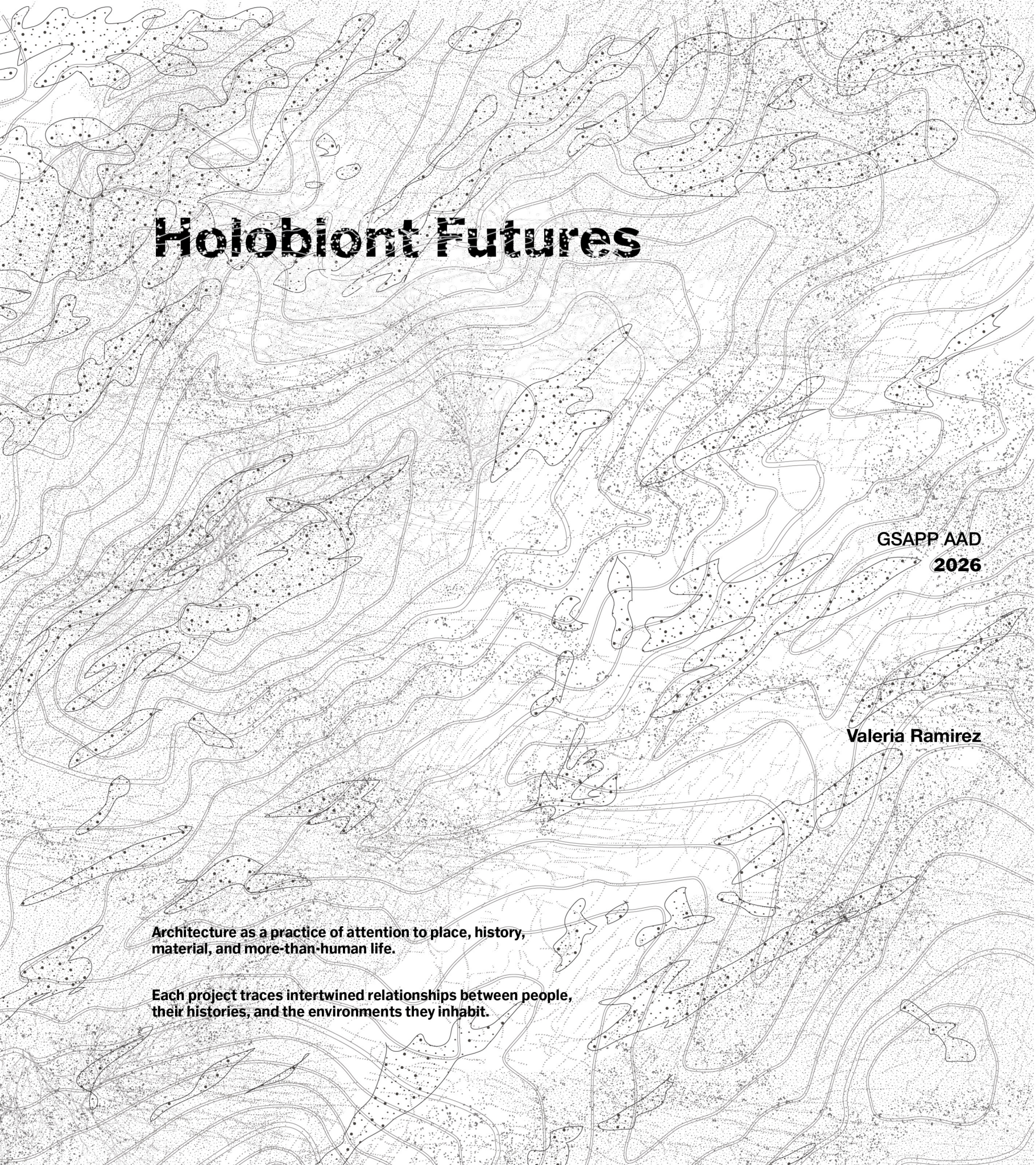


The background of the entire page is a complex, abstract pattern. It consists of numerous thin, wavy, grey lines that meander across the white space. Interspersed among these lines are small, dark grey dots, some of which are clustered together in small groups, while others are isolated. The overall effect is a textured, organic, and somewhat chaotic visual field.

Holobiont Futures

**GSAPP AAD
2026**

Valeria Ramirez

**Architecture as a practice of attention to place, history,
material, and more-than-human life.**

**Each project traces intertwined relationships between people,
their histories, and the environments they inhabit.**



The Liberation of the Leaf

03

A mycelial way of seeing

Imagining everyday life shaped by coexistence with fungi and new material ecologies.



Holobiont Futures

10

Archives of a Saltier World

An architectural archive made from the only rock we eat, moving between geology, architecture, and the body.



Salt Archaeologies

17

The coca plant as a living system

A territory where the leaf is no longer hidden, but allowed to exist openly within the landscapes, rituals, and infrastructures it has always shaped.

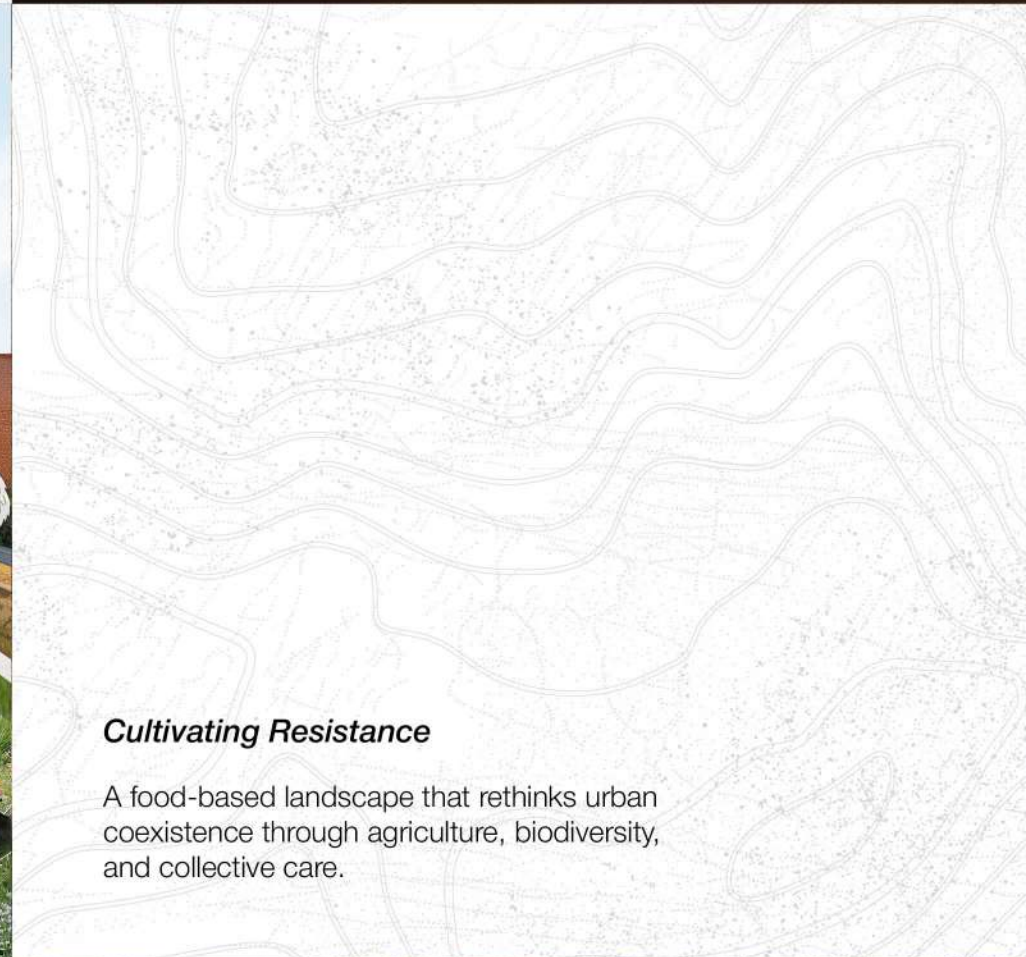


The Edible Rebellion

21

Cultivating Resistance

A food-based landscape that rethinks urban coexistence through agriculture, biodiversity, and collective care.

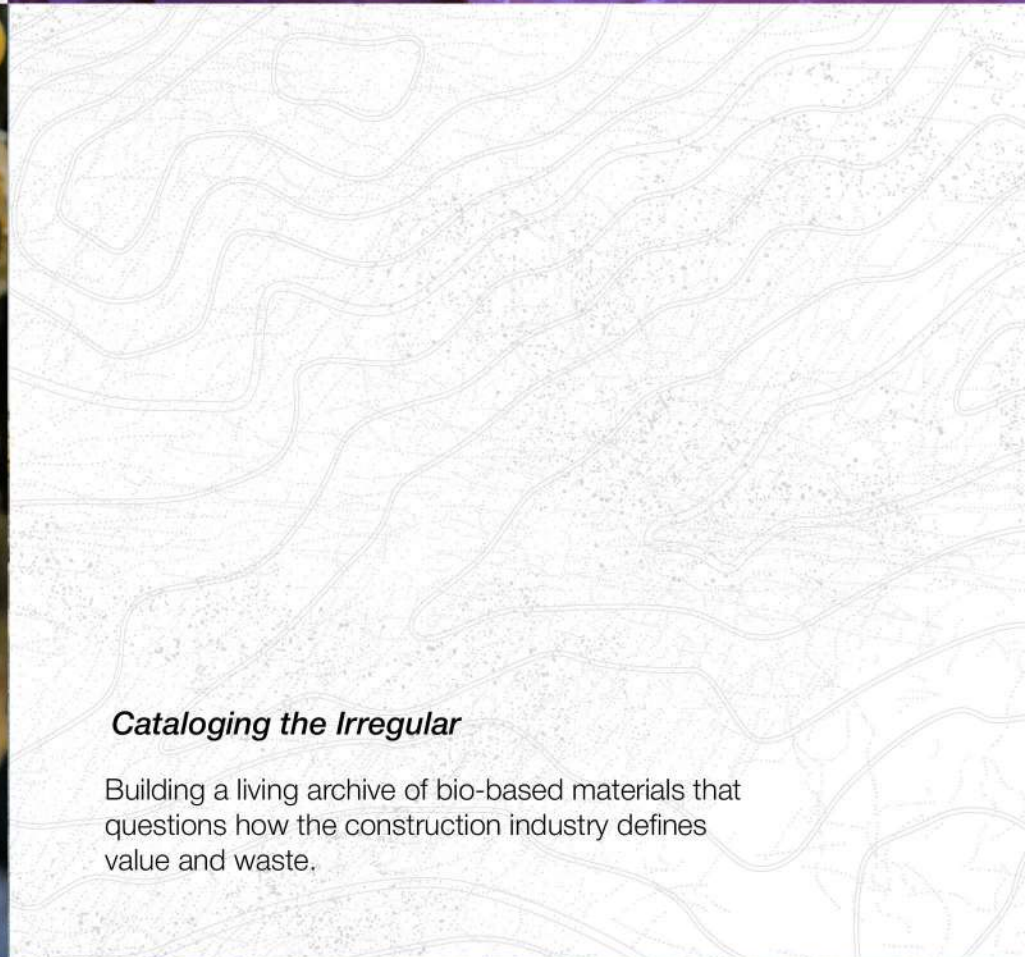


Material Libraries

25

Cataloging the Irregular

Building a living archive of bio-based materials that questions how the construction industry defines value and waste.



selected works

More-Than-Human Architectures

Exploring architectures for coexistence between humans, animals, plants, and ecosystems.

