

Defining Architectural Speeds:
A Spatial Investigation and Documentation of
the concept of Slowness and the Culture of Speed

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by
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Introduction

We are human *beings*, not humans *doing*

Victory Mori

In the summer of 2022, I took the opportunity to study in France as a part of the language immersion program. I had been living with a host family and taking classes in the central region of France in the town of Tours. Traveling independently for the first time set the tone for how I would reflect on where I had just come from. Over time I was introduced to daily rituals that I would have otherwise never noticed if I was not going to school every day to develop my own rituals. For the first time in my life, I was given the time to sit and eat breakfast in the morning before class. This concept was so unnatural to me because I never found a way to relax when I had to beat traffic or had a train to catch. This moment of resistance was my first realization of how indoctrinated I was in the social norms and expectations of life in the United States. During the school day, we were given a 20-minute break, and an hour and a half lunch break. It didn't feel like we were given this time because we earned it, we were given this time out of respect for others. My awareness altered after my schooling in France ended. In Paris, as I attempted to navigate my way I found myself at a small cafe. I had been on an aimless walk and thought I'd stop for a drink. When I ordered, the barista asked me if I wanted to sit or go, and I naturally said "to-go". Seemingly disappointed by my decision she continued by offering me some pastries. As I thought about her offer, I realized I had nowhere to be, and declared that I would sit. Her face lit up, and as I paid, I noticed behind her on the wall was a printed text stating, "Sorry, no laptops

les week-ends” with the intention of being entirely in English. It started to become clear that my habits were culturally tied.

I was unaware of the concept of slowness until I decided to research how a seemingly trivial collection of instances was connected on a much larger scale. What sparked my attention to these instances was in one of my first architecture classes at Bard with Michael Cohen. The final assignment: *Lack of Energy* was an opportunity to design a space that counters the high demands of constant productivity, or in another sense; a space to do nothing... A part of his argument critiqued that the implementation of leisurely activities was merely a way of creating efficient breaks,

People exist in a constant cycle of production and reproduction. In this cycle, activities of production relate to work, while activities of reproduction regenerate the human capacity to return to work. Leisure and rest can therefore be understood not as an escape from work and productivity, but rather as a necessary reprieve that allows the laborer to continue to exert energy.¹

The philosophy behind this assignment was based on the books *How To Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy* by Jenny Odell and *The Problem with Work* by Kathi Weeks. Both books capture a critique of the capitalist culture in a constant mode of productivity. This assignment also spoke to the fact that architecture is always built with intentionality, most typically hosting a space of production even in unrecognizable forms. For the assignment, I designed a space that inhibits productivity and the use of technology. I introduced the aerial hammock as a relaxing force that somewhat paralyzes the body, and makes the act of holding one's phone challenging. Being introduced to the concept of slowness in the context of space led my project to focus on the idea of slow spaces and how we use them.

¹ Michael Cohen, Assignment Prompt for Arch 111: Spatial Subjects, Final Assignment: Lack of Energy

My project investigates spaces of productivity and how the culture of work specifically in the United States has altered our perceptions of spaces of leisure and spaces of productivity. The concept of “Spaces of productivity” may sound ambiguous or up to interpretation and *that* is essentially what I am questioning. How have spaces of productivity become indistinguishable from spaces of leisure and rest? I am investigating the ways in which spatial design helps create this phenomenon. Documenting these spaces is important because it represents a physical manifestation of how our work life and non-work life are being combined. By distinguishing objects of leisure and objects of productivity the user can have a new perspective on how the implementation of slowness blurs the boundaries of work and leisure, ultimately with the intention of creating more space for production. By creating an embroidered floor plan of these spaces, the abstraction of their physical objects will display how the boundaries of leisure and work exist in the same space yet derive from two categories.

There is a reason why the typical American who indulges in a French cafe cannot “read the room” and approaches the space in a naive fashion. The implementation of leisurely activities, entertainment, or interior decor of a modern domicile into a productive space begins to change the intention of the space. These elements are considered to be a part of a slow space, because they are not inherently tools for production, this makes them slow.... The new trend which capitalizes on integrating such elements into the workspace has begun to commodify that which is “slow” as well as recontextualize spaces of productivity entirely into one indistinguishable entity. This phenomenon becoming a trend is how the appearance of spaces of leisure become commodified. But in order to talk about slowness first there must be an understanding of the culture of speed.

The Hare: Defining Fast

Fast Food. Fast Fashion. Fast Science.

The concept of “fast” i.e. *Fast* Food is a cultural symbol for the United States (especially amongst the rest of the world). Its ability to produce on a mass scale is celebrated through the notion of convenience. What makes this process a modern innovation is taking its *slow* practice and speeding up its development. Through the use of speed, quantity over quality comes into play. But what makes the concept of Fast Food so infamously American is its negative effects on people's health...

Speeding up the development of a slow practice, is modernization at its finest and therefore, the invention of “fast culture”. What was initially “survival of the fittest” has evolved into “survival of the *fastest*” yet it is culturally believed that slow and steady wins the race². The notion of “fast” exists throughout the United States at various scales from mass production to the way we think. Fastness has become a filter in which we see fragments of time as an opportunity to produce. Beginning as early as a child going to school, failing to catch up with their classmates is prescribed with a learning disorder because there is no time to learn at one's own pace. Now the process of learning is being challenged by artificial intelligence. Technology is the most objective form of fastness as its speed is marketed to help the ever-producing society, and why would we not accept help to do our jobs? As we introduce more modes of fastness into our lives we accept the strong current of work culture as our lifestyle. Yet if we don't welcome

² Carl Honoré *In Praise of Slowness: How a worldwide movement is challenging the cult of speed*. (NY, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004), 4.

innovations of assistance, work becomes an uphill battle and sometimes leads people into existential reevaluations. A result of some of these epiphanies has led to the notion of *slow*...

The Tortoise: Defining Slow

Slow Food. Slow Cities. Slow Living. Slow Religion. Slow Cinema. Slow Education. Slow Sex. Slow Medicine. Slow Fashion. Slow Parenting. Slow Travel. Slow Professors.

Today the concept of “slow” emerges as a reaction to the negative impacts of the capitalist ideology, in an effort to protect not only our health, that be the mind and body, but the planet as well. The Slow Movement is inherently tied to sustainable practices. Food production is an example of how slowness can be understood in a literal sense. The growth of agriculture and its weather dependent conditions does not supply the farmer with much agency over their crop. Without intervening with the natural cycles, the process of food production is a slow and patient one. Modern interventions have allowed for manipulation of this process by speeding up, and skipping over possible weather based loss. One could argue that sustainable practices are not inherently anti-capitalist, although unsustainable practices are often considered to be a byproduct of industrialization or any mass scale production. But even before such extreme modern inventions, we have seen how the pressure to maximize quantity led to catastrophic events, the most historical precedent being the dust bowl.³ This is just one example of how sustainable practices are relevant to the Slow Movement.

³ “The Dust Bowl.” National Drought Mitigation Center, Accessed April 30, 2024. <https://drought.unl.edu/>

When discussing how slowness functions spatially, it first must be understood contextually. Only through principle can a slow space manifest, after that, visual indicators prescribe how the space is intended to be used. A place of leisure typically represents slowness, but a place of leisure that is not transactional exists as a slow space in its purest form. An example of a non transactional slow space would be a public library. The space does not request anything in return in the form of currency, time, or energy.

True public spaces, the most obvious examples being parks and libraries, are places for –and thus the spatial underpinnings of– “what we will.” A public, non-commercial space demands nothing from you in order for you to enter, nor for you to stay; the most obvious difference between public space and other spaces is that you don’t have to buy anything, or pretend to want to buy something, to be there.⁴

Jenny Odell defines one way to identify a slow space by analysis of a *true* public space. Their function and neutral associations exhibit slowness through being spaces that can host the same practices as their social context. What makes a space slow is the synthesis of its inherent context and spatial design. A slow space is an environment to do anything but produce. It’s often seen as a place of reflection, introspection, and stillness, and it stands in its belief that these practices are a form of self-care and self-preservation. Jenny Odell’s book; *How to Do Nothing, Resisting the Attention Economy* discusses how our productivity-based society has negatively impacted the worker, or should I say; the user. Odell doesn’t explicitly speak of the concept of “slow” or “slowness” yet her philosophy couldn’t be any more aligned with these conceptions of speed.

...what I’m suggesting is that we take a protective stance toward ourselves, each other, and whatever is left of what makes us human – including the alliances that sustain and

⁴ Jenny Odell, *How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy* (Brooklyn, United States: Melville House Publishing, 2020), 13.

surprise us. I'm suggesting that we protect our *spaces* and our *time* for non-instrumental, noncommercial activity and thought, for maintenance, for care, for conviviality.⁵

Odell clarifies her beliefs that by claiming to *do* “nothing” is an act of self preservation as it inherently resists the commodification of one's time. The word “nothing” as the definition of this awareness is telling in itself, it is evocative and reveals that time spent outside of the work headspace is culturally deemed as useless if not contributing to productive society.

