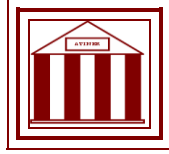


**Athens Institute for Education and Research  
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**Virtual Reconsecration of the  
Levelled Churchyard**

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Dr. Gregory T. Papanikos  
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## **Virtual Reconsecration of the Levelled Churchyard**

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### **Abstract**

Driven by the desire to comment on the ubiquitous use of technologies that establish their existence more and more in the modern society, and following my instinct to support a number of experiments as a delightful challenge; I undertook the first steps to my research.

The forthcoming research focused on the relation between technology and narrative with a process guided by a particular interest for the creative possibilities allowed by the errors and malfunctions of technological apparatuses that gave birth to a lot of interesting ideas and notions, such as the human body in motion and its relation to technology, the short life expectancy of the new technologies that creates a dialogue with the organic mortality of the human body, the loss and gain of information, the notion of the void, the repeated and controlled errors as a factor that transforms the work, the transaction from the physical world to the digital one, the invisible that ends up presenting itself as a visible entity with a three dimensional nature, the traces-material and immaterial, the notion of the ghost, the existence and non-existence, the burial tombs as symbols, the circle of life and death, the afterlife, the fear of the death. All the aforementioned ideas are examined under the qualities of an architecture that could be characterized as shadowy, dark and what Antony Vidler would describe as the 'Architectural Uncanny', the uncomfortable familiar.

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## **Preface**

The research started by examining the common place that seems to be developed between the human body in motion, and the notion of the space in architecture. With the comment that individuality disappears and gives its space to the upcoming massive use of technology, the question I was called to answer was whether I could use the technology in the less possible effective way- actually misuse it -so as to map my hand while retaining the information it includes as a landscape.

## **The Hands as a Symbol of..**

Juhani Pallasmaa has referred to the connection between the movement of the hand and the development of our thoughts in a way that underlines the overarching importance of the hand itself as a part of the human body. The reference to the human hand is a way to emphasize on the relation of the body to the mind; two interconnected entities that make up the whole of our existence. The human hand operates as the link between our experiences and our imagination, the haptic way of getting involved to our environment and the procedure that takes place from the moment a decision is taken until the moment it is to become a fact, a lived experience.

The idea that the hand through its uniqueness and its fingerprints is considered as a mean to identify people in the realm of a modern society of surveillance and control could, in an interesting way, be contradicted to a concept about the hand as a symbol of the identity and uniqueness of each personality; values that are about to disappear in a world that seeks for anonymity and mass production.

In my approach, the human hand, and more specifically my hands, are the starting point of my project more as a sign of my own identity, a subjective and personal "tool" to interpret the topics and issues I had the desire to comment on .

As if my hands are my lens that filter all the data received by linking to a, partly, self-portraying and self-representing approach to the conceptual and design part of the project.

## **The Art of Misusing..A 3D Scanner**

The idea of the misuse of technology has established its existence, mostly, in the territory of art practitioners. The main concept that lies behind the so called 'art of misuse' is that phenomena which are considered to be mistakes can be used as methods to produce creative effects. On my approach to the project, this idea of misusing the 3d scanner on purpose is both a mean to comment on the technology itself and a way of transforming a rather automatic procedure to a more slow and delightful experience. An experience than when is transformed into deeper knowledge of the tool that is used and then misused,

offers one the possibilities to use the 3d scanner as the machine that 'breaks down'. Thus, it is transformed from being the technical machine, into becoming my 'desiring-machine', described and defined as such by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari when introducing the term referring to the machine that works by 'breaking down'. Once a machine is constructed precisely as 'a system of interruptions or breaks'; we then have a system for determining or making out, through flows a situation of context anew.

In this case, I refer to a 3d scanner whose structural unity has been undone and it, therefore, works with a flow of desire. A 3d scanner that is misused with the intention to be charged with a more playful, slow and delightful character that allows me to experiment on its potentials in a more personal and creative way.

The use of the 3d scanner, as part of the reverse engineering technologies, provides a unique ability to capture the selected to be scanned objects in time. It is clearly a time -based process through which the amount of information captured can then be, at a later point curated. But the fact of the moments still remains. Such pioneering tools, though having the capacity for speculation and experimentation, are equally as likely to aid design, provide commentary on potential architectures of the future and, without doubt, provoke moments of delight.