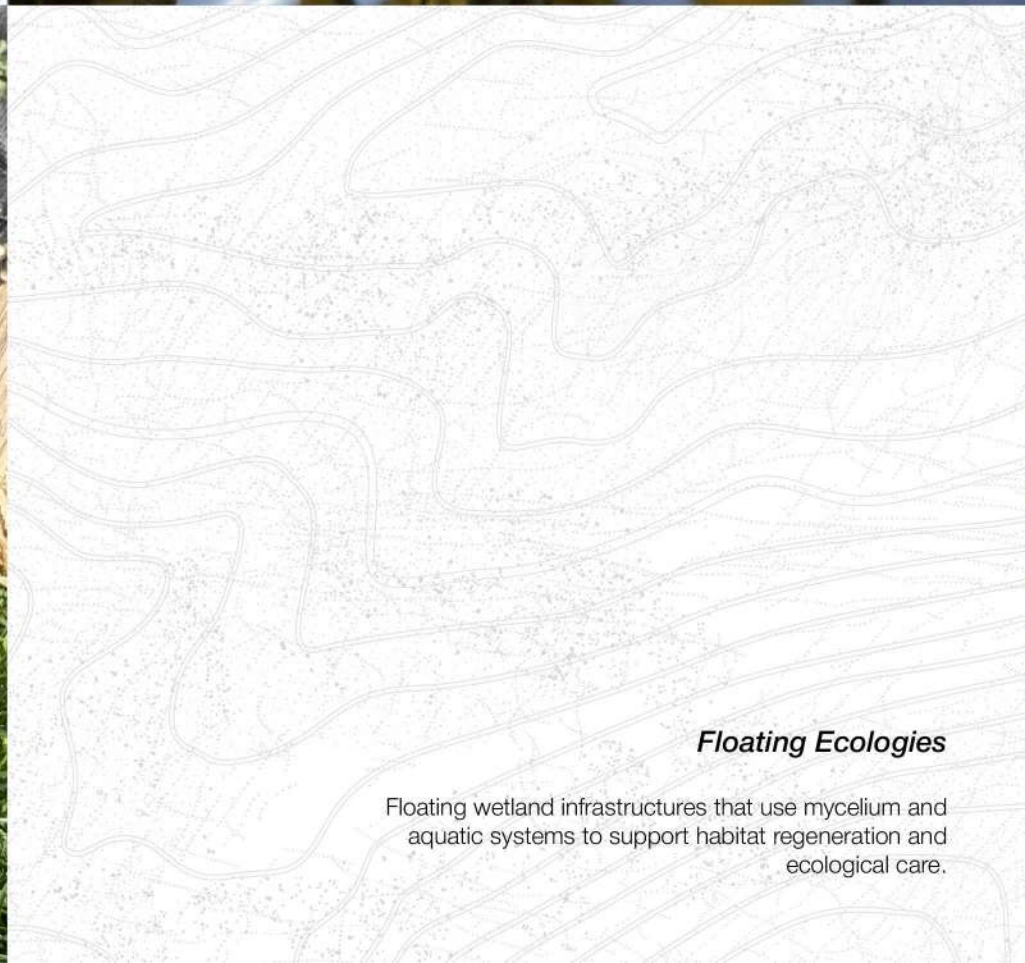


More-than-human architectures

28

Floating Ecologies

Floating wetland infrastructures that use mycelium and aquatic systems to support habitat regeneration and ecological care.



Fungal Waters

30

The Liberation of the Leaf

01

Advanced Studio VI: DETOX USA

Critic: Marc Wasiuta

Team: Valeria Ramírez

Location: Putumayo, Colombia

What would happen if the coca leaf was legalized?

It all begins with *Erythroxylum coca*, a plant that for thousands of years held cultural, medicinal, and spiritual value across the Andes. After cocaine was isolated and the coca leaf was criminalized in 1961, the plant came to be defined only by one extract and one narrative. In Colombia, this legal and political shift has produced landscapes marked by militarization, surveillance, eradication, and chemical concentration: from the substances used in clandestine processing laboratories to glyphosate dispersed across rural territories.

This project asks what new territorial realities could emerge if coca were legalized. Located near Orito, Colombia, it imagines a speculative 60-hectare sanctuary where a network of parallel infrastructures choreographs new encounters with the plant through cultivation, research, ritual, tourism, production, and regulation. Housing clusters, river ports, processing facilities, research pods, trails, meditation spaces, and control towers form an overlapping landscape where previously hidden systems become visible and open to negotiation.

In the end, the project reimagines an entire territorial system and becomes a way of advocating for the plant—shifting how it is seen, understood, and engaged beyond the single narrative that has defined it.



A typical Coca Crop, “The divine plant” of the Incas. William Golden Mortimer. – New York, 1901

For centuries, the coca plant has been embedded within Indigenous cultures of the Andes as a source of medicine, ritual, labor endurance, and social exchange. Long before prohibition, coca was widely cultivated, consumed, and internationally commercialized through medicinal and pharmaceutical products. During the 20th century, however, shifting global drug policies—culminating in the 1961 United Nations Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs—reframed coca within systems of surveillance, criminalization, and eradication. This transformation profoundly reshaped territories, rural economies, and the political landscape surrounding the plant.



Fluid coca extract for medicinal use — ca. 1910

This image reflects an early moment when coca was integrated into formal medical and pharmaceutical systems, revealing a different cultural and economic framing of the plant prior to prohibition. It situates coca within regimes of care, extraction, and industrialization.



United Nations Conference for the Adoption of a Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs - New York, 1961.

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1:30 pm
68°

0 40°17.49"N 76 54'47.07"W ORITO, COLOMBIA

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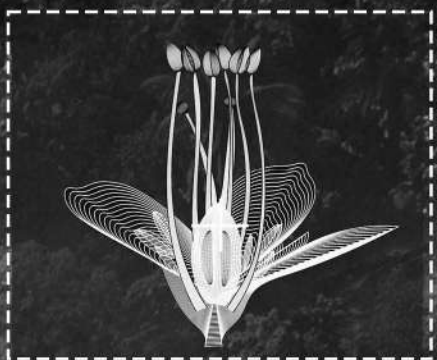
OPERATION:
LIBERATION OF THE LEAF

