

An assortment of projects and texts



AHAD M. IBRAHIM



This booklet explores the transformative power of architecture to create networks and shape the distribution of power. My time at GSAPP has profoundly changed my understanding of architecture, teaching me that there are no definitive answers—only evolving questions. This realization underscores the interconnectedness of architecture with the broader networks that define our world and influence power dynamics. Architecture must evolve and be understood as more than just buildings; it is defined by the relationships and entanglements it creates.

Architecture extends beyond architects. When viewed as part of a network, it involves multiple actors and becomes transdisciplinary, experimental, and performative. It influences not just human interactions but also relationships with other species and the environment. In addressing the complexities of today's world—climate crisis, geopolitics, toxicity, and social justice—architecture must recognize its role within a broader system and its power to instigate change.

The projects here operate within this dimension, conscious of their agency to transform the social, environmental, and political landscapes. They propose radical ways of living and unexpected interactions between species, extending beyond mere buildings. The accompanying essays and conversations delve into these themes, reflecting the insights and concerns that have shaped my year at GSAPP.

Here, I have learned that architecture can be confronted through text and sound, expanding the practice's boundaries. All of our actions are political, and by learning about history and incorporating it into our designs, we create cultural moments, not just buildings. I have also learned that each critique is an open dialogue that encourages critical and conscious thinking.

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01

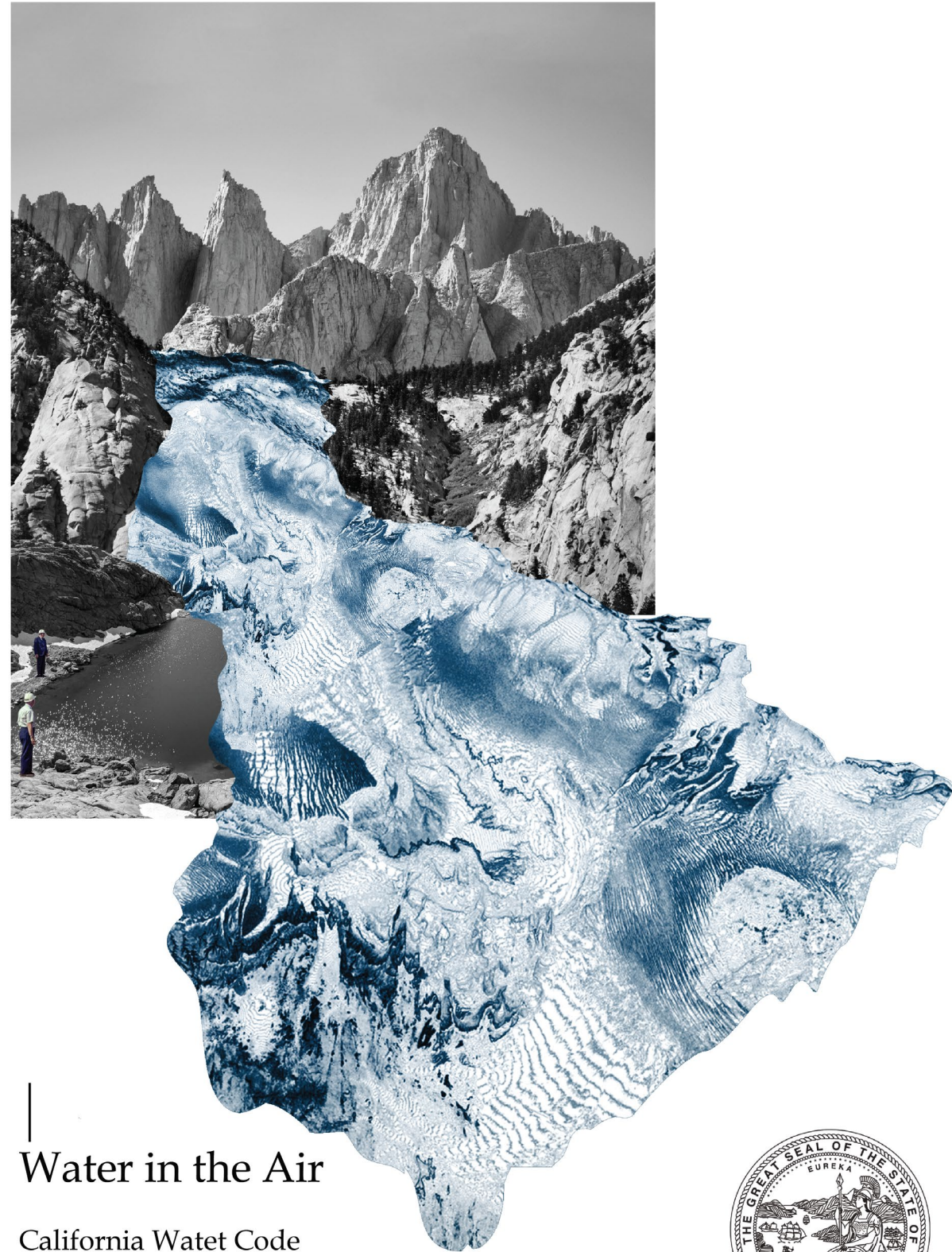
The Water In The Air

Legislating Nature

Professors: Marco Ferrari, Elise Misao Hunchuck | Studio Mentor: Ridhi Chopra

“Thinking about water is a complicated activity. Thinking about water in California can approach higher mathematics in complexity; for contemporary California invented itself through water engineering; and the intricacies and effects, intended or otherwise, of that invention are multiple. Thinking about the California Delta only compounds the problem, for this eco-region sustains within itself every positive and negative legacy of the way that Americans have restructured the environment since seizing California from Mexico in 1846.”

—Kevin Starr



Water in the Air

California Water Code
1948

The Sierra Nevada mountains play a crucial role in accumulating and supplying water to the continent. However, the region faces challenges due to climate fluctuations and uneven snow runoff caused by melting. These factors contribute to an increased frequency of water shortages and excessive water discharge into the ocean. While dams and reservoirs have been constructed to conserve water resources, they fall short of meeting the demands of the ecosystem and biodiversity. Although the California Water Code (1943) was established to facilitate the provision of water supplies throughout California, the legislation has remained relatively static over the years, with adjustments and updates primarily occurring as reactions to emergent problems or crises. California's population has experienced rapid growth in recent years, and this upward trend is expected to continue. California relies on a network of approximately 1,400 artificially constructed surface reservoirs to sustain its growing population with water. In situations where reservoirs in California become excessively filled (atmospheric river storms, for example), the surplus water is often discharged into the ocean, while during periods of drought, water is held in reservoirs and meted out slowly at agreed-upon rates. The current water code and the infrastructure that reflects its logic cannot keep up with water in the face of climate change and increasing atmospheric river events.

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The Water in the Air employs a methodological approach to analyze existing reservoirs, using Oroville Lake Reservoir as its case study. In 2017, heavy rainfall damaged the Oroville Lake Reservoir dam's main and emergency spillway. This research investigates historical and present fluctuations in water levels within the reservoir, considering all forms of water accumulation; solid (snow and ice), liquid (rain and water bodies), and gas (vapor). By comparing historical hydrological data with current conditions, this study looks at reservoir fluctuations, assessing whether the existing water code effectively accommodates these changes.

Looking to *Mathwa*, an Arabic word that means resting place or shelter, we will imagine a way of collecting and holding excess runoff water into surficial collection chambers. Made from soil of various consistencies and at various angles, we can think with water, natures, and infrastructure to respond to the evolving needs of water—in all of its forms.



1,2

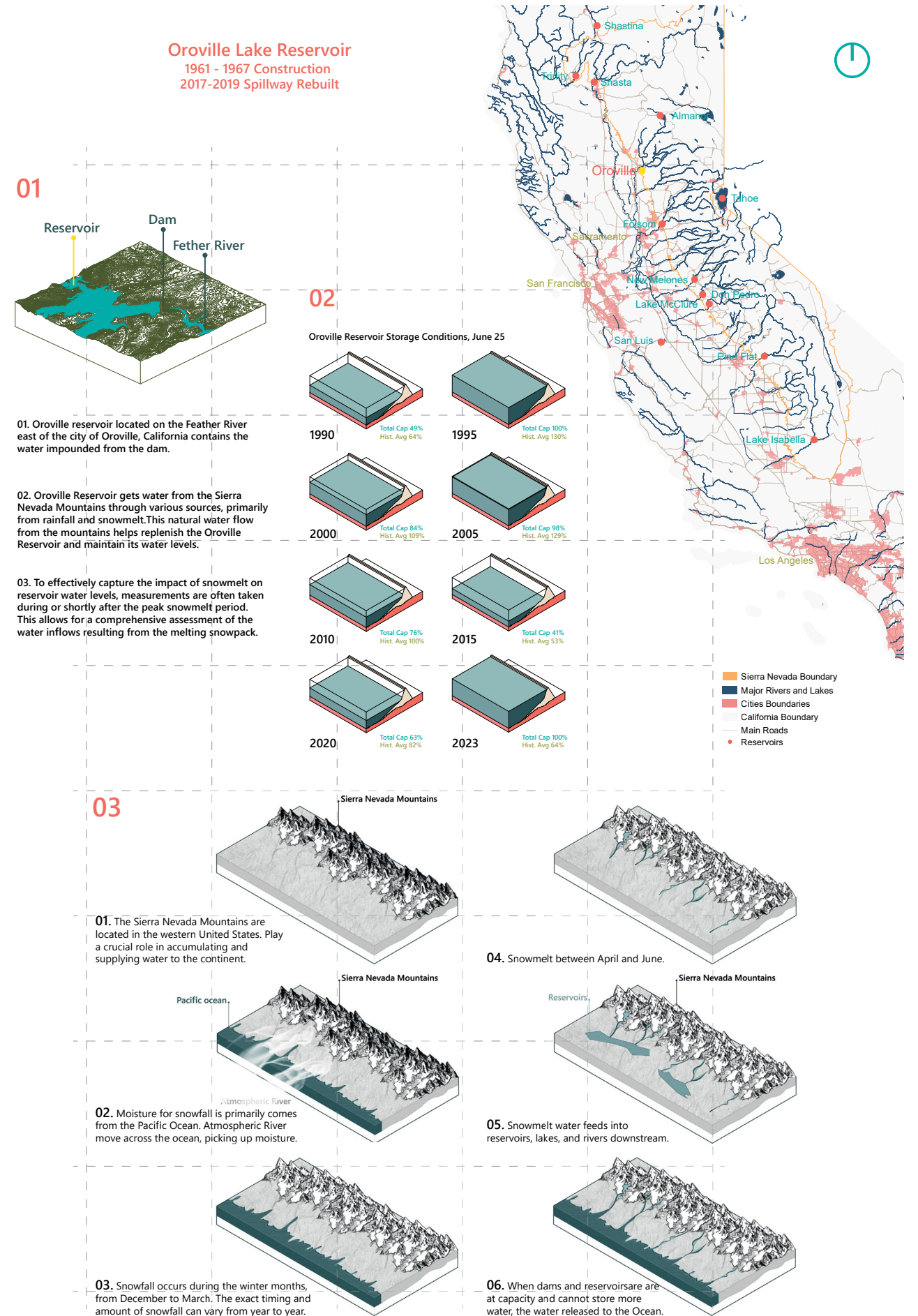


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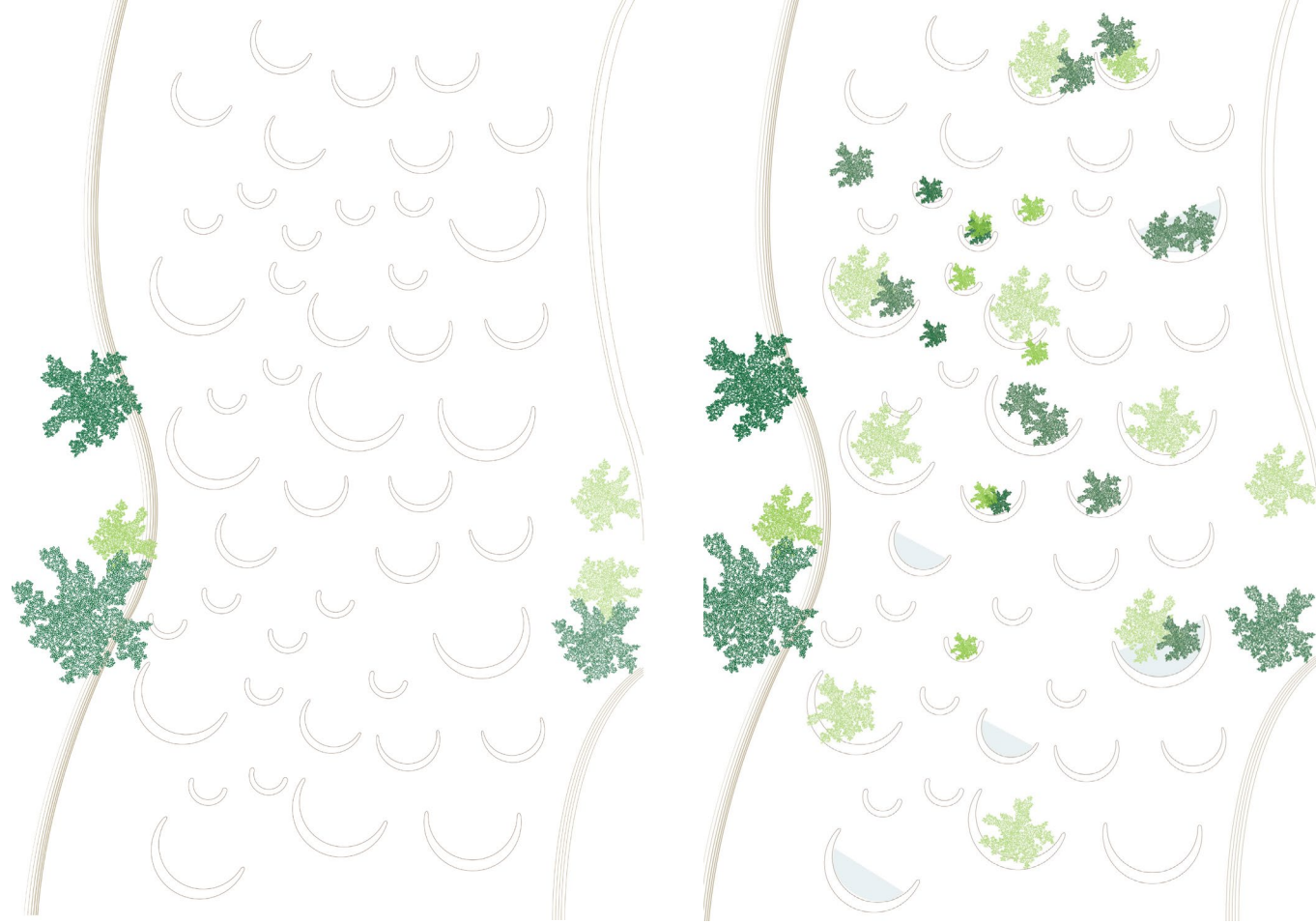
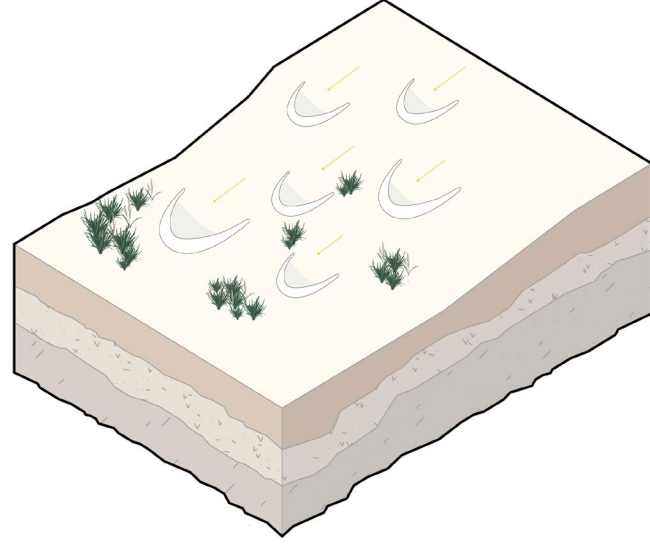
FIGS 1,2 In 1943 the California Water Code was established to facilitate the provision of water supplies throughout California. Due to California's rapid growth in population and the mismatch between the precipitation and population distribution. The historical John Wesley proposed to store water in reservoirs and build pipelines to move water.

