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issue #6
aeolian interiors

EDITORIAL

Writing in 1969, architecture historian Reyner Banham complains about the silence on mechanical services in contemporary architecture discourse, most specifically machines for the making of interior weather. Banham's book *The Architecture of the Well-Tempered Environment* is full of little arguments against the superiority of the visual, that is, the exterior aspect of a building rather than, for example, its fabricated interior weather. His work today comes across as an apology for technology before an era of environmental or social concerns stemming from it.

The present publication for *Taming the Horror Vacui* takes a less polemic yet more critical tone to explore fabricated climates. It follows *A Seedless Grape - Conditions for Air*, a talk by research-based artist James Beckett, who was invited by Rib to engage in conversation with Haseeb Ahmed and present his ongoing investigations into the subject of air conditioning.

This session resonated in the long-term program at Rib especially due to its connection with the walk through Rotterdam led by city planner Emiel Arends (June 2020), an event in *Taming the Horror Vacui* in which the city was explored through architectural interventions aimed at wind control. With this publication, aeolian landscapes leap into aeolian interiors, just like those simulated by Alessandro Gambale and BuildWind presented in the previous issue.

The symbolism of the wind between natural and cultural phenomena bounces within the space of built environments, hitting the history of industrial progress and corporate culture. These are the typical topics in Beckett's artwork. Stemming from his residency in a former New York printing factory, a place that was early on equipped with air conditioning, Beckett's talk addressed this technology as an "artefactual event." This concept from

philosopher Simon J. Evnine refers to an event as an ephemeral entity, which, in the case of air conditioning is "manufactured, distributed then dispersed" to use Beckett's terminology.

Continuing Ahmed's series of experiments in and with the wind tunnel at Rib, the two artists set out to produce together a testing model of an early air conditioning technology, the Coolrest. The wind tunnel at Rib facilitated the activation of this model from both a physical perspective (the actual visualization of air in and around the Coolrest) but also from an intellectual point of view: the generative interaction between two artists prompted by the technological apparatus of the wind tunnel.

With this publication we give an account of the event in *Taming the Horror Vacui* through a series of original contributions. We invited curator Anik Fournier to comment on the image of the wind tunnel test with the Coolrest. With attention to contemporary environmental discourses, her text delves into the topic of air conditioning through the philosophical framework of Simon J. Evnine. We asked artist Leandros Tsolas to annotate an image of a recent work by Ahmed about indoor air circulation. Serendipitously making a link to the first session of *Taming the Horror Vacui* and the work of Michèle Matyn on the spiritual origin of the wind, Tsolas' text explores the climatic conditions of caves as religious and culturally manufactured places at once. We also included a tale by one of the inhabitants of Charlois, who refers to the psychological effects of opening a window and let the air circulate indoor. We published the collaborative table top drawing by Ahmed and Beckett, along with a reflection on revolving doors. Lastly, we give a few updates on the current state of the installation at Rib.

Rotterdam, April 2021

Cover image: section model of the Coolrest by Haseeb Ahmed and James Beckett, before being tested in the wind tunnel at Rib. The model was produced with recycled materials from a decommissioned wind tunnel.

FOREGROUNDING INFRASTRUCTURAL INTIMACY

by Anik Fournier

Looking at the image of a black four-poster bed, covered by a slick, angular tent that rises to the same height as the beautifully carved posts, the small object appears both incredibly elegant and inordinately strange. The bed is a fragment that emerged from artist James Beckett's research into the history of industrialized air conditioning. During his lecture within the context of Haseeb Ahmed's *Taming the Horror Vacui* program at Rib Rotterdam (January 2021), Beckett spoke of how in 1934, the Crosely Radio Corporation in Louisville dabbled in non-radio domestic appliances and came up with the 'Coolrest', an air-conditioned tent that could be erected atop individual beds. Despite its affordable price, the product spawned little appeal because people found the idea of sleeping under a covering claustrophobic; as a result, it quickly faded into oblivion. Beckett and Ahmed produced a model of the Coolrest and ran several experiments with it in the wind tunnel at Rib.

