INTANGIBLE ARCHITECTURES
THE POST OFFICE IN AN AGE OF SPEED

BY

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CONTENTS

1.0 //INTRODUCTION

1.1 The place of the post office.

The traditional post office is a confusing and lost character within our urban fabric . Once a central part of towns both rural and urban it is now ignored by the communities it once served, a stagnant figure as communities struggle to figure out what role it still holds. This shift in its role raises larger questions about the shift in the way we view and use communication to express identity. Present day communication is largely conducted over the internet, and we primarily do so through our personal devices. Yet this is not a stagnant shift, with modes of communication evolving and multiplying ever more rapidly.

It is through this aspect of speed that begins to address the complexities of this shift.

Paul Virilio's writings on dromology discuss the connections between communication, geography and the virtual world. It offers a framework through which this shift can be viewed, looking at how these ever increasing speeds lead to a collapse of distance both temporally and physically. This results in a geographic disconnect that erodes our ability to engage in place identity. Architecture offers a way that this shift towards a virtual identity can be re-spatialised and authenticated, acknowledging the fractured identities we now hold in geographic and virtual realities.

To address this dromological shift this thesis looks at aspects of authenticity and performativity within the post office, investigating how they might offer a way to explore the intersection between old modes of postal communication and new ways of communicating through our cellphones. Through these architectural interventions the new post office is found, one that grounds modern communication within the wider chronological narrative of the post office.

figure 1.
post collection

figure 2.
cellphone use

2.0 //COMMUNICATION NETWORKS

2.1 Postal Service.

Early postal communication in New Zealand was a sporadic affair, with early settlers and whalers having to rely on passing ships for the postage and delivery of communications. But in the 1850's, with the establishment of settlements throughout the New Zealand interior, organised postal services became increasingly important (NZ Post). So with the formalisation of the Post Office through legislation, post offices were set up throughout the country. The postal service has served many different functions throughout its history, its core historic function being the transport of written messages. As it developed

it became a local center for a variety of communications, from personal letters to business affairs and the couriering of small goods (NZ `Post). The basic necessity of this service led to the proliferation of the post office. Though traditionally housed in formal civic buildings, post offices could also be found in a variety of other buildings, such as farmhouses, serving the surrounding rural families. In this way the postal service became a common element present most New Zealand towns, alongside local community halls, local dairies and sports domains.

As a central part of everyday life, and as a state service present throughout New Zealand, the postal service expanded to encompass a wide variety of other societal functions and services. From the late 1860's it also offered other governmental services including banking; births, deaths and marriages; police notices; and community news and weather alerts (Smith 12). The postal service came to be not only a common element in the urban environment, but also one for all members of the local community. Its broad range of private and public services made it a necessity of life for all, regardless of social background or standing.

Through this process of development and expansion the postal service came to be a significant civic figure for inhabitants of New Zealand towns. A prominent part of the community, the post office's traditionally stately architecture and central location made it a landmark meeting point. As a wide reaching and essential service it acted as a meeting point for the local community, irrespective of class or social standing. Within the wider context of the postal network, post offices offered a common element to contextually link and locate towns, offering an official validation of local place identity. By the mid-twentieth century the postal service had evolved into a central part of the daily New Zealand life.

2.2 The Internet.

Contemporary communications are dramatically different to those of the mid- twentieth century. The last two decades have seen a fast shift towards this new norm, beginning with wireless cellular calling. By the time cellular networks were developing the home telephone had become a central part of communications thanks to its ease of use, and the immediacy of the conversation. Cellular networks allowed this to be untethered from the home and as technological development made cell phones easier to produce efficiently and cheaply, they became the new standard for communication (Wolpin). This wireless technology, and the search for efficiency, also brought texting to cell phones, short email messages sent seemingly instantly from one person to the next. As personal devices, cell phones allowed communication to occur directly between people. Communication was no longer directed at a building or location; they allowed direct access to someone almost irrespective of where they were.

Alongside this computers and internet access became widespread. The open ended nature of this network allowed for a wide variety of new technologies to develop, a central one being social networks. These networks allowed people to create an online presence through which they connect with others, communicate, create groups to share interests, and update others on what they were doing. Different networks have served different niches, some focused on specific actions like sharing photos, others on setting up robust discussion via forum boards, and others have looked to a more broad approach, allowing flexible use the social network in a variety of ways. All these social networks operated through a number of different means, and set up different types of interaction and social engagement for their users. This variety of choice has aided their rise as a central means of communication for people today.

The proliferation of technologies such as Wi-Fi and smartphones have made mobile access to the internet, instant messaging and social networks a norm amongst developed countries. These technologies have

combined the efficiencies of cell phones and the internet, allowing people to stay connected with others with increasing ease. This combination of technologies has resulted in temporal ambiguity and site-less-ness. Through them people can be reached wherever they are and social networks allow us to connect with people we no longer see in our daily lives, resurfacing historic relationships, whenever they were. As modes of communication increasingly shift towards this ambiguous, siteless space, the devices themselves serve as a personal link to this virtual landscape. Communication, which once was a communal act through the postal service, has been inverted into a deeply individual one, with our personal devices serving the role the post office once held.
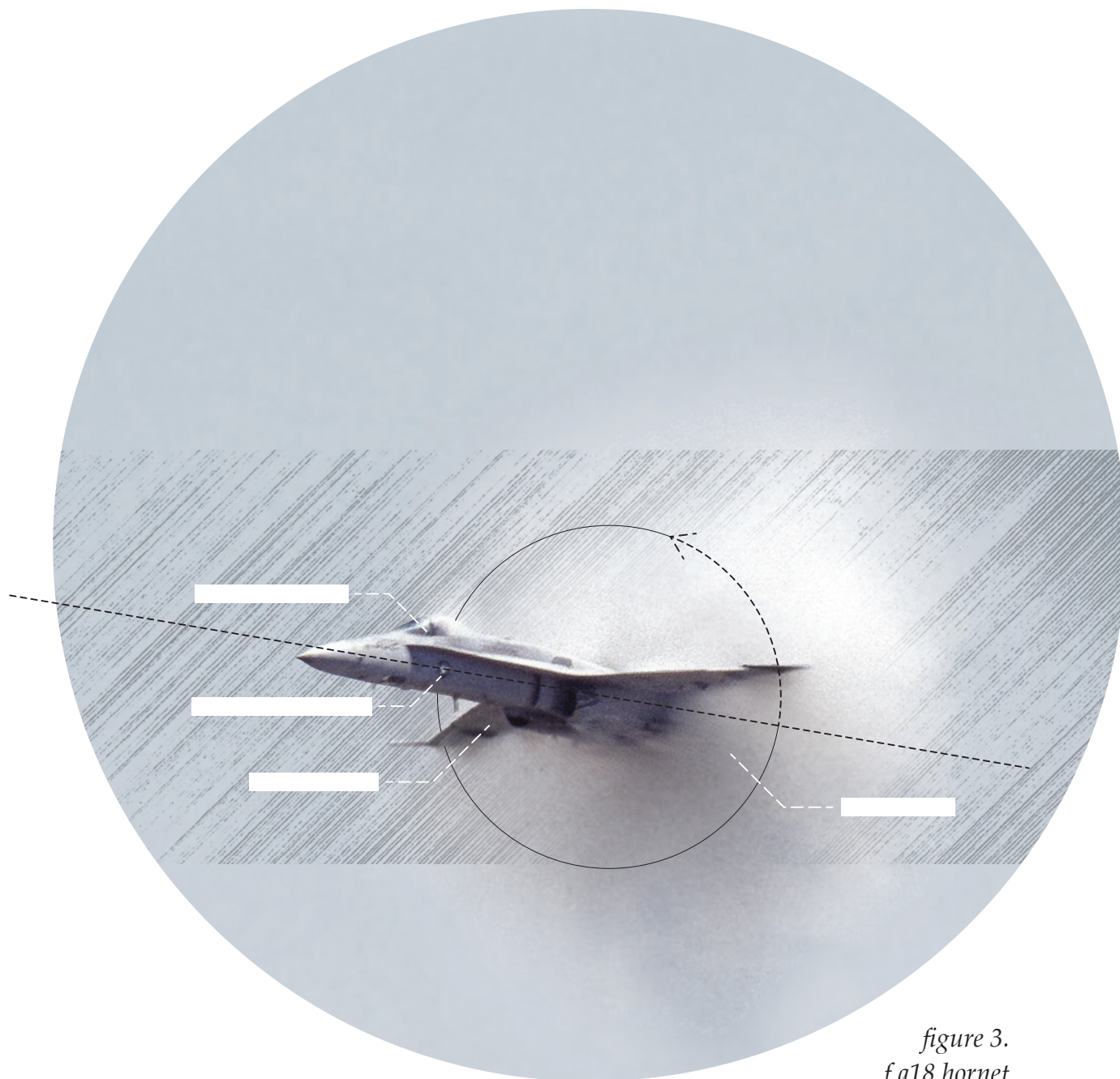
figure 3.
f a18 hornet

3.0 //ACCELERATING MESSAGES

3.1 Dromology.

The shift that has occurred between the postal service and the wireless network is clearly a complex one, with many factors at play across a broad range of topics. Both share aspects of civics, identity, community can communication. Paul Virilio's work, especially in the area of dromology, provides a framework within which we can begin to address these complexities, looking at temporal, spatial and architectural concerns.

3.2 Virilio.

Dromology refers to the study of speed and its sociological implications. In Speed and Politics Virilio discusses the relationship between dromology and distance, in particular its temporal and physical implications. The twentieth century has seen a vast increase in innovations that assist us in our day to day lives. From cars through to ready-made meals, new innovations constantly evolve, all with the purpose of making life more efficient. Our understanding of this efficiency is one where it allows us to achieve more, in a shorter amount of time, and, as Virilio suggests, speeding up society (Speed And Politics 134). This understanding of dromology not only applies to human actions, it also applies to information, and its dissemination and consumption. Television, the internet and increasingly social media, allow for information to be quickly disseminated and consumed by a vast number of people. It allows this information to be spread across immense geographic areas instantly, offering greater connectivity and adding to the idea of an increasingly global society. Virilio argues that this speed has the effect of collapsing distance both temporally and physically. As processes speed up we no longer consider the geographic concerns of what we are doing. Consumption of products becomes disassociated from its place of production; instant media happens everywhere, regardless of time; and instant communication dislocates people into a virtual world where they are locatable everywhere, all the time (Bartram 289). As inhabitants of an inherently geographic and spatial world, this dimensionless understanding comes to distort our view of the world. Local becomes an increasingly irrelevant word, and place identity erodes as we ourselves no longer strongly associate with a place.

