

Performative Autotopography as Creative Recording

Architectural Essay Films on the Imaginaries of
the Uncanny Home

performativite
ototopografya
mimari deneme filmi
tekinsizlik
ev
performativity
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architectural essay film
uncanny
home

Bu araştırma, benliğin ötekiyle etkileşimi boyunca ortaya çıkan ara bir alan olarak ototopografya kavramına ve ototopografik üretimin performatifliğine odaklanır. Mekansal hayallerin görsel ve işitsel formlara büründüğü performatif üretimleri benliğin ve mekanın birbiri içine geçtiği ve birbirini dönüştürdüğü yaratıcı süreçler üzerinden tartışır. Eysel mekana odaklanan çalışma, ardışık üç mimari deneme filmi yapımlarını bağlamında tartışır. Filmleri, hem bireysel hem de kolektif olarak çizimler, çekimler ve maket yapımı aracılığıyla evin tekinsiz anlatılarını kurmayı deneyen performatif ototopografik pratikler olarak ele alır. Mimari deneme filmlerinin performatif üretiminin, mekansal anlatının inşasında kaydın çoklu biçimlerini ve öznel karşılaşmaların muhtelif durumlarını birbirine entegre eden bir karaktere sahip olduğunu iddia eder. Bu anlamda ortaya koyduğumuz ara mekansallıklar, mimarilere dönüşen monologların, diyalogların ve polilogların yaratıcı ve hayali çevirilerinin izini sürerek evin tanımlı ve yerleşik sınırlarını bulanıklaştırır.

This research explores the concept of autotopography as an intermediate space emerging through the interplay of the self with the other and the performativity of autotopographical production. It discusses performative productions in which spatial imaginaries take on visual and auditory forms through creative processes in which self and space intertwine and transform each other. Focusing on the homely spaces, it discusses three subsequential architectural essay films within their context of making. These films are performative autotopographical practices that attempt rather uncanny narratives of the home through drawing, filming, and model-making both as collective and individual. We claim that the performative making of architectural essay films interweaves multiple forms of recording and many states of subjective encounter to build a spatial narrative. And, the in-between spatialities that we magnify trace the multitudes of creative and imaginative translations of monologues, dialogues, and polylogues that shapeshift into architectures, blurring the definite and established threshold of the home.

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INTRODUCTION

Architectural essay film offers a performative approach to architectural research, providing unique forms of recording and reimagining place to create spatial narratives. Penelope Haralambidou discusses how the architectural essay film juxtaposes filmmaking within architectural design theory, extending architecture practice beyond traditional building acts to challenge spatial concepts (Haralambidou, 2015, 235-237). Lilian Chee notes that this hybrid form merges design, history, biography, gender, and politics, providing an alternative perspective on spatial making (Chee, 2019, 127). In this research, we follow three architectural essay films: *(Un)Homely Dreams* (Kara, 2024), *Placeholder* (Kara, 2022), and *Peeling Off* (Kara, Balaban, Almaç, 2024). These films take on the mode of an essayistic, fluid form of representation and operate on the interstices of homely memory, unhomely feeling, spatial triggers, and collective encounters to individual registers.

Our work proposes that this in-between form of production reframes the unmaking of home as a performative autotopography. *Autotopography* is a term first discussed by Jennifer González, suggesting that the collection of autobiographical objects delineates a "material memory landscape" that reciprocally shapes the memory of the space and the self (González, 1995, 133). In our discussion, performative autotopography describes a rather ambiguous state that enables individual and collective memory landscapes to form through interactions with others and the creative acts of production. They define the synchronous emergence of the self and place as part of their performance; thus, the self registers itself through a place and among others. Our case studies, focus in particular on delineating spatial, tactile autotopographies formed by several acts of storing, collecting, displacing, or exposing the autotopographical forms of home.

The relationship between the

uncanny and the home reflects our everchanging connection with domestic spaces. Rapid economic, social, and technological changes have blurred the boundaries between familiarity and strangeness within the home. Remote work conditions have further challenged the distinction between home and work life. At the same time, the visibility of the domestic experiences of marginalised groups disrupts the so-called notion of a safe, familiar, and comfortable home. The uncanny offers a lens to understand these shifts, providing pathways to revisit and speculate the notion of home. Performative autotopographies represent such an attempt, offering fragmented and uncanny narratives within familiar spatiality. Through their voided and fragmented nature, these autotopographical performances unveil unfamiliar perspectives on the home.

The paper first delves into the term autotopography and defines performative autotopography with its probable interconnections to the uncanny and subjective registers. Here, González's discussions are expanded upon drawing on the Lacanian approach to the formation of self through others and memory (Lacan, 2006, [1966], 96), as well as Donald W. Winnicott's concept of transitional objects (Winnicott, 1991, [1971], 8-22). Autotopography depicts an ambiguous state and delineates a realm of constant transitions between the interconnected memories of subjects, objects and spatial fragments. This is a rather uncanny state as autotopographies reconfigure familiar memories within unexpected settings. Then, the paper follows Sigmund Freud's definition of the Uncanny (Freud, 2003, [1919], 151) and Anthony Vidler's take on domestic space within architectural theory (Vidler, 1994, 12) to understand how it might be related to the construction of autotopographies. Then, we address several artworks and architectural research by their approach to the uncanny of home through performative autotopography. The paper further focuses on the research

methodology and discusses architectural essay film and the creative potentials of the essayistic form. Following these approaches, we discuss our films by focusing on their subjective and collective reflections, ways of creative recording and translating the space through their mediums and the thresholds where memory resides in tactile or visual forms.

PERFORMATIVE AUTOTOPOGRAPHY

The term "autotopography" originates from the Greek roots *auto* (self), *topos* (place, space), and *graphein* (to write, to draw) (Heddon, 2007, 40). It denotes dynamic spatialities that intertwine action and spatiality, continuously rewritable spatial narratives entwined with the self. González first discussed the term autotopography, suggesting that it emerges from the combination of the factual history embedded in the material reality of objects and the fictional memory of the self; thus, they are associated with both the individual and the social, positioned between the past and the present. In her discussion, she explores autobiographical objects as extensions of memory which also extend back into memory; this mutual interaction shapes autotopography (González, 1995, 133-135). The configurations of the objects and their accumulation on autotopography define fragments that serve as cues for memory, influencing what is recalled or forgotten (González, 1995, 135-142). Therefore, personal archives represent a curated selection of memories, where ageing objects signify temporal distance and can alter or obscure past events.

