



Laundry, Presence and Production

a sundry of process

lim kun yi james

Abstract

Our clothes cling onto our bodies with a degree of intimacy unknown even to the closest of relationships. These garments act as a second skin, providing a barrier between our derma and the environment, insulating us from the torrid heat, keeping us clean from unsanitary matter and shielding us from UV amongst a multitude of functions. Yet the puritanical treatment of the maintenance and labour involved in upkeeping these prized possessions belies the value of both laundry and its caretakers. Clean clothes are seen as paradoxically contaminating the environment. Yet it is only when they are visible in the community, that they enable us to know when laundry has been left out for an unusual period of time, prompting one to do a welfare check on a neighbour.

The compression of laundry infrastructure from dedicated facilities into compact ubiquitous machines within the home and its peripheries, has engendered accessibility and convenience, whilst simultaneously naturalising and chronically devaluing the labour. Only foregrounded when it accumulates, or decommissions parts of the home during inclement weather, space for this invisible labour becomes a concession relegated to the unseen, compressed and immutable recesses of the home. Laundry and its processes, however, occupy a cyclical spatial and temporal presence, silenced but silently carving out latent spaces within the home. It serves as an indicator of interior microclimates and rituals, amplifying its role as a social condenser. The fragrance of UV, flittering garments in a breeze, and calls of impending rain echoing through the height of the block, instantiate my fascination with the observed aesthetic experiences and time-scales of laundry.

Key Words

invisible economy, time scales, interior microclimates, atmospheres, presence

Research Questions

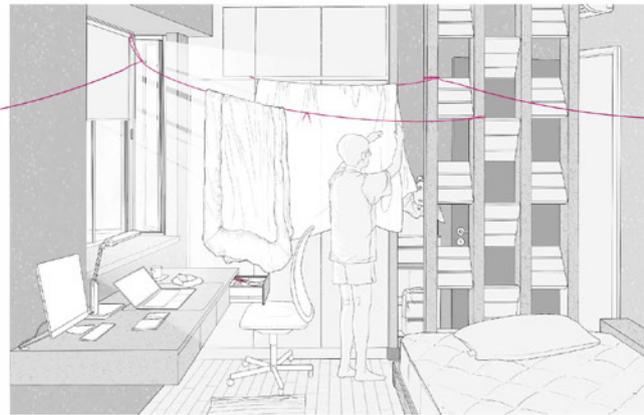
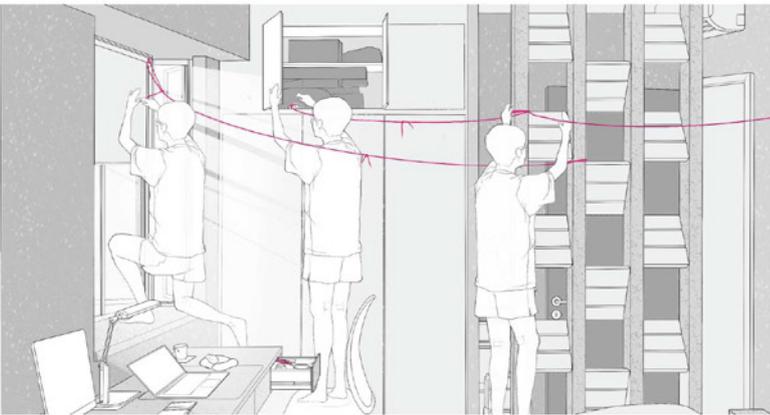
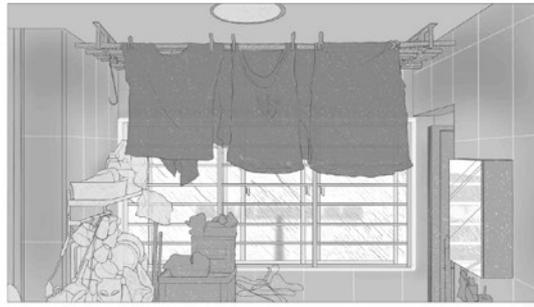
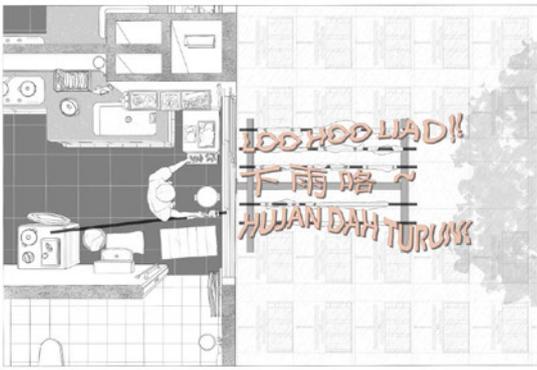
1. How can laundry as an informal climate indicator produce its own microclimates for the purposes of production and reproduction, and how may we represent these opportunities within the domestic sphere? Going beyond maintenance art and proposing a generation of its own capital, through spatial augmentation.
2. How can we make legible, the productive qualities of laundry, by foregrounding its visibility, and conferring value to an otherwise invisible labour, as it is contained within and spills out of the home?
3. As spatial hierarchies and thresholds for reproductive labour are perpetually reproduced within the home and its peripheries, how does laundry negotiate the tension of occupying a spatial and temporal presence in shared social environments like the corridor or the kitchen?

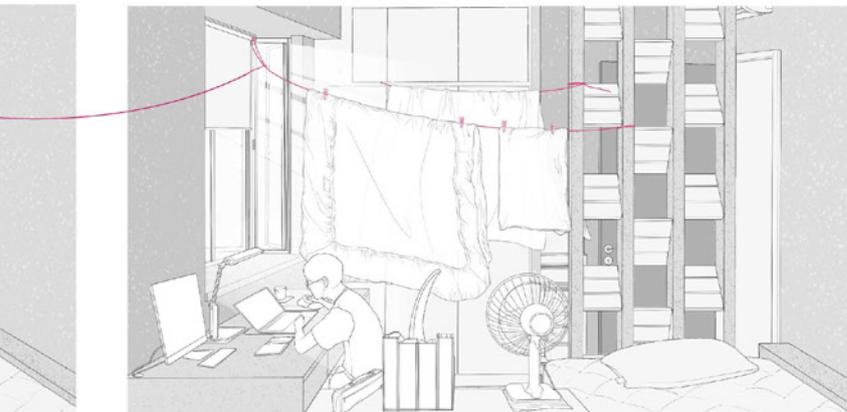
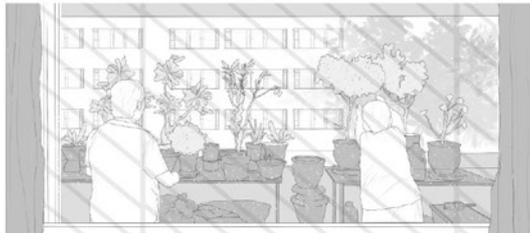


Scene 0 : A History of Gender and Presence

Laundry was as a public and social affair during ancient Rome, operating through the fullonics which were governed by state laws that regulated the practice and standards of fulling clothes. The work of fulling was largely a male endeavour due to the strenuous physical labour exacted from laundering. Over time with the emergence of new laundry technology, the labour became a private event amongst women during the medieval and Victorian periods. Although laundry remained an arduous task, requiring an entire day dedicated to its undertaking.

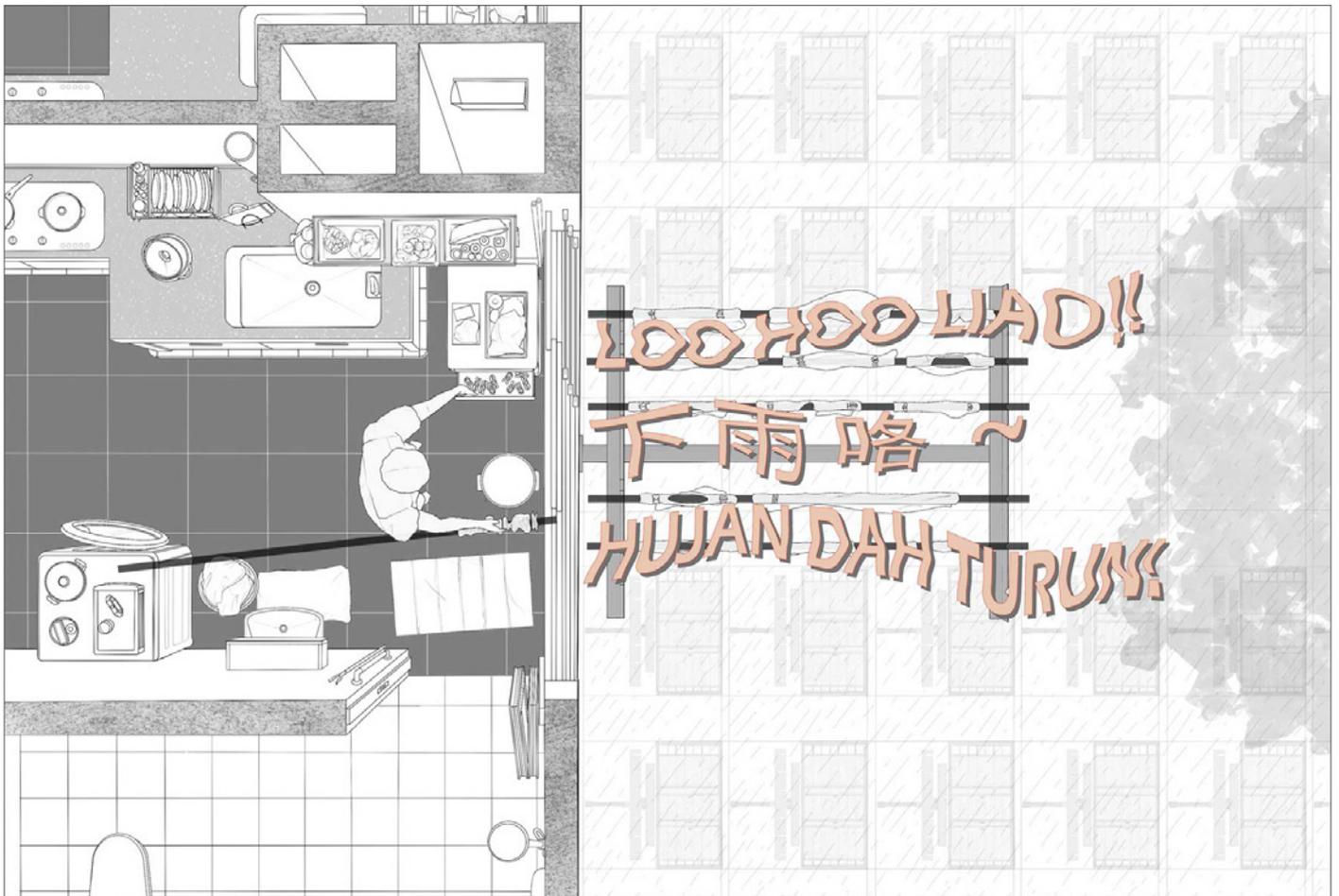
This key practice has continued to straddle the communal and domestic, shifting in its gendered labour, and progressing from manual to automated, social to introverted. What persists is a regulation of laundry processes, one on its visibility and presence in the realms of the public and domestic.





Scene 1.0 : Scenography

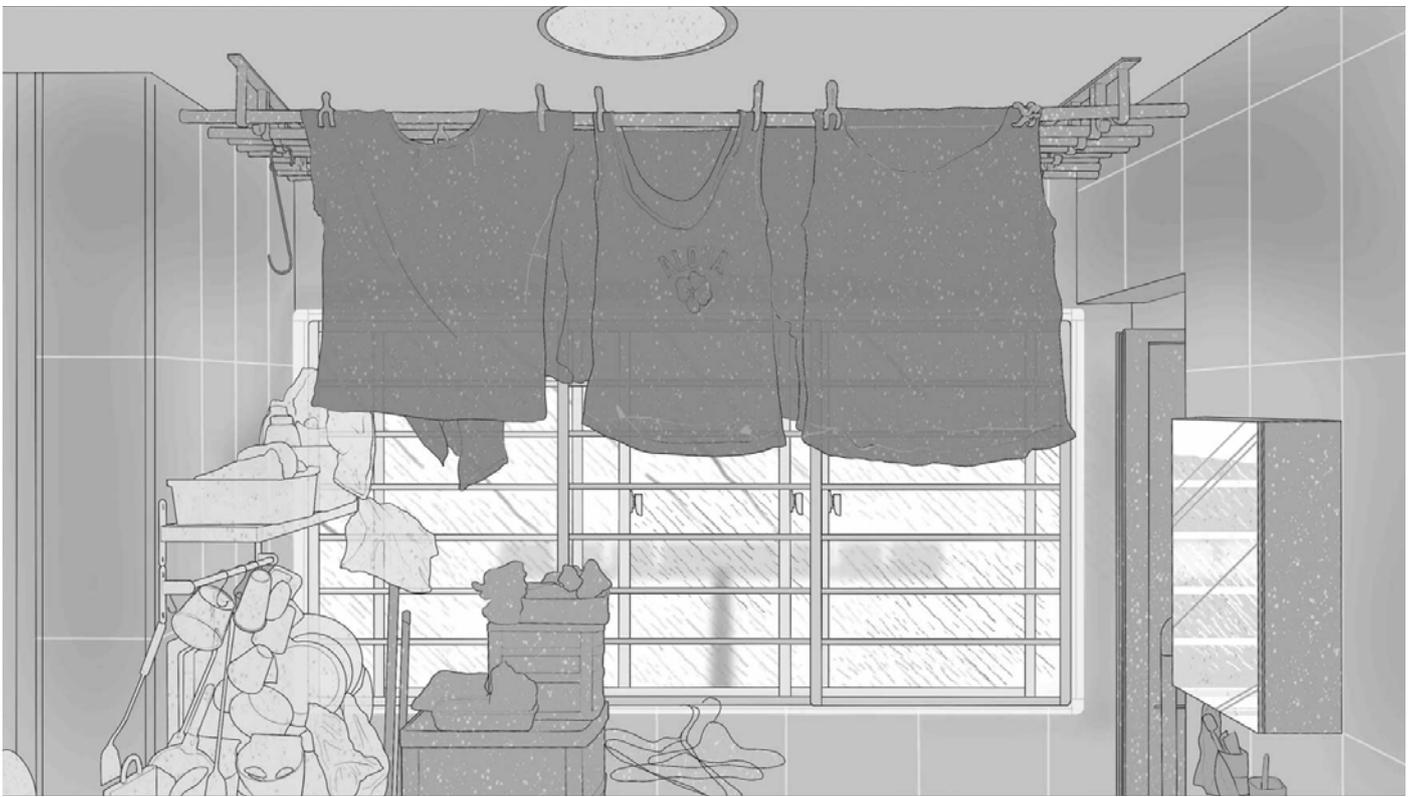
I first began documenting two houses with distinct laundry practices and technologies through videography, filming laundry and its presence as protagonist within the domestic space. This filmic convention gave rise to representations of laundry that appropriated scenography to foreground and frame laundry through a sequence of choreography, from which the subject sought to leap into unframed space. The series reflects on the flattened perspective upon which many of us have encased and enshrined laundry's productive capacities as mere maintenance labour and the space in which we have confined them to.