FIGS 3-4 At the end of one of California's worst droughts on record, Northern California had its wettest winter in almost 100 years. Extraordinary levels of snow and rain caused what are known as the "2017 California Floods" and, in February 2017, the heavy flows damaged the concrete spillway of the Oroville Dam, destroying the lower half of the chute and overtopped the emergency spillway.

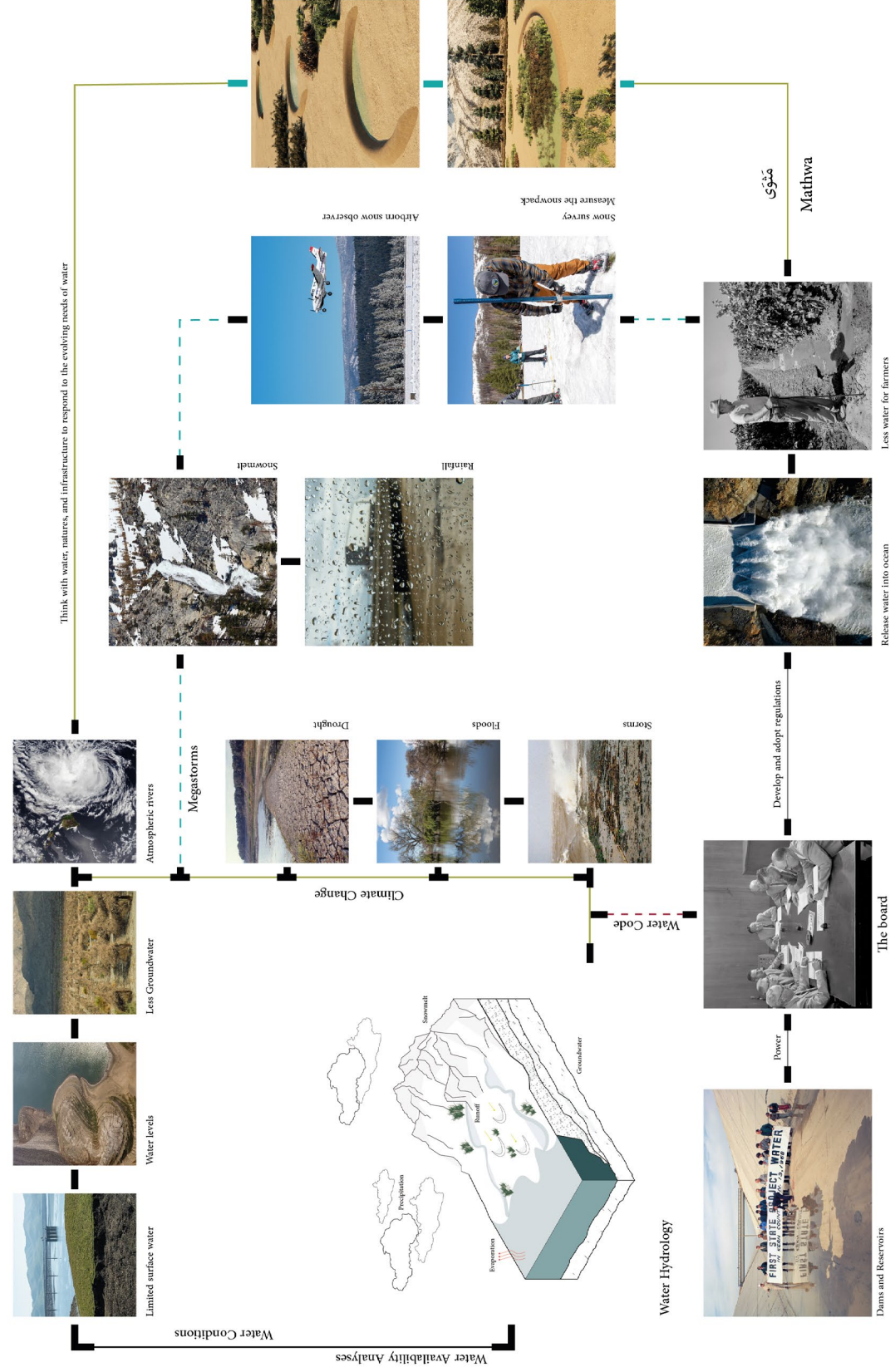


Using the earth itself as an infrastructure Mathwa depends on simple parameters: soil, slope, and water. It can be implemented in any subarea with a slope. The benefits include Slower water runoff, hydration of soil, and the mitigation of flood damage.

Mathwa also allows for the water balance to be restored, with more water available for the seeds present in the soil. It prevents water from washing away: this leaves more time for water to sink into the soil—recharge groundwater. Bringing back vegetation prevents soil erosion.



Water Code Analysis



02

The Seeds Cathedral: Unpacking Biopolitics

Transscalarities

Professors: Andres Jaque | Mentor: Alex kim

The Seeds Cathedral was chosen to represent the United Kingdom pavilion at Shanghai Expo 2010, with a remarkable structure that captures attention with its scale, material, and environmental interaction. Designing a pavilion for an Expo is a significant responsibility, as it represents a country and its values on a global stage. The Seeds Cathedral aims to showcase the positive attributes of the UK and highlights the complex interplay between seed preservation in representing British cities as the greenest in the world, the historical legacy of colonialism played a crucial role in driving its decline.

— *Crafting a global identity under the shadow of colonialism sparks*

The UK pavilion represents Great Britain and its green lands, by collaborating with Kew Gardens the world's first major botanical institution. Analyzing the history of Kew Gardens, the historian Bonneuil mentioned that the director of Kew succeeds in transforming it into a botanical center during Victorian imperial expansion. He revitalized the colonial network and founded the Museum of Economic Botany at Kew through overseas plant-hunting expeditions and facilitated plant transfers. It served as the connection for colonial botanical gardens and collecting botanical specimens resulting from the expanding imperial. Kew's Millennium Seed Bank goal is to preserve the seeds of 25% of the world's plant species. The seeds were preserved using acrylic rods 7.5-meter length through the walls of the box, extending them into the interior. This preservation can be viewed from two perspectives. Firstly, it may remind the world of Britain's historical colonial and imperial history. Secondly, it can be seen as a representation of ecological preservation through the lens of promoting seeds rather than colonization. However, it's crucial to acknowledge the historical political colonization that underlies this pavilion, indirectly conveyed through green lands propaganda.

The Pavilion highlights the biodiversity of living things, embodying the natural system through acrylic rods lit by the sunlight in the day and hidden lights inside the rods illuminate the seeds in the night. Operates like a living organism by swaying rods tips outside moving with the wind breeze. It reflects Britain's ability to navigate and exert control over other countries without causing damage to their lands. The Pavilion's design minimizes its ecological footprint with a compact 15x15-meter box. While it appears to focus on environmental conservation, it can also be interpreted as a British portal to address the damages caused by colonialism, on a large scale.

— *Consider how architecture, often revered for its artistic expression and functionality, can also be wielded as a tool of propaganda*

The name "Cathedral of Seeds" invites exploration into how it effectively represents the country. Cathedral is traditionally associated with religious spaces and Christianity. The massive scale of the Seeds Cathedral, measuring 15x15 meters wide and 10 meters high, could symbolize the importance of Christianity above all for the UK. The structure stands independently, emphasizing Britain's territorial significance and evoking its history as a colonizer. However, this raises questions about the relationship between defining nature and Britain's imperial history.

— *Think about the complex interplay between power, memory, and the built environment*

The design of the UK pavilion, represented by the Seeds Cathedral, showcases the country's positive attributes on a global stage. However, it is important to acknowledge the historical legacy of colonialism and the political motivations behind the pavilion design. The Cathedral's fusion of nature, history, and imperialism raises questions about its effectiveness in representing Great Britain and nature, as historian Anker argues that British imperialism goes beyond ecological considerations.

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03

Echoes of Capital

Dispatches: Unsettling Architecture and the Instabilities of Modernity

Professors: Mario Gooden, Raven Chacon | Studio Mentor: Khadija Tarver

“There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all.”
—Michel Foucault

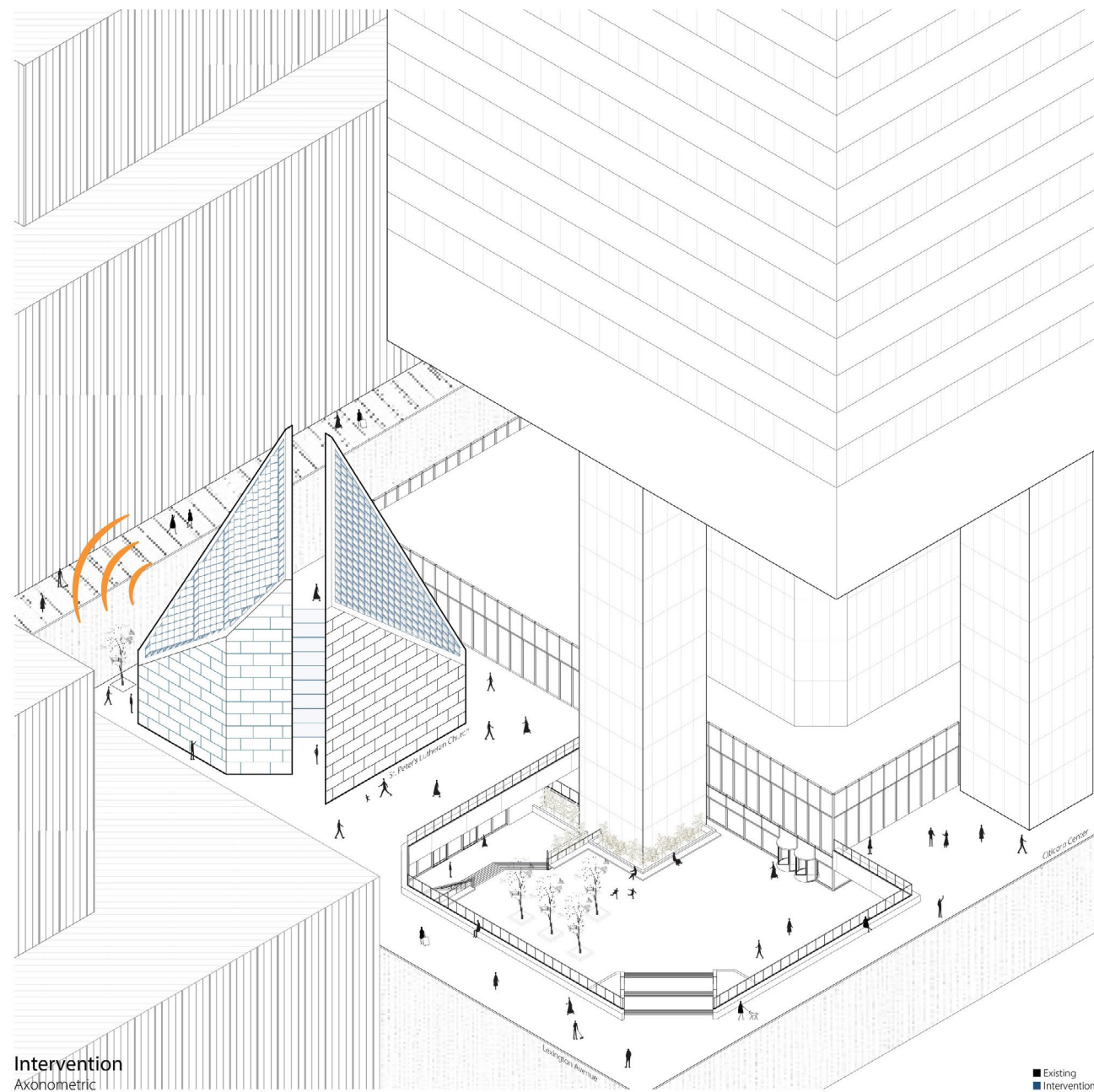
The Citicorp Plaza stands as a testament to the intertwined narratives of religion and finance, shaping the late 1970s wealth landscape. Concealed beneath its architectural facade lies a profound relationship between St. Peter’s church and the bank, driven by the transformative force of money. Through deep listening and innovative design interventions, this project seeks to unearth the hidden ties and explore the convergence of God and capital. By focusing on the collaboration between Christianity and capitalism, the thesis investigates how architectural interventions can expose and amplify this once-secret dialogue, transforming it into an audible narrative for public awareness and historical understanding.

