


SITUATION ROOMS

An abstract architectural drawing featuring several geometric shapes and hatched areas. The drawing is composed of black lines on a white background. There are two large hatched areas: one on the left side, bounded by a vertical line and a diagonal line, and another on the right side, bounded by a vertical line and a diagonal line. The central area is filled with various organic, hand-drawn shapes and lines, suggesting a complex spatial layout or a map. The overall style is minimalist and conceptual.

SURF [Pilot package]

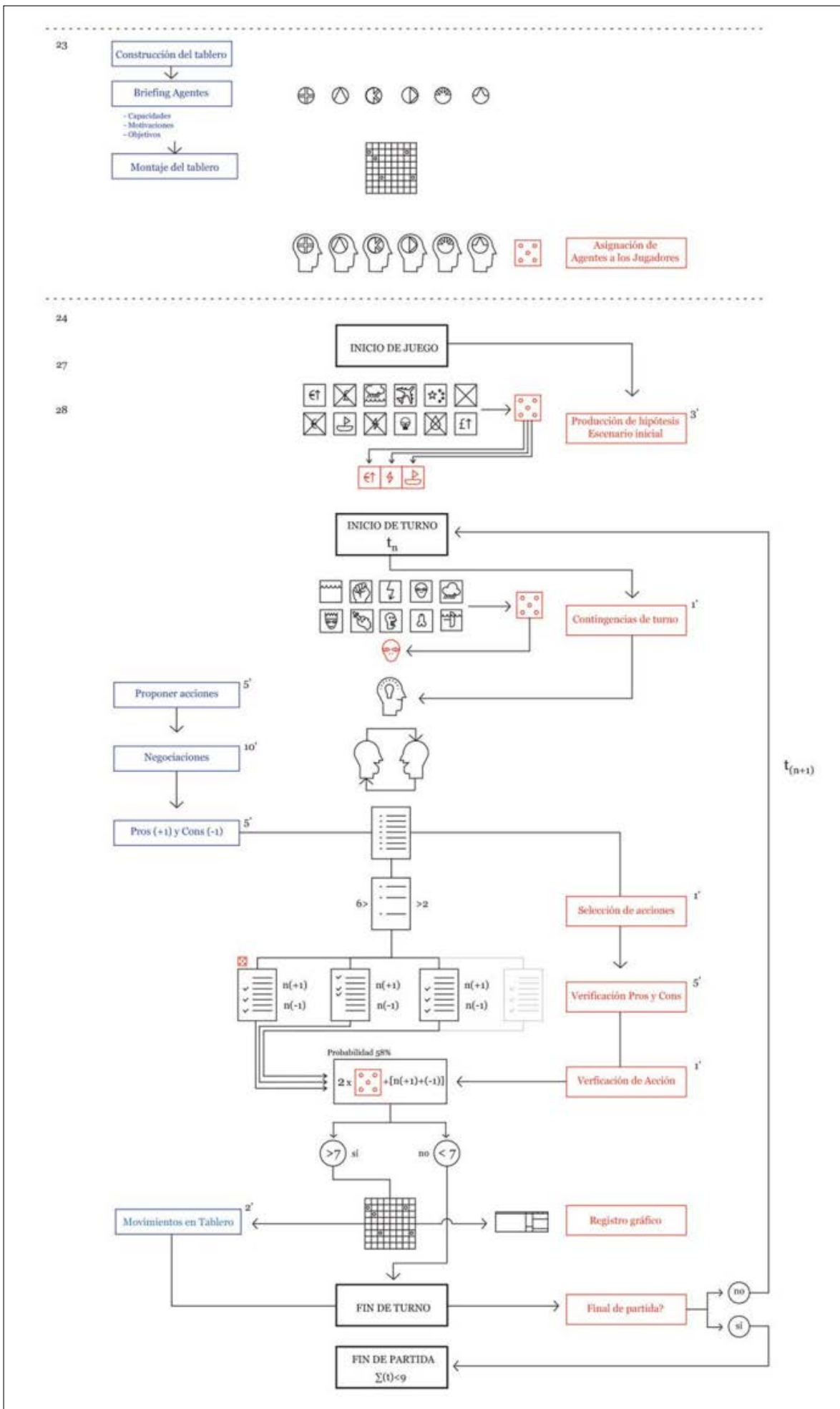


fig. 1
 Juan Elvira, Roger Paez. Design Through Play: The Archispiel Experience. In VII Jornadas sobre Innovación Docente en Arquitectura (JIDA'19), Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura de Madrid, 14 y 15 de Noviembre de 2019: libro de actas (pp. 386-401). Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya. Iniciativa Digital Politècnica, URL: <https://upcommons.upc.edu/bitstream/handle/2117/171539/8349-8401-1-PB.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

Simply stated, situation rooms use play and game-based practices to proliferate imaginaries. Using the basic tenets of play – a specific space and time, a series of (factual and self-imposed) constraints, and chance – situation rooms generate a temporary heterotopic condition conducive to exploration.