DETOX USA SPRING 2026
MARK WASIUTA
VALERIA RAMIREZ

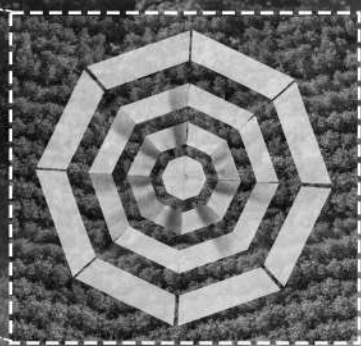
VERIFIED SITE -
AUTHORIZED CULTIVATION

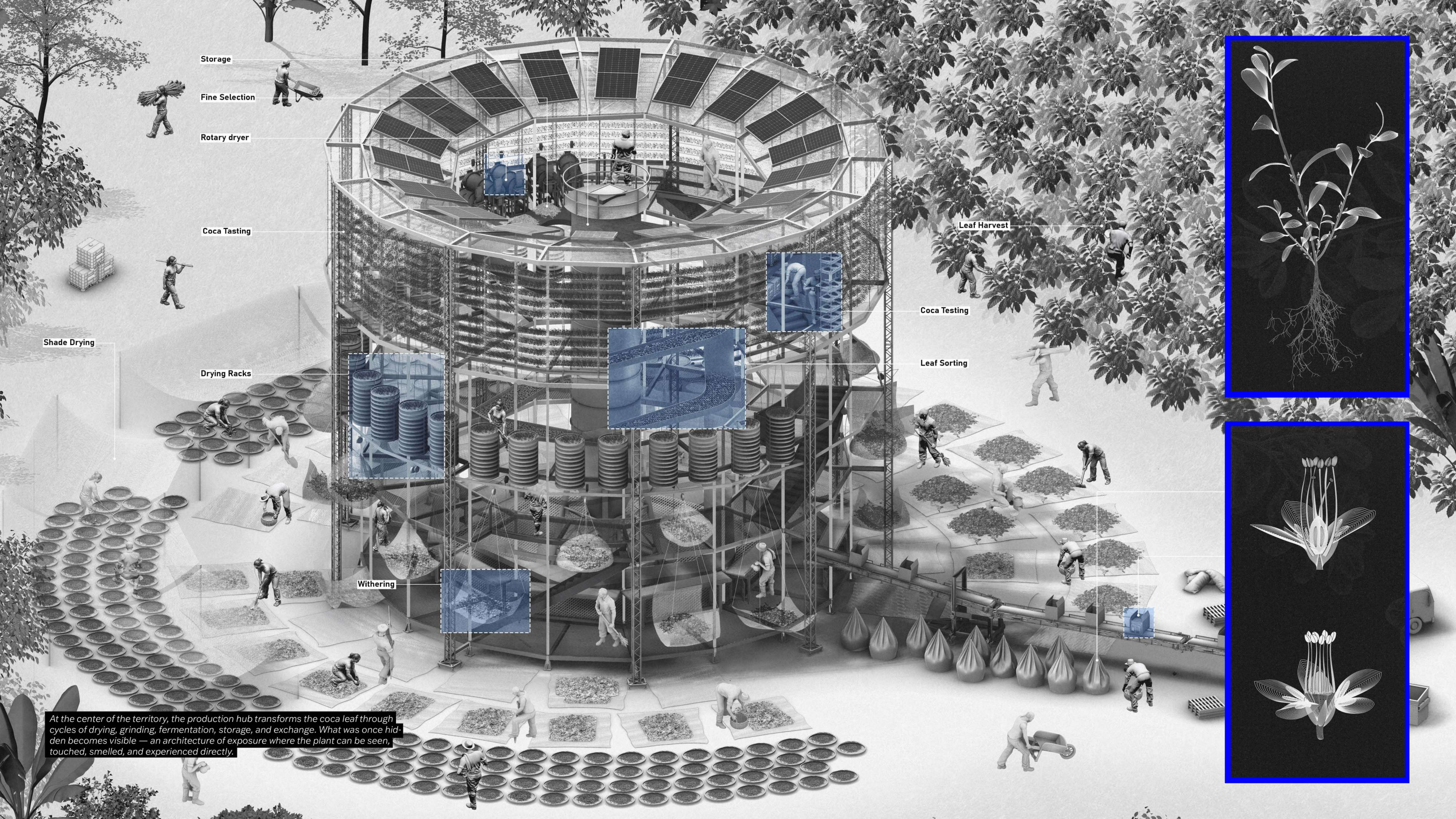
AO DESIGNATION:
LEGAL SANCTUARY

ERYTHROXYLUM COCA



CALLIBRATION POINT
+
AUTHORIZED
CULTIVATION
MARKER





Storage

Fine Selection

Rotary dryer

Coca Tasting

Leaf Harvest

Coca Testing

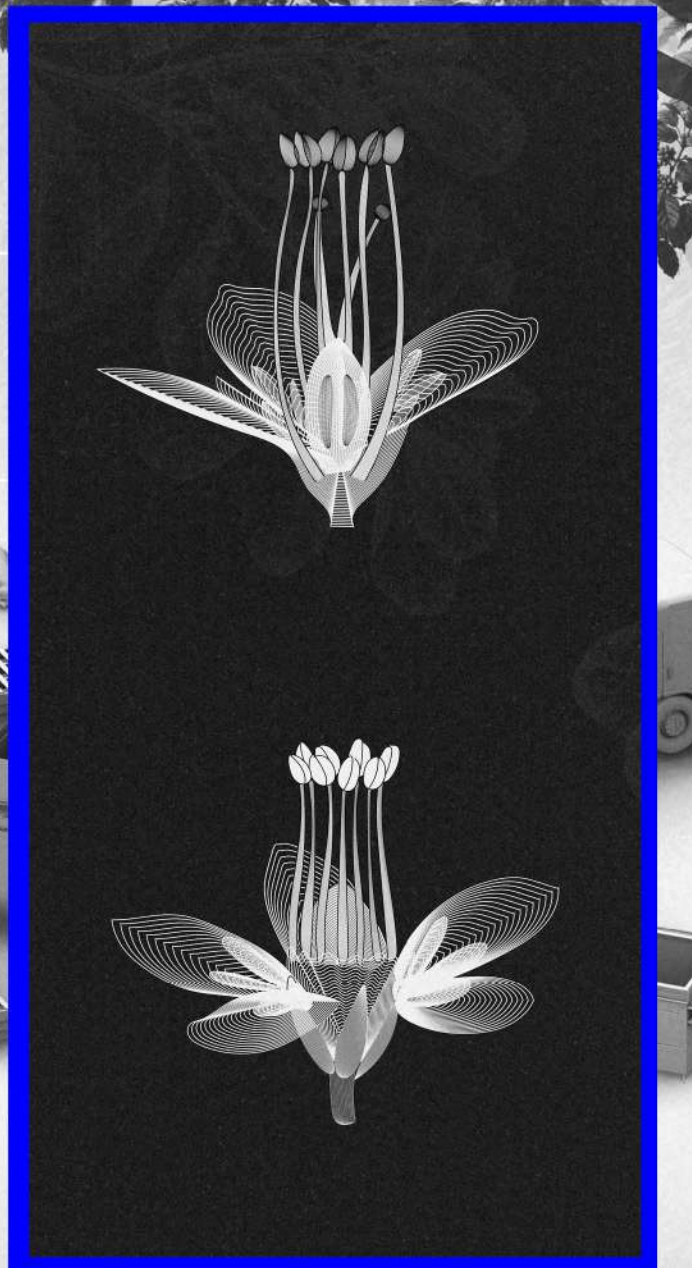
Leaf Sorting

Shade Drying

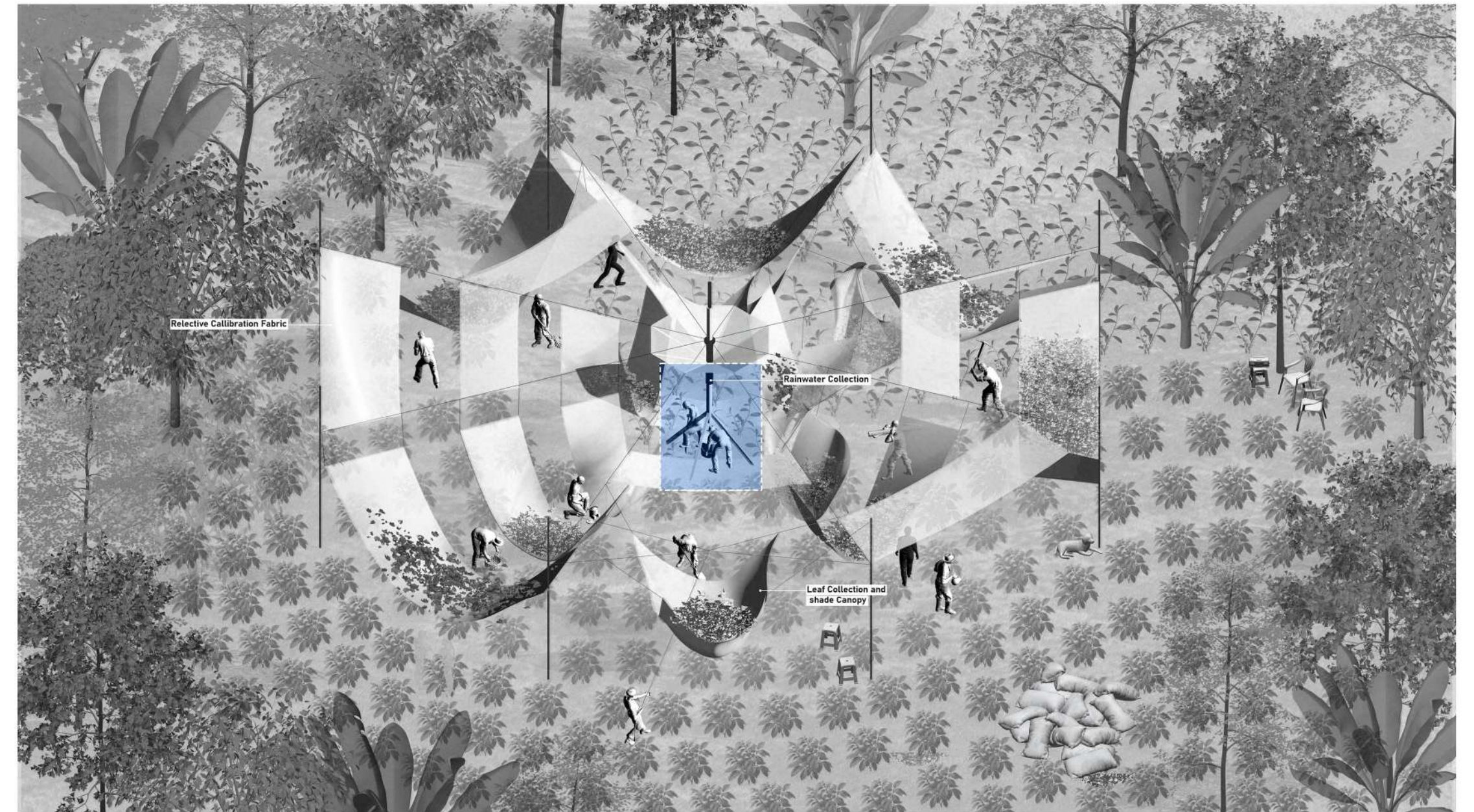
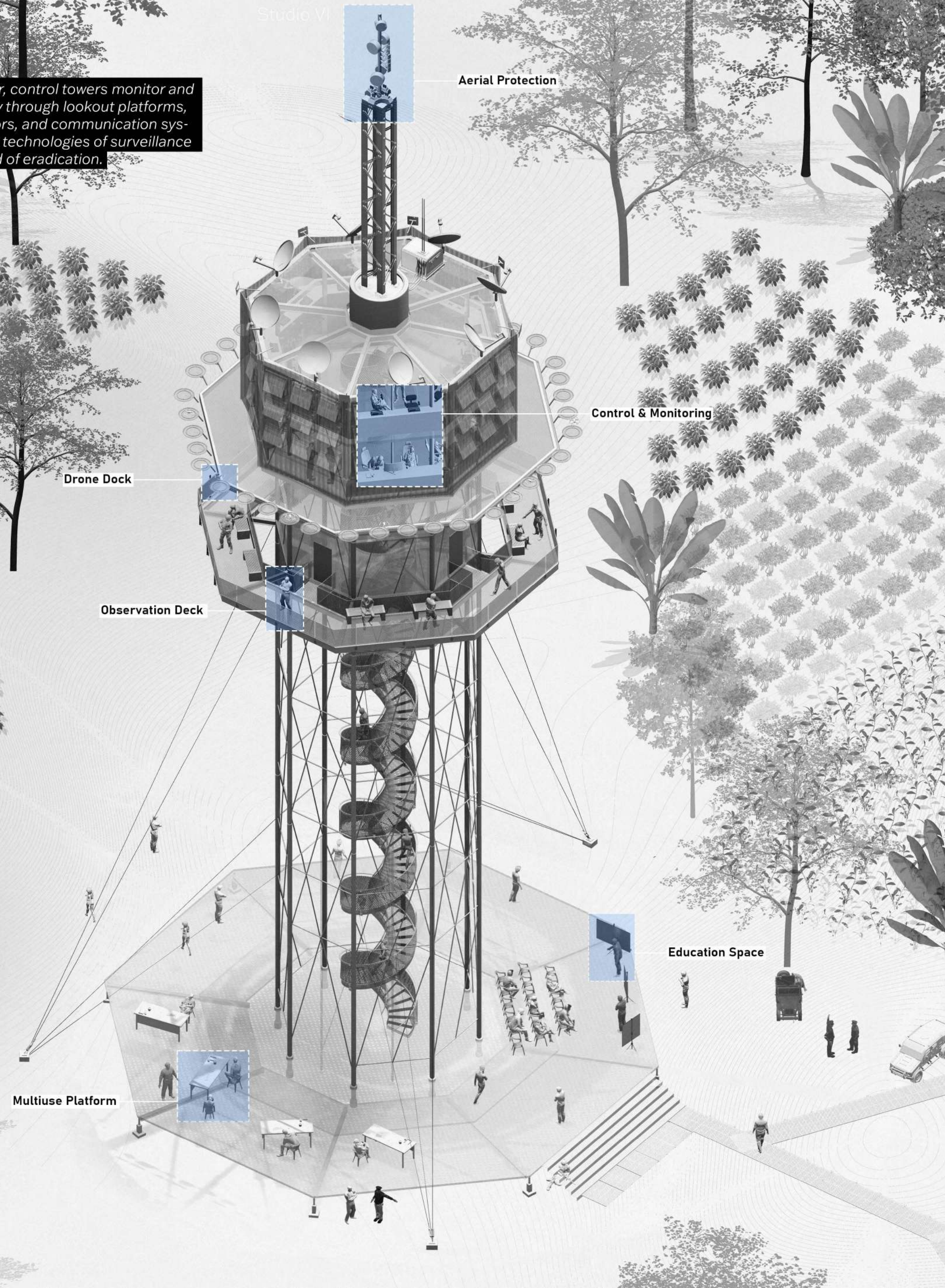
Drying Racks

Withering

At the center of the territory, the production hub transforms the coca leaf through cycles of drying, grinding, fermentation, storage, and exchange. What was once hidden becomes visible — an architecture of exposure where the plant can be seen, touched, smelled, and experienced directly.



Along the perimeter, control towers monitor and protect the territory through lookout platforms, drone decks, sensors, and communication systems — redirecting technologies of surveillance toward care instead of eradication.



This project proposes a speculative landscape where the legalization of coca gives rise to parallel infrastructures that choreograph different encounters with the plant—through care, knowledge, consumption, and control.

A territory where the plant is no longer hidden, but re-enters society—bringing together farmers, scientists, policymakers, and visitors.

