

RESEARCH

two layers, never interchanged

Field data — fifteen short interviews and a bilingual micro-survey (N=23) — is small and qualitative. Six anchors from representative surveys and controlled experiments stand beside it.

The instrument asks what happened the last time — dependence, distortion, the limits of telling. No questions about blindness; no questions about beliefs.

A second, co-creation protocol with blind collaborators runs in two visits: a day walked inside their world, then a translation-proofing session where drafts return to be corrected.

SIX ANCHORS FROM THE LITERATURE

[1] Pew Research 2016 — 82% read reviews before buying (N=4,787).

[2] Pew Research 2013 — 72% sought health information online.

[3] Pew Research 2025 — 34% have used ChatGPT (N=5,123).

[4] Savitsky et al., JESP 2011 — couples ≈ strangers in accuracy, far more confident.

[5] Eyal, Steffel & Epley, JPSP 2018 — imagining fails ×25; asking works.

[6] WHO 2019 · Be My Eyes — 2.2B vision-impaired; 1M users × 10M volunteers.

FROM THE QUOTE WALL

34 answers to “the thing I can never describe is...”

...the smell of rain before it

starts.

...the way my mother says my

name.

...what missing someone does at

night.

...the taste, however well AI

describes it.

...it vanishes before I even

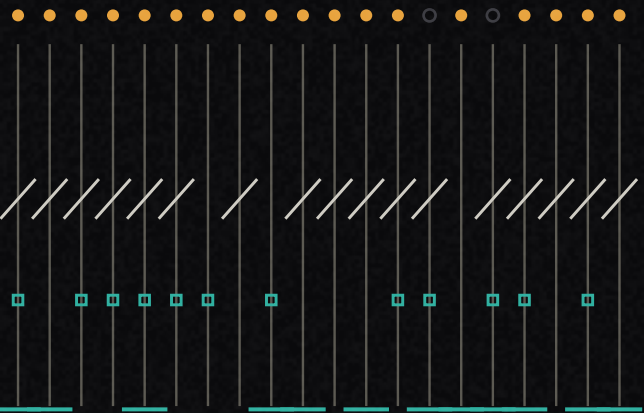
notice it.

...sincerity.

From field notes to a negotiated field

Short interviews (N=15) and a bilingual micro-survey (N=23), July 2026 — asked what happened the last time, not what people believe. Drawn one person at a time.

FIG.01 / ONE STEM PER PERSON



01 Field survey

One stem per person: 18/20 acted on others' experience this week; 17/20 followed it and it turned out different; 12/20 asked AI; 12/20 feel the gap behind “I understand you.”

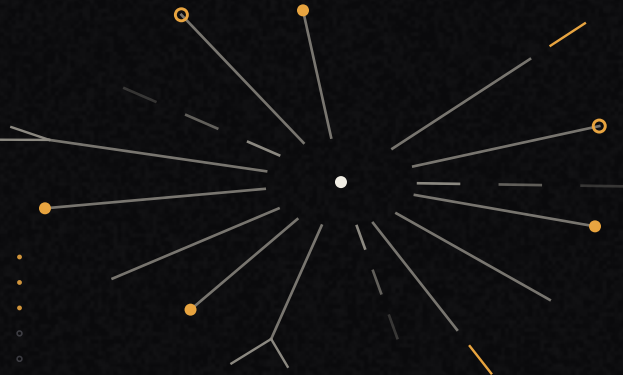
FIG.02 / SAID IS NOT HEARD



02 The leak

Speakers believed 72 of 100 utterances got through; listeners actually heard 61. Overestimating understanding is the norm, not a personal failure. (Keysar & Henly 2002)

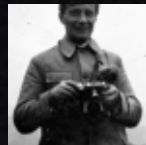
FIG.03 / SIX ENDINGS



[FIELD ARTIFACTS — A5 SURVEY · QUOTE WALL]



[RESEARCH PLATE · FOUR REFERENCES SUPPORTING THIS STRUCTURE]



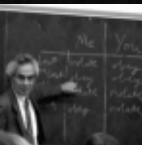
REF-01

Michael Polanyi

“The Last Unicorn,” 1966 —

“we can know more than we can tell.”