This dimension-less vision also affects cohesion of self. This second vision is one of the virtual world, "result[ing] in a process of de-localisation, of the unrooting of the being (Bartram, 294)." As we interact in this dimension-less reality we split ourselves. One self inhabits our geographic reality where we intrinsically know and appreciate our
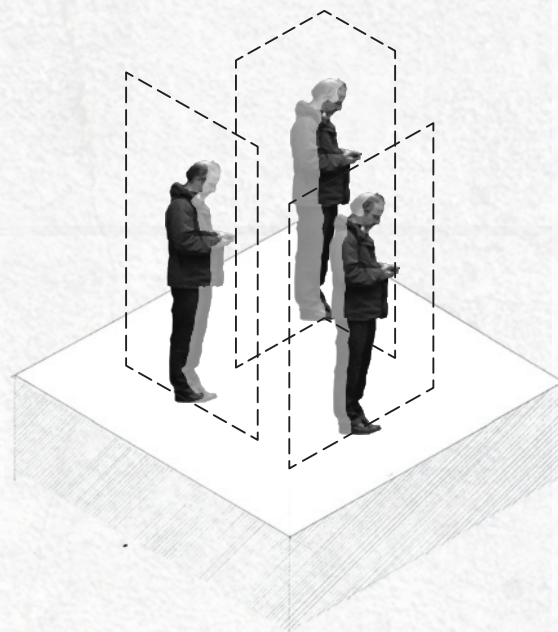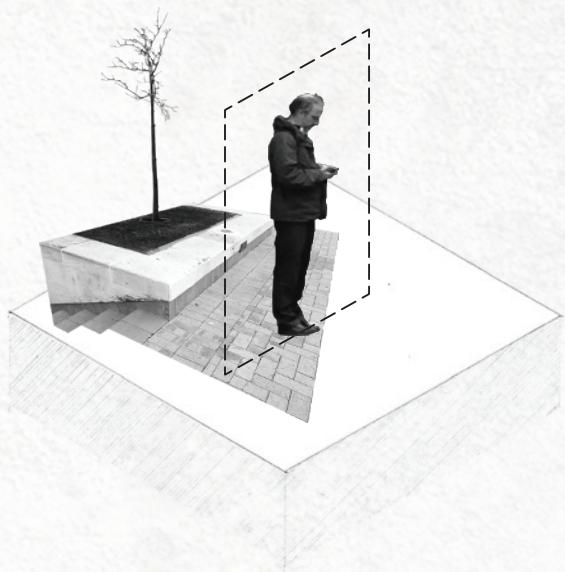
splitting of self across virtual networks. 1.
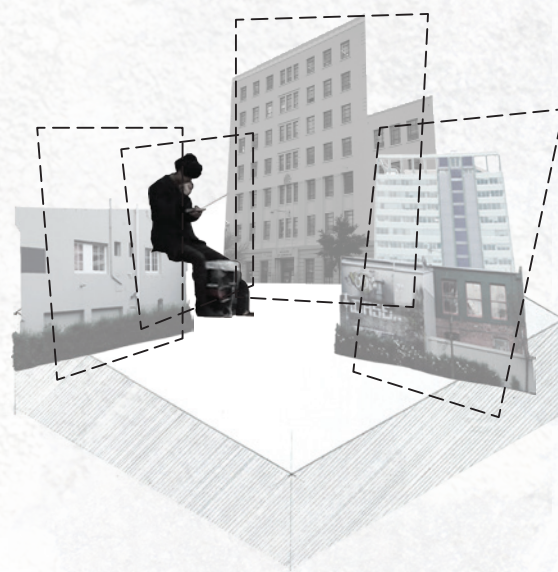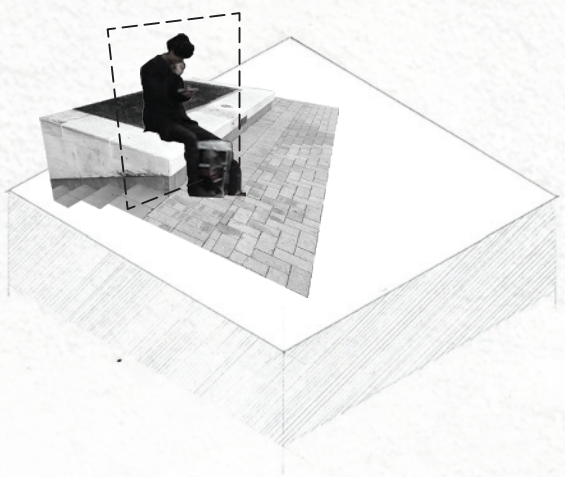
increased field of view to disparate locations. 2.

geographic place and reality, and one self inhabits the virtual reality where identity exists out of place and time. This splits our identity, and though Virilio is cautious about this split, he sees it as a one where we have to understand it for its possibilities, good and bad, rather than fear it. Virilio's concerns lie in the ability for this split to fully dislocate self from time and place. The saturation of this virtual reality where we can see 'all,' at all times, dislocates us into a false virtual reality, divorced from the geographic and temporal hierarchy of our lived reality (Bartram, 295).

opposite page - figure 4: diagrams exploring the concepts of field of view and the splitting of self associated with dromology and the acceleration of communication.

4.0 //PLACE AND IDENTITY

4.1 Identity.

Virilio's writings raise multiple questions around geographic and virtual identities, and what the compositions of these identities are. This question of identity is a central one to postal and internet communications, with communication central to construction, expression and reading of identity.

4.2 Place Identity.

Geographic identity deals with a complex mix of individuals, communities and space, looking at how we create and imprint an identity

on a specific location or area. The complexities associated with trying to assess how a wide range of elements come together to create this identity results in a wide range of theories around the nature of place identity. Fritz Steele, Kevin Lynch and Juhani Pallasmaa offer three connected ways we can begin to understand this concept. Steele outlines in The Sense Of Place that we can understand geographic [place] identity as being composed of the space and the person observing it. That is, that identity is both about the setting of the space, and the personal experiences that the people who inhabit it bring to that setting. Place identity is therefore understood as an interactional concept; it deals with the relationship between a space, the context that it brings, and a person, and the experiences they bring (12).

Lynch's work focuses on the nature of these settings, and how we can codify them and understand their relationships. In The Image Of The City he outlines five categories for these settings: paths, edges, districts, nodes and landmarks (46–82). These categories acknowledge that settings vary in their composition and this too changes with time. A single building or space might be considered as a setting for place identity. The same is also true for groups of buildings, or a string of roads, or any combination of elements at a range of scales. Though Lynch primarily focuses on the visual aspect of these settings, Steele also outlines the ways in which settings carry social connotations that affect their cultural context. This is often a more personal aspect that draws on an individual's experiences that they bring to the setting. It can also draw on group cultural associations which can be built up in a variety of ways: through programmatic indicators of use; associations with specific people(s); or through certification, the validation of a setting through media as canon (11, 15, 30).

Pallasmaa highlights the significance of these social connotations in his article Newness, Tradition and Identity. As Lynch acknowledged in his works, place identity and a setting's cultural and visual context are constantly evolving and shifting as we ourselves build, construct

past place identity -- -

-- - -- present place identity

-- - future place identity

KODAK–SAFETY

figure 6: the local context of place identity, noting the significance of individual perceptions, chronological context and the interplay between these elements in creating place identity.

20

and modify the places we inhabit (2). It is this temporal narrative that Pallasmaa highlights as being central to place identity and a setting's context. These narratives can be physical, seen through the visual reading of a setting's history and context, or abstract, seen through the conceptual referencing of past traditions and identities (15–19). It acknowledges that identity and setting do not exist simply in the now, with their strength on character in part relying on continuity with prior temporal narrative.

Collectively these three theorists outline four key elements in considering geographic identity. The central two elements are the setting of this identity, and the personal interaction and experiences of the person observing and interacting with it. In describing the setting, the social connotations are equally important as the visual characteristics of that space. Underpinning this is the temporal narrative that this setting exists in. Collectively these elements interact to create the geographic identities that use to understand the spaces we inhabit.

4.3 Virtual Identity.

In his 1994 interview in C-Theory Virilio discusses the splitting of self via virtual realities (Cyberwar, God And Television). The rapid development of the internet, and its integration into our day to day lives, has seen this split come to occur. Recent writings on the internet and virtual identities have looked at understanding this characteristic of the internet, in particular addressing how online social networks and computer mediated communications have created this concept of virtual identities. Katarzyna Musiał and Przemysław Kazienko outline the relationship between social and virtual identities in their article, Social Networks On The Internet. Broadly, virtual identity partially formed through the digitisation of a person's social identity – which can be seen through someone's email contact details, their Tumblr blog, their profile on Facebook, or any other iteration of their virtual presence on the internet (40). The other significant factor in

considering virtual identity is the group setting within which this virtual presence occurs. As the internet is largely uninhibited by geographic constraints, social groups can form around shared interests, and Deen Freelon notes the way that this different form of group building creates different norms, affecting the expression of a person's virtual identity (214–215).

The relationship between a person's social identity and their virtual identity is not a directly equable one. Musiał and Kazienko note that a virtual identity does not necessarily correlate directly with that person's social identity, or even correlate at all. Some people's online identities allow them to adopt an entirely different persona, or allow them to split different aspects of their social identity across different online presences (40–42). In their study into the dynamics of virtual identities, Jérôme Guegan and Estelle Michinov note that the anonymity offered by the internet creates a recursive relationship between social and virtual identities. The internet allows people to explore alternate identities, and in turn this alternate identity exerts its own influence back on the individual, affecting how they behave towards others in this virtual space (229–230). This can set up complex relationships between social and virtual identities, with the possibility for an individual to have multiple, disparate virtual identities present across a number of social networks.

The group setting is as equally important as the individual in considering virtual identities. In New Technologies At Work Magnus Bergquist discusses how new cultural groups arise out of these virtual settings. These virtual settings are not necessarily related to geographic counterparts, more often arising out of shared group interests. In this way socially and culturally disparate groups can form around a common factor. New cultures arise out of these settings, and this in turn creates a new set of norms that dictate what kind of virtual identity is present in this setting, and what types of hierarchies and behaviours are appropriate (223–224). As with their geographic coun-

interface
real identity
multiple virtual identities

figure 7: the interface between the real self and the virtual self.

terparts, these virtual settings occur at different scales. A broader scale setting like Reddit might dictate what type of virtual identity is created, but within this setting sub-groups form which can have their own set of rules and behaviours that affect the nature of that virtual identity. Understanding the setting is important to both the type of virtual identity, and the culture of how that identity is expressed.

In understanding virtual identity we therefore need to consider these four factors raised by Musiał, Kazienko, Freelon, Guegan, Michinov and Bergquist. The two primary factors are that of the individual identity and the group setting that it is expressed in. The individual identity is a complex figure that not only takes in the characteristics of that person's social identity, but the avatar that they create and how those two elements interact. The group setting is significant in that it indicates that way in which the virtual identity is created, and how it is expressed.

5.0 //DISLOCATED SYSTEMS

5.1 Framework.

Through this framework of dromology, geographic and virtual identities we can examine the roles of the post office and internet networks, understanding the nature of the shift that has occurred. As an inherently geographic and physical network, the postal service can be understood as an element within geographic identity creation. The internet is understood as an intangible entity, and as such operates as a setting for the creation of virtual identities.

