

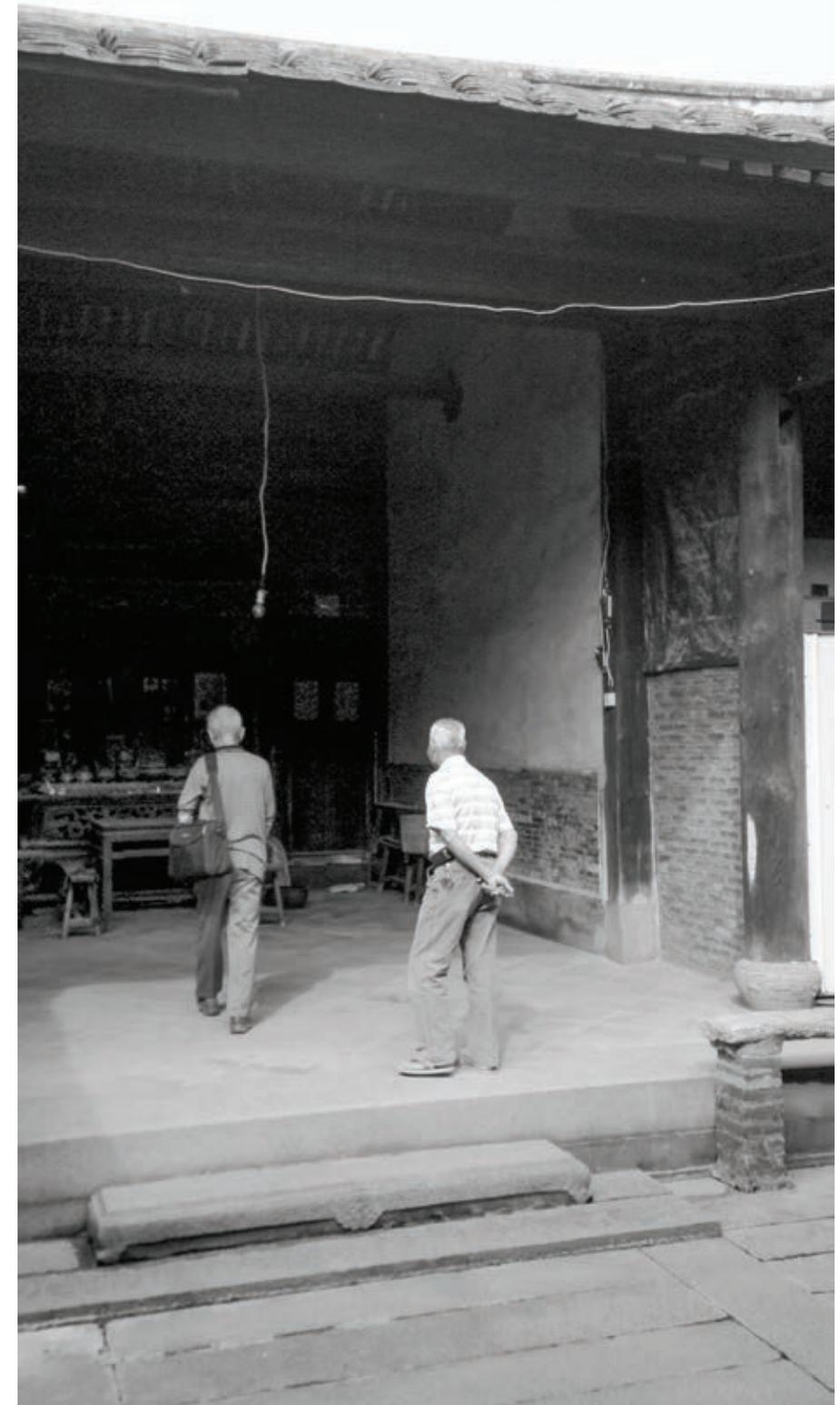
And there is a third column ^{NATURE}, the height a of every member in the structure, the rise measurement in the building, which is archit idea, but simply guided by the results of cal govern our universe) and the conception of steel in concrete, skinned, over bone, a but towards a new architecture; and pro all built ^{CREATED} things, and is apprehended of spurious reason, and is hardly real; wh dwelling ^{EXISTENCE} that it must of necessity b that what is neither in heaven nor in eart water. Of these and other things of the s pressured ^{WAKING} reality of nature, we hav unable to cast off sleep and determine th to himself in two stages: there are thos with names as formidable as *Australanthr* descendants often resulted in things oth combat, break the bone in order to make u break—make tools of things and later too dangerously from nature, destroy nature death and to make use of them. For an i which it is modelled, does not belong to it of some other, must be inferred to be in grasping existence in some way or other, light, I want a city all white, but the green But true and exact hue ^{REASON}, obtained by t chromatic scale rather than by deepening true being, maintains that while two things [cannot exist one of them in the other and

