Patrick Macklin

**Patrick Macklin is Head of the Interior Design Department at The Glasgow School of Art (GSA). He co-founded pop-up innovators Lapland and was an associate artist and designer with the award winning theatre company Suspect Culture. He is co-founder of the design studio SpaceKraft which is interested in the cultural significance of the interior and its emerging possible representations.**

**This Chapter explores impacts of design decisions on people, how they live, and how they create communities. It adopts a speculative approach to defining the identity of a neighborhood over a brief period in its existence, and reflects on ways that the residents of that community may shape their futures.**

**Aural Utopia**

**This piece begins with an echo of an earlier narrative, (re)setting the scene within a then relatively recently constructed multi-storey block of flats in the Woodside area of Glasgow. From there it proceeds to speculate on the future of renegotiating the utopian promise of high density living within everchanging social, legislative and technical landscapes.**

The windows are open, as if the room had cupped itself towards the neighbouring clang and clatter of construction and crumple of demolition. The windows are closed, the room reverberates to the sounds of Johnny Cash and a kettle whistling; the sound of Celtic versus Ajax; the sound of playing cards being shuffled; the sound of coins in a saucer. The windows open again, rubber radials rasp on tarmac, wave upon wave of vehicles thrumming into the distance below, glistening tyres slicing through surface water, the drone of engines, each instance merging into a soothing blanket of pink noise, modulated, complex Doppler effects, resoundingly hypnotic. Then the windows are closed, for the night. The kettle clicks off and abruptly the turntables’ tone-arm returns to rest in the groove of a seven-inch vinyl disc, the track it carries is *V-2 Schneider* the flip-side of Bowies' *Heroes*, its title is a composite containing both the name of a musician and the name of an unpiloted rocket, thus it simultaneously offers an homage to technologically mediated creation and destruction; to sound, then silence, then back to sound again.

A window has been left open, things are still, save for the whistling and wailing of the wind as it rushes through the internal stairwells and across the communal drying areas, it is occasionally accompanied by the distant chiming of tin-cans careering off of the sides of the waste disposal chutes and raining into the bin store at the base of the block. There are remote echoing voices chattering and shouting, there’s laughter too. It is Tuesday, the second of the month, so the air is heavy with aromas emanating from the brewery on an adjacent hill. The breeze carries thick, yeast-laden vapours through the vented escape stairs, percolating into the circulation spaces, corridors and ramps. We are over eighteen metres from the ground and everything inside the tower is stable.

In the apartment itself is the sound of drums relayed by tinny speakers. That Maserati performance, the mesmerising one, in the basement, with Jerry Fuchs centre stage, in a place, thousands of miles away, from a performance that took place many years ago. The clip is viewed repeatedly, re-played, re-posted, re-framed. Clicks and taps, live edits, and all the while the rice steamer is spluttering, the tomatoes on the veranda are ripening and rain is tapping out its own furious rhythms on the window panes.

Fig 1: Woodside Multi (2017), P. Macklin

Fig 2: Cedar Court (2017) P. Macklin

The tower was originally constructed as a consequence of the part of the city it occupied being designated a Comprehensive Development Area (CDA)[[1]](#footnote-1). Comprehensive development, or what later appeared to be the wholesale destruction of a community. The block had its fiftieth anniversary several years ago. At that time it enjoyed an extensive refurbishment, the installation of new, silent and reliable lifts that stopped on every floor; extended balconies; enhanced thermal efficiency, but nothing on the scale that was to follow. Through now triple-glazed window units the rig is visible. It was an emergency addition to the block, and has come to serve as a sky-garden, a street, and a means of escape. It has revolutionised ways of living by offering significant additional space to every apartment, the exact equivalent of each homes interior footprint, but on the outside, and in most cases, high off of the ground. It is magnificent. On it are real flowers, cascading everywhere over the balustrades, inside, there are flowers too: they're even better than real. Heavy, pale roses and peony, petals weighed down, always beautifully lit and in the residents favourite colours. They adorn the walls and upholstery. The blooms move slowly, imperceptibly, in loops, swaying at a snail’s pace, in some silent breeze. This week it might be decorative motifs that are in vogue, next week, being mid-winter, the trend might be to opt for something more subdued, geometric interpretations follow, then randomly generated forms, perhaps created by someone in a similar building, in another part of the world.

Drones deliver everything, of varying sizes and capacities, each with its own unique silhouette, they land on the exoskeletal service rig that now encapsulates the tower. Each level of the building has a dedicated perimeter platform with localised bays enabling the vehicles to dock and distribute their cargo, which consists of everything: groceries and musical instruments; books and medical supplies; clothing and bartered items. In between sorties they hover around the place in flocks, like birds, vast clouds formed from hundreds of dark silhouettes with uniform trajectories waltzing across the sky, visible from the duplex. Like the electric, self-driving cars and trucks that speed bumper to bumper along the motorway at the base of the block they are almost silent devices, which is just as well as they constantly criss-cross the city skyline preparing to encircle and lock into their destinations. Occasionally one will peel-off en route, jettison its payload, then rejoin the throng. They cast their own particular shadows that dance over walls and across ceilings and floors. Some people love shopping, some people love sharing and both have become spectacular.

Since the event, the room is a little smaller. It is protected, insulated with a skin is that is one hundred and fifty millimetres thick and is wrapped around every surface of the space. The lining is a fibre insulating batt that carries all of the cables, ducts and conduit that service the technologies, screens and speakers that have been bonded to its surface. They are flexible and high definition–there are rumours that the next series of updates will offer haptic resistance, precipitating a flocking revival, a kind of *Digiglypta*. It will be possible to recreate the octagonal chartreuse velvet-lined chambers at Château de Chenonceau as if straddling the Loire or the bunker-like scraped plaster and flyer pasted walls of The Milestone Club. Anything is possible. Simply scan, sample, duplicate and repeat or randomize customised decorative systems and at a stroke they are delivered, indistinguishable from the original, in printed form digitally rendered, decoration both simulated and actual. This second skin has reduced the volume of the room, both arithmetically and acoustically, there is no echo, such acoustically neutrality can assist in simulating the atmosphere and soundscape of other places too. The swaying flowers resonating as if located in the Grosser Musikvereinssaal in Vienna; or geometric lozenges hanging as a backdrop to the rhythms of Tokyo’s Womb club, endless varieties of place cascade from within each compartment of the building.

From the heart of this decorative revolution, one that restores craft, revivifies embellished sensory immersion, and ratchets up the significance of new symbolic languages, we pause, lay down our wands, and listen, together, for the murmur of approaching UAV’s.[[2]](#endnote-3)

*Aural Utopia began with partial recollections of half-remembered events that may have taken place in an apartment within a tower block in Glasgow, one of the few remaining mid-20th century multi-stories that once defined the skyline of the city. From this hazy departure point it pulled focus on the impulse to decorate, and imagined dynamic, augmented approaches to sculpting the formal language of domesticity at some point in the near future.*

1. In the 1950’s, in support of attempts to reduce the population of the centre of Glasgow, 29 Comprehensive Development Areas (CDA’s) were established. Existing housing stock within the CDA’s was demolished, almost entirely, and residents mainly rehoused in replacement multi-storey and deck access blocks or relocated to newly built housing estates created on the perimeter of the city. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Unmanned aerial vehicle [↑](#endnote-ref-3)