5.2 Postal Service.

The postal service has been established as a common element central to most New Zealand towns. Ubiquitous both in physical presence and as a part of daily life, post offices stand as landmarks for the towns they serve. Lynch singles out a landmark as being visually significant against its background, either in spatial arraignment, aesthetic uniqueness or enhanced through its location at a significant junction (78–81). This is reflected in post offices, traditionally buildings placed at the city center employing dominant architectural styles such as neo-classicism. The post office's social significance set it as a landmark even in cases where the office was not aesthetically dominant. In some cases offices were located in unassuming buildings: single storey wooden structures or the kitchen of a local farmhouse. Yet as a part of everyday life, with mail, banking, community notices and other services provided, the office nonetheless served as a social landmark for the local community.

This geographic place making is not only limited to the physical presence of the office itself. Both Lynch and Steele outline the way territory also contribute to place identity (66–72; 55–56). Territory can be physically or abstractly demarcated, either way it sets out the boundaries for where the place identity exists. Though the post office does not set out boundaries itself, the postal delivery workers serve this purpose. A figure seen daily in the community they serve they often come to know the households they serve, becoming an informal community figure, part of the common background for local residents. In this way they act as an extension of the postal service's territory, linking the surrounding town to its local office.

At a higher scale the postal service grounds and contextualises a community within the wider network. As a cultural institution the postal service extends throughout New Zealand. Post offices, though separate in nature, provide a reference point towards the larger narra-

tive of this institution. Through the hierarchy of the wider delivery network, and as a common element in most towns the postal service serves as an element of continuity physically and temporally for local residents and those visiting a locale. The offices themselves also serve as a form of validation for place identity. As Steele notes, through the official presence of a post office, this assists in legitimising the community it serves as a space for place identity (30).

Its intrinsically geographic nature sets the postal service as a strong form of place identity creation. Through the physical presence of post offices and the daily routine of postal deliver workers, it serves as a landmark and territory marker for the local community. The wider network of the postal service serves to contextualise the local identity within the overall hierarchy of the service. This form of official validation has the effect of legitimising this creation of identity, with the postal service ultimately acting as a strong form of geographic place identity creation.

following pages - figures 9 -12. diagrams exploring four different facets of the post office: the civic entrance, the counter, the post office floor, and the mail desk.

1.

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2.

3.

post office acting as a context marker for local place identity and
interactions. civic identity projects onto the surrounding urban space.

1. local community
2. civic representation
3. interface between civic / community

counter a common place of interface between members
of community and local representation of civic organisation. dual identities
of the greater civic network and the local community bridge as the two intersect.

iii. ENCOUNTER

1. checking bank account
2. delivering mail
3. registering motor vehicle
4. resulting interactions

*post office as a place where disparate members
of thelocal community have chance encounters and unique interactions. as an open
space with multiple functions identity shifts as different interactions and actions occur.*

*the post office as a space where
private actions and are carried out in a public place. identity brigdes this
threshold between public and private, separating it out from the greater space.*

5.3 The Internet.

As a virtual landscape, the internet, and the interfaces for connecting to it offer a different form of identity creation. The devices themselves are personal in nature, and the focus is therefore on individual identity creation. As a personal object we customise this interface with the internet to work in the ways that suit our personal habits. Smartphones, as objects that we constantly carry and consult throughout our day, are especially personal. In this capacity they come to act as extensions of ourselves, making this process of virtual identity creation a deeply personal one. This creates a divide between our real and virtual identities. Though these virtual identities exist in social settings, the act of connecting to these virtual settings is a personal one. Paradoxically, communicating on these social networks can be physically seen as a deeply individualistic action.

Despite their singular nature, interfaces such as smartphones do not equate to a single virtual identity. The internet does not suffer from geographic constraints, and as such the many settings for identity creation are open to all who have access to the internet. The variations between different settings such as Twitter, Vimeo or Pinterest result in different iterations of a person's identity for each site. Compounding this, varying levels of anonymity on each site exacerbate the possibility for the creation of dissociative identities. Collectively this goes beyond the dualistic split suggested by Virilio. This fragmentation of identity between a social identity and many virtual ones is not a clean demarcation. Rather it blurs an understanding of self; though these identities often share some characteristics they are separate, obscuring the cohesion of any identity creation and readability.

In understanding the internet as a setting for identity creation there is an acknowledgment of its ability to dislocate identities from geographic concerns. Through the connection of geographically, culturally and temporally disparate locations the internet tends to blur and

eliminate these demarcations and boundaries. As Virilio notes this, "privileges the 'now' of the timeslot … to the detriment of the 'here (Bartram, 292).'" Virtual identities are left incomplete as geographic indicators are eroded. Communication and identity are removed from their contextual markers leaving incomplete readings of identities.

The internet serves to connect many people and offer a sandbox setting in which this can occur. By the nature of the way in which we interface with the internet this is an individualistic action despite the social connectivity it offers. The variety of settings in which these social connections can occur results in a blurring and fragmentation of virtual identities left disconnected from geographic markers that might otherwise offer context.

following pages - figures 13 -16. Diagrams exploring four settings for virtual communication: civic space, the bus stop, a coffee bar, and a secluded park.

civic space acting as a formal area where virtual
communication occurs in a public space as a part of the greater action taking place.
greater identity formed from the accumulated interactions between the inhabitants.

*bus stop as a place of common experience shared by many using a
wider civic network. identity is a shared experience though mutually isolated.*
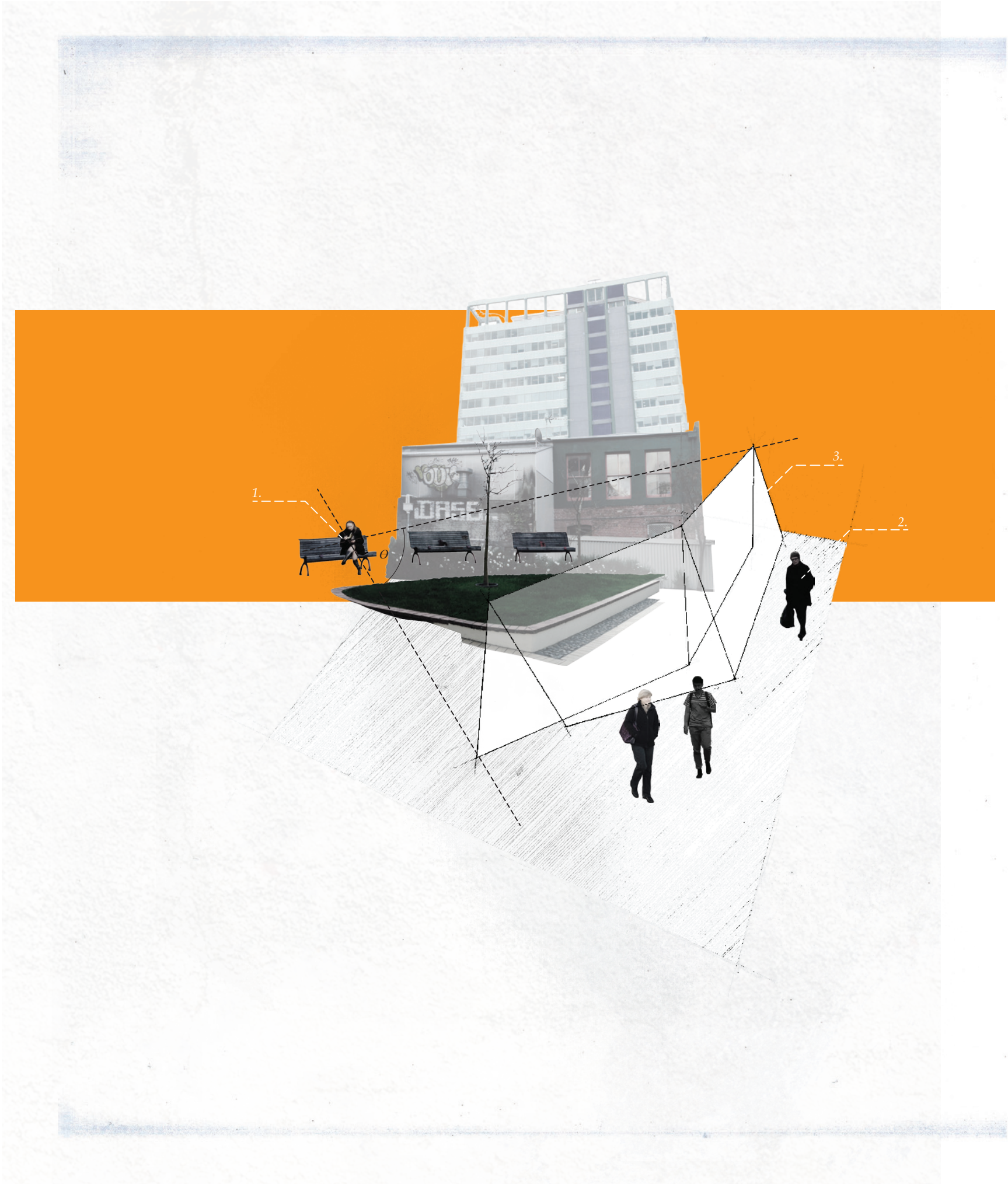
cafe as a place for direct communication
and background virtual communication offering chances for unexpected encounters
between inhabitants. identiy is open and loosely defined encouraging informal meetings.

i. CONCEALED

1. private virtual communication
2. pedestrians
3. implicit barrier

secluded public space as a part of the wider urban network. presents
connotations of an identity removed from main public areas and the wider urban space.

5.4 Identity Within Dromology.

The implications of how identity works within both of these networks gives an understanding of the dromological implications of the shift that has occurred between them. Primarily this is a shift of virtuality. As identity moves from a geographic reference point to a virtual one it is forcibly codified into data points that are loggable on computer networks. Where identity was once an ephemeral concept that arose out of group cultural understandings it is now measured and defined. Traits are codified into defined attributes, aesthetics are codified into metrics. People and place become data. The personal nature of this process leads to the individualisation of identity as it moves from a fluctuating whole towards defined fragments.

As data points in a virtual landscape identity becomes disjointed from the temporal continuum that Pallasmaa discusses in his work. Data becomes removed from the constraints of time, and only through physical intervention or deterioration is it affected. The complexity of this network of identities sitting out of time blurs the legibility of any temporal narrative; reading the cultural and aesthetic shifts central to the narrative of identity becomes difficult. Data exists in a paradox where old data accumulates, but without traces of palimpsest. History and context are ever more accessible yet the volume and accessibility of this data tends towards noise as temporal hierarchy is lost. This disconnect leads to what Virilio calls the privileging of the 'now' (Speed And Politics, 135). Faced with ever increasing choice data of the present is privileged over the noise of past narratives.