The proposal organizes the territory as a network of infrastructures that construct a new kind of coca economy.

At a territorial scale, multiple programs appear:

A river port that becomes the main point of arrival.
 Helipads that bring in state actors and regulatory bodies.
 Housing clusters for farmers—organized around communal kitchens, shared gardens, and spaces for collective living.
 Processing spaces where the leaf is transformed into legal products.

At the same time, the project introduces a parallel layer:

A system of paths and trails that move through the crops, connecting these infrastructures while opening the territory to visitors.
 Meditation spaces that reframe the plant as a spiritual guide.
 Cabins that allow temporary inhabitation or visiting.

And control towers that help monitor and protect the territory.

Together, these elements construct the Coca Sanctuary.

Water irrigation system

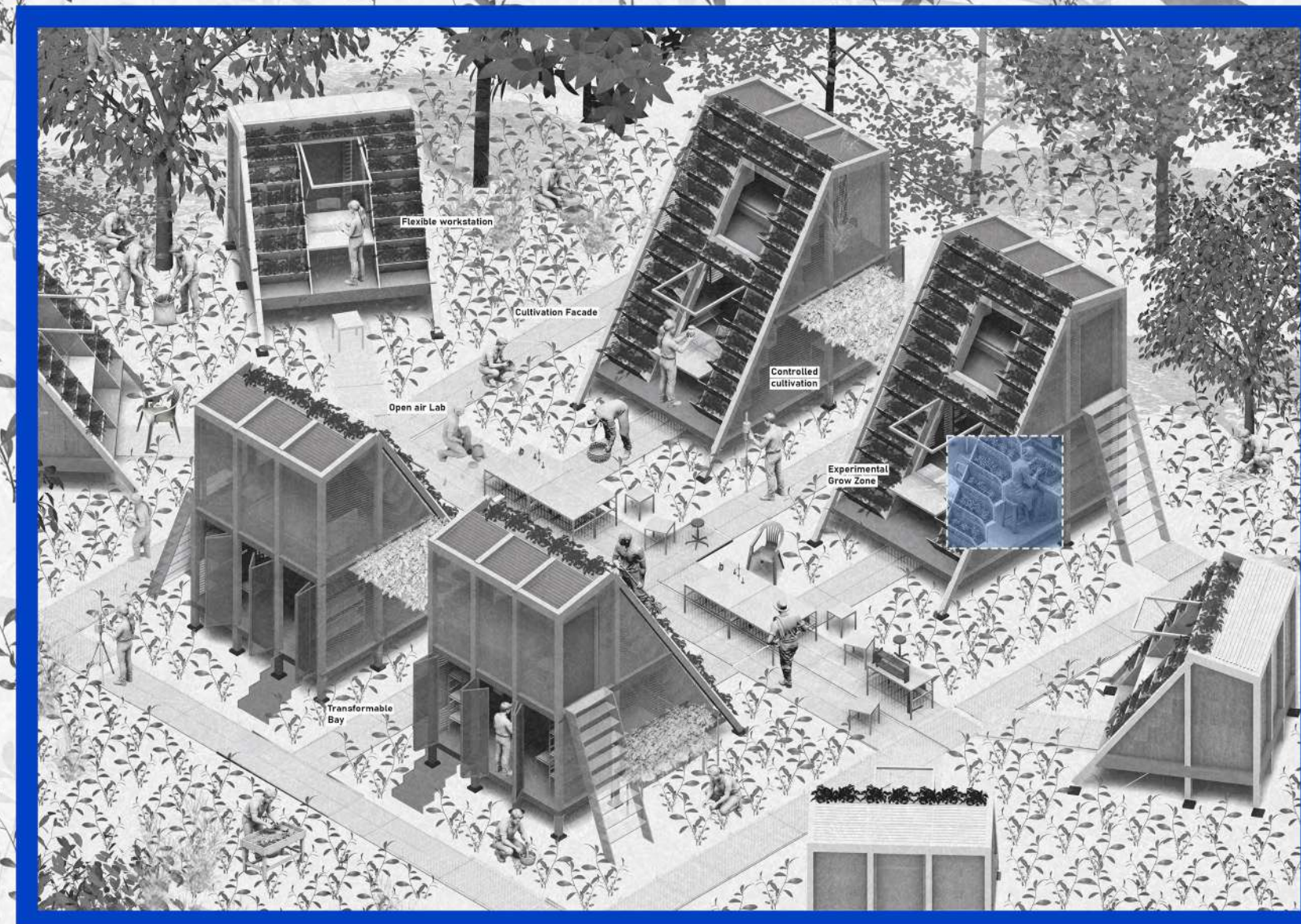
Coca Fabric Beds

Mambe Preparation

Meditation Space

The meditation chambers reinterpret gravity-fed irrigation systems as spaces for cultivation, rest, and ritual, where water moves slowly through planted structures creating environments for reflection and mambe consumption.

By incorporating spaces for ritual and mambe consumption, the project recognizes forms of knowledge and practices that have existed around the coca plant for centuries. These spaces acknowledge the plant not only as a raw material or commodity, but as part of cultural, medicinal, and spiritual traditions that have long been marginalized or erased. In doing so, the architecture becomes a way of giving visibility and legitimacy to these relationships, advocating for a broader understanding of the plant through experience, care, and collective



This project does not attempt to resolve the contradictions surrounding the coca plant. Instead, it uses architecture to make them visible. Behind something as seemingly small as a leaf exists a territory shaped by centuries of conflict, extraction, stigma, survival, knowledge, and control. The absurdity of these conditions reveals how deeply political, spatial, and cultural a plant can become.

The project proposes neither a utopia nor a definitive solution, but rather a possible route — one that asks what it would actually take to transform the perception of a territory and the systems attached to it. In doing so, it seeks to uncover relationships, violences, and possibilities that often remain invisible, using architecture not to simplify complexity, but to hold it, expose it, and make it impossible to ignore.

Holobiont Futures

02

Advanced Studio V: Vital, *Reimagining Buildings and Carbon at Scale*

Critic: David Benajmin

Team: Sofia Paniagua, Valeria Ramirez

Location: East Harlem, New York

How would a holobiont world look?



Holobiont futures imagines what the world could look like if a neighborhood started to act with a holobiont mindset. A world where people live with fungi and bacteria as everyday companions and where architecture becomes a tool, not only to scale up carbon capture, but also to improve indoor ecologies, repair cycles, and relationships with waste.

Inspired by our own experience growing mycelium, we began to understand its pedagogical value firsthand. Our rooms slowly turned into small laboratories, and through observing and caring for the material we realized its incredible ability to bind substrates and store carbon. Working with it directly also showed us how accessible it is, and that made us think about the possibility of democratizing the material. As we grew it, our perspective changed: waste began to gain value. Leaves, woodchips, and food scraps stopped being discarded matter and started to become nutrients, ingredients, and building blocks.

So we began asking: If mycelium entered daily life, how would homes, infrastructures, and habits change? How would our material culture shift? What new social practices would appear?



1. Food for mycelium / 2. Bedroom as laboratory / 3. Growing mycelium on cardboard / 4. Mycelium brick process / 5. Oyster Mushroom growing on brick / 6. Mushroom used for sample

A mycelial way of seeing

To explore that, we decided to start small and local, focusing on East Harlem. We mapped the neighborhood as if we were fungi: looking for nutrients, humidity and shelter.

By mapping East Harlems metabolism we found that 40 tons of food scraps, 17 tons of compostable paper + cardboard and 11 tons of leaves + yard trimmings are produced in the neighborhood each day.

Where would fruiting zones be?
Where would food be found?
Who would act as spore launchers?

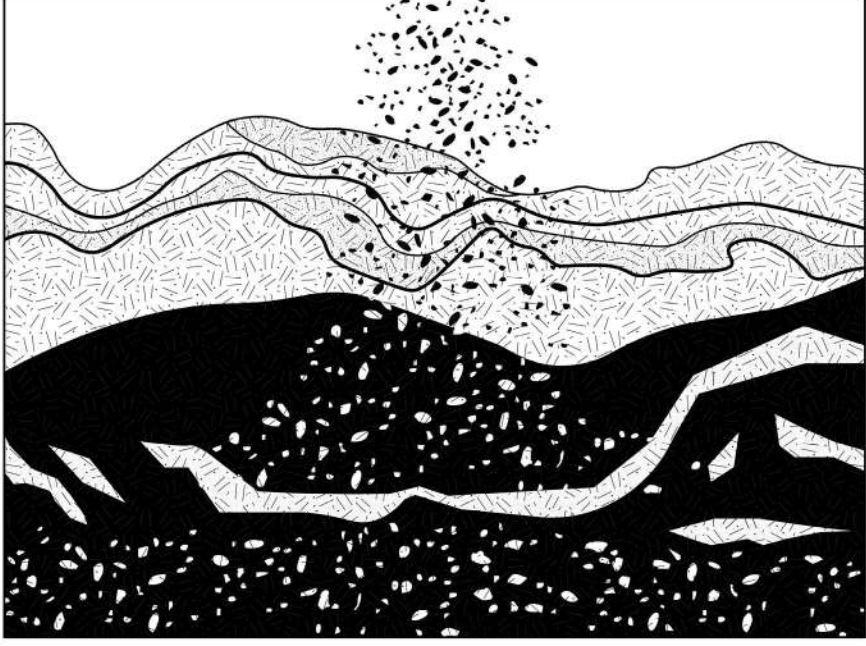
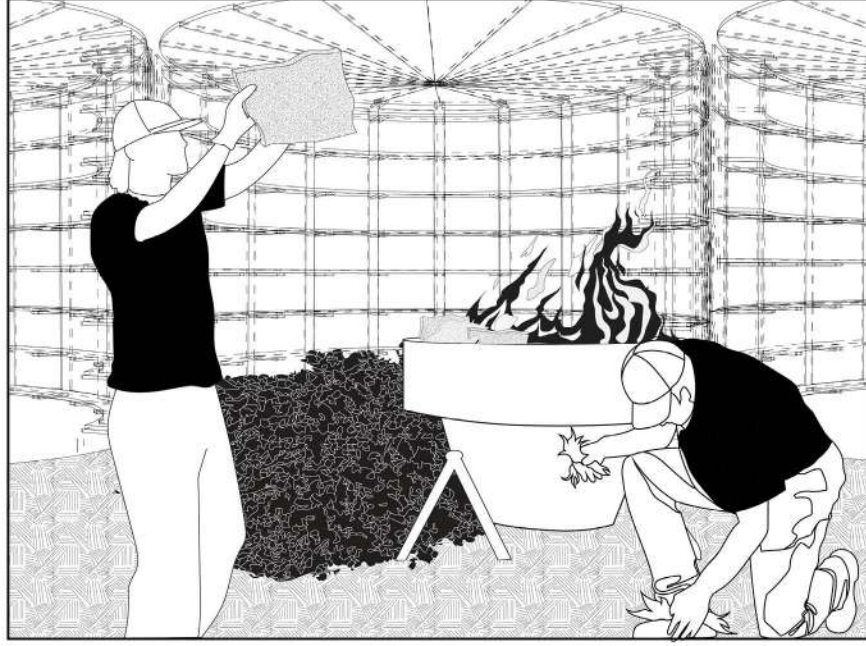
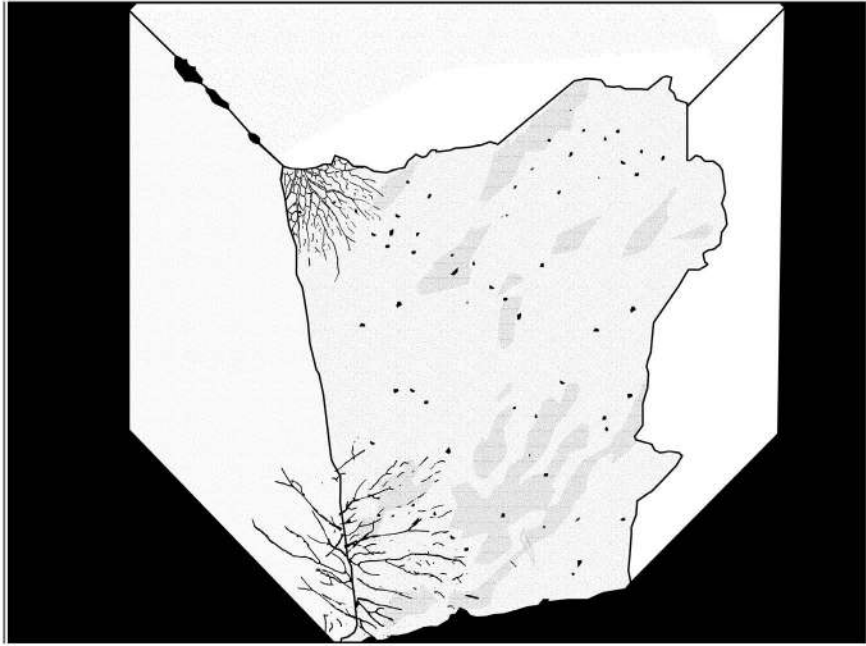
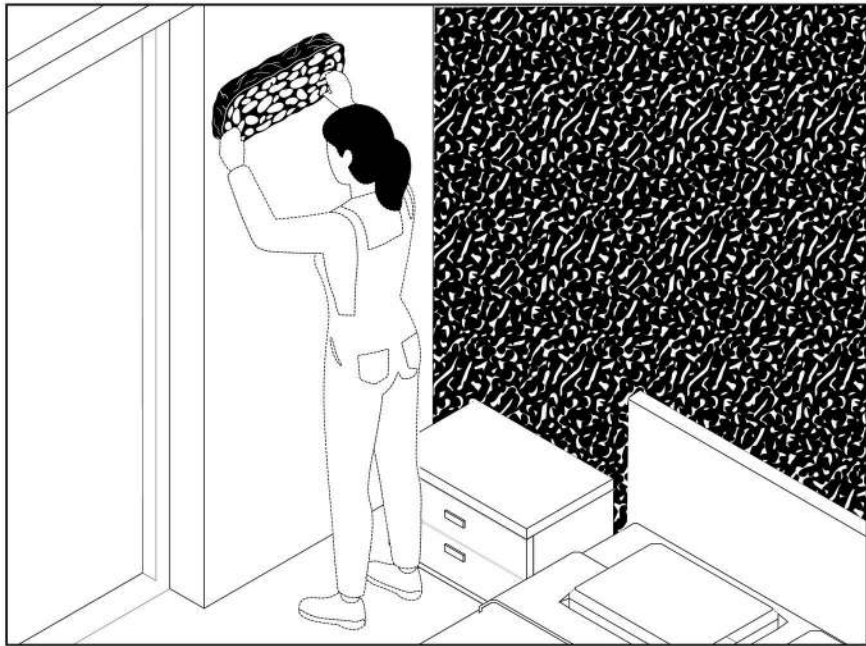