LOO HOO LIAD!!

下雨咯~

HUJAN DAH TURUN!!

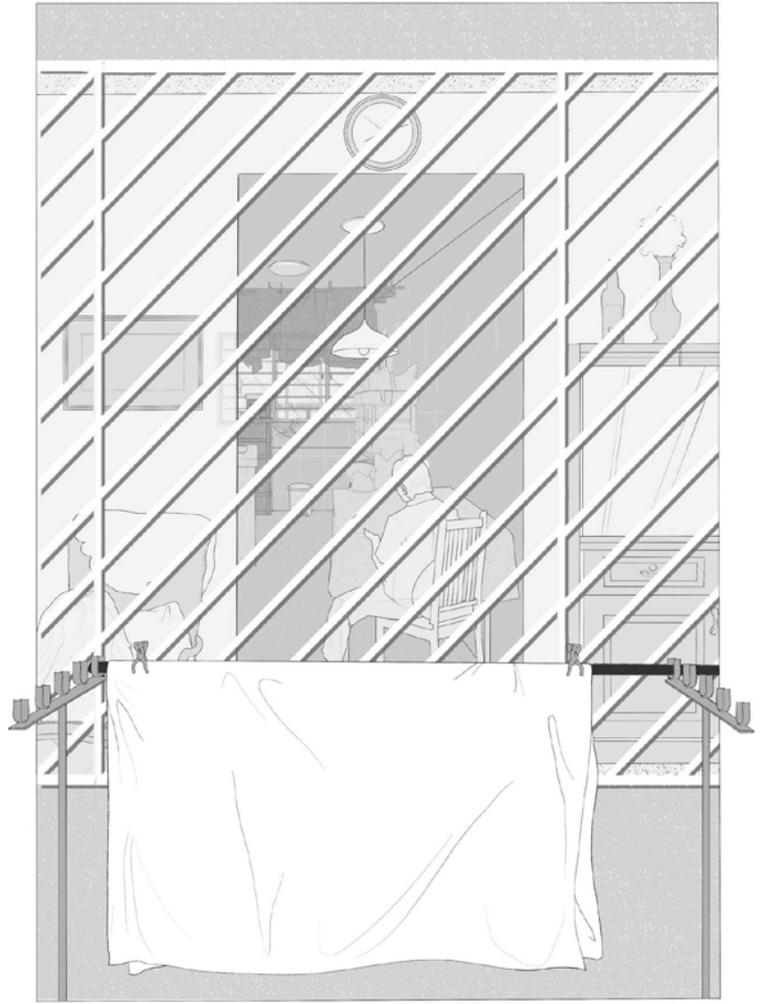




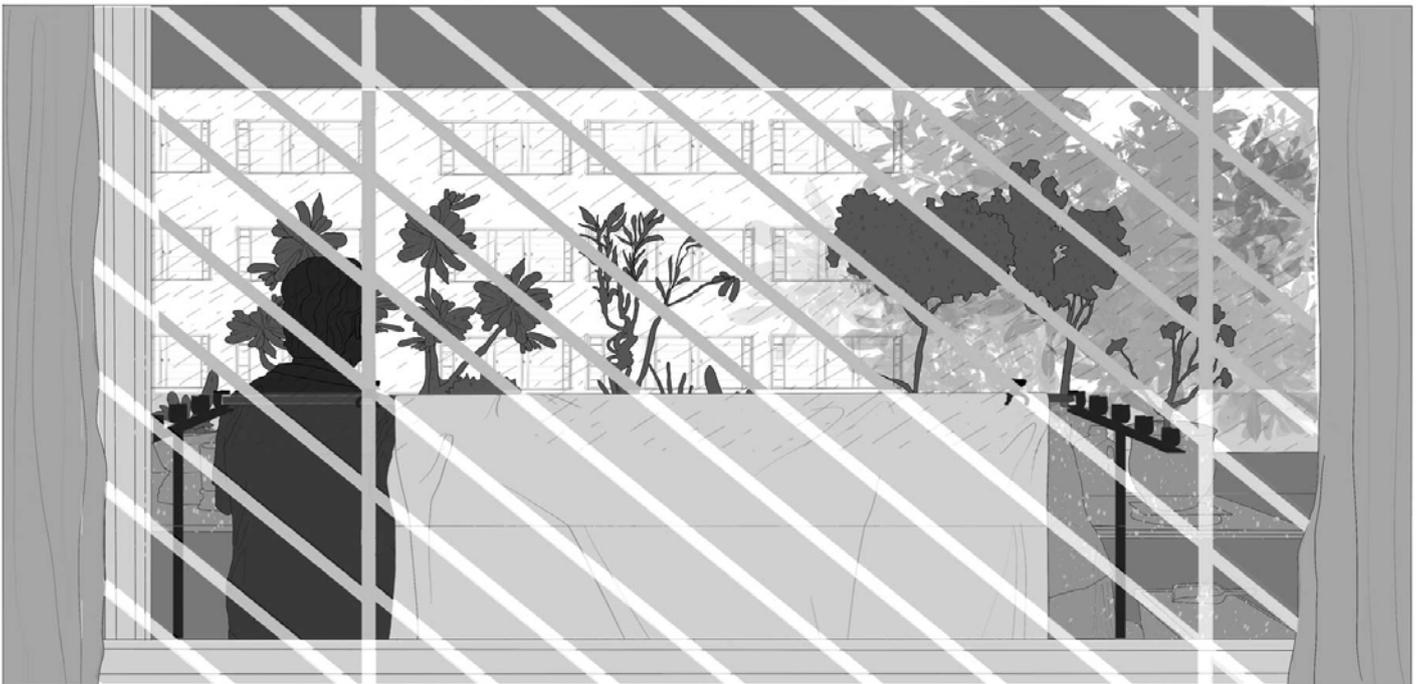
Scene 1.1: Watching Zoom, mum and the laundry

The house in question is a 4-room HDB flat, residence to three women - two working sisters and their elderly mother. The living room is a double act, a place for one sister to conduct her hybrid work arrangements, whilst accompanying her mother, at her request, within the same space. A third act emerges in the form of watching laundry, like one would watch a pot of soup boiling on a stove top. A clear line of sight established through the corridor, the living room and the kitchen, from which laundry migrates along, articulating various degrees of privacy into and out of the home.





Now the laundry watches her while you watch the laundry watching her watch the laundry.

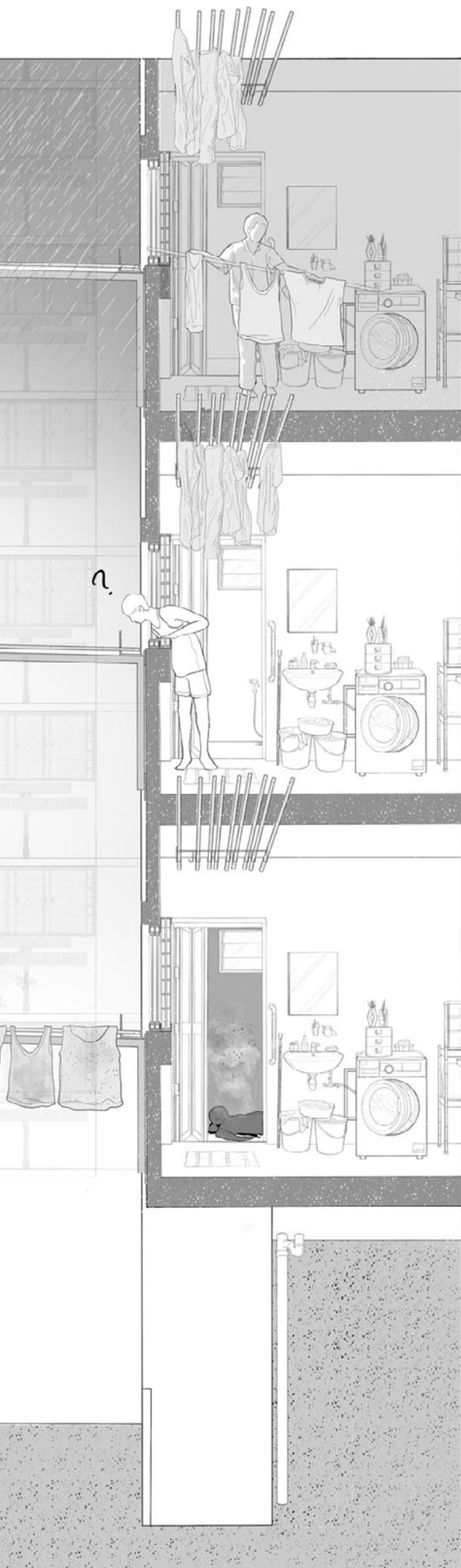




Layering production. And... scene.

