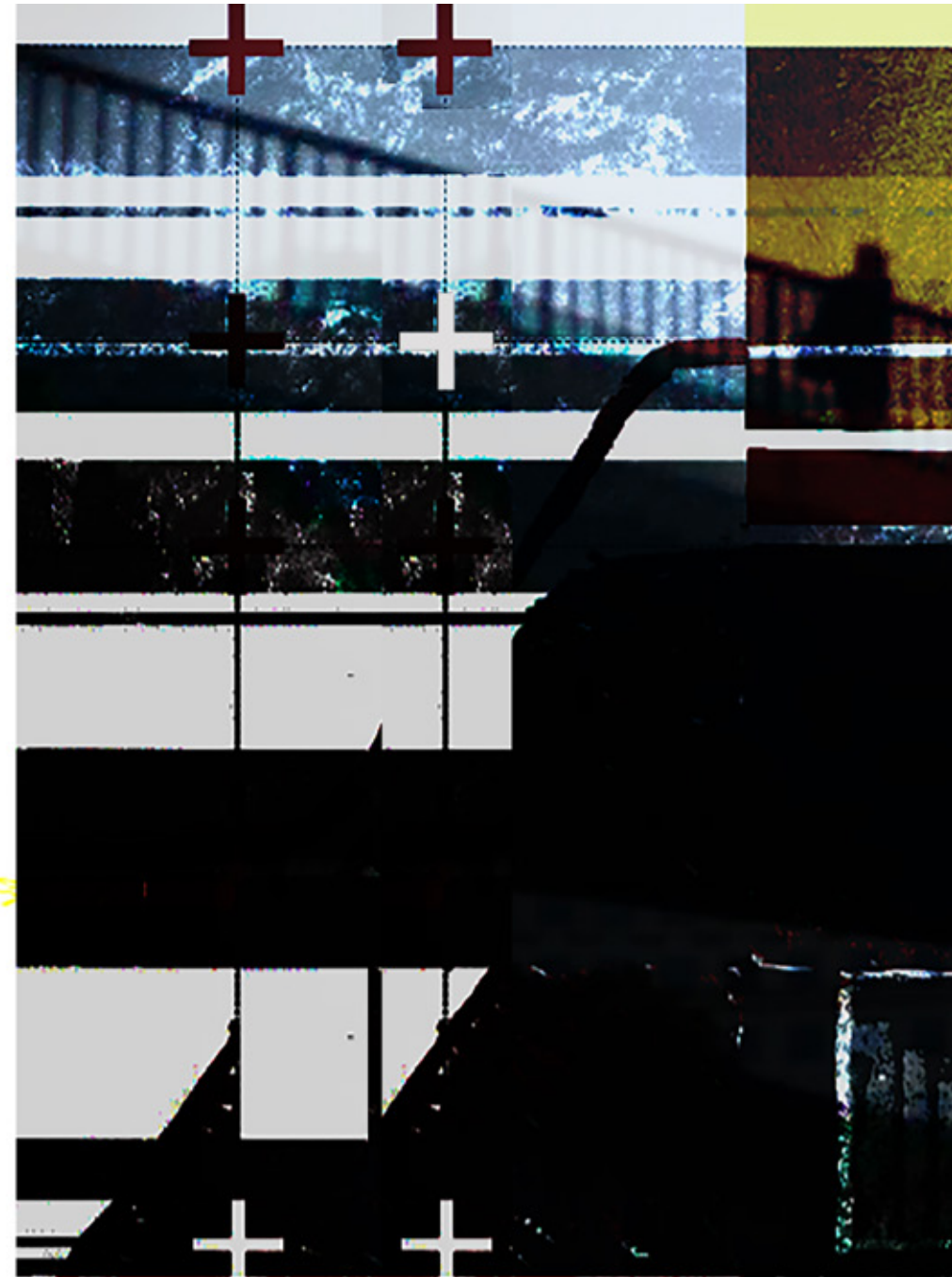
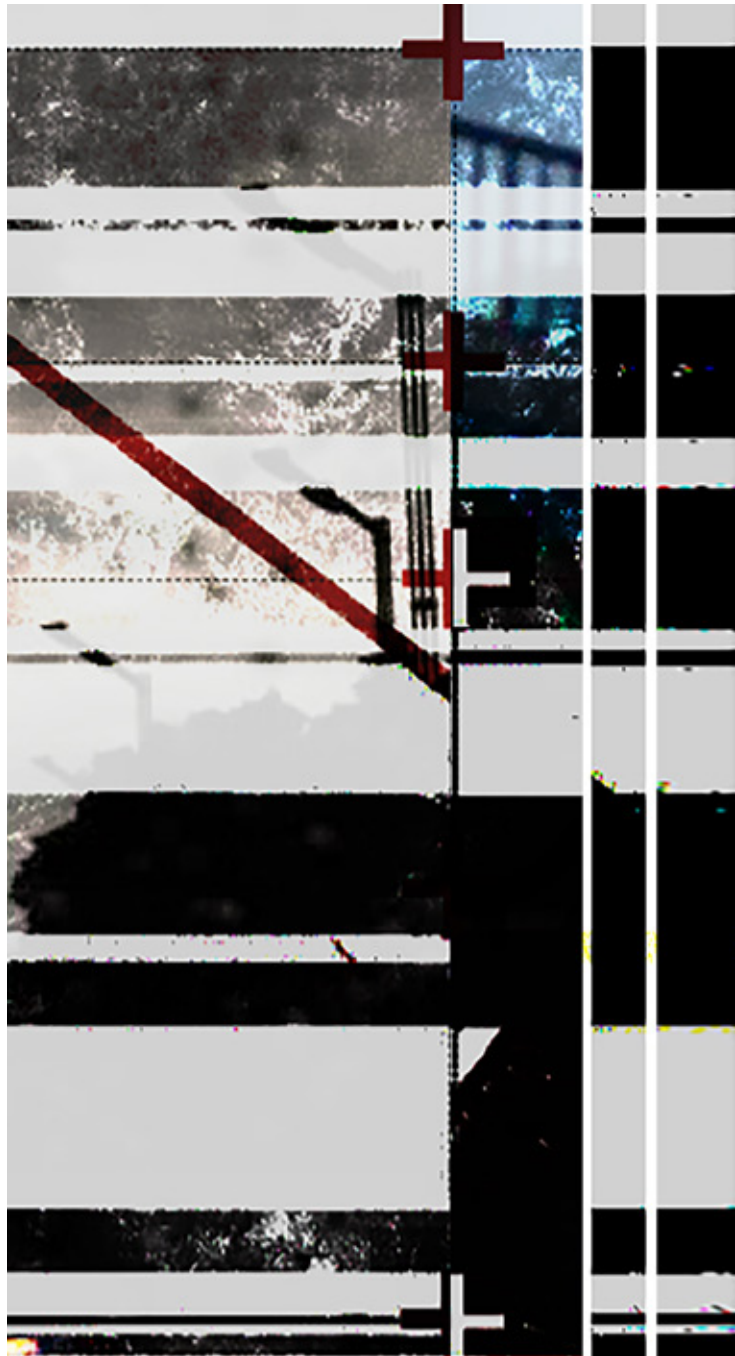
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