**Tanah* and *air* mean land and water respectively in Bahasa Indonesia. Together, *tanah air* means motherland.

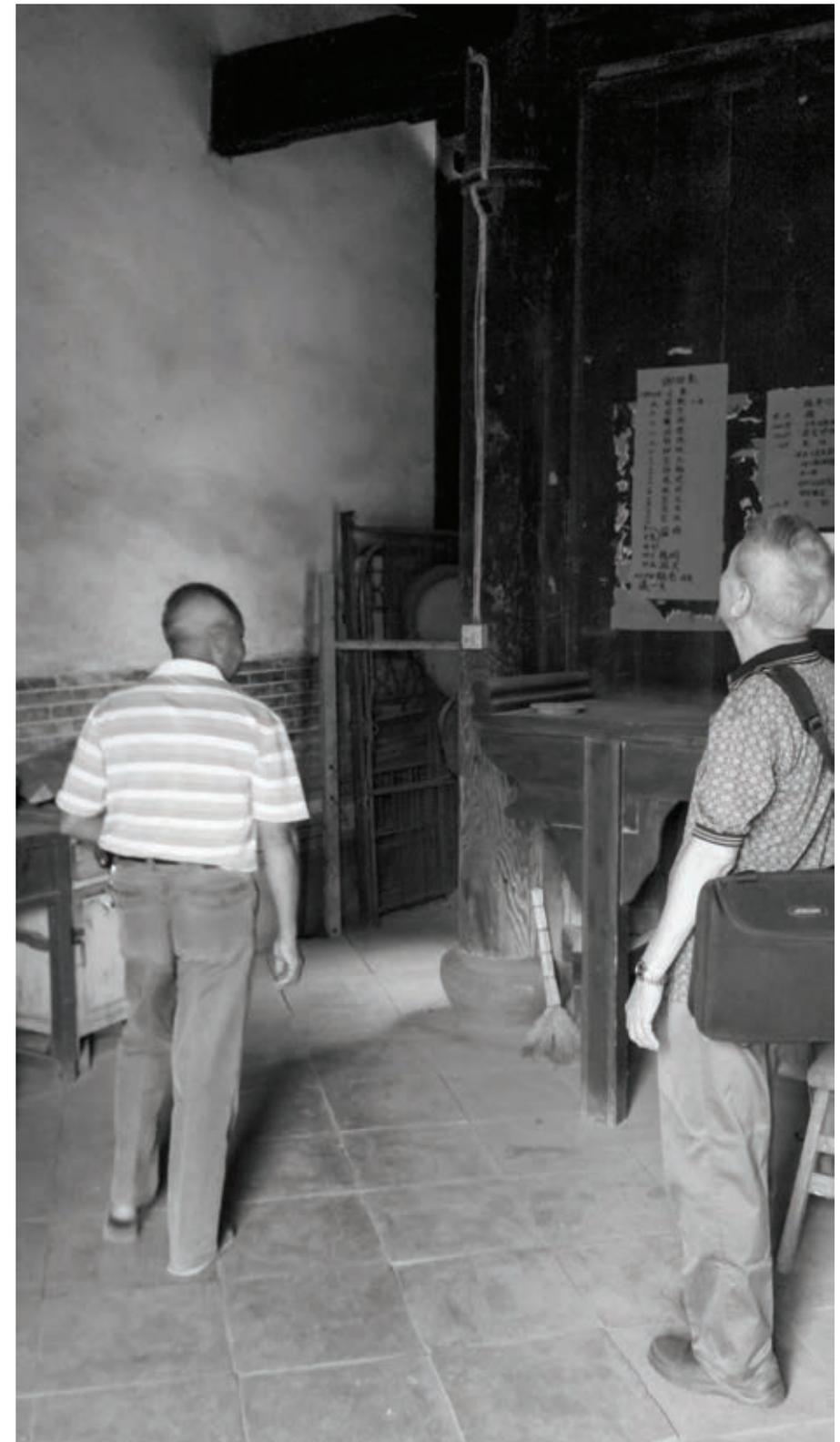
COVER: BOEDI WIDJAJA, *CHORA*, 2016

This text uses sections 52a–52d of the *Timaeus* dialogue (c. 360 BCE) by Plato, interposed with extracts from *Chinese architecture: A pictorial history* (2005) by Liang Ssu-ch'eng; Le Corbusier's travel diary *Journey to the east* (1987), and his collected essays, *Towards a new architecture* (1923); and *The birth of art* (1997), an essay by Maurice Blanchot. The source for *Timaeus* is *The dialogues of Plato translated into English with analyses and introductions by W Jowett, MA, in five volumes*, 3rd edition, Oxford University Press, 1892, viewed 26 September 2016, <<http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/767>>.

Boedi Widjaja also substituted selected words in Plato's *Timaeus*. Where a word is formatted in superscript, it is the original text from *Timaeus*. The word immediately preceding the superscript is the author's.







In 2012, I revisited my childhood house in Solo (Surakarta), Indonesia, and for the first time, went to my late grandfather's birthplace in Hong Dai Cun (洪岱村), Fujian, China.

The house in Solo was in a state of partial ruin, and I could barely recognise it. As I walked through the house, I made graphite frottages of its architecture: walls, windows, doors and ground. I wanted to feel the house, not the one in front of me, but the other, which had left me during my childhood.

Hong Dai Cun is a village less than two hours from Xiamen, an important city in Fujian province. Most of the houses there were built in recent decades, owing to the economic boom in Deng Xiaoping's China. Due to their newfound wealth, many villagers decided to demolish their houses—some of which were 300–400 years old, and built upon ancient Chinese architectural principles—to make room for new concrete buildings.

I met distant relatives who gave me a book that chronicled my 'true' ancestral line. My grandfather was adopted before he migrated to Indonesia, and had to change his surname from Shi (施) to Huang (黄).

Huang means yellow in Chinese, also appearing in *da tu huang* (大土黄), which means the yellow hue of the earth. It seems that the desire for grounding has gone back two generations, drawing a path across different lands.

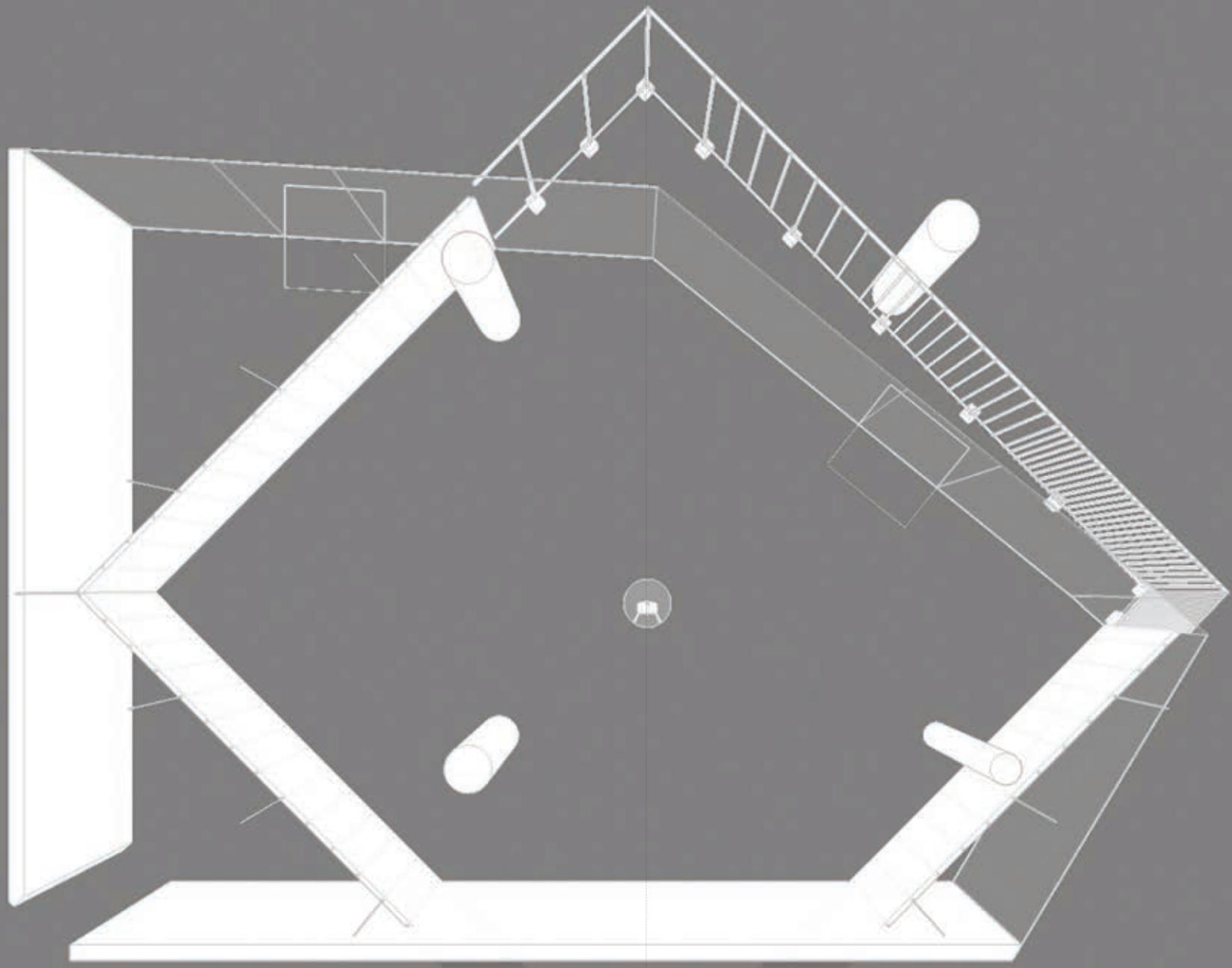
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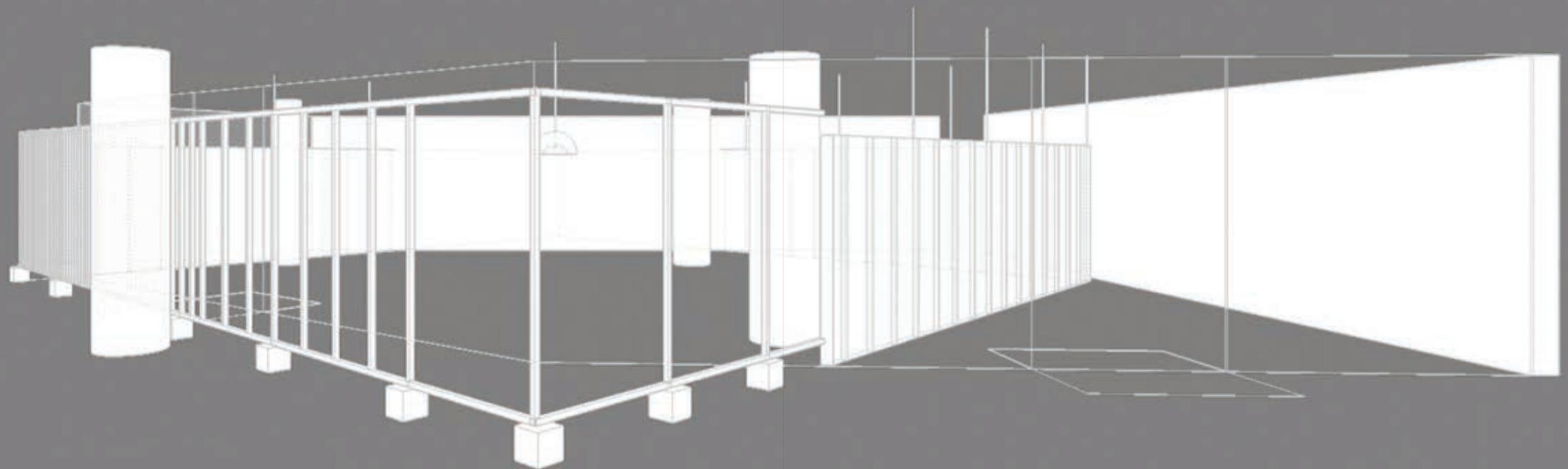