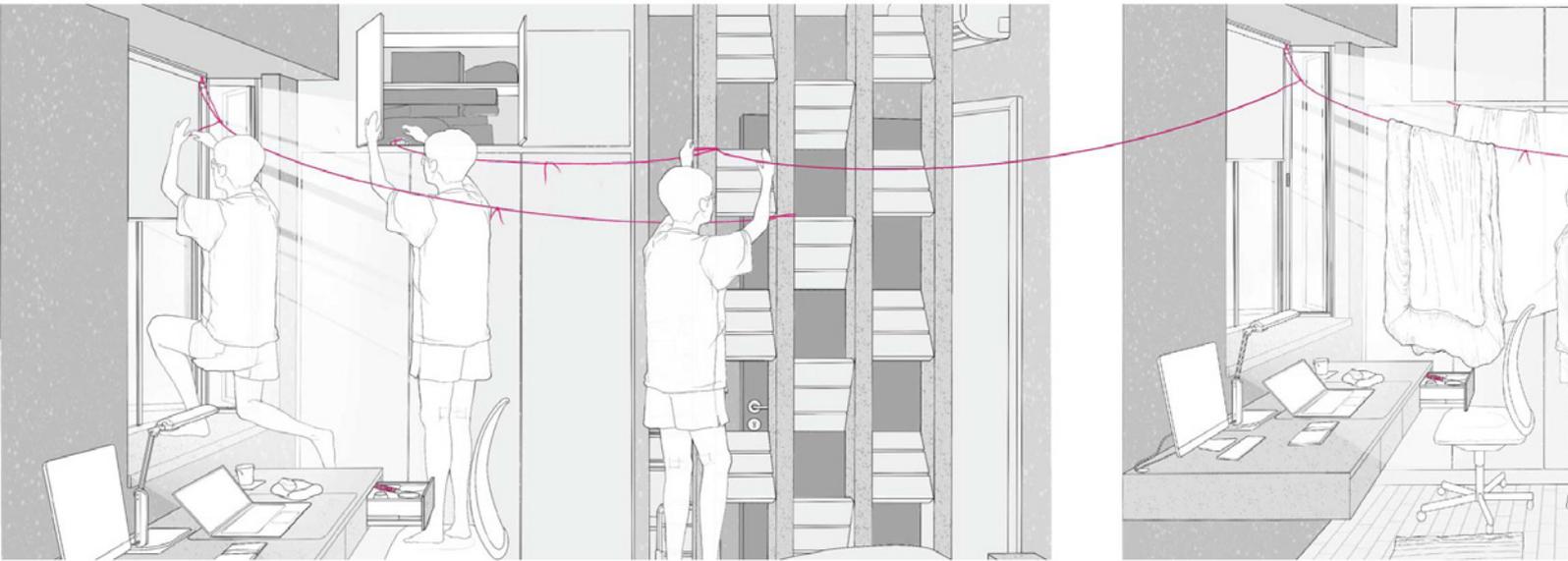






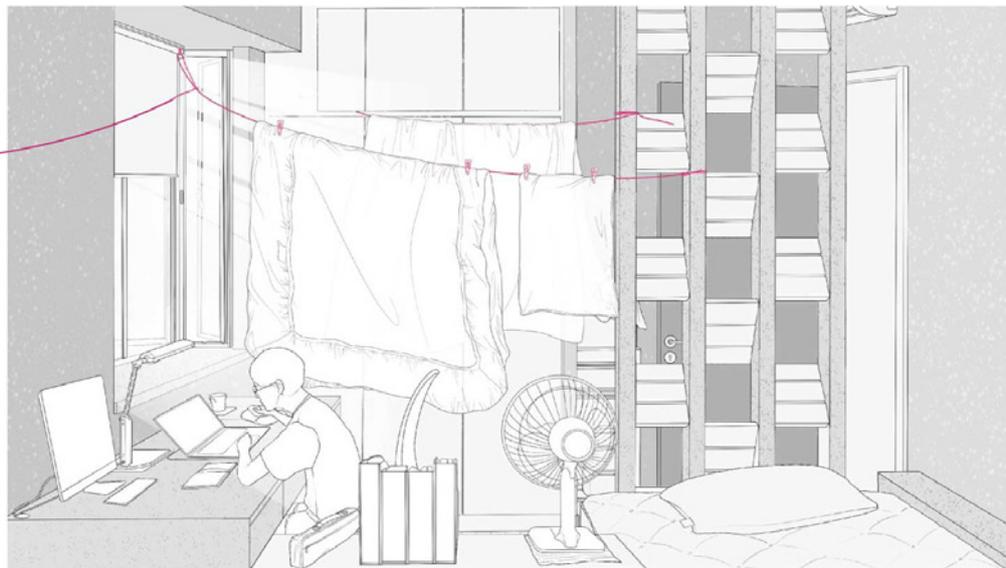
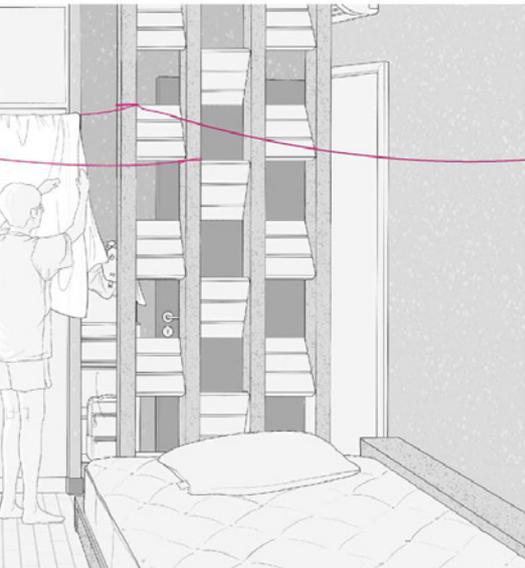
Scene 1.2: Huh, why is the laundry filthy?

Laundry's role as a social condenser is amplified in the vertical wet stacks of the high density high-rise flat. The aforementioned demonstrated by the echoing bellows of urgent calls from neighbours signalling an impending rain, and the dismal experience of water dripping from soiled laundry above onto one's already dry laundry. Or noticing clothes that have become filthy from being left out for an oddly long period of time, unbeknownst that someone had died in a flat beneath them.



Scene 1.3: The Shoelace, the Rock, and the Wardrobe

What began purely as my frustration over overlapping loads of laundry and a lack of sunny space to hang bedspreads and sheets, developed into an informal system of improvised laundry technology. Utilising the roller blind, privacy screen, a rock and my wardrobe in my room to leverage fixing a shoelace as a laundry line, a production of aesthetics and space materialises. The visual noise of fluttering sheets in the breeze and zephyrs of wind lacing through creates an extremely pleasant ambient atmosphere for deep focus work, complementing the lofi hip hop radio beats streaming 24/7 on youtube for a studying community.





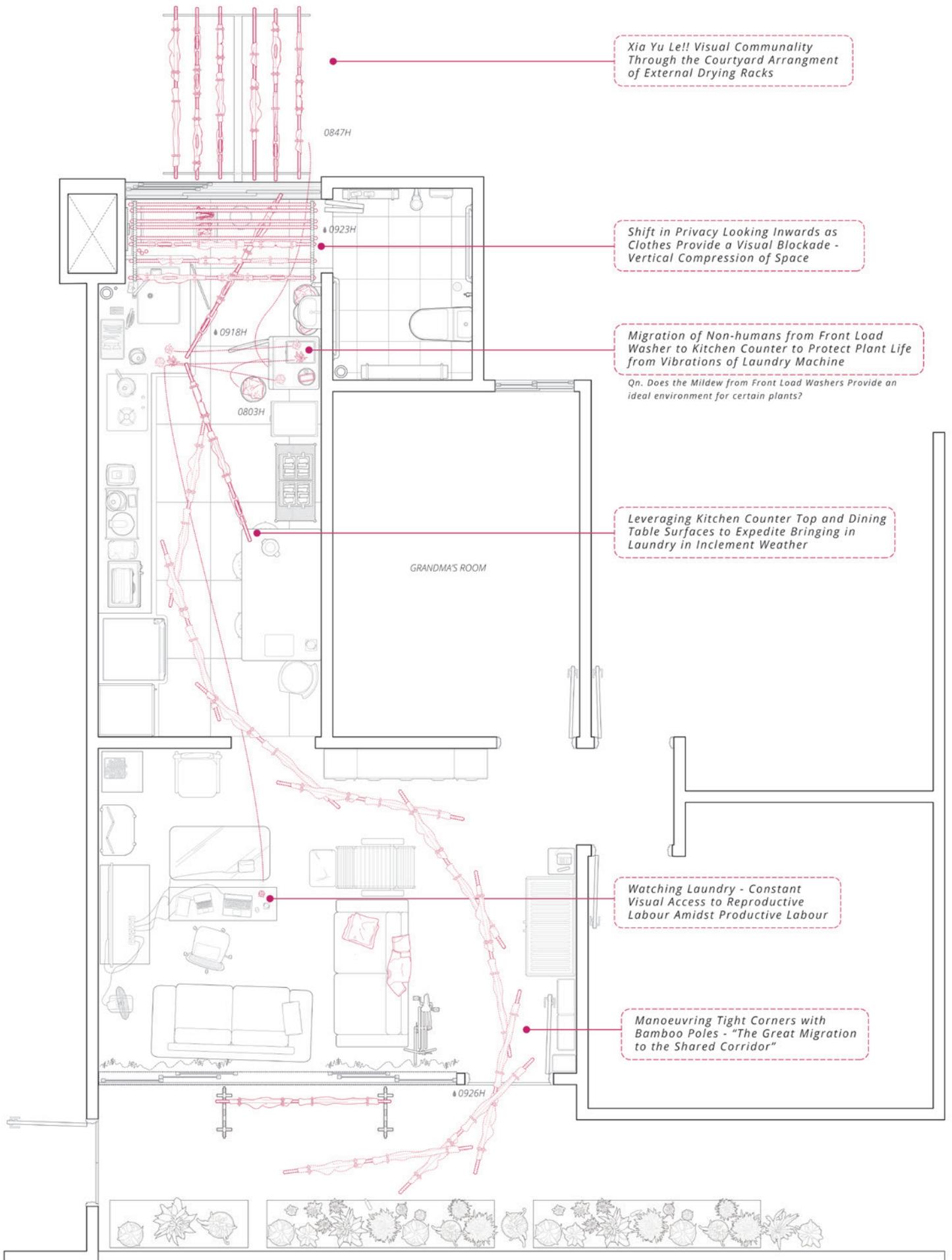
Scene 1.4: To the laundry basket... and beyond!

Once defunct, a foldable laundry rack has now been repurposed as a suspended rack, allowing long garments to be hung and dried in the expertly designed dim and humid yard room. Traversing to deposit clothes into the laundry basket becomes a climatic expedition through cold, damp and clammy laundry.





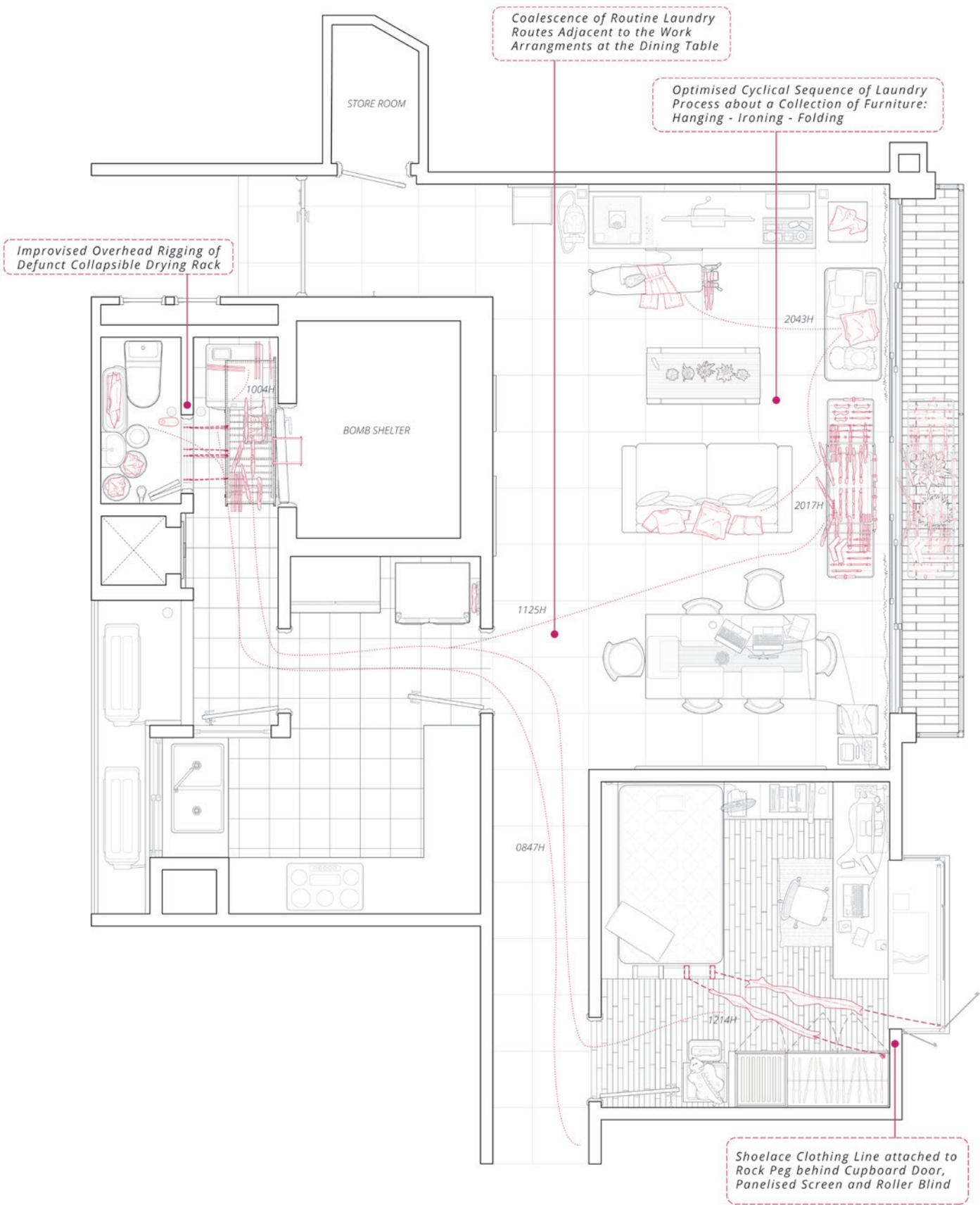




Domestic Laundry Ritual - Grandma's Place
 Laundry as Climate Indicator



0803H - 0926H



Domestic Laundry Ritual - Self Documentation
The Clockwork Migration of Laundry

0847H - 2043H



Informal Order of Laundry (washing and drying)

Sequence

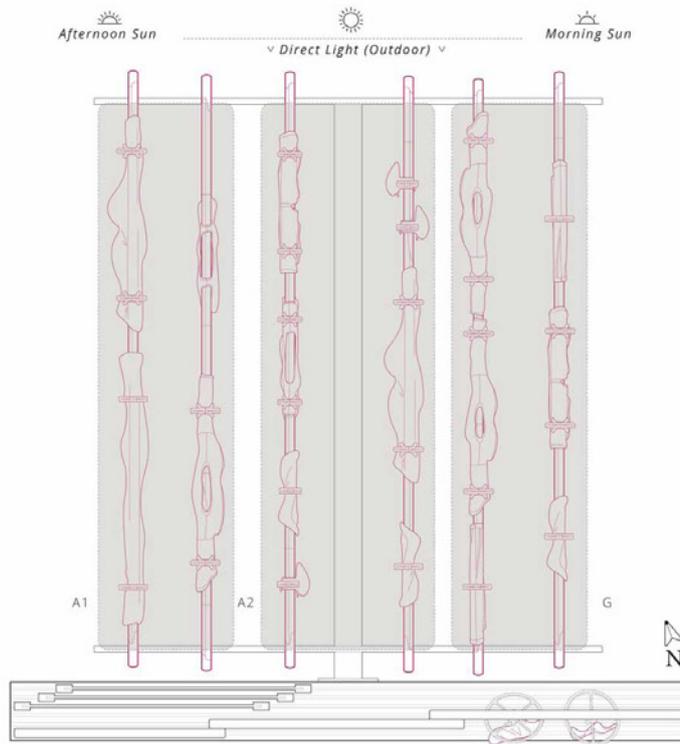
Frequency of Use, Urgency

Clustering

Users, Undergarments, Garments, Long Garments

Purpose

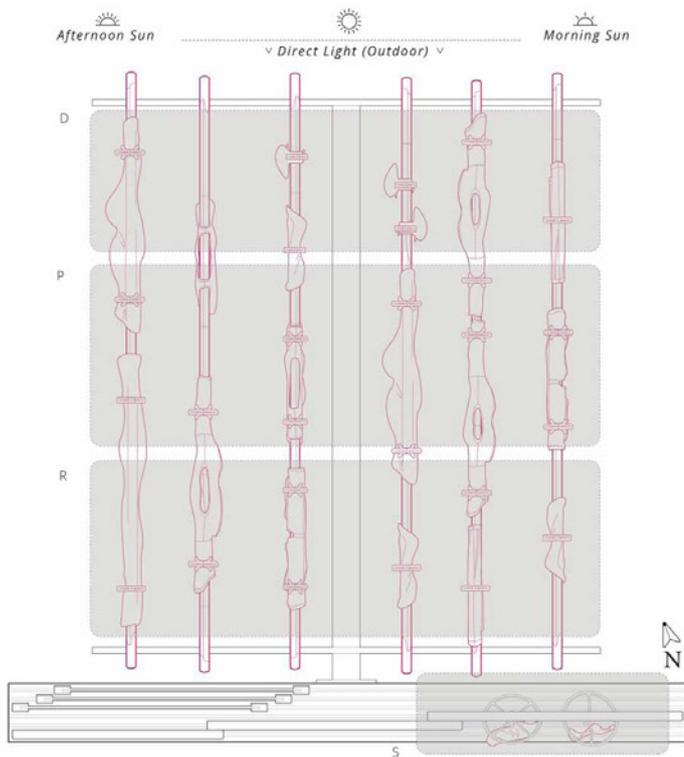
Productive over Reproductive W



Bamboo Cluster

Grouped by Users

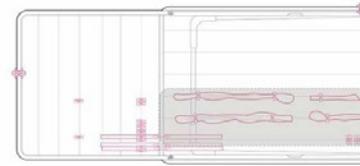
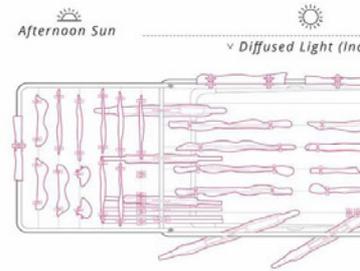
A1: Aunt 1 (Office Work); A2: Aunt 2 (Remote Working); G: Grandma (Daily PJs)