Autotopography is an incessant oscillation that can be discussed by psychoanalytic theory. Lacanian theory introduces subjective register through the "mirror stage", where the ego emerges and where relational dynamics between the self, the other, and consciousness are established (Lacan, 2006, [1966], 1-5). Jacques Lacan illustrates this phase with the example of an infant

encountering the absence of their mother, initiating the search for identification to compensate for her absence (Lacan, 2006, [1966], 1-5). In this phase, infants begin to position themselves among others; this signifies the emergence of fundamental conceptual structures like the subject, object, self, and other (Grosz, 1990, 35). Winnicott explores Lacan's notion of lack through "transitional phenomena" or "transitional space," a concept within *Object Relations Theory*. His theory, focusing on interpersonal and environmental relationships, defines transitional space as an intermediary realm between internal and shared reality. In this in-between area, predominantly shaped by interactions with the maternal figure or other "transitional objects," individuals differentiate between belongings that are "self" and those that are "non-self". This process involves navigating between an organised inner world of needs and a collectively experienced outer world. Transitional space thus serves as an intermediary field that encompasses and transcends both self and other (Winnicott, 1991, [1971], 8-22). According to Winnicott, this area, initiated during childhood through activities like play, persists into creative work and cultural experiences in adulthood. It arises from interactions with others or creative acts of production, fostering a mutually constructed relationship between self and other (Winnicott, 1991, [1971], 36-42). We claim that this intermediate realm of experience resembles performative autotopographical practice in that it aligns with a tertiary domain crafted through the interplay between self and other, emerging from creative encounters.

Autotopography, within the performative context of the self, is frequently explored in site-specific performances. Deirdre Heddon suggests that by adding "auto" to "topography," the self becomes the author of the place. Thus, she regards autotopographical practice as a form of site-specific performance, defining the place it delineates through constant interactions as autotopography.

In a collective work, *One Square Foot* (2003), each performance artist reproduces a square foot through their recollections. Heddon incorporates the materiality of a chosen tree and the stories associated with the area. She intertwines them with her narrative and links them to the other "one square foot" sites through textual elements. The place transcends the confines of a square foot, encompassing both temporal and spatial dimensions imbued with subjective meanings, evoking texts, bodily engagements, and narratives. Heddon characterises this creative process as "an act of creative positioning," wherein the space she selects becomes an autotopography, serving as both the "co-author" and "co-subject" of her performance (Heddon, 2007, 40-50). Similarly, Annette Arlander describes her performances as "autotopographical exercises" in which she walks every week for a year to a rural settlement from her childhood. She defines her video recordings as parts of an autotopographical collection, such as *Sitting on a Birch - My Fiftieth Year* (2006), *Secret Garden 1-2* (2006), and *Year of the Dog in Kalvola - Calendar* (2007). These records are about actions like sitting on a tree, walking along a sloped path, and hanging from a tree branch. Simultaneously, she reiterates her autobiographical memory of these places (Arlander, 2012, 251-258). While Arlander's performances enable a re-encounter with a familiar space, Heddon's performance allows the self to locate in an unfamiliar place. Throughout these performances, which highlight the performative exploration of place through the interaction of movement, process, and location, the artists make the place visible by revealing its temporal changes and transformations.

Performative autotopographies elucidate the interdependent emergence of the self and place within their performance, whereby the self registers its presence within space. In this context, the autotopographical performance of marginalised individuals allows them to claim their presence in

places where they have been rendered invisible (Heddon, 2006, 24-26). Heddon interprets graffiti in urban spaces as autotopographies and discusses the presence of queer graffiti examples in contrast to homophobic wall inscriptions. Through these opposing discourses, she speaks of the danger of perpetuating "acceptable" identities while at the same time suggesting that these clashings can also be a resistance to "normativity" (Heddon, 2002, 11-17). As seen in Heddon's discussion, the performance of identity in space can make visible the experiences of marginalised identities. In this sense, various performative works that provide the visibility of identity through interaction with space can be interpreted as part of autotopographical practices.

An example is the text *Closets, Clothes, disClosure* by Henry Urbach. Drawing from personal experiences, Urbach delves into the intricate relationship between storage and display, secrecy and disclosure. He highlights how the materiality of clothing closets symbolises the concealment of homosexual identity, a concept commonly referred to as "being in the closet." The closet is where "excesses" are stored, ensuring the room remains "clean and orderly." Similarly, the exclusion of homosexual identity in society enables the heterosexual identity to maintain its normative order (Urbach, 1996, 63-69). Urbach describes the space in front of the closet, where he tried on his mother's clothes and learned about his representational range in the closet mirror during childhood memories, as a space that disrupts the duality of identity's transformation and performance. He defines this area as an "ante-closet" (Urbach, 1996, 70-72). We interpret "ante-closet" as an autotopographical place where Urbach performs his identity.

Another example is *Color(ed) Theory* (2015), a work by Amanda Williams, about the homes of displaced Black people due to racist ideologies on the South Side of Chicago, where she grew up. In this work, Williams paints the facades of

vacant homes slated for demolition with a single colour and then photographs them. Each painted house is coloured in the hue of a product marketed to Black people and reflected in the community's memory, taking on the name of that product. The colours of the houses are also associated with the colours of housing maps that systematically discriminate against Black and minority communities by evaluating the "investment risk" of a neighbourhood based on its racial composition, thus devaluing the areas inhabited by these communities.

The spatial performance of identity can potentially transform the binary spaces of dominant ideologies. Heddon's graffiti and Urbach's ante-closet challenge the heteronormativity of space, while Williams' work challenges the erasure of a community's spaces and memory. The critical stance in each of the works relates to the position and identity of the maker and takes form through performative processes. Interpreted as performative autotopography, the identity affected by the space reciprocally responds with means of expression and reproduces the space.

THE UNCANNY HOME

Within this context, the characteristics inherent in autotopographical practice can also provide insights into establishing a homely place. For González, autotopographies initialise feelings with a revisit to the homely that might be contained within family photos, family relics, and their materiality and continue to the display of these objects, defining a homely-scape (González, 1995, 133-135). In this sense, autotopographical place contains multitudes of scales and times where the interior of a home equally resides with a small trinket from a childhood memory and expands to the outer realm of the home through creative imaginations, dreams for the future, and expectancies. Thus, it creates a boundless memory-home that does not rely on the constraints of the

house as a place. This approach can situate homely places, which form strong bonds with the reflections of subjective memory and identity, as spaces of material memories that can articulate the collective memory of the home. It demands a dispute on the notion of home and homely memories. Revisiting home through an autotopographical perspective can be a way to consider it beyond its given meanings and to articulate its uncanny character between familiarity and strangeness.

In *Das Unheimliche*, Freud re-conceptualises the term "uncanny". The concept, expressed in German as *unheimlich*, is formed by negating the expression *heim/heimlich*, which encompasses meanings of familiar, safe, close, home. Freud interprets the concept as the tension felt through situations such as the familiar becoming unfamiliar and taking unexpected forms, the return of the repressed, the loss of meaning through repetition of the familiar, or encountering the familiar within the unfamiliar. For Freud, the uncanny resides in those encounters that trigger unintentional responses to our drives of compulsory repetition. In his theory, the strange resides inside us in the discarded, repressed thoughts associated with our undesirable encounters. As he noted, the uncanny starts with the idea of a constant return to home (Freud, 2003 [1919], 151). For Vidler, the uncanny emerges with the transformation from familiar to foreign, corresponding to modern nostalgia and forced nomadism. He argues that this concept indicates a shift between the homely and the unhomely, thereby enabling us to look through different lenses such as self, otherness, body, fragmentation, alienation, absence, identity, and various aspects of social life, especially in the context of post-modernism. (Vidler, 1994, 3-14).

