

The Constructive Curtain Project

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The Constructive Curtain Project works in collaboration with architecture to generate more performative interiors. The curtain is capable of bridging the divide between architecture and interior design by generating more habitable environments. This divide has been recognized since the eighteenth-century when upholsterers and architects diverged in their appreciation for the hard versus soft and the permanent versus impermanent. The disciplines grew further apart in the nineteenth-century with the emergence of the professional decorator causing architects to perceive that their well-articulated spaces were being corrupted.¹

Historically, curtains have been utilized to block and filter light, provide privacy, and mend construction to minimize

drafts.² However, by the early twentieth-century, the curtain had come under attack, particularly by the doyen of decorative arts Edith Wharton. In her manifesto with Ogden Codman Jr., *The Decoration of Houses*, the chapter on windows banishes curtains from the well-bred house.³ Picture windows, popular in American mid-century tract homes, caused a resurgence in the installation of curtains. The windows, situated for exterior symmetry, generated difficult to inhabit imbalanced interiors, wall-to-wall curtaining was implemented as a correction.⁴ Contemporary urban glass towers further exacerbated this problem. This praxis-research tests the stance that the curtain is capable of correcting architectonic issues and bridging the disciplines.

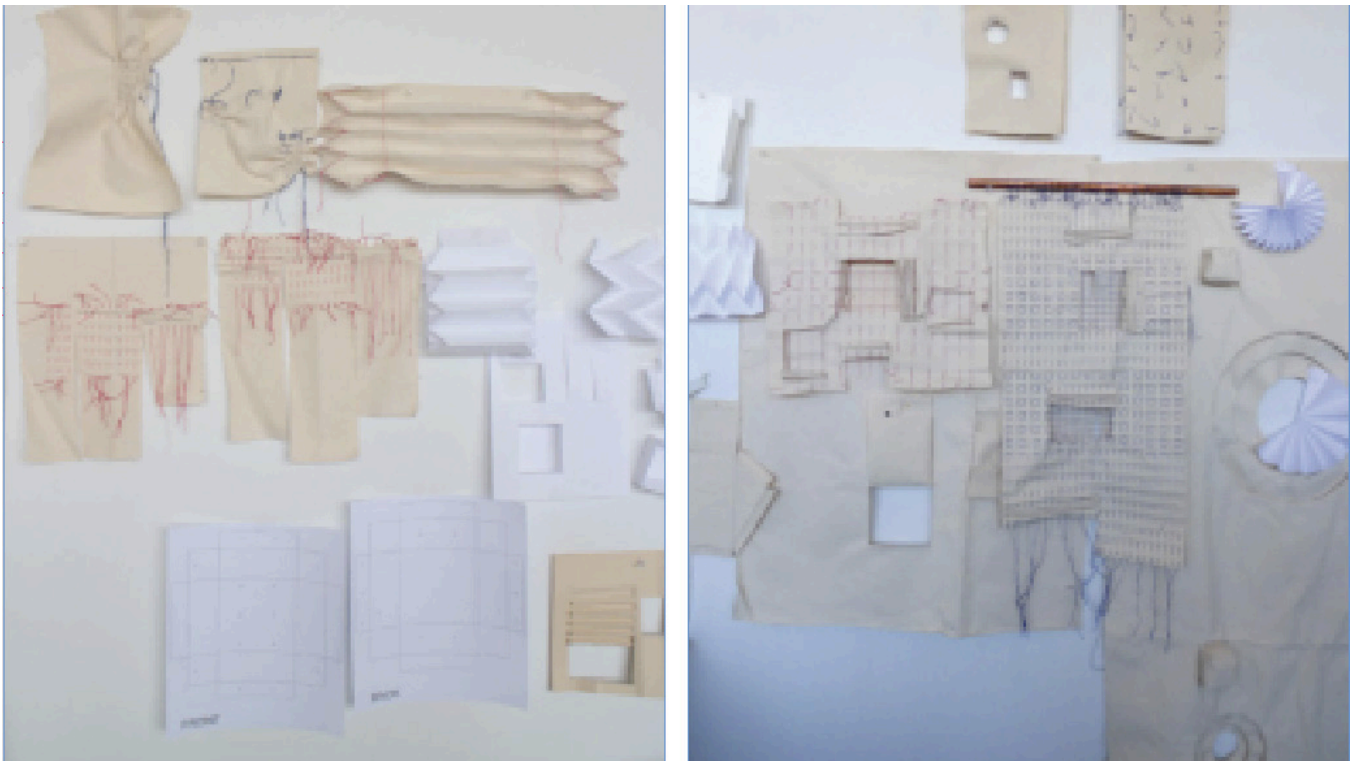


Figure 1. Constructive Curtain: Initial Studies. Deborah Schneiderman and Annie Coggan, 2018.



