

## The Unstable Image

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According to a 2018 Microsoft study, the attention span of human beings shrunk from 12 seconds in 2000 (the approximate start of the digital revolution) to 8 seconds. If we now have a lower attention span than a goldfish then how is architecture, a discipline that literally casts in place physical material with mortar, silicone and welds, to capture the attention of its subjects when other visual information is changing around us at gigabit speeds? While our attention may be waning our ability to multi-task has increased as our lives become increasingly digitized. This Darwinian adaptation of our brains and subsequently our eyes to multi-image screens suggests opportunities to expand architecture's cultural role.

The Unstable Image project interrogates contemporary ways in which images are destabilized through the various image-based platforms in which we consume them (social media, news outlets, etc.). It explores the spatial constructs that are lurking within the plethora of two-dimensional images that we engage daily, in rapid succession. Multi-screening, swiping and scrolling increases the quantity and impact of the images we consume, resulting in new media. We swipe in all directions and in our haste to see the next image blips occur. Sometimes these brief irregularities merge two discrete photos into a singular split screen image. Instagram stalling out between story transitions is one example of this, where images from two different events and authors are placed in a spatial dialog with one another. These temporary encounters result in unstable images that are

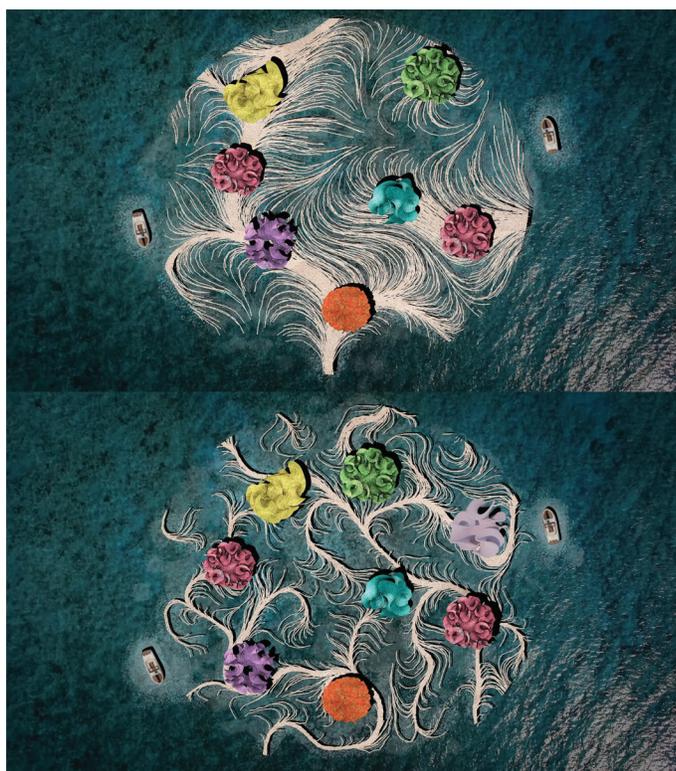


Figure 1. Instagram Story transitions using core sample model renderings. Image courtesy of BairBalliet.

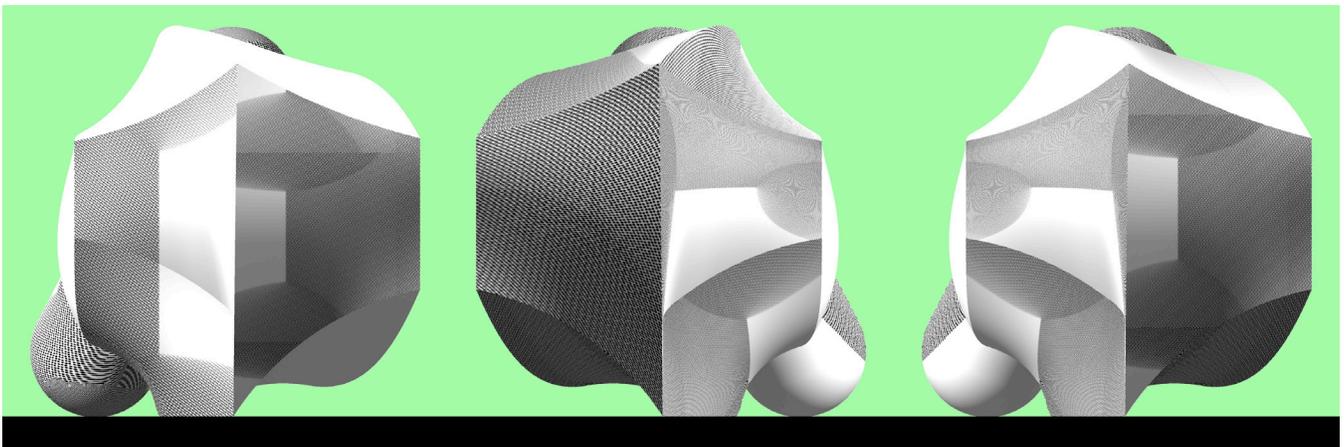


Figure 2. Instagram Story applied to non-primitive host body. Image courtesy of BairBalliet.