Linear Order

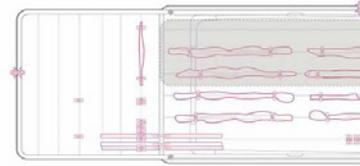
Grouped by Material and Purpose

D: Delicates (Cotton, Poly blends); P: Productive (Cotton, Linen, Poly, Wool); R: Reproductive (Cotton, Poly blends); S: Sundries (Microfibre Cloths, Mats, Masks)



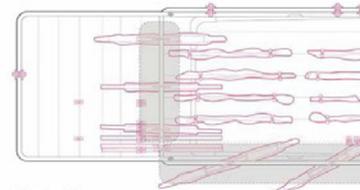
Cluster 1

Reproductive Clothes: Siblings (Dri-fit, Cotton, Po



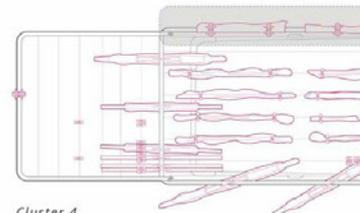
Cluster 2

Reproductive Clothes: Parents (Linen, Cottons, P



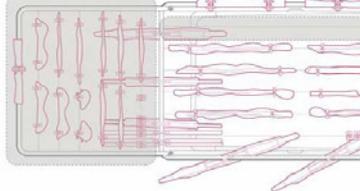
Cluster 3

Smart Reproductive/Productive Clothes: Hangers



Cluster 4

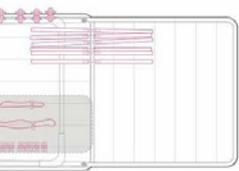
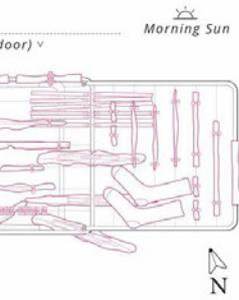
Reproductive Towels



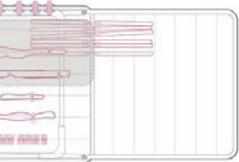
Cluster 5

Undergarments, Socks, Sundries: Left (Female), Rig

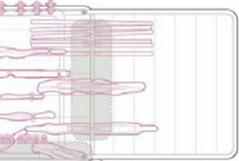
Material
 Silk - Polyesters - Linen - Cotton - Acrylic - Denim - Wool - Leather



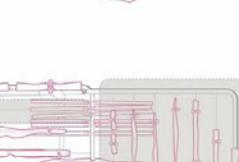
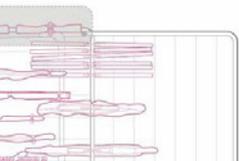
ly, Blends)



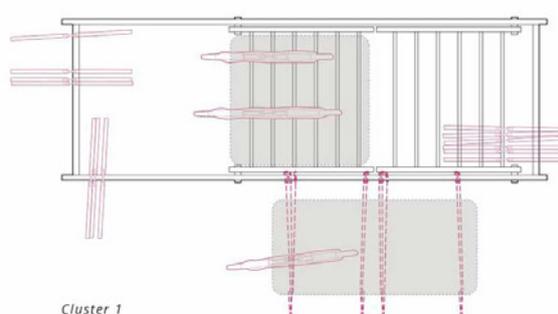
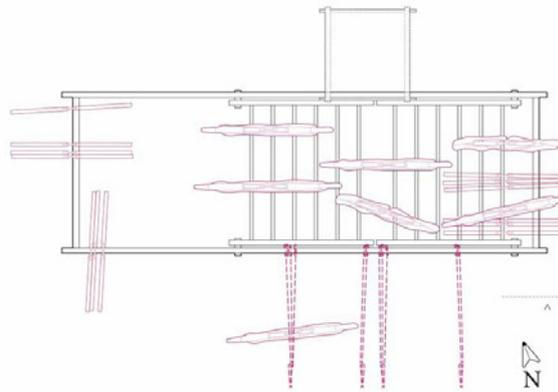
ly-Cotton Blends)



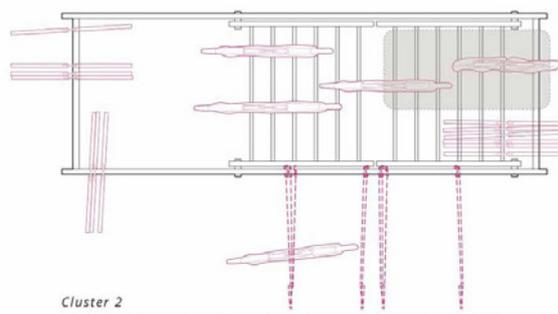
(Wrinkle-Free, Anti-Stretch)



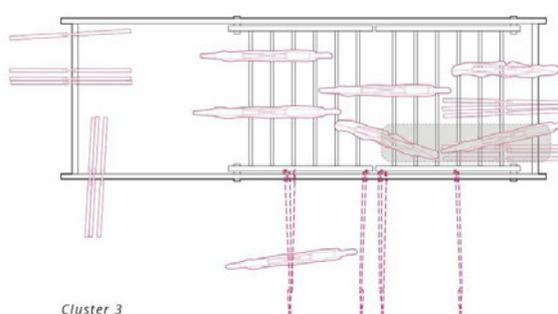
ght (Male and Socks), Middle (Excess)



Cluster 1
 Reproductive: Long Garments (Cotton, Poly, Blends)

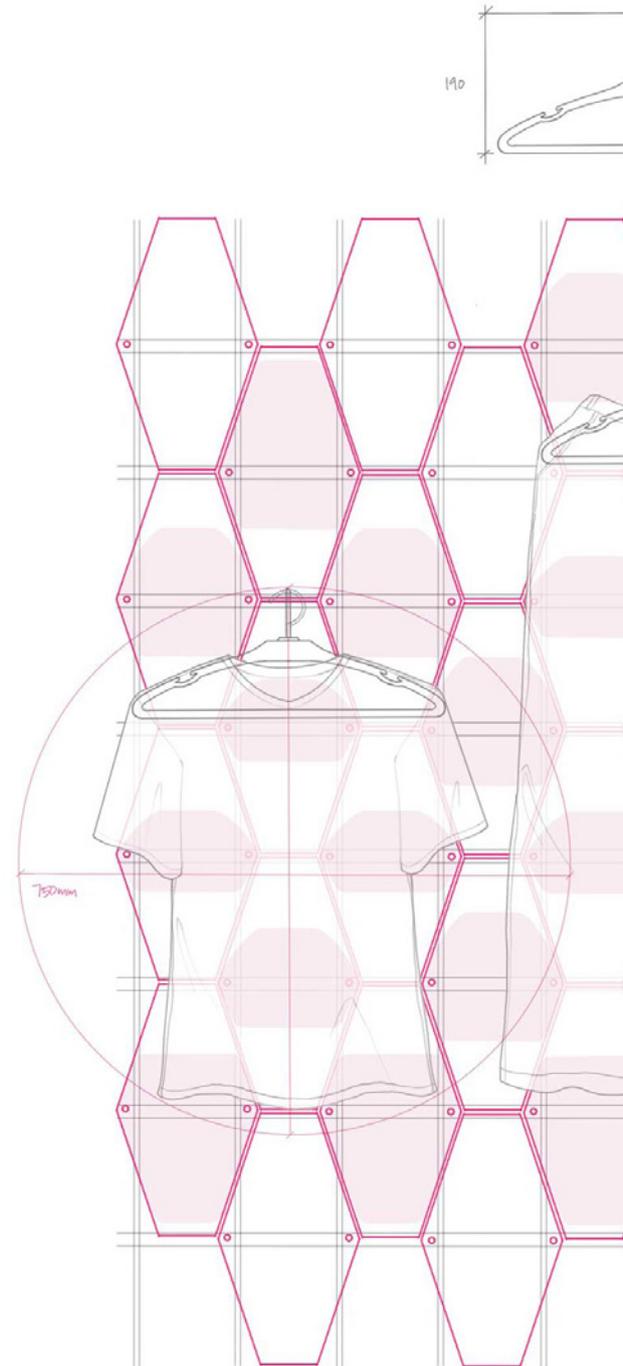
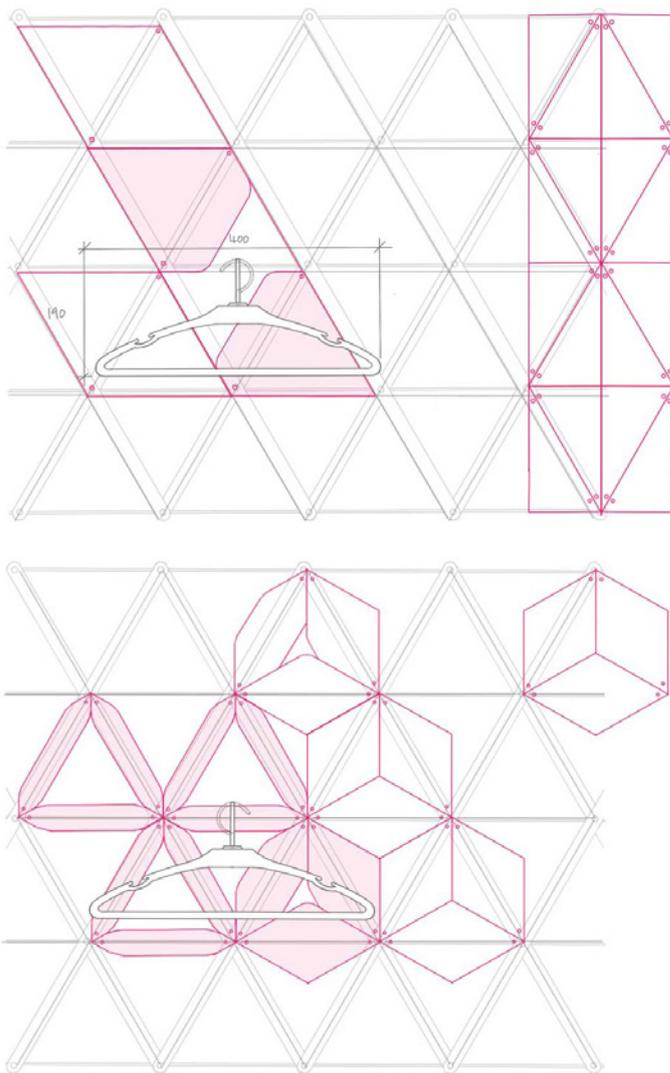


Cluster 2
 Formal Reproductive/Productive : Long Garments (Cotton, Poly, Blends, Wool, Denim)