The relationship between the concept of the uncanny and the home in the postmodern era is still evident in our contemporary relationships with the home. The notion of the home oscillates between familiarity and strangeness

within rapidly changing economic, social, technological, and societal factors. The distinct boundary between home and work life, eminent during modernisation, was blurred by remote working conditions. Unbounding the workplace from a fixed location has increased the mobility of workers and eliminated the obligation to be tied to a fixed home. Another consequence of these changes is that they contribute to shifting the home from a space that is owned or desired to be owned to one with a temporary character. Similarly, the search for alternative ownership models in homes due to economic constraints, such as various sharing options regulated by social networks, disrupts the perception of the home as a space that is owned. Meanwhile, as the domestic experiences of minor or marginalised social groups become visible, the so-called safe, familiar, and comfortable structure of the home is disintegrating; it becomes increasingly clear that social and political issues extend to the assumed safe inner space of the home.

The uncanny, which allows us to interpret the relationship between the home and changing social conditions, enables uncanny pathways for revisiting the homely and the notion of home. The fragmented, voided, and uncanny nature of autotopographical practices can enable unfamiliar narratives within familiar spatiality. In this sense, Mieke Bal's discussion of the performative production of autotopography through the interaction with an artwork can be mentioned. Bal states that autotopography in artworks is a spatial, local, and situated inscription of the self. She discusses this through the works of Louise Bourgeois, *Spider* (1995), and *Cells* (1989-1993) while defining them as architectural and domestic. She describes split subjects as being reflected in autotopographical places instead of holistic subjects. Bal views autotopographical practice as a spatial narrative where memory fragments of the split subject reside in the artwork's materiality, engaging viewers to

reproduce the work in the present moment continuously. This interaction creates an uncanny experience by juxtaposing familiar references within a foreign environment (Bal, 2002, 180-202).

Following Bal's reading on autotopography, we interpret several works within the art field and architecture research that relate to the uncanny of home as autotopographies. Below are several that we find essential to discuss along with our research.

Rachel Whiteread's works, namely *Pink Torso* (1995), *Ghost* (1990), and *House* (1993), triggered by homely memory, they expand from object scale to architectural scale, highlighting the negative spaces of the home (Barlas, 2020, 13-27). In her castings, the voids materialise, and as they become visible, they obstruct familiar relationships established with the home. By the now non-functional void, the objectified dwelling with familiar images closes off the routine homely experience. Here, the act of display questions the attributed privacy of the domestic space by bringing the inside out. The alienated images of artworks refer to lost, past, or forgotten homes. Each work is positioned between inside and outside, presence and absence, memory and forgetting, the figurative and the non-figurative (Harrison, 2022, 321-346).

Similarly, Doris Salcedo combines the furniture of domestic spaces, such as chairs, doors, beds, cabinets, and tables, with materials like concrete, fabric, rope, nails, hair, and bone in her installation series titled *La Casa Vidua* (1992-1995). Her works are grounded in the states of homely when it is perpetually threatened by the intrusion of the unhomely, emphasising the constant threat faced by the military violence in Colombia during the periods of war (Lauzon, 2015, 118-121). The viewers witness the subjectivities of these uncanny homes through the impossibility of their familiar bodily experience with these pieces of furniture yet become estranged from their familiar domestic

experience alongside traces of decay and destruction within the work, alienated from the home's safe space from the outside world.

A similar estrangement can be seen in Mona Hatoum's installation *Homebound* (2000). Hatoum's work reveals the traces of displacement and exile related to her life story. At first glance, *Homebound* (2000) presents a domestic environment with furniture such as beds, tables, chairs, various kitchen utensils, and everyday household equipment. This static domestic setting, inaccessible behind a barrier of steel wires, can only be viewed from a limited vantage point. The electric cables wrapped around the metal furniture and the sound of electricity emanating from the loudspeakers throughout the installation transform the domestic environment into a threatening space, questioning its safety. This installation, suggesting an inaccessible and uninhabitable homeliness, positions the viewer and the homely space in exile (Said, 2000, 39).

Mirak Jamal's installation *Untitled* (2017), exhibited in the 15th Istanbul Biennial, *A Good Neighbour*, is a passage made of plaster panels, where the artist displays his reimagined childhood drawings on the different homes in various countries that he has lived in after he had to leave Iran with his family (Jamal, 2017, 223). The room created in the exhibition space after the artist's childhood room resembles the construction and destruction of a house with its voided, fragmented, and undulating surfaces. The drawings, where autobiographical images of figurative and abstract lines, associate the continuously changing character of the home with a position between escape and adaptation, remembering and forgetting.

Bihter Almaç discusses the transformation of her relationship with her home during the COVID-19 pandemic through her *Rangers* drawings. She critically examines the unsettling states of being at home exacerbated by exaggerated quarantine restrictions in Istanbul

(Almaç, 2021, 50-59). Unlike the previous examples, the familiar domestic space becomes uncanny not through absence or distance but through the excessive presence that necessitates unceasing and out-of-home activities within its confines. The familiar home and its inhabitants interact as extensions of each other; this state of the relationship with the home is reflected in the forms of drawings that we could describe as autotopographical.

These works disrupt familiar domestic fragments and images in the collective memory while producing narratives about the subjectivities of the homely space. In the disruption, the method, material, and image created in performative autotopography actively participate; each corresponds to a layer that constructs the discourse. The mentioned performative autotopographies encompass various forms of creative making, ranging from spatial installations to collages and drawings. Therefore, the distinctive aspect of autotopography lies in its ability to delineate interpretable and explicit narratives through the interaction between the self's situated and reflexive reflections with space. Within the scope of our research, creative production is defined through creative records, and we examine the performative autotopographies of the home through the framework of architectural essay films. This form, embodying the subjective reflections of filmmaking, is positioned in our research as a creative form of recording that enables gathering the fragments of home and reassembling them in the fluid field of film space.

CREATIVE RECORDING

Timothy Corrigan approaches the essay film as a continuation of the literary essay. He states that understanding the structure of essay films entails situating them within the characteristics of the "essayistic" as a performative

presentation of a self-discussion in a public experience in which narrative or experimental structures engage in reflection (Corrigan, 2011, 4-6). From the literary genre of the essay to essay films, the essayistic form has existed for four hundred years as an ambiguous tool for recording and evaluating reality; it has resisted classification by maintaining its indefinable nature (Rascaroli, 2008, 25). Essays are subjective interpretations of reality, existing in the realm between "fact" and "fiction." (Alter, 2007, 45-52). They offer a flexible platform for producing speculative ideas. Theodor W. Adorno, conversely, focuses on the essay's critical aspect, disrupting intellectual formations and concepts; he asserts that its most intrinsic formal law is its "heresy" (Adorno, 1984, 171). For both Georg Lukács and Adorno, the essay does not seek absolute truths; instead, it establishes its integrity by navigating between fragmented ideas (Adorno, 1984, 159; Lukács, 1978, 11-15). As a form, the essay rejects generalizations, preconceptions, and closed-ended definitions, embracing a fragmented, relational, critical, and process-oriented perspective.

