

# RITUALS OF ARCHITECTURE

Using Ecosystems as Co-Designers



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**Project:** *The Farm*

**Location:** *Vallée de La Loire,  
France; London, UK*

**Architect:** *Eric Guibert*

**Client/Funder:** *Self-generated,*

**Collaborators:** *Ecosystems  
including clients and their  
networks*

**Date:** *2000-ongoing*

**Project:** *Literacy Library*

**Location:** *London*

**Architect:** *Eric Guibert*

**Client/Funder:** *CLPE*

**Collaborators:** *Ecosystems  
including clients and their  
networks*

**Date:** *2015-2018*





Fig. 1  
The Farm  
Aerial photograph of the property  
showing house, barn and landscape

**ABSTRACT**

This body of works brings New Materialist theories and sensibilities into working architectural design practice. Eric Guibert’s ‘gardener architect’ approach re-frames architectural practice as a form of co-design, in which the architect must collaborate with different types and scales of ecosystems, including clients, users, climates, landscapes, plants, soils and other agents to form a new ecological and cosmopolitical approach to architecture.

The research proposes a focus on ‘rituals’ for engaging in architecture with an emphasis on time, maintenance, care, and co-creativity to propose a New Materialist framework for what architectural practice could be. In this, it offers an alternative to conventional design approaches (which focus primarily on human aspects alone and which prioritise a ‘finished’ final design product). The research considers what ‘useful’ rituals as architecture could be, as well as the tangible and intangible elements that constitute them.

The projects were developed through Guibert’s work as a sole practitioner, especially those projects which ran over extended periods of time, beyond the normal brief involvement of the architect. The main project in this folio is the renovation and rewilding of a rural landscape and farm buildings which acts as a laboratory for testing these ongoing methodologies over time. Another is the redesign of the building and landscape of a charitable organisation in central London, while aspects of the redesign of two houses and a garden in suburban and urban settings also allowed aspects of this ‘gardener’ architecture to be tested and developed.

Guibert argues that where most design approaches block the creative capacity of ecosystems and focus primarily on humans, these projects nurture complex capacities of the intertwined qualities of resilience and agency as a central architectural aim and investigate ecological ways of designing architecture using the emergent capacity of these ecosystems. This gardening-based methodology thus acts as a localised cosmopolitical process that engages with ecosystems as creative beings, developing an animist ontology for architectural practice.

The research has been presented in lectures, exhibitions and debates in various international research and practice forums, and will be published in the author’s upcoming article ‘On the Usefulness of Modern Animism’ in *Geohumanities*, and the ‘Modern Animism’ lecture, being co-organised with the Garden Museum in London, (both delayed by Covid-19 into 2021).



Fig. 2  
The Literacy Library  
A model photo showing the hall

Figs 3, 4  
Landscape gestures rituals. These moments not only shape the landscape, they also are performances of togetherness, contemplation with the landscape, and shared with the community that develops around the Farm



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Fig. 5  
First installation of the wallpaper frescoes at The Literacy Library



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## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How may an architectural design method incorporate unpredictable cycles of growth, climate and social behaviour – in the scope of projects as well as in design, building, and inhabitation – to generate a more environmentally responsive and responsible ecological architecture? What tools may assist this?
- Can architecture foreground co-creative rituals as a new form of architectural practice? Does gardening offer a useful alternative model for this, including emphasis on creative and collective maintenance rather than individual expression and ‘design completion’?
- In an architectural culture and procurement system which is framed around aesthetic and pragmatic control and ideas of perfection, how far can the architect loosen control to allow for ecological processes to evolve and to be respected? How may intensity, agency and resilience of life, rather than control, be nurtured, and how may this approach re-frame contemporary society’s expectations of architecture?

## GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The architectural projects included in this folio are seen as vehicles which allow for the development of rituals which are considered the main outcome of the work. The two principal projects listed below both allowed for the testing of this approach over an extended period of time. Some more conventional projects for clients have also allowed further tests of this architectural approach.

### The Farm

The rewilding and renovation of a three-hectare rural property in Western France acts as an ongoing test of this design approach. The site is composed of farm buildings – a house and a barn from the 18th and 19th centuries – in a landscape with a diverse topography. The property was close to ruin when bought and the land was in high stages of scrubland, rapidly becoming a woodland. The property was gradually renovated and extended to create a second building, with the two linked under a continuous roof, forming an openable central space that acts as an open loggia or closed winter garden, depending on season and activity. It is designed to operate economically as a comfortable house for two people, using part of the building only, or to house a larger number of guests and participants.

The design thus adopts a passive/active approach. It ‘passively’ uses the sun reaching the land to heat space and water economically. Yet the inhabitants, supported by low-tech equipment, actively adjust the environmental conditions to respond directly to seasonal changes, weather and activities. These ‘comforting rituals’ work in connection with the gardening ‘landscape gestures’ rituals that are co-generated by the users and inhabitants of the house throughout the year.<sup>1</sup> These interactions with landscape and climate, are ephemeral transformations that simultaneously produce fuel – wood – and alter the layout of the landscape each year and are considered the primary focus of the project. The collective ongoing works are thus the primary way of testing the uses of rituals of architecture over time.



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Figs 6 & 7  
The loggia dividing the guest house from the main house can be adjusted in response to the climate to operate as closed living room, or open space, in response to the seasonal rituals of the project. The loggia sectional door façade retracts at the push of a button. A comforting ritual.

The non-paved and unmanicured aspects of the area immediately outside expresses the challenge to both architect and viewer in “letting go” any architectural project, and the assumptions about the imperatives for a “finished project” which is subliminally seen as the norm.

Fig 8  
Thermal plan - ground floor - of the Farm. The rooms in pale orange are those with the most constant temperature.



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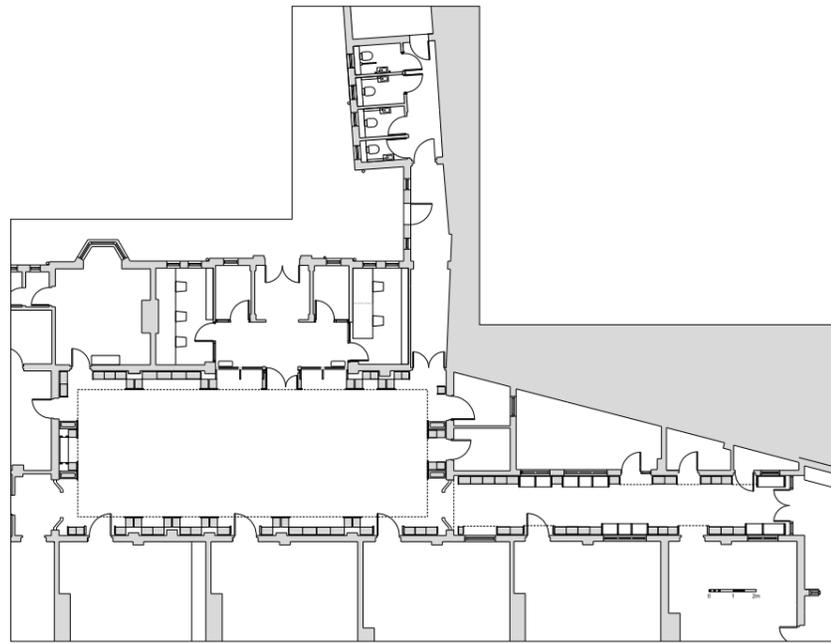
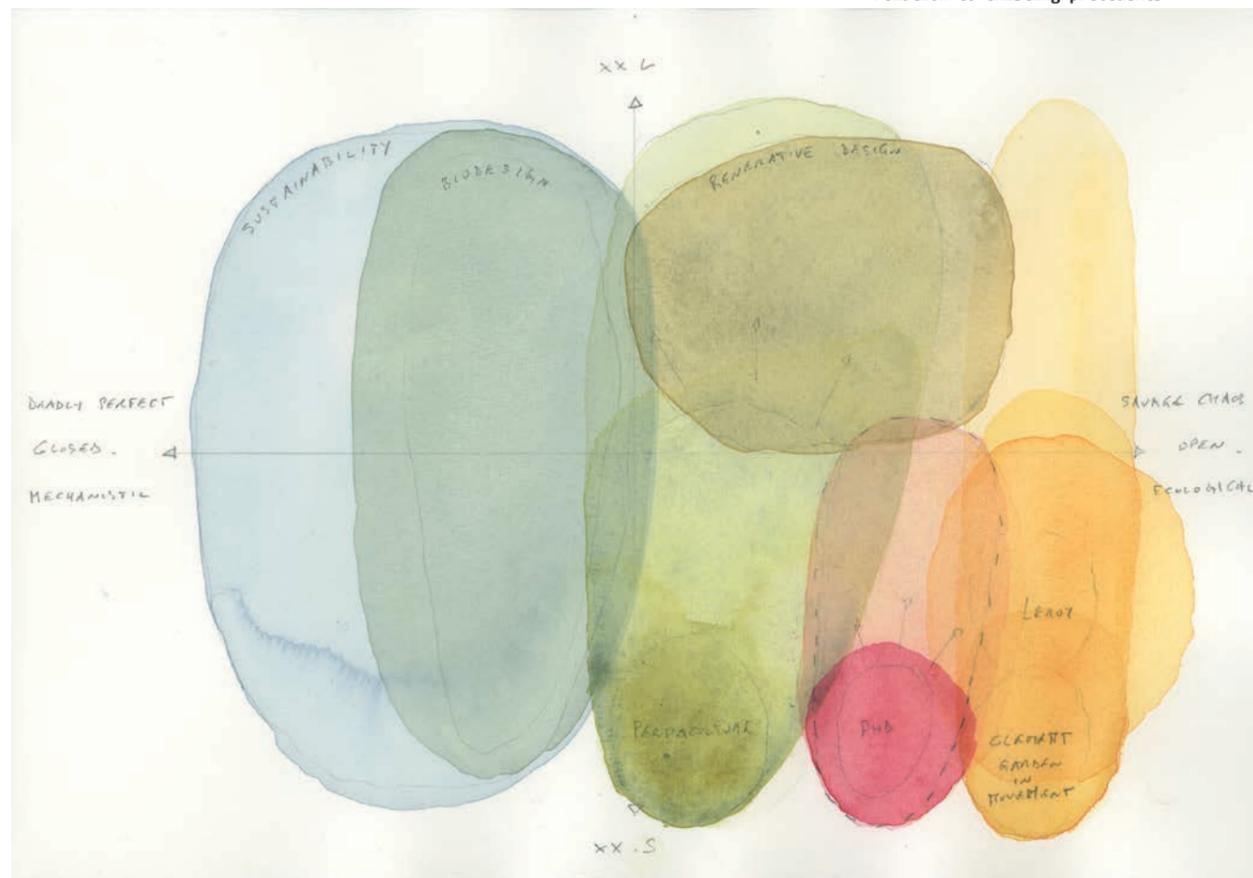