Odell's “nothing” functions similarly to “slow” in depicting the slow movement. Both concepts are not always meant to be taken literally but rather in the context of the ever-producing modern society.

Being Slow means that you control the rhythms of your own life. You decide how fast you have to go in any given context. If today I want to go fast, I go fast: if tomorrow I want to go slow, I go slow. What we are fighting for is the right to determine our own tempos.⁶

In 1986, the Slow Food movement arose as a response to Fast Food chains emerging in Rome. The industrialization of agriculture set a new speed in which methods of production prior would forever seem inefficient and slow. Yet today the environmental and physical repercussions of this mass-scale production have led us back to where we started. The founder Carlo Petrini describes his version of slowness which may just be the most realistic approach in our fast demanding world. What is unique about Petrini's statement is how he declares the power we should have over our time, our speed and ultimately our energy. This is one of the most important factors in understanding the principles behind the Slow Movement.

⁵Jenny Odell, *How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy* (Brooklyn, United States: Melville House Publishing, 2020), 28.

⁶ Carl Honoré *In Praise of Slowness: How a worldwide movement is challenging the cult of speed*. (NY, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004), 16.

The Cultural Relativity of Speed

Speed is only categorized by its relativity, and without “fast” there was no reason to create the Slow Movement. Many slow practices are in reference to society prior to the Industrial Revolution. Slow Food and Slow Fashion intend to replace what the industry neglects as a result of mass-scale production. Although modern technology is often used, their principles truly display their intentions. Working closely with the industrial revolution, is the concept of the commodity. The commodity becomes relevant in the discussion of not only slowness but slow spaces as trends of slowness manifest into spaces. The French philosopher Guy Debord describes the many ways this concept of the “commodity” has inherently redefined itself through modernity.

With the Industrial Revolution’s manufactural division of labor and mass production for a global market, the commodity finally became fully visible as a power that was *colonizing* all social life.⁷

The commodity exists as simple material goods that hold value in the economy, and, therefore, can be bought or sold. Yet today we have applied this understanding to modern conceptions as our modes of profit evolve. In terms of social life, the commodity can be found in the consumerism of American culture. Beyond the tangible forms of the commodity, the popularity of American media has created an ever growing industry that has been globalized. From movies, TV shows, to TikTok we are constantly being asked to consume. It’s revered as a form of relaxation, an activity that permits a break from work to sit in a dark room, or something to make the slowness of eating dinner feel more stimulating. As the presence of social media

⁷ Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2014), 16.

grows, our time becomes a form of currency, because what we do with our time is now being converted into data. The rise of technology has challenged the idea of slowness in intangible and nuanced ways.

Most of the seemingly irreducible necessities of human life – hunger, thirst, sexual desire, and recently the need for friendship – have been remade into commodified or financialized forms.⁸

Media is not considered to be necessary for survival, but the large industry behind it has been able to capitalize on views, subscriptions and develop content creators into paid workers all focusing on ways to get our attention. Being in a constant state of consumption is a part of the culture of speed. Therefore, these manifestations of capitalism are all different mediums of fastness. Because of this diverse range of commodities, concepts of fast or slow can easily become lost in a sea of consumption, becoming indistinguishable from another. This is why it's important to understand the principles of the Slow Movement. Watching a movie does not initially exhibit the culture of speed, it's a leisurely activity, and a form of entertainment. But like most experiences in American culture, it's not exactly free...

The concept of slowness actively attempts to resist capitalist ideology, but over time like most things it has been molded into an experience accessible through currency, that be time, money, or data. This dynamic forms a transactional relationship between the user and the provider and creates exclusive accessibility to indulge the space. I am taking a look at how seemingly public spaces have become a place to host freelance workers. Cafe's are an example of this phenomenon at play. Coffee shops are perceived as an open and comfortable space to set up shop and get some work done. But as we enter the space of a company, we know our role as

⁸ Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (New York, NY: Verso, 2013), 10.

the consumer. As Odell describes in her definition of public spaces, to purchase the bare minimum is implied if not expected in order to justify taking up a seat. It is clear that this workspace is effective for people, it is successful for me in fact. But as I write about this phenomenon in the spaces I am studying, my view becomes dystopian. I look up to see more than half of customers seated staring at screens with a cup in one hand. This creates the illusion that the space is busy from its amazing coffee or food, but it becomes unclear if that is the case when the space features; large windows, wooden furniture, cushioned seating, lively plants, and a water dispenser. What becomes attractive about this environment are objects of leisure, or in other words objects of slowness.

Considering the cubicle to have been the modern workspace of the twentieth century, it has now become the vacant office space as new designs develop. Culturally known as the most infamous work setting, the office's sterile environment is justified by the stability it can provide. With the belief that fewer distractions would create more productivity, a space of work and a space of leisure could not be more discernible. As technology progressed the space of productivity was being put in question. I am not claiming that fluorescent lighting in a cubicle is how workspaces should be. I am calling awareness to the implementation of leisurely activities. Ping pong tables and bars in the workspace only encourages further occupation of the space, and therefore, keeps people in further contact with productivity.

24/7 is a time of indifference, against which the fragility of human life is increasingly inadequate and within which sleep has no necessity or inevitability. In relation to labor, it renders plausible, even normal, the idea of working without a pause, without limits.⁹

⁹ Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (New York, NY: Verso, 2013), 9.

Since objects of slowness have been integrated into the newer forms of the workspace, i.e. WeWork we are forced to recontextualize the concept of the workspace entirely. Jonathan Crary describes how the essential human factor of sleep is being challenged by the military in an effort to destroy the inherent boundary between work and non-working time, he most notably refers to this as the “24/7 society”. Although seemingly impossible, this would allow for the human being to have the potential of becoming purely an agent of work. Crary states how this concept is understandable in the context of the work environment, which I find disturbingly true. Although our workspaces today do not overtly deprive us of sleep, nor take away breaks, a subtle variation of this concept is prevalent in our engineered spaces of public productivity. Providing leisurely activities actually creates an efficient break. As contradictory as that sounds, amenities within the space shorten the time it would take to take a break by searching for food or any need. By compressing this matter into the same space implicitly questions why we would need to leave the building at all, that is unless we need to sleep...

A by-product of this phenomenon is that which creates a vernacular or an aesthetic that can be capitalized on. Through this aesthetic becomes a clear codified way to read the space as slow. These elements used in the space to create the aesthetic are capitalized on through a means of reproduction. In an effort to recreate a slow space, the objects of slowness become commodified as slow elements. Although they are already a commodity as material goods that are bought or sold, now they become visual representatives of not only slow spaces but the slow movement when they actually exist within a fast space.

This form of commodification is not representative of a slow space. One could claim that these are no longer slow spaces by principle, but if we start to recontextualize the slow space in

the workspace as just a fast space my argument would seem rather defeated. Instead, I am arguing for an awareness of this social phenomenon, because with just a simple awareness we can think twice about how we spend our time and treat our minds and bodies.

The most ubiquitous amenity a productive space is known to provide is that of coffee and/or tea. Caffeine is regarded as one of the most significant catalysts for the progression of the industrial revolution. The use of caffeine is responsible for breaking the labor schedule from depending on sunrise and sunset to working around the clock. Jonathan Crary describes the ways in which society has become affected by this transition;

One of those conditions can be characterized as a generalized inscription of human life into duration without breaks, defined by a principle of continuous functioning. It is a time that no longer passes, beyond clock time.¹⁰

Crary acknowledges how this breaking of the boundaries has played out beyond the industrial revolution and now beyond the clock entirely. There was a time when the natural cycles of the earth prescribed when it was possible to work and when it was time to rest. Because of this clear distinction, spaces of work, and spaces of rest were very clear. The discovery of electricity and caffeine are just a couple factors that disrupted the circadian approach to life and work, and has led to the morphing of work and rest spaces into one entity.

Caffeine is possibly the most culturally acceptable addictions and dependencies for productivity that flows freely in the workspace. It is responsible for efficiency so why would the use of caffeine be challenged when it only helps production? There is no issue with its level of productivity, but more so why we all justify the ingestion of caffeine. It is not even a topic of discussion because it is understood that not only is it addictive, but we probably would not be

¹⁰Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (New York, NY: Verso, 2013), 8.

able to sustain our workload without caffeine. This predicament is where the issue lies. How have we accepted such high intensity work that a drug of productivity is needed to justify that workload? Kathi Weeks analyzes this dilemma and proposes some reasoning for our choices:

(...) [W]e work because we must: while some of us may have a choice of where to work, in an economy predicated on waged work, few have the power to determine much about the specific terms of that employment. (...) Whereas this first response focuses on necessity, the second emphasizes our willingness to work. According to this account, we work because we want to: work provides a variety of satisfactions – in addition to income, it can be a source of meaning, purpose, structure, social ties, and recognition.¹¹

Not only do we take on such work because we may not have a choice, but Weeks admits that there is a sense of pride and purpose that comes with such a heavy workload. This notion may be useful in trying to understand our dependency and how slowness has entered as a form of comfort in the mandatory high speed of the work space.