The final intervention aims to foster meaningful dialogue between Christianity and capitalism, beginning with physical separation at street level and culminating in a chamber for whispered communication underground. By reconnecting the two buildings and transforming the bisected skylight into a frameless structure with a sound chimney, the project creates a transparent interconnection, revealing their collaboration. The church, transformed into a dynamic sound amplifier, boasts kinetic double louvers featuring two distinct layers: a wooden layer facing the street and a glass layer directed towards the church. This design facilitates the seamless transfer of sound, unveiling the dialogue between the two entities. A sound cone at street level invites the public to actively engage in listening to the dialogue, while wooden cladding in the facade connects to organ pipes through sound posts, creating a vibrant skin for the church. With the once-hidden communication between the bank and the church now audible and visible to the public, their dialogue emerges from secrecy, symbolizing the revealed collaboration between God and money.

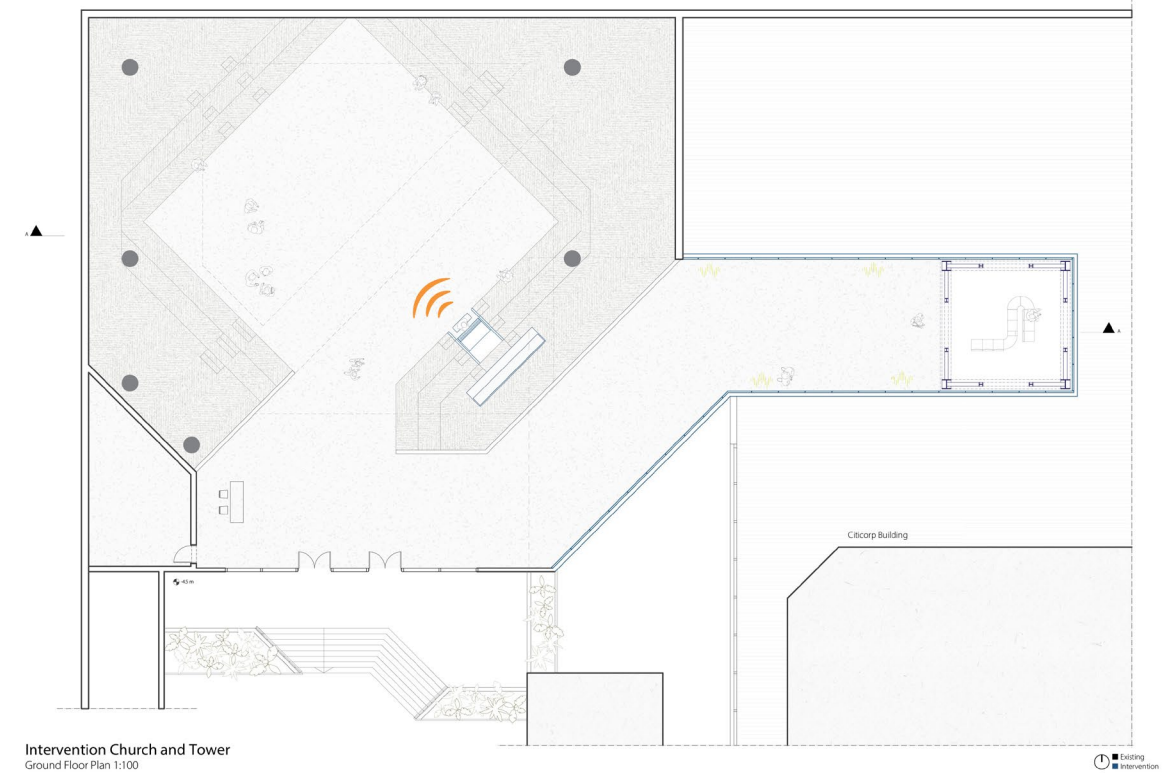


As I conducted field recordings, I delved into the hidden history of the complex, amidst the noisy machinery and bustling activity attempting to obscure the past.

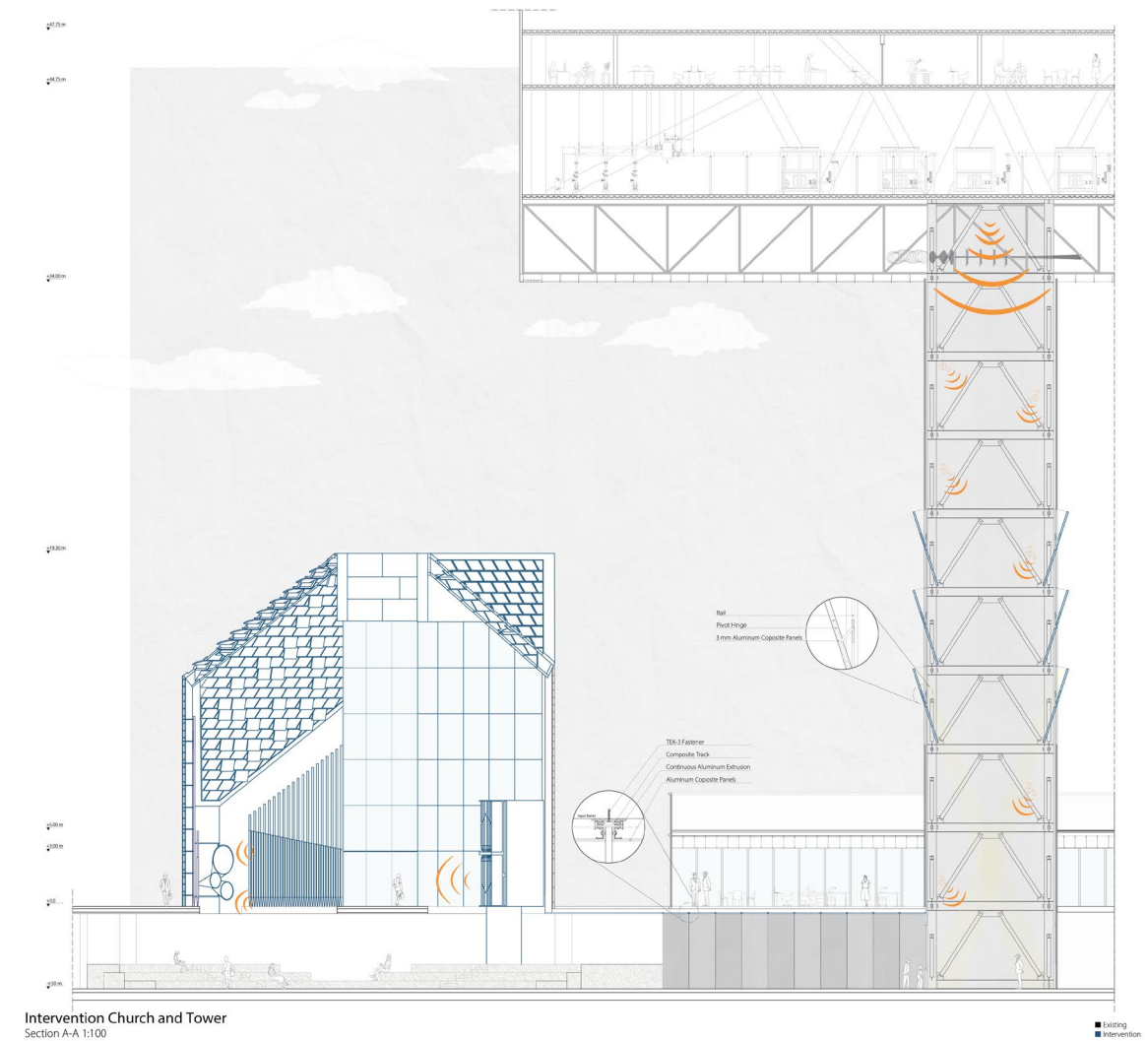
Field recording capturing the sounds, vibrations, and histories of the site.



Intervention
Axonometric



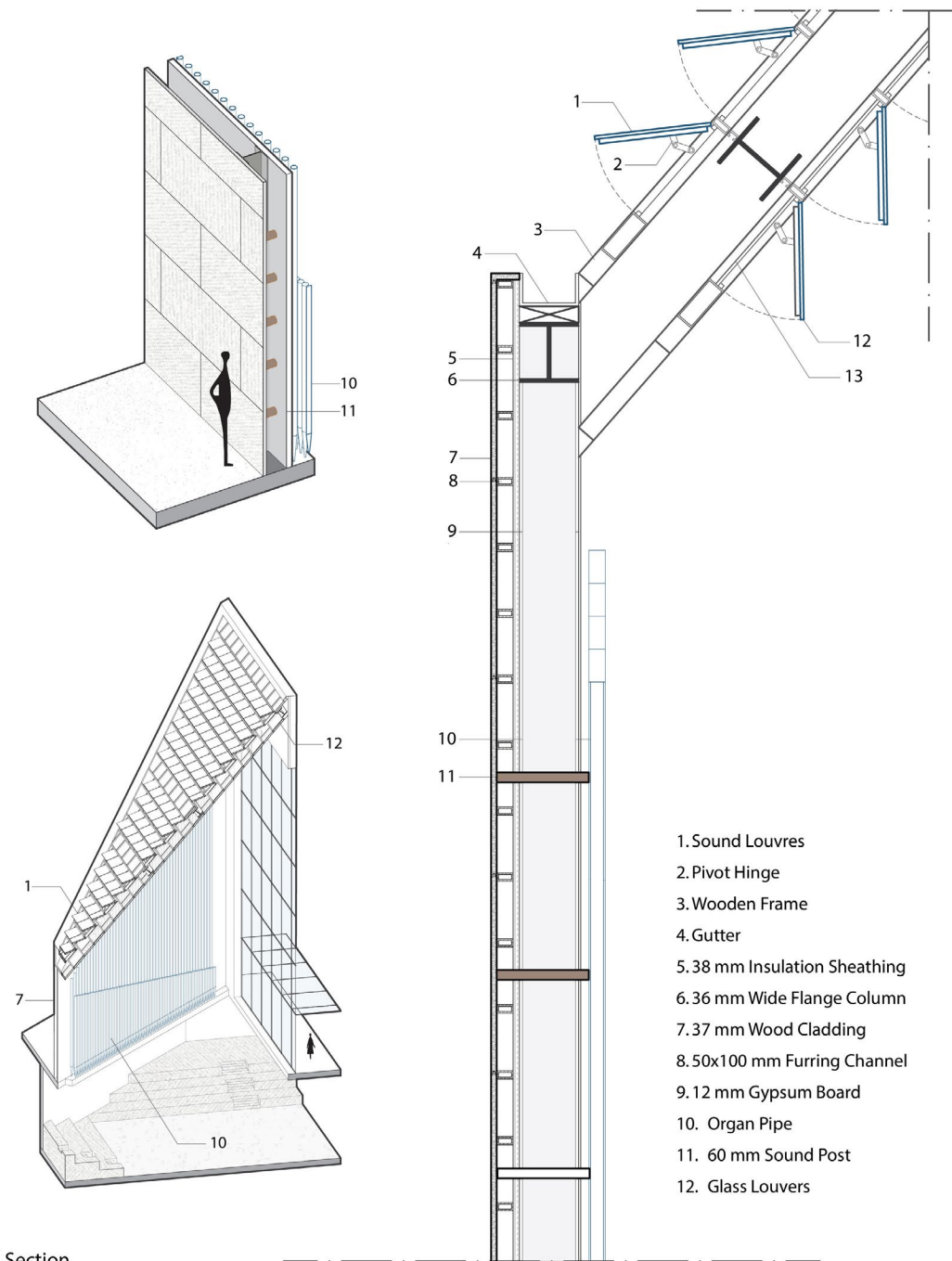
Intervention Church and Tower
Ground Floor Plan 1:100