Fig. 9  
Plan of the Literacy Library, South London

Fig. 10  
Diagram locating the practice in relation to existing precedents



**Literacy Library**

The second project, for a charity supporting literacy teaching in primary education in central South London, also extends beyond the usual time frame of an architectural project. It involved refurbishing and altering an existing Edwardian school for disabled children to provide improved and increased office spaces and a flexible library to be used for lectures and courses, as well as being available to rent out for income generation.

The key drivers here are creating a flexible space that could hold a maximum number of books while expressing the dynamic institution and its evolving network of children's books' writers, illustrators and publishers. This took the shape of a hall entirely lined with book alcoves on to which a grand flat colonnade is ritually re-papered with illustrations from current books every few years as part of the re-creative maintenance ritual. In the courtyards, the ecological processes of rainwater drainage and soil formation are brought back by breaking the tarmac to release the land's capacity for growth.

The project has been built in stages following waves of funding, and will continue to do so, in a less extensive way with the refurbishment of a few more rooms and the wallpaper ritual.

**CONTEXT**

**Theoretical Background**

Guibert's approach links New Materialism ideas of Isabelle Stengers (2012, 2013, 2018), Bruno Latour (2004), and Jane Bennett (2010), as a theoretical position exploring architecture as part of a wider ecosystem approach, with the work of Leon van Schaik and others at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) in surfacing and sharing the tacit methodologies developed through individual and specific architectural practice. Tacit here is not only the tacit knowledge of the practitioner and its human community,<sup>2</sup> but a cosmopolitical tacit knowledge. Guibert understands a cosmopolitical architectural practice as one that nurtures other-than-human inhabitants and gives them a voice by including their reactions to human actions in the design overtime through the use of rituals. The co-designer here is the 'nonconscious cognition' of the ecosystem as a whole, of both human and other-than-human agents combined, including the rationality of humans.<sup>3</sup>

**Practice**

Eric Guibert works as a sole practitioner, teacher, researcher and small-scale developer of residential lived-in projects. This allows him to test and develop residential/development models over longer time frames than conventional practice delivery. The projects have been further developed through reflective practice research processes by presenting past and new work in methodological terms at various academic and professional conferences, events and publications.

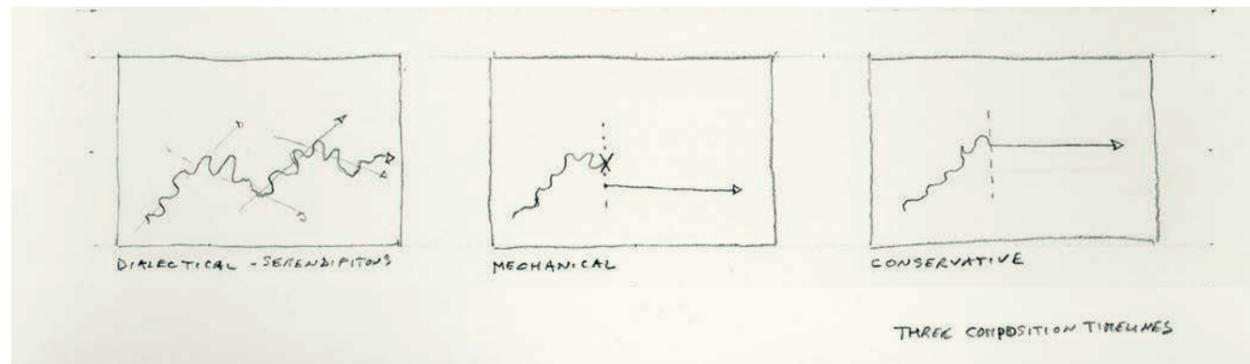


Fig. 11  
Sketch timeline diagram used to conceive main design approaches. The serendipitous gardener approach (left) used in this research, shows design primarily conceived as evolving (though with relatively stable periods). The more usual approach (right), sees design as more static. The mechanical approach (centre) creates something new on 'blank pages' while the conservative defines a point in the past to be preserved.



Fig. 12  
Author scything

### Contextualised Approach

Working from a New Materialist perspective, each living being is given – almost – equal importance and understood as a 'symbiont' in dynamic change.<sup>4</sup> The processes of production of architecture are cosmopolitical cycles that evolve with the ecosystem's dynamically and gradually include an increasing number of 'actants': buildings, other-than-humans, humans, climate, soils, animals, plants, and the various communities they form.<sup>5</sup> They nurture and guide their creative capacity for self-generation and diversification. As a secular form of 'architectural animism', this practice therefore treats ecosystems as creative beings.<sup>6</sup>

The work has also focused on revealing the 'tacit knowledge' and methodologies of a practice,<sup>7</sup> here extended to the tacit knowledge of entire ecosystems. This research thus argues it is not only humans that 'know'. Ecology is understood in Felix Guattari's sense to include the intertwined personal, societal and environmental dimensions.<sup>8</sup> Following a New Materialist and cosmopolitical position, the multiple 'actants/actors' of ecosystems are taken into account as dynamically changing.<sup>9</sup> They are all understood as alive, entangled in ecosystems that provide a broad range of services for the benefit of all. Key to their health, their resilience, each needs a degree of agency in order to evolve, and thus a voice in the design and making processes.<sup>10</sup>

### Precedents

Many co-creative architects have, since the 1960s, developed various consultation, briefing, co-design and co-making processes, for example Lucien Kroll.<sup>11</sup> Virtually all have focused on giving a voice to human inhabitants during the involvement of the architect to produce complete designs, during briefing, design and construction. These approaches are both primarily anthropocentric and do not deal with the inevitable evolution of the ecosystem after 'completion'.

A number of artists and landscape architects have worked on the question of dynamic change, attempting to design with future evolution. Of more relevance to this practice are those that, instead of developing fixed future phased plans, propose processes such as landscape architect Gilles Clement's Garden in Movement concept,<sup>12</sup> and the landscape artist Louis Le Roy's Ekokathedraals.<sup>13</sup> Clement uses a continuous process of working with what the ecosystems grow by editing out the plants you do not want. As the plants move over time, the mowed areas change and thus the garden plan is constantly in flux. Le Roy's process is one of constant construction of terraced structures made of rubble within which plants are added to launch processes of succession that are let to develop mostly unhindered. The practice described in this folio has developed these indeterminate and dynamic processes as 'landscape gestures'<sup>14</sup> with a marginally higher level of control and – ephemeral – formality, by layering on the emergent chance of ecosystems other types of chance, such as randomness through 'chance operations', processes originally developed by John Cage for music composition and prints.<sup>15</sup> These landscape gestures may be said to replace normal forms of architectural aesthetic control and attempts to relate them instead to the ecosystems that lead to rewilding.

This approach distinguishes itself from other co-creative building architectural practices through its focus on the co-creation taking place beyond the involvement of the architect, and by designing with the ecosystems as a whole, taking into account the other-than-human as much as the human inhabitants. In order to deal with the dynamic evolution of ecosystems, with unpredictability and change, it disregards



Fig. 13  
 Sketch timeline diagram used to conceive the design process as a nurturing of coherence and synergy between the various agents in the ecosystems

architecture as the design of perfect and static objects in favour of a performative approach supported by the built elements; it accepts the degree of imperfection that comes from letting architectural elements be designed by inhabitants without influencing the specific performance.

Guibert's term 'Rituals as Architecture' is therefore used to re-frame the performances that inhabitants enact overtime as defining varying relations between humans, landscape and climate as being central to a design practice. The architect re-designs settings and rituals, for others to perform – and alter – once the architect has gone. They adapt spaces for various activities, transform the appearance of a building, and alter the plan and ecology of a landscape. The architectures evolve over time; alive, they are neither permanent nor definite. In rituals as architecture, the creative capacity is disseminated both through the ecosystem and time.

### AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- To develop an ecological architecture that works with the creative capacity and nurtures the resilience of all kinds of ecosystem, including but not limited to human ones, by designing rituals which place inhabitants comfortably close to climatic and landscape rhythms. This is seen as both an environmental and cosmopolitical act.
- To propose an alternative framework for the production of architecture, which challenges expectations of high levels of control, and focuses on rituals of maintenance and repair, rather than finished, architectural products.
- To extend notions of participatory and co-design to non-human as well as human actants.



Fig. 14  
An example of sketch mapping, recording the evolution of the landscape.

Fig. 15  
Literacy Library  
The wall with drawings by various illustrators that represented the existing ritual that will form the basis of the library design.



**METHODOLOGY**

This methodology draws on Gilles Clement’s ‘Garden in Movement’ process, an ecological gardening process developed in situ, through a regular process of looking, reflecting, projecting, making, repeating in constant and parallel cycles for the different rituals. As in vernacular architecture, this is an iterative process.

