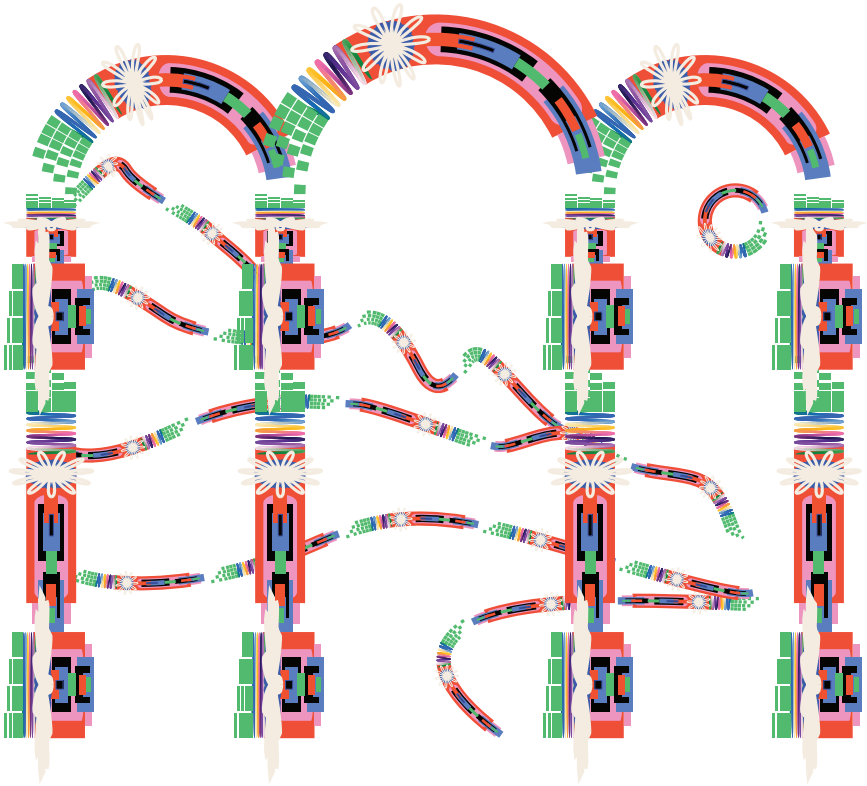
THE TELE-PROVINCE



STUDIO SPACE POPULAR

THE TELE-PROVINCE

Designing for a Networked Region in Demographic Decline

SUMMER SEMSTER 2025/26
[VIRTUAL INFRASTRUCTURE]

STUDIO SPACE POPULAR

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Modelmaking Assistant - Martin Murero

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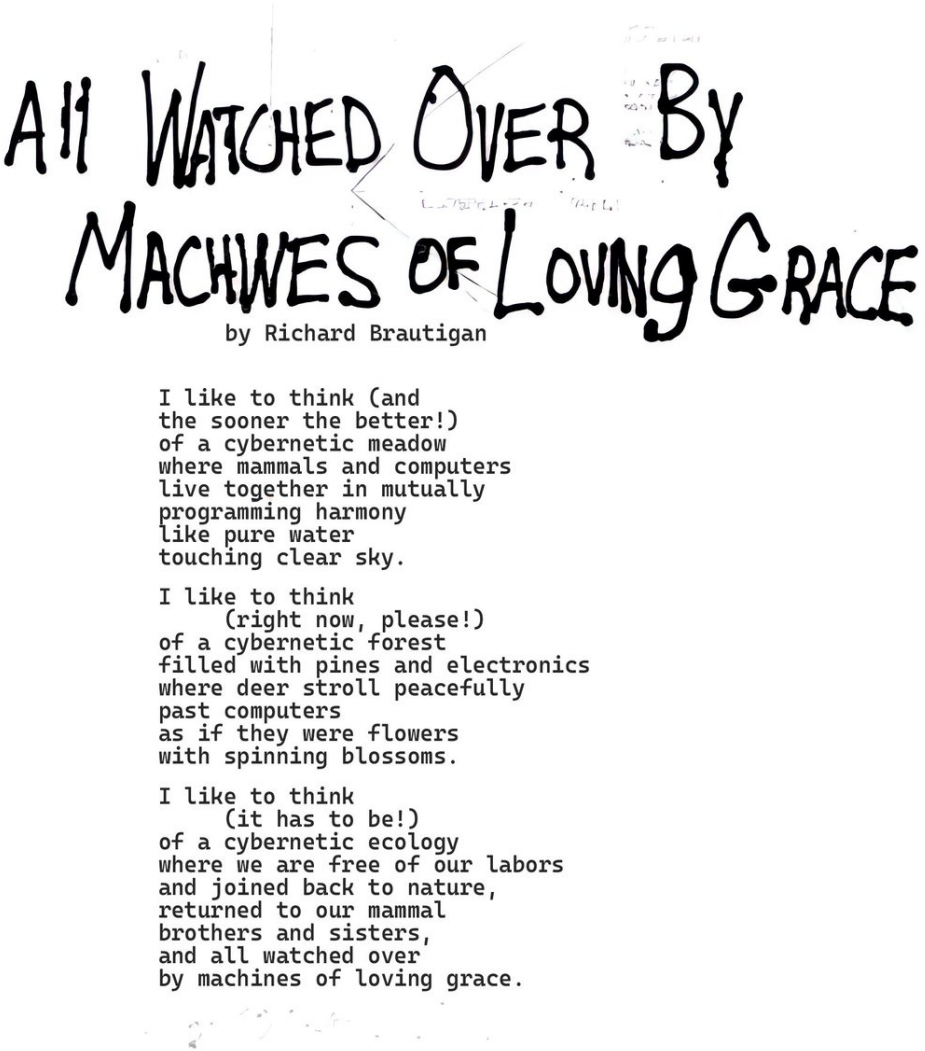