Staying with the image of the model, what is intriguing is its capacity to hold contradictory readings. Despite its size, our familiarity with the object immediately interpolates a bodily response: we can imagine being in this bed and the feeling is not readily comforting. This familiarity and realistic rendering are supported and simultaneously undone by the sharpness of details; the features and sculptural elements are precise and yet their precision and monochromatic rendering tip the balance into abstraction. And just as the relation to the bed's scale is unsettled in the act of perception, so too is the sense of a clear historical reference: is this bed from the past or the future? The ongoing slippage in readings aligns with how architecture historian Paolo Patelli, in a previous session of *Taming the Horror Vacui*, described the nature of models as simplified artifacts that mediate between the real and the abstract. For Patelli, models are not representations of entities out in reality or of abstract ideas, but generative investigations of new realities and imaginaries.

Beckett's historiography of industrial air conditioning dovetails these claims, proposing to see air conditioning as what philosopher Simon J. Evnine calls a hylomorphically complex artifact. Evnine's theory for understanding artifacts, objects and events, revisits the Aristotelian branch of hylomorphism that posits entities as composites of form and matter. However, Evnine's theory develops an amorphic and met-



The model of the Coolrest designed by Haseeb Ahmed and James Beckett and tested in the wind tunnel at Rib (February 2021). The Coolrest was an air-conditioned tent to be erected above a bed in order to regulate temperature. Introduced by the Crosely Radio Corporation in the US in 1934, it was a commercial failure and was soon replaced by modern air conditioning. The test with the Coolrest was carried out at Rib specifically for Beckett's talk moderated by Ahmed.

abolic approach that privileges matter without recourse to the concept of form. Entities are understood to be materially constituted, but non-reducible to their materiality, being the result of coinciding processes of intentions, functions, and characteristic behaviors. An entity's relation to its matter can and invariably does transform over time. [1] Hence, an understanding of an artifact goes hand

in hand with understanding its history.

Taking air conditioning as an hylomorphically complex artifact becomes a productive methodological tool, emphasizing how what we experience as comfortable, cooled air on a hot day is a manufactured object. It is the result of an intention and a process to condition air in a specific way, and it



The Milam Building in downtown San Antonio, Texas. When completed in 1928, it was the first fully air-conditioned high rise office building in the world. The press at the time praised the AC fabricator and supplier Carrier Corporation for being able to "manufacture weather" and "make every day a good day" inside the building.

genealogy of the realist impulse through the *longue durée* of industrial capitalism. Their goal: to glean what forms could serve to mediate the present where the realities of climate strain our epistemologies, ontologies, aesthetics and existence. John Ruskin with Karl Marx serve as unexpected founding figures in this genealogy. For Ruskin, the goal of realism and the detailed observation of the natural world were not in the service of mimesis, but rather for comprehending the world's infinite variation of form. In his writings, Marx sought to capture the human industrialization of planetary resources through recourse to figuration, often conflating natural and historical forces. For the authors, the most productive strands of realism in the present are those that provide sites "where the objectivity of Ruskin's realism co-mingles with the material substrate of Marx's planetary force, *in situ*, *in bodies*, *in minds*, and *in history* all at once." [2] In other words, a realist aesthetics must include our entangled subjectivities within the picture.