Working as sole practitioner and small-scale property developer, Guibert works with clients desiring phased construction and self-generated opportunities to realise projects over time rather than in a single construction phase. The outcomes in this practice-model are seen as the evolving rituals and the spaces that afford them. Being present, or continuing to visit, over time, is an essential condition for this approach. This extends to co-actants in this process.

In this approach, the design’s authorship and processes are inherently and expressly shared. Not only are they disseminated through the ecosystem between the various beings present during the usual phases of briefing, design and original construction, they are also disseminated through time. The architect’s control is loose; the designer envisions the propensity of the ecosystem, and co-develops rituals and their settings to be performed, and transformed, later, especially once the architect is long gone.

**Site and Eco-system Analysis**

The design process thus begins by looking and analysing the existing processes in situ, and in similar ecosystems. Sketch mapping and photography are generally used in conjunction with diary entries. Together they record processes already at play, and the settings that afford them. For example, a wall where illustrators have been drawing directly showing the intensity of exchange between them and the charity of the Literacy Library, or the plant communities in a landscape.

Most existing rituals are discovered through dialogue, highlighting processes that are not always visible. Either through discussions with the clients during walks through the property, or in the physical dialogue with the ecosystem in the case of self-generated work.

These are recorded first informally through sketches and short text in sketchbooks, and then in the written brief for the commissioned work. Text is used primarily, often with a slight literary or poetic quality, in preference to drawings for both keeping an openness to the later definition of the forms they will support, as well as expediency – the fees of these small projects are limited.

**Development through Dialogue**

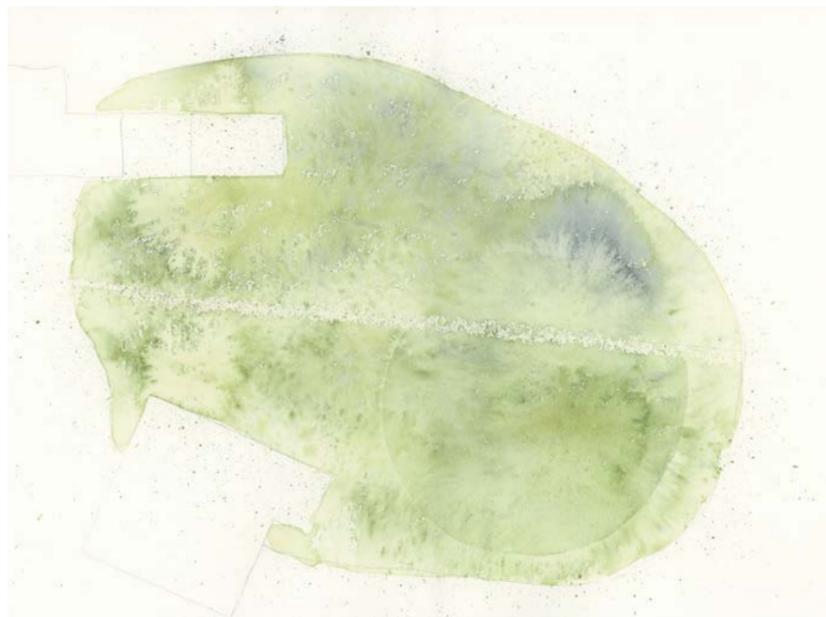
Developing these intangible patterns is done through a period of design development and dialogue punctuated by a few meetings with the co-actants. When working directly with humans, drawings by hand, in watercolour generally, are regularly made and discussed; these form the central architectural tool allowing both the ritual and the supporting spaces to develop. These drawings are always surrounded by writing that generally conveys the temporality or multi-sensory quality of the rituals.

A quality that differs from many architectural practices is these drawings’ informal qualities: not quite complete, not quite definite, open for interpretation and dialogue. These contrast with CAD drawings that test dimensions thoroughly.



Fig. 16  
 Example of a design development drawing  
 brought for discussion with the clients.

Fig. 17  
 Example of a watercolour enactment of a  
 potential score to imagine what happens  
 at a certain scale to a landscape.



Many of these drawings are perspectives and axonometric drawings. But orthographic drawings are also produced such as ecological sections to understand the multiple process at play, especially the relations between climate, soil, growth, rain. Details also appear, for example for the library they were used to define the ephemeral materiality the ritual could take, considering the option of framing original artworks as in a museum, versus the ephemeral wallpaper solution that was chosen.

It is through this ongoing exchange of words and drawings that the design emerges. The role of the architect is first to facilitate the dialogue and envision what appears, as well as show potential and possibility. Rituals design requires ongoing discussions with co-actants, as the designer is never knowledgeable enough about the complexity of the ecosystem to know what is possible.

From these observations, some potential ideas emerge for new rituals that are either existing ones re-framed, or a few crossed together to form a hybrid. In the Literacy Library, the illustrations are used in a more ephemeral way, at a larger scale and printed instead of drawn directly on the wall.

The architect's key role is to envision – seeing and representing – what the ecosystem is tending towards and how this can be guided to a favourable direction. In order to co-create, the design process is seen as 'open' through the regular conversations on the latest sketches of the project, ideally on site or in person.

### Scoring and Choreography

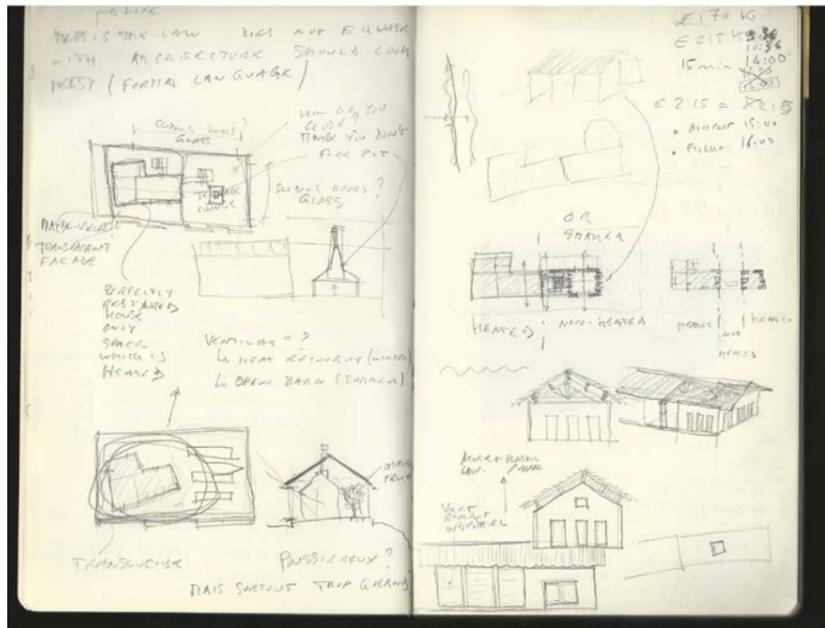
The communication of the score of a ritual is often done live in the first 'performance' of the emerging ritual, such as scything a meadow on a particular pattern score or the process of realisation of the wallpaper frescoes in the literacy library. But often this is not possible, and the score is given as a short word description with a rough sketch – the emergent plans – used to test potential. The score is a sketch diagram associated with short descriptions to convey the choreography to a remote user. These thus relate to the indeterminate scoring produced by composers such as John Cage or Morton Feldman.

Rituals are often drawn as plans, or elevations, in watercolour. The choreography of a ritual, although never definite, is tested generally through emergent plans or other forms of speculative mapping or activity plans to test the potential occupation of plant communities or human occupation. These are developed in parallel to timelines sketched in order to understand the relationships between the various rhythms (climatic, biological, ecological) over the year or decade.

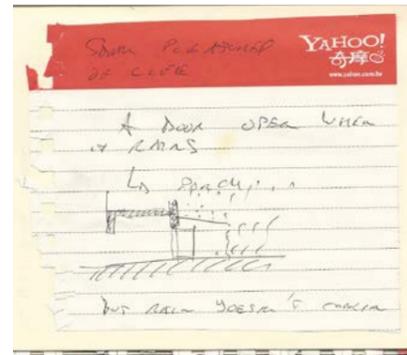
The concise texts and indefinite drawings allow openness to result. It is much more similar to a game than a procedure. In practice, the co-actants display agency by omitting some lines, or tweaking the angles of a path, in response to the site and their intuition at that moment. The result is that the performance of the score never is as the sketch, sometimes varying widely but imbued with its essence.

### Developing through Occupancy

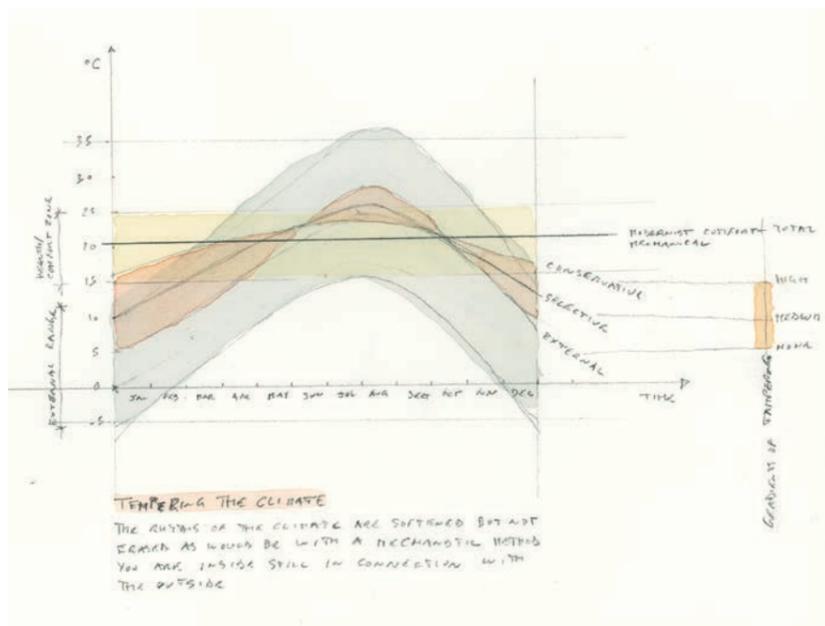
The comforting rituals are generally developed through testing typologies. At the Farm, three options were considered to achieve two primary factors: spaces that could be heated for a range of occupation scenarios – either one part is rented and the other owner-occupied, only one part is occupied, or part is lived in by guests and