The Commodification of Slowness

Co-working spaces are a form of a public workspace that poses as an example of a fast space implementing elements of slowness. But when this phenomenon occurs on a global scale it begins to question the concept of a workspace in its entirety, inevitably redefining spaces of efficiency. Evidence of this phenomenon is present in places such as the company WeWork. Their spaces provide an example of how the boundaries of work time & leisure have become limitless. The concept of WeWork is to invite freelance workers to indulge in a comfortable workspace that also provides a form of community. What makes these spaces attractive is the aesthetic in which they are marketed. This interior decor is most notably used and associated with Airbnb and trendy American cafes. Architecture reflects the intended use of space and

¹¹Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham etc.: Duke University Press, 2011), 37.

properties are the identifiers for what speed is categorized as, but through this trend our ability to read a space is being challenged, and how we read them is altered. Using elements of domesticity as a veil for attracting people to the workspace is very telling about how work is perceived. This need for such a comfortable and attractive space in order to be productive is almost dystopian.

The other day I walked by a cafe, bookstore, and bar called “Rough Draft” and through the window all I could see were five laptops reflecting back at me. I couldn’t help but walk inside to discover more than just laptops, but people talking, and reading books. It was clear that it was a workspace considering its pun, but they also acknowledged this through a blackboard that stated; “No laptops after 3” as this place claims to have so many uses, a sign like this must be necessary in order to utilize the rest of the space throughout the day.

Another form of commodification that takes place in slowness, is through slow spaces like the home. Airbnb is an example of how the commodification of the domestic space can be seen through renting. Airbnb is marketed as a tool to find alternative accommodations for short-term stays. But what makes the company stand out is its home-based offers. Not only does this concept offer agency as a renter or owner, but it is also a cheaper alternative. This notion of Airbnb emerging from the home has progressed far beyond the simplicity of giving the house another use. Today we see land being bought as the new site of an Airbnb home, tiny homes being designed, and container houses constructed purely with the intention of listing it on Airbnb.

Arguing that Airbnb is the commodification of a slow space acknowledges the home as a place of leisure. A slow space is an environment where production or any form of work ceases to exist, but the home requires continuous maintenance to stay a slow space. This form of labor is

typically met by the live-in residents. The traditional American household depends on the wife to uphold the livability of the space, and since this labor has not been historically recognized as a form of unpaid work, the home is marketed through the image of “slowness” in the space.

With concepts like Airbnb and Peerspace commodification exists on the other side of the coin. Instead of introducing elements that create a comfortable environment, the rental of a home invites forms of production. This heightened trend in Airbnb is partially from the discovery that it would still be profitable to build a house from scratch rather than just rent one's own home. But it goes beyond just the homeowner. Homes are being designed, built, and furnished all with the single intention of being a temporary rental. Airbnb homes have since become as diverse as can be.

When listing a home for any kind of rental the maintenance of the space becomes directed toward serving the client. Cleaning for one's comfort in the home easily becomes blurred with cleaning for business. As a high schooler, I witnessed my mother become obsessive about not only the cleanliness of the space but also the representation.

At the age of thirteen, my parents decided to move into an industrial space with the sole purpose of making it into a multi-use creative space. We took an old fish factory that was most recently turned into a gallery space, and built bedrooms, bathrooms, and a kitchen. We listed our house on Peerspace and almost every weekend I would come home to hundreds of strangers as I snuck into my room. Eventually, we could afford to pay for a weekly cleaning service, but that didn't stop my mother from constantly maintaining the 4,300 square foot space. Over time more of our personal items were removed from the open space to prevent inevitable damage. This precaution extended from the art on the walls to the dishes we ate on. Indulging in our space as a

home became rare through the commodification of space. Basing profit on the condition of the domicile is how the boundaries between the space of production and rest or leisure begin to fade. This is one example of how the slow space in the domestic sphere can be infiltrated and turned into a fast space. By principle, its most important function becomes renting the space before the condition of the living space, because without that, the inhabitants lose profit.

Method

If it wasn't for my adolescent experience in my house, I would most likely be unaware of how the commodification of the home through companies like Peerspace and Airbnb affect the residents of the space. Investigating spaces is just one example of evidence for how the boundaries of productivity and leisure are being combined. Spaces can be used as a tool to see the physical manifestation of how our work life and non-work life are being combined. I am documenting how spaces of productivity and leisure have become one entity through the commodification of slow spaces. What makes a slow space is not only its given context but the objects of leisure put in the space. By distinguishing objects of leisure and objects of productivity the user can have a new perspective on how the implementation of slowness blurs the boundaries of work and leisure, ultimately with the intention of creating more space for production.

The commodification of slowness contradicts the concept of slowness entirely. Creating profit off of leisure is an *industry* not *slowness*. It's important to recognize how our workspaces inevitably define our work days. Through the freedom of mobility that technology provides today, we see how innovations have created a limitless workspace and timeframe. For freelance workers, productivity mostly takes place on the computer. We search for a space that exhibits productivity and spend our time there until the place cannot serve our needs. It's amazing how

often the conversation around having more amenities like food or drinks people would continue to indulge a workspace. Even a place of rest or comfort away in the same workspace is recognized as an amenity when in truth we should know when it's time to go home...But companies are aware of this dilemma, and I am documenting exactly how spatial design accommodates this need in productive spaces.

This concept of introducing amenities has led to a major trend and investment in designing a recognizable aesthetic. Spatial designers, that be: architects, engineers, interior designers, and interior decorators have begun to recreate what is now the modern workspace. The place of commodification exists in this new vernacular of interior design most heavily associated with trendy cafes and listings on Airbnb.

Through aesthetic practices, the boundaries of work and non-work begin to vanish. I believe that by providing an abstraction of these familiar spaces we can see how intertwined they are without bias. I do not intend to inhibit the use of these spaces, but merely to create an awareness of how the design can allow one to become numb to the world of productivity beyond just the workspace. We tend to neglect our needs when our culture only supports us through spaces of productivity. With just a little awareness we can begin to slow down and take a moment for ourselves.

The method by which I am documenting these spaces is by taking the perspective of the consumer and using what evidence is readily accessible to translate these spaces into abstract floor plans. To use images given to the consumer is evidence of promoting leisurely amenities within the workspace. By extracting a mockup floor plan I will display the relationship between these objects of leisure and productivity. After determining what elements are fast (productivity)

and slow (leisure) I color coordinate them into hues of orange and blue. By using warm and cool tones I intend to represent our associations with work and leisure through our perception of color. Orange and blue are complementary colors, this displays how work and leisure are inherently in dialectical opposition. Orange is attention grabbing while blue is almost always associated with tranquility and ease. After color coordinating I will display these floor plans in the medium of embroidery. Each floor plan is embroidered onto a 12" x 12" canvas in abstract forms. Through the embroidery of the plan, the space becomes unrecognizable and defamiliarized. These abstractions allow for a new perspective, reflecting interior elements that make up the usage of the space in its raw form. I intend to create a new relationship between the users of space and the engineers of the space. This "undoing" of the fastness allows the user/audience to create one's own interpretation of the data.

Through these abstractions, I intend to display one way in which these fast spaces are engineered to appear slow. The choice of embroidery as my medium for documentation holds many reasons. First I wanted my medium to display a slow practice. Creating these abstractions in the digital realm is more efficient, and in some sense almost easier. I was also searching for a way to juxtapose hand-made textures and the floor plan to acknowledge the unnatural ways we formally construct spaces.

Although sewing by hand may seem intuitive, I probably would not have gravitated toward this medium if it wasn't for my mother who taught me the basics, and for that matter, her very skilled mother who taught her. The craft of embroidery and sewing has historically been a

feminist practice¹². Before women were allowed to work, using a needle and thread gave women agency and provided creative expression.¹³

This form of documentation brings into question the hyper-productive society and the commodification of one's time. In another sense, questioning how we have culturally accepted these societal standards, and why we do not impose boundaries...Architecture has the power to host any ideology. As soon as Architecture is recognized as a contributing agent, it can be used as a "space" metaphorically to discuss what Jonathan Crary refers to as the "24/7 society" and contribute or resist the culture of speed.

Architecture's Approach to Slowness

Before the modern idea of the Slow Movement, slowness was apparent in the architecture of cultures prior to the development of the United States. The cafe can be considered to be a modern evolution of an original space we might think of as "slow". Prior to the industrial revolution it can be argued to have held slowness before we coined the term "slowness" or a "slow space". Its concept in modern society is based on capitalist ideology; a brick-and-mortar place to purchase a cup of coffee or tea is a place of profit, yet it is infamously recognized as a place of leisure...This underlying perception stems from practices in parts of Asia, one example is the Japanese Tea Ceremony. *Chanoyu*, or *sado* translated as the Way of Tea is considered to be an elevated art form based on Buddhist philosophy. The space that hosts these traditional practices; the *Chashitsu* "tea room" is based on the module of the tatami mat. Besides the room

¹²E. Tammy Kim, "The Feminist Power of Embroidery," The New York Times, December 29, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/29/opinion/sunday/feminist-embroidery-korea.html>

¹³Stefanie Graf, "The Feminist Revival of Embroidery," Hyperallergic, September 26, 2022, <https://hyperallergic.com/763837/the-feminist-revival-of-embroidery/>

itself, the Chashitsu encompasses the entire surrounding area through a serene landscape. A small garden is common and is used as a place to become present with nature before coming into the tea room. The practice is based on four principles; harmony, tranquility, purity, and respect, and it can be seen through the design of these spaces and their environments. Unfortunately the practice of Japanese Tea Ceremony has become a dying art form, and in an effort to continue the tradition it is openly taught to travelers.



fig. 1 Interior of a Chashitsu¹⁴



fig. 2 Choshukaku (Mikasa House)¹⁵

The Chashitsu should be a precedent for how slow spaces can be approached in modern architecture. It is only recently that the concept of slowness infiltrated the field of architecture and has since then attempted to contribute to what is now being called, the “Slow Space Movement”...