The essay film, drawing from its literary form, encompasses visual and auditory productions that hybridize the characteristics of documentary and fiction genres (Alter, 2007, 52). Positioned beyond disciplinary boundaries, in line with its interdisciplinary conceptual and formal nature, it occupies a space outside the dual categories of representation. Thus, it is a non-genre. This formal structure allows for a creative approach beyond the familiar attitudes of recording and archiving.

In architectural practice, the essay film is conceptualised under the name "architectural essay film" by Haralambidou; it is positioned as a hybrid form between filmmaking and architectural design theories and practices. Architectural essay films describe a mode of making that goes beyond the building act in architecture, complicating the idea of space and offering an alternative to spatial production

(Haralambidou, 2015, 235-237). Chee uses the essay film for feminist political expression and discusses it as a performative and representational mode of architectural research. In *Flats* (2014), she suggests that the essay film is a creative research tool for readdressing overlooked subjects encoded with biased and dominant approaches, enabling the merging of issues such as design, history, biography, gender, and politics (Chee, 2019, 127). In this aspect, many essay films can be regarded as architectural essay films, as they offer unique forms of recording place, creating spatial narratives, and reimagining place. Several resonate with performative autotopographies, recording the space interwoven with its subjective reflections and constructing spatialities formed through memory. Thus, they might offer a framework for crafting autotopographies through essayistic filmmaking.

For example, Alain Resnais engages with notions of forming architectural place through collected memories in the film *Toute La Mémoire du Monde* (1956), where *Paris National Library* clads on a rather uncanny persona that collects and reconfigures all the memories of the world. Working on another Resnais film *L'année Dernière à Marienbad* (1961), Haralambidou makes a fragmental filmic space installation entitled *Déjà vu* (2009) that constantly recreates its subjects, their memories and their remembered place. In Chris Marker's film *Sans Soleil* (1983), a travelogue of remembrance and memory edited as letters written to a woman, the audience hears her reading the letters and imagining the sequences with her.

In *Les Statues Meurent Aussi* (1953) by Ghislain Cloquet, Chris Marker and Alain Resnais, the colonial act of appropriating cultures is contemplated through the memories of African Masks and relics. As in autotopography, the depiction of space in these films parallels the narrative exploration of memory. Likewise, many essay films centre on micro-narratives

involving various spatial subjects. Beka and Lemoine's *Barbicania* (2014) rebuilds *Barbican* by the narratives of its people (inhabitants, users, performers). Their film *Butohouse* (2020) is a manifest of the maker architect, Keisuke Okada, who is also a Butoh dancer; we see him enacting the home he builds through a Butoh performance towards the film's end. In Wim Wender's *Cathedrals of Culture* (2014), we follow architectures that make subjective narratives of both the place and its inhabitants.

As in these examples, architectural essay films, incorporating features of time images and the essayistic form such as reflexivity and openness, enable exceptional, subjective and collective spatial exploration. The recording of place in these kinds of films enables the inclusion of temporality of sequences and subjectivity, allowing for both distancing from the familiar through framing and approaching the unfamiliar through recording.

Embracing these forms of creating spatial narratives, our research, formed in parallel with the following films, situates itself at a juncture that amplifies the researcher's position and facilitates dialogue among different actors, spatialities, and memories involved in the research.

The research process is constructed through monologues, dialogues, and polylogues extending from filmmaking to the screening and beyond, producing relational, fragmented, situated, and critical knowledge about architectural places.

THE HOME OF THE RECORDS

In this chapter, we present and reflect three autotopographical essay films that engage with homely memories as practical experiments within the theoretical background of our research: *(Un)Homely Dreams*¹ (Kara, 2024), *Placeholder*² (Kara, 2022) and *Peeling Off*³ (Kara, Balaban, Almaç, 2024). Each of the films engages with homely memory in unique ways, differing in their

methods of reproducing the home, how homely fragments assemble, and how the subjects involved in the production interact. Rather than following a predefined route, the films produce autotopographies by establishing their own compositional and narrative characters through performative processes. They imagine multiple versions of uncanny, hollow, unfinished homeliness in line with filmmaking tactics.

Each of the films in this section, positioned in sequential order, progresses through a diversity of actors remembering and forgetting the home in search of forms of creative recording that range from the individual to the collective. The sequencing of the films resonates with states of engagement in performative processes: a monologue that begins with images of homely memory, continues with a dialogue with domestic objects, and finally, with a polylogue shaped by the collective production of an uncanny home.

A Monologue Within the Unconscious of the Home: (Un) Homely Dreams

The first film, *(Un)Homely Dreams* (2024), depicts a monologue within the images from homely memory through dream records captured in writing and drawing. The film draws an analogy between creative recording practices and "dreamwork", a term coined by Freud to describe the process by which unconscious images transform into a dream that the conscious mind can remember. For Freud's dreamwork, our thoughts and desires pass through the "condensation, displacement, secondary revision and considerations of representation" stages and transform into forms and events differentiated from their initial forms in our dreams. Familiar images exist in dreams within other images from memory but in their alienated forms,

forming "uncanny" spatialities (Freud, 2014 [1900], 309-367). This process finds its counterpart in the autotopographical drawing of the film, where (un)homely dream narratives transform into drawings, photographic images, and moving images (Fig.1). The digital drawing established throughout the film bears parallels with the automatic drawing method of surrealist artists inspired by the dream phenomenon in their production processes, in which the conscious mind is suppressed and the spontaneous, erroneous, and accidental lines reflecting the unconscious formed during the free movement of the hand on the paper shape the drawing process (Brotchie, 1995, 49). According to the Surrealists, the unconscious experience is "outside the experience of the self"; the dream produces its universe and its own rules as the self oscillates between creating and experiencing the dream scene (Brotchie, 1995, 10-15). The described form of production delineates a state of creation arising from the fusion of



Fig.1 – *(Un)Homely Dreams*, 2024, Film still.