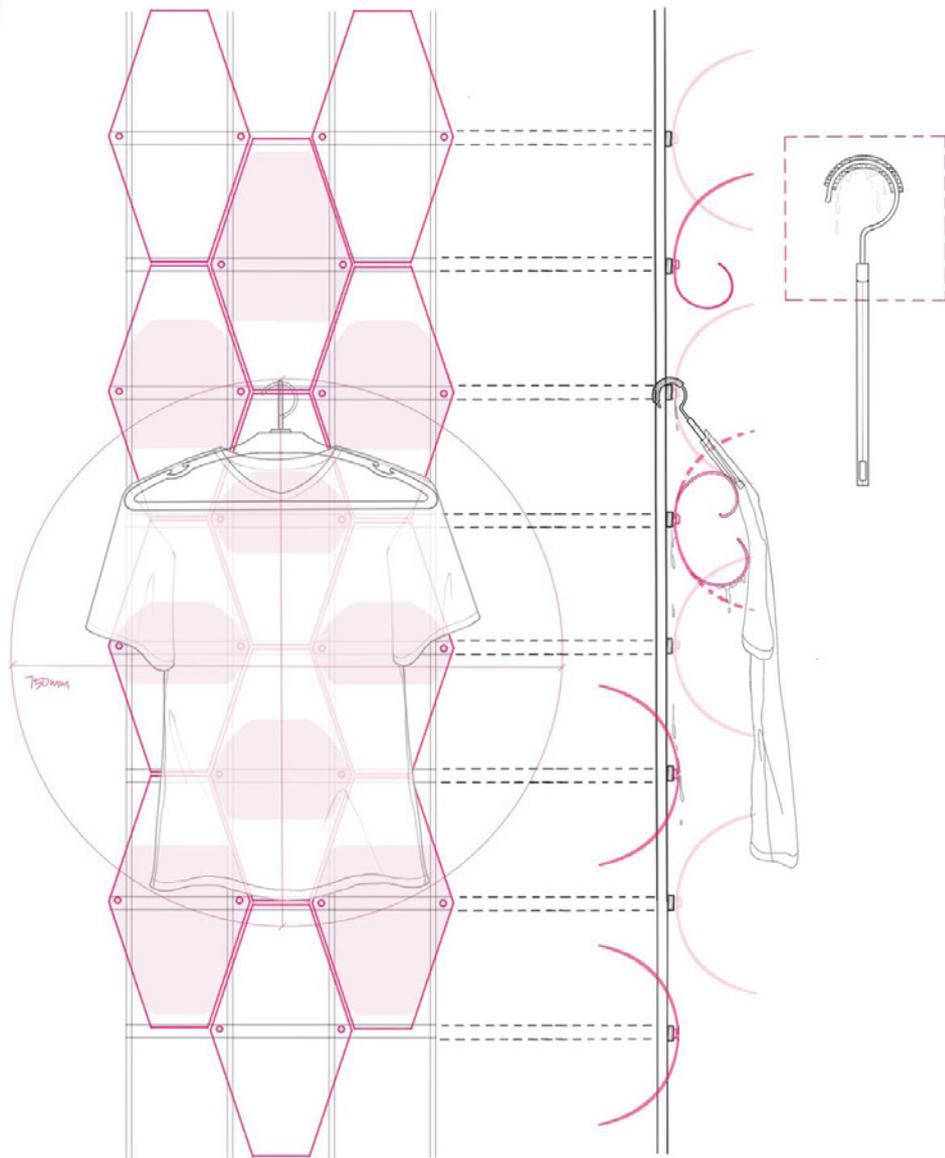
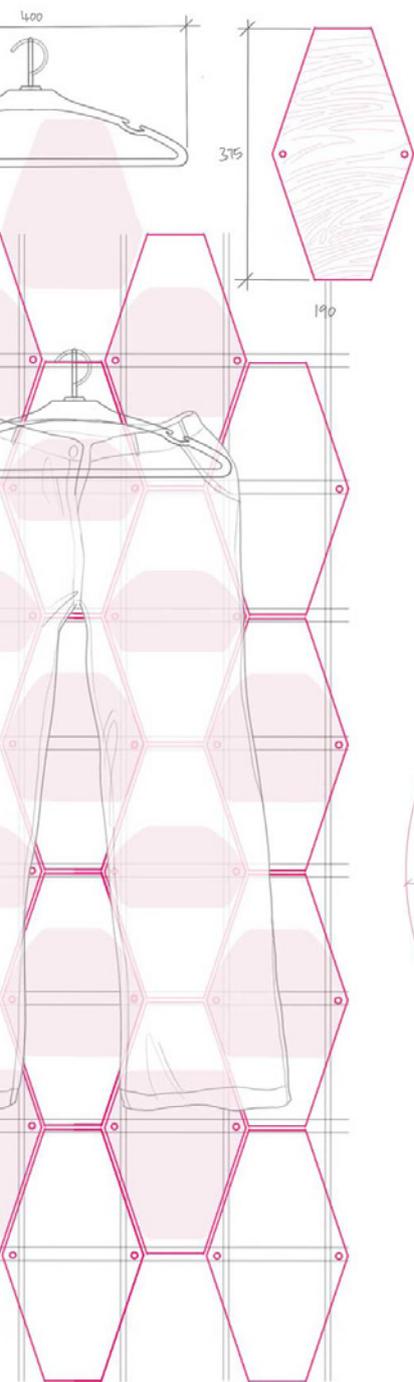
Cluster 3
 Productive : Long Garments (Cotton, Poly, Blends, Wool, Denim)

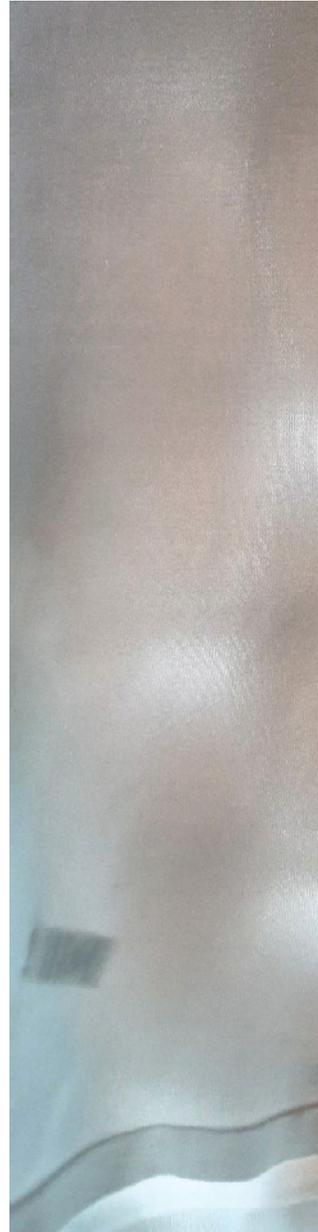
Cotton	Acrylic	Wool	Leather

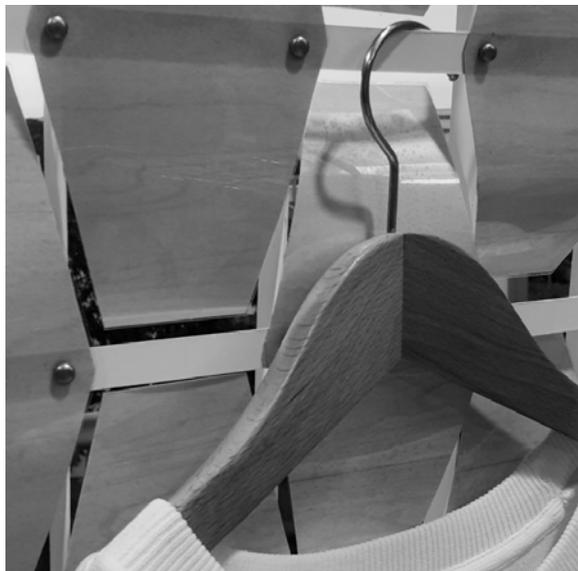
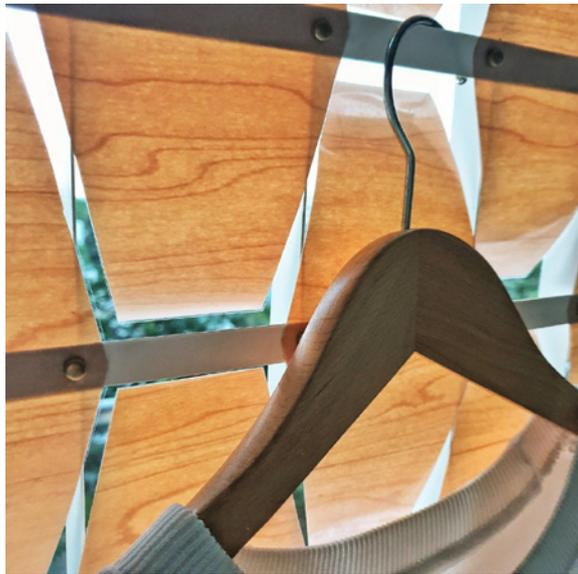


Scene 2.0: Wallpapers

In imagining the flat as a laundry machine, a material was developed to respond to the atmospheric changes brought about by and for the facilitation of laundry. The composite veneer panels offer a way to tune the degree of porosity, both in the material's response to the environment and the changes imposed by the occupant. This affectionate term "wallpaper" indicates a mutable treatment of this material as one of many ways to develop and adopt a responsive medium or tectonic language.







Scene 3.0: Byōbu Series

If laundry is no longer ugly, is it then... beautiful? The optics of laundry often sees the laundry process as a series of discrete objects, compressed but cluttered, receding into the background of household noise. The exploration predicated on questioning the reductive state of laundry within the high rise flat, situating laundry as an expansive field to be encountered and adopting the format of a sequenced choreography spanning the monsoon season. Beauty here, is perhaps concerned with the aesthetic production of cyclical gradients in ambient interior microclimates that correspond to the time scales of laundry loads, rituals and external macroclimate.

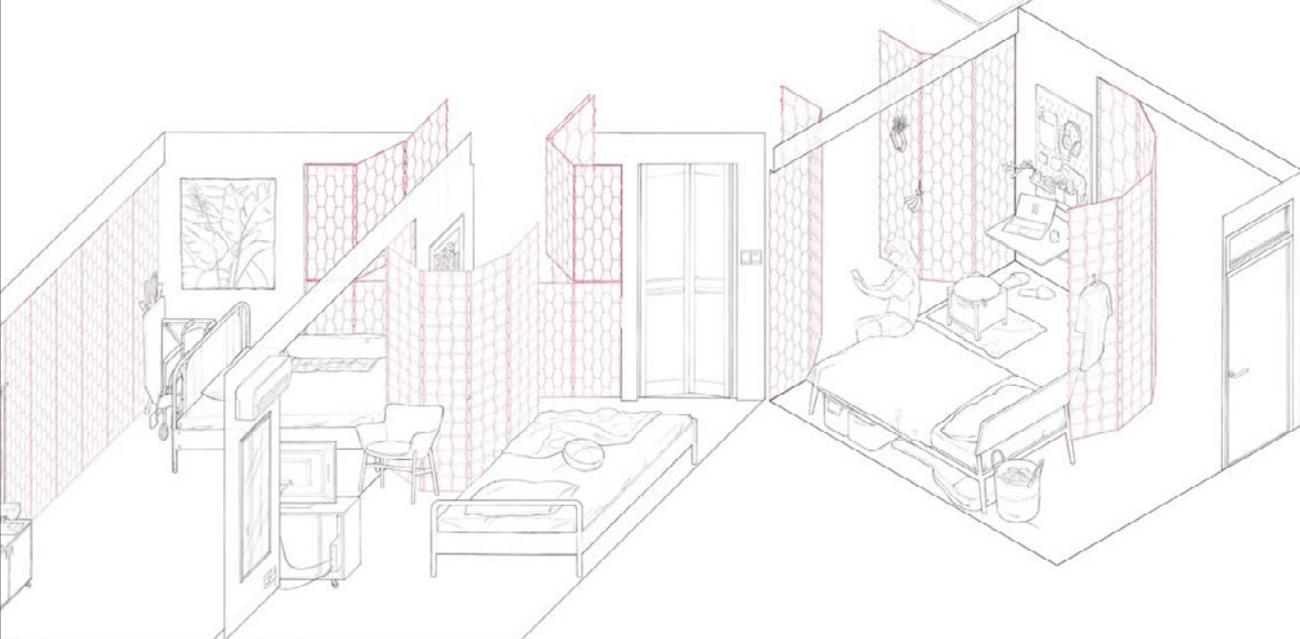
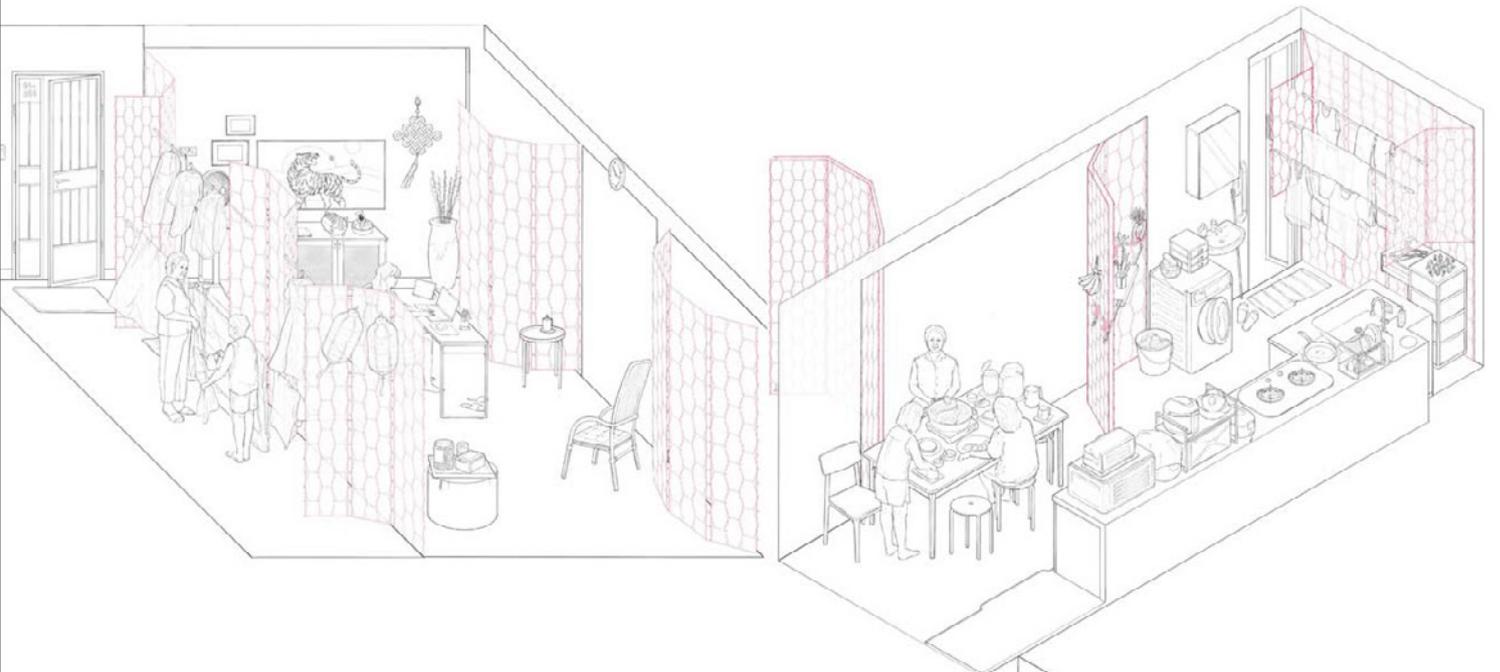
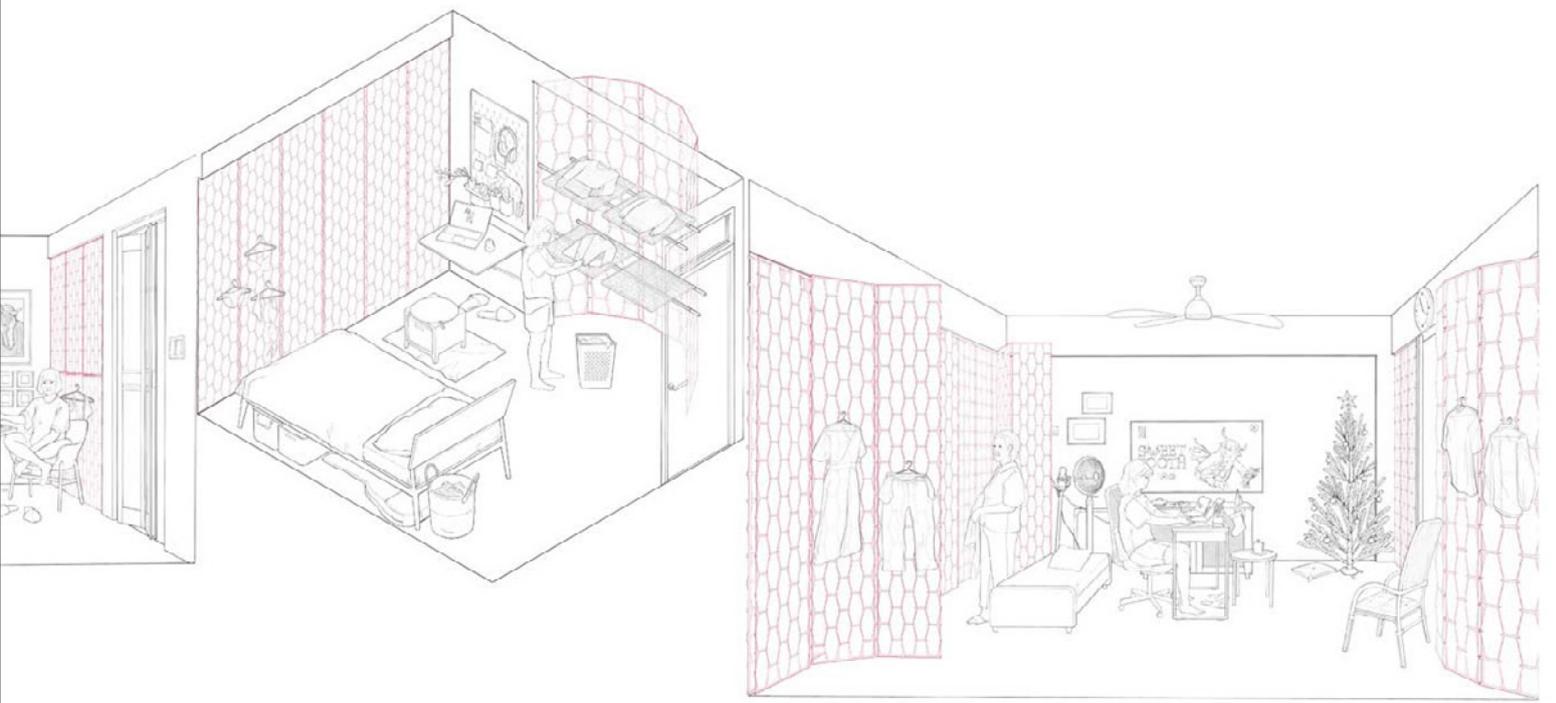
The flat reimagined as a laundry machine is thus rendered almost entirely porous, and by extension, enacts the same performative labour. Tasked with negotiating the migration of laundry across three weeks during the northeast Monsoon season, as the family does their laundry during Christmas in December, the Lunar New Year in February and readjusts back to the inter-monsoon season in early March. The monsoon progresses from the wettest month of December to relatively dry conditions in the later periods, with laundry loads peaking mid-monsoon during spring cleaning.