Situation rooms, and play and games in general, have a long history of being used in arts and design. Critical theory has consistently construed play as a necessary condition for the generation of culture and as a crucial process in human cognitive development. Since the trailblazing work of Johan Huizinga, pioneering authors have definitively disconnected play and games from their traditional association with frivolous or inconsequential activity. Following the spirit of these authors (if not always their statements), we claim that play is so relevant that it should be conceived as a way of relating to the world rather than a sub-set of ‘childish’ activities that can be isolated and treated accordingly.

Other fundamental aspects notwithstanding, we are particularly interested in the generative value of play: play may be used as a way of transforming reality. We can understand play as addressing three basic themes: limits, self and chance. These refer, respectively, to the way we construe an understandable order of the world (how we establish physical, temporal and normative limits to define a specific subset of actionable reality in order to deal with it), the way we construe ourselves (how we construct our own selves in relation to others) and the way we construe the unobservable or hidden forces of reality (how we deal with asubjective agencies). Play, then, simultaneously addresses the objective, subjective, and asubjective realms. This threefold capacity of play to define limits, test and expand the self, and address chance makes it a perfect ally for all design-based disciplines, whose primary aim is to transform our world, imagining and projecting other realities. The relationship between play and design is a very strong one, and one worth exploring in a radical way. Indeed, thanks to their simultaneously regulated and exploratory nature, games and play can be harnessed to fuel the disruptive capacities of design.

An expanded notion of play holds an incredible potential for design. We can summarise the contribution of play to design in three concepts that mirror the triad of play’s pursuits: constraints (facilitating an exploratory use of factual or self-imposed constraints); engagement (prompting new types of engagement and authorship); and chance (creatively embracing chance). Coupling pragmatic efficacy with visionary criticality, combining its role as solution provider and as a problematising practice, design can further its relevance as a practice that simultaneously contributes to proposing solutions and posing questions that help address significant societal, technical and cultural issues.

Within the array of playful and game-based formats, situation rooms hold a special position. Situation rooms were first used for military purposes, and their format derives from the need to address emergencies through a multi-actor arrangement in a space single (which is enclosed, yet strongly connected to the outside) and in a limited (and usually critical) timeframe. What characterises a situation room is a heightened sense of heterotopia, achieved by the definition of an self-contained space where all information meets, an intense timeframe and chance (or unpredictable) inputs that force rapid decision-making, as well as multivocal structure that nonetheless needs to provide a single response.

Can be adapted to short projects or used as an approach for bigger research projects