The slippages at work in Beckett and Ahmed's Coolrest model embody this aesthetics of entanglement. In his lecture, Beckett spoke about the first instance of industrial air conditioning in a former printing plant in Brooklyn that now houses the International Studio and Curatorial Program (ISCP New York), where he is currently a resident. Significantly, in this first installation the intention was not to make the space more comfortable for the workers, but to ensure quality printing. Since its inception, industrial air conditioning has not targeted individuals but entire spaces resulting in an energy intensive infrastructure that has evolved to the point that it has largely become invisible, operating in the background of our daily lives. The Coolrest model radically shifts our focus by bringing the infrastructural background to the fore, into intimate proximity with our bodies. The model mediates past, present and possible futures, imaging an attunement of subjects to their self-fashioned environments within a warming world.

has, as Beckett's research makes clear, a sophisticated material infrastructure. Consistent with the idea that artifacts are generative, Beckett's tracing of the developments of industrialized air conditioning exposes its entanglement with, and reproduction of socio-political, cultural and economic structures. Yet, looking at air conditioning as a composite artifact opens a space to imagine

other forms of air-conditioning that have comparable functions and characteristic behaviors, but are dependent on different, less damaging material infrastructures, such as the Coolrest bed.

In *Climate Realism: The Aesthetics of Weather and Atmosphere in the Anthropocene*, Lynn Badia, Marija Cetinić, and Jeff Diamanti trace an idiosyncratic

[1] Simon J. Evnine, *Making Objects and Events: A Hylomorphic Theory of Artifacts, Actions, and Organisms*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, p.22.

[2] Lynn Badia, Marija Cetinić and Jeff Diamanti, 'Introduction', *Climate Realism: The Aesthetics of Weather and Atmosphere in the Anthropocene*, New York: Routledge, 2021, p.14.

CHARLOIS (WIND)TALES

Mostly I think... it has a lot to do with uhm, that I'm inside. That I feel this... this need to go outside, once in a while.

..

The windows should be open against each other, the wind blowing through our living room... But not only the house should freshen up like that, also a little bit my head... you know.

By, well, by going outside for instance, or by taking a walk or, well, letting the sunlight fall uh, fall on my head. Uhm... that is probably necessary to keep some of the pressure off or something! I try to keep the stress off from all the things I have to do for uni, all kinds of deadlines. Try to not think too much about the what-do-you-call-it... the preparations for my exam.

To think about nothing. And uh... get a sort of... helicopter view this way, or a new view on things, to uh, to think. To "get" what I am doing now, and not to think too much about future plans, where my fascinations lie, if I actually have those, which uh, which could also be untrue. I want to leave those doubts uhm, leave them behind. And not have to do things for a bit. At least once a day. Or something.

This story is told by Karlijn, inhabitant of Charlois, Rotterdam. Edited and transcribed by Jakob van Klinken.