### **The Role of the 3D Scanner. My Methodology**

As far as my working methodology and my relation to the misuse of the scanner are concerned, it is significant to mention that throughout the whole scanning process the scanning system due to its misuse comes across a lot of errors in capturing the object-the constantly moving hands of mine. These errors are, partially, interpreted by the tool either as void-loss of information and data, or as the reason for creating an augmented datascape that consists of multiple overlapping surfaces. Therefore, the misuse of the scanner offers me an ephemeral casting of the hands in time, but in a way that, the aforementioned datascape obtain their own identity and thus, become a different, distinct and self-existing being compared to their pre-existing self.

The outcomes of the whole process are numerous surfaces created by controlled and multiplied repeated errors that open a window to the idea of the beauty that lies behind the distortion, the mistruth, the incompleteness, the imperfection (Figure 1). Far away from what Jorge Luis Borges<sup>1</sup> delicately described in his short story of the Cartographers that looked for the total accuracy of their tools, I decided to explore the unexpected at first, and controlled, at the end, errors of my tool as both a challenging field to draw inspiration from and, also, as an approach that would place me as an architect closer to a playful, subjective and experimental way of using the technological means. The 3d scanning is a part of great significance as it operates as the main

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<sup>1</sup>Short story about the map/territory relation written in the form of a literary forgery by Jorge Luis Borges "On Exactitude in Science", 1946

tool that offers me the first level of transformation and interpretation of the motion of my hands into datascares.

The second level of the misinterpretation transforms the initial information into landscapes of point clouds (Figure 2). The aforementioned nature of the point clouds is my interpretation of the landscape that the human hands create while moving, that is otherwise invisible. The 3d scanner plays the role of the 'casting tool' that brings into light these datascares that are invisible but their existence cannot be questioned. Therefore, it is the mean through which I am offered the visibility of the landscapes I research, create and manipulate further on. Informing and continuing the process both by the scanner, that consists the first source, and the computer, the interesting part is that the black color and the physical shadow are not to be detected by the scanner. They appear to be totally invisible to the tool.

Furthermore, a different aspect of the project is the ways that technologies, and more specifically the 3d scanner can and does stretch the boundaries of the human body in addition to the fact that in a technological era when new technical-machines succeed the previous ones, the short life expectancy of the technologies we cast off is indisputable. Thus, this short life expectancy creates a parallel dialogue with the organic mortality, the mortality of the human body. The fact that the materiality contradicts the immaterial existence, could be considered as a first metaphor of the circle of visibility-invisibility, existence and non-existence, life and death.

Based on the idea of the circle of life and death, the role that the 3d scanner plays in the project is that of the tool that bridges these polarities by offering ephemeral castings of mementos of the motion of the living hands, that present a final image characterized by immateriality. It visualizes the, otherwise, invisible landscape that is created by the motion of the body itself and rereads the space around it. It freezes the moments and the memories, as temporary-instant castings that are being, later on, interpreted through computer software and digital media.

### **The Uncanny. The Dark Space. The Death Space**

'The uncanny', stated Freud, 'is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression...The uncanny [is] something which ought to have remained hidden but has come to light'.

As long as one refers to the dark space, as Foucault points out, one realizes that it was exactly that fear of the dark that led to a fascination with all these shadowy areas at the late nineteenth century. A sense of darkness, though, that always entails the light leading to the duality of the presence of death in life, the dark space in bright space, the insistent presence of the one into the other, as Vidler underlines by stating:

*'While light space is eliminated by the materiality of objects, darkness is "filled", it touches the individual directly, envelops him, penetrates him and even passes through him[ ...]the feeling of mystery that one experiences at night*



*would not come from anything else'.*

The project is a constant balance between these ambiguities that exist due to their polarity; the seen and the unseen, the visible and the invisible, the *unhomely* and the homely, the unknown and the known, the shadow and the light, the materiality versus the immateriality, the clear picture versus the ghostly figure, the stillness and the blur due to the motion, the existence and the non-existence, the absence and the presence, the death and the life, the death and the 'afterlife'.

Throughout my research I have been in constant search of this duality that is offered by possible sites that are of the atmosphere of a necropolis-of the city of the dead. When referring to a space that is charged with a specific atmosphere, one often speaks metaphorically filling it with fear, sorrow or tension.