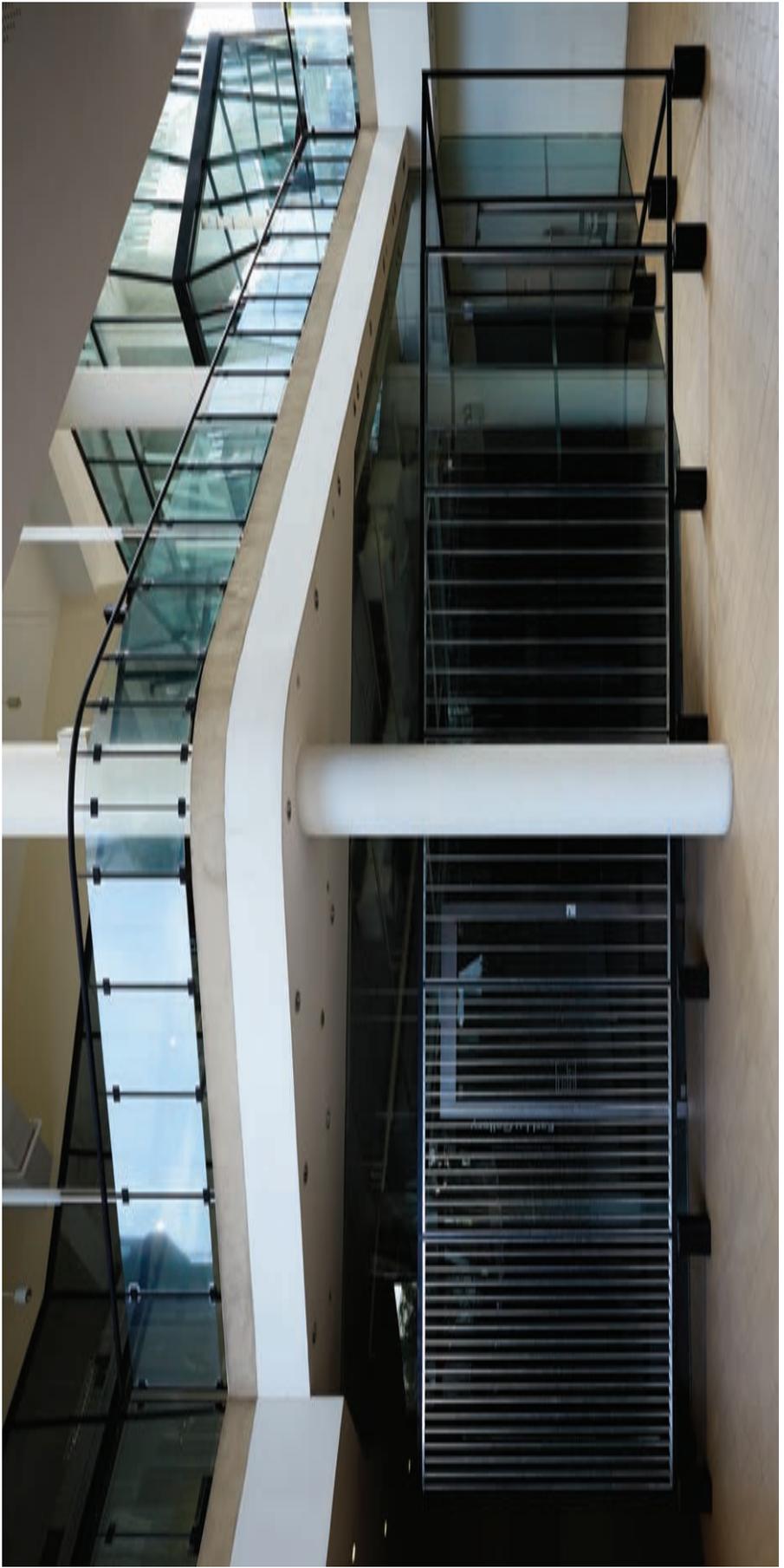


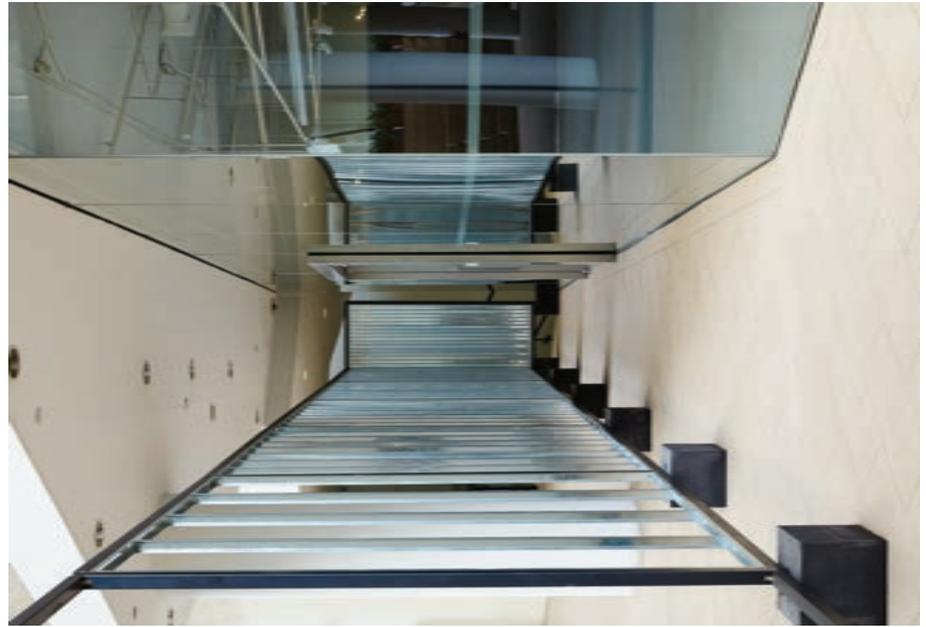
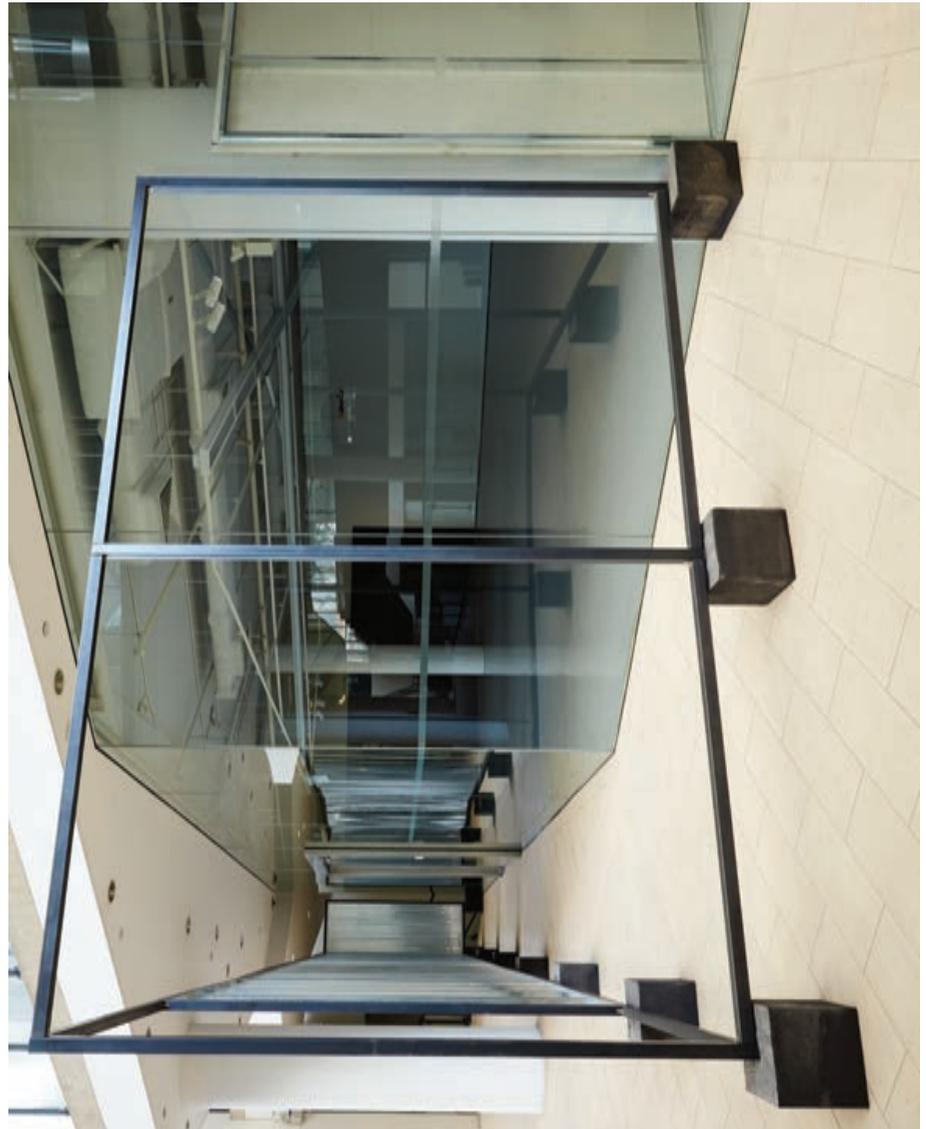
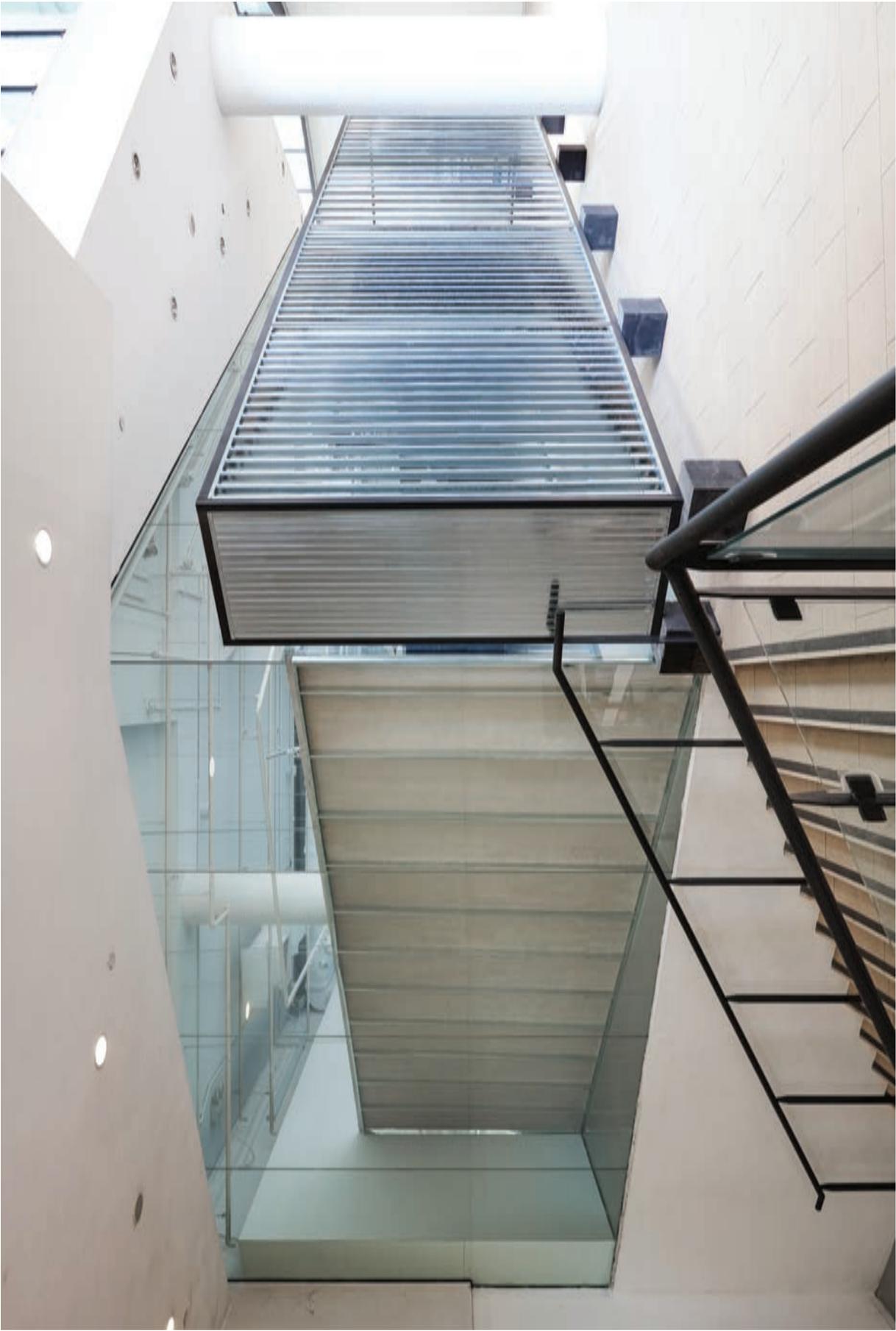


1-5 Boedi Widjaja and his father visiting their ancestral village, Hong Dai Cun (洪岱村), Fujian, China, 2012. Photos: Boedi Widjaja
8-13 Boedi Widjaja at his childhood home in Solo (Surakarta), Indonesia, 2012. Photos: Audrey Koh















Boedi Widjaja: Black—Hut, installation views, Earl Lu Gallery, Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, LASALLE College of the Arts, 2016. © Courtesy the artist

Photography: Cher Him

Boedi Widjaja: Black—Hut

Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore
LASALLE College of the Arts

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Foreword

Bala Starr

Co-curator Melanie Pocock and I first met with Boedi Widjaja to discuss a possible exhibition in April 2015. At the time he described as career highlights two solo exhibitions in Singapore; the first in his ongoing *Path*. series, presented at The Substation in 2012, and the sixth in the same series, presented at Esplanade's Jendela in 2014. Widjaja founded a design agency in 2002, which he ran with Audrey Koh from 2003. He has been working as an independent artist since 2009 and for the past seven years, he and Koh have continued to work collaboratively, with Widjaja exhibiting as part of international festivals and self-produced projects, in contemporary art spaces, museums, and artist-run initiatives.

My early meeting notes capture comments from Widjaja such as 'philosophical approach to data analysis', 'dream sequence as a set of architectural drawings', and 'the present constantly rewrites history', which are interspersed with biographical facts and memories. Through the one-and-a-half-year project development period, myriad changing tactics and ideas have folded into *Black—Hut*, his major new work.