¹⁴“Famous Tea Houses,” Traditional Kyoto, accessed April 30, 2024, <https://traditionalkyoto.com/architecture/famous-tea-houses/>

¹⁵Matsuo Bashō, “Choshukaku (Mikasa House)” Mapcarta, accessed April 30, 2024, <https://mapcarta.com/W316202169>

Architects Caroline Amstutz and David Pankhurst have contributed to the slow space movement through developing an architectural manifesto entitled, “Searching for Slowness”, The M.I.T. architects researched “Slow Architecture” and interviewed various architecture firms; Todd Williams Billie Tsien Architects, RMA Architects, Studio Mumbai, Aamodt / Plumb, and MASS Design Group. Their manifesto deems that;

Slow Architecture is an alternative practice, production, and occupation of architecture, which is attuned to environment and cultural context, with all aspects of the design deeply considered and deliberately working to achieve quality and longevity...with speed comes compromise at the cost of our environment, health, and culture.¹⁶

To declare that Slow Architecture is an *alternative* practice suggests that the traditional practice of architecture is “fast”. The intention to “slow down” inherently revisits traditional architectural practices and recontextualizes them. The commodification of architecture originating as a Western concept ties the profession to capitalist cultures. Although architectural practices have evolved since its institutionalization, its development into modernity is through fast practices, such as; engineering spaces for maximum efficiency, the use of cheap materials, and unsustainable methods.

The manifesto “Searching for Slowness” considers the concept of “slow” to be a reaction to fast modern conveniences and their solution is approached in the same manner and urgency as the climate crisis with sustainable methods. Amstutz and Pankhurst’s analysis of “slowness” encapsulates the concept accurately across other practices outside of architecture.

There is no single or “correct” definition of slowness. Rather Slow Architecture is defined by a series of principles, presented as malleable tenets, which were found resting under the surface of our discussions.¹⁷

¹⁶Caroline Amstutz and David Pankhurst, *Searching for Slowness: A Future-Paced Ethos* (Massachusetts Institute for Technology 2020)

¹⁷Amstutz and Pankhurst, *Searching for Slowness: A Future-Paced Ethos*

I find this description to accurately encapsulate the essence of slowness, in one sense it can be rather abstract yet its core principles are what define it. The concept is prevalent in the discussion of daily life when we talk to our friends about how much work we got done or why we are going to bed early. In searching for slowness we find ourselves speeding up in a never ending cycle that becomes a ubiquitous experience. Amstutz and Pankhurst's manifesto can be found on the slow space movement website, organized by architect Mette Aamodt as a place to connect with others through sharing pieces of work and art.

In 2016, Harvard Architects; Mette Aamodt and Andrew Plumb founded the Slow Space Movement as a direct protest to Trump's inauguration, stating that:

“[T]he Slow Space Movement is a broadly defined cultural shift in the priorities for the built environment. Instead of building fast and cheap to meet immediate market needs we should think long term and create buildings that are good, clean and fair for all.¹⁸

Their architecture firm, Aamodt / Plumb, now designs living spaces that promote “slowness”. The concept of “Slow Living” is referred to in their work as a guide for how they intend to design their spaces. These spaces counter consumer-based methods by prioritizing quality over quantity and hold the belief that creating a slow living space leads to a healthy lifestyle.

The firm contributes to the slow movement in the domestic sphere, and designs with an aim to incorporate a relationship with nature. Aamodt / Plumb use environmentally responsible methods to create long-lasting spaces, and a part of their holistic approach uses materials sourced locally and fairly to the site of construction. With a Scandinavian essence, many of their projects host a very modern aesthetic and represent the popular style of interior design of the time, most

¹⁸ Mette Aamodt, “Slow Space, Slow Cities” *The Big Picture*, (March 19, 2018)

notably through the use of wood paneling, brick, and charcoal color exteriors. This aesthetic is most similar to Airbnb's through its exposed materials and cleanliness, and somewhat speaks to the way slowness is promoted within the home.



fig. 1 Modern Barns Project¹⁹



fig. 2 Fort Hill Cottage²⁰

This notion of slowness intentionally designed for the home in a modern setting is so new that its style is completely up to interpretation. We can see here how one architecture firm approaches this uncharted territory. Slowness is a concept, not an aesthetic and as soon as a slow space can become identifiable for its interior decor it transforms into a marketable style. This contradiction of commodifying the slow space is already happening and is being seen in public workspaces.

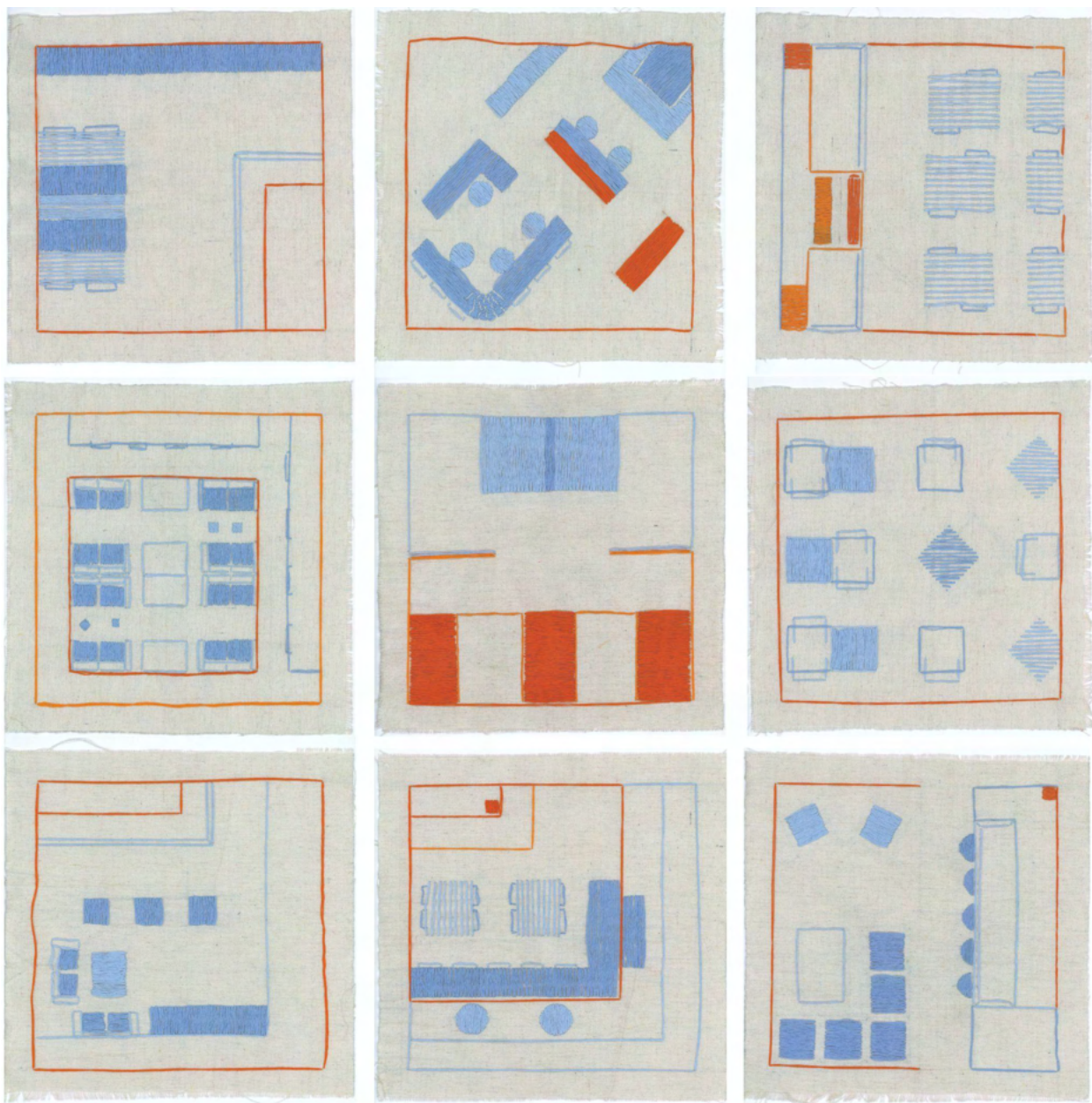
¹⁹Jane Messinger, "Fort Hill Cottage", Aamodt / Plumb. Accessed April 30, 2024.
<https://aamodtplumb.com/projects/fort-hill-cottage/>

²⁰Chuck Choi, "Modern Barns", Aamodt / Plumb. Accessed April 30, 2024.
<https://aamodtplumb.com/projects/modern-barns/>

Conclusion

Slowness is beyond just speed, it's a concept recognized in the manifestation of speed. Bringing attention to spaces of productivity exposes inattentive behaviors that lead to mental and physical issues we would otherwise not correlate to a hyperproductive society. But through the appropriation of slowness, we see how it masks the intensity of work culture in the United States. How can we move forward with architectural practices without contradicting the entire concept of slowness? Is it even possible to authentically approach slow spaces in a capitalist society? It is a paradox. I do not propose a solution to this underlying issue, but can merely argue for the importance of this phenomenon and its documentation. Slowness is a resistance, a political act, often mistaken for an “a-political” act. It has the power to act against the expectations of a growing profit-based society. Slowness is a demand for normalcy, to break the cycle of working to live and living to work. It calls for living to live, acknowledging that we are human-*beings*, not humans-*doing*...