Taking inspiration from architectural forms, shapes, symbols and the exploration of rather unusual and uncanny locations, the design work operated as a reaction to the site that worked as the story-telling ground. The site of the dead, through a specific symbol, tombstone or mausoleum of a well-known, or not, person offered me the inspiration and the required information about his story, as tombs present a high symbolic value of the deceased person they are designed for, based on their own or their beloved will; for 'Dead men tell no stories, but their tombstones do'<sup>2</sup>. These tombs or tombstones push toward a chain reaction of my system that enables the "spatial readings of the stories"; an interpretation of these stories that becomes symbolic, emotional, metaphorical and personal (See Figures 3,4).

Cemeteries are believed to have operated as a mirror of the society and its architecture of that era; 'A fading mirror to a society which shaped our own as no other before'. When wandering in these rather unusual locations the viewer can walk among the tombstones and search for signs to explain the feeling of discovering personal traces of the inhabitants of the site. The heavy materiality of the space nourishes a feeling of permanence and finality: a feeling that could only be described as uncanny.

The information of the story is interpreted through my moving hands that commune the story via their physical movements. These movements create an immaterial landscape, a spatial reading of the information that is visualized through the use of the 3d scanner, and further on manipulated to be transformed into a point cloud with a misty and ghostly three-dimensional nature. These datascares are nothing but ephemeral castings of my interpretation of the death story as a response and reaction to a death, dark space.

The propositional part of the project was formed around the idea of becoming a virtual and spatial reconsecration of the site of today's St.Pancras Gardens in London.

This site has been charged with an odd city legend that has its roots back in the early 1860's. At that time, the garden used to be a churchyard part of which had to be unceremoniously removed due to the upcoming construction of the

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<sup>2</sup>Stated by Keister, D. from the book "Stories in Stone", USA: Gibbs Smith, 2004

Midland railway.

A widespread legend of the city talks about a young architect called Thomas Hardy who was charged with the task of overseeing and unburying the dismantling human remains and dislocating their tombstones, so that that specific part of the site would be offered to the new structure. Nowadays, the only proof of the story is a Hardy tree that is surrounded by the numerous dislocated tombstones and is facing Sir John Soane's Mausoleum (Figure 5), and of course, a well known poem written by Thomas Hardy himself entitled 'The Levelled Churchyard' that refers to his memories of that time.

The project has been charged with the role of reconsecrating the site, digitally, as a ritual performed on the site leads to the creation of a point cloud of my scanned moving hands. That point cloud operates as a vehicle to navigate into the site, occasionally presented in a diagrammatic way, and it reacts in three different ways by Knitting, Extruding and Cutting its own body. The idea of this triptych is based on the myth of the three Greek goddesses called Moirai (Fates) that were believed to be responsible of the human lives-*as if they held death into their hands*.

## Conclusion & Discussion

To sum up, the general approach to my work could be considered as a statement that supports the authentic, the personal approach in the way of working, the idea of using the technology offered in a more personalized, unexpected and creative way that offers me the opportunity to inject my identity and personality into my design and architectural approach to my work. It is more about underlining the importance of exploring means in a different way, accepting the possible unexpected mistakes and errors that a process may bring to light, as a source of inspiration rather than an undesirable part of the working process. For only through experimenting and partly, failing and accepting the mistakes, could one acquire the adequate knowledge to form his/her own 'desiring-process' that by breaking down would offer one the possibility to express him/herself, to express myself, in a more humanistic and authentic way while revealing my *own new real*.