All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace. Poem by Richard Brautigan. 1967 — an early reflection from the era of cybernetic techno-optimism, widely read as an ironic vision of benevolent technological governance.

INTRODUCTION

The prefix tele- refers to that which is far off — to action at a distance. Television, telescope, or telegram describe hardware that extends the human ability to see, sense, and communicate beyond our physical capacities. Tele- has since expanded to describe services performed remotely (like tele-care or tele-work). It describes situations in which work, care, governance, and social life take place without physical co-presence, mediated by communication technologies. ***Tele*- does not abolish distance, it changes how and whether distance matters and how proximity is produced.**

This condition requires a distinction between the notions of topography and topology. **Topography** describes the physical form of a territory: slopes, altitude, terrain, and material composition that shape movement, resources, and forms of settlement. **Topology**, in contrast, describes how places are related to one another through connections, infrastructures, and flows that challenge physical form. In a topological system, proximity and therefore access can be defined by *connectivity* rather than physical distance. Media operates topologically, not topographically — allowing distant places to function, in some ways, as neighbours while nearby places may remain disconnected.

In recent years, the capacity for tele-mediated topological organisation has been framed as one of the solutions to various issues, particularly in places considered remote: the many good old *middle-of-nowheres*. Digital media and networked infrastructures promise new ways of living together without physical closeness. Remote work, tele-care, and online education are just a few examples of what are increasingly presented as mechanisms through which regions in demographic and financial decline might prevail, or even thrive, without the need for localised measures. **This faith in tele-mediation is often disproportionate and a relief route for governments to continue investing in metropolitan centers and avoid facing the question of the *non-urban*.** When connectivity is treated as a substitute for territory itself, it can only perpetuate existing issues such as shrinking populations, disappearing services, and eroded civic life.

they told us that we couldn't live without the handshake, but it is them who cannot live without our rent

Yet, from the metropolitan perspective, the enthusiasm for tele-mediated life that surged during the COVID-19 pandemic was soon followed by a growing aversion to online access. Practices that demonstrated the feasibility of remote work, distributed governance, and broadened the access to education and culture were rapidly rolled back. Public discourse increasingly framed physical co-presence as inherently superior, necessary for true social cohesion and collaboration. While such arguments emphasise the value of embodied togetherness, they also align

worryingly closely with the economic interests of real estate speculators and the financial structure of metropolitan centers . The return to the office had little to do with care for cultural practices, it was structural: dense occupation sustains rent extraction, service economies and established hierarchies of labour. In this climate, tele-access represented a threat, and strategic stigma was cultivated against it (associating it with withdrawal, inefficiency, lack of commitment, etc.). The openness that briefly allowed people to work, learn, and participate from dispersed locations closed once again.

The region of Asturias, in Northern Spain, embodies this tension with particular clarity. Despite being one of the most mountainous regions in Europe, with over 35% of its territory exceeding 50% slopes, it has one of the most extensive fibre-optic and 5G networks in the country (access to 1Gbps fibre connection is common in residential properties in Asturias, while the same is not even possible in cities like Vienna or London). In a region defined by extreme topographic constraint and highly dispersed settlement, digital connectivity is unusually dense.

Meditation Battlestation. Tom Galle & Moises Sanabria in collaboration with Eva Papamargariti.

Widespread access to the internet, together with public infrastructures (such as Telecentros) make Asturias into an experiment in connectivity-led territorial strategies. But at what cost?

This technological condition overlays a complex territorial reality. Asturias is populated in a scattered manner, with 78 municipalities in 10,000 km2. Historically shaped by resource extraction (coal, water, and other minerals), the region went through two major waves of industrialisation, in the early 19th and mid 20th centuries, that brought many people to its numerous valleys.

A dense railway network, built to serve extraction rather than urbanisation, once connected the territory but its operation is significantly reduced today. While extractive industries produced housing, welfare systems, and significantly improved the lives of many, its legacy is ambivalent: Asturias is marketed as a natural paradise while remaining the most polluted region in Spain, with hospitals maintaining entire wings dedicated to lung disease. Moreover, such efforts for social improvement were largely motivated by Franco's fascist regime (1939-1975) as a strategy to control the overwhelmingly left-leaning Asturias where the Spanish union movement was most significant (see 1934 Octubre Rojo). Industrial paternalism welfare is inseparable from strategies of repression and control.