This increasing speed and connectivity, combined with the disconnect from geographic and temporal realities leads to the dromological effects discussed by Virilio. While the internet offers a new sandbox in which identities can be created and expressed, it is also a setting where users can be dislocated from reality. Virilio describes this as a world of 'total vision,' a world where all is visible, and sight lines are

no longer constrained by dead angles or areas of shadow (Bartram, 296). This new panopticon is one where distances of space and time are collapsed to the point where they can lack relevance. Without these significant contextual markers it becomes a site without orientation. Identity becomes lost in a virtual space without the reference points of geographic or temporal dimensions.
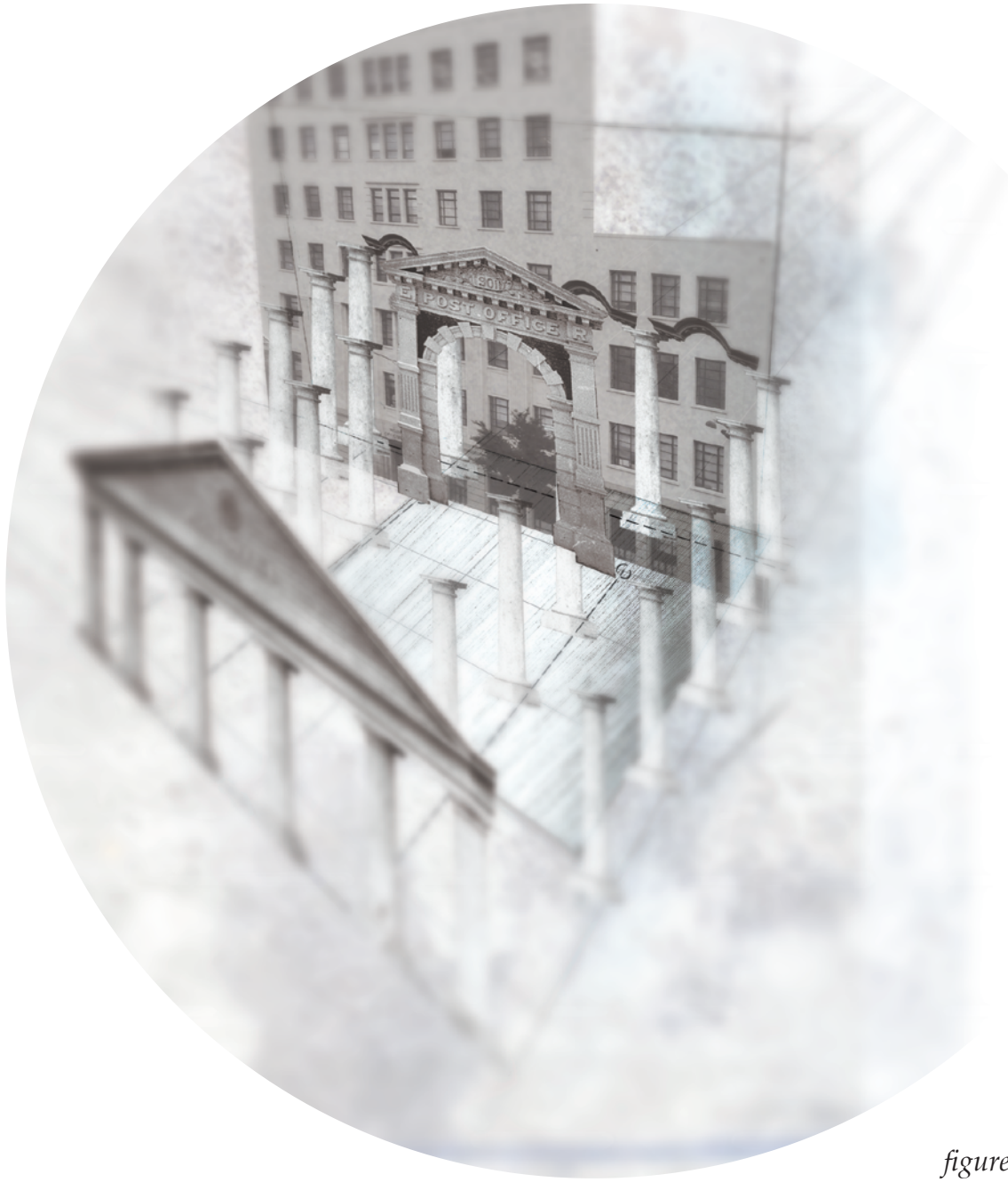
figure 17.

6.0 //PERFORMATIVE AND AUTHENTIC

6.1 The New Post Office.

To reverse the shift of dromology on the post office and reclaim it as an agent of place identity creation requires an engagement with inhabitant and place, with time and distance. Slowing down acts of identity creation and engagement with the person can be framed through an investigation into performativity. An understanding of authenticity allows place identity to be spatialised. Through slowing down and spatialising these new acts of identity we can begin to reveal a new post office.

6.2 Performativity.

A theory of performativity is largely concerned with the exploration of how acts are connected with place identity, and how meaning and structure is imbued and read into these acts (Smitheram). Susanna Rostas notes though that performativity, and meaning, is rooted in the ritualistic. These actions a habitual events that are carried out almost unintentionally. They are couched in convention and a wider cultural context, Rostas suggesting that in these rituals the agency of the participant is subsumed by the wider context of the action and norms around protocol. Performativity arises when the participant imparts a meaning to these acts and moves beyond the expected norms. For Rostas though, it is the ritual underpinning behind these performative acts that give them wider meaning and ground them as a meaningful performance (21). Without this grounding context performance becomes unsustainable, and ultimately meaningless to the inhabitant.

This dialectic between ritual and performativity is expanded upon by Lisa Benham in Diversity In Architectural Processes. She touches on Judith Butler's comment that "identity is a process of becoming," and that performativity allows us to understand how the repetition of these processes feeds into an expression and creation of identity (91). In focusing her work on performativity within communities Benham also highlights the communal nature of this relationship between ritual and performativity. As individual inhabitants carry out communal ritualistic acts the cumulative whole creates larger place identity. Furthermore as individuals imbue these performative rituals with their own meaning this larger identity is one that constantly shifts as inhabitants express their own performative interpretation of the rituals of space.

It is this relationship, and recursive relationship that performativity has with space that Katarina Bonnevier finds in her analysis of Eileen Gray's house. Bonnevier explores how Gray's design contra-

venes the expectations of the home at that time. She notes how the bedroom becomes the living space, the shower bleeds into common areas, and the layered veils hiding interior niches within each other. This play with form not only comments on our expectations of domestic public and private spaces, it also comments on how our reading of space contributes to the performative qualities of space. The private and personal rituals associated with the bedroom are undermined by the dislocation into a public living space (166). The space both brings to attention the implicit performative associations of space and also challenges these assumptions and behaviours. In this way architecture becomes a vehicle to drive and play with notions of performativity.

6.3 Spatial Context.

The post office draws on this relationship to become a rich ground for the performative. Though no two post offices appear the same, they are highly ritualised spaces, and as a larger network, have clear signals about the types of rituals carried out within. As inhabitants go about paying for their post, addressing envelopes, carrying out their banking, and other daily rituals these normative acts become performative as each participant imparts their identity on the action. This relationship between the performative qualities of the post office and its context as a place for identity generation is a central quality of the post office lost in today's context of modern communication. Previously acts of communication are external actions placed within the spatial context of the post office. They involved real time, face to face interaction with others within the same local context. These acts become personal in internalised within our phones, and individualised for each participant. Communication becomes about inward focused actions with others dislocated from the local context of space and time. The spatial and performative aspects of the post office are fragmented and are only seen in a local context as short form performative actions that engage shallowly with other inhabitants of the same place.

To reclaim the distance inherent in dromology involves spatialising the different performative qualities of modern communication over the internet, making these rituals public in a way that engages with the local context. This offers the opportunity to slow down these now rapid rituals, offering a new performative framework in which a community can engage with each other's communication. The ritual of checking notifications, sending emails, updating statuses becomes a public act, one that not only involves the inhabitant and their virtual identity, but also involves the participation of the local community around them. Spatialising this performance and locating in a context with other local inhabitants grounds the act of creating a virtual identity in a physical space shared with others. New ways of communicating are decelerated, shared with others, and re-purposed into performative acts of place identity creation, a new performative post office.

Performativity can be used to call on historic understandings of the rituals around the post office. Against the contemporary use of cellphones for communication and the progression towards virtual and internal performative acts these historic understandings appear irrelevant. However through grounding the contemporary in the wider context of the historic, new rituals around communication are re-purposed to call on these historic rituals, to allow them to become acts of place identity creation.

following pages - figures 18 -27. Two sequences of shetch diagrams investigating performativity and authenticity. The first half uses the performative aspects of communication to explore form while the latter uses historic forms of the post office to layout new programmes over present day spaces.

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2.
3.

3.
2.
1.

1-3. hierarchy
4. field of view
5-6. audience / performer

ARTY BEES
BOOKS

2.

3.

4.

5.