PUBLIC DOMAIN · WIKIMEDIA



REF-02

Thomas Nagel

“What is it like to be a Bat?”,

1974 — the partial position.

CC BY-SA · WIKIMEDIA



REF-03

Ludwig
Wittgenstein

“I guess, 1930 — I end shared

word, unverifiable contents.

PUBLIC DOMAIN · WIKIMEDIA



REF-04

Walter Benjamin

“The Storyteller,” 1936 —

experience compressed into information.

PUBLIC DOMAIN · WIKIMEDIA

Six anchors from the literature: Pew 2016 (82% reviews) · Pew 2013 (72% health) · Pew 2025 (34% ChatGPT) · Savitsky 2011 (couples≈strangers) · Eyal/Epley 2018 (×25: asking works) · WHO/Be My Eyes (2.2B · 1M×10M).

Field data is a small qualitative sample; the surveys and experiments beside it are representative or controlled. The two layers are shown side by side, never interchanged.

Denominators are per figure: FIG.01 draws on the first 20 survey responses (collection continues, N=23); FIG.02 visualises Keysar & Henly 2002; FIG.03 codes all fifteen interviews.

Asking, not imagining

FIELD INTERVIEWS — N = 15

Fifteen short interviews asked what happened the last time — the last time you relied on someone’s experience, the last time telling failed — never what people believe about understanding. Everyone was interviewed; blindness was never mentioned: the point is that the condition is universal.

A second, co-creation protocol with blind collaborators runs in two visits: a day walked together inside their world, then a translation-proofing session where drafts return to be corrected — “what I assumed” set against “what they said.”

“I can describe anything. But if the other person cannot fully understand it — have I really finished describing?”

P13

“However well AI describes it, it cannot make you taste it.”

P15

“It disappears before I even notice it.”

FROM THE QUOTE WALL — 34 ANSWERS TO “THE THING I CAN NEVER DESCRIBE IS...”

“Forget it. It doesn’t matter.”

P11 — ENDING A CONVERSATION WITH HER THERAPIST

The shortest answer on the quote wall, and its last word: “Sincerity.”

How conversations end

●	“I think I understand.”	·4
	the negotiated good-enough ending	
— — —	“Forget it.”	·3
	giving up on being understood	
<	Agree to differ	·2
	negotiating an end to negotiation	
○	Pretend to understand	·2
	the social performance	
— —	Look it up later	·2
	understanding privatised	
⤿	“As long as you’re happy.”	·2
	ending with a blessing	

“Sweet like sugar — but the small part that isn’t sugar is usually the part that matters.”

P13, ON HONEY — THE GOOD-ENOUGH THEORY OF UNDERSTANDING, FROM THE FIELD

ETHICS & CONSENT

Interview consent and exhibition-playback consent are collected separately; storytellers keep veto power over the finished films. Blind collaborators are credited, compensated co-creators; braille passes three gates with blind proofreaders.

THE INSTRUMENT

01 DEPENDENCE

“When did you last act on someone else’s experience?”

02 DISTORTION

“You followed it. What turned out different?”

03 LIMITS

“What can you never quite put into words?”

TWO VISITS

01 — a day walked inside their world

02 — drafts return, corrected line by line

FIFTEEN CONVERSATIONS — CODED

● ○ — — — < ● ⤿ ● < — — — — — ⤿ ● — — — ○ — — —

each mark = one interview, by ending

01 The invisible endpoint

Where negotiation stops: interviewees stopped asking to be understood — most often with those closest.

02 Pretend, then search

Pretending to understand in company, then privately looking it up afterwards, appeared independently across interviews — understanding delayed and privatised.

03 The blessing

“As long as you’re happy” ends negotiation kindly: a form of care that no longer asks for understanding.