Demographically, Asturias faces one of the most acute crises in Europe. It has the highest mortality rate in Spain and the lowest birth rate in the EU (0.94). The conditions situate the region at the center of debates on depopulation, migration, and the future of non-metropolitan territories often simplistically referred to as rural or the countryside; terms that obscure more than they define.

Asturias is paradigmatic of many regions that resists familiar spatial categories. The urban-rural divide is of little relevance here, if it ever was elsewhere. The region challenges the notion that metropolitanism or urbanisation are the only imaginable, or desirable, territorial futures. At the same time, narratives of climate refuge, neo-rural settlement, and long-term tourism (aka digital nomadism) not only expose Asturias to the whims of speculation but also risk romanticising it as antidote to the city rather than recognising it as a space with its own political, social and infrastructural frameworks; **an actual place.**

At the same time, **tele-mediated reorganisation does not exist outside the logics of capital and property**. Remote access may enable life beyond metropolitan density, but it can accelerate uneven and uncontrolled development. Digital access can facilitate relocation without responsibility, investment without accountability, and presence without participation. In this way, the aspiration to escape urban pressures may just displace speculative dynamics onto non-metropolitan regions, turning places like Asturias into opportunities for cost-of-living displacement strategies rather than places of collective transformation.

It is within these tensions -between tele-mediated topological reorganisation and topographic realities, and between aspirations to escape metropolitan speculation and the likelihood of reproducing its logics- that The Tele-Province places its inquiry.

THE TERRITORY AND THE ROOM

The semester begins with an introduction to the two sites in Asturias: Perlora (a former miner's holiday colony) and A Paicega (an abandoned colony which housed workers for the construction of a dam). These sites are presented not as isolated architectural problems, but as fragments of a larger territorial condition shaped by extraction, industrial paternalism, and later neglect.

In parallel, students will engage with the notion of the room within the domestic environment, reconsidered under tele-mediated conditions where work and collective life re-enter the domestic sphere. The room is understood here not as a neutral interior but as the fundamental architectural unit through which individuality, property, and the separation between public and private life have historically been constructed.

By holding these two scales together -the dispersed territory and the contained room- the studio establishes a continuity between them and presents them as mutually constitutive: the territory shapes the conditions of life, while the room shapes the forms of (tele-) subjectivity that, in turn, reorganise the territory.

COUNTER-MAPPING AND TOPOLOGY

While developing the room, students will prepare for the field trip where they will deploy counter-mapping strategies. Mapping will be understood not as a representation but a critical tool that enables topological thinking and to position oneself in that context. What does conventional cartography make visible? What does it obscure? Who benefits from dominant spatial narratives?

These mappings should not aim to provide an objective narrative but to expose tensions between connectivity and isolation, regeneration and speculation, transformation and extraction, remoteness and rootedness. Maps shall act as bridges between observation and projection, not as a diagnostic tool but a means to imagine and reflect, resulting in a territorial strategy for the projects.

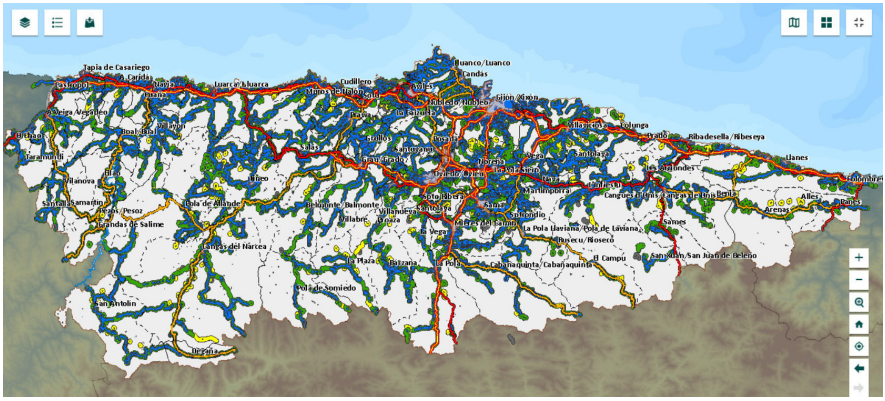
MATERIALISING THE TELE-PROVINCE

The designs must operate across scales, bringing together territorial strategies into architectural specificity. Each project is expected to articulate a regional position, a strategy for the selected settlement, and a detailed architectural intervention. Students will develop a planning framework for the selected settlement proposing spatial and programmatic transformations across the multiple buildings and

landscape, while detailing one building to a high level of material, structural and environmental resolution.

A room will be developed in depth as the most precise unit of intervention. The room must embody the site's territorial logic—addressing remote work, collective life, infrastructural connectivity, and the negotiation between privacy and publicness—while being grounded in construction, materiality, and spatial clarity.