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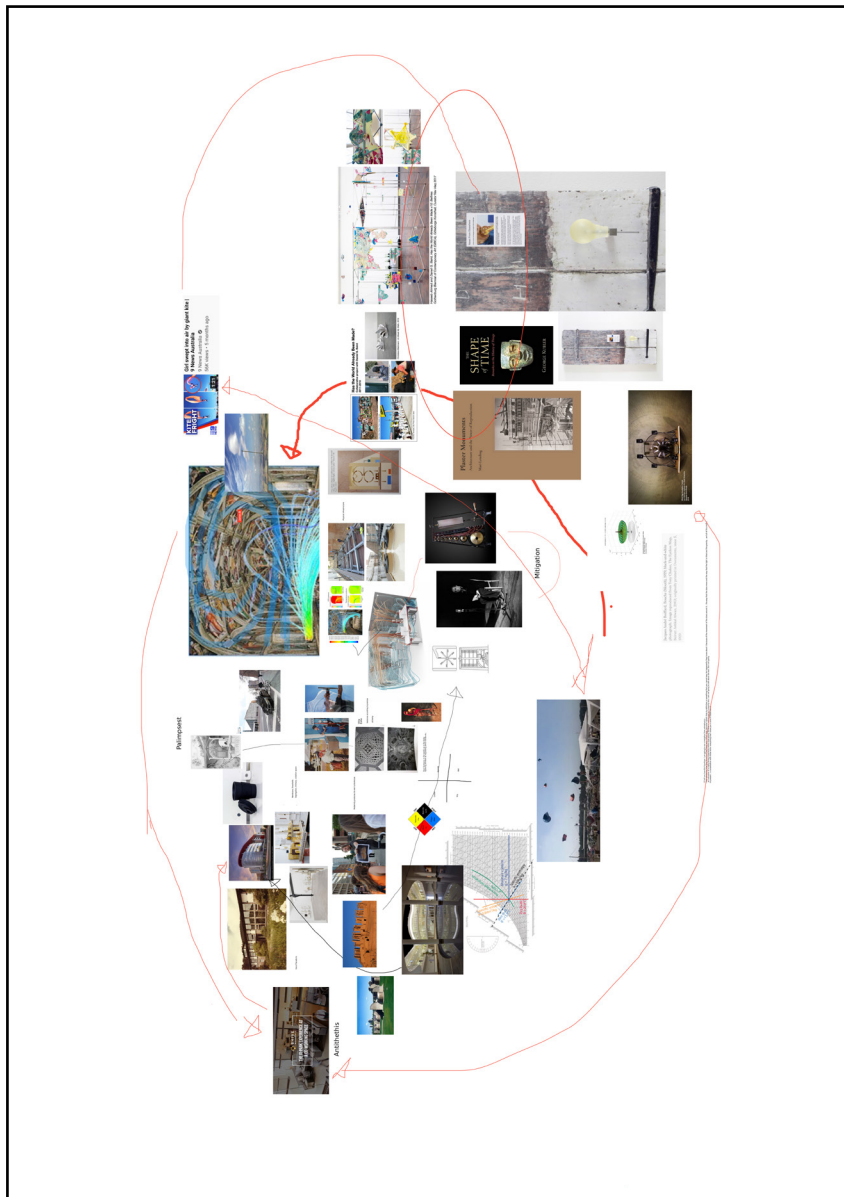
Edison Electric Institute, 750 Third Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017

This is the Lennox Total Comfort air-treating unit. It heats, cools, cleans the air, and controls humidity... electrically. Fits anywhere, horizontally or vertically.

"The Name of the Game is Living"

1968 Lennox "Breathe that Great Outdoors Indoors" Vintage Print Ad. This artifact was presented in *A Seedless Grapes - Conditions for Air* by James Beckett, an online artist talk and conversation for *Taming the Horror Vacui*. Says Beckett: "With this moving of ice [in the 19th century ice harvest] to create weather elsewhere, we see that every air is a palimpsest, or a reconfiguration of other airs, a construct, a new and changing configuration. As a reference to another season or climate, air-conditioning can here be seen as a synthesis or mimicry of some remote, ideal format of weather, a faux. Its presence has come to establish a kind of norm, resulting in expectations and entitlement. What was initially a relief and exception has become a standard."

This tale from Charlois is a glimpse of student life. It talks about the obligation to remain indoor during exams and because of the pandemic. The open windows are symbols of liberation. The wind running between them is the beneficial "fresh air" that eases minds and spirits.



The collaborative digital table top by Haseeb Ahmed and James Beckett, March 2021. References and artworks are combined in a spiraling diagram.

REVOLVING DOORS

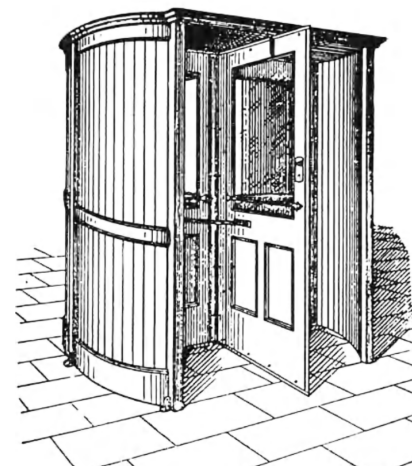
Archaic technology, wind control system, threshold between inside and outside, revolving doors bring the potential of bridging artifact of fabricated weather at urban scale (repeating entry points on ground level) and buildings (the interior air conditions).

The van Kannel revolving door unit in its most inexpensive and basic form, 1900.