1.
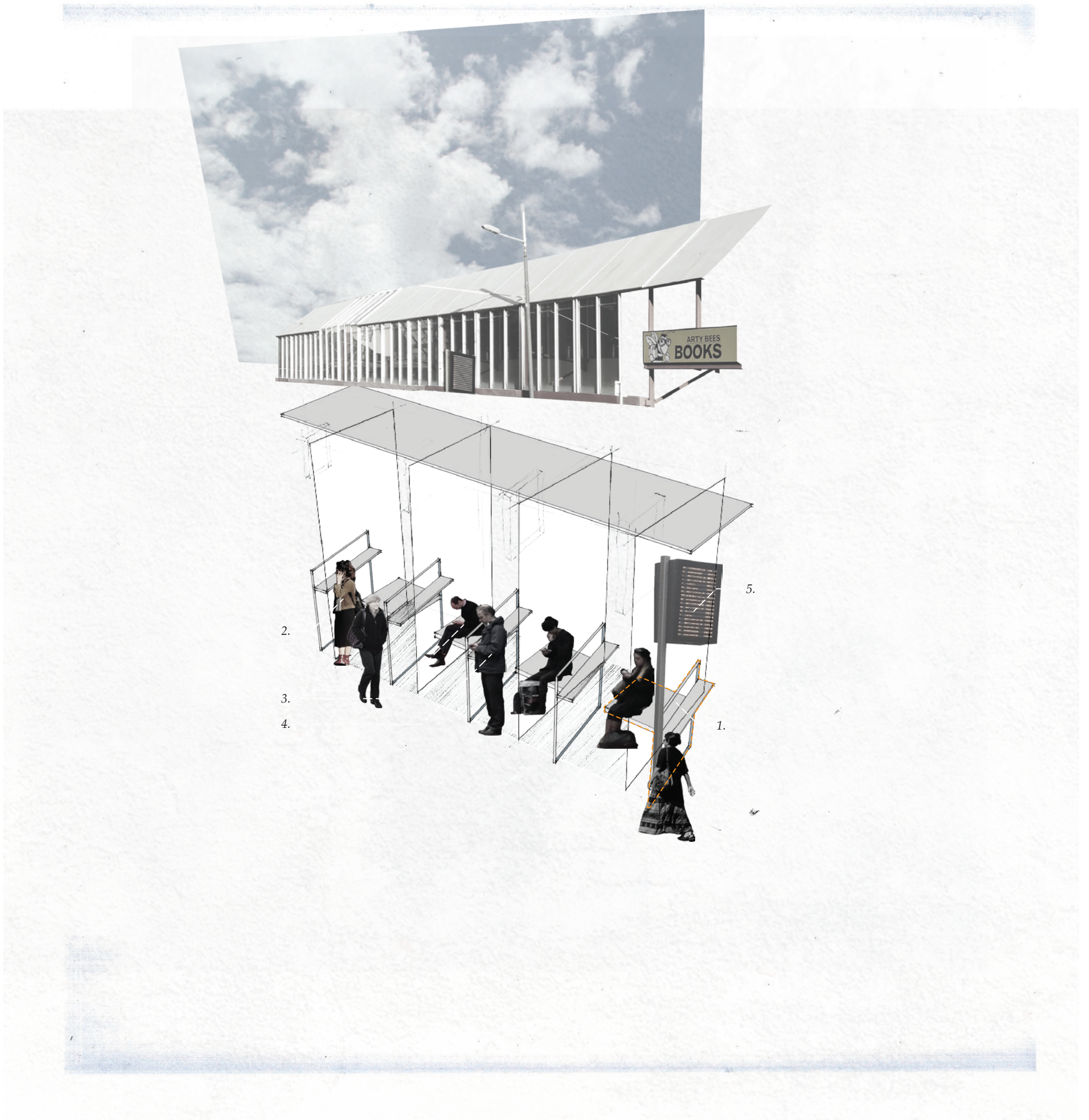
1. uniformity
2-4. varied cellphone use
5. civic context
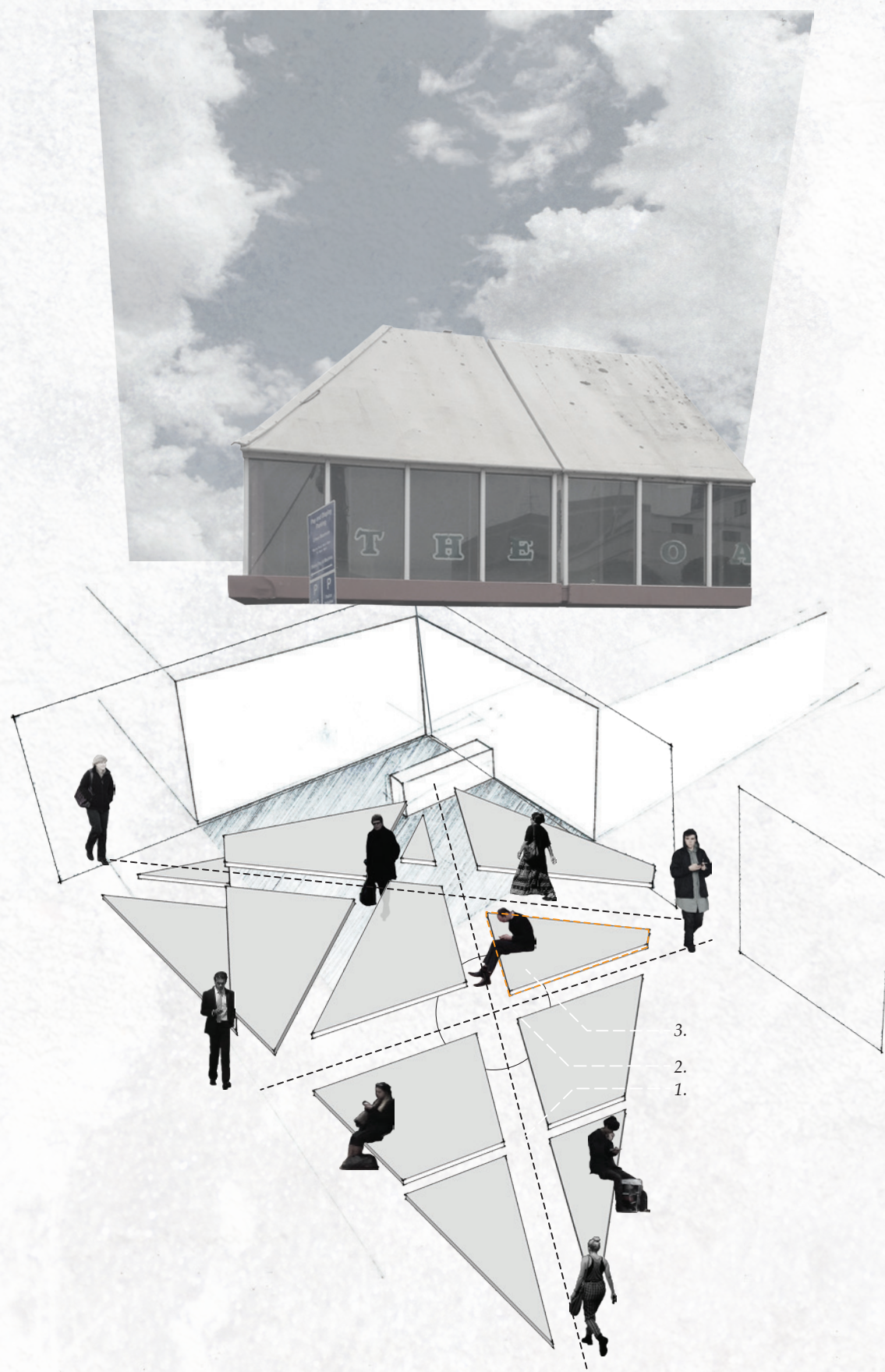
1. multiple pathways
2. meeting points
3. open use

θ

2.
1.

3.
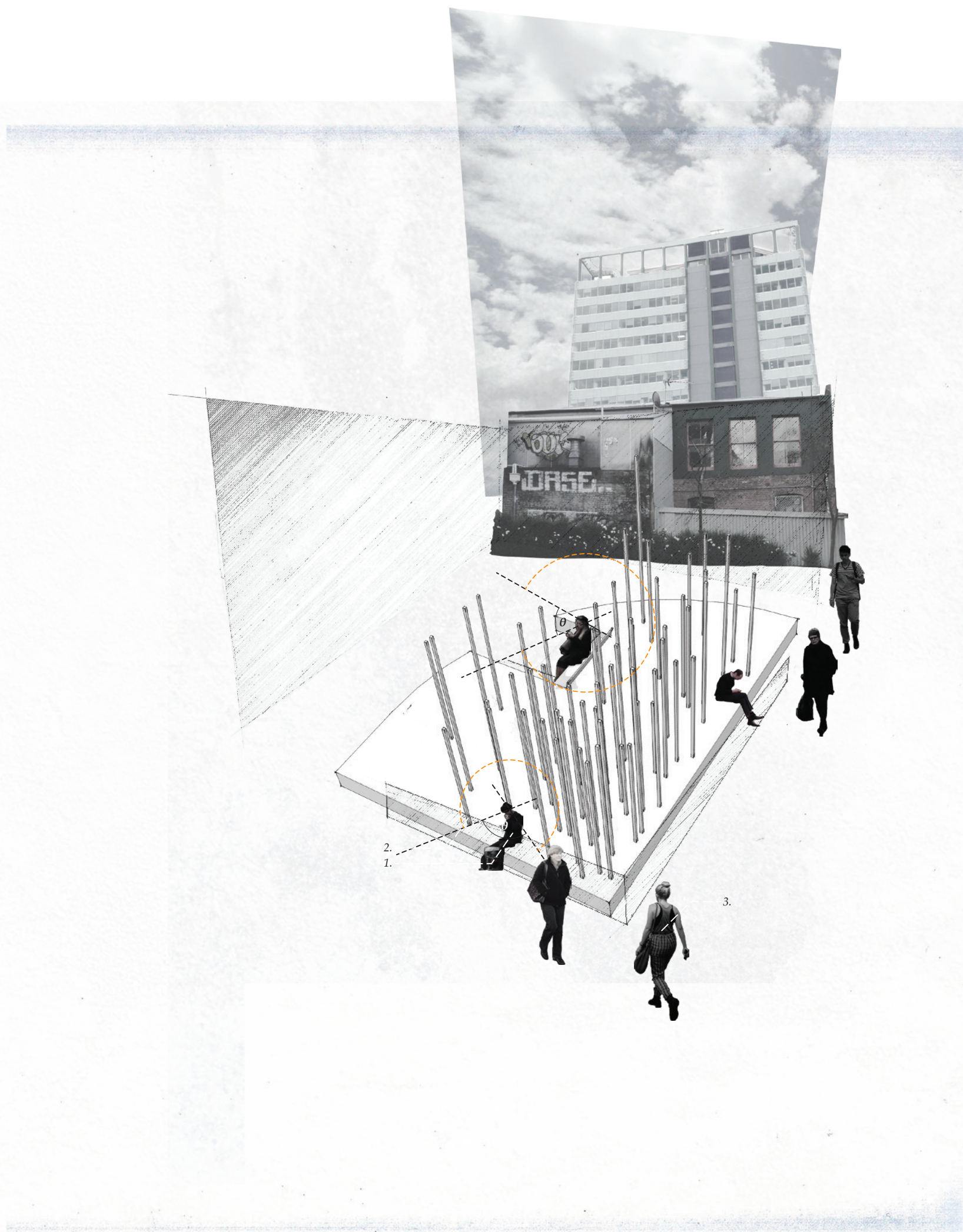
1. limited visibility
2. translucent barrier
3. wider local community
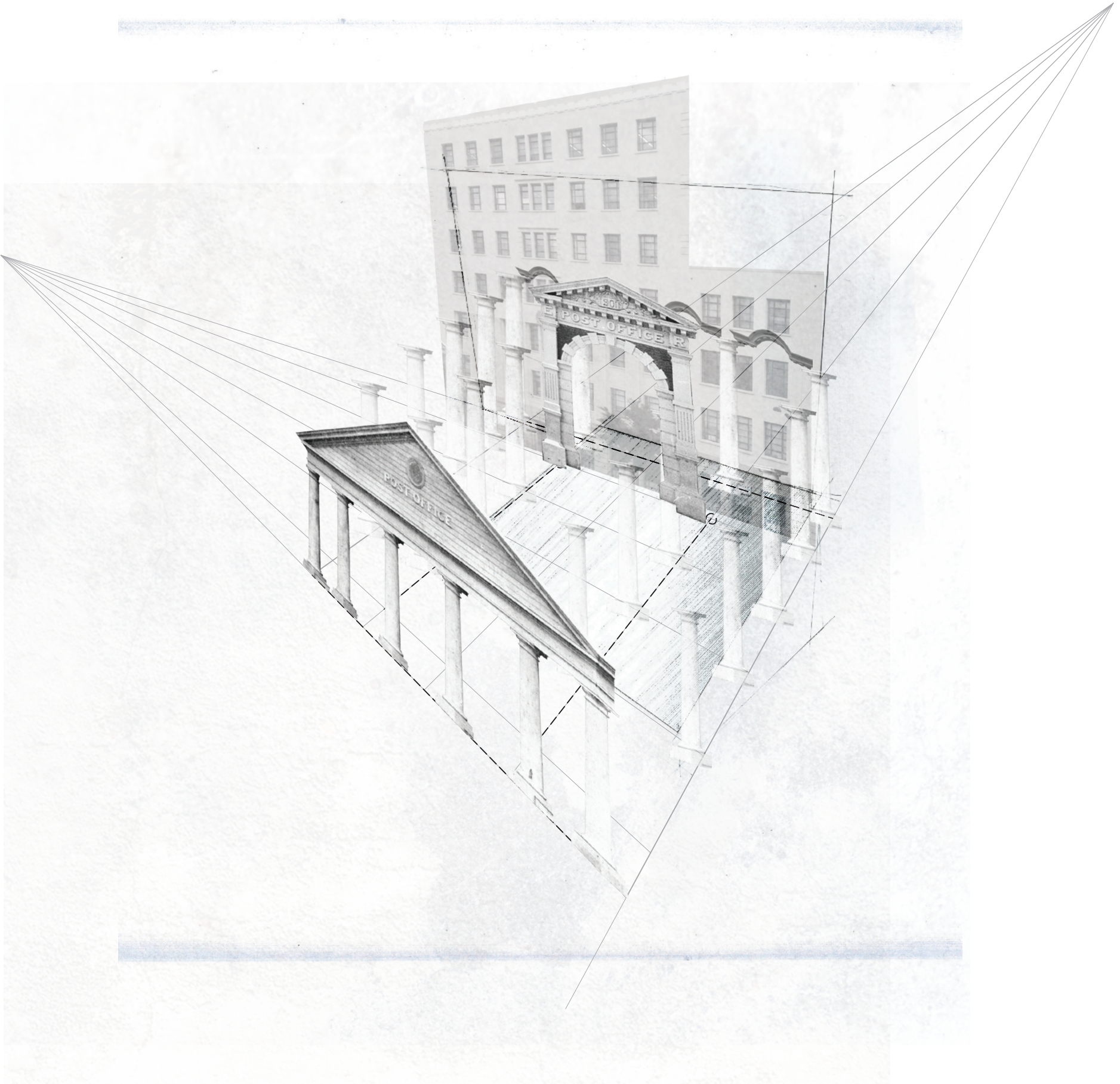
*formal visual elements from the post office as a
representation of authority in civic representation.*