The design proposals must demonstrate how tele-mediated topologies can be translated into spatial form without reproducing speculative dynamics, extractive logics, or nostalgic rural imaginaries. Beyond offering solutions to repopulation, the projects must take a position on how post-extractive territories might reorganise themselves spatially, socially and materially under tele-mediated conditions.



Mobile coverage map of Asturias, Spain. 2022

SITES

Two sites have been selected for the students to choose from: Perlora (a former miner's holiday colony) and A Paicega (an abandoned colony which housed workers for the construction of a dam)

A PAICEGA
(text by Natalia Tielve García for patrimoniuindustrial.com)

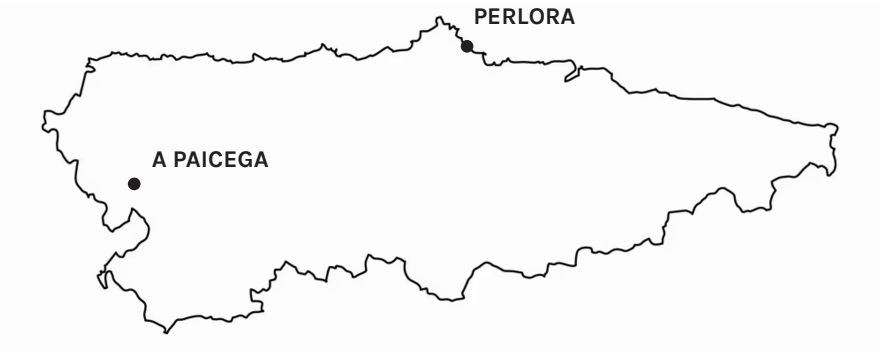
The building of Salto de Salime (1945-1955), a monumental work of civil engineering, art and architecture, required the hiring of a large number of workers. They came from various parts of the country, often accompanied by their families. Four villages were built to house them: A Paincega, el Campín del Segundo Plano, Vistalegre and Eritaña. Their remains have been preserved, although in a state of abandonment, as romantic ruins near El Salto.

The employees were distributed between the villages of A Paincega and Vistalegre. The former had a dominant position over the dam and was planned to accommodate two hundred inhabitants, distributed in twelve pavilions with three houses each (intended for family groups) and a residential pavilion. Together with the accommodation, the facilities were arranged: a church, a company shop, warehouses, a bakery, a hairdresser, a canteen, barracks, a power transformer station and schools for boys and girls.

Vistalegre is located on the side of the mountain. It consists of four three-floor buildings with accommodation for employees, as well as five single-family dwellings for engineers. It also had social facilities: a chapel, a bar, garages, warehouses, boys' and girls' schools, a lounge-theatre-cinema, a community residence office, a bowling alley and rana and llave traditional games.

In contrast to the privileged location and better facilities of the employees, the workers were located in the immediate vicinity of their workplace, in the villages of Campín del Segundo Plano, halfway up the mountain, and Eritaña, at the foot of the dam. The Campín is made up of six two-floor pavilions, with a capacity for 1,200 workers, with sleeping rooms, kitchens, a dining room, a chapel, a canteen, a barber's shop and a cinema lounge. In Eritaña, four two-floor pavilions with a capacity for five hundred men and a provisional chapel were built.

In addition to these villages, there is also the labourers (productores) village in Grandas de Salime, designed by the architect Ignacio Álvarez Castelao, and the management residence in Grandas, by Joaquín Vaquero Palacios.



PERLORA
(text by Rubén Domínguez Rodríguez for patrimoniuindustrial.com)

In Perlora, near the town of Candás, an important project was developed at the beginning of the 1950s, promoted by the institution Educación y Descanso, which belongs to the Spanish Syndical Organization. Perlora's residential town, located in a wide coastal area, is one of the three so-called "ciudades sindicales" built in Spain, together with those of Tarragona and Marbella.

This privileged location by the sea was the reason why the place was chosen to create a unique urban and architectural complex that was one of the best examples of paternalistic leisure control policies. In 1952, the construction of the residential complex designed by Federico Somolinos Cuesta began. It was inaugurated in 1954 and served as a precedent for the construction of the city from 1956 on.

Six streets make up the communication routes of the complex, in which there are small detached houses that, due to their dimensions and aesthetic approaches, fit in perfectly with the landscape framework in which they are built. The homes have between one and three bedrooms and were designed by outstanding architects of the time, such as Julio Galán, Juan Manuel del Busto, Juan José Suárez Aller and Miguel Díaz Negrete, among others. The rooms offered both at the residential complex and at the detached houses provided a large accommodation capacity. This brought together 1,500 people at the same time, including workers and their families, who were associated with the companies that used the facilities. These were praised as "necessary", "effective" and "exemplary" in NO-DO (a state-controlled Spanish newsreel).