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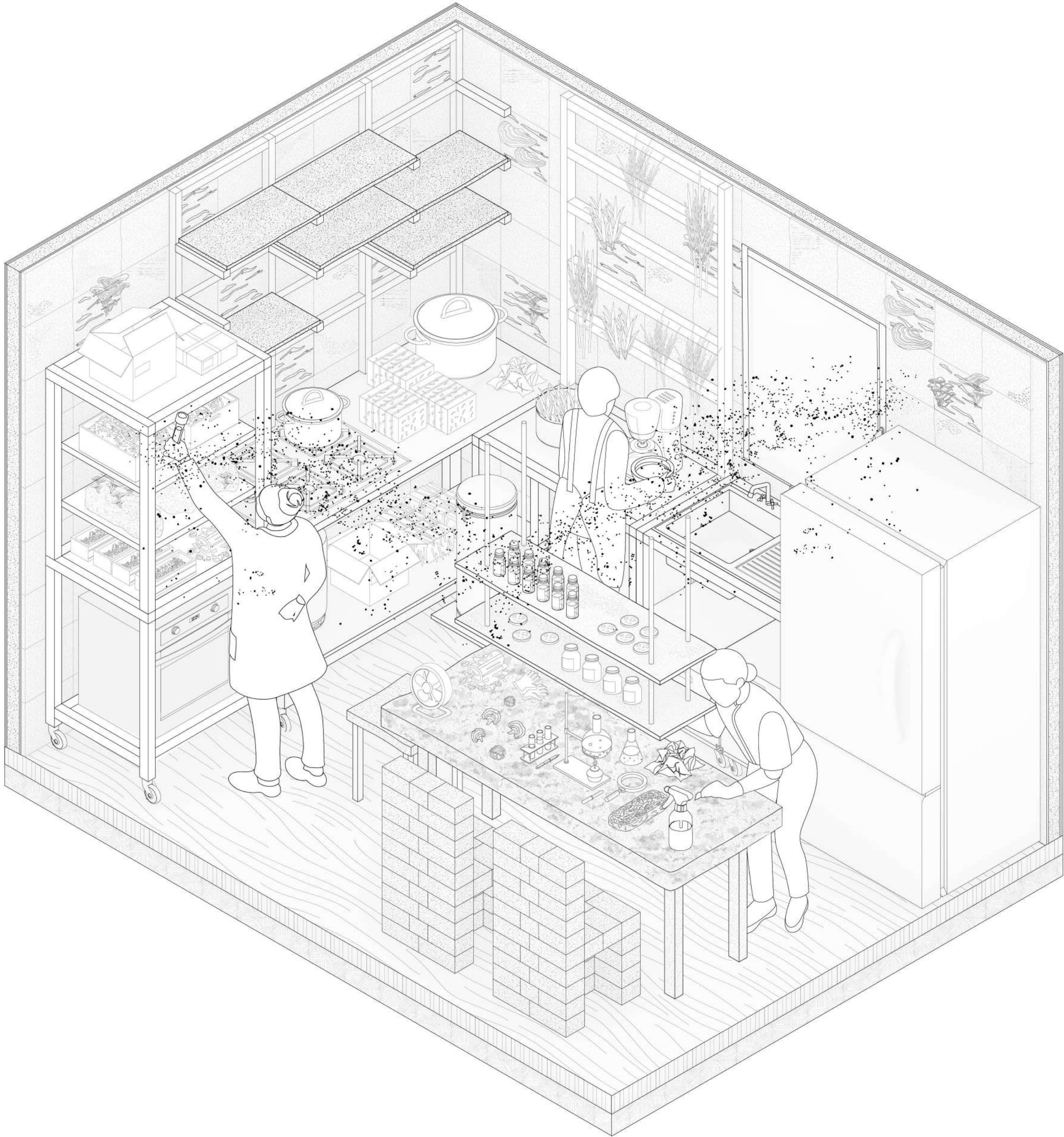
Fall 2025



The many lives of a spore

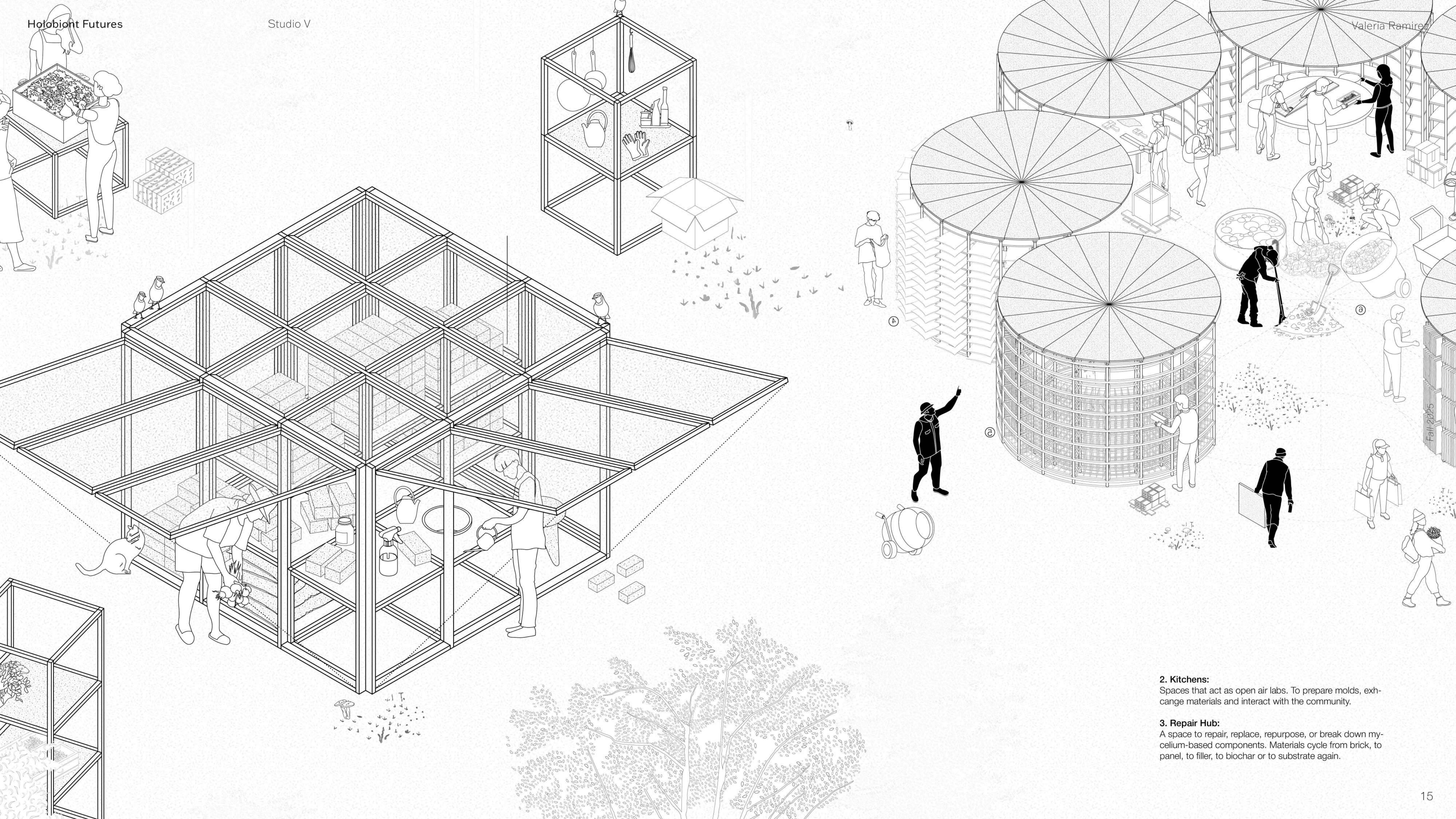


- 1. The first falling
- 2. The finder
- 3. At the gardens threshold
- 4. Shared matters
- 5. Experiments with the living
- 6. The terms of coexistence
- 7. Traces of time
- 8. Becoming carbon
- 9. Back to the cycle



This led us to design a pilot project, grounded in real flows and existing communities, and structured around three scales:

1. Domestic scale:
Consists of small interventions inside the home: insulation panels, small pieces of furniture or storage and objects that regulate humidity and indoor microbiomes. This scale helps us see what habits change when fungi enter daily life, like smell, maintenance, temperature and ventilation.