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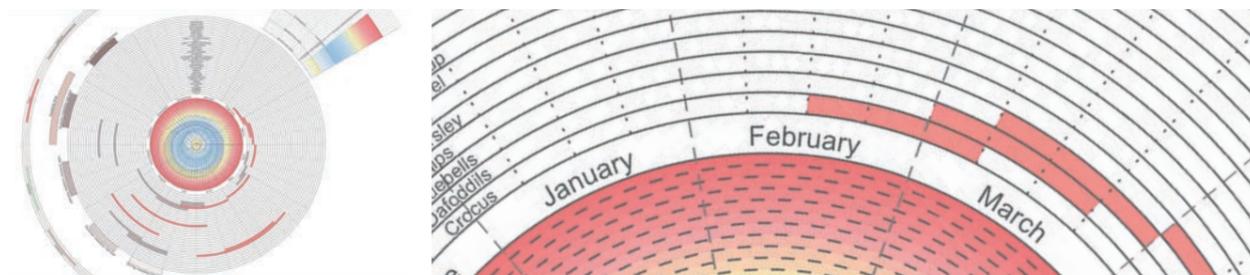


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Figs 18 & 19  
Early concept sketches of the environmental concept: increasing blurring as far as possible the distinction between indoor and outdoor climates through the creation of the loggia.

Fig. 20  
A redrawn sketch timeline to understand the relationship to seeding, growth and cuts of species in the meadow

Fig. 21  
Timeline and detail showing the tempering of the climate in the buildings of the Farm



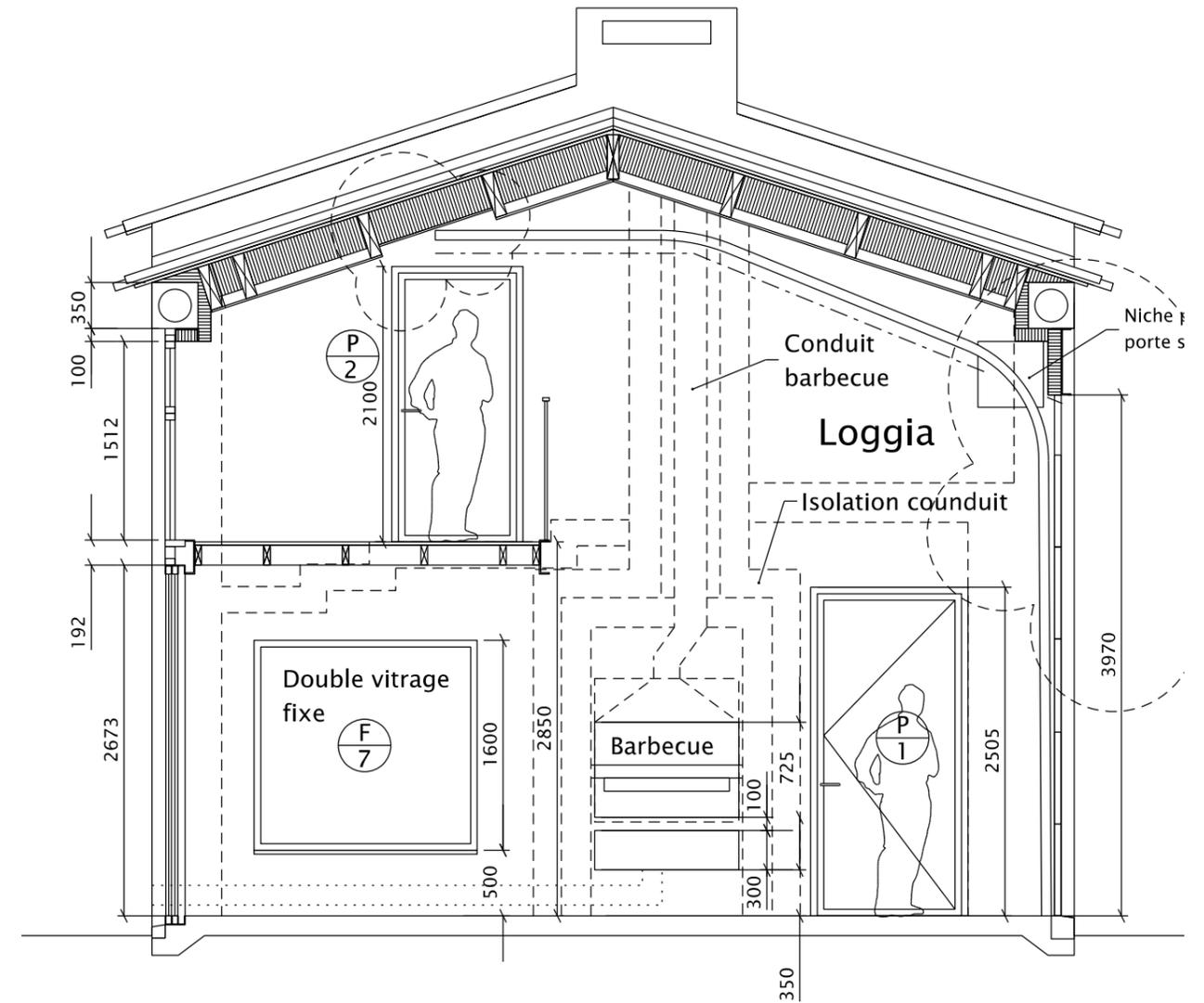
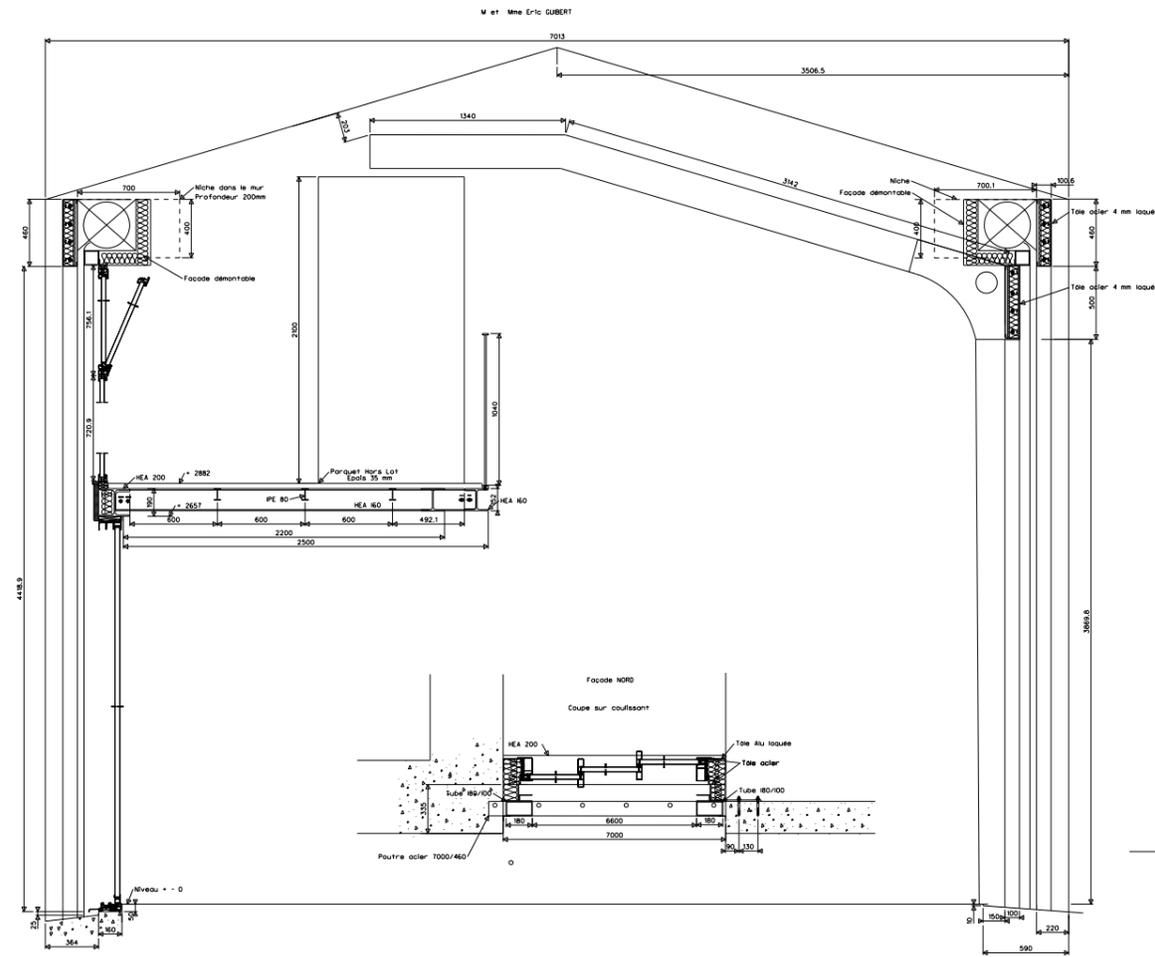
the other by the owners – and a shared flexible space that could shift between being outdoors and covered outdoors. This led to the two houses connected by a closable loggia. The beginning of the design came from an ugly sketched section of a doorway with a canopy with a few words to the side: ‘a door open when it rains, but rain doesn’t come in’. And the decision for the specific typology came from another tiny massing sketch that reads: heated / non heated / heated, next to pages of research on extra large glazed sliding and sectional doors. Both of these are to be understood in parallel to the use of the site: to look after the landscape prior to the building being inhabitable – the early experiments of the landscape gestures. A desire to find a balance between comfortable all-year-round inhabitation and outdoor living, to get as close to the climate, and each other, without losing comfort.