Secondary school to postdoc, ideally master students

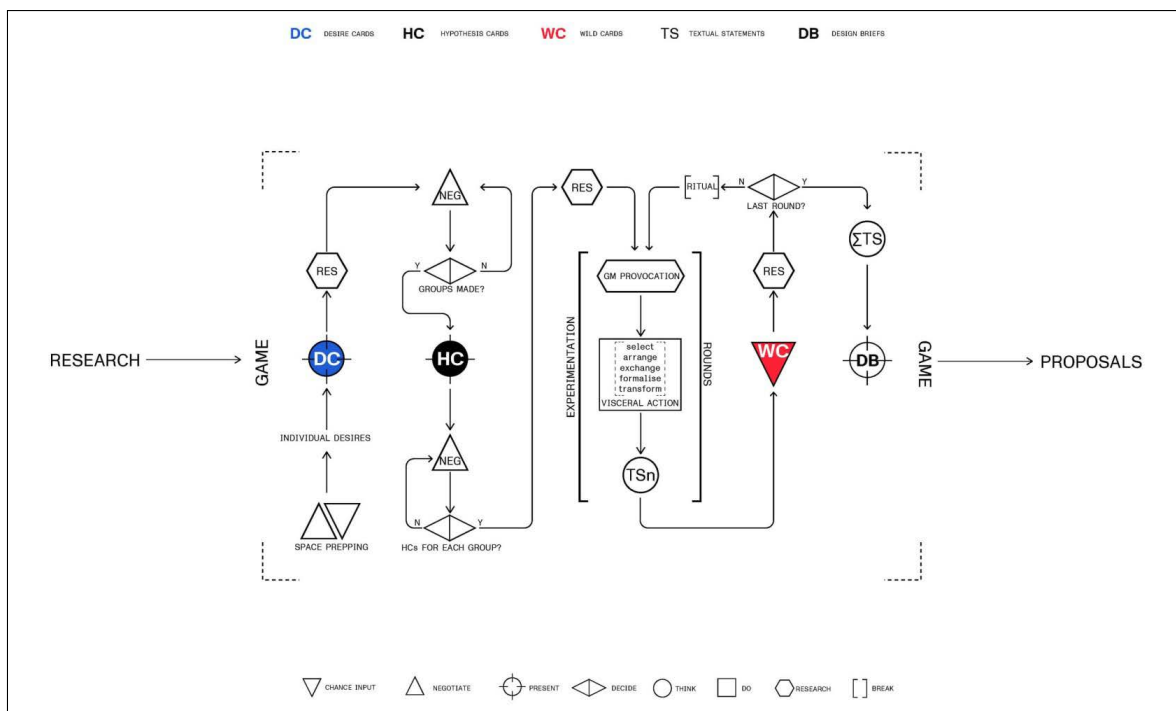


fig. 2 Situation Room methodology diagram, with a special focus on its game-like dynamics.

OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTATIONS

There are three key factors pertinent to the situation rooms approach:

- 1 Research to define the main challenges and hypotheses of the chosen topic, including the definition of the (physical, social and cultural) context of interest, and preparation of the research booklets and the cards needed to play the game.
- 2 Game-based practice in a situation room setting, fostering lateral thinking to explore novel ways of addressing design opportunities on the chosen topic and context, distilling them into design briefs with a potential high impact in triggering positive changes in the present.
- 3 Proposals responding to the design briefs generated in the previous phase. The main objective of the proposals is to test, visualise and evaluate future urban scenarios to prompt design challenges in the present.

DELIVERABLES

- 1 Research documents: Systematic research on all the relevant aspects of the topic of interest with a special focus on context-related specificities and preferable futures. The deliverable format can vary but the research must be formalised (a paragraph, a lecture, a book).
- 2 Game cards: Definition of game cards:
 - desire card,
 - hypothesis card,
 - wild card.
- 3 Situation room results: Based on the results, each team/player will distil distinct design briefs (title+ subtitle + definition) that explicitly address the HC and rationally/analytically reflecting on the SR's intuitive/visceral results.
- 4 Final deliverable: Report (based on given format) of the whole process, including all rounds, and ending with resulting design briefs.

REFERENCE PROJECT / SUMMARY

Example of Research

- Researchers investigate the chosen topic (future of inhabitation) in relation to a specific aspect (temporality) and context (Catalonia).
- This research is summarised and formalised in booklets that are used as a starting point by master students in the Game phase.

Topic of interest

Future × inhabitation × temporality × local context

Design Hypothesis

Definition of strategic design hypothesis related to the specific goals for desirable development, which can rehearse and enact novel modes of urban resilience related to the main research topic.

In the case of future × inhabitation × temporality × local context the chosen design hypothesis to be investigated are:

- H01 Indeterminacy and Change,
- H02 New Ecologies and Sustainability
- H03 Intersectionality and Plurality.

Example of a Situation Room result

New habitats for climate emergency [fig. 3]

This triplet of design briefs speculates about a future scenario where world average temperatures would rise three degrees and five degrees in cities. In this climate emergency context, it would be imperative to explore new ways of inhabitation that provide climatic shelters for both humans and other species and drastically reduce the carbon footprint of our existence. Building new ecosystems where humans and other animal and plant species coexist in harmony and balance, finding new ways of communal organisation where energy waste is minimised by sharing resources and infrastructures, creating closed cycles for all processes related to construction, waste, food chain, water management, cancelling fuel-based mobility, etc...

This brief package requests to provide solutions at three different scales: the basic inhabitation unit, the close community and the urban neighbourhood.

Example of Proposal

[fig. 4 & 5]