Perlora has large gardens and sports areas, taking advantage of the conditions of the natural environment in which it is located. Its two squares, in which the streets of the enclosure converge, bring together the service buildings. The dining rooms, the management area and La Sagrada Familia church are excellent examples of modern architecture. After the end of the activity and the demolition of the residential complex, the city was suddenly left behind and the whole area became increasingly deteriorated.

OBJECTIVES

Throughout this semester students will:

Develop a topological understanding of territory
- Distinguish between topography and topology as spatial/mapping frameworks
- Understand how media infrastructures reshape territorial relations

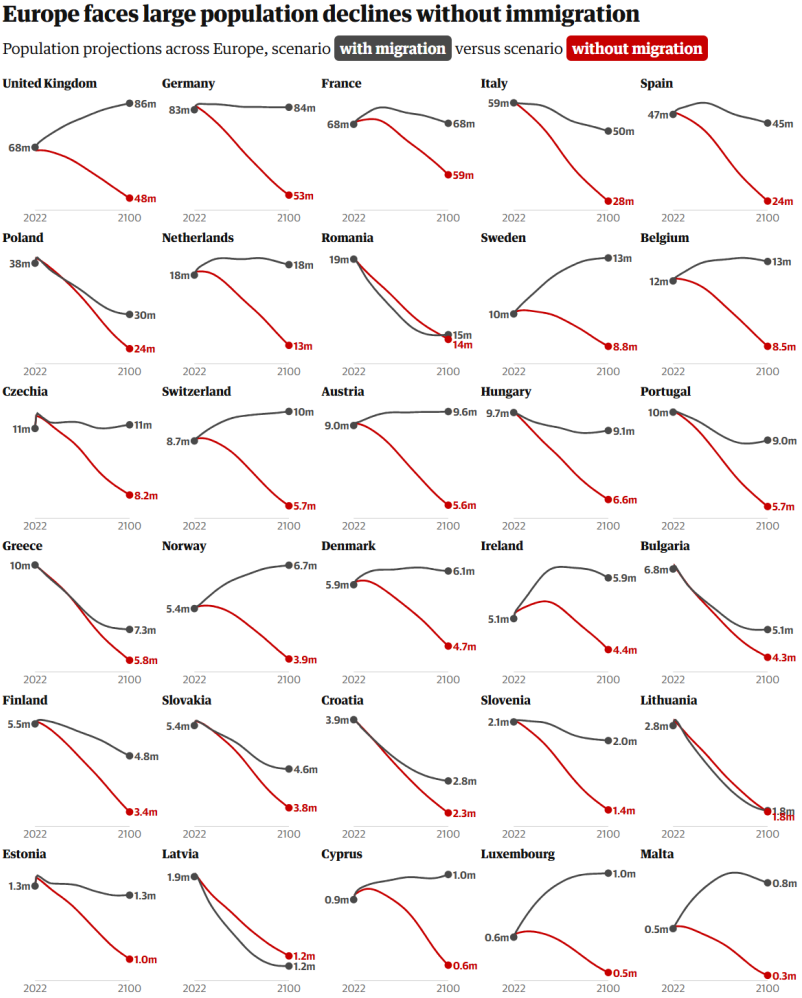
Critically examine the non-metropolitan condition
- Dismantle the urban–rural dichotomy as a spatial and ideological given
- Identify how extraction, industrial paternalism, and property regimes shape lifestyles and opportunities and how to counter them architecturally
- Evaluate how connectivity can both enable and reproduce spatial injustice

Employ counter-mapping as a design instrument
- Deploy mapping as a critical and positional tool rather than neutral representation
- Construct layered cartographies that present subjectivities
- Experiment on how to represent topological conditions

Rethink the room as a political and architectural unit
- Understand the room as a historical instrument of emancipation and precarity
- Observe and manage how domestic spaces handle new tele-mediated functions

Operate across scales
- Move from regional analysis to architectural detailing
- Develop planning frameworks for complex, multi-building sites
- Advance one building to material, structural, and environmental resolution
- Integrate territorial logic into detailed architectural design

Materialise territorial positions
- Translate topological thinking into spatial and constructive form
- Evaluate how design decisions reproduce or resist extractive and speculative logics
- Articulate a coherent design position through drawings, models, mapping, and narrative media



Guardian graphic. Source: Eurostat population projections, UK Office for National Statistics. Scenario with migration is based on a country's average net migration levels from up to 20 years ago, depending on data availability. Scenario without excludes this input in the projection model and is based on natural population dynamics

METHODOLOGY

PHASE 1
THE TELE-MEDIATED ROOM

We will begin by working with the room as the primary spatial and political unit through which tele-mediated domestic life unfolds.

PORTRAITS OF A TELE-MEDIATED LIFE

Students will craft a portrait of a tele-mediated life. The images should be part physical ready-made setup, part digitally enhanced, and combine current observations with future projections. More than a design exercise it is a way to capture what it means to have let media deeply into our domestic, and therefore most intimate, environments.