Embroideries



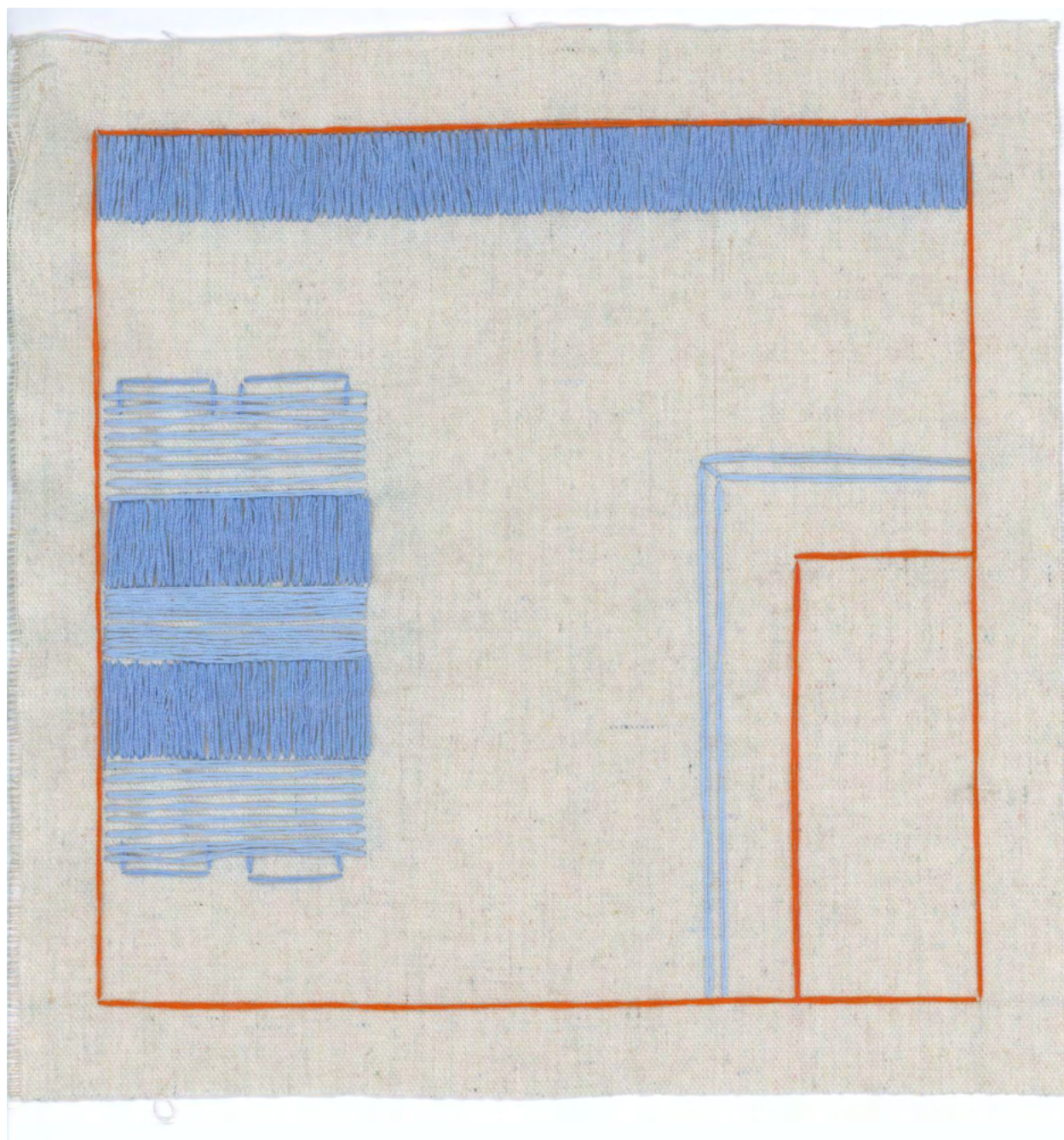


fig. 1

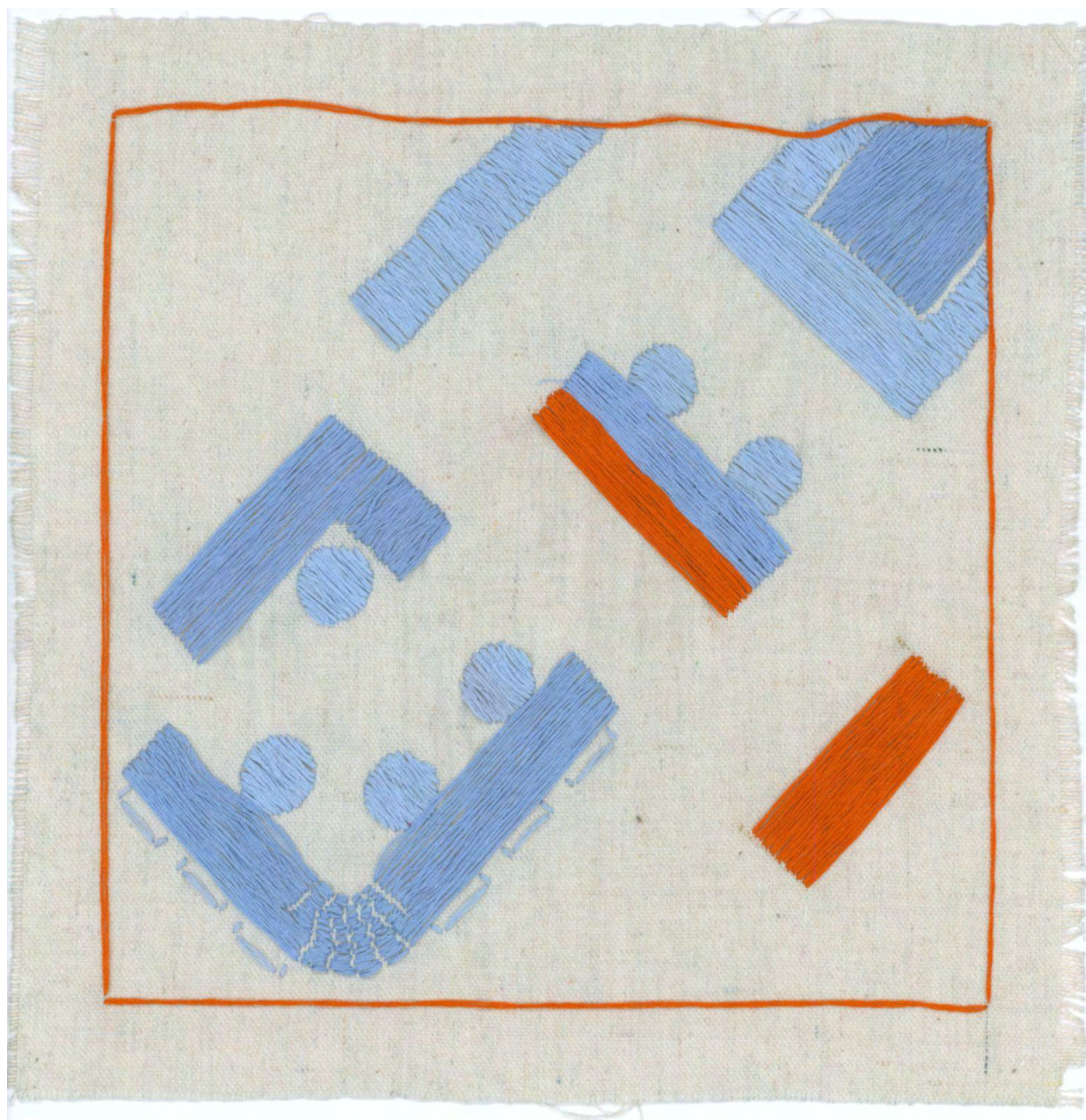