Dissemination

As reflective practice, this work has been presented at various stages in its development and to a range of academic and practice research and interest groups, engaging with the broader and current debate on co-creativity as well as on the specific ontology of an architectural animism as part of this research process. This included a lecture on built and grown architectures that embrace the creativity of its human and other-than-human inhabitants (from this practice as well as others) at an event focusing on the influence of the anarchist Colin Ward on architecture co-organised by the Architecture Foundation and The Garden Museum in London (with David Knight and Daisy Froud). The co-creative angle was addressed at an event organised by Guibert for the London Festival of Architecture in June 2019 where five practices presented a project each and discussed the potential and challenges of such an approach (Guibert, landscape architect Johanna Gibbons, social practice artist Jenny Dunn, Anthony Meacock from the collective Assemble and Takeshi Hayatsu, chaired by Kester Rattenbury).

The various reflective methods – performative, textual, photographic, drawn – are now integrated in a continuous reflective process embedded in the practice. The textual method has recently transformed into an epistolary dialogue between the author and other ‘actants’ – such as soils – that have been designed with in order to define what they are, and how to communicate and design with them. This method parallels the Actor Network Theory method used by Bruno Latour in Aramis.<sup>16</sup>

As a result, the practice is currently developing in an increasingly loose, organic and anthropomorphic direction: the landscape gestures are increasingly being defined by others involved, anthropomorphic pieces of trees are made into sculptures or integrated in interior design.



Figs 22-23  
 Technical drawings of the loggia by the window manufacturer Gaillard (left) and architect (right).

They show the layered combination of open-able glazed façades and perforated shutters that provide shading and security.

North side, sliding doors, South side a full width - 7m - sectional glazed door that entirely lifts up at the push of a button under the ceiling when open.



Fig. 24  
Literacy Library interior showing the flat colonnade covered with the renewing wallpaper

Figs 25-27  
CLPE's Instagram feed showing various other rituals that show the broad range of events taking place in, and adjusting, the hall



## OUTPUTS AND FINDINGS

In this approach, the outputs are essentially seen as the emerging rituals themselves afforded by the tools and spaces needed to perform them, including buildings. All of these projects are used to generate rituals that are then performed by others, which often develop in multiple and unpredictable ways. Thus the farmhouse is seen as a devise or a frame for generating the rituals of the human interaction with the landscape.

### The Farm

The Farm has been occupied in stages throughout, with patterns of (often regular) guests and co-actants occupying the guest house and working with the owners on a cycle of seasonal rituals of maintenance and renewal; principally using the house and working on the landscape, developing landscape gestures, or more recently creating 'ready grown' sculptures and elements for interior architecture design on other projects. Outdoor activities evolve during the seasons in response to growth patterns but continue unless it rains heavily. In the warmer months, the key activities are mowing and scything, whereas in autumn and winter it shifts to planting, felling and shaping trees. Although the occupation is highest in the summer, it takes place in short periods scattered throughout the year as professional activities permit.

Living in the farm building with the separation of the houses gives a distinct sense of a hamlet with a covered square. In the summer and half seasons, most of the communal life – virtually all meals including some of the cooking – takes place in the loggia. It has the softest dynamic temperature and light and is open to the landscape, where much activity takes place. It also is flexible thanks to its large scale and concrete floor; the rough and sturdy materiality welcoming robust activities.

The sectional door and shutter are used to adjust the climate and shelter. The easy operation of these by any occupant at the touch of a button is seen as a key ritual, enacted by any actant, who thus changes the operation of space and ecosystem. The door is open virtually all the time except during cold weather. The perforated shutter in front of it comes down at night to close and is half-open during the day on hot days to provide shade. The windows and shutters of the 'standard' windows move more and these are controlled by whomever uses the room. Guibert has observed how Northern Europeans struggle to understand the rhythms of the traditional Mediterranean climatic ritual to keep a house cool by closing it during the hot period of the day. On rainy days, when little activity can take place outside, the loggia is still used, open as long as mild enough.

Despite the communal nature, all occupants have a high level of independence. The polycentric yet close quality of the plan leads to this balance between closeness and freedom. This is true of both summer and winter but in the winter the life, seeking warmth, tends to retract into the smaller and more enclosed rooms within the separate houses, heated with wood burners, which can more economically and successfully kept warm.

The original business plan and design for the Farm, as well as the practice in general, has a relationship to the work of Assemble, especially their Granby Four Streets project, although one is more public and urban, the other more private and rural. Both practices create a dynamic social and spatial initiative generated through

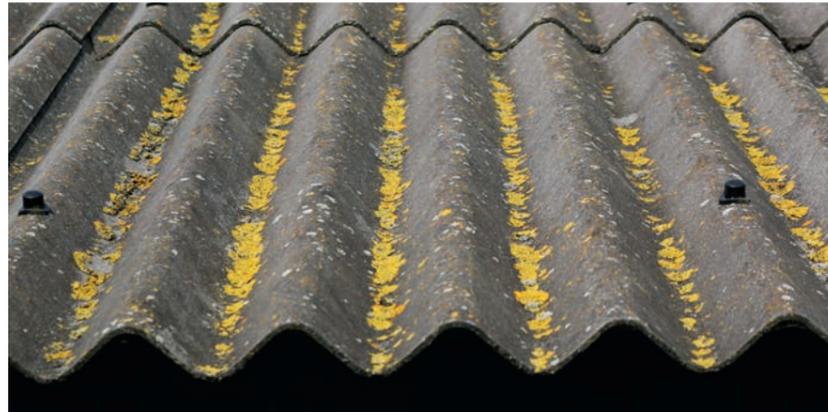


Fig. 28  
Front view of Cement House, clad in corrugated cement board for lichen to grow on.

Fig. 29  
The cladding after three years, with lichen beginning to grow on mineral.

Fig. 30  
The recreated cracks as originally planted by the client.

Fig. 31  
The original cracking slab.



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**Literacy Library**

gardening processes, both involving spaces that blur distinctions between an interior and a landscape. In both practices multiple revenue streams are used. Assemble uses more public and inner city avenues – competitions, craft production, artist residency – whereas Guibert’s practice is – so far – following more private entrepreneurial means. The Farm was originally conceived to be rented for short holiday lets to fund the ongoing costs (although this has not yet happened due to logistics).

The first ‘performance’ of the Literacy Library ritual has brought the entire network ecosystem of the charity together in complex synergistic relational and economic flows. Publishers have been keen to sponsor specific illustrations to market some of their new books. They have funded the ritual itself as well as part of the refurbishment of the buildings. The launch of the current fresco brought together the entire network of the charity: writers, illustrators and publishers of children books, other sponsors, teachers, and key stakeholders.

The curation performed by the client was a subtle balancing exercise between choosing the work that is most relevant at this point in time – bringing to the fore under-represented women and BAME narratives, and the best recent books – and the marketing of the blockbusters.

The most fascinating phenomenon has been the transformation of the ritual into other large scale performances, unguided by the architect, such as a full wall illustration by Chris Ridell in the café. Guibert understands from discussions with the clients that the Library ritual design made them aware of the importance, and gave them confidence to work at this larger scale. They already had created the small scale version of the ritual in the entrance, and they have learned how to bring this to an architectural scale for full impact.

What will happen to the wallpaper ritual in its next performance remains to be seen. It may be delayed by the Covid-19 situation, or become an opportunity to express a more positive renewal. The renewal of the courtyards, based on breaking the tarmac of existing courtyards to restart ecological processes of growth and soil formation, whilst retaining access, has not yet been enacted.

**Contributory projects**

Inevitably, the attempt to loosen ‘control’ generates its own paradoxes and problems. In a front garden in Hackney, East London, an existing slab covering was to be redesigned by drilling a number of holes into which trees and shrubs were to be planted, to increase the rhythms of growth and erosion, accelerating the decay of the slab. The cyclical rhythms of soil formation were to be allowed to thrive again: plants grow and shed their leaves, leaves compost down to enrich the soil, rain infiltrates the ground. As the trees grow, the trunks further crack the slab and thus continue this opening up of the decaying slab. In the event, the contractor ignored, or misunderstood, this non-conventional intention and removed the slab altogether, and a more curated new ‘cracked slab’ had to be designed and installed. Again, the contractual aspects of this methodology are particularly challenging.