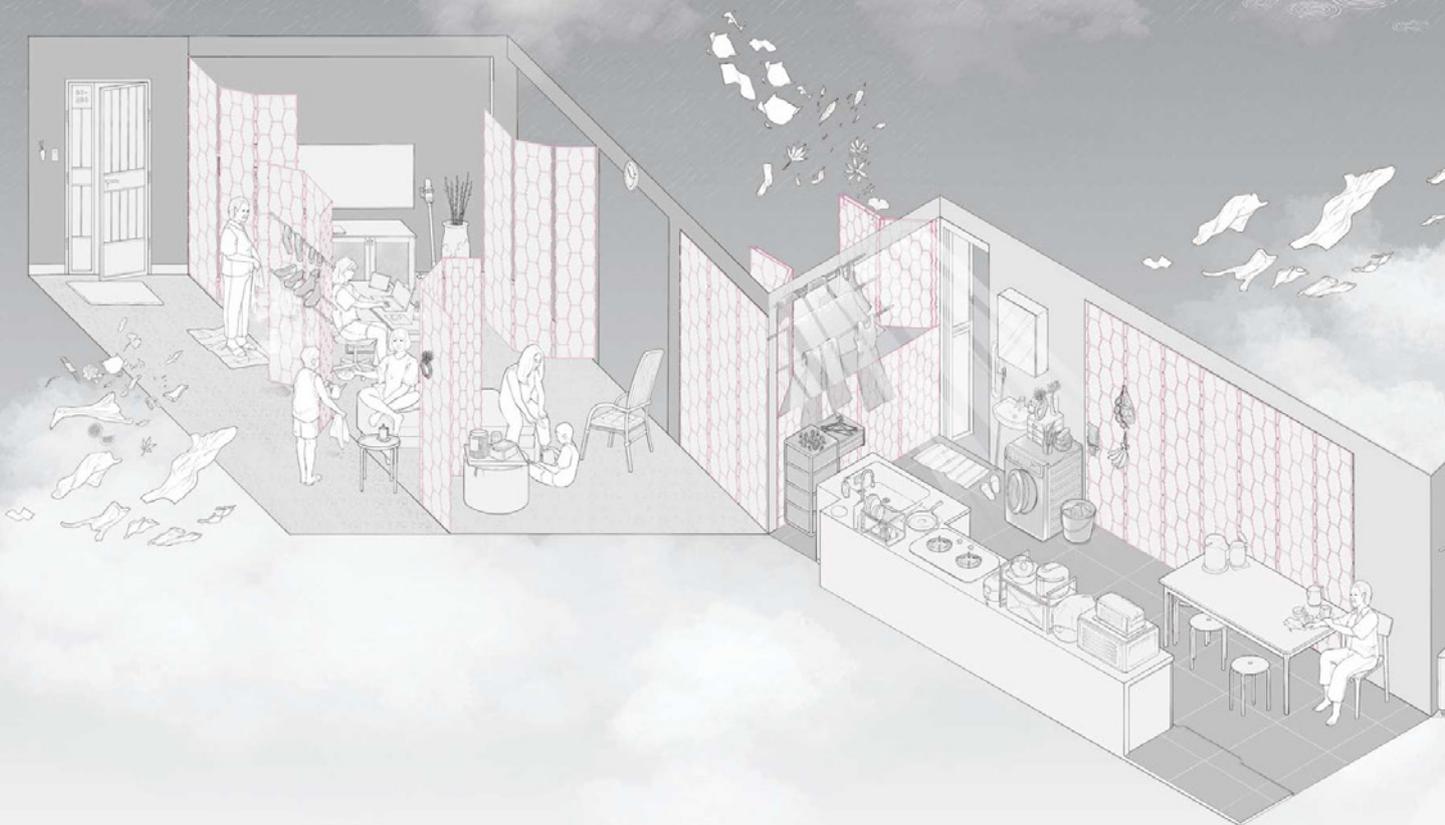
The aforementioned expansive field is expressed through material thresholds of “wallpapers”. In doing so, the project seeks to relocate laundry out of the compressed recesses of the home, within which they are confined, into interactive spaces in flux. Attempting to elevate and restore value and visibility to clean and essential laundry, seen at once unsightly and nondescript.

Byōbu 1/3 : Merry Christmas, niches! (Early-Monsoon)

Byōbu 2/3 : Spring clean and corridor tea, xoxo (Mid-Monsoon)

Byōbu 3/3 : A sudden gust of undies, amongst other things (Inter-Monsoon)