In his wonderful essay, author Joshua Comaroff describes *Black—Hut* as a 'container of conceptual instabilities'. Widjaja's is an architectural and sound project that contemplates his own identity through the act of building. The project is especially designed for the Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore's Earl Lu Gallery and its adjacent amphitheatre space on a mezzanine level at LASALLE College of the Arts. In the work, Widjaja connects ideas found in European modernist, Javanese and Chinese architecture as a method to reconfigure the spatial organisation of the gallery. The process of creating *Black—Hut* has carried risk and generated innovation; qualities that are integral to our mission of enabling experimental artistic practices.

Already this year, Widjaja has held a solo exhibition of new photographic works at Objectifs Centre for Photography and Film, and, further afield, he has exhibited in the

inaugural Yinchuan Biennale, curated by Bose Krishnamachari, in northwestern China. Widjaja approaches each project discretely, dynamically, addressing local sites and global contexts, while being primarily interested in the dialectics around his singular lived experience involving migration, culture and aesthetics.

It has been an enormous pleasure for the whole ICA Singapore team to work with Boedi Widjaja, and with Audrey Koh. We have been assisted as always by colleagues at LASALLE, especially in the divisions of Advancement, Communications and Facilities. Crucial support has been provided by architectural concrete specialist, Jay Fung, of Lwc Alliance. Jay Fung's generosity, commitment to experimentation, and expert ability to customise his materials and methods have been integral to our ability to realise Boedi Widjaja's ambitions for *Black—Hut*. We warmly thank him and his team.

We are delighted that *Boedi Widjaja: Black—Hut* is an Affiliate Project of the Singapore Biennale 2016. I thank Singapore Biennale Creative Director Susie Lingham, Biennale curators, and staff at Singapore Art Museum for their support and collegiality.

Bala Starr is Director, Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, LASALLE College of the Arts.

Skin deep

Joshua Comaroff

Boedi Widjaja's *Black—Hut* is a complex meditation on *bios* and *techne*, on body and building, on nature and artifice. The artist, working as a dialectician, treats these not as opposed terms, but as elements to be related in a series of experimental syntheses. His installation at LASALLE's Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore becomes the site for this exploration, relating the *bios/techne* duality via a cycle of references: building—body, grid—body, and, finally, building—dwelling. These relations are activated both by the form of the hut—as an historically freighted figure of 'primitive' building—and the process of its making.

The installation is most simply described as one space superimposed upon another. The artist introduces four new walls that intersect the Earl Lu Gallery, appearing to slip in and out of its existing perimeter. This new rectangle is not uniform along its length. As a spatial enclosure, it varies from skeletal metal framing to a solid surface coated in dark concrete render. Widjaja's four walls counter the free-form geometry of the existing gallery plan—which he finds 'disorienting' and 'insubstantial'—with a sober, rectilinear form. The position of the hut is carefully rationalized, distributed around a notional centre point that is equidistant from three existing columns. At this centre point is a parabolic speaker, which plays a sound piece created for the work.

The installation is a quiet, dark eminence—a sort of *ka'aba* at the centre of what Widjaja calls his 'internal architectures'. It is an object around which a series of biographical—experiential structures are related, where buildings and selves stand in a process of co-creation. Widjaja believes that these structures can be 'unpacked', can be 'mapped'. *Black—Hut*, then, stands as an analogue to the famous hut on the frontispiece of the abbé Marc-Antoine Laugier's *Essai sur l'architecture* (1753): an explorative outpost, the first shelter in an expansive psychic wilderness.

BODY AND BUILDING, BIOS AND GRID

Black—Hut began with something like a vision.

The figure of Le Corbusier appeared to Boedi Widjaja in a dream. The great architect was lying on a forensic table in a space resembling a cave, which—by the contradictory logic of the oneiric—had a 'clinical quality'. Corb's fingers were inserted into his own face, which wore a passive expression. The scene lacked any sense of horror; the exposed tissue had the objectified aspect of an anatomical model. His hands moved, pulling those distinctive features into new permutations. At the same time, elevations of buildings from the Corbusian oeuvre, shown on a screen above, shifted into corresponding states of rearrangement. While the architect appeared partially plasticized, his buildings had a 'fleshy'

appearance. In this moment of self-fashioning, face and façade, flesh and concrete, mirrored one another—albeit inexactly. Widjaja recalls that he has never had another dream as detailed or realistic. He describes it as 'having watched an art film, while standing on the edge of the set'.

The dream left the artist with a sense of lingering awe, and a desire to respond with some form of architectural work. While its subject was a carnivalesque (and perhaps mildly obscene) version of the autopsy, Widjaja remembers that the experience was one of calm revelation. But this 'revelation' was clearly neither fixed nor factual. Where the forensic grows from a matrix of empirical certainty, in which a 'truth' of the body can be exposed, Widjaja's vision grows from an assumption of possibility and indeterminacy. The body does not lie still and expose its secrets, but rather rearranges itself—and its worldly reflection, architecture—in a way that allows no fixed dispensation or understanding. The corpse is a kind of *corps exquis*.

This fantastical, conjectural mirroring of building and body channels one of architecture's hoariest myths: the building as biometrically determinate object. The body has long been cited as the primary model for a building—whether in whole or part. Vitruvius located the origin of 'correct' proportion in an analogue of head, torso, and legs. This was true of the column, as much as of the façade as a composition. This idea likewise appeared in classical anecdotes linking sculpture and architecture. Caryatids, for example, were thought to have originated as a reminder of the women of Karyes, a Spartan town that sided with the Persians against the Greeks. The biometric tradition survives into modernity, through variants of functionalism. Today, the anatomical determination survives under the sign of ergonomics or bio-mimesis; in Le Corbusier's moment, it was the Modulor system of proportions.

Widjaja revisits this conceptual history. But unlike the classicists—or contemporary ergonomists who would see their work as biologically rooted and beyond history or ideology—he pursues the inherent ambiguities of the building/body relationship. This is appropriate, perhaps, given the origin of the work: Le Corbusier's auto-autopsy, with its cinematic hints of Peter Greenaway and David Cronenberg.

Hence Widjaja's choice of the 'hut'—perhaps the most freighted of architectural typologies. This invocation positions the work directly within the discourse of origins, and of naturalism. It is precisely the hut that appears as the most immediate, pre-vernacular building. It stands, in literature and in architectural theory, as the central figure of pseudo-historical myths of origin. The most famous case is the 'primitive hut' of the abbé Marc-Antoine Laugier, with its image of the hut as a simple pediment barely abstracted from a grove of trees. The hut is often shown in this way, as but one step removed from nature (our own and that which surrounds us). In reality, it has often been a complex, latter-day concoction; as with Laugier, the hut is designed retroactively to naturalize a contemporary design theory or practice.

Widjaja's own hut, while a container of conceptual instabilities, is most certainly positioned in construction's present day. Its light-gauge steel framing is an industrial product, used chiefly for the partitions of office interiors. These surfaces make no pretence of historical gravity, instead being borrowed from the language of expedient modernism—of the absorption of internationalist utopias by the marketplace.

It is upon this series of panels, however, that Widjaja re-engages the naturalistic history of the hut in an extraordinary way. The interior-

facing surfaces have been coated in an unusual concrete render, integrally coloured and mixed with salt crystals. The render is the product of an experimental method of application. Concrete was applied in progressive coats and trowelled for smooth and rough finishes, as opposed to horizontal 'lifts' or slabs shaped by formwork. Where traditional casting produces a volumetric muscularity—celebrated in Corb's own work—Widjaja has gone to great lengths to create tissual layers, which cover the panels like skin. The dissolution of salt crystals within the mixtures leaves a fine pattern of pores. When smooth, the finish appears more architectural; when rough, it begins to resemble an integument, or a hide. The slim character of the backing panels underscores this effect, heightening the viewer's awareness of the concrete as a laminar element.

The rigorous, rectilinear composition of *Black—Hut*, its overtly technical assembly of frame and infill, plays against this dermal surface that would seem to originate from an alien material logic. Changes in concrete, from rough to polished, appear to mediate this radical difference, albeit only momentarily. As with the vision of Le Corbusier on the table, the organic and the technical seem poised within an odd, complementary labour of making.