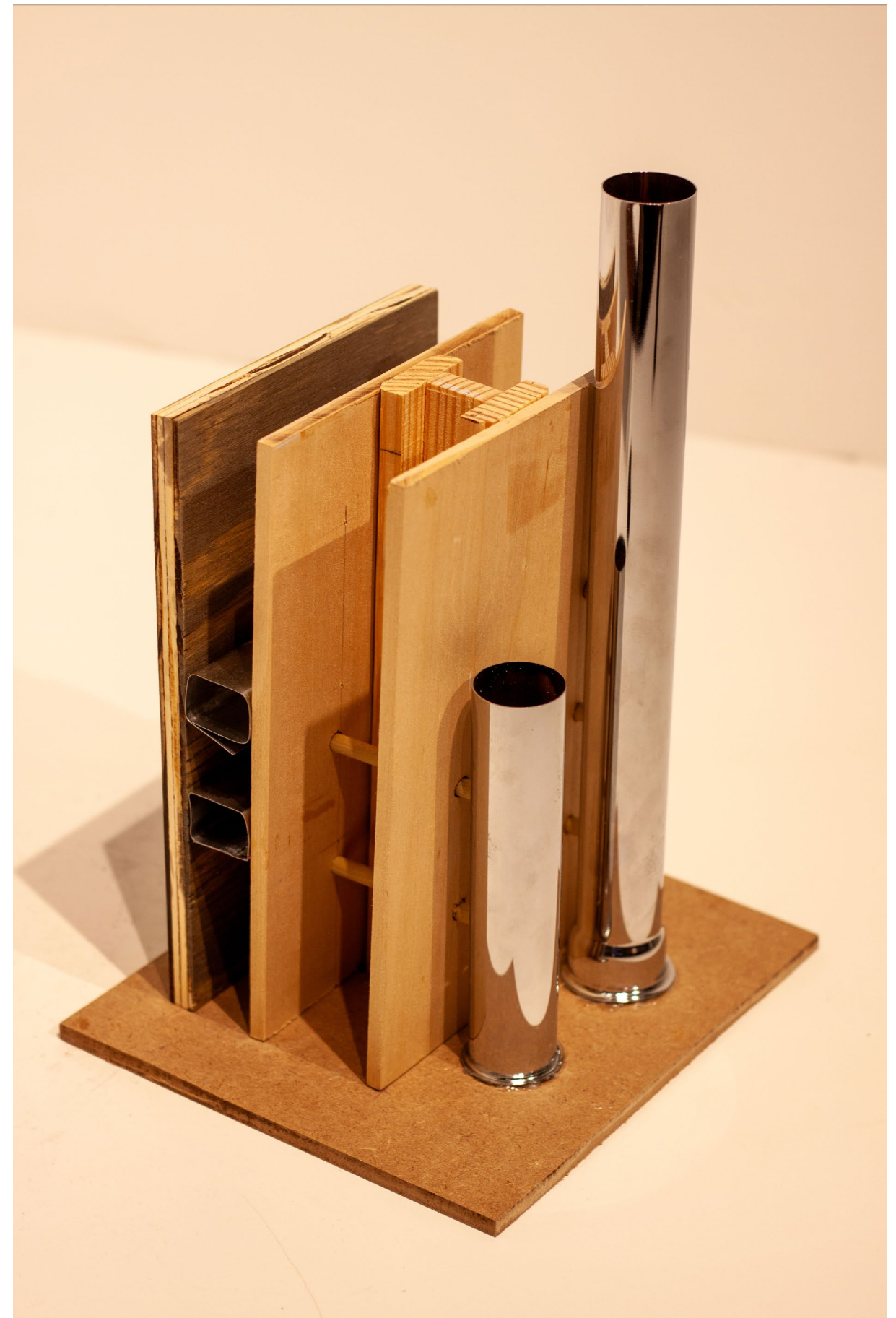
Intervention Church and Tower
Section A-A 1:100

Through integration, the wooden cladding on the facade intertwines with organ pipes via sound posts, breathing life into the church's exterior, turning it into a dynamic and resonant structure.

New Sound Compositions

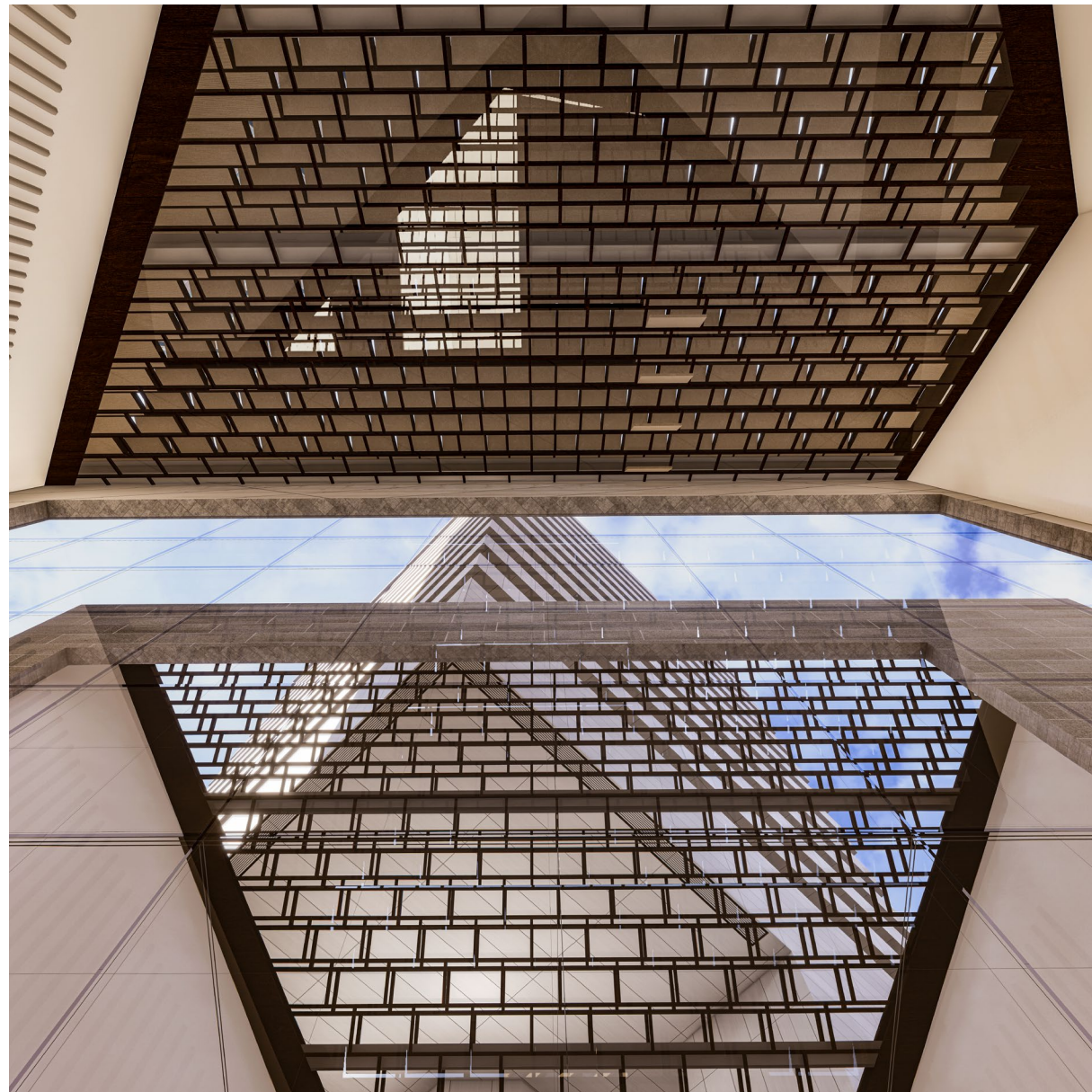


Detail Wall Section
1:15



Wall Section Model

— Challenging traditional beliefs, it seems the church isn't directing its reverence towards God, but rather towards the bank. This intriguing observation hints at a deep intertwining of spirituality and finance, where the sacred act of worship merges with the pursuit of profit, creating a unique bond between two seemingly disparate entities. Andrew Alpern and Seymour Durst characterized the agreement as "ecumenically joining God and mammon to the benefit of both".



— Initiating with a deliberate physical parting at street level, the process then intricately reunites the church with the tower column underground, forming a clandestine chamber for hushed exchanges.

04

Mount Beacon Overlook

Dispatches: Unsettling Architecture and the Instabilities of Modernity

Professors: Mario Gooden, Raven Chacon | Studio Mentor: Khadija Tarver

““Dispatch” is either a transcription of events around the 2016 DAPL encroachment at Standing Rock, a prompt for an ecological oral future, or at the very least, a critique of the privilege of meditative Deep Listening. This score can be realized as a performance or as a series of imagined events. It can also be enacted in the real world. The players, the prompts, and the schematics are derived from an analysis of the surface dynamics and organization of the Water Protectors in defense of Standing Rock during the #noDAPL movement, not glossing over the miscommunication, profiteering, and injustices. In an increasingly fractured society, new paths and new formations are needed to refocus our attention in an attempt to find truth. Participating in this score may produce sonic or visual artifacts, these are as important as the actions.”
—Raven Chacon

A sound we hear defines the presence of existence, each one telling a unique narrative about the elements and the life that inhabits our world. Among these tales are the whispers of the natural world – the sounds of the mountains, the wind, and the trees. In the hushed murmurs of these elements’ voices, we find a profound connection to the earth and the complex tapestry of existence. Each sound, in its own way, offers a gateway to a deeper appreciation of the intricate relationships between humanity and the natural forces that define our existence. As we listen to the earth’s resonance, the wind’s whispers, and the trees’ tales, we embark on a sensory journey that transcends the boundaries of language, inviting us to embrace the rich tapestry of life that surrounds us.

During the Hike to the Mount Beacon Overlook, I employed audio recording devices to capture the immersive soundscape of the environment. Each recording meticulously captured the distinct ambiance of the mountain itself, the whispering wind and the rustling of the trees, each contributing to the rich tapestry of natural sounds. Subsequently, I meticulously developed a unique notational system and crafted conceptual scores from each recording, translating the raw auditory experiences into tangible representations that evoke the essence of the journey.

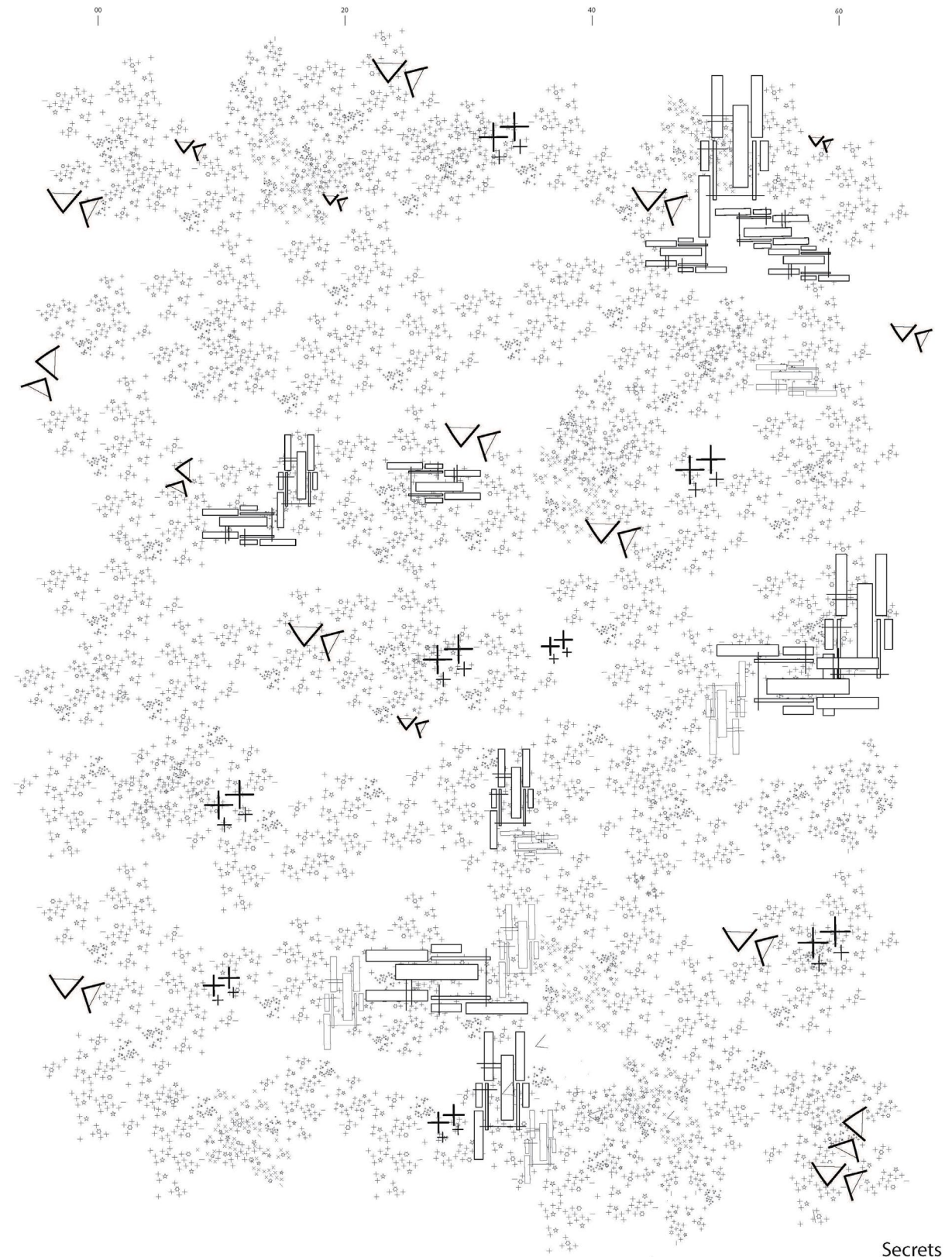


Secrets

In the heart of the forest, the trees share their secrets, tales of growth and resilience, through the gentle creaks, rustles, and the rhythmic swaying of their limbs. Their stories are intertwined with the melodic sounds of the birds, which lean on the leaves like notes on a page of music. The trees' symphony of sound creates a gentle, light, and delicate melody that graces the human ear. It's as if the woods have opened a door to a hidden world, inviting us to listen to the wisdom of the ages, the stories of survival, and the beauty of nature's song.



Sound on



Whisper

The sound of the wind, a delicate dance of whispers, reveals itself in nature, creating a conversation among tree leaves, birds, insects, and the silent rocks. It's as if a magical connection exists, uniting all living beings through this complex soundscape. The wind's voice moves dynamically—sometimes a soft caress, other times a powerful crescendo—with a boundless reach extending in every direction. Despite its freedom to roam, it maintains a rhythmic harmony, a sequence of spaces etched through lines of sound that transcends the ordinary. With each shift in its pitch, the wind wields the power to not only alter the scale and dimensions of the space it traverses but also the very quality of that space. It plays with the listener's soul, emotions, memories, and wonder through its ever-changing melodies. And yet, in the midst of its ceaseless motion, the wind can also choose to pause, lingering in a moment of serene quietness, as if it, too, appreciates the beauty of stillness.