Figure 2. IProductive Drapery Test A: Retractable Curtaining. Deborah Schneiderman, 2019

The task of Constructive Curtains, unlike Petra Blaisse's site-specific curtaining,⁵ is to address and rectify quotidian interior issues in multiple settings. Those caused by irregular interior spatial conditions, large expanses of glass, and obstructions created by HVAC elements. They accomplish this with dimensionality, modularity, and adaptability. The prototypes provide context for window-treatment, adapting to frame views, compressing and expanding to meet changing spatial and climatic conditions (when monitored with a thermal imaging camera, tested Constructive Curtains heightened the interior temperature by 10 degrees). Highlighting Curtaining's historically performative role also questions issues of home-goods consumption.

In combining the tasks of decorative objects; lights/curtains, picture frames/curtains, room /curtain, prototypes provide an edited cohesive environment. Fabrication methods encompass, hand-sewing, machine-sewing, smocking, folding, pleating, and embroidery. Materials include various textiles including, woven, knit, and felted.

Retractable Curtaining is intended to meet existing conditions; resolve issues caused by HVAC; respond to season and climate; frame view; and correct overexposure due to large glass expanses. The modular curtain, prototyped in 100% recycled PET felt, is retractable both vertically and horizontally to

accommodate varying structural and functional conditions. Unlike an off-the-shelf curtain that rarely has a precise fit to an existing condition, the base of the retractable curtain can be adjusted to a given interior height. The curtain is further retractable above unit-air-conditioners, baseboard-heating-elements, and to allow airflow through an open window. Additionally, the curtains are retractable from the top to produce a clerestory-window, internally to create view-windows, from the bottom to thicken around window edges and puddle on the floor to minimize drafts. The operability enables the inhabitant to frame views, control light, and fit interior

condition as they can be expanded, reduced, or composed by combining modules.

View/Furniture Curtaining expands curtaining’s function to incorporate decor and furnishing. The modular canvas and felt prototype contains a series of openings that are equipped with magnetic snaps to allow expansion and attach functional elements. The prototyped design contains multiples of one systematized insert that, through various folding operations, can perform three functions or be removed entirely. Firstly, as a shelf that recedes behind the curtain. Secondly, as a functional



Figure 3. Constructive Curtain Test B: View/Furniture Curtaining. Deborah Schneiderman, 2018.



Figure 4. Constructive Curtain Test C: Snap/Switch Curtaining. Deborah Schneiderman, 2018.

pocket on the front side of the curtain. Lastly, folded and secured above the portal, hence framing view. Such curtains reorganize the glass facade residential tower as a device for framing view, while simultaneously minimizing additional furnishing requirements, consequently reducing consumption. The curtain incorporates a modular retractable extension element and can be further customized as a larger modular expanse. As the interior is temporal, the addition of the retraction pieces allows this curtain to adapt to multiple locations, accommodate climatic changes, and adjust to meet obstructions.

Snap/Switch Curtaining furthers the research from the previous two curtains. It not only incorporates furnishing, lighting, and fenestration, but is also length adjustable. Inner portions of the panel can be folded open to allow view through the solar screen; the folding of the panel simultaneously forms a shelf and battery powered LED light fixture. The grid of snaps functions to support the folded shelves, to hang add on elements such as pockets, and to fold the curtain from the bottom or the side to create variations in height, width, and density. The panel is constructed from recycled PET felt and can also be considered a module of a whole, readily expandable with the grid of snaps.



Figure 5. Constructive Curtain Test D: Illuminated Curtaining. Deborah Schneiderman and Annie Coggan, 2018

Illuminated Curtaining, derived from an experimental curtain designed by mid-century modernist lighting designer Richard Kelly, is an attempt at giving a curtain a responsibility in addition to being a decorative object in an urban inhabitation. During the evening it provides a soft atmospheric illumination over a window opening and during the day it functions as a contemporary Roman shade. The combination of functions, light and shading, reduces excessive consumption of consumer goods through multi-functionality. The curtain is constructed from canvas substantial enough to support organza lanterns that contain LED lighting embedded within the textile.