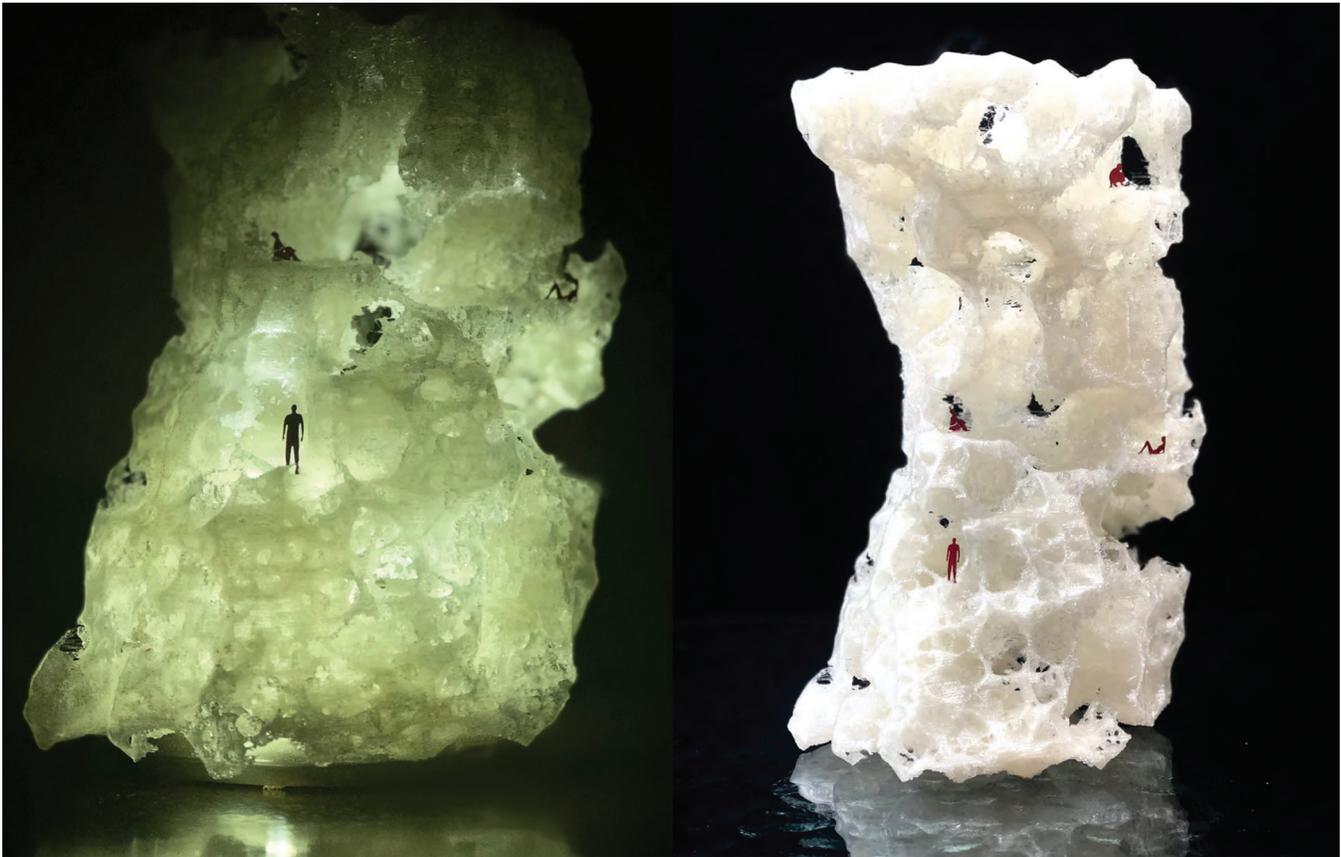


Figure 3. 3d Model views of alternative inner cores and inverted facades. Image courtesy of BairBalliet.

composited and hybridized three-dimensionally (Instagram Feed & Story Transitions), grafted and scaled (Wayfair & Houzz), and split into multiple frames (Living Spaces Virtual Room Design). The Unstable Image analyzes and intentionally hacks these destabilized images towards the production of spatial constructions that reference the digital platforms while proposing alternative scenarios for architecture in the physical world.