Sound on

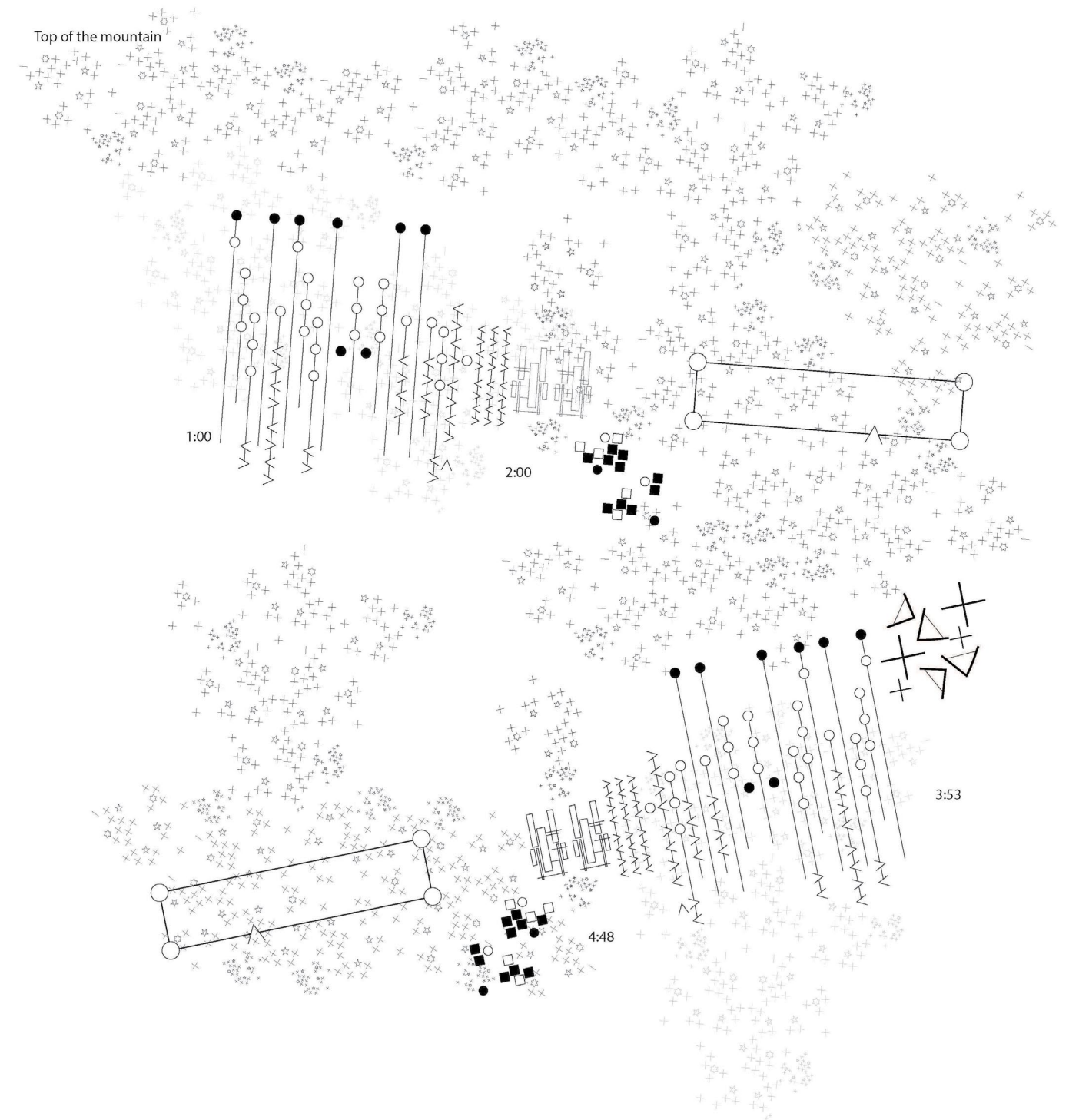


Existence

“What does the mountain sound like? Does it possess a voice we can truly hear?” I settled into silence, perched atop the mountain’s peak. It stood there, seemingly peaceful, yet beneath the surface, it bore the scars of its rough presence. As I listened closely, the mountain’s sound was a symphony of silence, a powerful hush that resonated with the very essence of the earth. It was thick, harsh, and deep. This symphony, however, was not alone. It was woven into the intricate rhythm of the wind, the swaying trees, the melodious birds, and the whispering insects. Amid this natural chorus, we could also discern the occasional sound of falling rocks from the mountain itself. Its voice, though subtle, revealed the profound story of its enduring strength and timeless existence.



Sound on



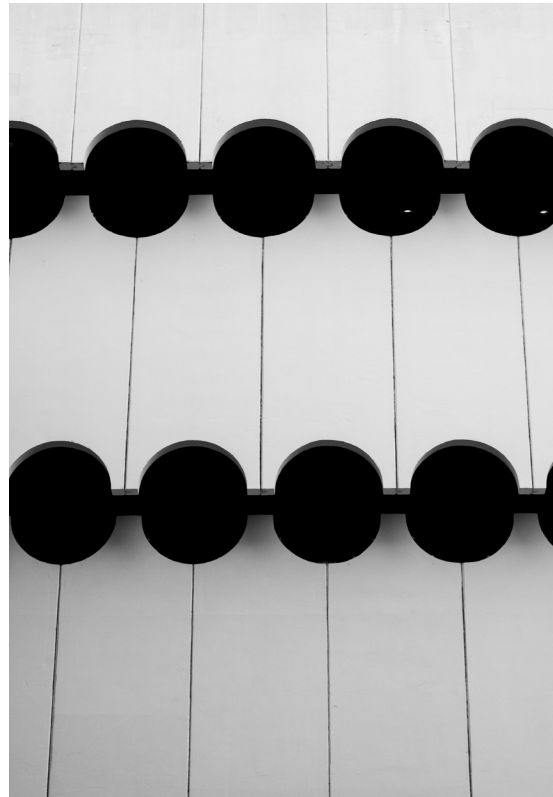
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Spaces Reimagined

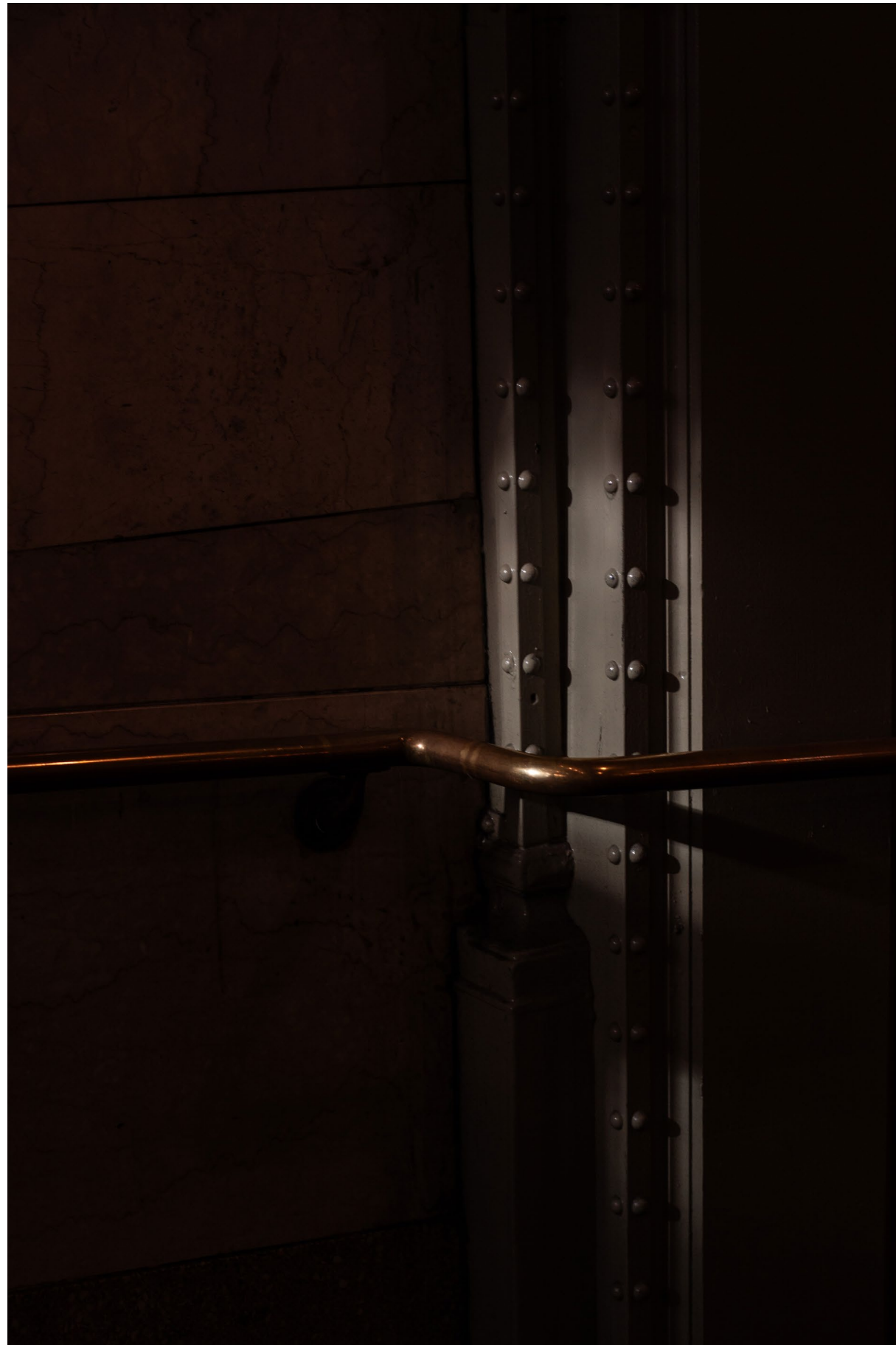
Architectural Photography

Professor: Michael Vahrenwald

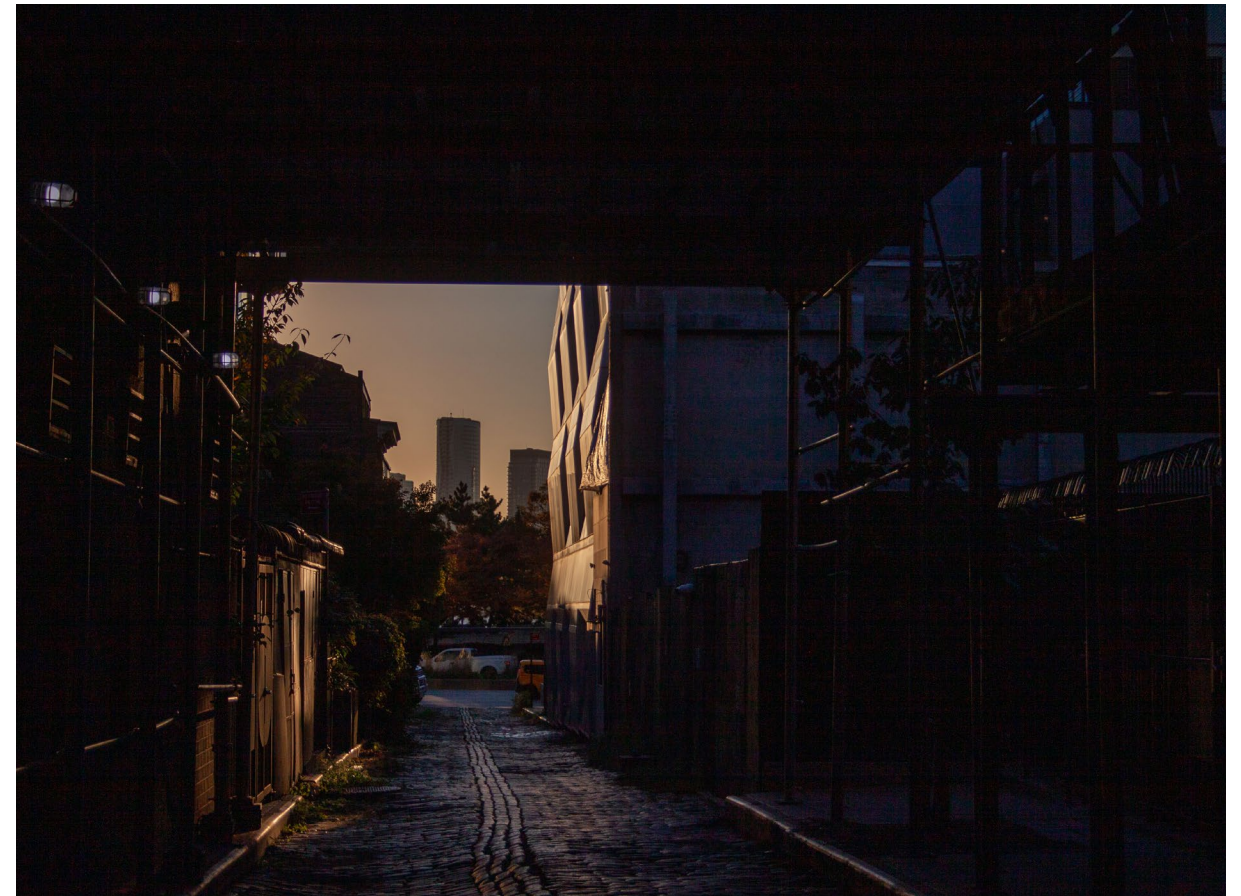
People often say that photography is an easy job—all you have to do is hold the camera. However, it is much more than that. It's about the position, the subject, the weather, the daylight, the setting, and seeing beyond the lens to convey a story. To me, photography is an integral part of architecture, serving as a tool that encourages us to look at and think about our surroundings in new and profound ways.



The O'Toole Building



Ghost in a shell



Transformative qualities of light



People and Place

06

*Design Process:
A Struggle
or a Path of Idea Exploration*

Science + Technology Studies

Professor: Albena Yaneva

The process of design, often romanticized as an artist's playground or an architect's dream, is a multilayered journey filled with challenges and creative exploration. Drawing from my own perspective, design, whether in architecture or other creative fields, is not only about the final product; it's a long path of exploration. The design process is full of intricate thoughts, potential solutions, and many directions to discover. It is not just about creating but also about discerning the path from myriad choices.