Less controversially, on a refurbishment of a private house on the Chichester Harbour Area of Natural Outstanding Beauty, a corrugated cement board was chosen as

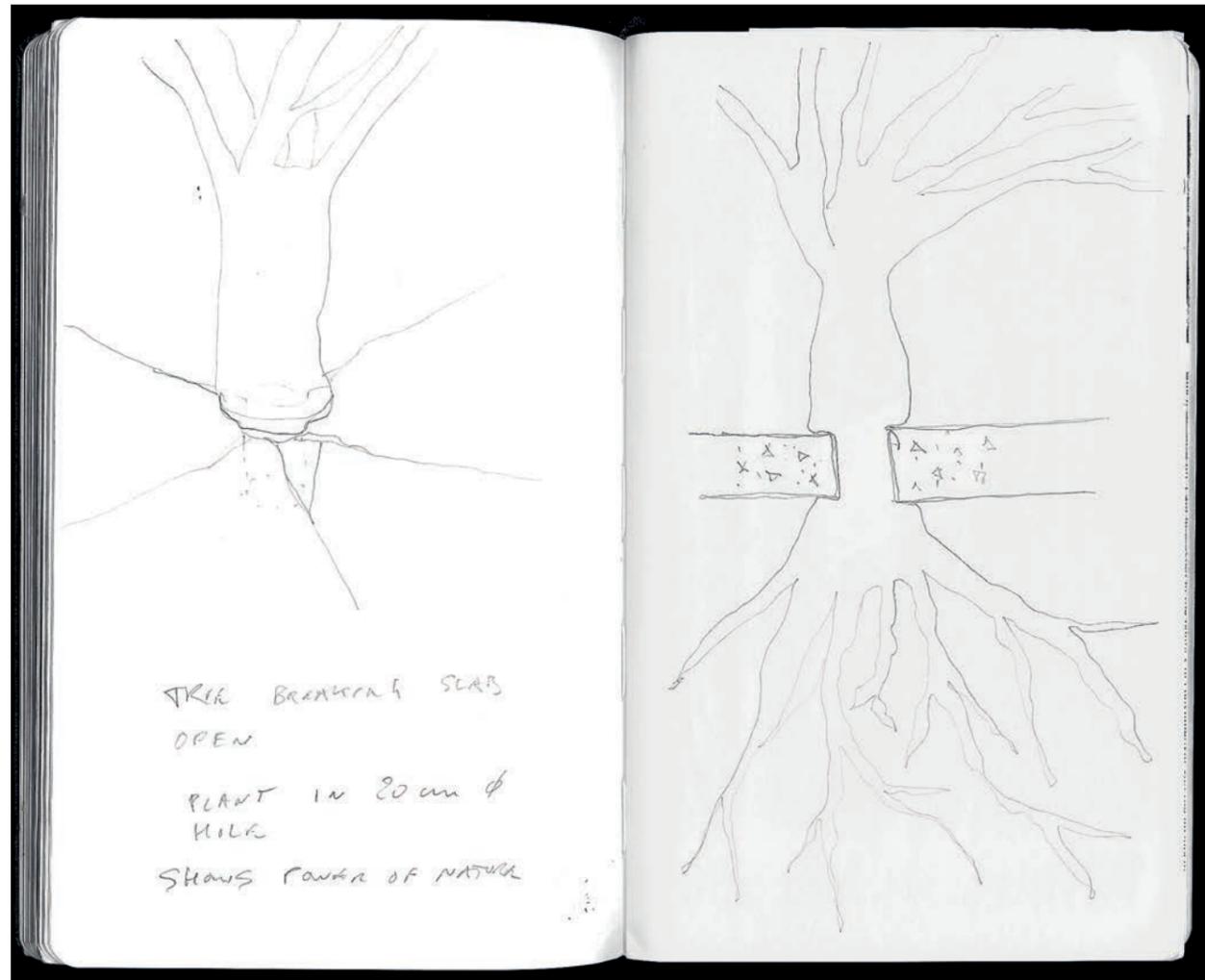


Fig. 32  
First concept sketches of Tree Cracks, establishing the process of splitting through the growth of roots.



Fig. 33  
The ritual developed and transformed by the client and their ecosystem. An entire architectural element taken over by the illustrator Chris Riddel

cladding to become a micro garden of lichen; forming a tiny ecosystem of its own planted and gardened by the sea air and climate. The material proved controversial for the planning officer but was supported by the ANOB conservancy for its receding quality in the landscape that will make the building less visible from the sea. Various lichen have thrived, especially a bright orange species that contrasts beautifully with the dark grey of the roof.

Rituals and Buildings

In this model, the architecture is the operation of the whole system and not just the physical and technical built components. For example, the physical human engagement with these rituals through physical actions, whether pushing a button to open up or close down a space, or scything a meadow, are seen as part of the 'comforting' nature of rituals themselves, whereby humans gain a strong sense of their own physical engagement with and existence as part of a wider ecosystem.

Successful rituals reproduce by themselves and evolve. At the Literacy Library, the client evolved the ritual to implement other large-scale illustrations elsewhere in the building. At the Farm, wider groups of guests and participants involved in shaping the landscape return annually and share their knowledge of the patterns learnt with others. There is in all of them a combination of game, aesthetic act, and communal activity; in other words, there is joy and playfulness in the performance.

Visitors and clients generally point out the vibrancy and diversity of these projects. The fact that they look 'young', 'fresh', 'alive' (clients of the charity). It seems to be their key aesthetic quality. This is both in the way they appear as the skin is regularly renewed, and as life thrives. It is also the enjoyment of performing and adapting the rituals, of the agency that it gives.

Yet the abnegation of areas of control, is a challenge for an architect, both in loosening aesthetic control and in delivering conventional aspects of a project. Some elements require standard procedures for cost-effectiveness and speed, especially the realisation of the main structures, and that these must be procured without further deliberation. Otherwise, long delays can occur, and thus escalation of the architect's effort. Carefully defining the formal and informal processes and clearly separating them temporally as well as physically, so that they retain independence, is essential to control cost. The architect should avoid becoming responsible for the delivery of the latter.

Many of these rituals, therefore, show either a renewal or adjustment of the 'skin'; a layer that can be renewed, replaced and changed easily, whether that be soil that self-renews, illustrated wallpaper updated by an organisation, the adjustment of the building's envelope to temper the climate, or changing the role of spaces through movable elements, furniture or objects, for example. The fragility and ephemerality of these skins create a need for renewal that encourages the rhythm of enactment.

In some early gestures, the un-engaged or negative reactions of visitors showed their discomfort with the unpredictable elements of pests, weeds, dirt, chaos, decay, mess, aliens, imperfections; with what Batailles called 'the formless' ('l'informe').<sup>17</sup> This clearly related to discussions in Isabella Tree's *Wilding*, in which problems of trying to shift the aesthetic frames through which we see our landscape are described as a fundamental challenge to rethink human interactions with wider ecosystems.<sup>18</sup> Thus,

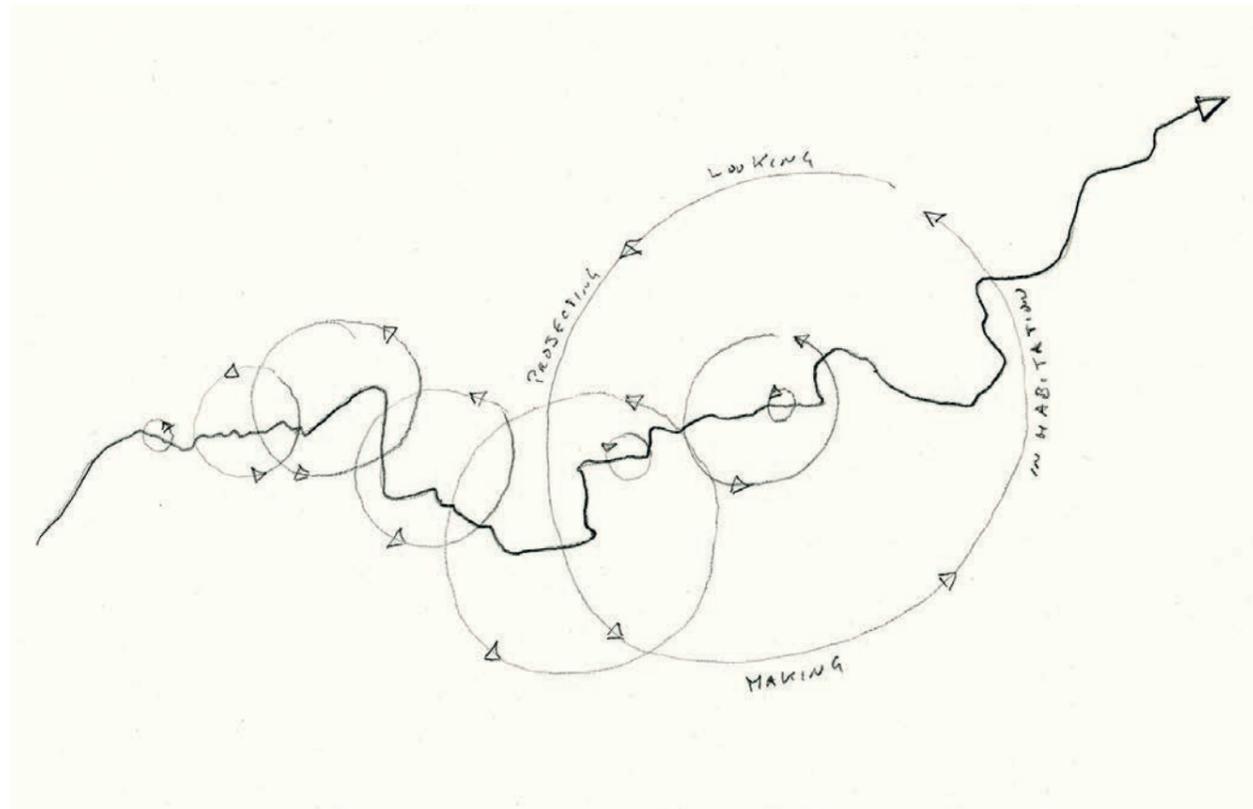


Fig. 43  
A sketch diagram of the circular rhythms of parallel gardening rhythms of looking, projecting, making, and inhabitation

while a key example may seem to be the contractor who demolished the already cracked slab, the wider issue is really a whole system of thought about, seeing, and making architecture which has been framed through the idea and representation of complete and fixed aesthetic control. A recurring question for this research has been how to re-frame our contemporary capacity and obsession for control and permanence in order to allow ecosystems again to thrive around us.