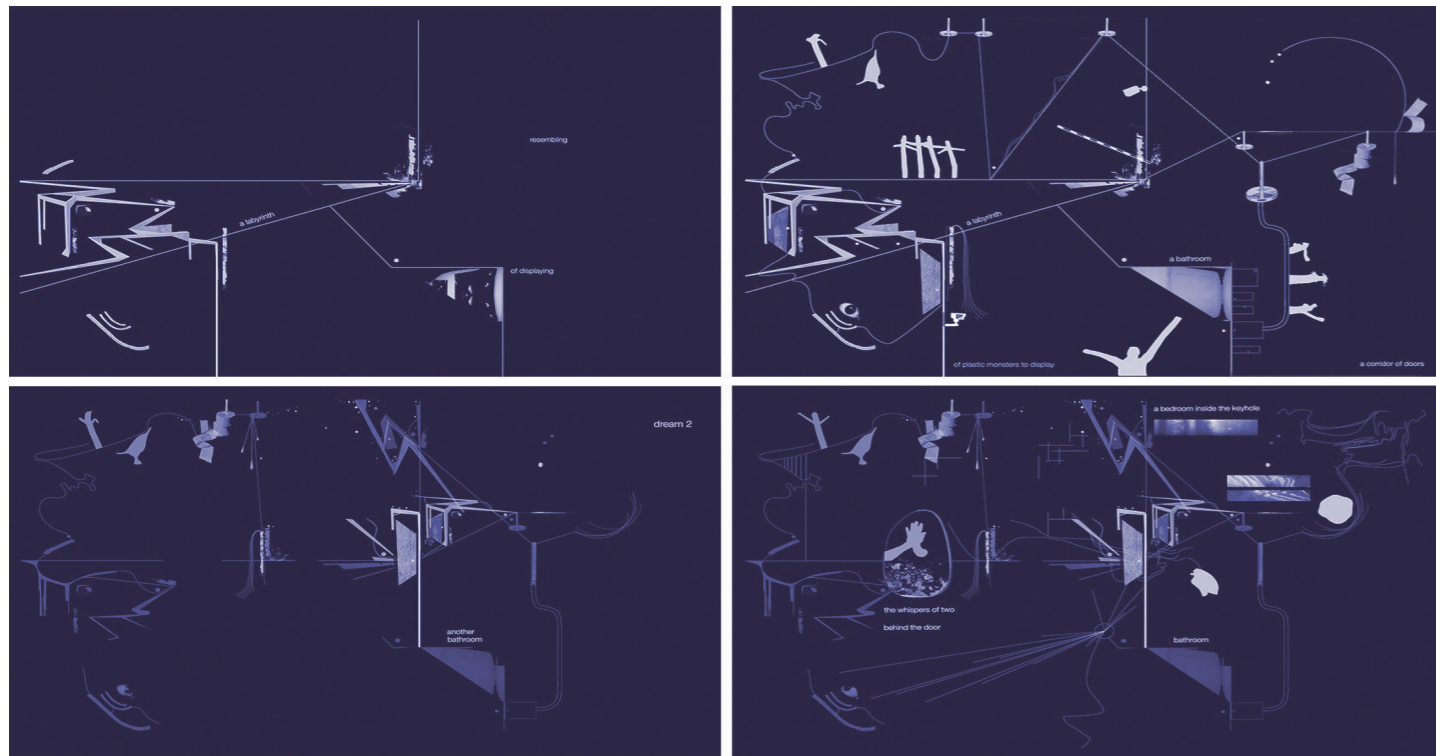


Fig.2 - (Un)Homely Dreams, 2024, Film stills.

the producer's associations and the incidentalities of the process. This approach contrasts a production state that accentuates the subject, who premeditates in the mind and deliberately produces.

The film begins with the distortion of a photographic image on a black background as sentences describing the first dream appear on the screen. Subsequently,

static and moving drawings come together on the screen. When a dream concludes, the screen goes dark; as the narrative of the second dream begins, fragments from the previous drawing appear on the screen, positioned in different arrangements. The "remembered" images from the first dream, much like in the dream itself, establish connections with homely images in the other dream in a modified

form from their original state. Since each dream needs to establish a connection with the images from the previous dreams, the film's drawing process eventually starts to define its own rules. The film continues to flow where each dream constructs a textual and visual narrative; the (un)homely autotopography developed throughout the film constantly deteriorates and reconstructs the

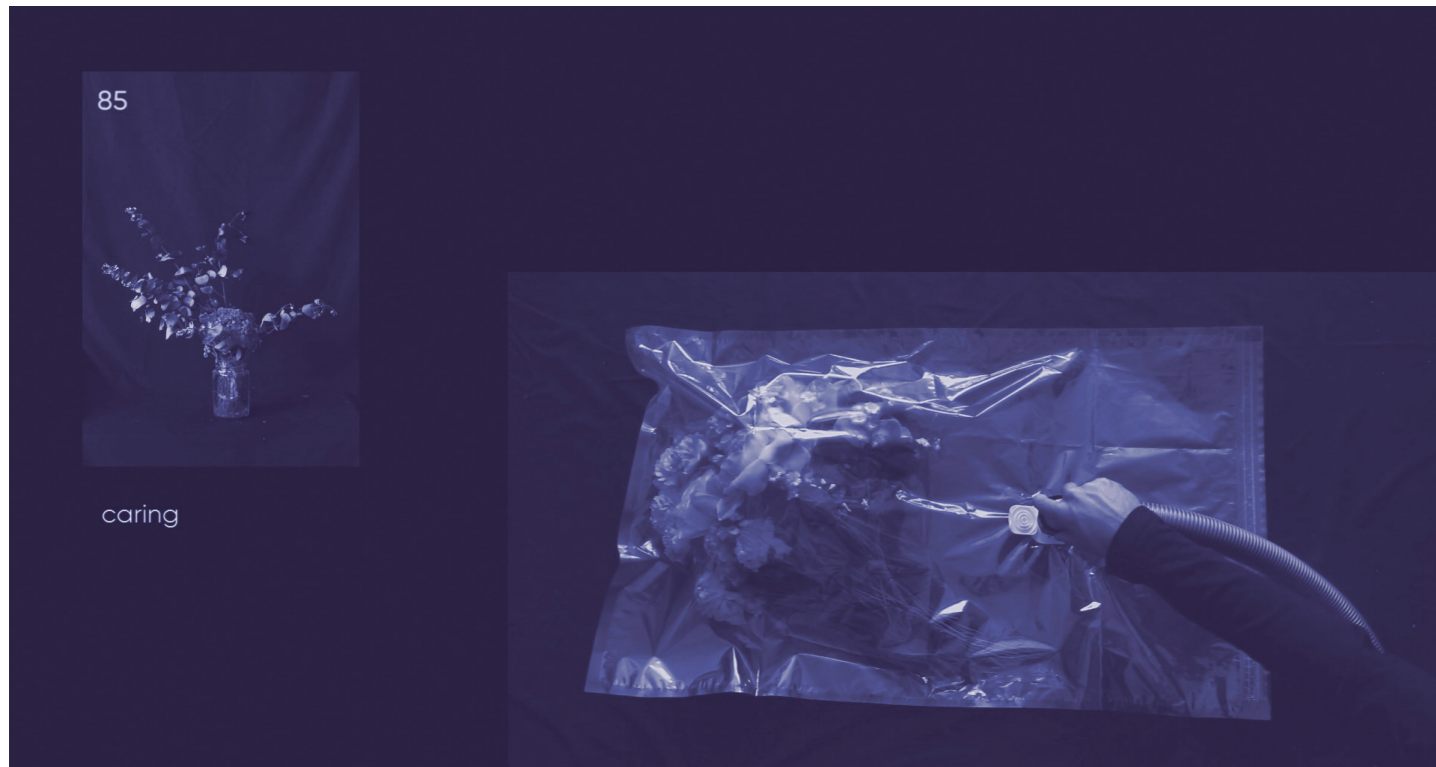


Fig.3 - Placeholder, 2022, Film still.

images through drawing, erasing, merging, accumulating, and deforming (Fig.2). The drawings, interlocking with each other, establish relationships in a manner that can be repeated endlessly. Through this structure, the film aims to continue being constructed through the viewer's associations. Each dream incorporated into the film corresponds to an uncanny visuality of home, creating a dream house and "a stage for viewer's dreams", as Bal expressed (Bal, 2002, 185).