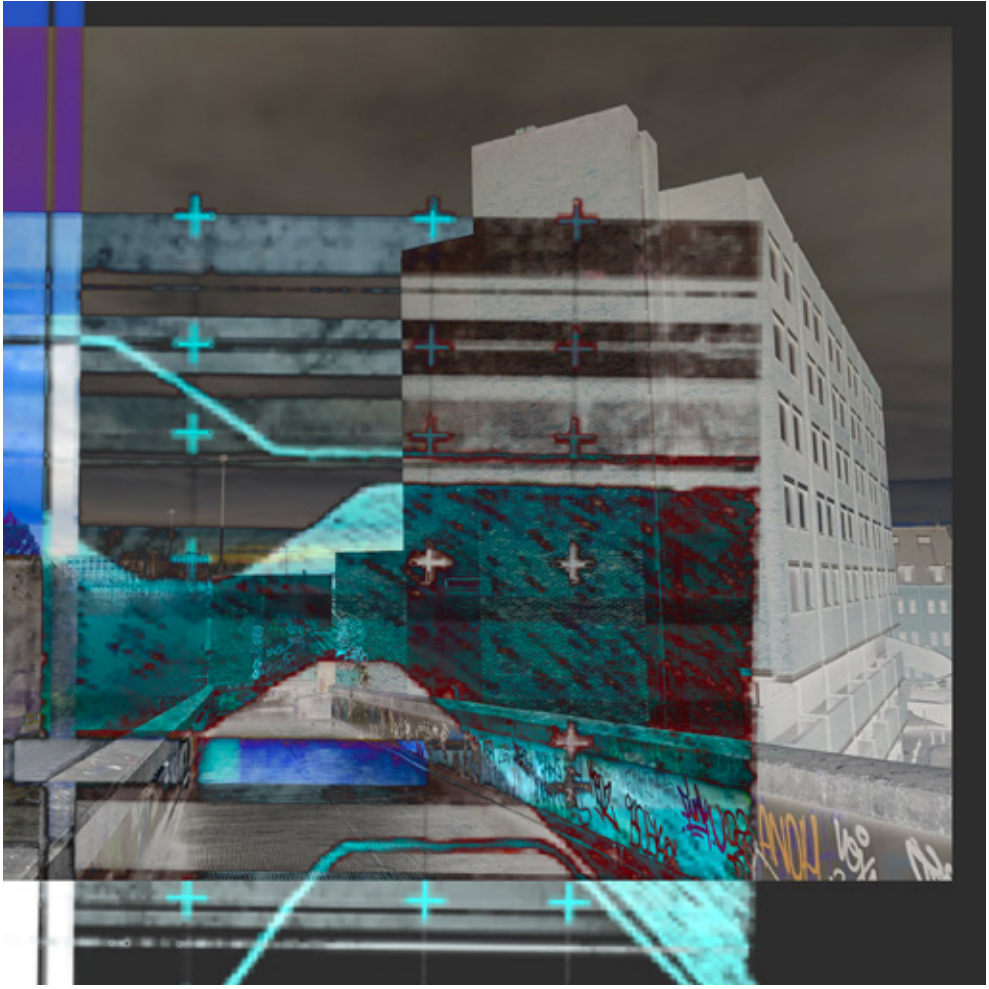
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