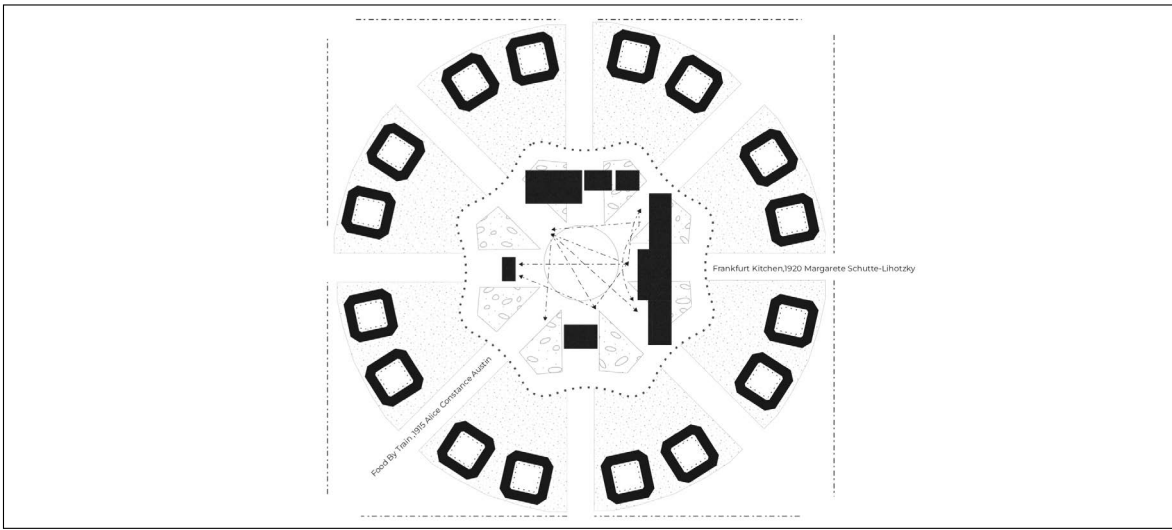


fig. 3
Communal kitchen.
Diego Sanchez, Kiran Karwal,
Lara Bertin, Majka Tkacikova
& Rebecca Diaz.

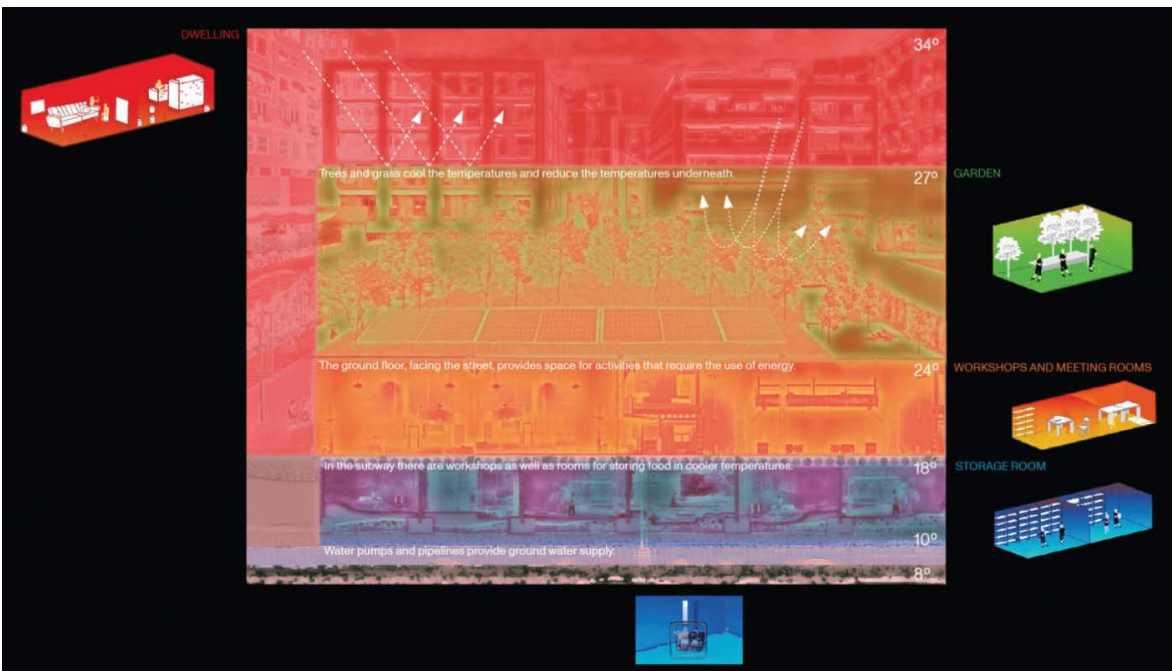
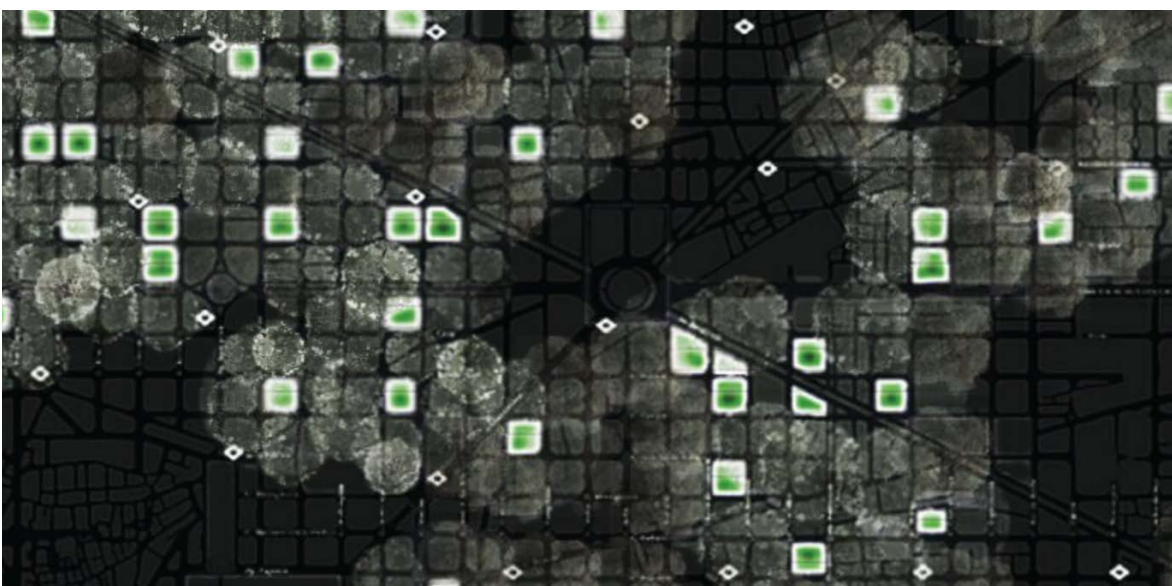