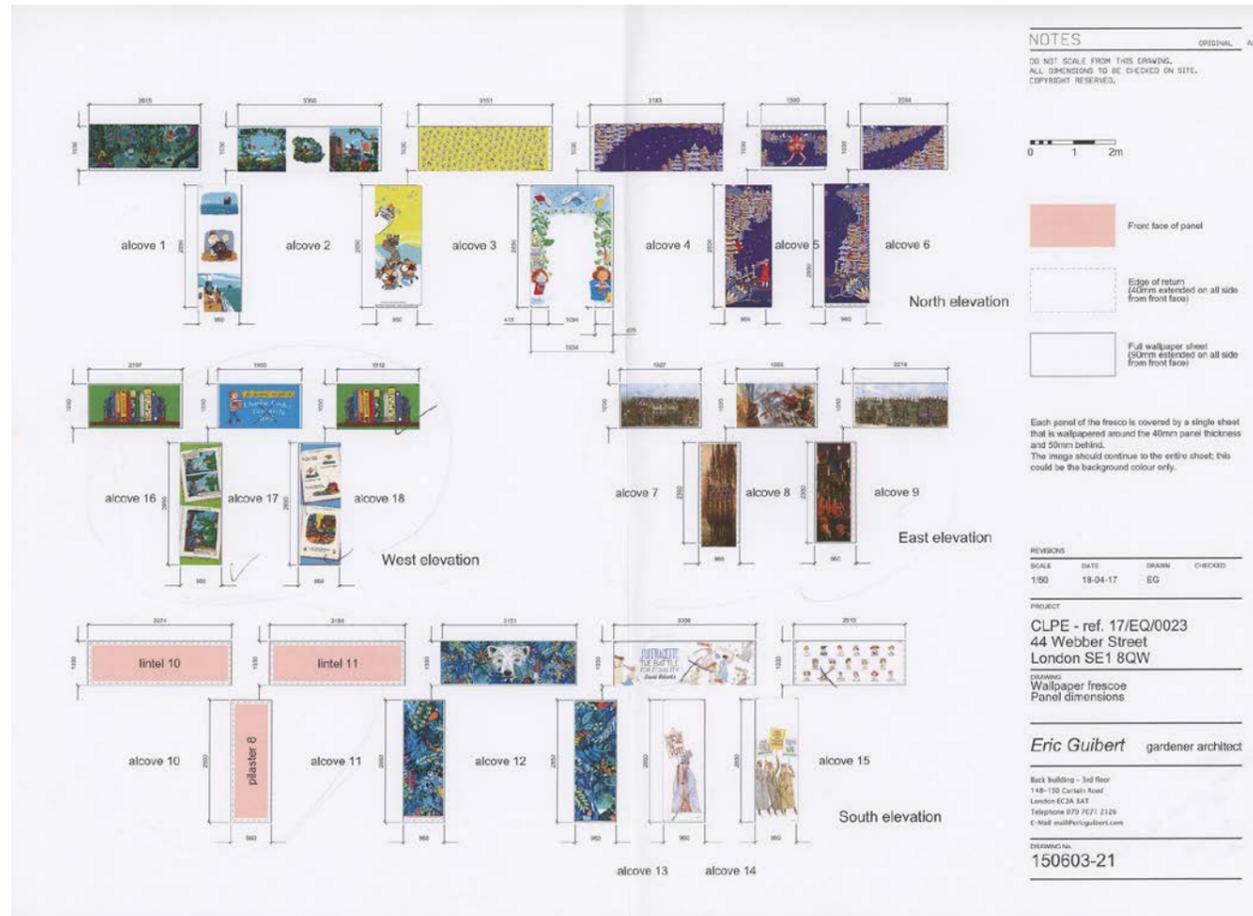
Later rituals developed in this work aimed to change this negative perception by creating stronger frames, using clearly readable geometries and / or neat edges: patterns of paths through the meadow; rectangular panels for the illustrations' colonnade; a rectangle of concrete where the cracks show. Finding a working balance between our human perception and aesthetic expectations, and the qualities of ecodiversity sought here may thus be temporarily engineered by establishing a clearly readable, sometimes provisional and at others long-lived, frame to the diverse and unpredictable nature of what is being framed. At present this generally means a degree of formality, whether sinuous or geometric, even when applied irregularly, though if perceptions and understandings change, this relationship itself may be seen as dynamic and capable of change.

Certainly, the fear of what seems chaotic is itself arguably a sign of a wider cultural position in regards to landscape which this research in part aims to challenge. Conversely, those gardening practices which have more evidently designed aspects (grown installations, scythed patterns, artworks made using logs etc.) offer another way of framing or expressing the human and aesthetic processes in this ecosystemic approach.

Designing with the emergent natures of places, Guibert's practice is seen as a (secular) form of 'architectural animism'. In theoretical terms, these processes, these rituals, are framed as cosmopolitical, similarly to the 'parliament of things' described by Bruno Latour;<sup>19</sup> its gardening cycles gradually including a growing number of actants. Instead of Latour's description of cosmopolitics at the national, or at least regional, scale, involving a large number of scientists, rituals as architecture are local and physical dialogues between human inhabitants and the rest of the ecosystem conceived as working nested in the larger 'parliament of things'.

Guibert argues that this approach, with its systemic adaptation to changing circumstances, to growth and decay, is an evolving culture, offering a closer relation to climate and ecosystems than more mainstream 'sustainable' approaches; it is one in which humans are expected to be more active, and yet the ecosystems are allowed to self-generate, and engage in the creative act. The emphasis on these rituals is thus pragmatic, regenerative for both human and wider ecosystems, performative and symbolic.

The architect's role is therefore to notice and describe these existing choreographies, to facilitate their development, co-create both frameworks and choreographies with the inhabitants – either virtually with humans or physically with plant communities – and to describe it so that it can be performed by others. Secondary to this, their role is to champion and disseminate such patterns; to teach and publicise.



34

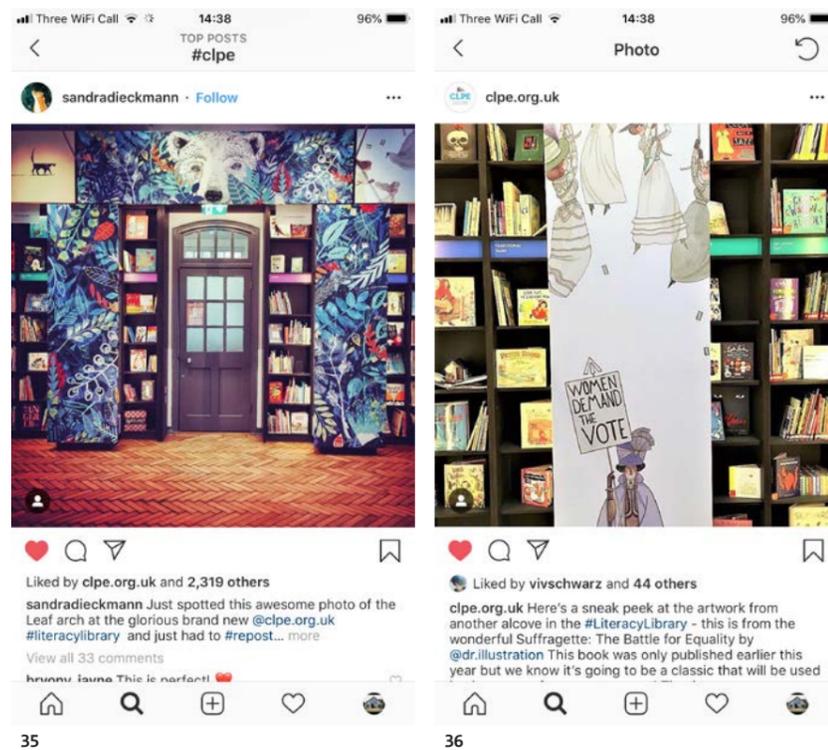


Fig. 34 Above, the score for the literacy library was a pattern of each panel with short descriptions on the side. The image reproduced is the drawing the clients produced using the score drawing as template and collaging the illustrations they selected without the architect.

Figs 35 & 36 Literacy Library: Instagram posts of the charity that show the results of the first wallpaper ritual.

Figs 37-42 Other posts from CLPE's instagram feed showing a new ritual that has appeared connected to the illustrations of the Literacy Library: the celebratory photograph of individuals related to specific illustrations or books in a relevant alcove, when they come and visit the charity.

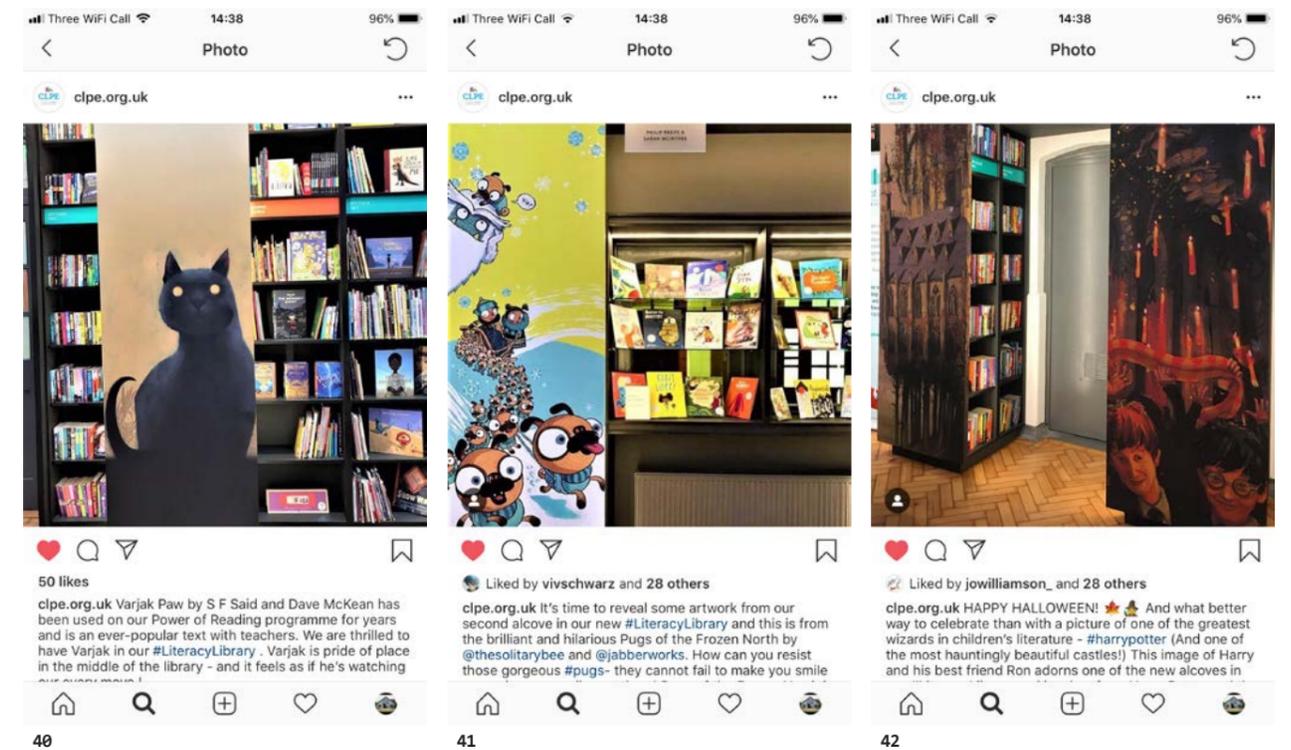




Fig. 44  
A border co-created with the ecosystem, where all plants came of their own volition, but guided through a yearly scything following the ripening of large perennials.