WHAT THIS ADDS TO HCI

- C1 A six-ending taxonomy of how everyday understanding closes.
- C2 Folk theory meets the literature: the honey gap as good-enough understanding.
- C3 “Forget it” — the invisible endpoint where people stop asking to be understood.

THE WORK — 2024

Eleven films grown from spoken worlds

We asked blind and low-vision friends to describe their worlds, then translated those descriptions into moving images. In the room the films are the size of a hand — you must walk close to see; eight channels fill the dark from eight corners, carrying one sentence spoken nearly two hundred ways.



The captions are the translators' second readings — not quotations; some films combine several storytellers. Four of the eleven films loop on two screens each; the films are silent — seeing and hearing are negotiated separately. All eleven playable online.

In the room

SCREENS	15 positions on floor stands, 0.6–1.9 m — the height of a hand held out
LOOPS	four of the eleven films loop on two screens each
SILENT	the films carry no sound; seeing and hearing are negotiated separately
SCALE	each image roughly the size of a postcard

— you must walk close
“However well AI describes it, it cannot

make you taste it.” — P15

ELEVEN READINGS



01 The Crane and the Moon

Someone described the moon as something near — near enough to install. So we hung it.



04 A Cathedral Overheard

A building never visited, built from adjectives overheard. The grain of the stone is the residue of other people's voices.



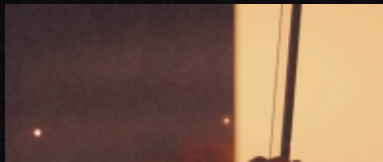
07 The Wire Sphere

The thing inside can't be explained — only that it burns, and that wire wraps around it. The fire is small; it stays lit.



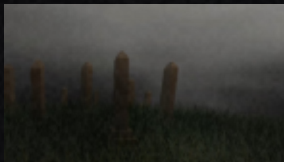
10 Three Cats

Three cats on a white city — a kitten between two grown ones — watching the sun go down. No one explains orange to



02 The Threshold

Half of it is not yet said; half already understood. The border keeps moving, and dust crosses through the light.



05 Steles in Fog

Grass to the knee, steles in fog. A shape without a name can still be remembered — remembering how it feels is enough.



08 A Planet on No Map

The world he spoke of is on no map. Fine — give it a glowing horizon and a few yellow moons. It is wherever you say it is.



11 Daytime Through Paper

The whole world gauzed in yellow, like light seen through paper. He said: this is my daytime. So we placed the camera



03 Brightness That Refuses

That brightness is not for seeing — it forces the eyes shut. Only when he said “bright” did we learn that brightness can refuse.



06 Assemblage at Dusk

A column, pipes, a cracked tub: sentences from different people piled into one dusk. None is whole; together they resemble a home.



09 The Doorway

She stands in the doorway; beyond it, a sky described to her a thousand times. Seeing was never something we could finish on her behalf.

EIGHT CHANNELS

Eight channels occupy eight corners of a dark room; they never pair with the screens. To see, you walk to an image; to listen, you stand where the channels balance.

No position lets you do both at once — seeing and hearing must be negotiated separately, step by step.



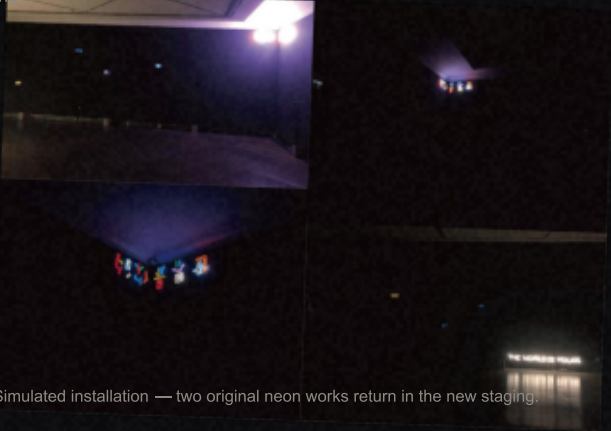
Combined stereo reference 11:09; in the room, eight independent sources. One sentence, spoken nearly two hundred times in different voices, cut into eight channels. The sound layer is complete in itself: for blind and low-vision visitors it is the entire work.