Clearly, there is an intentional interplay between *bios* and *techne* in this juxtaposition of materiality. The examination of this duality goes further, however, in the artist's exploration of formal logics—in particular, the experimental conflation of organic and rational. As mentioned, the plan of the hut has been superimposed as a rationalization of the Earl Lu Gallery's oblique geometry, using the existing columns to find a centroid. Its walls have then been finished in a sort of concrete epidermis, which dramatizes an organic material placed upon a rectilinear substrate. The basic language of the installation, then, would seem to follow logically from the original vision: a shifting correspondence between the tissues of a human face and the elevations of a modernist architecture.

This theme, the distortion of bodies on grids (and vice versa) reappears one more time, when the visitor reaches the centre of the hut. Here, a parabolic speaker plays a composition that has been created specifically for the work. This sound piece is not immediately comprehensible. It is perceptible as the product of an analogue instrument: a string, perhaps, or a vibrating surface. However, the original sounds have clearly been manipulated to lose some of their integrity—they slur and dilate in the manner of George Harrison's reversed guitar in The Beatles' 'Tomorrow never knows'.

The instrument is the metallophone of an Indonesian gamelan. Widjaja has digitally manipulated the sound, quantizing the notes into a slow, regular pulse. The traditional timing of this ensemble, which appears to expand and contract against conventional tempo, has been rationalized. Widjaja describes this operation as 'taking a body—for example a skeleton, and reshaping it so that all of the bones are distributed on a grid'. The sound loop depicts the outcome, the physical logic of an organic music being distorted by the requirements of an imposed, alien system.

This operation, like the form of the hut and its cladding, is neither about perfection nor distortion—Widjaja seems to reject both of these historical antecedents in the relation of bodies to buildings. Rather, superposition creates a space of inquiry, and a mode of play. Different forms of organic composition, and their incomplete adaptation to the productive logic of the technical, express a shifting dialectic of terms, a search for the architectures of the personal.

BUILDING, DWELLING

The meeting of *bios* and *techne* occurs once more in *Black—Hut*. This involves a second important architectural referent: the artist's childhood home, in Solo (Surakarta). The latter operates as a counterweight, perhaps, to the work's invocation of the modern tradition. Widjaja recounts that his thoughts have often turned to this building after his dream of Le Corbusier. The memories recurred with a fresh urgency in recent months, as the house has been put up for sale and will likely be demolished by the next owner.

Like many environments of our early years, the Solo house was formative. Widjaja, following Gaston Bachelard, states that one 'cannot really leave the childhood home'. We carry it within us, as a basic archetype—a spatialization of ourselves. The house has functioned, thus, as a kind of mental map; it was also integrally related to Widjaja's identity as member of a Chinese Indonesian family. Its absent presence serves as a structure for both mind and personhood.

In this sense, the work can be read more personally, beyond a general exploration of the relations between building and body. It may also be understood as a sounding of the relationship between Widjaja and his own personal architecture. The work, itself, does not attempt—as in the case of artist Do Ho Suh, or others—to replicate formally the childhood home. Rather, it merely notes its importance. The Solo house registers as a spectral presence, as that enclosure which, like the body, precedes all others. Its character is both carnal and technical; it can, in fact, exist only as a meld of both.

This is, at the same time, a nod to another spectral eminence: Martin Heidegger, and the influence of the essay 'Building dwelling thinking' on Boedi Widjaja. The hut, in its role as a rhetorical architecture—as something both more and less than a building—engages a broad set of social practices that contribute to an idea of dwelling. Following Heidegger, *Black—Hut* proposes a building that exceeds 'construction', narrowly defined. It is one of a number of peri-architectural practices that contribute to a space of being in the world, and serve to integrate mankind with its terrestrial and spiritual context.

This raises profound questions about the act of building; about the zone where the human and the dwelling cannot be disambiguated, where a commerce between the structuring conventions of bodies and architecture takes place. At the same time, Widjaja is staking a claim for the role of art as a building practice, as a site for thinking about dwelling. The artist emphasizes dwelling-making as a kind of forensic practice. Architecture, as a physical thing, is a 'fleshly' undertaking. As a way of thinking, it remains ever within us—a technology of the self.

Joshua Comaroff is an architect and academic geographer. Since 2002, together with Ong Ker-Shing, he has run Lekker Design, a Singapore-based practice.

Interview with Boedi Widjaja

Melanie Pocock & Bala Starr

Melanie Pocock & Bala Starr:

Our early conversations about this project began with you recounting a dream, and memories of your grandfather's home in China, and your own childhood home in Solo (Surakarta). What keeps you returning to these memories, leading to your exploration of them in *Black—Hut*?

Boedi Widjaja:

To clarify, the exploration wasn't of the memories but of the artwork in the making. The memories formed a critical part of the exploration but they were never the true subjects. However, like you said, I repeatedly returned to them.

The memory of my childhood home in Solo (that in turn holds the memory of my grandfather's house in China) is akin to an invisible living image that has been engraved into my being. To recall the house is to trace the complex, subtly shifting contours of the image, sensing its material presence, atmosphere, sounds, smell and texture. The act of making a work, be it a drawing, an installation or live art, activates this mnemonic image. I like how Gaston Bachelard described it: 'the house image would appear to have become the topography of our intimate being'. In this way, the image facilitates access to my deepest bliss and pain, and within a dialectical psychic state, I make art.

It's interesting you mention this state. You expressed something similar in relation to your live art, something akin to entering a kind of trance. Are you conscious of yourself when entering this state, and of making art? Is this a necessary state for you to create work, or is it particular to certain projects, like *Black—Hut*?

Consciousness is high, a state of focus and deep calm. If the mental state is to be compared with a room, it would be one

that evokes feelings of familiarity, safety and possibility. I need to get in there to make art.

In live art, this mental state enables me to be present, grounded, and connected to my surroundings. Space becomes simultaneously abstract and tactile. On one hand, spatial relations between me and the audience, and environment, are flattened into a diagram, like a Malevich painting; while on the other, I feel as if I can manipulate, re-arrange or compose space, through movement, akin to making architecture or a sculpture.

Tell us about what you've described as your lived experience of migration, culture and aesthetics.

Together with my elder sister, I left my home in Solo for Singapore at the age of nine, without my parents, due to ethnic tensions. The event has framed my lived experience of migration. It profoundly marked me with regards to how I think about national and ethnic identities, and I developed an awareness of their political reality.

The experience was overwhelming. Singapore was very different from Solo, in both culture and languages. I learnt English and Chinese, even as Bahasa Indonesia became a language of refuge. The built environment felt severe: unbending, endless straight lines that led to elevated grounds. I moved five times in the first four years alone.

The period's uncertainty must have shaped my aesthetic sensibilities. In live art, my space is movement—falling, leaning, pivoting—each an attempt at grounding. Image is an important subject in my practice. I contemplate, often through drawing, text and photography, its flatness, distance, weight, texture and meaning.

Heidegger, building, dwelling, thinking. *Black—Hut*—a reference to Heidegger's hut on the edge of the Black Forest—reminds us that Heidegger's thinking was rooted in a material understanding and dialogue with the environment in which he lived. Heidegger is also known as one of the most incomprehensible German philosophers. What influence has his writing had on your practice?

'Building dwelling thinking' was the first Heideggerian text that I read in architecture school. For this reason, I tend to consider Heidegger's metaphysics of place and identity with any work that deals directly with the experience of the built environment. I read Heidegger not to study his words but to experience them. His lexicon of ideas—world, earth, *Dasein*, being-with, etc.—are poetic and they suggest a sensitivity towards one's surroundings. Prior to Heidegger, I never knew of the embodiment of spatial experience. This is the primary reason I chose it as one of the reading texts for *Black—Hut*.

You've talked a lot about connections in architectural theory and practice across cultures—Western modernism, Chinese and Indonesian architecture, etc. These are often thought about as contrasting ideals and designs but you also highlight the ways they overlap. Can you describe some of these overlaps? What do you anticipate occurring at those points?