2. Kitchens:

Spaces that act as open air labs. To prepare molds, exchange materials and interact with the community.

3. Repair Hub:

A space to repair, replace, repurpose, or break down mycelium-based components. Materials cycle from brick, to panel, to filler, to biochar or to substrate again.



01.



02.



03.

Mycelium samples grown from the waste streams of East Harlem. Testing how local residues can become new materials.

- 01. Oyster spawn with sawdust
- 02, 03. Blue oyster spawn with cardboard and leaves

Salt Archaeologies

03

Edible Summit: Instalation

Curators: Lydia Kallipoliti & Xiaoxi Chen

Team: Georgios Koltiris, Shannon Levkovitz, Julio Viejo, Vasiliki Zochiou, Valeria Ramirez

Location: Columbia GSAPP

What if the world got saltier?

Salt Archaeologies invites visitors to imagine a world both ancient and imminent: a planet growing saltier by the day. Rising temperatures, land-sea exchanges, extractive mining practices, and the excessive use of road salts are redistributing sodium chloride into places where it does not belong. Rivers, lakes, soils, and atmospheres are increasingly saturated with salt, forming toxic chemical cocktails that circulate indefinitely. The world is getting saltier, and at an accelerating pace.

This condition is not entirely new. Billions of years ago, Earth existed in a state of low oxygen and extreme salinity. Life thrived through halophile organisms that harvested light differently, using retinal-based photosynthesis which reflects red and blue wavelengths rather than green. The result was a purple world. Purple Earth reintroduces this chromatic and metabolic condition, framing it not as science fiction but as a future humans are actively recreating.

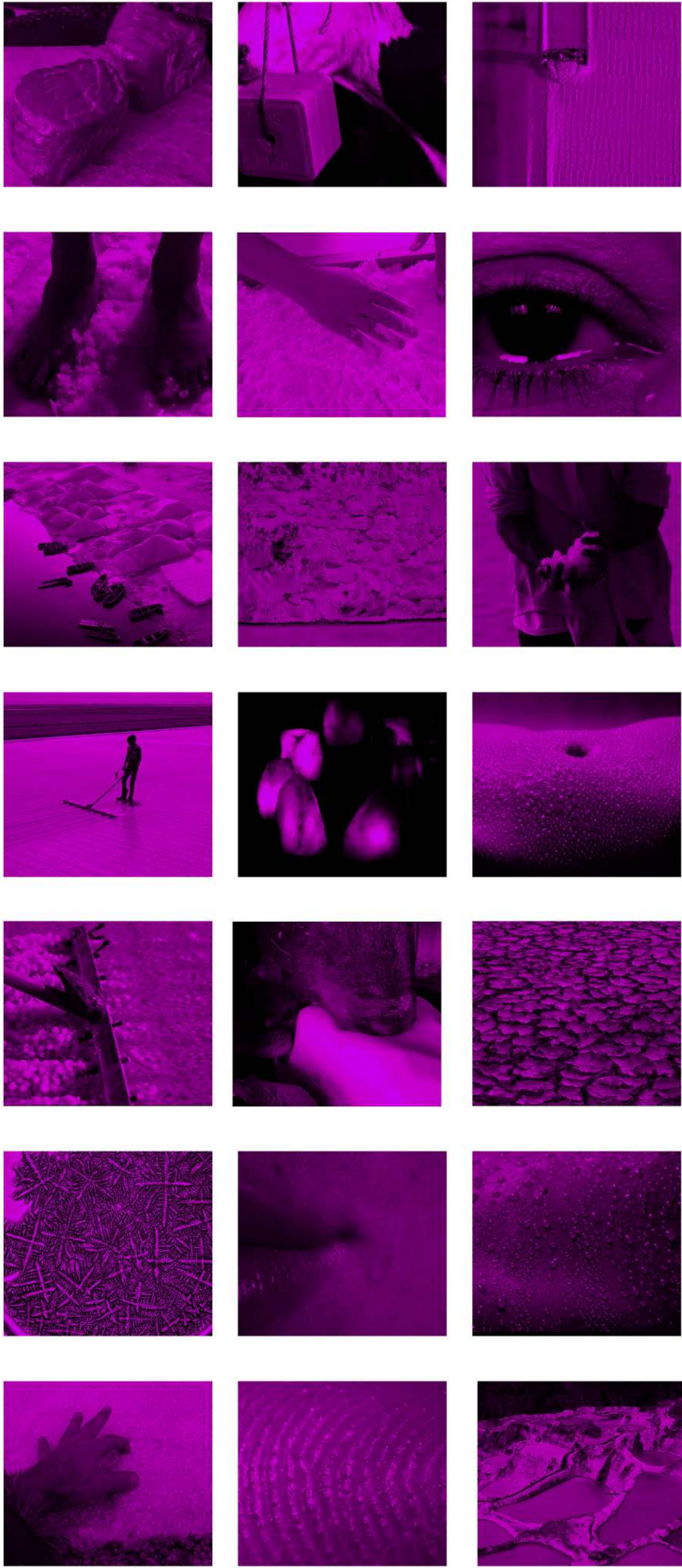
The project unfolds as an immersive dining ritual, asking participants to embrace their halophile selves and to reimagine eating as an intimate bodily experience tied to the only rock humans consume: salt. The installation is structured through a sequence of embodied acts: cleansing, breathing, drinking, licking, and eating, each revealing salt's agency across scales, from the geological to the visceral. Salt Archaeologies frames salt as poetic, symbolic, structural, mineral, and edible, and is approached as an archaeological site from a future already unfolding: one where humans must relearn how to live with salt, not merely extract it. The project asks participants to de-familiarize themselves with a substance they think they know and to encounter it anew through the body.

The installation unfolds through a sequence of embodied encounters: cleansing, breathing, drinking, and licking, through which salt is experienced as a mineral with agency across bodily, atmospheric, and geological scales.

Participants begin by immersing their hands in a salt landscape, recalling the mineral's formation through the slow evaporation of ancient seas and its long cultural history as a cleansing and sacred substance.

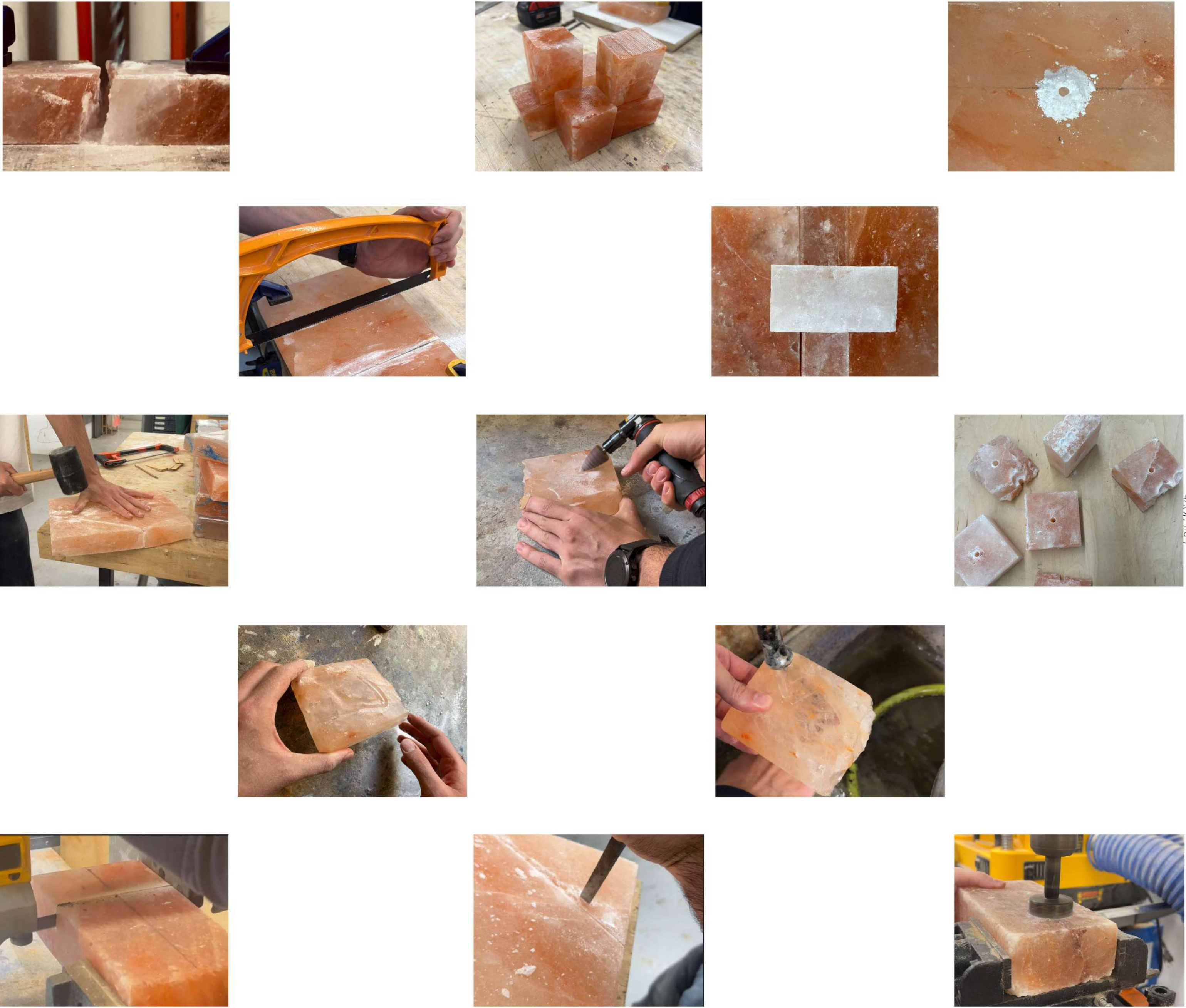
They then breathe humid, salty air, sensing both its mood-altering properties and its capacity to bind with contaminants, circulating chemical residues through land and atmosphere. Salt is further encountered as sodium chloride within the body, through drops collected in lachrymatory vessels, evoking tears as crystallized expressions of life, loss, and species difference.

Salt Archaeologies



Edible Summit

Finally, participants trace and produce new halophile paths by touching and licking salt sculptures, reenacting the ancient trajectories through which animals and humans historically followed salt, shaping roads, settlements, and territorial networks. Together, these stations collapse distinctions between resource and body, atmosphere and mineral, revealing salt as simultaneously vital, contaminating, intimate, and infrastructural.