fig. 2

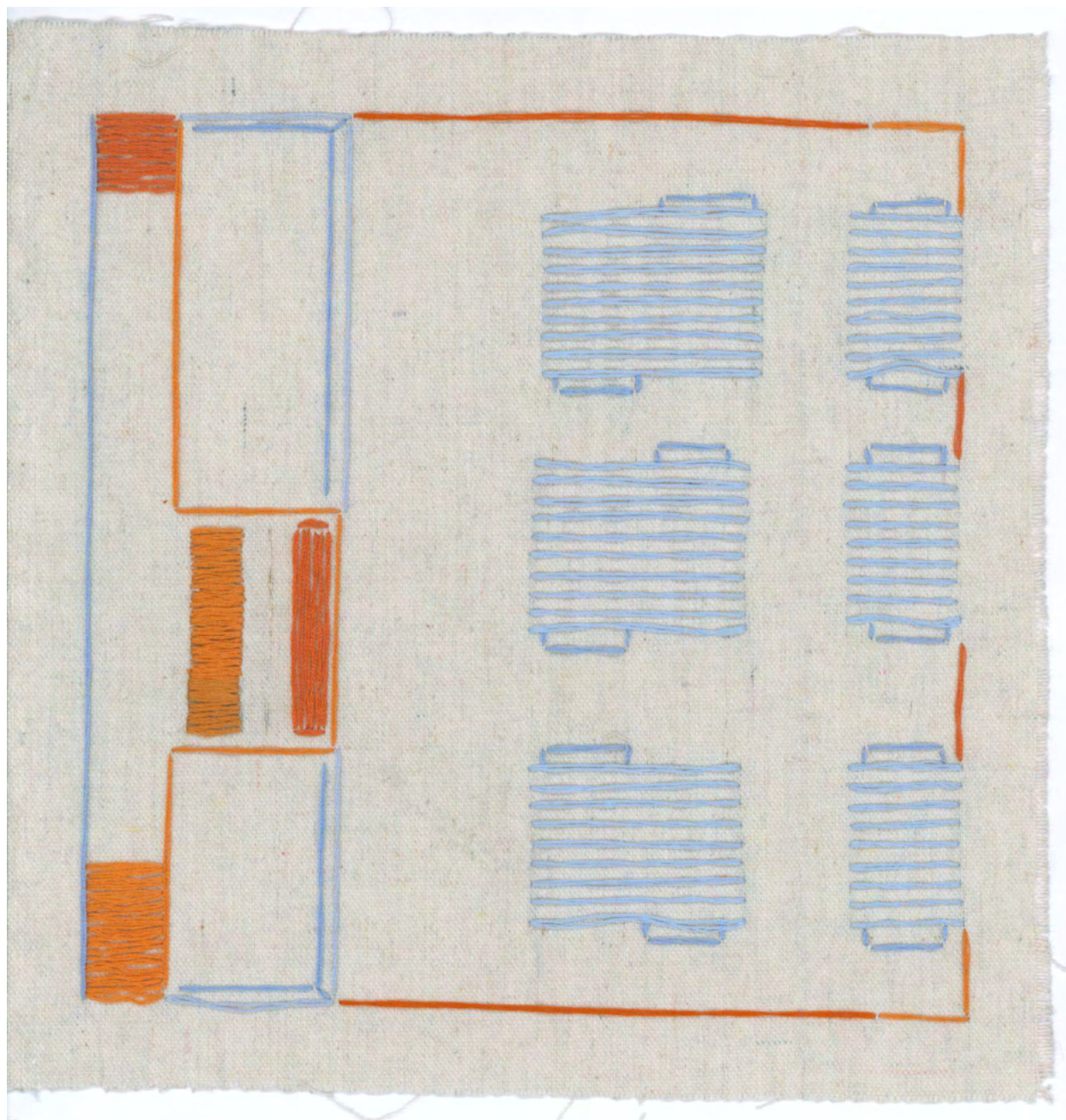
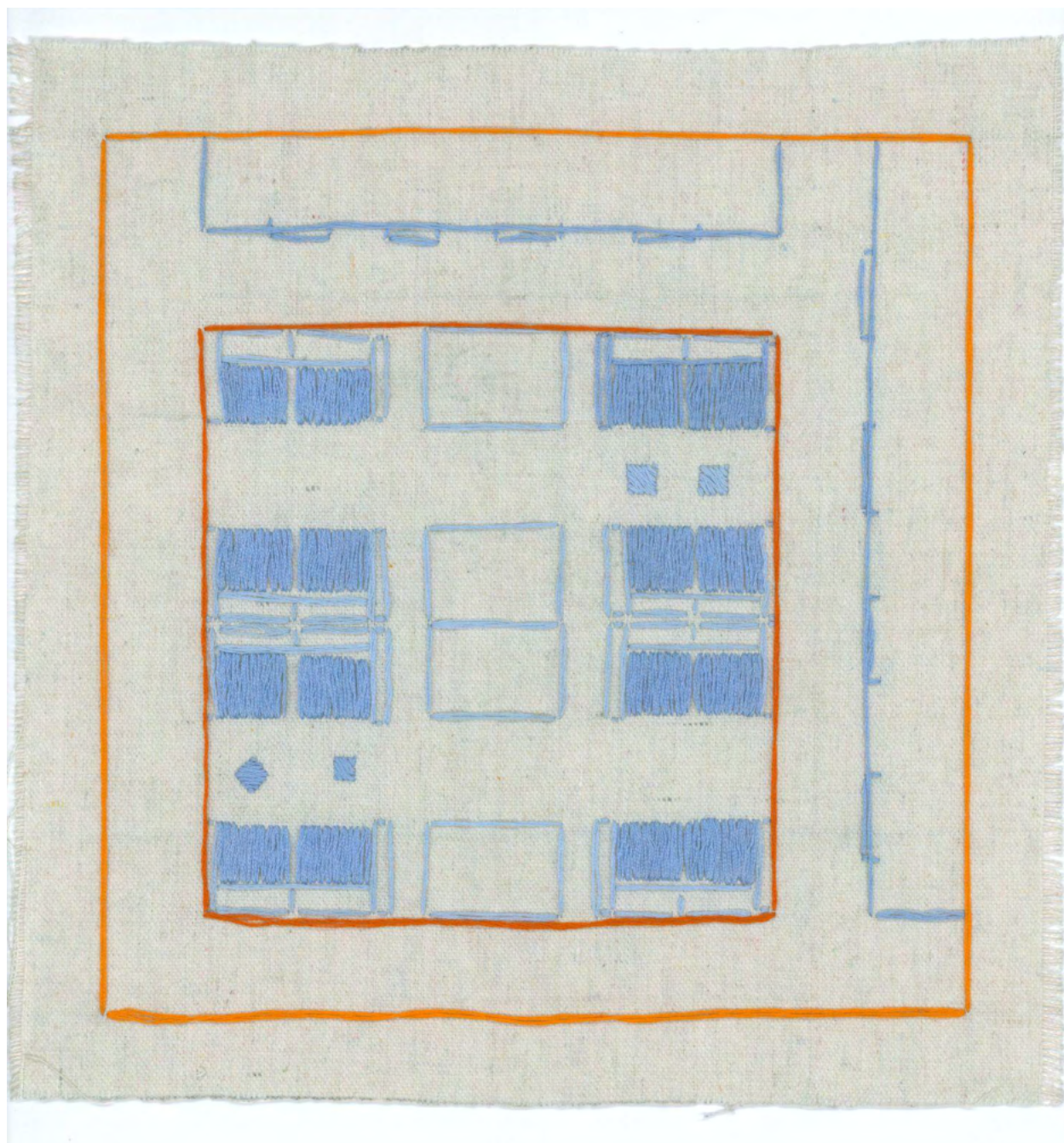