For this exercise, we will introduce the method of portraiture to capture and document complexities of contexts, narratives, and aesthetics. It allows for interpretation and analysis of how people organize, live in, relate to, and use their private spaces. In developing the portraits, students are encouraged to think beyond visual representation and attempt to bring glimpses of what informs the domestic situation or condition: for example, technological, social, digital, political, climatic. Students will integrate within the portraits, their investigation into how digital communication devices/interfaces (laptops, smartphones, webcams, streaming devices and immersive media hardware) inhabit the domestic environment. Rather than treating these tools as external devices, we will consider how they may be integrated with the spaces while remaining flexible.

Historically, design engaged with the ergonomics of computer systems. We see examples all the way from the 1920s up until today that try to resolve how we place our bodies in front/within such interfaces. However, as they literally moved into bed with us (especially through smartphones), the spatial, political, and bodily implications of their use in domestic environments became normalised and less scrutinised. This phase reintroduces awareness of how domestic life is transformed by digital devices, and subsequently how these conditions are captured in the portraits.

Students shall think about: home as context vs. home produced as workplace (spatial reconfigurations, micro boundary negotiations - kitchen table to workstation; visibility regimes-camera frame vs. off screen domesticity). The “Portrait” is reframed as socio-spatial assemblage: it entangles material domestic infrastructure (desk, bed, router, lighting, background aesthetics), platform architectures, temporal rhythms (gig cycles, algorithmic demand, care interruptions), affective intensities (fatigue, intimacy spillover). As such the portraiture moves closer to a multi-scalar mapping practice/exercise.

Computer Bed Setup. Centre for Research. 2026

Based on the observations and projections from the portraits, initial information from the site, and historical references, students will consider workspace configurations reflecting on how digital devices and virtual visitors intersect with domestic life. This should be done considering how furniture sits in the room and how a room may (or may not) be shaped by furniture. For this exercise, students will work with detailed 3D models.

Framework for portraits and workspace

- Size constraint (could be 4x4 based on the A Paicega width)
- Exist within the current technological state of the world
- It may be personal to you, someone else, or imagined

Perlora, Asturias, Spain, 2026

PHASE 2
COUNTER-MAPPING

From the room we will move to the territory, looking at counter-mapping strategies based on different approaches. Counter-mapping is a methodology for unravelling imperial and colonial mapping and cartographic techniques, which erase complex relationships within given socio-cultural ecosystems. Approaches to counter-mapping use a range of existing tools, formats, and mixed media strategies to develop rich and layered sets of information about places, people, and the interrelated conditions. Students will select information to include based on research and analysis. Depending on emerging topics and thematic interests, the counter-map may convey layers of narratives, highlight transformations, or bring specific relations to the foreground.

The first mapping exercise will be to create a collective map for each site. Students will be divided into two groups to carry these out. This will be more akin to a conventional approach to marking spaces in a format of Cartesian mapping. It should include, for instance, topography and landscape, access and transportation infrastructures, industry, housing, public/private facilities.

The second mapping will be carried out individually in response to the site. For this, students will develop a strategy for creating a counter-map based on their approach to the site, including selecting the format for counter-mapping. Students will need to familiarize themselves with the site before the trip and consider how they will document it. This will be especially useful in preparing any equipment to travel with (for example, a camera for video or photography, an audio recorder, scanning equipment, etcetera).

BEFORE THE TRIP
- Develop an initial understanding of Perlora, A Paicega, and the region at large
- Select one of the two sites and pick a field trip partner (ideally someone who has selected the other site) who can assist you on-site
- Identify site research questions
- Prepare a list of tools, equipment and recording strategies and coordinate them with your field trip partner
- Define your mapping lenses/perspectives

DURING THE TRIP
- Conduct necessary observations and recordings
- Test preliminary mapping hypotheses on site

AFTER THE TRIP
- Produce a comprehensive piece of mapping (open format) that presents both observations and projections and demonstrates topological thinking - how things connect, behave, and transform (focus on relationships, continuities and spatial logic)
- Develop an argument for your territorial approach and initial notions for how this translates into formal, material and structural strategies

A Paicega, Asturias, Spain, 2026

PHASE 3
THE TELE-PROVINCE

In the last phase, students will translate both territorial and room investigations into planning and architectural proposals for the chosen site.

VOLUMETRIC DIAGRAM

Building on the counter-mapping work, each project must present an overall planning proposal for the chosen site. This must include how programmatic relationships are organised and which resources are necessary, while situating the proposal in a broader regional context. Formally, it should include the volumetric proposal for the restoration of existing buildings and proposed new structures (if any). The volumetric proposal diagram will take the form of one drawing, which could be hybrid or mixed-media. Students may need to use other means to work on or represent the territorial/relational strategy.

ARCHITECTURAL PROPOSAL

In parallel, the spatial questions explored in phase 1 (remote work, collective life, tele-mediated lifestyles, reconfiguration of domestic space), along with property and ownership configurations must be developed architecturally.