— *"The difficulty of dealing with novel situations is directly related to the number of possibilities"*

In my experience, the design process varies considerably between designing as a student and designing as a professional architect. As a student, the absence of limitations often poses a challenge. With boundless creative freedom, it can be challenging to start the design journey. Most of the time, I find myself grappling with too many ideas and a lack of focus, and eventually, I get lost in the middle of the process, contemplating quitting. Overthinking is a common pitfall in my design process. The abundance of ideas, thoughts, and imagination can lead to analysis paralysis. I have found myself at a crossroads during design, feeling lost and uncertain about the next steps. However, these moments of doubt and hesitation often mark the start of my journey, as they challenge me to think critically and refine my designs. One strategy I employ when I get lost is seeking feedback from a diverse group of people, including friends, family, and sometimes even strangers from outside the field. This is a common practice for me to develop my design and break free from my design circle; I often turn to those who think differently from me. The power of diverse perspectives is a driving force for me. It leads to a more holistic design approach and a comprehensive understanding of the project I'm designing for.

On the other hand, designing as an architect for clients is a different experience. The process becomes more enjoyable and fulfilling. The presence of a client's needs and preferences provides an exciting and challenging framework for the design. Collaboration with clients allows for an ongoing dialogue, fostering a dynamic design process that motivates me to create diverse solutions.

— *I thought
limitations
constrained
creativity*

As an architect, I've come to realize that the perception of design as an easy, enjoyable task is somewhat of a struggle to me. Yet I enjoy it the most! the design process is a paradox, simultaneously a struggle and a path of idea exploration. It is in these struggles and explorations that true innovation and creativity emerge, pushing me to refine my skills and ultimately produce designs that are not only beautiful but also functional and meaningful. It's a journey that challenges and inspires, a process where the destination is not just a finished product but the evolution of ideas and the creation of spaces that enhance the human experience.

— *I found that
limitations are a
driving force for me
in design*

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07

Multi-Faceted Personality Of Recycled Pulp

Home Is Where The Toxics Are

Professor: Marta Heisel-Wisniewska | Partner: Yichen Xu

“This seminar seeks to retrieve the inherent values of materials by specifically focusing on questions of health, ranging from the scale of the construction detail to broader social and political implications.” 15
—Marta Heisel-Wisniewska

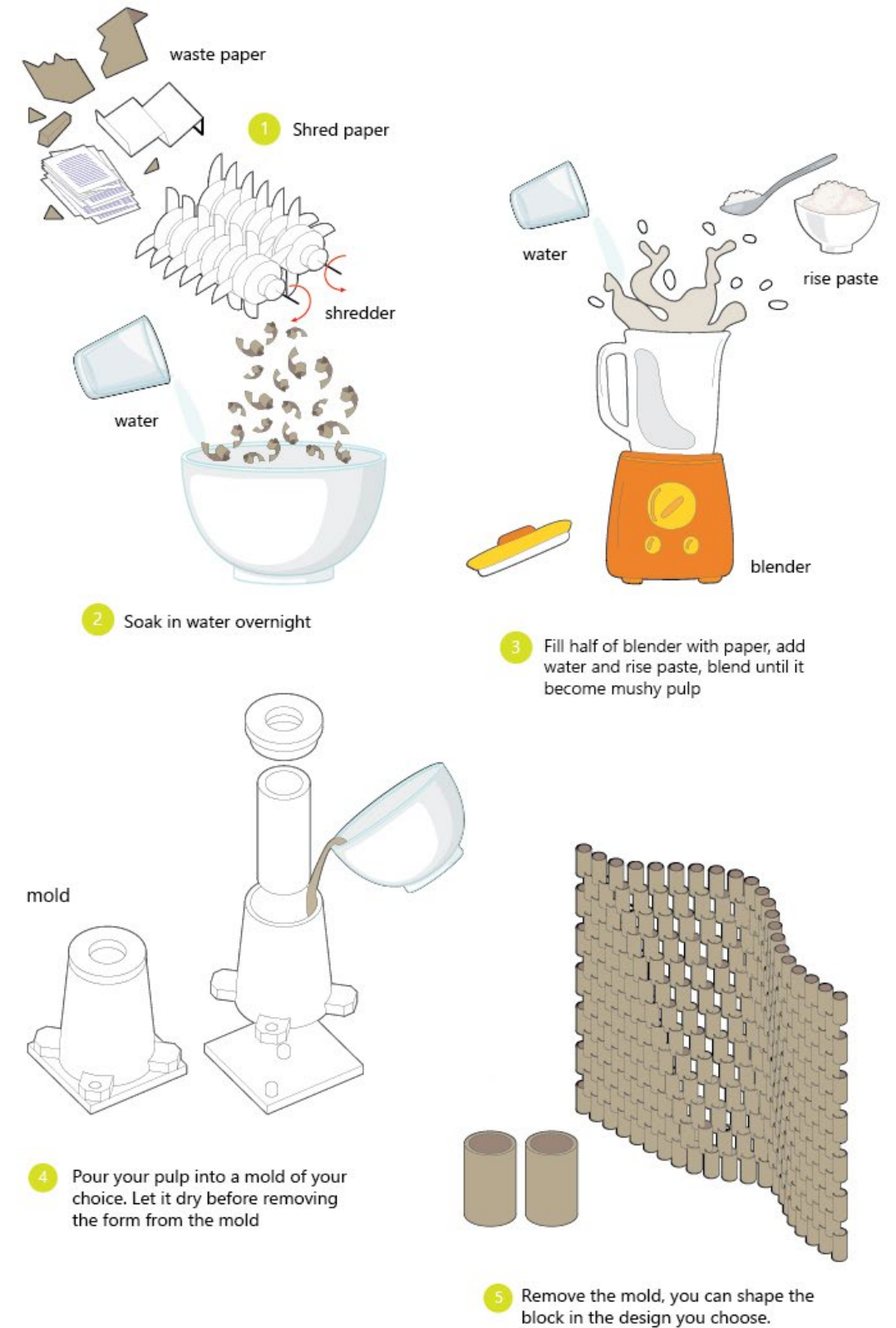
Wood, as a versatile and essential natural resource in the United States, plays a pivotal role in various sectors of the economy, from the forest products industry to construction and manufacturing. However, with the growing concern for environmental sustainability, the recycling of paper-based products has emerged as a crucial aspect of responsible resource management. This abstract delves into the diverse facets of recycled pulp, shedding light on its economic significance, environmental implications, and architectural applications.

The forest products industry in the US encompasses a wide range of sectors, including logging, sawmills, and pulp and paper production, contributing significantly to the nation’s economy. Despite being one of the world’s leading producers of wood and wood products, recent trends in waste paper imports indicate a shift in the global waste paper trade from developed to developing countries, posing environmental challenges and highlighting the need for a stronger circular economy system.

In urban settings like New York City and academic institutions such as Columbia University, paper recycling programs play a crucial role in diverting significant amounts of paper and cardboard from landfills, thereby reducing environmental impact. The environmental benefits of paper recycling are substantial, with each ton of recycled paper saving 17 trees, reducing oil consumption, energy usage, landfill space, and pollution.

Recycled pulp emerges as a sustainable and adaptable material with diverse architectural applications. From cylindrical paper tubes used in curved partition walls to plant walls and light and ventilation systems, recycled pulp offers versatility and environmental responsibility. By promoting the repeated use of paper-based products, recycled pulp contributes to resource conservation and environmental sustainability.

Manual Recycled Pulp



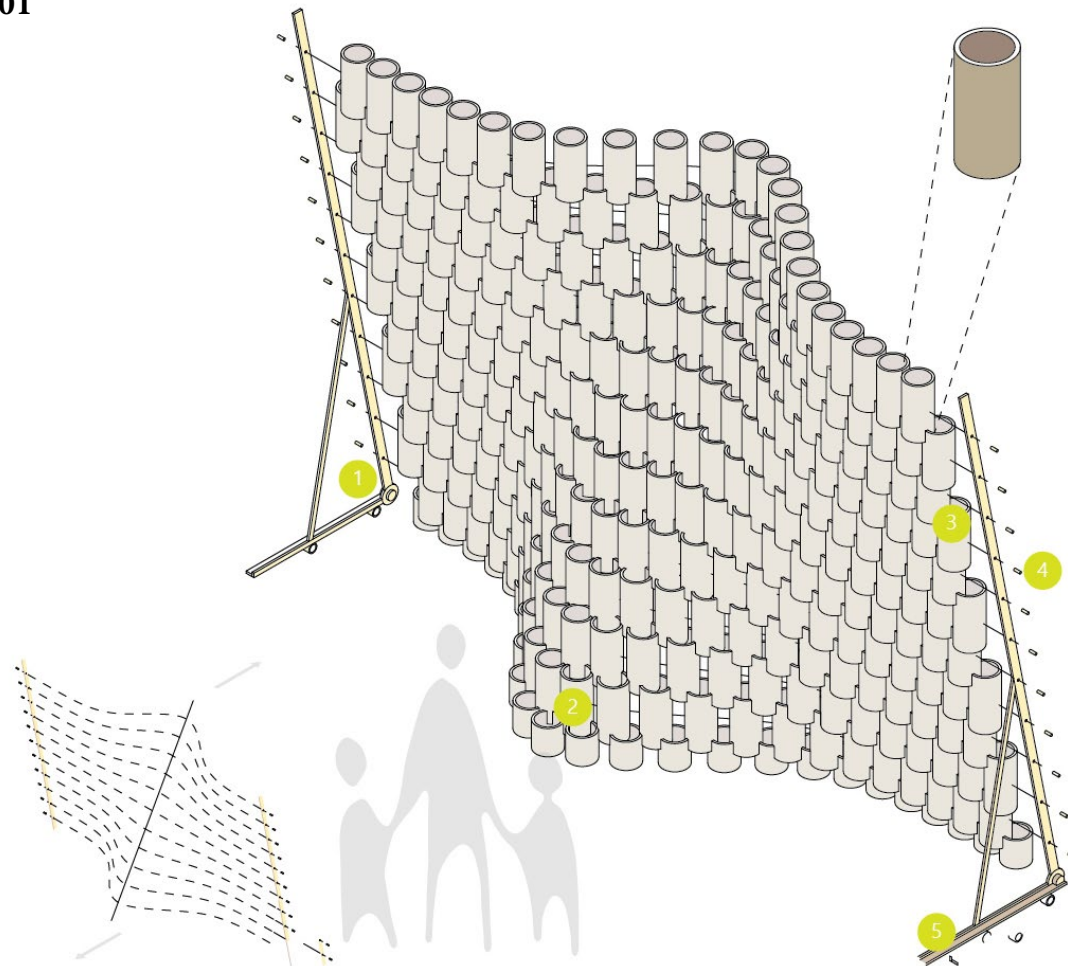
Architectural application

01. Parametrically dimensioned portable division walls

By employing specific curved forms, it becomes possible to instill stability in an otherwise fragile and easily collapsible pulp tube wall. Similar to how cardboard can stand upright when folded at a 90-degree angle, it is incapable of standing independently without this crucial fold.

Each paper tube is assigned an opening and number for assembly before integration. The incorporation of ropes and wooden supports aids in shaping the wall layer by layer, making it well-suited for decorative walls featuring various curved forms.

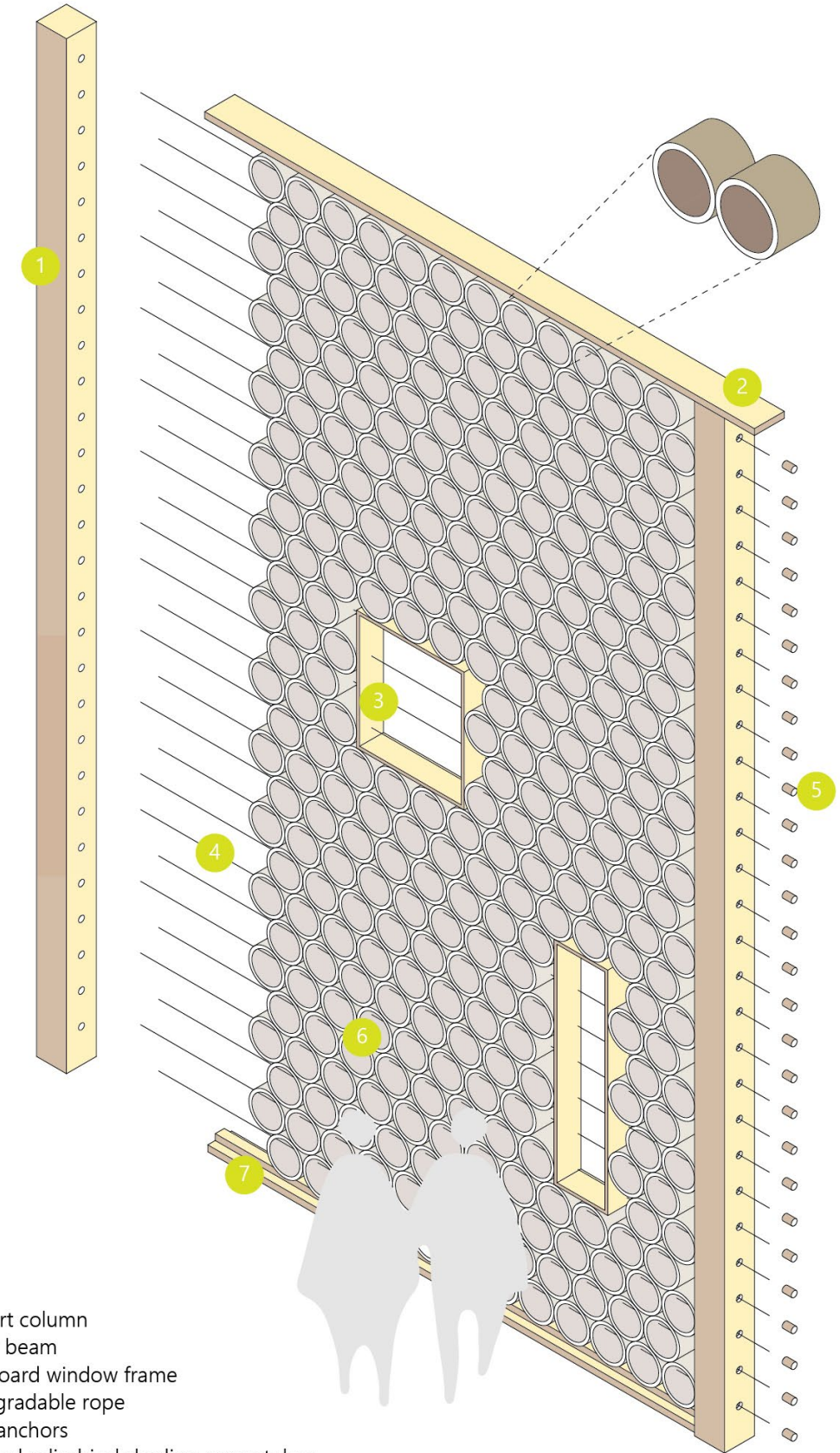
01



02. Translucent division decorative wall

All around the world, ventilation walls made of stacked cylindrical barrels have long been used. However, most of them are made of special bricks made of burned clay, which are heavy and vulnerable to breakdown. Using a combination of recycled pulp tubes and ropes offers new