Beatriz Colomina claims that the idea of a single image that commands our attention has faded away stating that “it seems as if we need to be distracted in order to concentrate”, positing that in this state of distraction we’ve in fact produced a new form of attention. Colomina goes on to describe the Eameses’ exhibition design for the 1959 Moscow World’s Fair involving an array of seven twenty foot by thirty foot screens suspended within a Bucky Fuller geodesic dome upon which their film “Glimpses of the USA” was projected onto. The film, a collection of thousands of images from multiple sources was not projected simply for informational or entertainment purposes but rather to produce a space within a space. While one might gather the use of multiple screens in the Eameses’ work (film and architecture alike) stems from prevalent military and surveillance videos of the times, their effects went beyond perceptual views towards the destabilization of the linear experience of architectural

space. The split screen, traditionally used as a cinematic and television technique, specifically challenges ones understanding of space, time and perception by constructing framed views of multiple scenes simultaneously. According to Malte Hagener the split screen foregrounds the artificial nature of the image. A frame within a frame draws attention to the act of framing itself by visibly displaying the basic principle that forms the condition of possibility for the image: the frame that draws a distinction between inside and outside, between image and non-image. <sup>3</sup>

The Unstable Image looks at the blip of Instagram’s story transitions and the temporary stall between two unrelated images. In this contemporary moment of distraction, the core, an interior point of shared origin, focuses on the stable centers and the zones of maximum spatial interchange. Core samples, extracted from existing canonical and vernacular houses, are modeled and rendered at oblique camera angles to establish a split-screen image and spliced together in four ways. First, renderings of the core models are posted in sequence within Instagram’s “Story” interface. As stories cycle through the uploaded images are three-dimensionalized on two adjacent surfaces producing the illusion of a cubic massing (*figure 1*). Next, interior renderings are projected to non-primitive shapes developed from the volume within the renderings

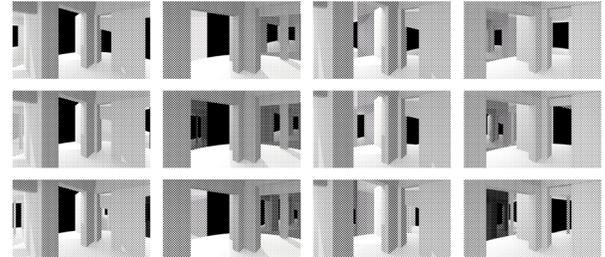
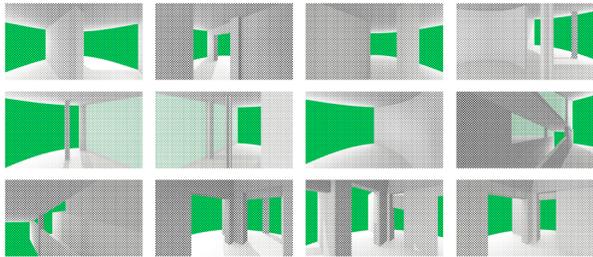


Figure 4. Green Screen storyboard. Image courtesy of BairBalliet.

Figure 5. Film Stills. Image courtesy of BairBalliet.