The nuisance value of the thermal siphon effect in tall buildings went beyond waste of heat however: the suction could pull in bad weather and street dirt at ground level, could make doors difficult to manage, and whisk papers from desks. The ultimate solution was to be controlled mechanical ventilation of a sealed building envelope, but a simple and ingenious Victorian solution was to hand by the end of the eighties—the revolving door.

This was hardly a novel invention, but it was in this period that it was brought to its present level of operational perfection and was made a piece of standard equipment, specifiable ex catalogue, and it was for these refinements that Theophilus van Kannel received the John Scott medal of the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia in 1889. The van Kannel Company's slogan 'Always Closed' ('a person passing through the door pushes any one of its four wings forward, the wing behind him arriving at the curved side wall before the wing in front leaves it') explains well enough why their catalogue could claim better ventilation control and greater uniformity of temperature within the building as a consequence of using their revolving door. It was an effective environmental filter that admitted persons but not the wind, a draught-lock if not an airlock, that strangled violent up-currents at birth.

From Rayner Banham, *The Architecture of the Well-Tempered Environment*. (1969) London: The Architectural Press, p. 74.



THE CLIMATE OF CAVES

by Leandros Ntolas

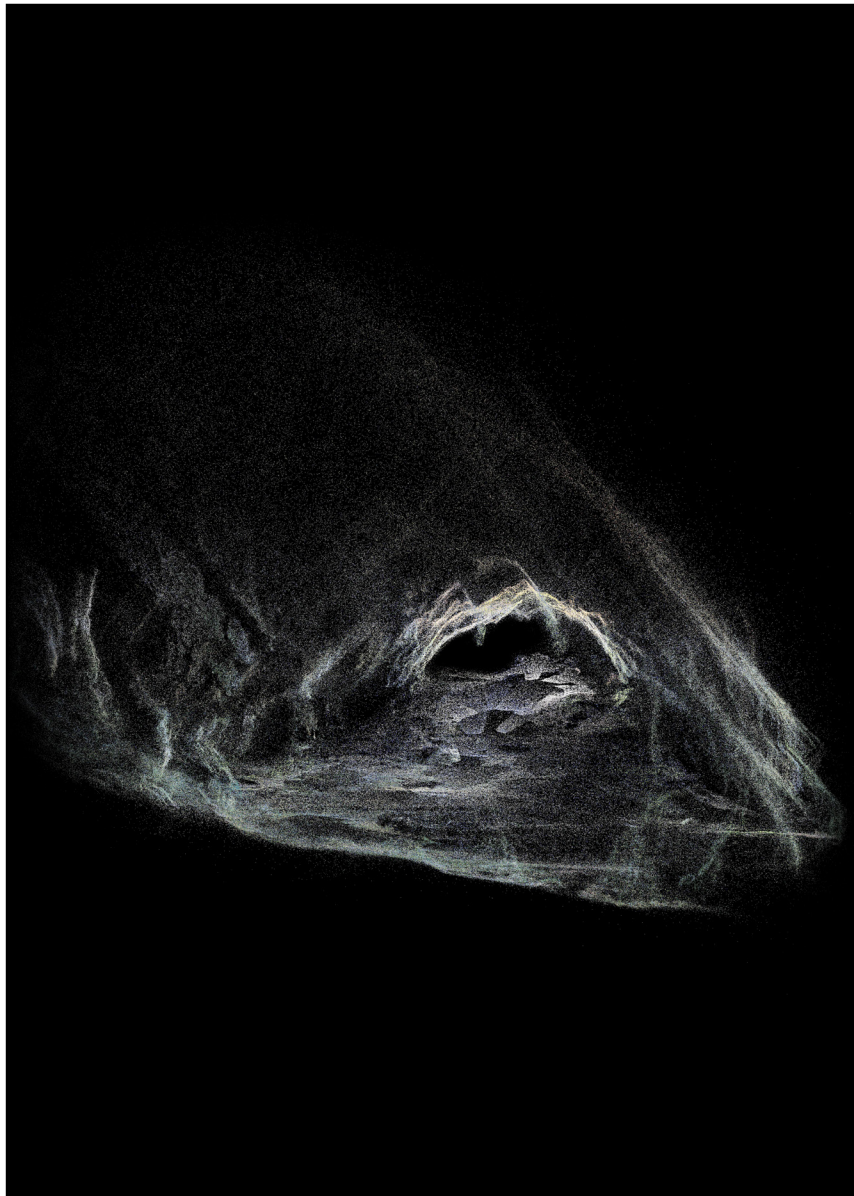
Visita Interiora Terrae Rectificando Invenies Occultum Lapidem.