02

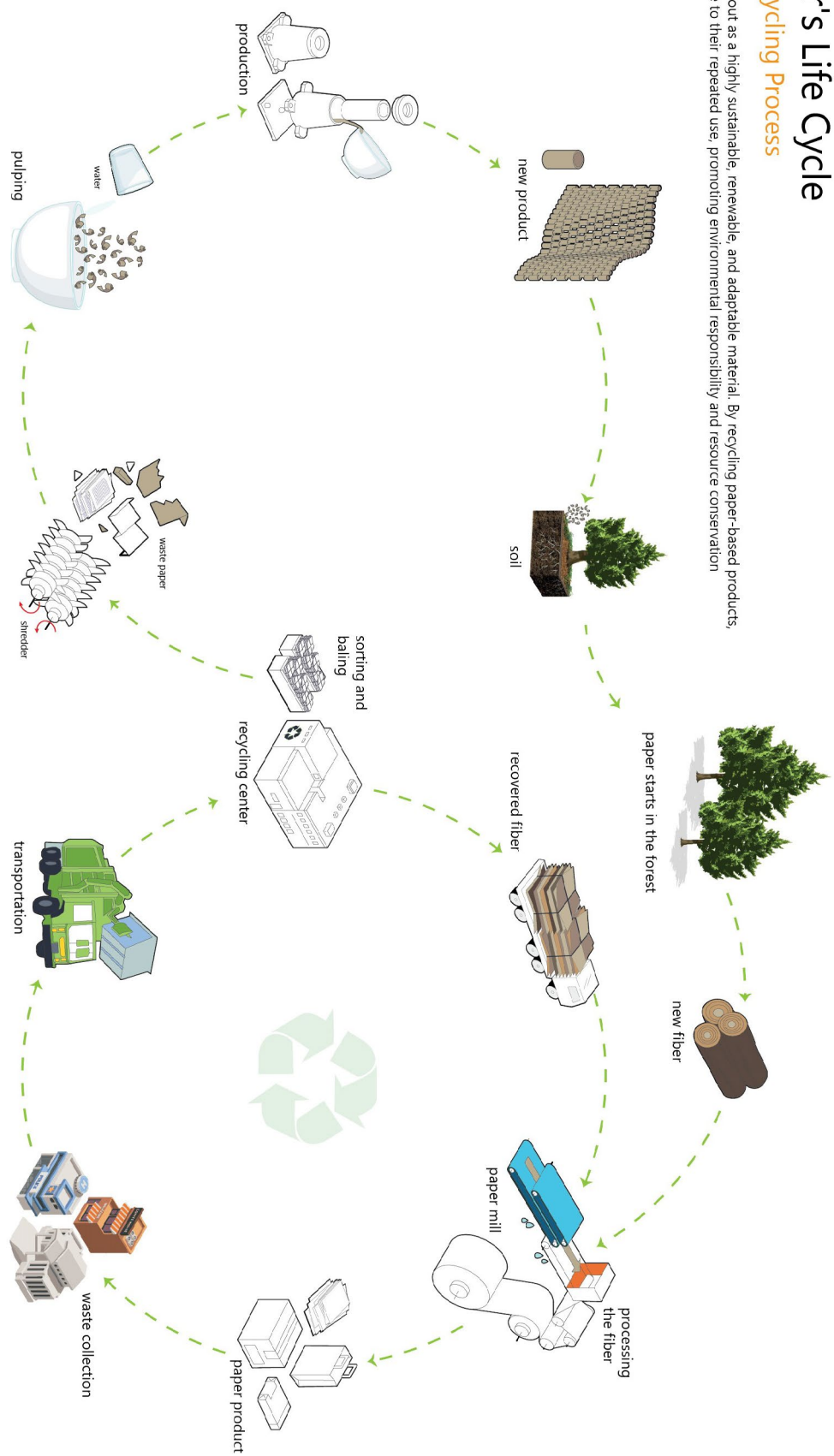


1. support column
2. Upper beam
3. Cardboard window frame
4. Biodegradable rope
5. Rope anchors
6. Recycled cylindrical shading paper tubes
7. Elevated Moisture Barrier

Paper's Life Cycle

The Recycling Process

Paper stands out as a highly sustainable, renewable, and adaptable material. By recycling paper-based products, we contribute to their repeated use, promoting environmental responsibility and resource conservation.



- Left to right**
- Waste paper, flour, lime and oil
 - Waste paper and glue
 - Waste paper and water
 - Waste paper and flour
 - Waste paper, water and rice paste

08

The Riparian Institute

De-Monumentalizing Modernist Big Containers Of Madrid

Professors: Juan Herreros Guerra, Oscar M Caballero | Studio Mentor: Kriti Shivagunde

Partners: Maria Berger, Jillian Katz

“How can architecture transform the theoretical discourse that institutions have embraced when they declare themselves to be transparent, inclusive, anti-colonialist, anti-machist, anti-racist and eco-friendly into a physical reality?”

Our project reimagines the Hydrographic Institute, inaugurated in 1963 with a dedication to the study and commitment to building robust water infrastructure throughout Spain. Spain’s deep-rooted water tradition, entwined with its history of constructing numerous dams, reservoirs, and water towers, was profoundly shaped by the Franco dictatorship. Franco’s ideological mission to modernize Spain, aiming to transform it into a hydro-efficient powerhouse, left a lasting mark on the country. Despite political propaganda depicting Spain as a “water power,” the reality is marked by recurring droughts and ecological disruption, necessitating a profound reevaluation.

The Spanish government established the Hydrographic Institute headquarters along the Manzanares river, strategically located near significant cultural landmarks like the Royal Palace and la Casa de Campo. However, this industrialization and modernization of the river, along with the construction of the hydrographic headquarters, led to the isolation of neighboring communities from the river.

The architectural layout of the Hydrographic Institute building reflects the political climate of its time. Designed by Miguel Fisac, known for his ties to Opus Dei, a religious organization intertwined with politics, the building’s imagery projected austerity and prestige. Fisac’s innovative use of precast concrete beams, known as “bone beams,” allowed for efficient water drainage and structural integrity, crucial for hydrographic research. Despite its functional purpose for hydrographic research, the building’s design also served as a symbolic representation of scientific progress. However, the need for physical testing models was minimal, emphasizing a “show of science” rather than scientific advancement.

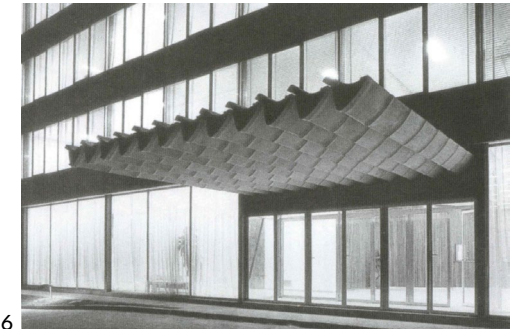
Our proposal seeks to honor the historical significance of the Hydrographic Institute while repurposing it for contemporary needs. We envision a three-fold approach: reconfiguring the building’s existing materiality to preserve its historical significance, creating a new topography that fosters cultural enrichment, and integrating a visible water pipe system that emphasizes efficient water management.



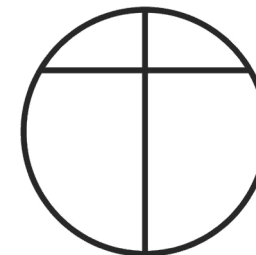
1, 2



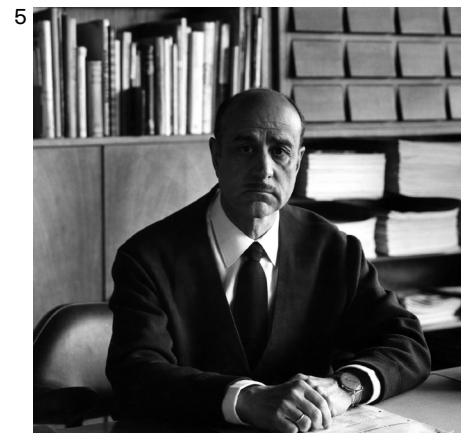
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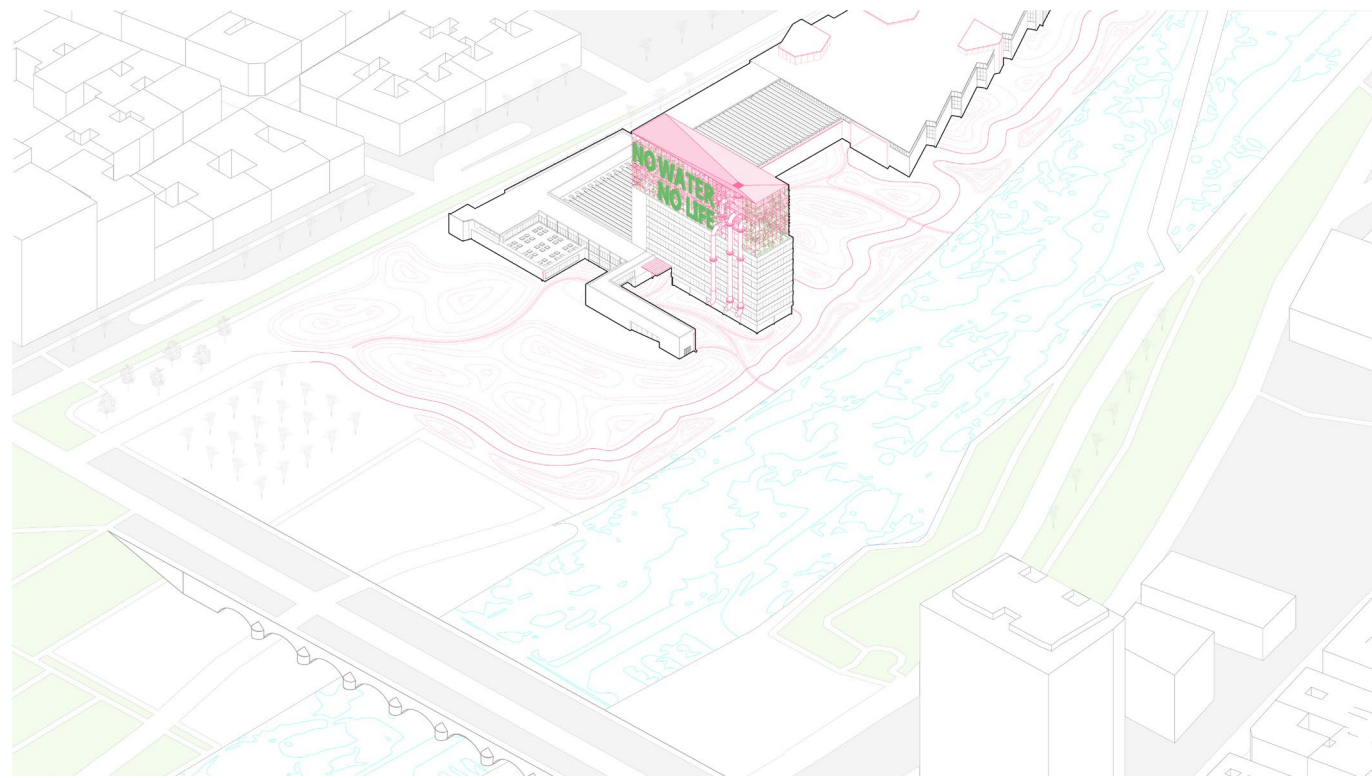
7

FIGS 1, 2 Footage from “no-do” is a political propaganda advertisement. It was produced by the oppressive regime, showing Franco visiting and inaugurating dams throughout Spain. Although, this doesn't quite reflect the reality of the situation. Spain had been experiencing high water stress for some time, but rather reflects his fascination with ‘water power’.