The overlaps are numerous. If one refers to the modernist maxims in Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson's *The international style: Architecture since 1922*, a publication that was also the catalogue of an eponymous exhibition held at MoMA in 1932, they could as well be describing the building principles of Chinese and Javanese architecture. The emphasis on a building's structural parts and their separation from the façade, the free and open plan, frankness in materiality and highly ordered spatial relationships are common features across the architectural ideas of the different cultures.

I anticipate both repulsion and cohesion of ideas where they overlap. In fact, I don't visualise them as vector points that

coincide but as amorphous hybrid spaces. Edward Soja termed this the 'trialectics of spatiality'—a spatial metaphor for the absence of a hegemon, in which different creative forces and tensions coexist; similar in vein to Michel Foucault's concept of 'other spaces' and Homi Bhabha's 'third space'. The dialectics of cultures and ideas are very real to me and I look to such spaces for authentic impulses. To use drawing as metaphor, these cultural overlaps are opportunities to trace out new relationships, thoughts and forms.

Your installation treats concrete in a very different way—not as a fixed, hard material, but something that changes over time, almost 'soft'. Connotations of the material change. Why did you decide to work with concrete for this project?

I had not seen many concrete buildings before I came to Singapore hence concrete is a psychologically complex material for me. Many Western modernist buildings in the twentieth century, perhaps epitomised by Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation, were dramatic architectural expressions in concrete. In my view, concrete has been mythicised as the modern material that brought about the new international architecture—a utopian, immortal spatial idea of order and beauty—when it really is an ancient material.

In *Black—Hut*, I am exploring concrete's textural and compositional possibilities. I am interested to complicate the abstract Cartesian image of concrete, by giving it a corporeal quality. I want to perceive concrete how it is: a changing, breathing, organic material. Concrete is in fact elemental and constituted mostly of sand, stone aggregate, lime, water and air. I recently learnt that engineers calculate structural stress loads on concrete in the same way they do for liquid materials, suggesting a dynamic and fluid material as opposed to the static, inert material that we often think it is.

Your approach to working with the concrete has gone through several changes. At first the concrete was designed to remain 'wet' and slowly cure during the exhibition. Later, your

experiments developed an expressive quality, in which different shades (black, white, grey, etc.) were manipulated almost like paint. The final installation will contain mica, and salt, which will gradually rise to the surface over time. How have these various experiments informed the shape and form of the work as it will be experienced in the gallery?

The experiments were primarily methods for me to sense the material and to know it better. I must have been intuitively seeking ways to complicate concrete's ubiquitous, mechanically produced aesthetics. Looking back, I notice a singular thread: a preoccupation with concrete's fluidity and texture—two material aspects that I will eventually explore in the installation of the work in the gallery.

Your installation has two very different dynamics; on the one hand improvisation and organic movement, 'intuition' as you say, and, on the other, 'thinking architecture', with patterns of concrete following the dimensions and configurations of a square form. The architecture of the LASALLE McNally campus has been described as a 'black box turned inside-out', which suggests a psychological condition of place. Do these different dynamics reconcile in your installation? Do they cohere, or collapse?

Intuitive and rational modes of thought are hardly dichotomous when placed in the context of human agency. Corbusier's visual explorations in paintings and sculptures differed greatly from the calculated, machine aesthetics of his architecture. However, one could see the presence of symmetry, axis and grid in the former two, and idiosyncrasies in projects such as Villa Savoye [1931] or Cité Radieuse [1952].

In the making of *Black—Hut*, what I hope to achieve is a state of dynamic equilibrium, where numerous continuing processes are held in tension. I imagine a system where different dynamics flex and shift as they interact. They cohere, collapse, resonate and dissonate, all at the same time.

What kind of image is *Black—Hut*, as it emerges from these specific conditions and motivations?

There are two images of *Black—Hut*, one that I think about prior to its installation and the other which I have yet to perceive, post-installation. The former is an image that feels rudimentary, spare, direct, stripped to its bare bones, like a modern line drawing that contemplates its prehistoric origins. I also sense the image's centre oscillating subtly, between two grids that align and misalign periodically.

In considering the post-installation image of *Black—Hut*, the black box metaphor comes to mind. A black box system is essentially opaque and contained; yet for every input, one is guaranteed an output, suggesting a functioning set of dynamics within its enclosure. I would like to imagine that when we turn a black box inside-out, we discover a void, in other words, a system that operates out of invisibility. That is my test for the installation, whether it renders an invisible image, out of its fullness.

Architecture is not only 'animated' through the projection of personal memories. It is as if the installation itself is a body, one that 'secretes' over time. Perhaps living in a tropical climate makes us more aware of time and speed—mould turns concrete into a garden eventually. What do you hope people will feel and experience physically when they are inside the installation? And what do you hope these experiences will create, or mean for visitors? Or do you only indirectly engage viewers' experiences and as a single part of the work not intended as its main outcome?

Architecture is historically performed through several modalities, most commonly through image, text and architectonic space—each a partial existence. *Black—Hut* is built to be experienced in space, hence making the visitor's experience an important consideration.

The spatial configuration of the installation takes into account existing elements of the gallery. By superimposing two plans—the work's and the gallery's—I hope the installation functions like a harness, pulling the gallery space unto itself, building up intensity. The external metal frame directs the visitor's approach to the gallery and, materially, it contrasts with the gallery's glass façade. In the

gallery, I worked to achieve a meditative atmosphere, using light, sound and tactility, to subtly evoke a sense of personal interiority. To draw the visitor closer to the environment, subtle gaps are left between the installation's form and the columns, walls and corners of the gallery.

Can we circle back slightly? How do you think about the place (or role) of an artist these days? You do have an unusual vantage point in the sense that you have not followed the usual pathways of an academic art training.

I was formally trained in architecture and had practised graphic design for a decade before getting into visual art. I had my moments of doubt of course. However, I saw the capacious space of contemporary art as one that could contain different modes of practices.

As an artist, I am first and foremost drawn to contemporary art's open-ended, multicultural global forum where current issues—anthropocene, the migrant crisis, globalisation, artificial intelligence, identity politics, etc.—are discussed. The discursive mode is at the same time accompanied by art's self-reflexivity, an ongoing ontological crisis since the twentieth century. Based on my experience, the overlap between art, architecture and design is found within scopes of conceptual techniques and aesthetic skillsets. The disciplines, however, are distinguished by their discourses. I inevitably connect them, bringing perspectives, histories and conceptual concerns across architecture and design into artistic discourse.

Many would argue that the globalisation of the art world is increasing the dominance of academia in the scene. Do you think about these things? Do you see yourself in relation to the broader mechanics of the art world?

Yes, I do think about them although I try not to tie (it's tempting to) my practice too tightly to the mechanics that you speak about. I follow my instinct, do my best to produce works that matter within the contexts that I genuinely connect with.

The dominance of academia in art is, in my opinion, symptomatic of public-

private partnerships—a type of capitalist relation between the private sector and the state—that are formed and operated on a global scale, with art as commodity. There are many dynamics at play, of which the institutionalisation and internationalisation of art, through the mechanics of the state and privately funded biennales and museum shows, play a big role. Nation branding, global consumption and commercial opportunities, and art's cultural cachet, all contribute towards the urgency to produce institutionally branded, and internationally understood art in large quantity. Biennales, international art fairs, private museums and big retrospectives of established artists explode in number for this reason. In this model, curatorial production becomes urgent, it being positioned at both ends of the production line—as the setter of criteria and quality control respectively.

The current model both empowers and disempowers the artist. The positive side being that as an artist today, one can more easily connect with an international network of practitioners and cultural workers, via global art's infrastructures. This stimulates and feeds the discourse that I mentioned earlier. The flip side is that at any one time, only a selection of issues, artistic media and discursive contexts is made visible. Learning to navigate without losing one's authentic impulses is critical for any artist who does not wish to lose their agency and the integrity of their practice.