post office counter and bus stop
interface between community and civic networks
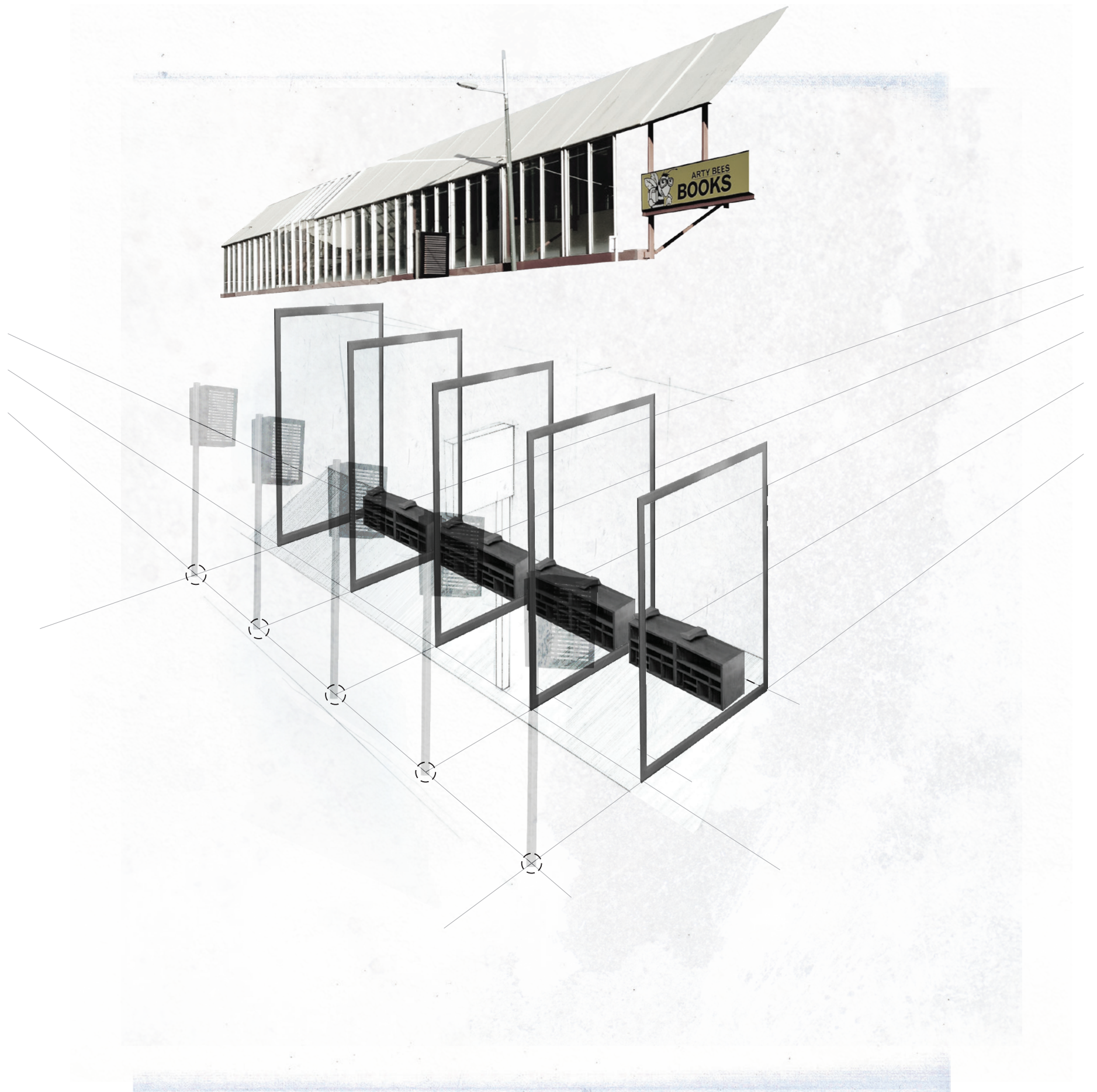
repetition and shared experience of the post office queue as
an opportunity to form shared expeirence of the civic network.

*varied and defined programmes of the post office offering
multiple uses and opportunities for spontaneous interaction.*

*permiable partitions outlining the blurred threshold
between private actions in public spaces.*

6.4 Authenticity.

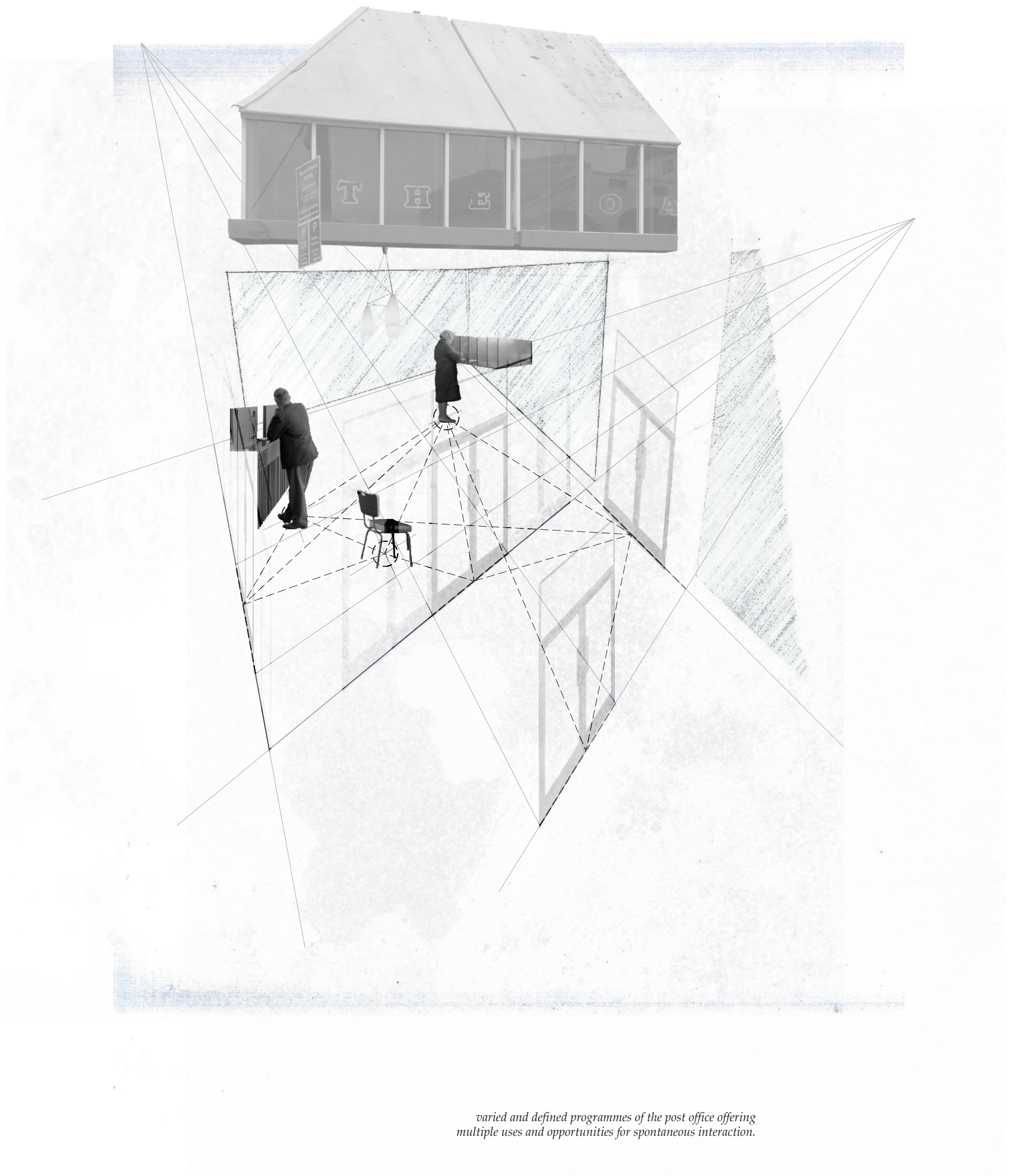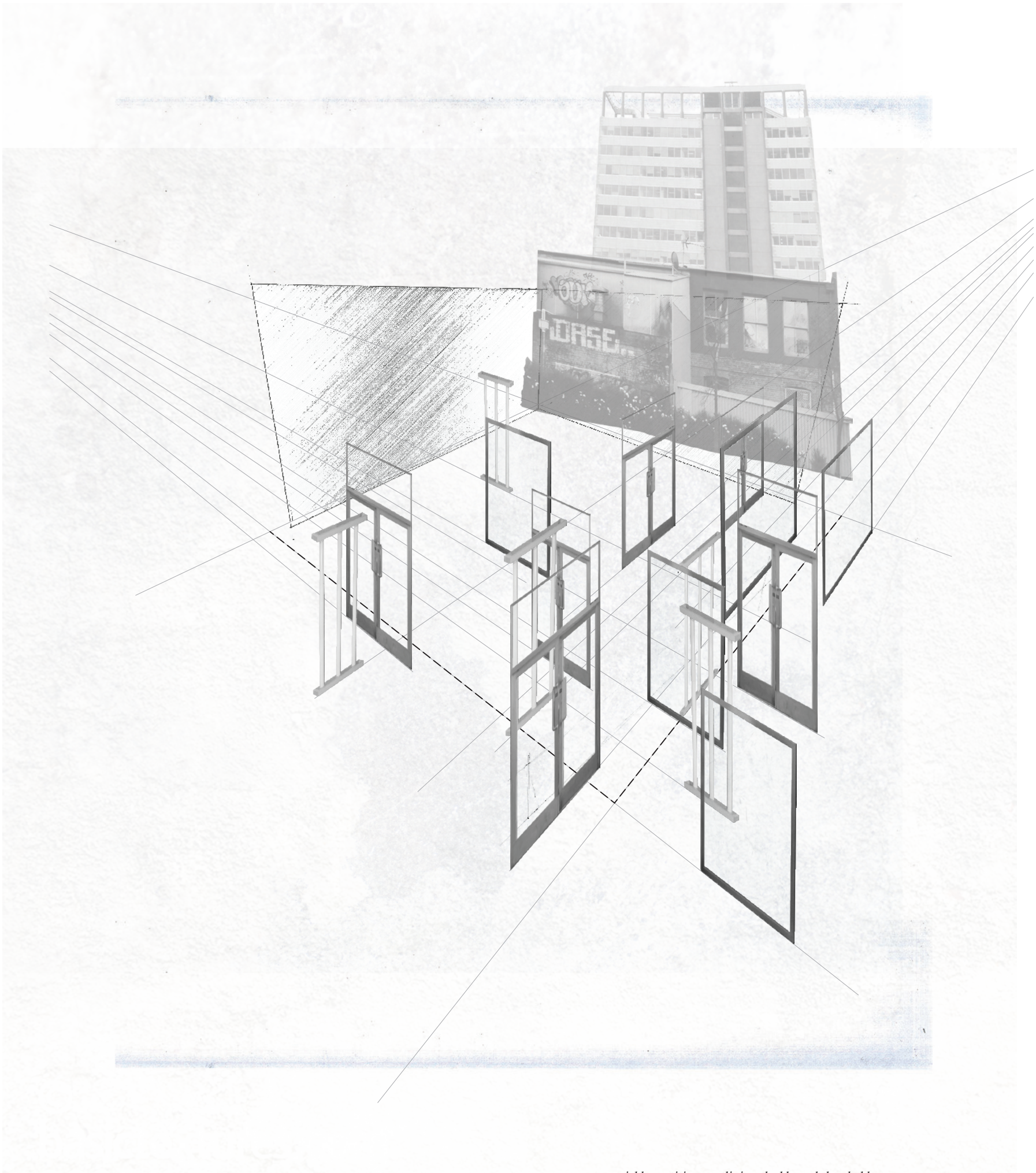*Performativity allows us to spatialise inhabitation and programme, however architectural authenticity allows a discussion of spatiality and form. Given the significance of time and space in a dromological framework there are three ways of exploring authenticity: the digital, the site, and the historic.*