CH1–CH8 · sources at 2.05 m, corners and mid-walls · positions indicative until commissioning

THE WORLD IS YOURS

One sentence, two hundred ways.

00 00 00 00 00



Simulated installation — two original neon works return in the new staging.

SITE — rejected twice, chosen once

The venue is an argument: the mechanics of the work dictate the room. Three Boston-area candidates were surveyed and measured; two were rejected for reasons that define what the work is.

01 BCA Cyclorama — rejected

A 4,600-seat-scale rotunda. The volume forces large projections: walk-close-to-see dies at that scale, and the dome smears eight discrete channels into wash. Grand, and wrong.

02 Plaza Black Box — rejected

Clean darkness, but a seating system makes it a theatre: an audience faces a stage. The work needs a room you wander and negotiate, not a show you watch.

03 Warehouse XI — chosen

A raw white-brick hall in Somerville: no theatrical apparatus, day-rate hire, one room that takes the whole route. The single work item: blacking out the glass front—darkness must be built, which is true to the work.

ROUTE

- 01 south double doors in
- 02 buffer, foreword wall
- 03 west gap, into the dark
- 04 star field, wander
- 05 north-west opening
- 06 echo, along the braille wall
- 07 east door, card in hand
- 08 lounge, card opened
- 09 south exit — the brightest

SURVEY / MEASURED ON SITE

MAIN HALL

21.9 × 9.0 m — 198 sqm

star field · 15 screens

LOUNGE

17.5 × 4.4 m — 76 sqm

bright exit · readings

SMALL HALL

7.0 × 4.2 m — 29 sqm

echo · braille wall

CEILING

4.2 m clear

blackout rig height

Floor measurements from

the venue's National Floor

Plans survey, verified

against the author's CAD;

door positions to be

confirmed on site.