You've talked about your own space as being one of 'movement—falling, leaning, pivoting', where you suggest 'authenticity' as a possibility of dialectical thinking and even intercultural dialectics. Is this a slightly antithetical logic if you begin at the point where popular sentiment associates culture with belonging and identity, and describes these as 'authentic'?

Identity is not a monolith. It is open, manifold and in the constant process of metabolising. When we contemplate belonging, it is more likely than not that we see contradictions, frictions and differences in places or societies that we feel attached to. Authenticity, in my

opinion, is not achieved by streamlining culture. Right-wing politics is not going to truly solve the deterioration of social ties and feelings of personal isolation. We simply need to connect better. Each one of us is already a converging point of numerous lines of relations. We can reflect these invisible lines, direct them outwards, like rays of daylight along boulevards in a radiant city.

Biography

Boedi Widjaja

Born Solo (Surakarta), Indonesia, 1975; emigrated to Singapore 1984; lives in Singapore

2000 Bachelor of Architectural Studies (Hons), University of New South Wales, Sydney

Selected solo exhibitions

- 2016 *Imaginary homeland: 我是不是該安靜地走開*, Objectifs Centre for Photography and Film, Singapore
- 2014 *Drawing cage*, The u Factory, Singapore
Path. 6, Unpacking my library. 书城, Jendela (Visual Arts Space), Esplanade, Singapore
- 2012 *Path. 1, The white city*, The Substation, Singapore
Sungai, sejarah 河流, 历史, 源, Yellow River Arts Centre Singapore Base

Live art works

- 2015 *Path. 7, New ground*
- 2014 *Cradle song* (with Dawn Fung and Naomi Huang)
My drawing is better than your drawing (with Wong Lip Chin)
- 2013 *One and a half*
Path. 3, The lode in my heart
- 2012 *Palimpsest* (with David Letellier)
Path. 1, The white city
Path. 2, Travelling body (with Pranoto)
- 2011 *INSITU Fort Canning Hill: Earth moves* (with David Letellier)

Selected group exhibitions

- 2016 *Betwixt festival: Art & bytes*, ArtScience Museum, Singapore
Derwent Art Prize 2016, Mall Galleries, London
For an image, faster than light, Yinchuan Biennale, Museum of Contemporary Art Yinchuan, China
- 2015 *From east to the Barbican*, Barbican Centre, London
London calling, British High Commissioner's Residence, Eden Hall, Singapore
Infinity in flux: The unending loop that bonds the artist and the audience, Art Jog 8, Taman Budaya Yogyakarta (TBY), Indonesia
53rd International show, San Diego Art Institute, CA, United States
Potong ice-cream \$2, Latent Spaces booth, Art Stage Singapore, Marina Bay Sands
Sovereign Asian Art Prize finalists' exhibition, SOHO 189 Art Lane, Hong Kong
- 2014 *DiverseCity*, National Museum of Singapore
A drawing show, Yeo Workshop, Singapore
Print lab, Grey Projects, Singapore
Singapore, Inc., Unit 21, The Lorong 24A Shophouse Series, Singapore
SeptFest 2014, The Substation, Singapore
- 2013 *Closure*, organised by Free of Charge Art (FOCA), #1-52, Block 8 Teban Gardens Rd, Singapore
Displacements, 13 Wilkie Tce, Singapore
Masterpieces, National Museum of Singapore
Passports: Through the red dot into other worlds, Unit 11, The Lorong 24A Shophouse Series, Singapore

Further reading

- Ciclitira, s (ed.) 2015, 'Boedi Widjaja', in *Singapore eye: Contemporary Singapore art*, Skira, Milan, pp. 242–5.
- Davis, T 2014, 'Chat: Boedi Widjaja', *JUICE (Singapore)*, 28 November, viewed 26 September 2016, <<http://www.juice.com.sg/navigate/chat-boedi-widjaja-0/>>.
- Fung, D 2016, 'Interview with Boedi Widjaja', *Harvest & Wine*, Singapore, viewed 26 September 2016, <<http://www.harvestandwine.com/category/interviews/>>.
- Ho, L 2014, 'Boedi Widjaja: FutureGreat Asia', *ArtReview Asia*, autumn & winter, p. 85.
- Ho, L 2014, 'Interview: Boedi Widjaja', in Ho, L & Yeo, A (eds), *A drawing show*, Yeo Workshop, Singapore, pp. 39–41.
- Koh, A & Widjaja, B 2012, *INSITU Fort Canning Hill*, Beautiful/Banal, Singapore.
- Muhammad, Z 2012, 'The forking paths of memory', in *Path. 1, The white city*, The Substation, Singapore.
- Tiong, L 2013, 'Memories and landfills: The lode in my heart', in *How do we deal with constant change?*, Free of Charge Artshow (FOCA), Singapore, pp. 18–19.
- Widjaja, B 2015, 'Paths of memory, identity and belonging', in Hartung, R (ed.), *Singapore: Insights from the inside—volume II*, Singapore International Foundation, pp. 116–19.
- Zhou, YP 2012, 'Boedi Widjaja's journey of new paths', *Lianhe Zaobao*, 11 October.

- 2012 *Bains Numériques #7*, Centre des Arts d'Enghien-les-Bains, Enghien-les-Bains, France
Celeste Prize 2012, Centrale Montemartini, Rome
DiverseCity, Singapore Art Museum at 8Q
31st UOB painting of the year, Singapore Art Museum
- 2011 *INSITU.ASIA*, organised by Beautiful/Banal, National Geographic Store, Regent Street, London
INSITU Fort Canning Hill, organised by Beautiful/Banal, Salon Space@Festival Village, Singapore
- 2010 *Centre to periphery*, Japan Creative Centre, Singapore
TITAN illustration in design, organised by ESAD College of Art and Design, Matosinhos Municipal Gallery, Portugal
- 2009 *Space, flat*, Night and Day Gallery, Singapore
- 2002 *Fascination*, Singapore Art Museum
- 2000 *Harbour/Metropolis*, Museum of Sydney

Commissions and residencies

- 2014 Residency, DRAWinternational, Caylus, France
- 2013 Commission, Masterpieces, Samsung, Singapore
- 2012 *Asemic text*, commission, Art in Transit, Land Transport Authority, Beauty World MRT Station, Singapore
Logo commission, Yellow River Arts Centre, Yinchuan, China
Sungai, sejarah 河流, 历史, 源, commission, Yellow River Arts Centre, Yinchuan, China
- 2008 Residency, Lingua Comica 3: Asia–Europe Cultural Dialogue through Comics, organised by the Asia–Europe Foundation, Kyoto, Japan

Boedi Widjaja: Black—Hut

Published by the Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore on the occasion of the exhibition *Boedi Widjaja: Black—Hut*, 28 October 2016 to 1 February 2017.

Curators: Melanie Pocock and Bala Starr

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and breadth of every building, the dimensions
and curve of the roofline, in short, every
architecture ^{SPACE}, not in pursuit of an architectural
circulation (derived from the principles which
of A LIVING ORGANISM, and is material ^{ETERNAL},
and admits not of reconstruction ^{DESTRUCTION}
provides an overexposed foundation ^{HOME} for
without the help of history ^{SENSE}, by a kind
which we behold as in a dream, say of all
be in some place and occupy a space, but
which has no existence. *Tanah, air**, land and
of the same kind, relating to the present ^{TRUE} and
we have only this dreamlike sense, and we are
the truth about them. It is as if man came
the millions of years during which beings
Protopus, Telanthropus, Sinanthropus, whose
other than men, stand erect, use a tibia in
the use of its fragments—until it is stones they
deals with things, thus distance themselves
from them, and learn to recognise destruction and
the image, since the BLACK—HUT ^{REALITY}, after
it, and it exists ever as the fleeting shadow
of another [i.e. in mass, surface, plan] ^{SPACE},
or it could not be at all. Under the bright
cypresses must be there to punctuate it.
the juxtaposition of colours related to the
of a single colour; vindicating the nature of
[i.e. the image and space] are different they
so be one and also two at the same time.