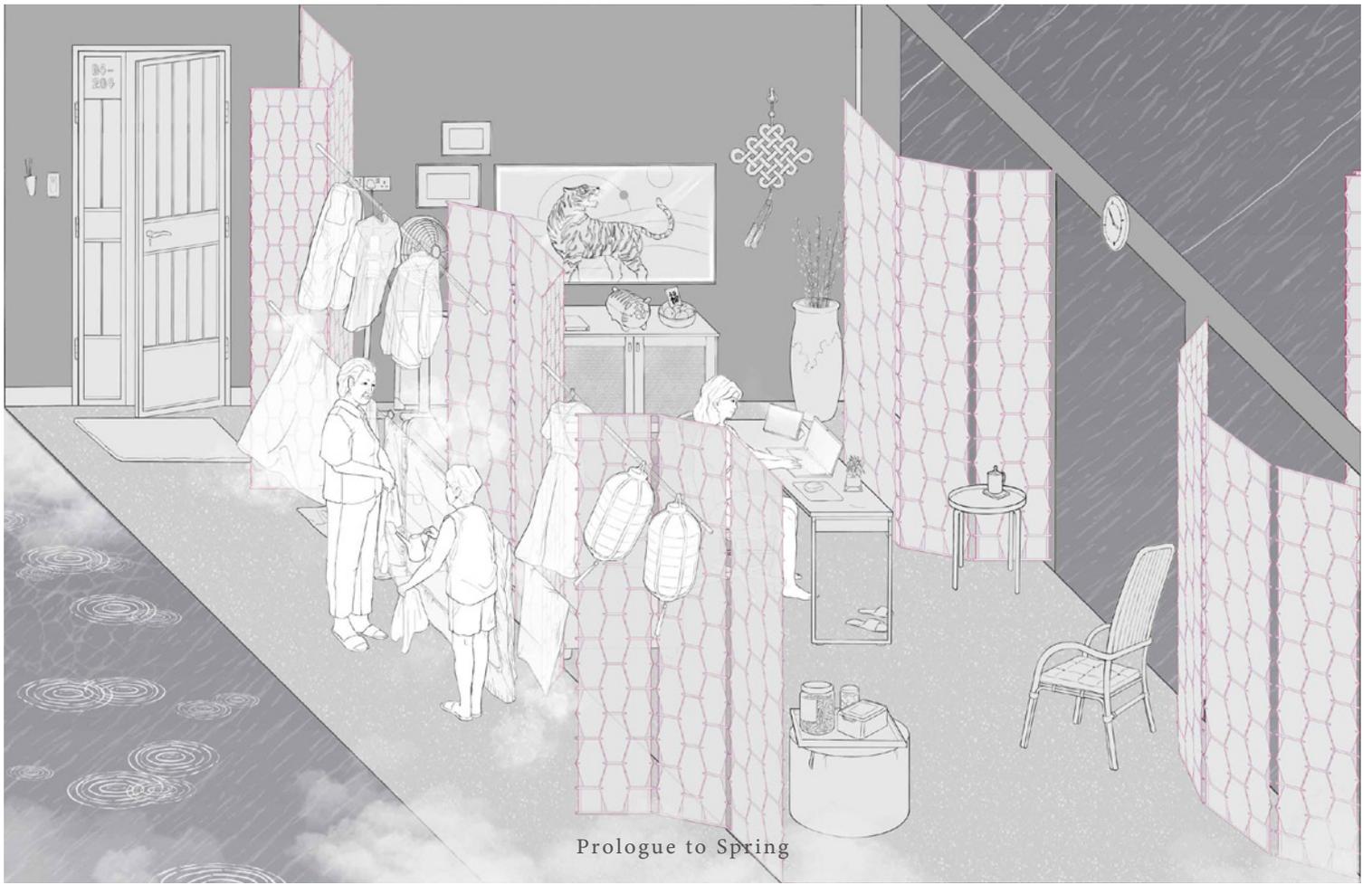


Scene 3.1: Winter is Coming / Prologue to Spring / Spring Epilogue

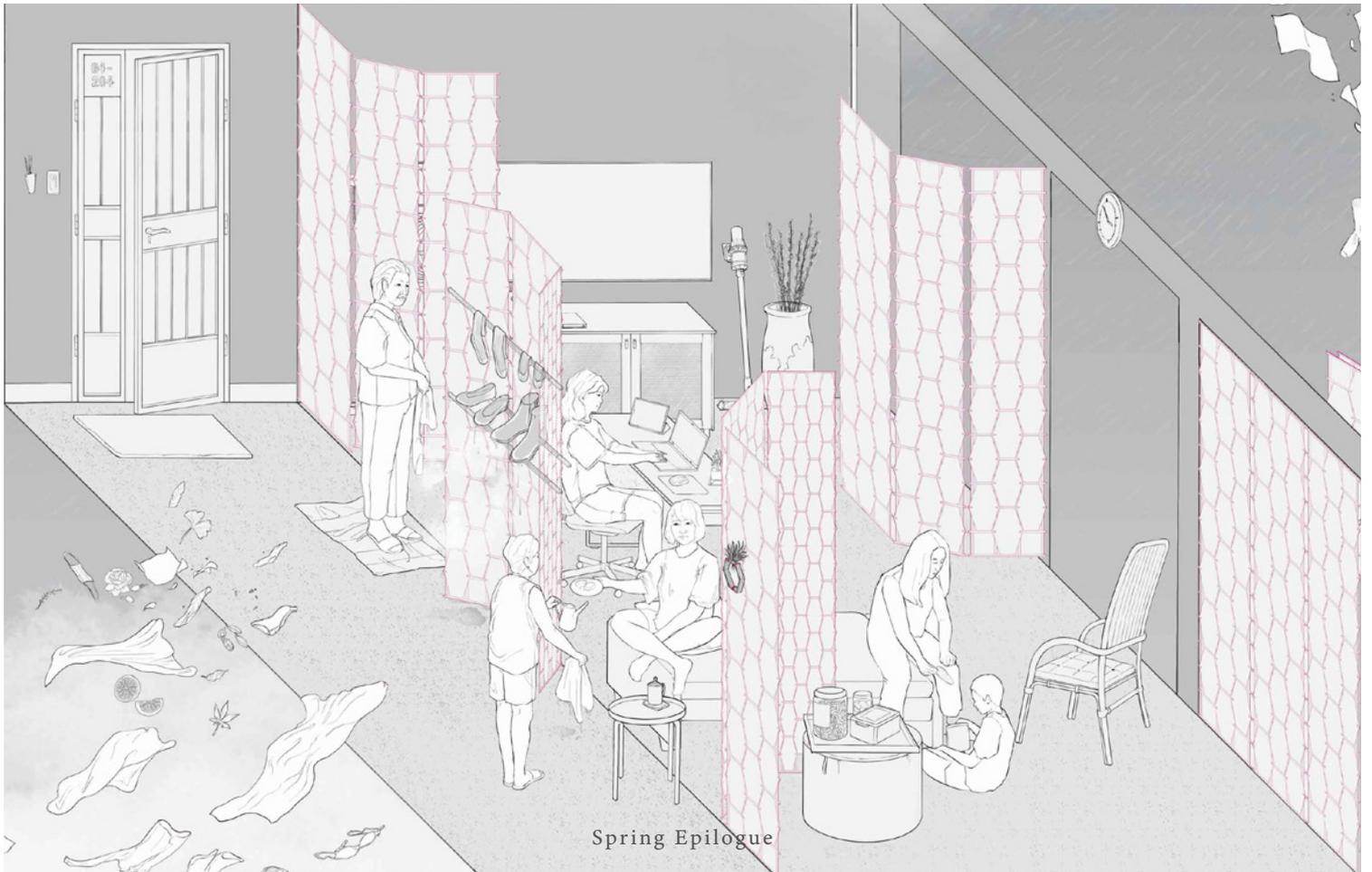
At a junction of overlapping programmes and interactions, the living room houses multiple occupants and activities. On the eve of Christmas, damp garments hang like ornaments, embellishing the wallpapers, bringing winter to the living room as water wicks away and cools the room.

In the lead up to spring, the veneer panels curl outwards to accommodate heavier loads of laundry and “tea” to occur in the shared veranda. One might mistake the two ladies watering plants and lining sheets up as the latest spinoff of gossip grannies.

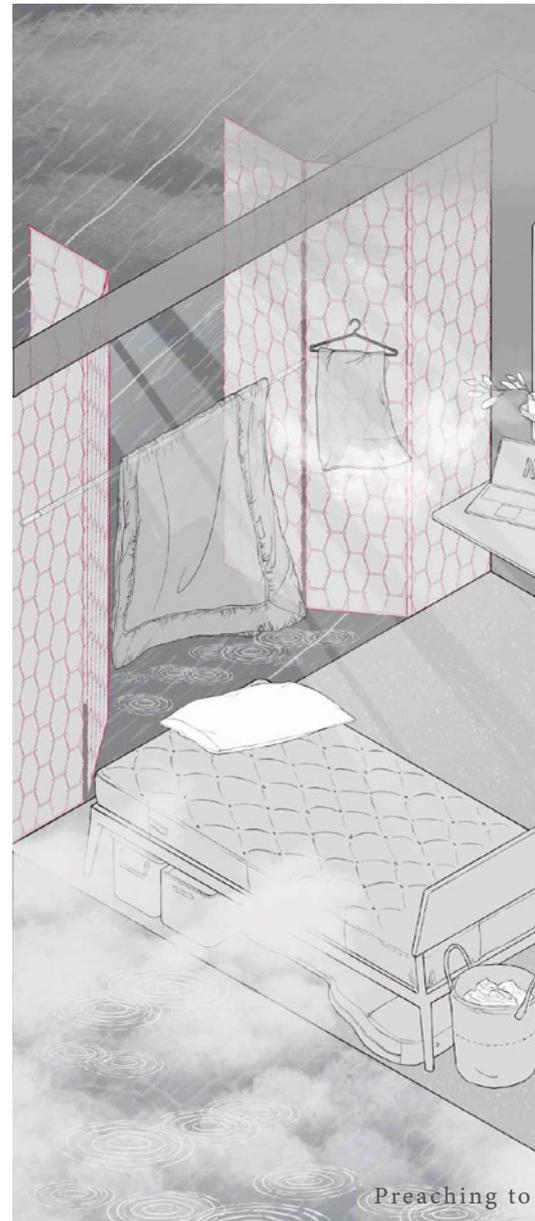
As March rolls around, late Lunar New Year visitations are rounding up, and the weather permits laundry to be hung outside once more. With the panels curled inwards, the corridor is absorbed into the living room, extending the definition of communal space. The ottoman, now oriented towards the corridor, is a convenient place to perch and watch the flowers in bloom, alongside inviting chatters from the next door aunty. Now who forgot to use clothes pegs for their delicates again?



Prologue to Spring



Spring Epilogue



Scene 3.2: Drip Dry / Preaching to the Laundry / Why is Everyone in My Room?

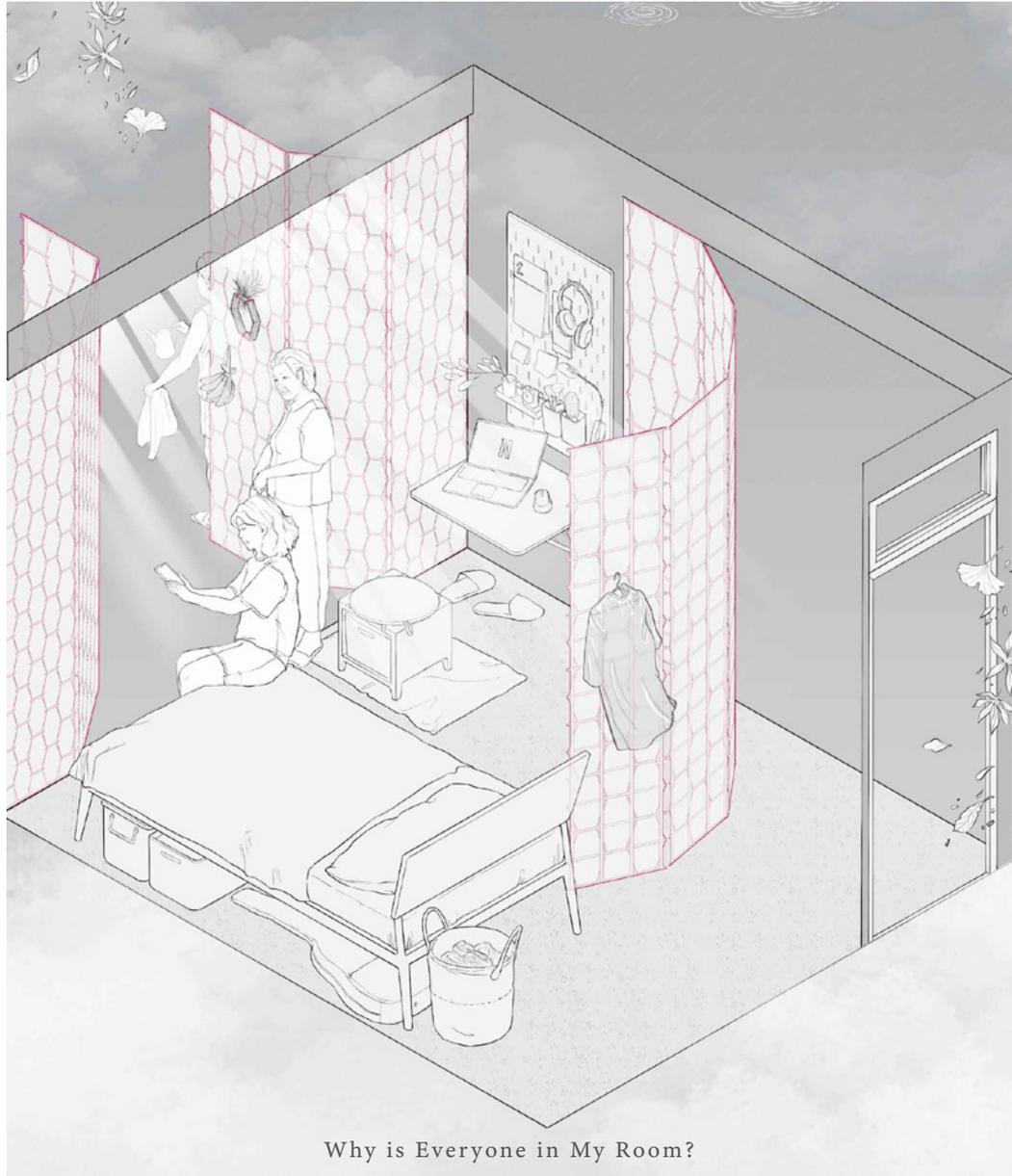
Sweater weather means flat drying woven textiles to prevent their fibres from fraying and the fabric from being misshapen in the dryer. Here the wallpaper curls to form a niche to allow drip drying to occur efficiently.

As laundry loads take over the living room and kitchen, the bedroom opens up to the veranda to accommodate expedient drying of sheets. The tiered layers of laundry in the niche create an excellent acoustic buffer for some worship guitar sessions.

With the return of fairer weather, the bedroom is sectioned, pushing inhabitation further towards the precipice of shared corridor and interior. Suddenly the aunts watering plants in the corridor are at once in a daughter's bedroom.



the Laundry



Why is Everyone in My Room?



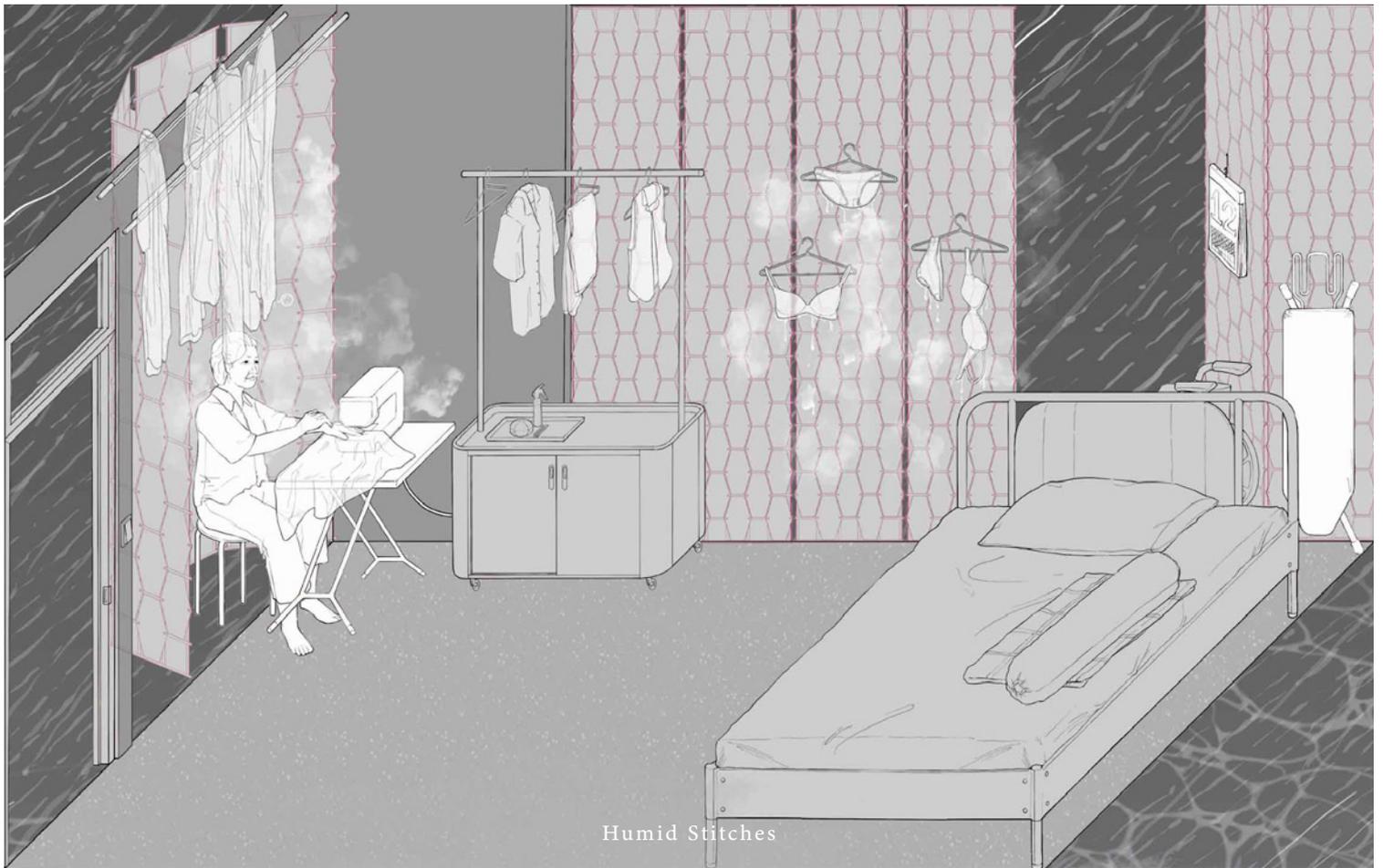
Scene 3.3: Garments in Devotions / Curating Wallpaper / Hi Bye, Mama!