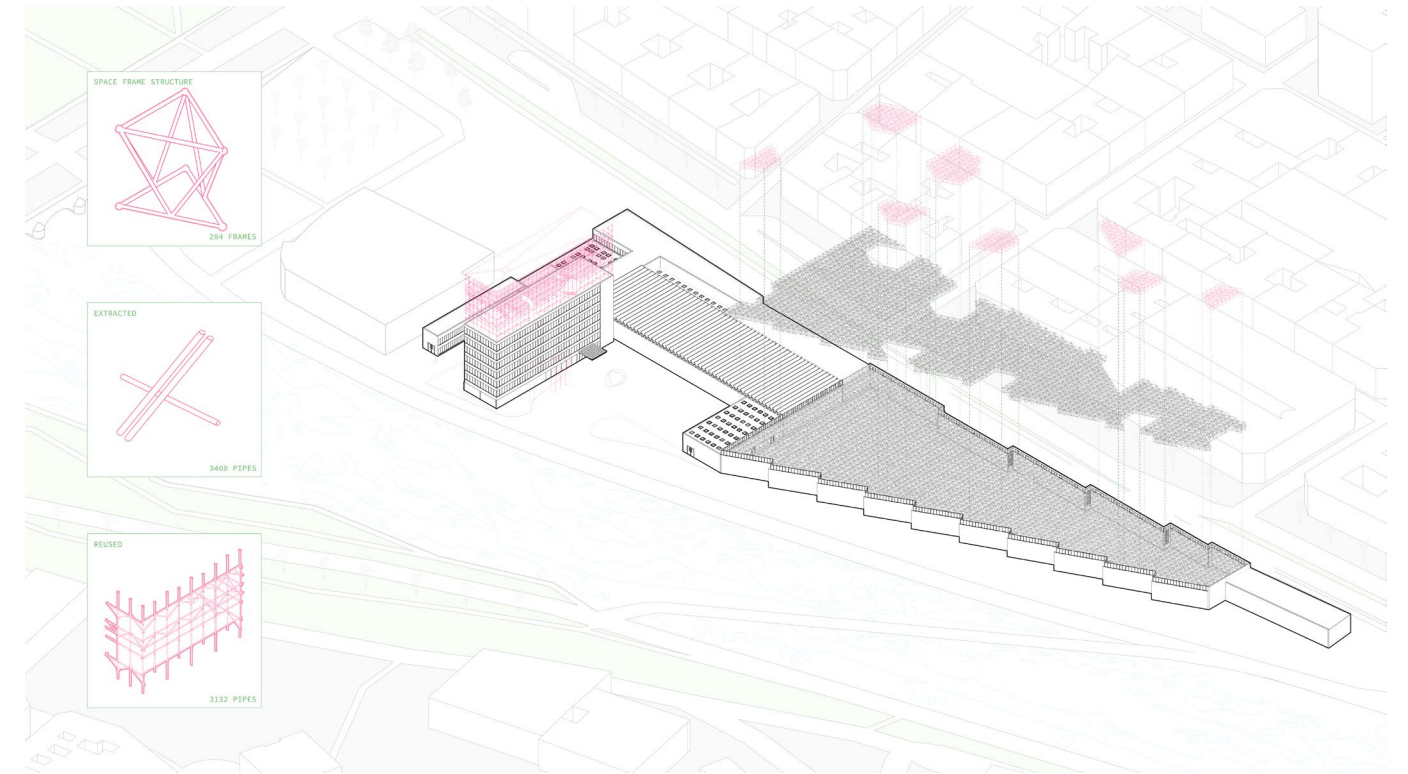
FIGS 3-4 Franco hired Miguel Fisac, the architect of the building, who was commonly involved in other governmentally-funded architectural projects at the time due to his ties to Opus Dei, a religious organization deeply intertwined within the political arena, working hand-in-hand.

FIGS 6-7 The imagery of the Hydrographic Institute was carefully selected and curated to promote austerity and prestige, with one iconic image being the meeting room—a space where important decisions were made.

— The building invites dialogue between the city and its water usage. The exaggerated pipes and roof funnel, along with the 'no water, no life' sign, serve as reflections of scarcity.

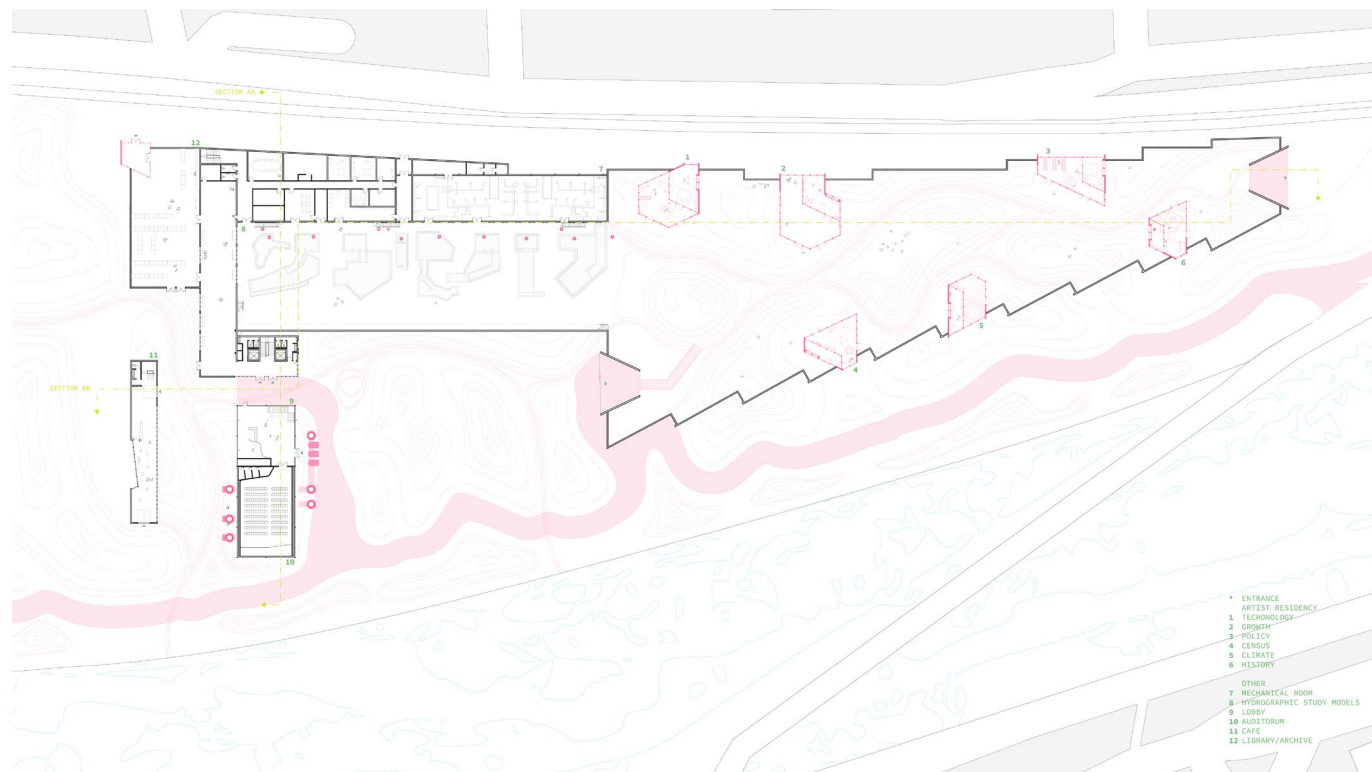


The Riparian Institute

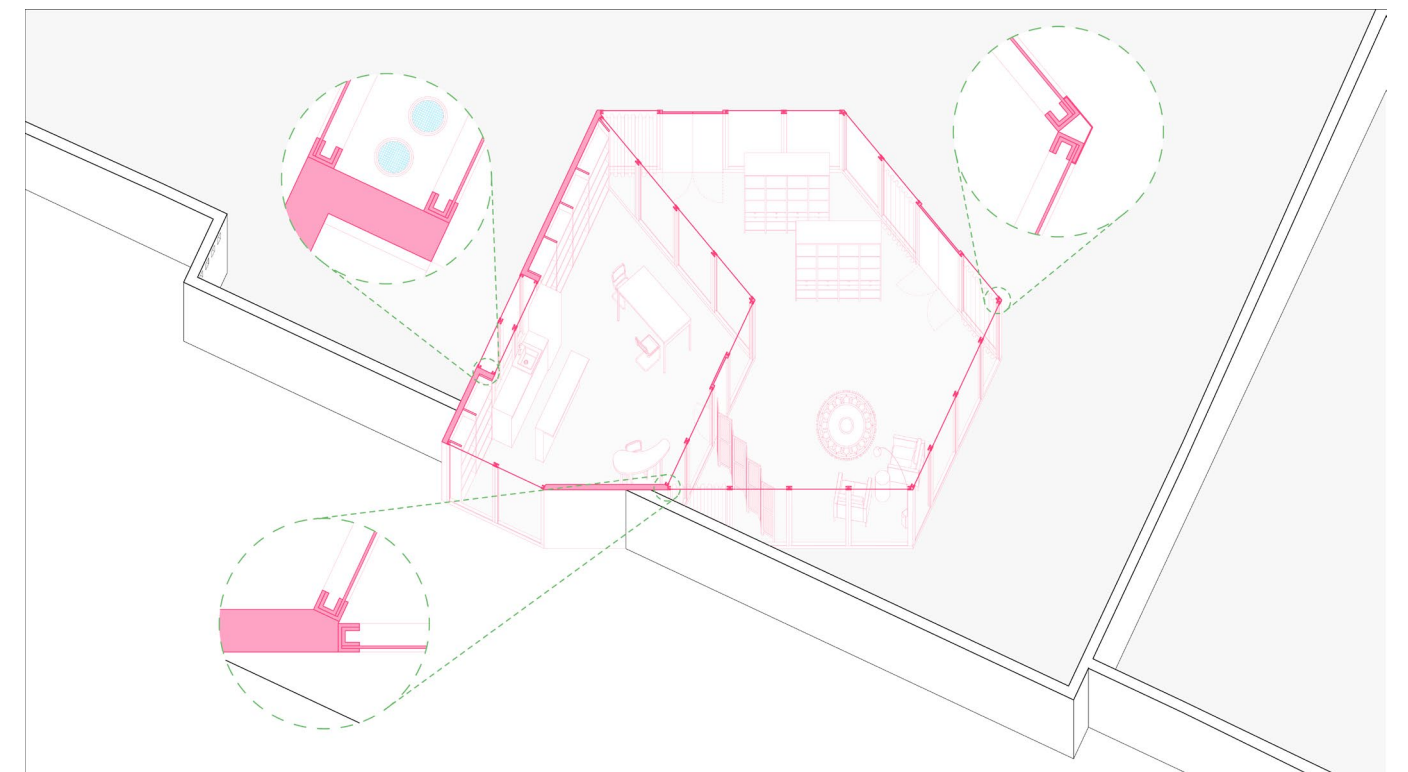


Structure Re-Use

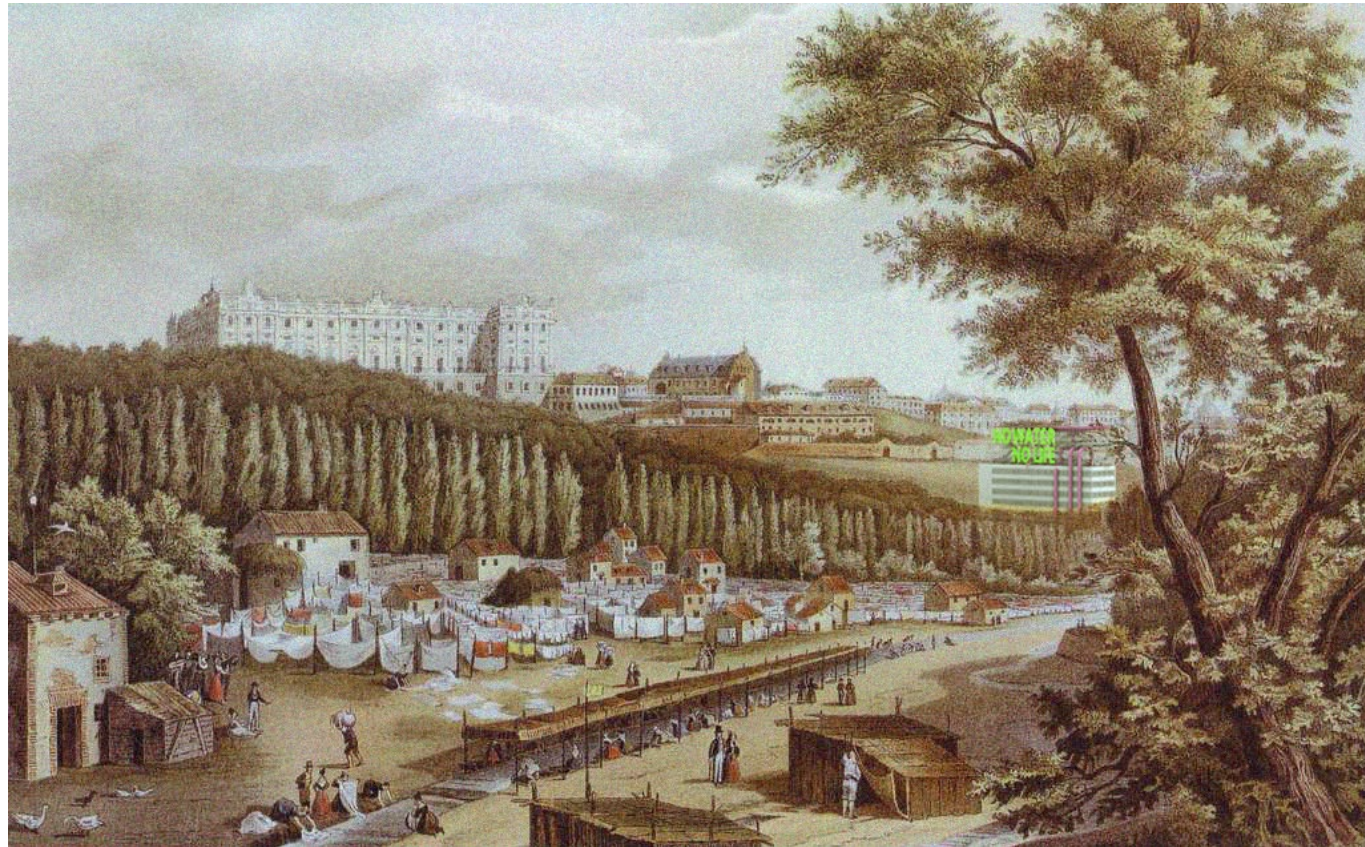
— Reconfigure the building using its existing materiality—utilize a circular system that repurposes as much of the existing building material as possible, preserving and honoring its historical significance rather than demolishing it.



Ground Floor Plan



Artist Residence



Within the architectural design lie features awaiting adaptation, poised to redefine programming and the rapport with water. Amidst the present state, lacking a symbiotic connection with its surroundings, one wonders about the untapped potential for environmental, educational, and cultural enrichment.

The Riparian Institute will serve as a cultural center, fostering dialogue and interaction among diverse communities. By reclaiming the inaccessible riverfront and incorporating elements of Miguel Fisac's architectural legacy, our proposal aims to address the complex challenges of water management, environmental degradation, and social inequality. Through innovative design, ecological restoration, and technological innovation, the Riparian Institute will promote resilience, sustainability, and community cohesion in the face of a changing climate and evolving social dynamics.