fig. 3

*fig. 4*

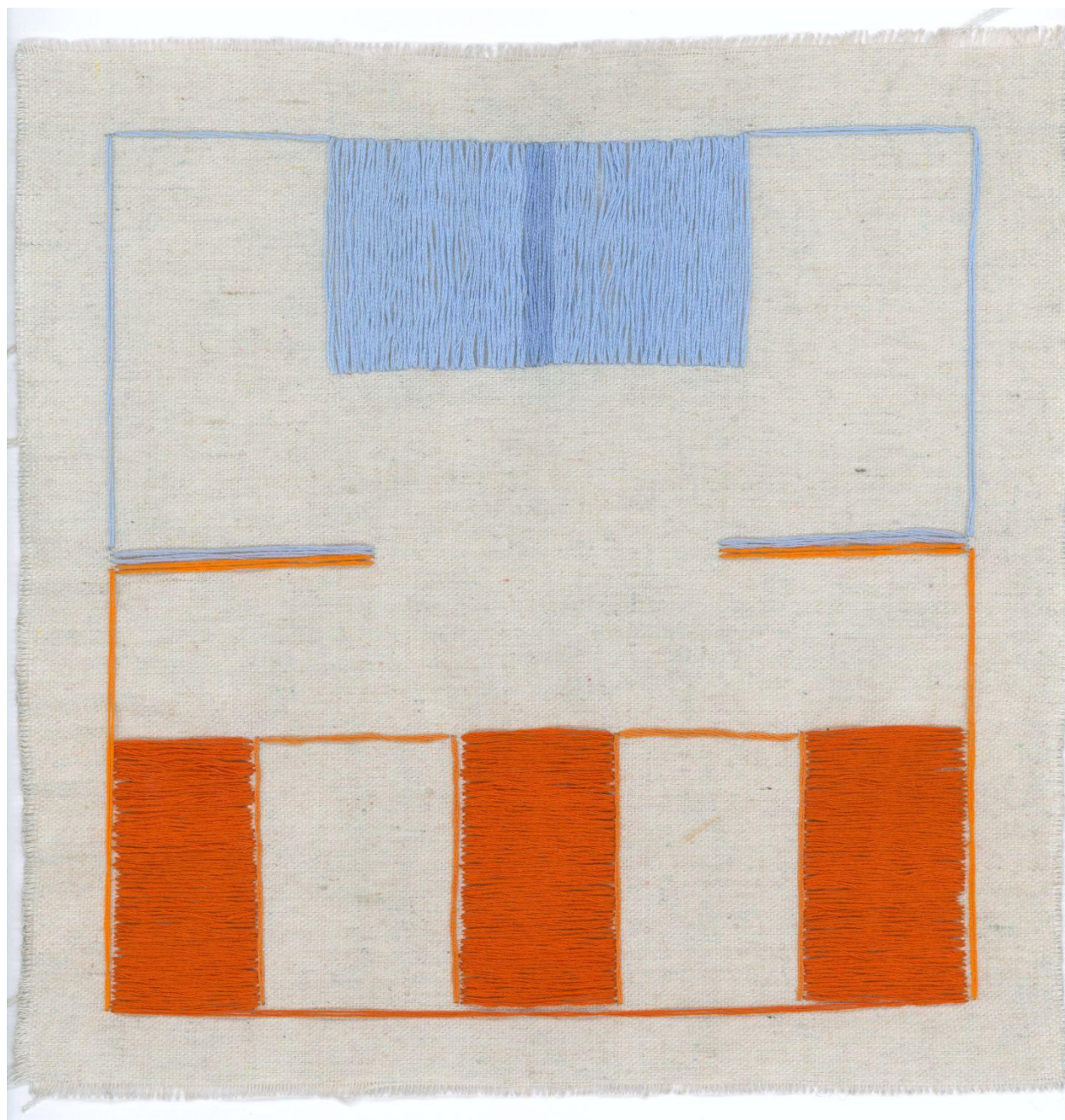


fig. 5

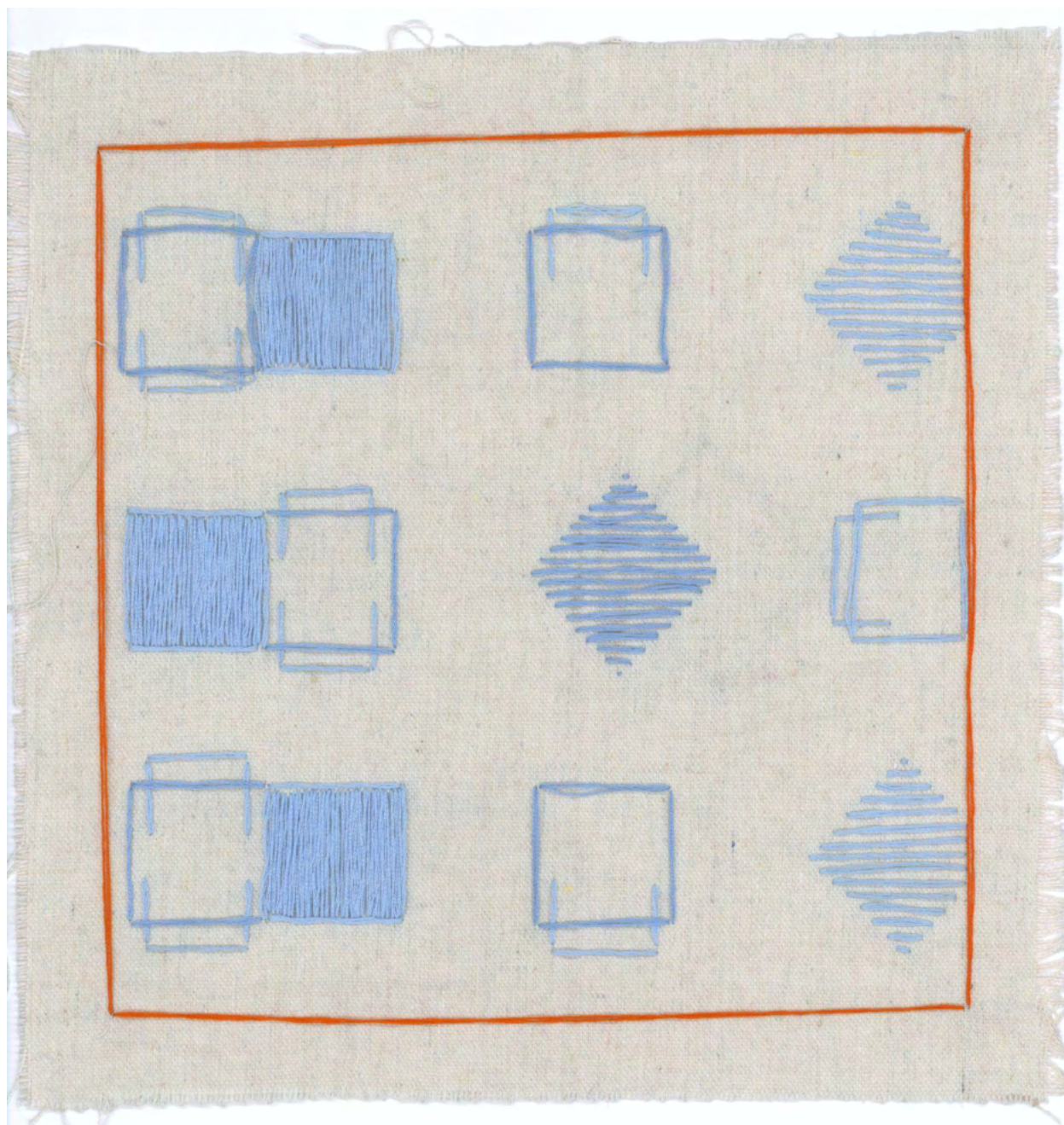


fig. 6

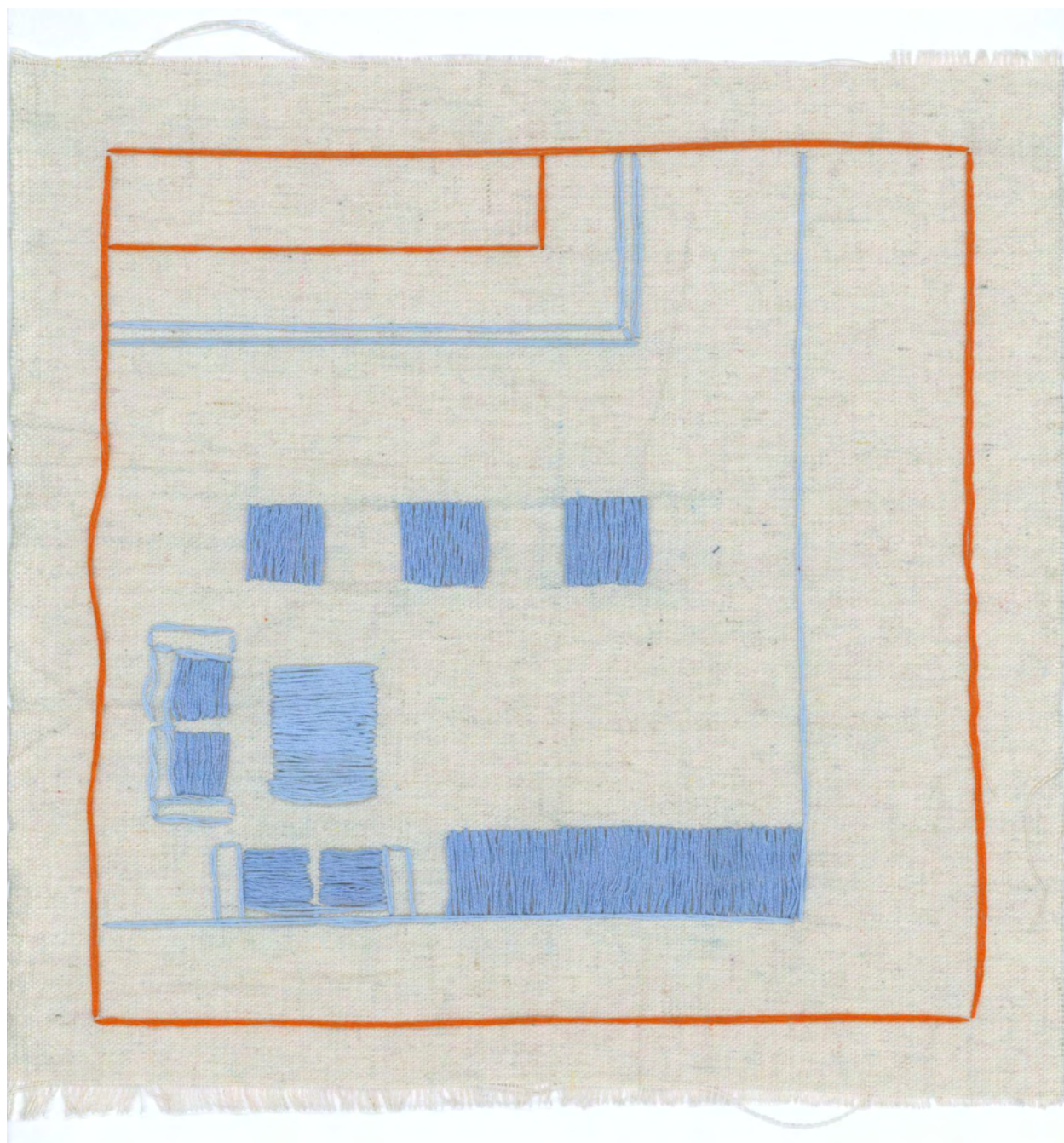