A Dialogue Tracing the Voids of the Home: Placeholder

Placeholder (2022) approaches the home in terms of its absence as a spatiality that corresponds to different places in different times, which no longer physically exists but is inaccessible or has been forgotten and lost. It positions home in the void of the black and undefined background of the film plane. The film fills this void fully by recording familiar objects, memories, and daily rituals that replace the home, tracing it within the dialogues established with the stored, preserved, and accumulated objects. It involves various recording tactics, such as storing, collecting, photographing, numbering, and performing the objects, linking them with remembering and forgetting the home (Fig.3). While some objects are reminders of the home with the familiar routines and memories they bring, others replace forgotten multiplicities of homeliness. The film, constructed in line with these archival tactics, is produced alongside an inventory booklet (Fig.4). The objects positioned statically in the inventory in the booklet constitute the primary sequences of the film, together with the texts of homely memories and video recordings of performative acts made with objects.

The film contains objects such as plants, childhood toys, keepsakes, souvenirs, family heirlooms, and actions such as boxing, unboxing, rooting, repotting, vacuuming, and tying knots (Fig.5). The different



Fig.4 - Placeholder, 2022, The inventory booklet.

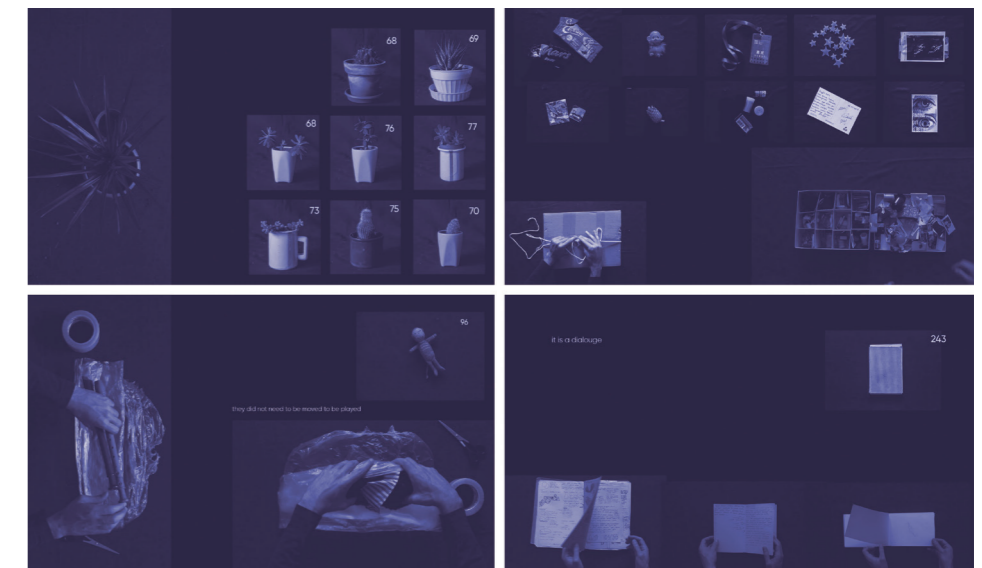


Fig.5 - Placeholder, 2022, Film stills.

temporalities of the homes in the film come together with the temporalities of homely actions, such as storing, accumulating, and moving, and the temporalities of everyday objects, such as growth, decay, dissolution, and obsolescence. The sequences form a narrative on the ambivalent position between identification with and dissociation from objects through keeping and discarding. Recording and performing the objects position the home at a crossroads between familiarity and strangeness. While the "undefined" environment of the film and the inventory situate familiar domestic objects in an estranged place, the recording process enables revisiting objects through their connotative meanings. Instead of serving a predefined narrative, the film's narrative forms through the encounters that emerge

from the process. It comprises fragments in which sequences can be interchanged, new sequences can be added, or existing ones can be removed and seem not to have a fixed beginning and end. Their assembly is not based on visual relationships but rather on their ties to the memories they narrate. The evocative relationships between spaces, everyday objects, and actions in the film aim to engage the viewer in their homely memories. Objects construct an autotopography throughout the film, functioning as devices for remembering and forgetting their material presence and positioning themselves as co-subjects of the work. This performative and self-reflexive recording provides a creative way of constructing the autotopographical home on the film plane.