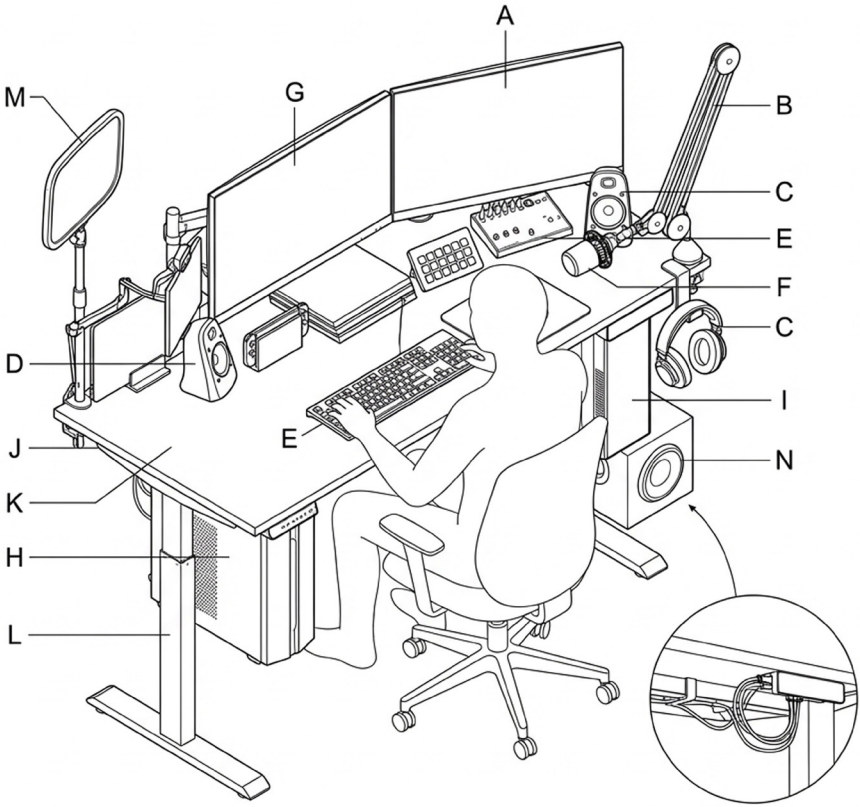
BUILDING
A building or building fragments will be resolved to a high level of detail in a set of architectural drawings (or equivalent)

ROOM MODEL
Detailed physical model of one of the rooms at a large scale. The model can be a series of room fragments, if that is better suited to the design approach. The model will depict a room/room fragments with articulated details such as materials, furniture, lighting, digital interfaces, textiles, sonic elements, and construction systems.

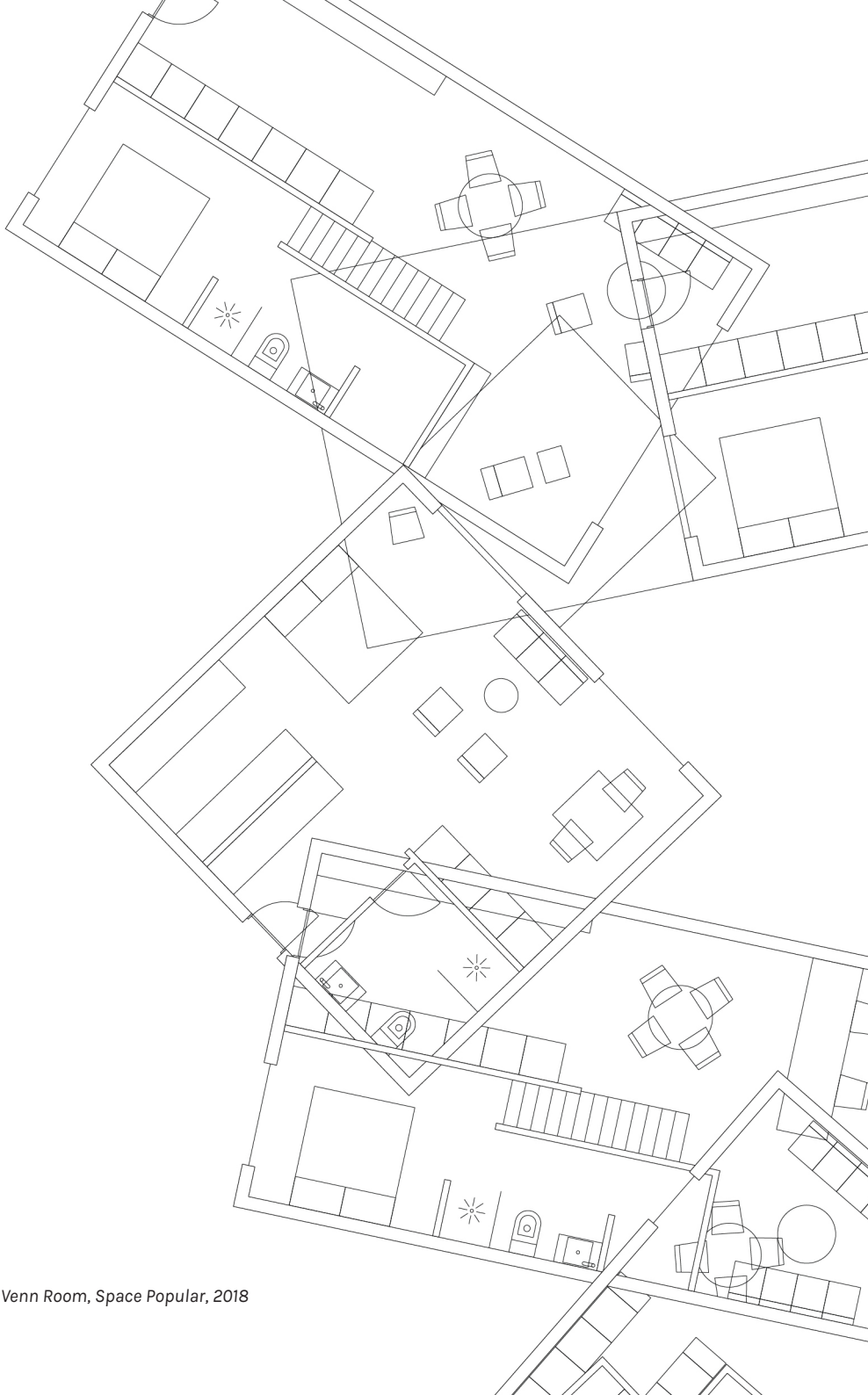
Architectural drawings for all “rooms” for a day in the life of a dweller. The drawings should represent different conditions that could relate to the time of the day, daily rituals, individual versus multiple users, etcetera.