William Mitchell discusses authenticity in the context of the digital space. He argues that the digital allows us to further explore and play with complexity, both in regards to form and programme. The central aspect of this digital authenticity is a responsiveness, a response to site and a response to design parameters of the architecture (88). The digital space of new tools for interaction and design offers up a vast array of ways to generate and analyse data, and out of this complexity arises the opportunity to draw on and reference the conditions of site and design through a synthesis of the multiple factors involved. It is not necessarily the inclusion of this complexity that equates to an authentic architecture, rather it is the response to this data on the part of the designer that leads to an authentic architecture. The opportunity to create space that is aware of the conditions it exists in can lead to spaces where inhabitants are aware of the designer's ability, and deliberate decisions, to integrate these conditions into their design.

The significance of site is further expanded in Sharon Zukin's work Naked City. She notes that for urban groups authenticity in architecture is a connection to place, it is when we can no longer see "the shifting meanings of space and time" in our urban landscape that authenticity is lost (222). Here too the specifics of site are significant to an architectural form. Zukin sees a homogenisation of architectural design across different sites, dislocating new work from the local context. In drawing architectural form back to a local context it allows the architecture to draw on both the programmatic and aesthetic vernacular. Historic local ways of carrying out tasks, and the

way they are presented become just as evocative of an authentic space, if not more so than visual references to abstract concepts. Architecture might explore new forms, but references to local history, explicit or implied, are central to an authentic space.

Given that authentic architecture draws on the historic aspects of site, the question must also address where in this timeline this authenticity lies. This issue is addressed in The Fragile Monument - On Conservation And Modernity. In this Thordis Arrhenius discusses the approaches to conservation and authenticity by Viollet-le-Duc and John Ruskin. For le-Duc an authentic architecture dealt with three temporal concepts, the ideal past, the real present, and the imagined future. Restoring a building was to "restore it in a condition of completeness which could never have existed at any given time (62)." le-Duc was recognising that an authentic architecture looked to a past that was inherently false, memory tainted by imagined ideas and conceptions. The act of restoring buildings, or creating new forms, that drew on this idealised past created a new form of authenticity, one that married preconceptions of the past, the realities of the present, and our ideas of the future possibilities for these spaces.

This acknowledgment that authentic architecture draws on a multitude of historic factors, both imagined and real, was a central observation of Ruskin. From here he differed from le-Duc, seeing restoration as an act of destruction. Ruskin's concept of authenticity privileged the physical history of the architectural form. This authenticity lay in the palimpsest of the building, the accrual of patina, marks, traces of time that suggested a past and an authentic form that has drawn on the context of what has happened around it (79). Here authenticity lies in the present, but not in isolation. It is a present that form that carries traces of the past, traces that could reference the idealised past of le-Duc, or a past which the inhabitant reads into these traces.

6.5 Chronological Context.

Through calling on the real and implied palimpsest of the post office new understandings of communication and identity are placed into a larger chronological context. Drawing on the visual and spatial characteristics of the post office a link to the historic post office is created, allowing what would otherwise be a disconnected design to draw on the collective imagined authentic post office.

As an aesthetic object the post office has a varied but rich history. Smith noted the wide variety of locations of the post office, from civic locations in city squares to informal operations out the side of a farmhouse. This variety was also reflected in the visual presentation of the post office. Civic settings generally saw neo-classical and formal design, stately architecture that reflected the post office's place as a representation of civic governance and organisation. Rural areas also saw more humble timber versions, the weatherboard vernacular of New Zealand architecture mixed with visual signals of the function inside. Though the post office has a wide ranging history of different architectural representations, the saturation of the post office throughout New Zealand towns makes the overall architecture one that is easily recognised and contextually linked back into the wider understanding of the image of the post office. The span of this visual language allows contemporary explorations of the post office to explicitly call on different visual cues of the post office to different effects, from the civic role through to the humble practicality of the office.

Drawing on the ritualistic and spatial characteristics of the post office offers more opportunity to connect back into the concept of the authentic post office. More so than visual cues, spatial references allows the architecture to create these links. As a cultural object there are well established norms around the functions of the post office, and the spatial elements that are used to facilitate these. As noted the post office has served a breadth of different functions throughout its history,

central to these being functions of postal delivery, personal banking, and community organisation. Together these functions have come to be associated with a number of spatial elements in the post office; the counter, mail desk, and notice boards, to name a few. Though the functions of the post office might no longer be reflected in these elements as being relevant, they still hold a wider cultural relevance given their past use and significance. Using these spatial elements to implicitly refer to a historic understanding of the authentic post office allows the architecture to place itself within this wider process of the evolution of the post office.

The post office carries established connotations around the aesthetic and spatial characteristics of its architecture. Understanding its authentic characteristics calls on the accumulated palimpsest of these characteristics, characteristics that can be used implicitly and explicitly to link back to this concept of the authentic post office. Through this, contemporary communication is grounded in the historic architectural understanding of the post office, referring to the historic context, and building on the concept of what the authentic post office is.

7.0 //THE POST OFFICE

7.1 A New Understanding.

The new post office becomes a fragmented building, a series of interventions, this split recognising the variety of ways virtual communication occurs in the urban environment. The location of these splits plays a significant role in how the act of communication is presented and in how it is carried out, from the public presentation in civic spaces through to private use in secluded parks. Much less of a defined building, these interventions recognises the shift of the post office from building to object. With the functions of the post office now residing in our pockets, communication becomes a versatile act, removed from the

interiority of past post office walls. The following are four iterations of the new post office: the civic space, the bus stop, the coffee bar, and the secluded park.

7.2 Civic Square.

Communication in Civic Square is a public act, occurring at regular intervals set in place around its status as a civic landmark also serving offices around it. Inhabitants of the square fluctuate, some using the space as a thoroughfare through to other spaces, others to meet up at a civic landmark, and many using it as a breakout space for lunch.

The variety and scale of those using the space sets up relationships between those walking through the square and viewing it, and those inhabiting the square and using it as a longer term place for virtual communication. This becomes an informally structured relationship, hierarchy drawn from the day to day cycles of use and the formal civic functions and aesthetic of the buildings surrounding the square. The inhabitants become elements of the square for viewing as much as the buildings around them, performers to the audience passing on through.

As a civic landmark this intervention refers back to formal examples of post office architecture and neo-classical elements. The use of colonnades, pediments and formal layouts recalls the role the post office itself used to play as a civic building and marker for local place identity. The elements now instead signal back to this time, a chronological link back to our idea of the post office.