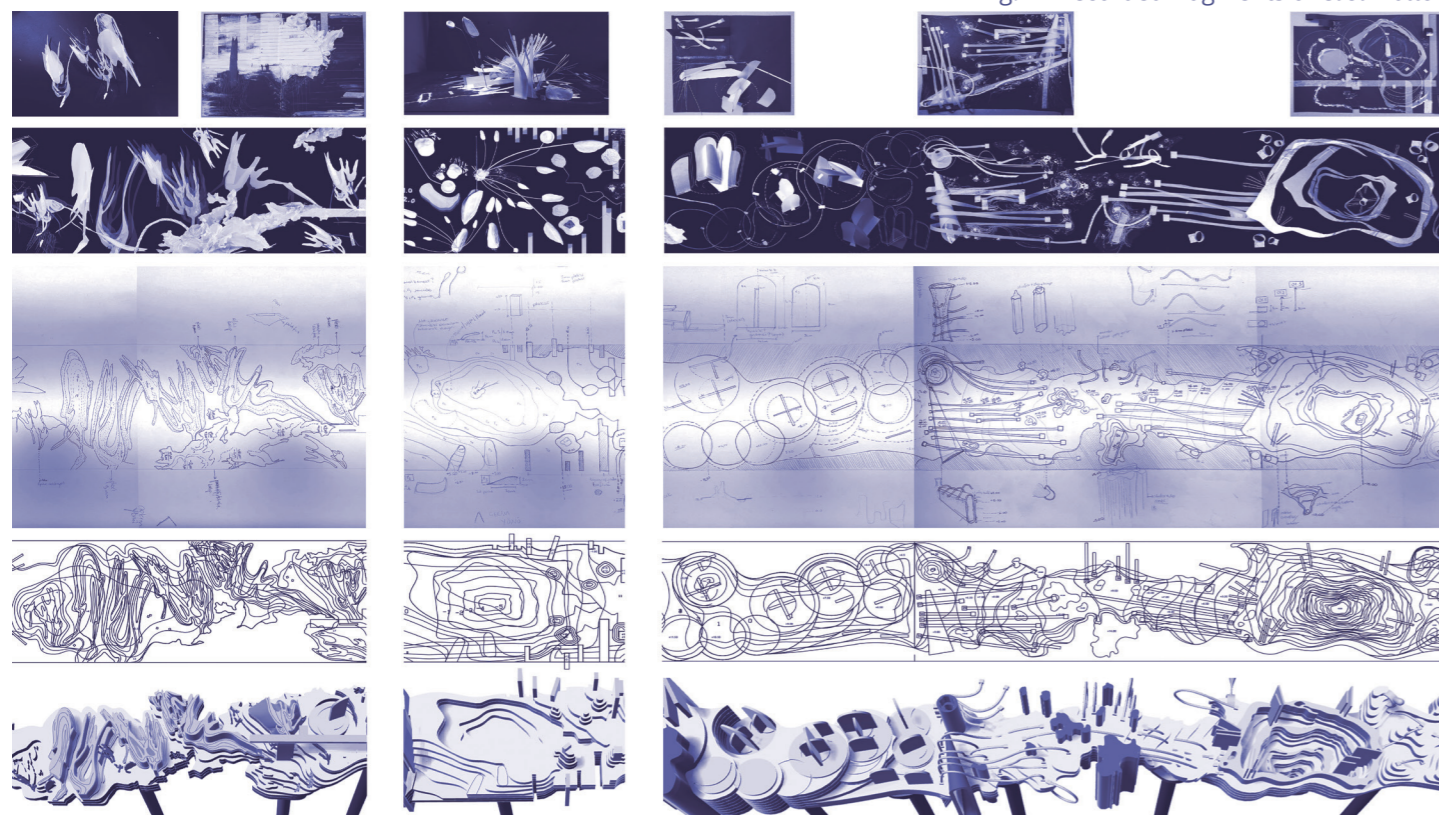
Fig.6 - *Peeling Off*, 2024, Film still.Fig.7 - Recorded fragments of *Casa Botter*.

Fig.8 - Translation process of spatial fragments between different representational media.

A Polylogue Established through the Associations of Home: Peeling Off

Peeling Off (2024) unfolds through a process in which three researchers, whose memories of home do not correspond to a singular space, return to their homely memories while recording an unfamiliar place under restoration and resurface their memories through texts, drawings, collages, and models (Fig.6). The performative process of autotopographical production proceeding through the transmission of homely memories between different representational media, overlaps on the film plane with the recording of an autotopographical model. The film nestles the ambiguous form of autotopography that simultaneously corresponds to performativity and spatiality.

The filming begins with the researchers recording in *Casa Botter*, an old art nouveau apartment house in Istanbul. *Casa Botter*, an unfamiliar building with no place in researchers' homely memories, bears traces of its layered temporality with its stripped walls, rusted surfaces, and dislocated structural elements and positions as one of the film's co-authors through the recordings of its fragmented, dispersed, uncanny spatiality (Fig.7). The filming of the building establishes an analogy between the processes of remembering - forgetting and the acts of deconstruction, selection, elimination, preservation, and maintenance during the restoration process. This relationship parallels Walter Benjamin's analogy between recollection and archaeological excavation, in which he describes memory as "the medium of what is experienced rather than a means of discovering the past" (Benjamin, 2005 [1932], 576). The recording process is a performative experience in which the layers of homely memory are peeled off.

Resurfacing of memories proceeds

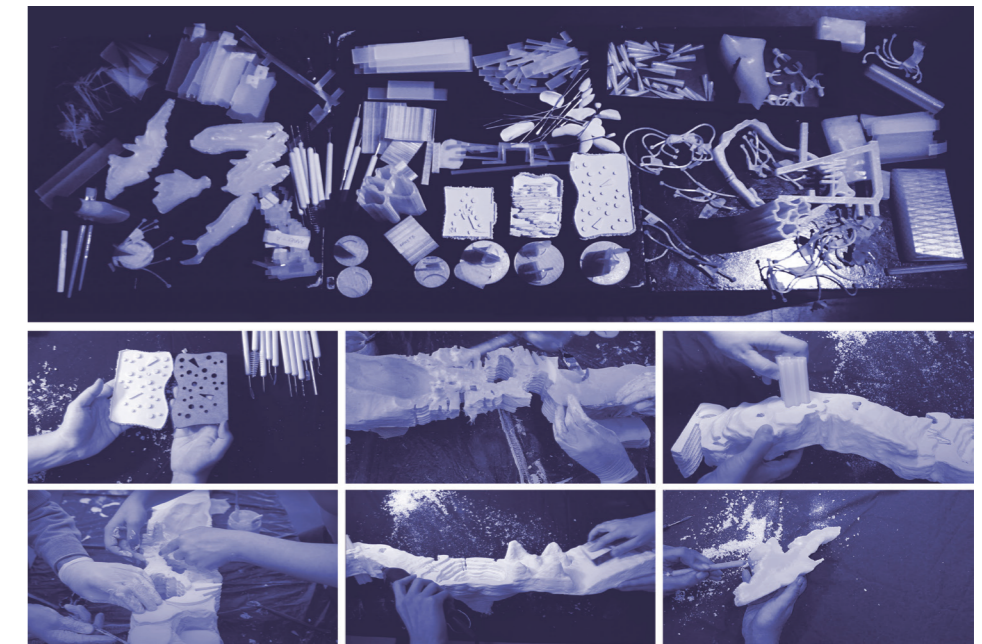


Fig.9 - Materialisation of spatial fragments constructing the collective autotopography.

with paper models produced following a series of evocative texts written to remember the home with the *Casa Botter* recordings. The researchers reflect their homely elements, such as traces of surfaces, moulds, light switches, windows, dust, chairs, doors, and gardens, by visualising them through drawing, folding, sticking, cutting, or scratching them on black paper. The fragments of the paper models come together first in a collage and then in a drawing, while their forms undergo translation and start to be estranged (Fig.8).

During the translation process, subjective memories create collective imaginations on a topographical model. The images on the two-dimensional picture plane find their forms in line with the possibilities and obstacles of the materials as they move to the third dimension (Fig.9). Surfaces, objects, spatial fragments, and actions associated with homely memories materialise in the topographical model as plaster hollows and mounds, as filament-printed strips, plexiglass treads, silicon surfaces, or wax masses. Actions, spaces, and subjects in memories merge and transform, recorded and embedded in the forms and material presence of the topography (Fig.10).

The co-planar convergence of actions and spaces repeats in

the film's editing. In line with the autotopographical approach, corresponding to both an action and a spatiality, the film contains production outputs such as drawings, collages, and models on the one hand and the processes of making the topographical model on the other. In other words, the film plane simultaneously corresponds to the space on which the autotopographical home is constructed and the phases of making.