fig. 7

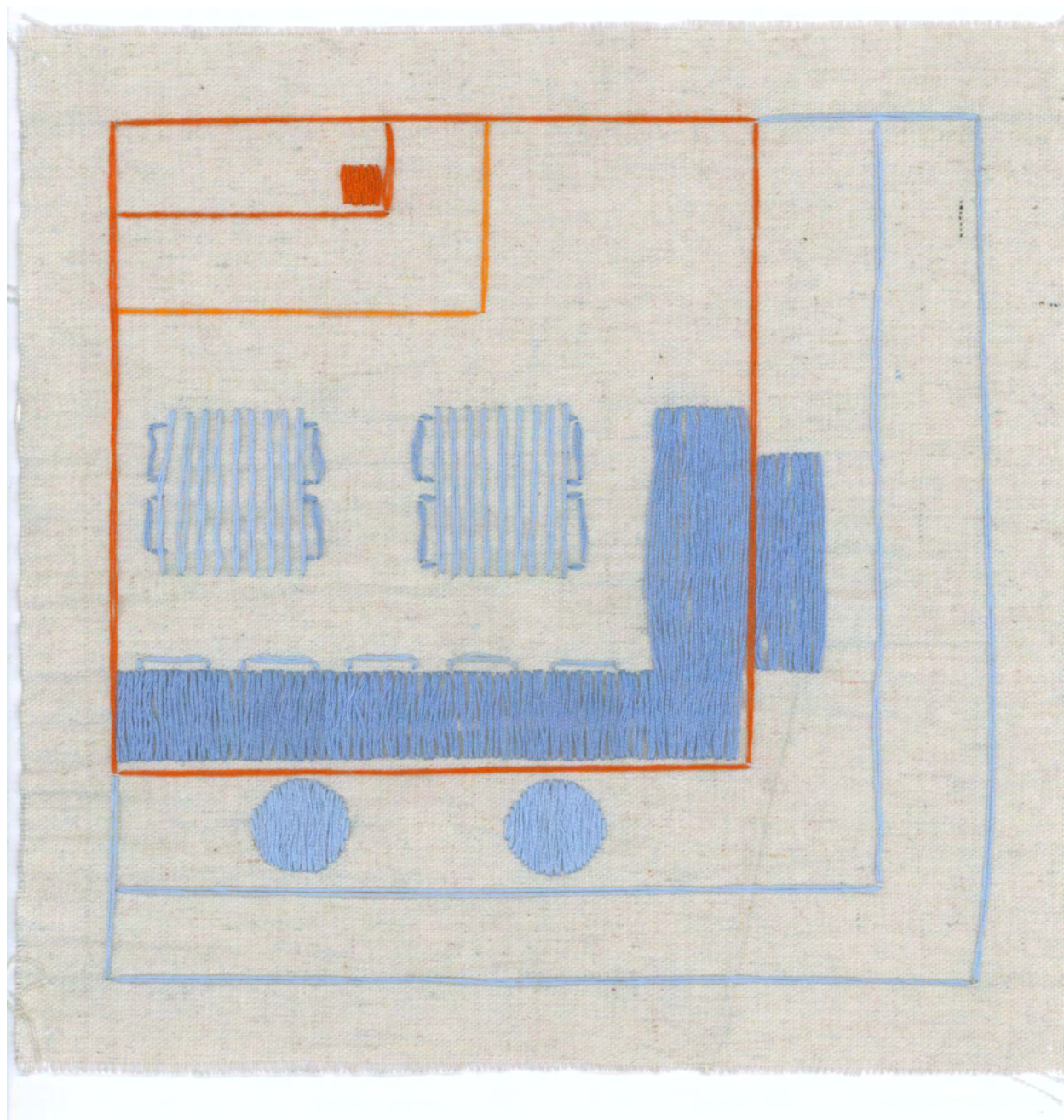
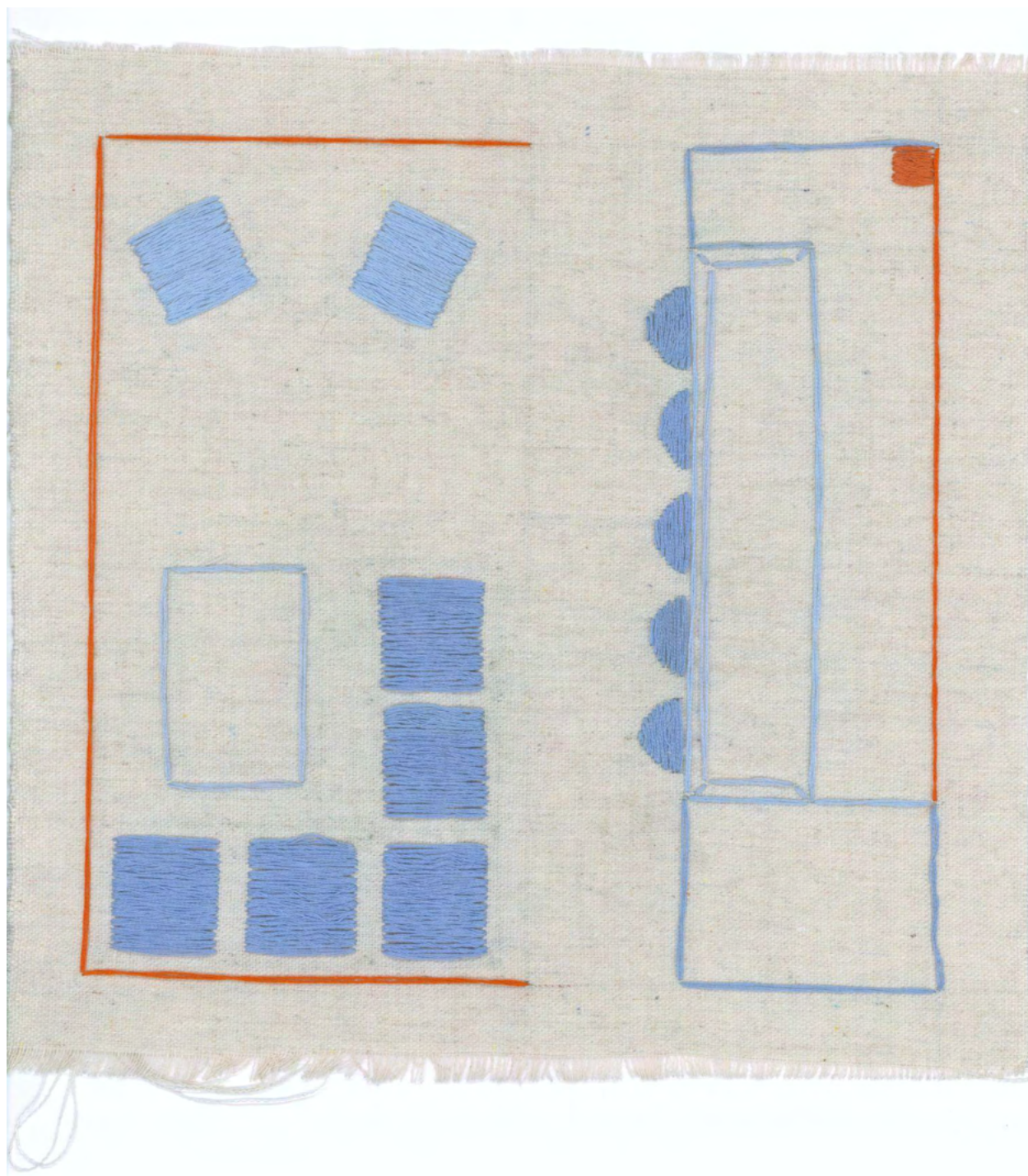


fig. 8

*fig. 9*

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