(Visit the interior of the earth and [by] purifying [yourself] you will find the hidden stone).

- Well-known alchemical motto, which forms the acronym "V.I.T.R.I.O.L."

Encountering a cave in the wilderness—one untouched by human activity—and descending into it, can be a unique and visceral experience. Scouting for caves and religious spaces in Greece during a recent research trip, I witnessed that the transition from the bright, warm and dry environment of the Greek countryside, into the dark, cool and damp interior environment of a cave, never failed to constitute a near-mystical, out-of-the-ordinary event. The mouth of the cave acted as a border between realities and upon entering—instantly cut off from the external world and reality—I would be confronted with some sort of primordial fear joined with a feeling of sublime awe. Upon exiting the cave, back to the light, I would feel rejuvenated; to exaggerate a bit, as if born anew. In an uncanny way, the experience resembled that of entering a quiet, dark and serene religious space.

Cave meteorology, the study of the interior weather of caves, can be quite a complex thing depending on factors such as the depth of the cave, distance from the mouth, and number of openings into the body of the cave. Nevertheless, it is safe to say that most caves are naturally air-conditioned and 'air-purified' spaces. They maintain a stable temperature of around 10-15 degrees Celsius all-year-round and in contrast to common belief they contain healthy, clean air. This is due to the high levels of humidity and negative air ionization which cause dust, fine airborne particles and allergens to stick to the surfaces of the interior and not float around, thus rendering the air very clean. Negative air ions (NAI) are air molecules with a negative electric charge. They are created in many ways, for example by UV sunlight, waterfalls and waves (Lenard effect), or cosmic rays in the atmosphere; in caves they are caused by radioactive minerals present on the wet rock surfaces. The presence of NAIs is credited for helping overcome chronic and seasonal depression and for increasing mental clarity and overall well-being. Although there is no reliable scientific evidence for these benefits, the market has been flooded with air-ionizers, domestic appliances producing NAIs inside your home, as



Sparse point cloud visualization of the interior of the Corycian Cave in Greece by Leandros Ntolas. The 3D reconstruction of the cave was produced using a technique called photogrammetry. In his text, Ntolas connects caves and their specific interior climates to religious experiences and architecture.

well as ozone, an unwanted and potentially lung-harming by-product of the ionization process. Due to their special air climate, in some countries caves are used to cure chronic respiratory illnesses like asthma by having patients being exposed to their climate for periods of time: a debatable practice named 'speleotherapy' (from the Greek word for cave *speleon*).

The use of caves by humans has been consistent for thousands of years; caves constituted sacred space used for ritualistic purposes, and not so much habitable space as it was previously thought. In the example of ancient Greece, caves played an important role as places of worship, most often connected with initiation rites, divination, and altered states of consciousness. Subsequently



Installation view of Haseeb Ahmed's *Ruach not Rauch*, a commissioned work for the 2019 Werkleitz Festival, held in Dessau, Germany for the 100 year anniversary of the Bauhaus. The shot is from an air shaft of the ruined mausoleum of the Askania royal family. In this work, Ahmed reactivated the ventilation system of the building by connecting it with a nearby wind tunnel. Restoring the interior weather and air circulation of the mausoleum hinted at the power of the wind to bring things to life according to many cultures. Photo credit: Matthias Knoch.

artificial caverns underneath temples were used with the same purposes, created in such way so as to imitate the phenomenological qualities of caves. It has been suggested that a common technique used in these practices and spaces was sensory deprivation, as caverns and grottoes provided an easy way to achieve total or near total isolation. Modern research demonstrates

that reduction of external stimuli can lead to visual hallucinations and altered states of consciousness. A second, less used technique was utilizing the natural exhalation of psychotropic gases from the ground in specific locations, in order to induce trance-like states.