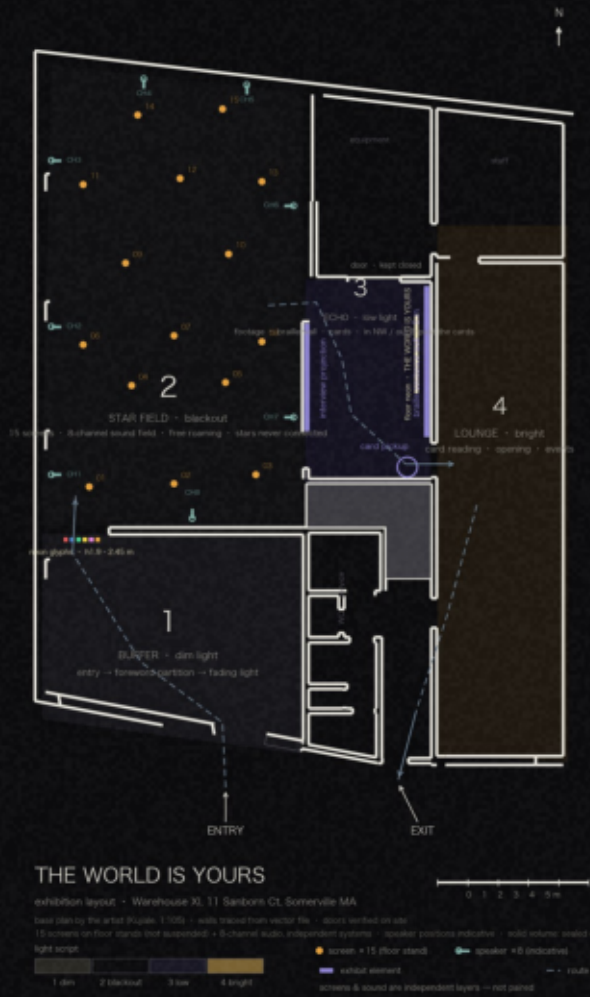


FIG.04 / PLAN — black-line, from the author's CAD

four zones · 15 screens · 8 channels · final route

EXHIBITION DESIGN

Four halls, one light script — the exit is the brightest place in the building

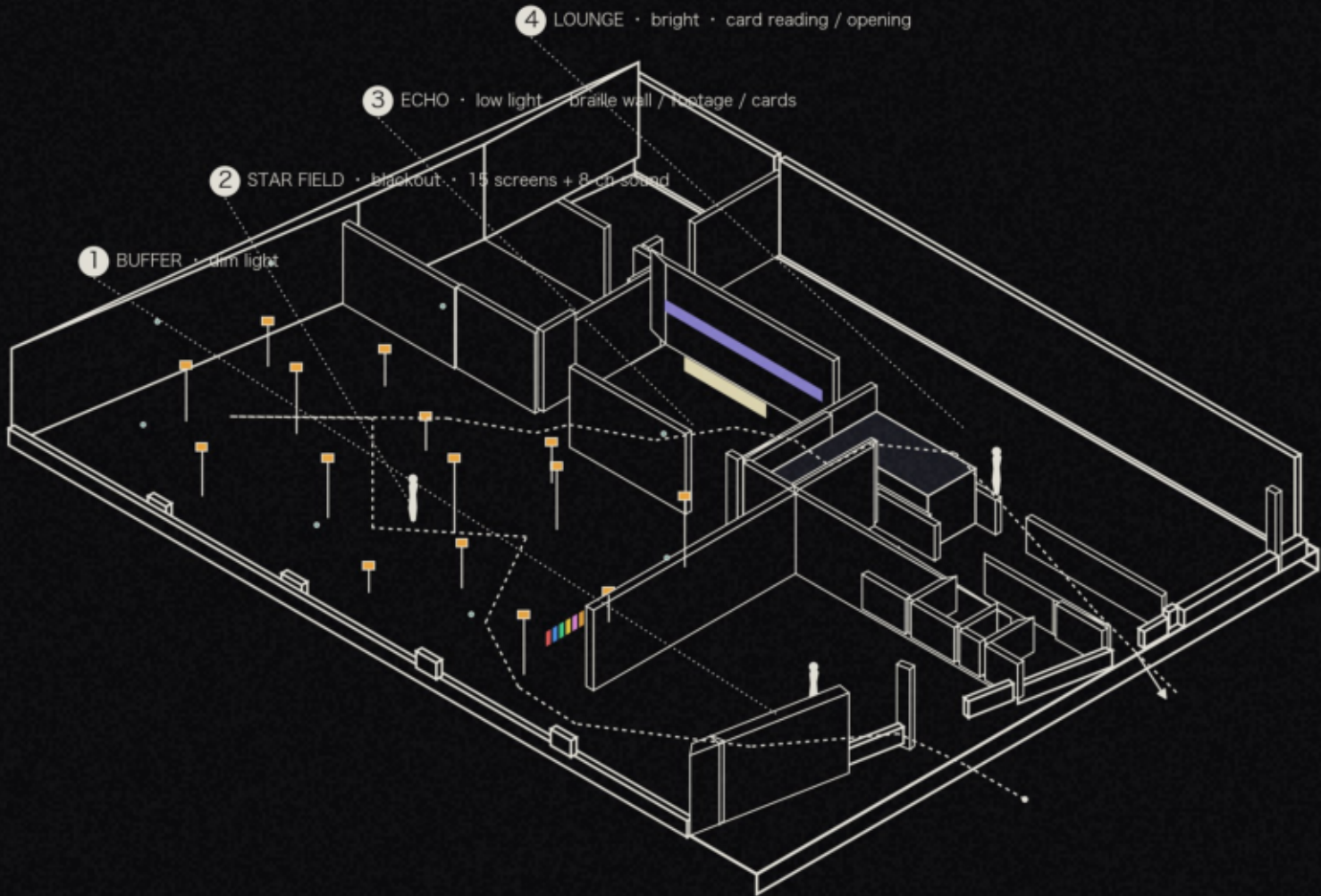
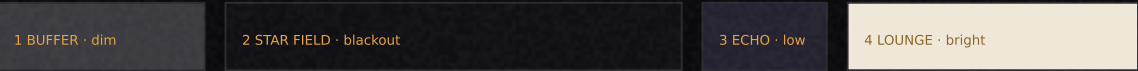