fig. 4 & 5
Climate Shelters, Mar Gené, 2024. Today, a large part of the population is living in urban areas, dealing with increasingly high temperatures. How could we explore with innovative approaches, focusing instead on survival needs by reintroducing shared spaces and resource-sharing to minimize energy consumption in a crisis context? This project imagines a future scenario where world average temperatures have risen between three degrees and five degrees in cities and the fuel-dependent mobility has disappeared.



KEY STAGES

Phase 1

[20% project duration]

- 1 Topics presentation
- 2 Design Cards filling
- 3 Individual Drift
- 4 Individual Drifts Presentation
- 5 Groups making
- 6 Hypothesis Cards presentation
- 7 HC selection
- 8 3xHC Group Research Presentation
- 9 Context assignment and research

Phase 2

[20% project duration]

- 1 Space prepping
- 2 Rounds of group experimentation
- 3 Rituals

Phase 3

[60% project duration]

- 1 Design briefs
- 2 Final presentation
- 3 Final deliverables

DETAILED SCHEDULE

PHASE 1

- 1 Topics presentation
- 2 Design Cards filling
- 3 Individual Drift: Individual Visual Collection of 50 images per person (one image per printed page, no given format)
- 4 Individual Drifts Presentation: Individual 2 minutes presentation of Individual image collection to articulate individual DCs (50 printed images per person)
- 5 Groups making: 3 groups of 5-6 participants
- 6 Hypothesis Cards presentation: All students negotiate to choose 3 HC per group (one per topic per approach, align priorities)
- 7 HC selection
- 8 3xHC Group Research Presentation: All participants are aware of all the HC presented, terminology is clarified and so on
- 9 Context assignment and research: GM describes the basic context for each the three topic axis and each team takes care of further researching one

PHASE 2

- 1 Space prepping
- 2 Rounds of group experimentation: In order to enrich creative thinking through constraints, authorial displacement and chance, implement multiple rounds (ROX) of group experimentation leading to breaking down linear thinking and individualistic authorship modes, and in doing so opening creative paths that use viscerality, immediacy and intuition, as well as rational-discursive thinking. Rationally interpret each round's findings and iteratively distill textual statements (TSOX). Each round builds on the findings of the previous one(s).
- 3 Rituals: In each round of group experimentation, propose rituals as mandatory disconnections to generate other kind of interpersonal relationships beyond the scope of the game.

PHASE 3

- 1 Design briefs: Based on RO1, RO2, RO3, RO4 results each team will distil three distinct design briefs (title+ subtitle + definition) that explicitly address the HC and rationally/analytically reflecting on the SR's intuitive/visceral results. Each design brief will be accompanied by a journey map.
- 2 Final presentation: The distilled design briefs will be discussed and refined to ensure a high potential impact in triggering positive changes in the present.
- 3 Final deliverables: Report (1 per team, based on given format) of the whole process, including all rounds (image/collage/model/drawing), and ending with three distilled design briefs per team.

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