Valeria Ramirez

Fall 2025

■

Tears

Tears gathered as mineral, memory, and trace.



■

Cleansing

Salt meets the body through contact and immersion.



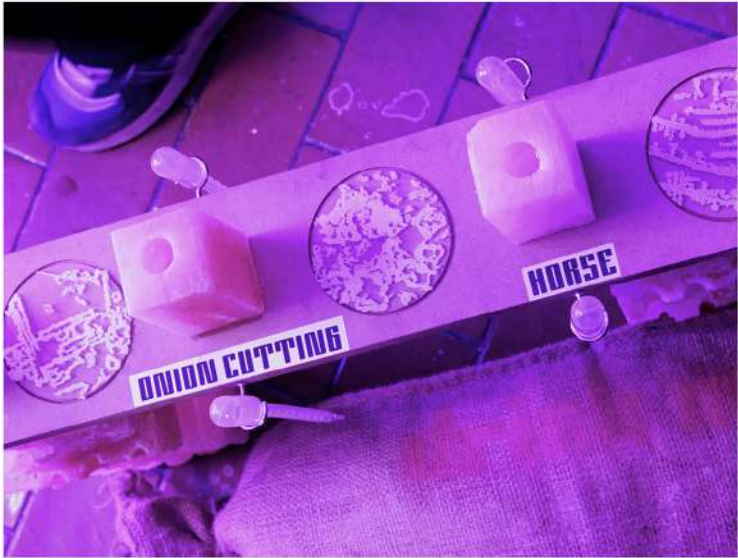
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■

Eating

Salt holds food, time, and gathering in place.



■

Licking

Salt traced by touch, taste, and movement.



■

Purple World

Entering a salt-saturated world



■

Patterns

Tears crystallize into distinct patterns, shaped by emotion and chemistry.

The Edible Rebellion

04

Advanced Studio IV: Apocalypse Ecstasy, Cosmotechnics and Ecologies of Desire
Critic: Luis Uriel Fogué
Team: Valeria Ramirez
Location: East Harlem, New York

What spatial, cultural, and political transformations would allow East Harlem to feed itself?

East Harlem is one of the most food-insecure neighborhoods in New York City. While community gardens, composting collectives, and informal food networks have emerged as tools of care and resistance, they remain fragmented and insufficient.

Through a speculative Crisis Cabinet, five figures representing different perspectives: a plant-based advocate, an animal defender, a meat eater, a member of the Puerto Rican community, and a composter, are invited to negotiate what food sovereignty might look like. Their debate reveals the conflicting demands between ethics, property, space, and labor. A series of urban sections grounded in real data reveals the scale of transformation needed: for instance, over 36 hectares of land would be required to sustain animal-based diets locally, while a fully plant-based system would still demand that over 70% of the neighborhood's land be dedicated to food production. These sections challenge the assumption that food self-sufficiency is simply a matter of access, they show how it would radically reshape urban life. Speculative collages explore how the

se scenarios might materialize: turning rooftops into farms, domestic kitchens into hydroponic labs, and public gardens into zones of productivity. What for one group appears as ecological utopia, for another threatens cultural erasure or overwork.

In response, the project proposes a toolkit that analyzes existing community infrastructures (hydroponic systems, compost hubs, chicken coops, casitas, insect hotels, low-tech gardening tools) and explores how they could be adapted or scaled without undermining the social ecosystems they support.

The Edible Rebelion



Valeria Ramirez



Food sovereignty



Soil Sovereignty



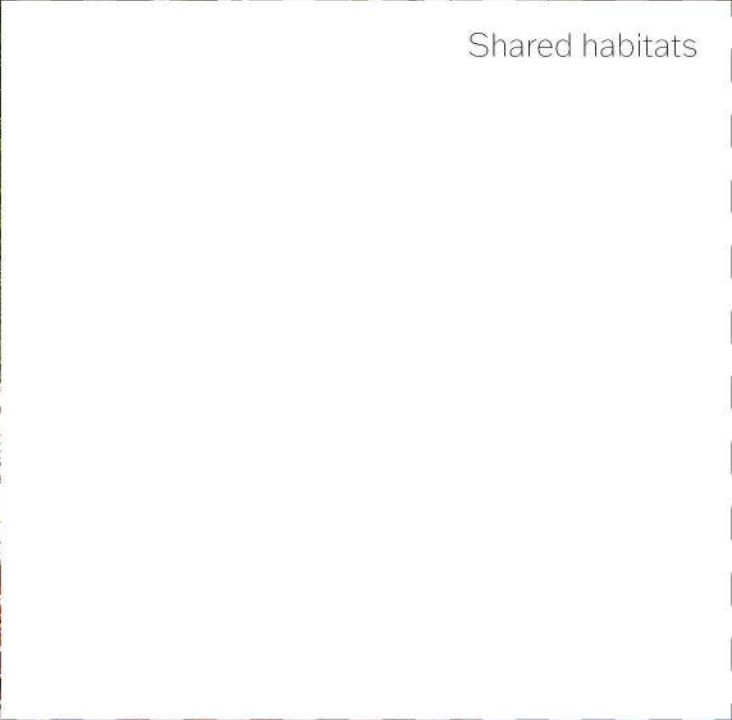
Food as ritual



Diet as identity



Shared habitats



Shared soil



Silent collapse



Casitas as commons



Insatiable appetite



VEGAN

ANIMAL ADVOCATE

COMPOSTER

PUERTO RICAN

MEAT EATER

Hydroponic Farms
1,590,000 m2 (40% area)
Up to 50 kg/m2 per year

Bird Facade
Nesting for 50 bird species

Anaerobic Digester
2-5m3 can process 1-5 kg/
day of food waste

Domino Table
Connections between 20-50 com-
munity members/week

Chicken Coops
6 hens can produce 20-30
eggs/week

Greenhouse
795,000 m2 (20% area)
25 kg/m2 per year

Insect Hotels
Pollinator boost yields by
30-50%

Compost Bin
1m2 = 300-500 kg of food waste/
year

Shade Structure
Extend use of space by 6
hours/day

Cold Storage
200 L freezer can store
80-100 kg of produce

Raised Beds
1,192,599 m2 (30% area)
Up to 20 kg/m2 per year

Rainwater Collector
Hydration for 30 species

Chicken compost
5 chickens
150g/day of food scraps

Small Shed
Supports 5-15 garden
members

Silos
Can hold 100-300 kg of
grains, seeds

Garden Facade
25 kg/m2 per year

Bioswales
100-200 pollinator visits/day

Chute compost
1-3 kg/week of food scraps/
household diverted

Casitas
Help maintain 20-30 distinct
cultural practices

Aquaponic Farms
200 L tanks support
15-25 tilapia

Sumer 2025

The final layer, a comic-like section, traces these tensions at the scale of the everyday: elders asked to farm more to sustain a volunteer model. cultural spaces in the community gardens displaced by crop rows, neighbors negotiating over where to raise chickens or grow lettuce. These stories reveal that food sovereignty is not a neutral goal, but a cosmopolitical field of negotiation.



The Edible Rebellion is not a finished proposal, it is a prototype for thinking, a spatial test of what it truly means to claim autonomy over food, in a dense, divided, and unequal city. It asks: can architecture support the messy, ongoing work of survival and resistance?

These unresolved tensions remind us that spatial and political shifts happen through an ongoing dialogue. And in that complexity, there is also agency. Perhaps, from within those negotiations, something collective, and more just can begin.

Raw Material Libraries and Cataloguing the irregular 05

Building Science and Technology Elective

Critic: Lola Ben-Alon

Team: Vasiliki Zochiou, Valeria Ramírez

**The exhibition was developed collectively by the entire class*

How might bio-based materials reframe the way architecture values waste, care, and ecological responsibility within the building industry?

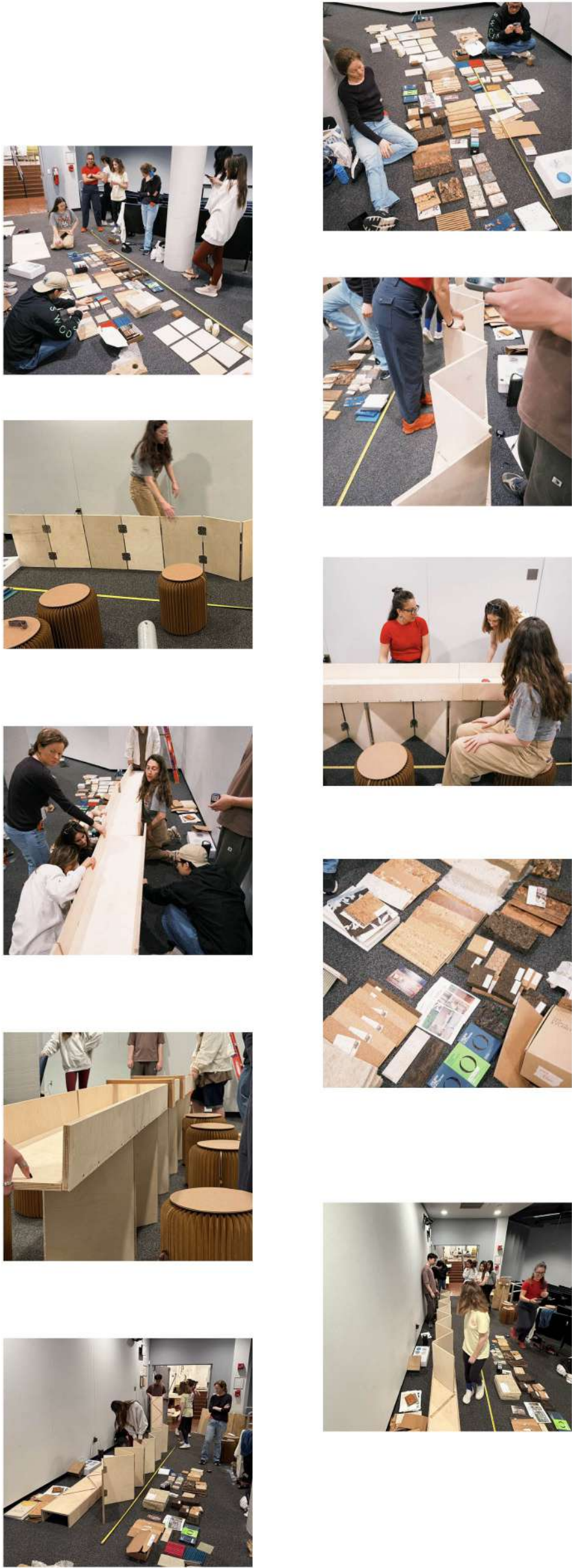
Material Libraries: Variance and Cataloging the Irregular explored the material library as both a spatial and intellectual infrastructure, questioning how materials are collected, classified, archived, and valued within architectural practice. Developed in collaboration with Columbia GSAPP's Natural Materials Lab and through a series of visits to material archives, fabrication spaces, preservation labs, and architecture offices such as COOKFOX, the course examined the hidden systems behind material sourcing, production, and representation. Throughout the semester, we worked on building an archive of material samples that focused particularly on bio-based materials, irregularities, waste streams, and forms of material variance that are often excluded from conventional architectural catalogs. Rather than understanding materials as standardized products, the course approached them as living matter shaped by geological, ecological, industrial, and social histories.