Damp weighted garments layered together in a niche create a sonic brevity from the bustle of the minutiae, carving a retreat of solitude for one to dwell in religious devotions.

It is often good practice to air garments from time to time, to prevent mildew from developing. Here the act of hanging laundry adopts a sensitivity for composition, on an interface that privileges a format of presenting laundry in its entirety.

Whist the living room is a shared domain of watching mum and Zoom, the adjoining bedrooms for another daughter allows for watching mum and melodramas. The act of opening both daughter and mother's bedroom windows in coordination, assemble a shared exterior laundry apparatus.



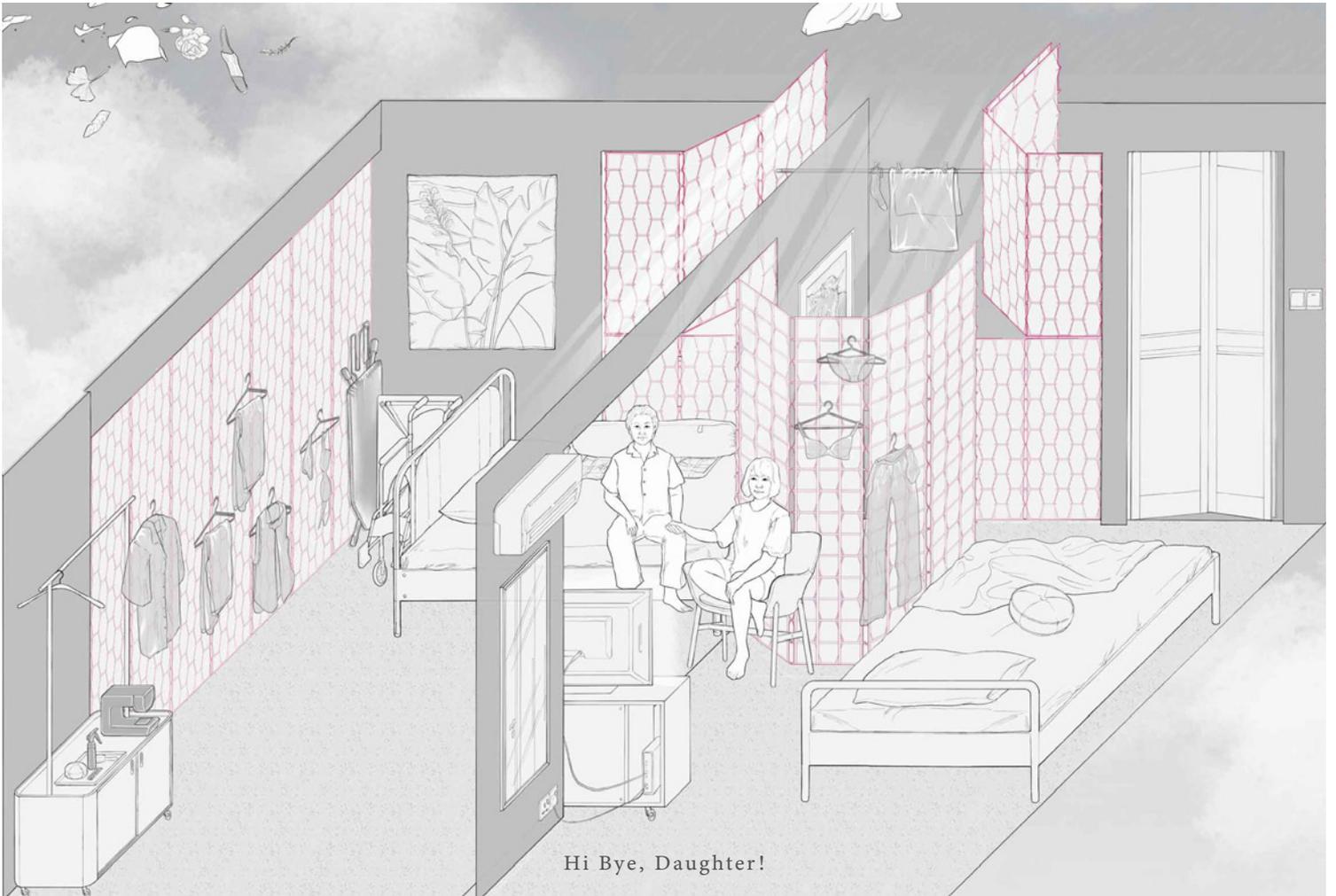
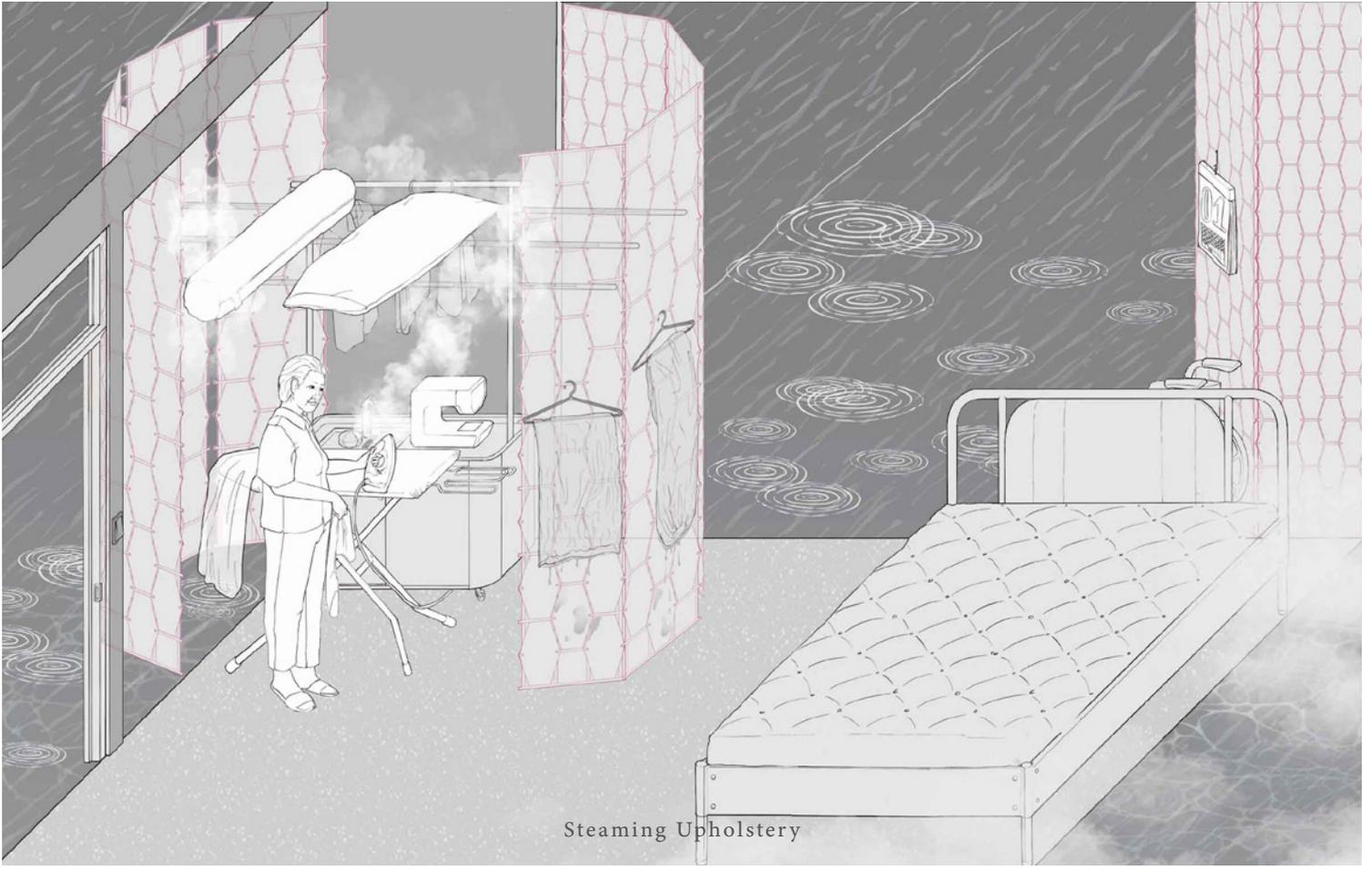


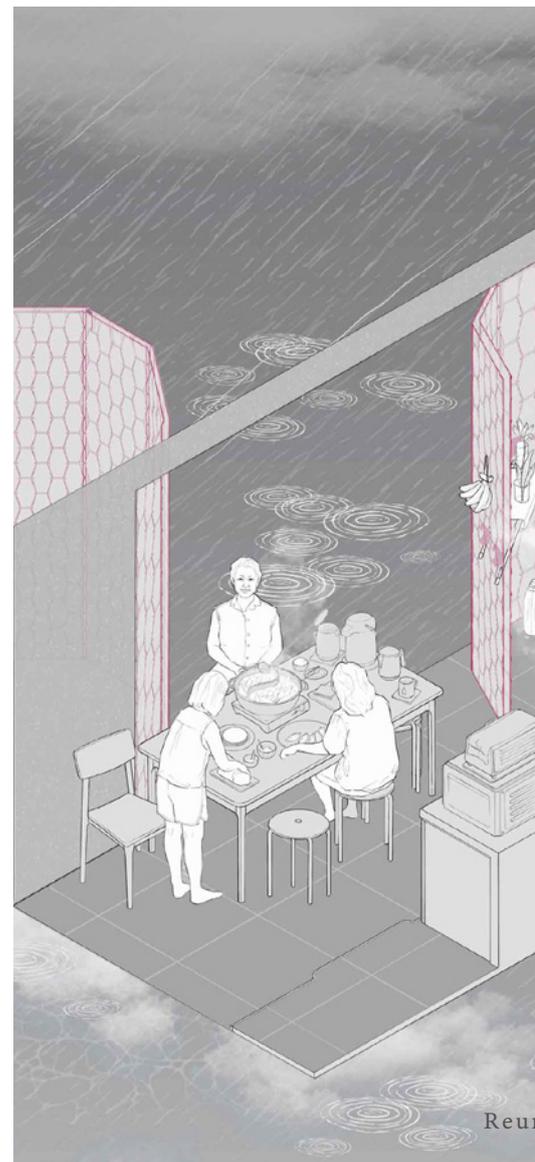
Scene 3.4: Humid Stitches / Steaming Upholstery / Hi Bye, Daughter!

Cascading garments flittering above head create a diaphonous experience, whilst passing a cloth under a threaded machine. Delicates are hung on the finer grain veneer panels, while the coarser grain panels face towards the kitchen, separating intimates from the voyeuristic kitchen space.

Pillows and bolsters could often use a little rejuvenation, and what better way than with hot steam to clear the mustiness and kill that 0.01% of germs. Ironing and steaming is synergised through this niche created by two adjacent wallpapers, allowing the humid steam to linger amongst the wood veneers.

As the veneer panel is peeled away, a mobile console allows a television to sit in both rooms at once - in effect a quasi secondary living room.





Scene 3.5: Loh Hoo Liao Reprised / Reunion / Bananas and Alliums

Plants sitting atop the washing machine are relocated onto shelves in the niche each time the washing machine is in operation due to the vigour at which the machine vibrates.

Reunion dinner often involves sitting around a table, this means peeling back the wallpaper to accomodate space, even if it means half of the table having dinner inside mum's room.

What previously was laundry beneath the line of sight as it hangs on pole socket systems and neighbours being able to peer into the kitchen, now laundry is tiered and elevated, allowing for an option to enact a privacy screen vis-a-vis damp garments whilst they are outside in all the UV glory.



onion



Bananas and Alliums



Scene 4.0: Study Model S = 1/50

The language of curling as a natural extension to the operative function of panelised “wallpaper” allows the flat to be rendered almost entirely porous. The curling of panels produce niches and openings, creating moments of encountering laundry throughout the house whilst further conflating privacy and interiority through the cyclical performance of laundry in the flat.

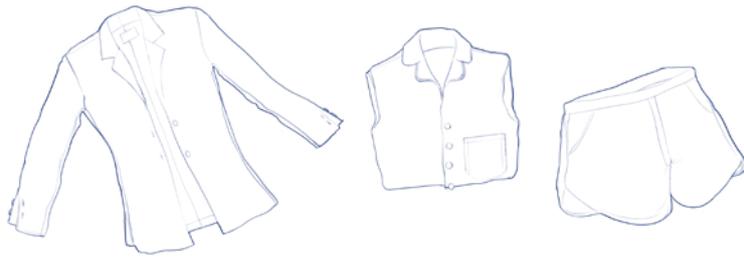








That's a wrap.



For my grandma and aunts who were so gracious and supportive behind the scenes.