FIG.05 / AXONOMETRIC — white-line on black · route identical to plan · 15 screens on stands · two original neons placed back in



01 BUFFER · dim

A little light on the foreword wall only. Eyes adapt; the room empties of images before the field begins.

02 STAR FIELD · blackout

Fifteen screens on stands at hand height, 0.6–1.9 m. From afar: a field of small stars, never joined into constellations. Walk close to see; stand still to listen.

03 ECHO · low

A five-metre braille sentence wall at 1.05–1.38 m; interview footage projected; a card taken in the dark — braille on the front, unreadable where you receive it.

04 LOUNGE · bright

The card is opened: ink translation on the back. Readings, opening events; the sentence finally printed in full light.

1 BUFFER

dim · ~5 lux

2 STAR FIELD

blackout · <1 lux

3 ECHO

low · ~20 lux

4 LOUNGE

bright · ~300 lux

LIGHT SCRIPT

the page order of the building

the four halls of the building · the light script

The sentence appears three times: braille wall in half-dark, embossed card front, ink translation in the light.

05 Safety & access

45-minute sessions, max 25 visitors; photoluminescent guidance, red torches, life-safety lighting confirmed with Somerville FD. Guided touch-route sessions; the sound layer is complete without the images.

06 Materials

Braille-embossed ticket; A6 guide with braille pages beside ink pages. Three fabrication gates: grade decided with blind collaborators, tone-mark proofreading, tactile sign-off on physical proofs.

07 The card

Taken in the echo hall's half-dark, read in the lounge's full light — a pocket-size rehearsal of negotiated understanding.
A6 GUIDE — CONTENTS

Cover · Foreword · Visiting in the dark · The four halls · The channels · The images · The sentence · Credits & access statement — braille pages bound beside ink pages, same paper weight.