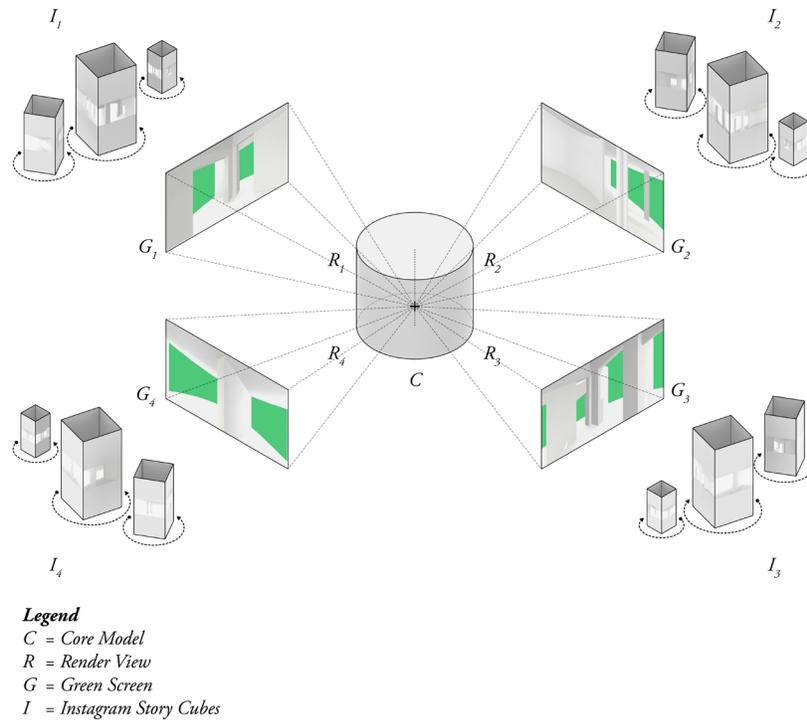


Figure 6. Scene Diagram. Image courtesy of BairBalliet.

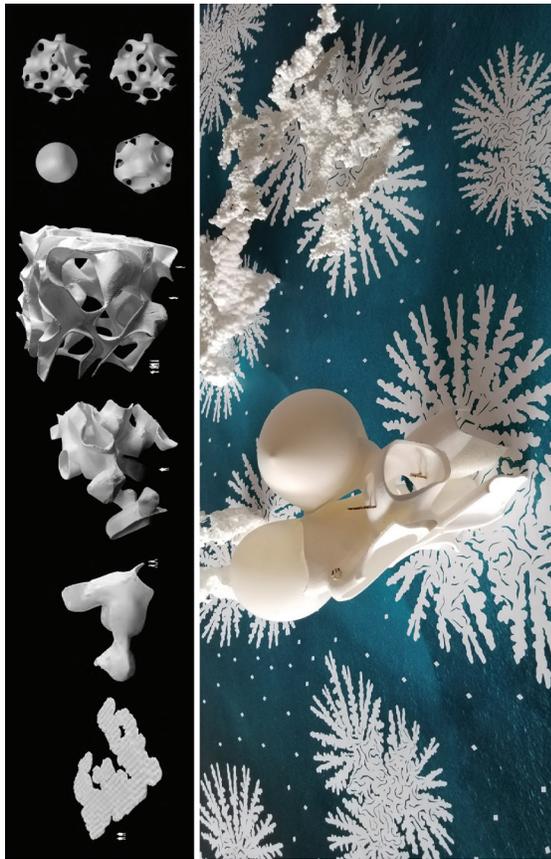


Figure 7. Core Sample Catalog. Image courtesy of BairBalliet.

(figure 2) simulating the story transition but with a nuanced host form. Third, interior renderings are three-dimensionally mapped onto surfaces that thicken and layer in the form of alternative inner cores and inverted facades (figure 3). Lastly, the renderings are developed through green screens (figure 4) that result in animated short films (figure 5). The films reframe and extend the single objective lens of the original static images (figure 6).

The second instance of the project literalizes the core samples (figure 7) and organizes them as moveable wall partitions intended to be experienced in the round and without fixed viewpoints (figure 8). The resultant space(s) offer unique possibilities for architectural elements by rethinking typical linear enclosures such as the extruded wall or the suspended ceiling (figure 9). No longer limited by fixed locations in space or prescriptive relationships between elements the cores migrate around and between each other producing spaces to both view and inhabit (figure 10).

In conclusion, The Unstable Image expands the depths of reality that stem from our image saturated world as opposed to flattening it. It stakes a claim on the image's potential to produce spatial propositions in an age of ubiquitous image-making. If contemporary modes of operation are to either post

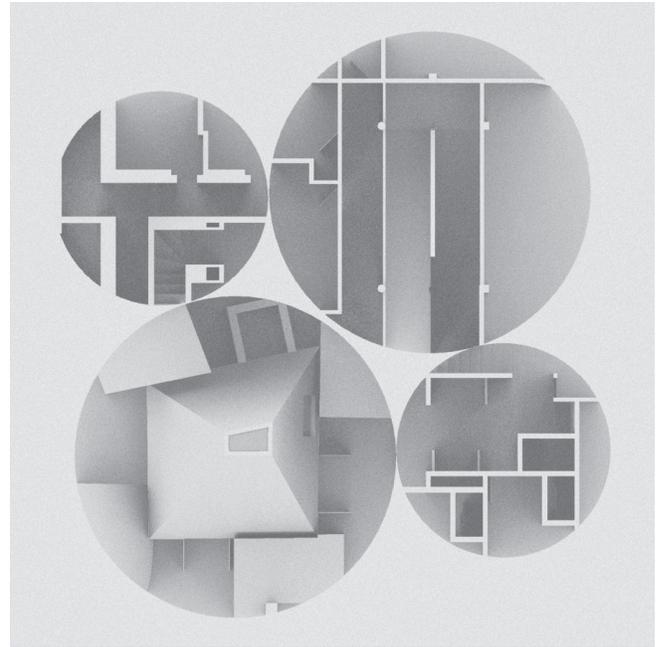


Figure 8. Top View of Core Samples. Image courtesy of BairBalliet.