POST OFFICE

*hierarchy and order placing virtual
communication on display. formal links back to the post office.*
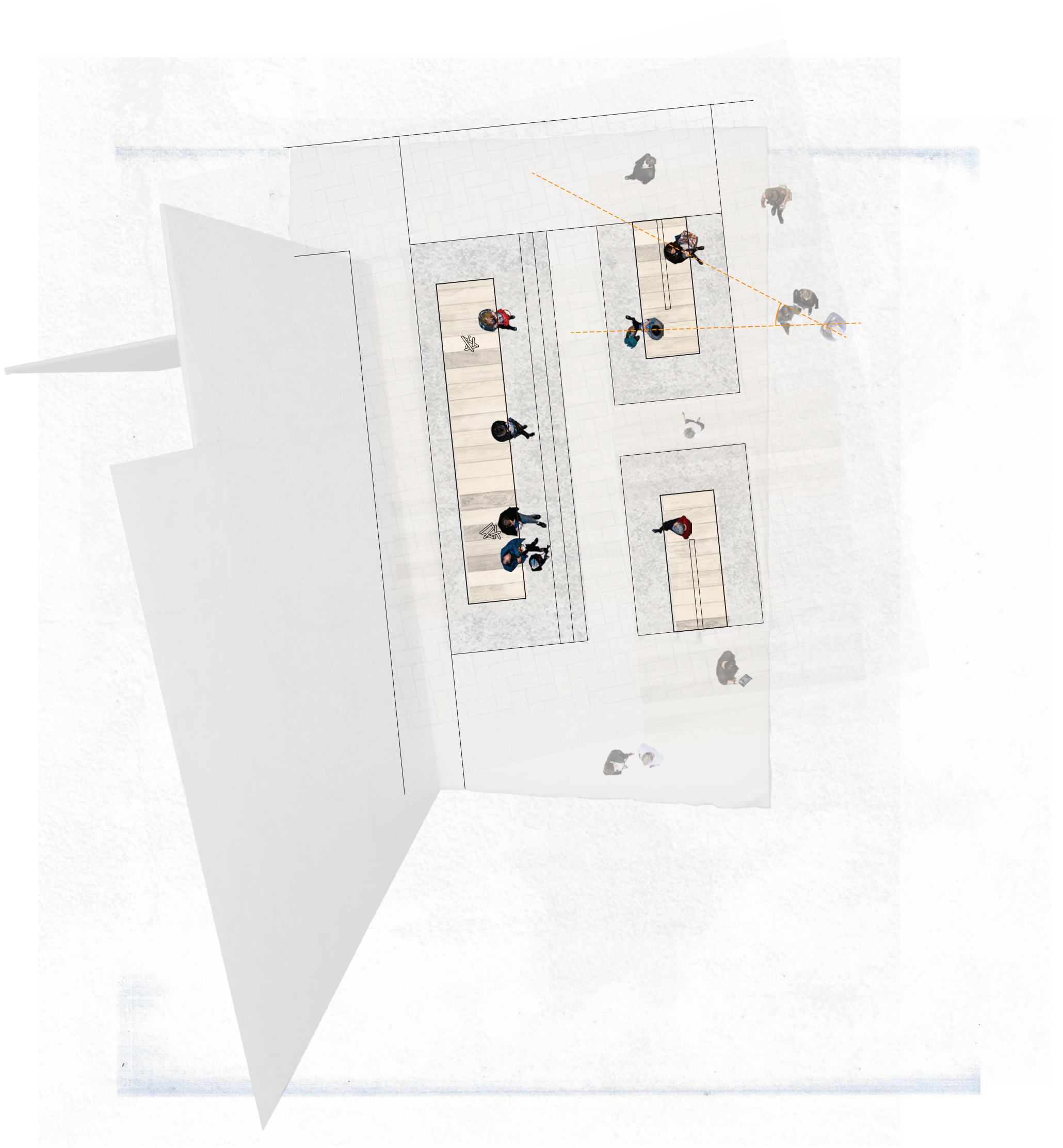
PLAN 1:50

7.3 The Bus Stop.

The bus stop stands as an ambiguous space in the urban environment, set in location but uncertain as to how it might be inhabited. The numbers of inhabitants, ways the space can be used, and length of time spent in the space makes the bus stop a shifting space as the ebb and flow of commuters pass through. Yet in spite of this ambiguity of inhabitation the bus stop serves as a common connection into the wider civic network of public transport. The frequency with which this network is used alongside the uncertain pauses the bus stop places on inhabitants make it a space where many engage in virtual communication, filling in uncertain edges of time around the daily commute.

It therefore offers the opportunity to recognise the shared common experience of the bus stop as a shared space for virtual communication. Various modes of inhabiting the bus stop are recognised and reinforced. Repetition of form underlines the shared experience and so despite the fluctuating use, the bus stop presents to the wider urban environment as a space for virtual communication. This pause and interaction recalls queuing at the post office, and the connection here between the individual and the civic is reinforced in the intervention.

bus stop accomodating various expressions of virtual
communication. commonality of experience reinforced through repetition.

PLAN 1:50

7.4 The Coffee Bar.

A daily ritual for many, the coffee bar serves up many opportunities for unexpected encounters. Periods of pause, as inhabitants wait for coffee or drink it before moving on, are interspersed with casual encounters, as patrons interact with each other and the pedestrians passing by. This dichotomy between waiting and interaction sets up a loose programme with unexpected shifts between virtual communication and interaction.

The open ended nature of this allows virtual communication to be brought into public communication, with the two existing side by side with little definition between the two. Thresholds become further blurred, as virtual communication gets shared during meetings, participants using it as a part of regular conversation over coffee. In this way the coffee bar acts like the post office floor, becoming a space where different activities blend together, virtual communication blurring and interacting with face to face communication.
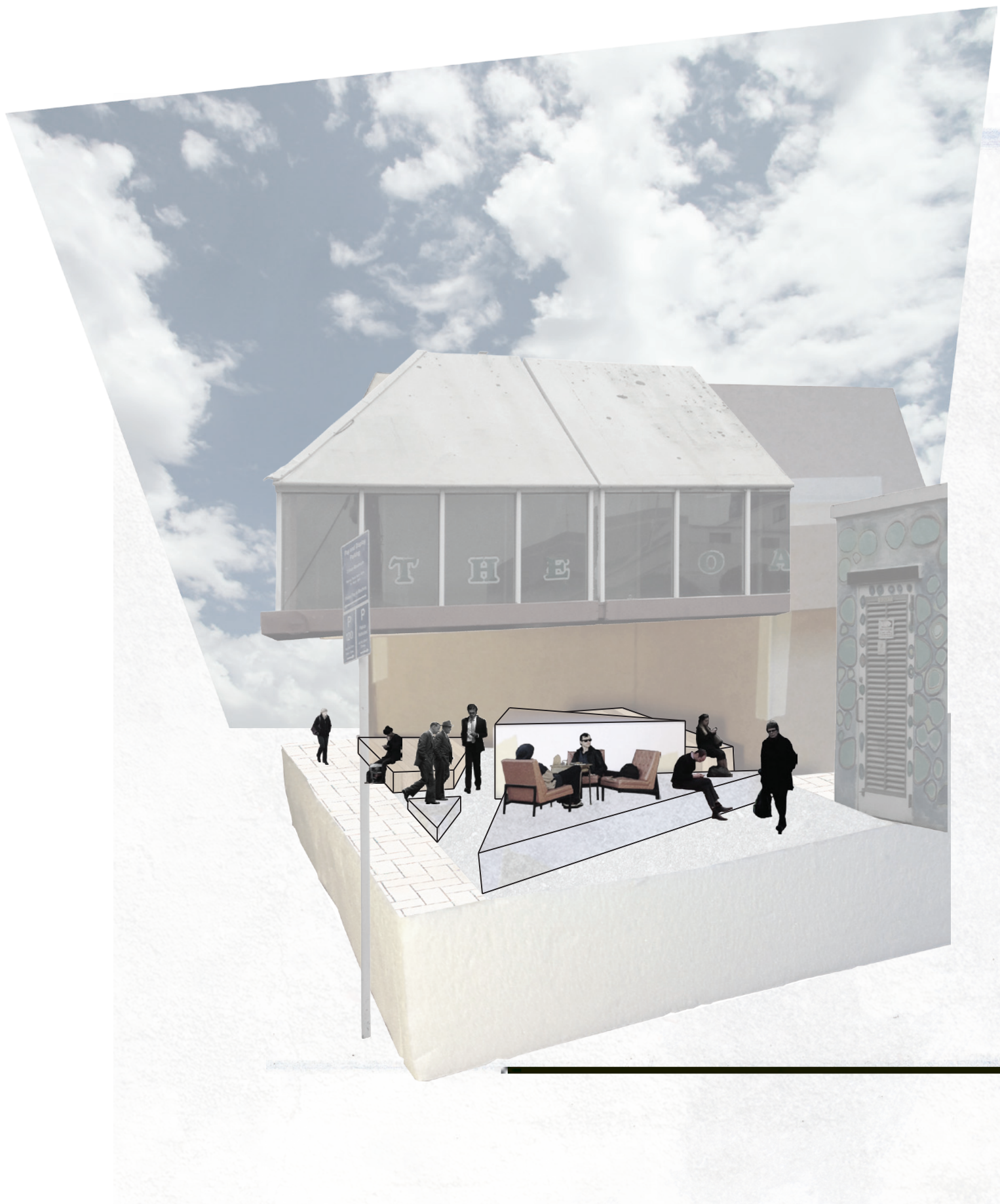
*coffee bar as a open space allowing for virtual
communication to intersect with physical communication.*

PLAN 1:50

7.5 Secluded Park.

Though it forms part of a wider network of urban open space, the secluded park offers a bridge to more private spaces and private virtual communication. Removed from main thoroughfares they are a degree separated from the public eye, offering a quieter, less frequented spaces. Here perception turns inwards as inhabitants seek to focus on their own agenda.

However, though the secluded park offers a sense of privacy they are nonetheless public. Here the privacy draws on the permeable partitions of the banking desk at the post office. Serving more as an indicator, the partitions signal that inhabitants of the space are carrying out private activities, despite the public setting. Those passing through partake of this implicit agreement, acknowledging the partition between public and private and that the interloper is intruding in on a temporary private space. Here virtual communication is privileged as being private, a personal act relevant only to the inhabitant. With the shift to virtual communication the traditional post office is lost to the history of our urban environment. Postal communication has shifted from being an act carried out in a building to one carried out on devices in our pockets. This dromological shift in speed has altered the way we interact and view the urban environment. Instant communication fragments identity, and as the post office is left in the past, its role as a space for the creation of local place identity is lost too.

*partition signalling the secluded park as a private space. a focus
on individual agency while acknowledging the public environment.*

PLAN 1:50

8.0 // CONCLUSION

8.1 An Intangible Architecture.

The post office is an object that has been lost to the past. As communication has shifted from an act carried out in civic buildings to one carried out on devices in our pockets the role of the post office has been left behind. This shift is not just a physical one, and as the post office has vanished, its role as a space for the creation of local place identity has been lost too. This dromological shift has changed how the urban environment and place is viewed, with instant communication dislocating the inhabitant from place and the shift in speed fragmenting identity.

In understanding the role of the post office in a modern context performativity and authenticity offer frameworks through which it can be viewed. As a performative space the post office is now fragmented, but still present in virtual communication. Creating small scale interventions allows for the re-purposing of virtual communication within these fragments of the post office. Through this, the post office's role as a space for place identity creation is reintroduced into the urban environment. As an authentic object the post office is no longer relevant as a complete building. Rather elements of the post office and its various iterations can be used to create references to the chronological context of communication, reinforcing the significance of this contextual link in authentic place identity.

The new post office no longer stands as a civic building, one landmark central to the place identity of the local urban environment. However as a network of interventions the post office is re-imagined in the modern context of virtual communication, an intangible network that still relevant to the identity of place and those that inhabit it.

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