Thermal Curtaining draws on a number of historical precedents, and is an investigation into the performative nature of drapery.

The design of the Thermal Curtain mimics a lady's wool coat with faux cuffs and bottom trim and pays homage to the probably deeply thermally sound Lina Loos bedroom. The traditional "puddle" can make a vast difference in combating drafts at the baseboard level. This curtain combats drafts in a blatant and intentionally obvious manner. It can be used at the base board level and the window sill level, also potentially as a portiere.

The curtain, as evidenced, is well poised to bridge architecture and the interior. We continue to develop and test a taxonomy of conditions that address the pragmatics of curtains via analog and digital methods. Through the manipulation of prototypes, we test pedestrian ideas of domesticity and create new textile-based interiors.



Figure 6. Figure 5. Constructive Curtain Test E: Thermal Curtaining. Deborah Schneiderman and Annie Coggan, 2019

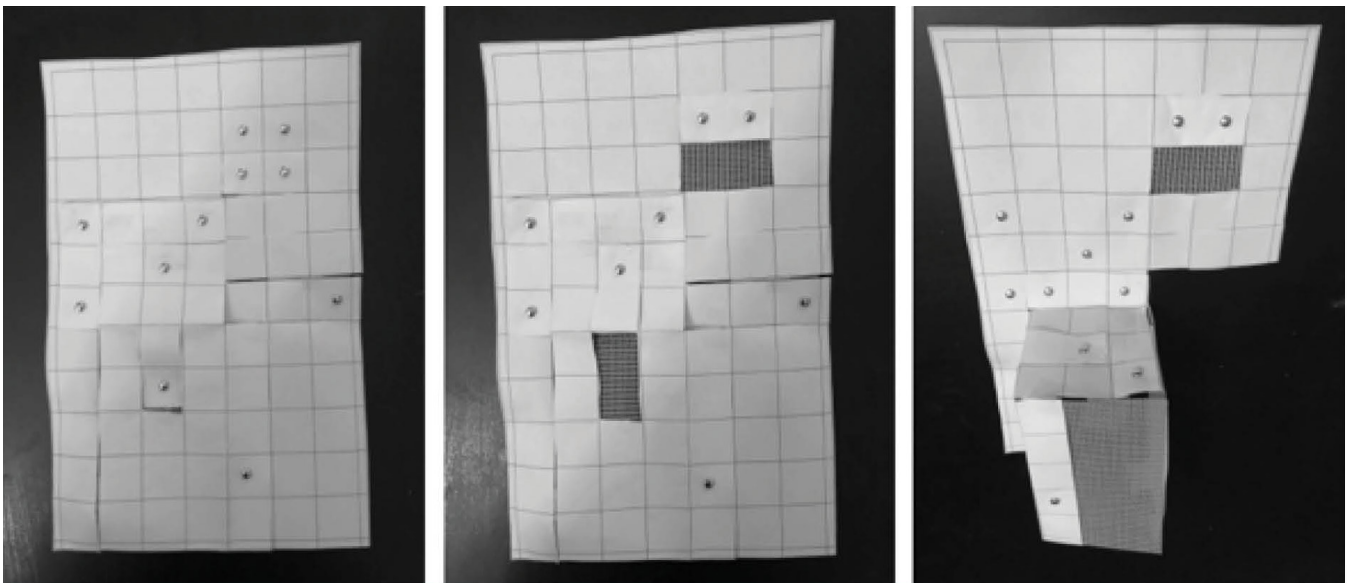


Figure 5. Constructive Curtain Test F: Interior/Exterior Curtaining paper study. Deborah Schneiderman, 2019

ENDNOTES

1. Joel Sanders, *Curtain Wars*, *Harvard Design Magazine*, No. 16, (Winter/Spring 2002): 14-20. DOI: <http://www.harvarddesignmagazine.org/issues/16/curtain-was>
2. Katherine Greer, *Culture and Comfort: Parlor Making and Middle-Class Identity 1850-1930*, Smithsonian, Washington DC, 2010.
3. Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman, Jr, *The Decoration of Houses*. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1897.
4. Margaret Maile Petty, "Curtains and the Soft Architecture of the American Postwar Domestic Environment," *Home Cultures* Vol. 9, issue 1(2012): 35-56.
5. Petra Blaise. "Curtain as Architecture: Casa Da Musica, Porto," in *Inside Outside Reveiling*, Nai Publishers, Rotterdam