The film takes on an essayistic form through its visually and materially inscribed memories on the film plane with a self-reflexive and performative process. The transmissive relations between the different recording devices are also related to the translatable structure of the form, as a creative character of essayistic productions enabling the layering of meaning, as discussed by Alter (Alter, 2007, 54-55).

Peeling Off depicts an uncanny sense of reproducing home in which the familiarity of home is sought in an unfamiliar place. This autotopographical film juxtaposes the unearthed memories of home with an abstract model and the acts of making it. Meanwhile, the materiality of space triggering the production and the memories of varied homes are positioned in

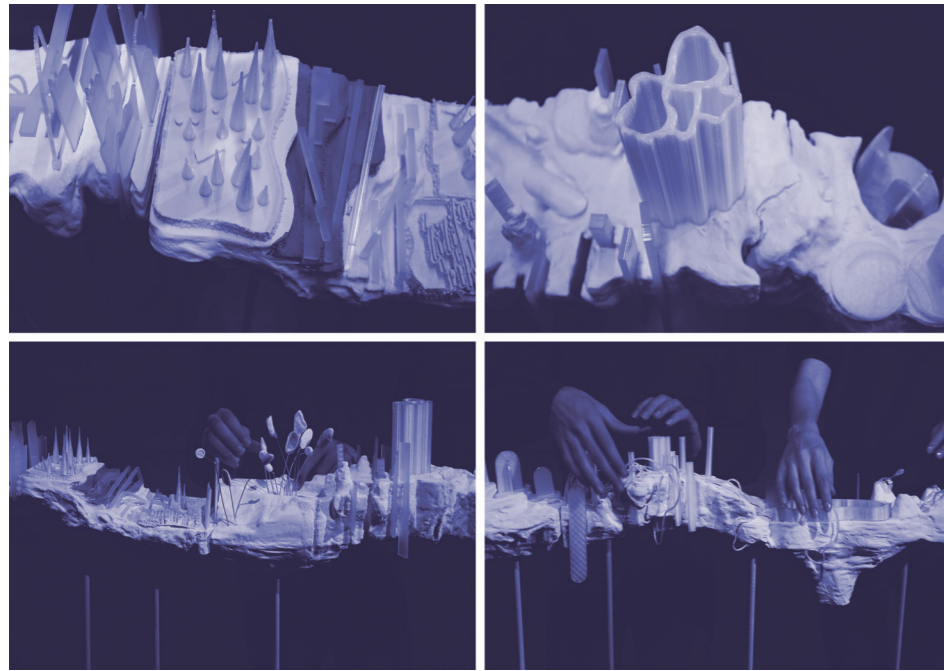


Fig.10 – Fragments of the collective topographical model.

the film as co-subjects setting up autotopography. In this sense, the film corresponds to a performative and site-specific approach to autotopography.

At this point, the essay form enables the situated production of spatial knowledge by providing the necessary condition for self-reflexive spatial research. It stretches the boundaries of architectural representation while allowing the transfer between means of representation.

It gives a field for an alternative spatial production of subjective and collective registers and a creative way of recording the home.

CONCLUSION

Autotopography is defined by fragments that serve as cues for memory, influencing what is recalled or forgotten. So to say, our archives are curated selections of memories constantly obscured by new encounters and configurations of events. Thus, we claim that the constant oscillation that delineates autotopography can be a transitional presence, whereas creative recordings such as essayistic filmmaking experiment with the notion of home.

The interconnectedness between the self and other and their mutual construction fosters a creative

state akin to the performativity of autotopography. Autotopographical practice is a form of site-specific performance that defines the place it delineates through constant interactions.

The expression of identity through spatial performance has the potential to reshape conventional binary spaces dictated by dominant ideologies. In performative autotopography, the interaction between identity and space leads to a reciprocal exchange, where identity responds through expression and, in turn, shapes and delineates the spatialities it engages.

Within this context, the characteristics inherent in autotopographical practice can also provide insights into establishing a homely place. Autotopography encompasses various scales and times, blurring the boundaries between the interior and exterior realms of the home. This approach unbounds the notion of home from the confines of physical space, transforming it into a boundless repository of memories and identities. By revisiting home through an autotopographical lens, we can redefine its meaning and explore its uncanny nature, oscillating between familiarity and strangeness.

The distinctive aspect of

autotopography lies in its ability to generate interpretable and explicit narratives through the interaction between the self's situated and reflexive reflections with space. Within the scope of our research, creative production was defined through creative records, and we examined the performative autotopographies of the home through the framework of architectural essay films.

In our study, creative making was characterized by creative recording, focusing on the performative autotopographies of homes explored within the context of architectural essay films. This form, embodying essayistic making, is positioned in our research as a creative form of recording that enables the collecting of fragments of home and reassembling them in the fluid field of film space. Thus, we claim that the performative making of architecture essay films forms an in-between space, interweaving multiple recording forms and many states of subjective encounter to build a spatial narrative.

Throughout the paper, we discussed three of our works. Each film explores homely memory through different methods to capture the essence of home, assemble its fragments, and depict collective imaginations among those involved.

Rather than following a predefined route, these films create distinct autotopographies, each with its own composition and creative recording, employing performative techniques to evoke uncanny, partial representations of home.

Presented sequentially, the films progress from individual recollections to collective imaginations, reflecting various stages of engagement in the creative recording. And, the interstices that we wanted to magnify trace the multitudes of creative and imaginative translations of monologues, dialogues, and polylogues that shapeshift into architectures, blurring the definite and established threshold of the home to portray an uncanny home.

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NOTES

1. (Un)Homely Dreams (2024) is produced by Mert Zafer Kara for the Master's Thesis entitled An Autotopographical Look at Home: The Filmic Reproduction of Home Through Creative Recordings (Kara, 2024), supervised by Meltem Aksoy and Bihter Almaç in ITU Architectural Design Master Programme. The film can be viewed on the following website: <https://vimeo.com/mertzaferkara>

2. Placeholder (2022) is produced by Mert Zafer Kara as part of the graduate course Architecture in Context, focusing on essayistic filmmaking as a design research method and representation tool in architectural theory and practice, led by Bihter Almaç in ITU Architectural Design Master's Programme. The film can be viewed on the following website of the course: <https://architecturalessayfilm.wordpress.com/2022/06/08/placeholder/>

3. Peeling Off (2024) evolved from discussions and projects in the Architecture in Context course at ITU, led by Bihter Almaç. It stemmed from initial conversations sparked by Placeholder (Kara, 2022) and Nothing Happens (Balaban, 2022). These works, along with collaborative discussions led by Kara, Almaç and Balaban, shaped Peeling Off. The discussions of this collective production can be examined in the article entitled Tracing the Familiar: Spatial Research Through Essayistic Filmmaking (Kara, Balaban, Almaç, 2024) and the film can be viewed on the following website: <https://vimeo.com/mertzaferkara>