(as in upload) work designed specifically for a particular image-sharing platform or to build work in the physical world that is literally an image, The Unstable Image offers an alternative to the image problem by spatially materializing non-linear image matter into subjective architectural experiences for physical and virtual audiences alike.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Kevin McSpadden, "You Now Have a Shorter Attention Span Than a Goldfish," *Time*, May 14, 2015, <https://time.com/3858309/attention-spans-goldfish/>.
2. Beatriz Colomina, "Enclosed by Images: The Eameses' Multimedia Architecture," *Grey Room*, no. 02 (Winter 2001): 6–29.
3. Malte Hagener, "The Aesthetics of Displays: How the Split-Screen Remediate Other Media," *Refractory: A Journal of Entertainment Media* 2008.

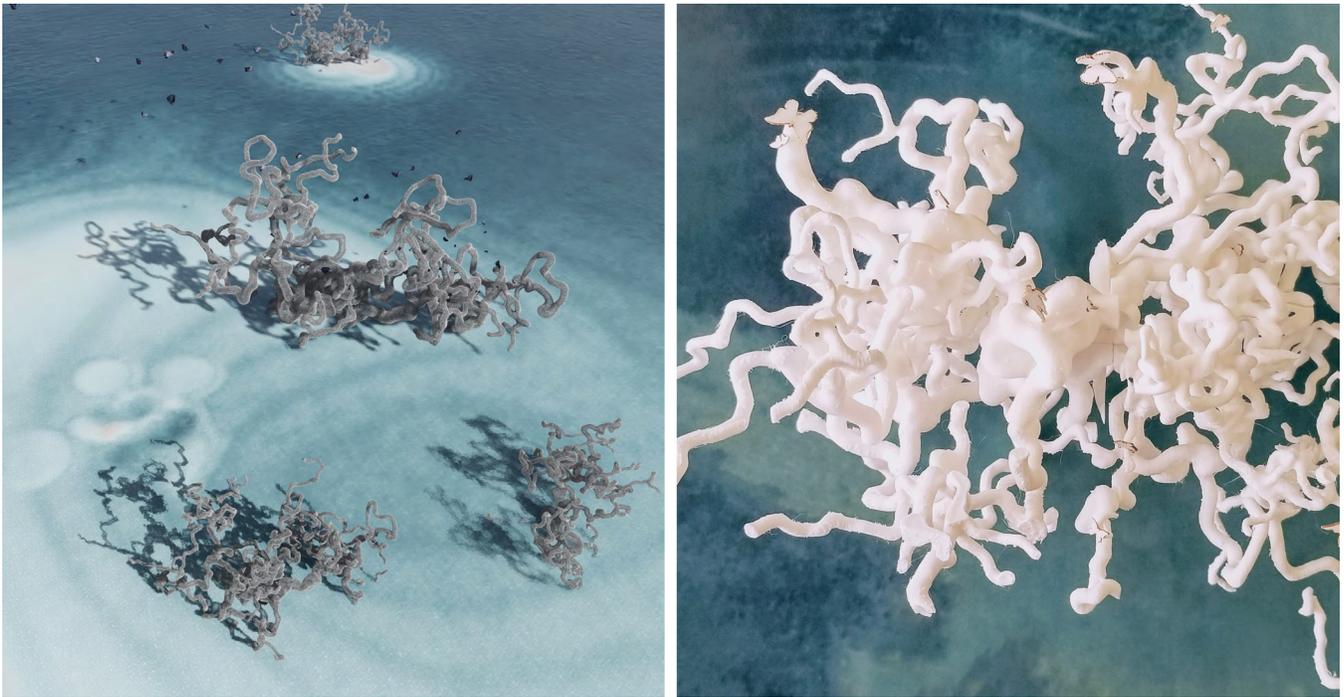


Figure 9. Axonometric of Core Samples. Image courtesy of BairBalliet



Figure 10. Unfolded Elevation of Core Samples. Image courtesy of BairBalliet.