Develop design proposal and strategy
- Territorial strategy through diagrams and other means
- Architectural drawings for all “rooms” for a day in the life of a dweller
- Detailed physical model of one of the rooms and large scale

Streamer Desk Setup



Centre for Research



The Venn Room, Space Popular, 2018

SELECTED READINGS

TO COMPLETE BY MARCH 17TH

Please complete reading on the three sections below by March 17th. Pick 2 of the 3 categories to read from. Only the 2 assigned readings from each category are necessary. In total you'll read 4 readings from this section.

ROOM & PROPERTY

Assigned Readings:
- DOGMA_The Room Of One's Own
- Brenna Bhandar_Colonial Lives of Property_CONCLUSION

Additional Recommended Readings:
- Swati Chattopadhyay_Small Spaces: Recasting the Architecture of Empire_ Chapter

TOPOLOGY

Assigned Readings:
- Rob Shields_Spatial Questions-Cultural Topologies and Social Spatialisations
- Doreen Massey on Space - Social Science Space (podcast)

Additional Recommended Readings:
- Spiekermann Wegener_The Shrinking Continent
- Keller Easterling

COUNTER-MAPPING

Assigned Readings:
- Matthew Edney_Cartography-The Ideal and its History_INTRODUCTION
- Select one of the two options below:
    - John Tinnell_All the World's a Link
    - Iman Fayyad_The Fickleness of the Drawn Line

Additional Recommended Readings:
- Janet Abrams/Peter Hall: Else/Where Mapping:
- (Re)Mapping Indigenous Presence on the Land in Native Women's Literature_Mishuana Goeman
- Giuliana Bruno_Affective Mapping-An Excerpt from Atlas of Emotion

TO COMPLETE BY MAY 5TH

Please complete reading on the three sections below by May 15th. Only 2 assigned readings from each category are necessary. The additional recommended readings are for those who want to read more.

CYBERNETICS

Assigned Readings:
- Gordon Pask_The Architectural Relevance of Cybernetics
- Fredrik Torisson_The Cybernetic Hypothesis and Architecture

Additional Recommended Readings:
- Tanja Herdt_From Cybernetics to an Architecture of Ecology
- Tiqqun_The Cybernetic Hypothesis

URBAN/RURAL

Assigned Readings:
- Kanishka Goonewardena_The Country and the City in the Urban Revolution
- Swarnabh Ghosh_Notes on Rurality or The Theoretical Usefulness of the Not-Urban

Additional Recommended Readings:
- Arturo Escobar_Encountering Development (Chapter 6)
- Ruth Wilson Gilmore_"Forgotten Places and the Seeds of Grassroots Planning" (Selected pages 34-36, "Toward a Unified Concept of Forgotten Place." terms: forgotten places, deskota)

ENVIRONMENT & INDUSTRY

Assigned Readings:
- ANGELA FERREIRA_From Industrial Heritage to Industrial Tourism
- LOPEZ ARRAIZA Sara RUIZ ALLEN Nacho_Learning from Las Cuencas

Additional Recommended Readings:
- Kathryn Yusoff_Mine as Paradigm
- JANE HUTTON_Reciprocal Landscapes: Stories of Material Movements. Introduction

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(I oA) die ANGEWANDTE