Fig. 45  
Compost circle. A 'perfect' circle of compost spread in autumn to alter the soil composition and lead to a different plant community the following year.

## CRITICAL SELF-APPRAISAL

This practice follows what is called in ecology a generalist model. Instead of specialising in a single function such as the commercial procurement of architectural services, it exists in a complex web of connections and roles (entrepreneur, architect, gardener, teacher) to achieve economic viability. The projects here follow equally non-standard means of procurement and standard contracts, at different stages.

Given the success of people's engagement in these projects and the growth of the third sector – voluntary work – and indeed the ongoing growth of small-scale entrepreneurial and participatory projects, there is room for a fuller exploration of how these processes might play out, both in terms of standard procurement and in terms of variants of contracts. Similarly, further investigation is needed on understanding how both choreographies and frameworks function and are shared, especially when dealing with larger scale, more contested projects, or communicating to larger audiences.

Given that the work deals at all levels with aspects of entanglement, it is not surprising that it may appear – from a dualistic point of view – to have generated paradoxes. The most salient is that of authorship. Here, this is explicitly shared with other humans (contractors, users) and others (plants, animals), accepting all parties are authors simultaneously, regardless of how much influence each has. Yet at the same time, the work claims authorship in the specificity of the way it is conducted through traditional formats of publication and academic context. There are many ways of designing with the natures of the world, and this field is only in its infancy.

Paradoxically again, the very complexity of the systems being discussed in this folio means that the main means of communication has been either highly controlled or effectively tacit: either through more or less formal academic presentations, with all their inherent codes and restrictions, or through collective endeavours, new projects and discussions, where the knowledge is shared through more or less tacit means. Authorship is here impure, muddled, messy and this can be challenging for the architect.

Letting go of a project can also be difficult – as it was during the first application of illustrations on the colonnade in the Literacy Library. This was entirely processed by the client with only guidance from Guibert on process and help with realisation. When first receiving the client's completed photograph of the work, the architect's first reaction, though positive, was perceived as being not enthusiastic enough. It takes time for an architect, trained, practiced in skills of managing the production of form, and judged by peers, to accept the lack of control on form.

The degree of simplicity of forms in the Literacy Library or The Farm may indicate to some a desire for architectural order and orders – classical or vernacular – for their own sake, with all the usual discourse on language they are associated with. However, they result here primarily from the combined factors of designing with existing buildings, with their own agency from a New Materialist position, maximising flexibility, efficacy to deal with limited budgets (for both fees and construction cost), environmental design and most importantly holding sufficient order so the result is not perceived as messy by society at large. Architectural order is here a tool for the rituals, for an appreciation of life, not a fetish.

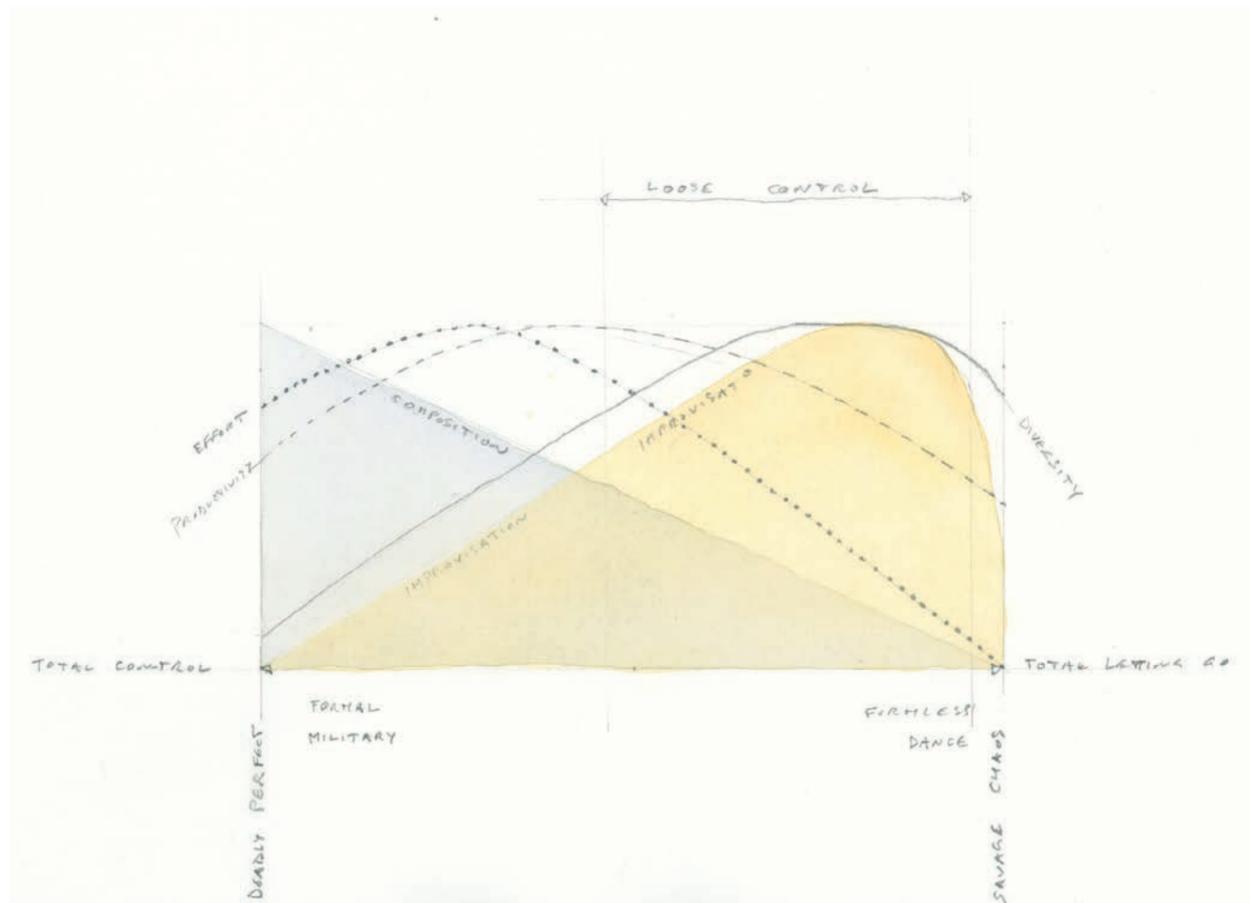


Fig. 46  
Diagram of the adaptive renewal cycle,  
showing the process of reorganisation  
after disturbance.

This body of work also reveals the question of the longevity of the intangible rituals. Tangible elements also do not last for ever, of course, and rely on renewal for their longevity, but are rituals as lasting? Guibert does not mean this in the sense of the usual architect obsession with permanence, but in terms of how, like a species evolving through natural selection, rituals continue providing a beneficial role as they evolve. Thus the designer's role is not to create rituals from scratch – but to recognise and nurture the existing patterns through beneficial evolution.

Such rituals do take place in other architectures but they generally remain uncelebrated and thus their evolution is blocked. They are often relegated to concepts of maintenance of the original form, or desecration of the purity of the original design, probably due to the unpredictability of their evolution. This practice aims to shift their perception so that these uncertain elements that are essential to life become as central a focus.

Another paradox is that while claiming rituals as a form of practice, this research has always put its emphasis on those aspects of the approach which are outside those traditionally ascribed to the architect. Thus, in public presentations, much has been said about scything or the design of wallpaper, and little about the design of the buildings. Due to the concise form of this portfolio, even here only limited emphasis has been given to these architectural moves which enable the development of the now well-established rituals of maintenance and co-creation. This accent on the rituals over time purposefully aims to rebalance the usual focus on aspects – the physical, technical building – which traditionally have all the explicit attention. By focusing on life, on performance – both of the rituals and of the buildings – the latter become primarily tools, and details something designed as simply and cost effectively as possible with those who built it.

## DISSEMINATION, ACHIEVEMENTS, PEER REVIEW

In the last 5 years, the research on these rituals has been disseminated at various events, including those described above, as well as publications:

Conferences and Exhibitions	Year	Event
	2015	'Re-imagining Rurality', conference at the University of Westminster, February 2015
	2015	'Learning from Colin Ward' at the Garden Museum, Organised by the Garden Museum and the Architecture Foundation, 8 October 2015
	2019	'ADAPT-r', exhibition, Ambika P3 gallery, London, November 2016
	2019	'Monsoon [+ Other] Grounds' symposium, University of Westminster, March 2019
	2019	London Festival of Architecture lectures, 'Blurring boundaries between inhabiting, designing, and making', University of Westminster, June 2019
	2020	'Animal Gaze Constructed: Art, Architecture & Animal-Human Studies', conference, Sir John Cass School of Art, Architecture & Design, London Metropolitan University, March 2020

## FOOTNOTES

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