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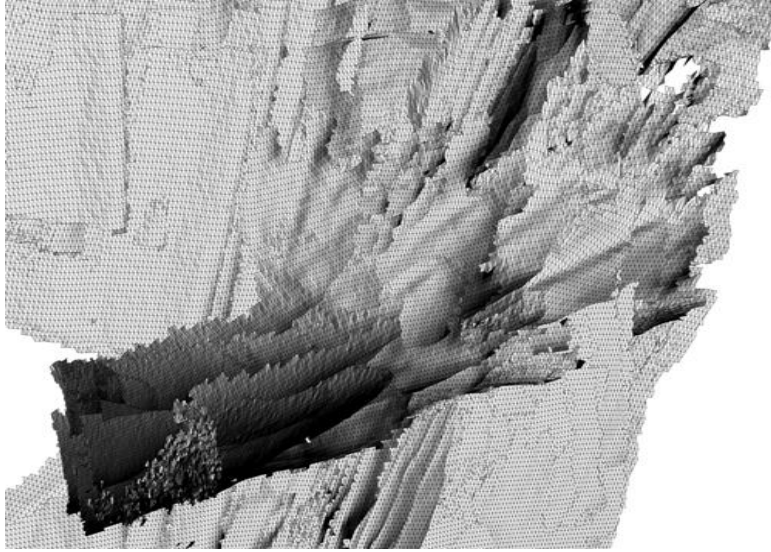


Figure 1. The augmented data-scape of the moving hand.



Figure 2. Capturing the hand ghosts. Experimenting with the point clouds.



Figure 3. Introducing the ghost hands to the death space. Highgate Cemetery A.



Figure 4. Releasing the story-telling hand ghosts. Highgate Cemetery B.

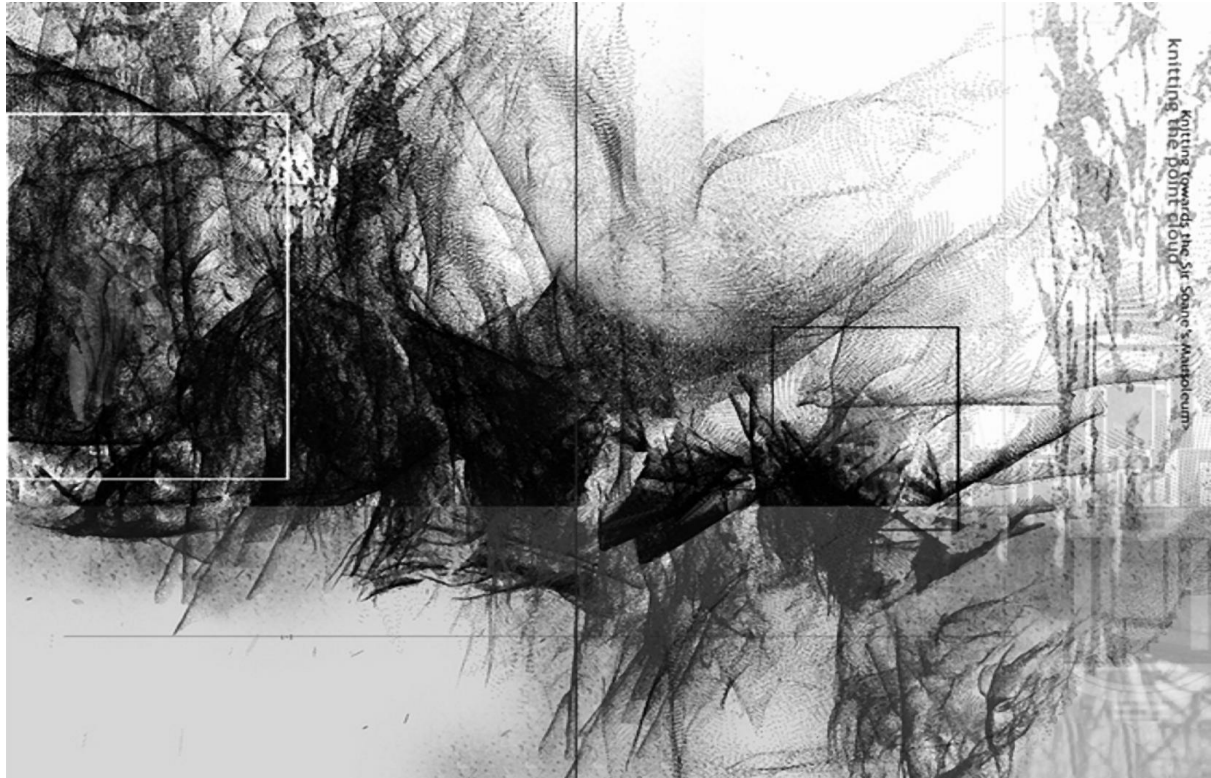


Figure 5: Re-reading the space around the Sir John Soane's Mausoleum. St.Pancras Gardens.