THE CARD — 74 × 105 mm



front: braille only

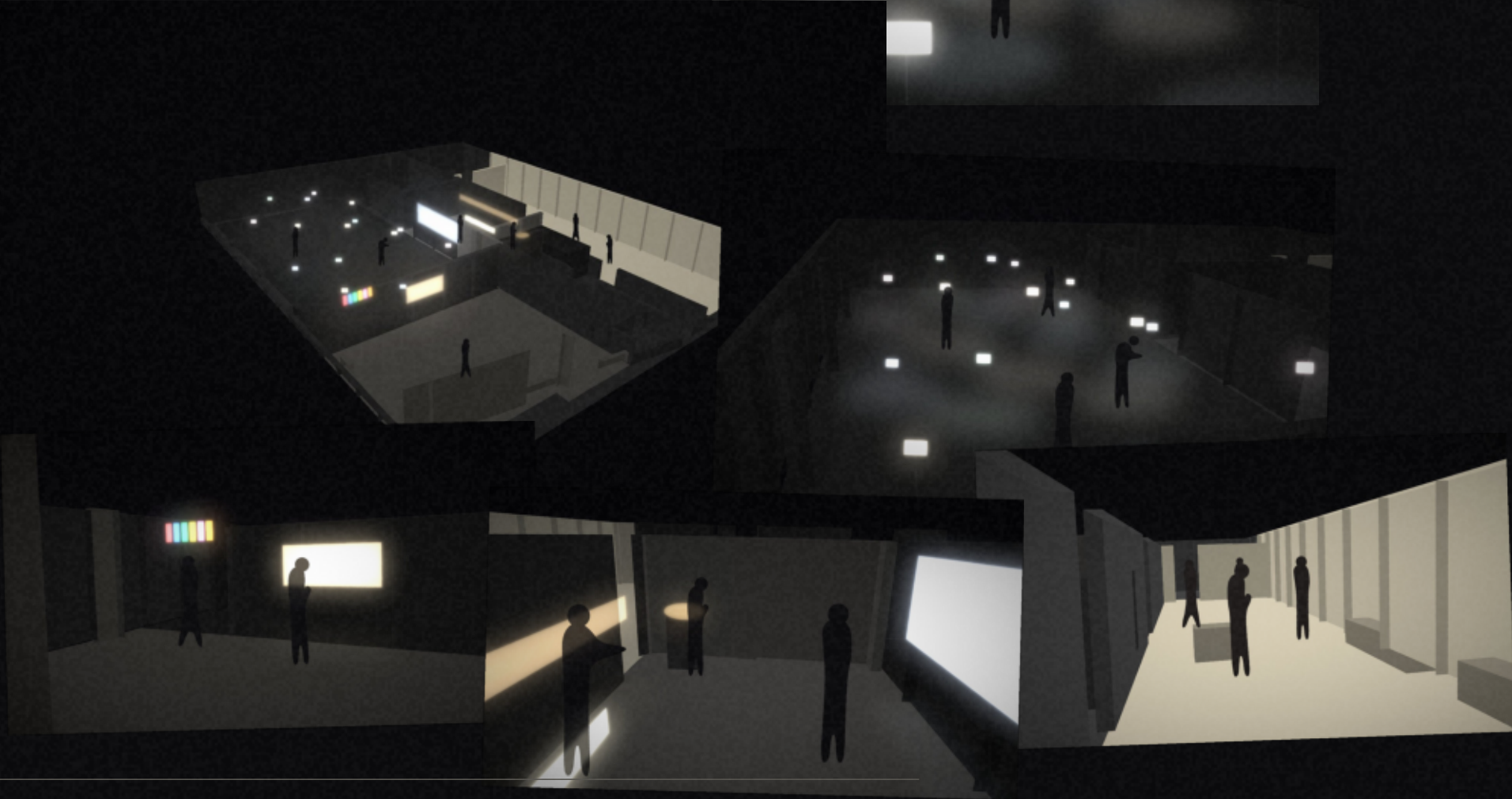
back: ink, in the light

THE ROOMS

digital visualizations from the layout data · not photographs



Hall 2 · eye level



overview · star field · buffer · echo · lounge — one light script, walked in five frames

Renders share the drawings' pipeline: walls extracted from the CAD, zone light levels from the script, figures posed at true screen positions.

ONLINE EXHIBITION

A web version rebuilt in web-native language: a cinematic index of eleven films, each opening full-screen with slow crossfades; a black room where the eight channels surface while equalizer lines breathe; the sentence in neon. English and Chinese pages; the case study carries the research, drawings and this PDF.



SCAN — ONLINE EXHIBITION

eleven films · eight channels · case study · this PDF

01 Index

Typographic list; a video preview follows the cursor; click into a one-film-at-a-time watch mode.

02 Channels

Stand-still-to-listen is translated to the page: the audio surfaces, the lines move.

03 Case

Research figures, literature anchors, drawings, renders, and the downloadable portfolio.

THE WORLD IS YOURS

The world is
yours.

NEGOTIATED UNDERSTANDING

It may be a gift, a trust handed over, or the version least likely to be misunderstood. We cannot tell which — and the work refuses to decide.

11

films

8

channels

15

screens

5 m

braille wall

45 min

sessions

25

visitors max

© THE WORLD IS YOURS · Negotiated Understanding · multi-screen digital video, 8-channel sound installation · with gratitude to the storytellers who lent this work their worlds.