A well-known example is the Oracle of Delphi, where the high priestess Pythia

would give riddled oracles while sitting in the adyton (the place where one does not enter), a dark chamber underneath the temple of Apollo, and enter a prophetic trance by inhaling natural intoxicating gases which exited the ground at that specific spot. According to the geographer Strabo (c. 64 B.C.–25 A.D.), "the seat of the oracle is a cavern hollowed down in the depths... From which arises *pneuma* (breath, vapor, gas) that inspires a divine state of possession." (Geography 9.3.5).

In Plato's allegory, people are imprisoned inside a cave, perceiving as their only reality the shadows of objects, *eidola* (ghosts) projected by an artificial light source. Eventually a prisoner—the philosopher—manages to escape the cave and see the light of the sun, being a metaphor for Truth, and the 'real' objects that it reveals; the Ideas of Plato. On the contrary, throughout history of humankind and religion, people have always sought the 'sacred' darkness of caves, or of their own beings through meditation and introspection practices, to shut off their senses from the external "illusory" reality in order to come in contact with some higher meaning and truth.

The dark environment of a cave can be suggested to be one of the main archetypes of religious architecture. Examples are ample, from funerary architecture of megalithic cultures like dolmens and burial mounds, to rock-cut architecture across cultures, or more recent ones such as Byzantine or Gothic churches. The way I like to view the interiors of these spaces is as highly composed or orchestrated versions of caves, whose entropy has been reduced greatly by human intervention and design, but whose core elements, such as heavy materiality, low light conditions, sense of space and scale, distinct interior atmospheric conditions (low relative temperature and presence of fumes by ritual incense burning) and very importantly acoustic properties (silence and long reverberation times), remain very similar. By retaining such qualities, these spaces, working hand in hand with religious faith, are able to re-create the primordial atmosphere of sublime awe that humans have experienced in caves, thus rendering them sacred and detached from everyday profane reality.

THE STATE OF THE INSTALLATION

The current installation by Haseeb Ahmed at Rib is reaching completion. The program *Taming the Horror Vacui* will continue for two more months and the largest elements in the space at Rib have been added.

Until June 2021, the library of the wind will be enriched by new test models and other relevant objects. The board will further present important references. More table tops drawings will be added. The wind tunnel will be again activated for new experiments in collaboration with guests.

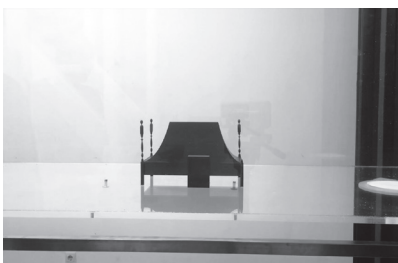
The next issue of this publication will present the most comprehensive documentation of the installation *Taming the Horror Vacui* yet.



A recent outdoor view of Rib with the current state of *Taming the Horror Vacui* installation. Photo credit: Sander van Wetten, 2021.



Detail of the current installation by Haseeb Ahmed at Rib in Rotterdam, April 2021. The documentation table has been used to photograph table top drawings made in collaboration with guests of the *Taming the Horror Vacui* program, as well as models for the wind tunnel fabricated by visitors to Rib in the context of their participation to different workshops-notably the one organized by Olivier Chazot for the inauguration of the wind tunnel. Photo credit: Sander van Wetten, 2021.



The model of the Coolrest produced by Ahmed is tested in the wind tunnel at Rib in view of James Beckett's talk .

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