The work combined research, cataloging, fabrication, and exhibition design. Students collected, documented, organized, and represented different material families while developing new methods for displaying and discussing them collectively. The archive became a tool not only for preservation, but also for critical reflection on sustainability, labor, craft, toxicity, and environmental responsibility within architecture. The semester culminated in a collective exhibition that brought together the physical samples, research processes, and display systems developed throughout the course, transforming the material archive into a public space for discussion and exchange.

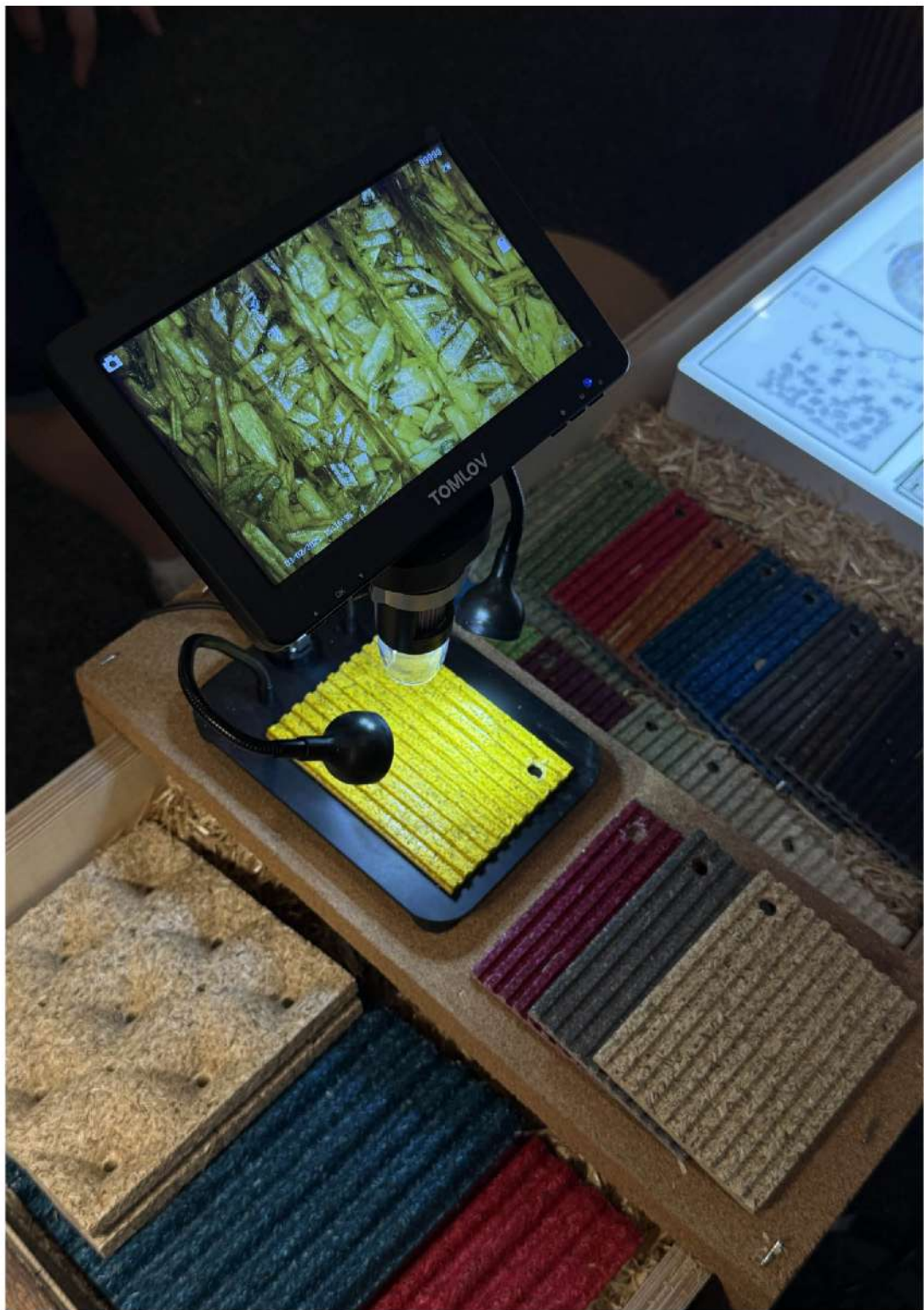


The final exhibition centered around the design and fabrication of a large communal table constructed entirely from bio-based, reclaimed, and naturally derived materials gathered and studied throughout the semester. More than a display object, the table was conceived as a spatial device for conversation — a place where people could gather, sit together, touch the materials, and engage in discussions around architecture, ecology, and material cultures. Inspired by the social role of the dining table as a site of exchange and collective reflection, the installation transformed the exhibition into an active environment rather than a static presentation.

Every component of the table became an opportunity to test alternative material possibilities and fabrication methods. Bio-based panels, natural fibers, recycled aggregates, and experimental finishes were assembled into a single continuous surface that functioned simultaneously as furniture, archive, and exhibition infrastructure. Material samples were embedded, displayed, and distributed across the table in ways that encouraged close interaction and informal dialogue between visitors. By positioning the archive around a shared space of gathering, the project proposed a different understanding of the material library — not as a closed cabinet of isolated samples, but as a living and collective platform where knowledge is exchanged through conversation, proximity, and physical engagement.



Spring 2026



Photography By Vincent Zhang *



Spring 2026

Architecture for and of
the more than Human

06

Design Seminar: Architectures of and for the More-Than-Human
Critic: Mireia Luzarraga
Team: Valeria Ramírez

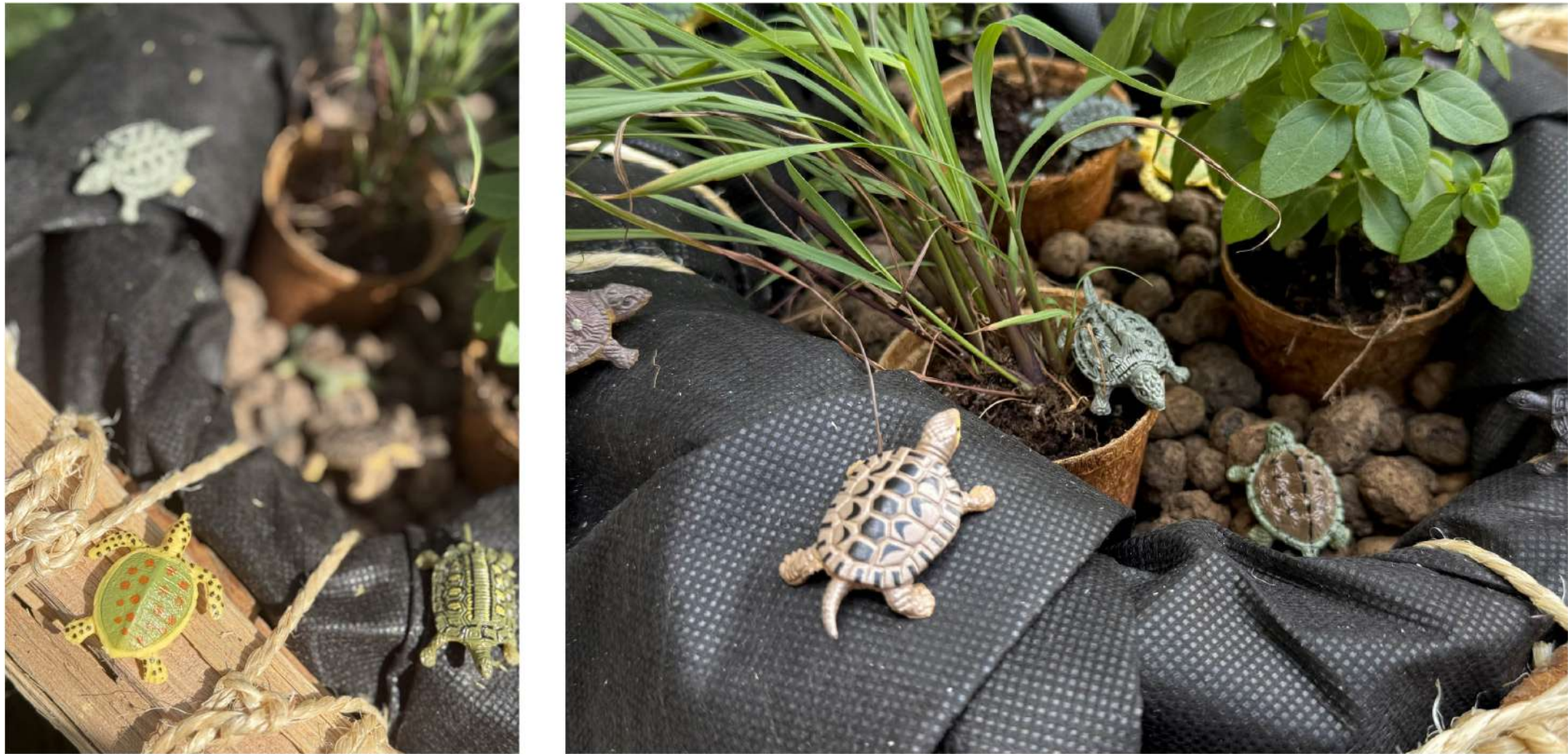
How might architectures of and for the more-than-human reshape the way we understand coexistence, interdependence, and our relationship with the living world?

CHAMBERS

- 1. Nursery
- 2. Queen
- 3. Queen
- 4. CO2 diffusion
- 5. Abandoned
- 6. Fungi farm
- 7. Leaf Input
- 8. Microbial exchange

Architectures of and for the More-Than-Human explored architecture beyond a human-centered perspective, examining how spaces, infrastructures, and environments can support forms of coexistence between humans, animals, plants, microorganisms, and ecosystems. Through lectures, readings, drawings, and case studies, the seminar investigated historical and contemporary examples of architectures designed both for and by non-human species — from apiaries, bird towers, and coral formations to ecological infrastructures and multispecies habitats. The course approached architecture as a relational practice embedded within larger environmental systems, questioning conventional ideas of comfort, authorship, and control in the context of the Anthropocene.

Throughout the semester, we collectively built a repository of interspecies architectural precedents, analyzing their spatial organizations, material systems, environmental behaviors, and ecological relationships. Special emphasis was placed on representation techniques capable of making visible invisible systems such as flows of matter, energy exchanges, territorial dependencies, and biological interactions. The class framed architecture not as an isolated object, but as part of a network of living processes, encouraging new forms of ecological thinking, reciprocity, and care. The seminar culminated in the design of small-scale architectures for non-human inhabitants, extending architectural practice toward questions of coexistence, environmental stewardship, and interspecies collaboration.



Building on the research developed in my previous studios and ecological design work, my final proposal focused on the design of a floating wetland prototype for turtles and aquatic ecosystems. The project emerged from an interest in understanding waterfronts not simply as urban edges, but as complex habitats shaped by continuous interactions between water, vegetation, microorganisms, animals, pollution, and human activity. After studying precedents of interspecies infrastructures and analyzing the ecological dynamics of wetland systems, I developed a floating structure designed to support habitat regeneration while creating shelter, nesting, and resting spaces for turtles and other aquatic species.



Spring 2026



Fungal Waters07

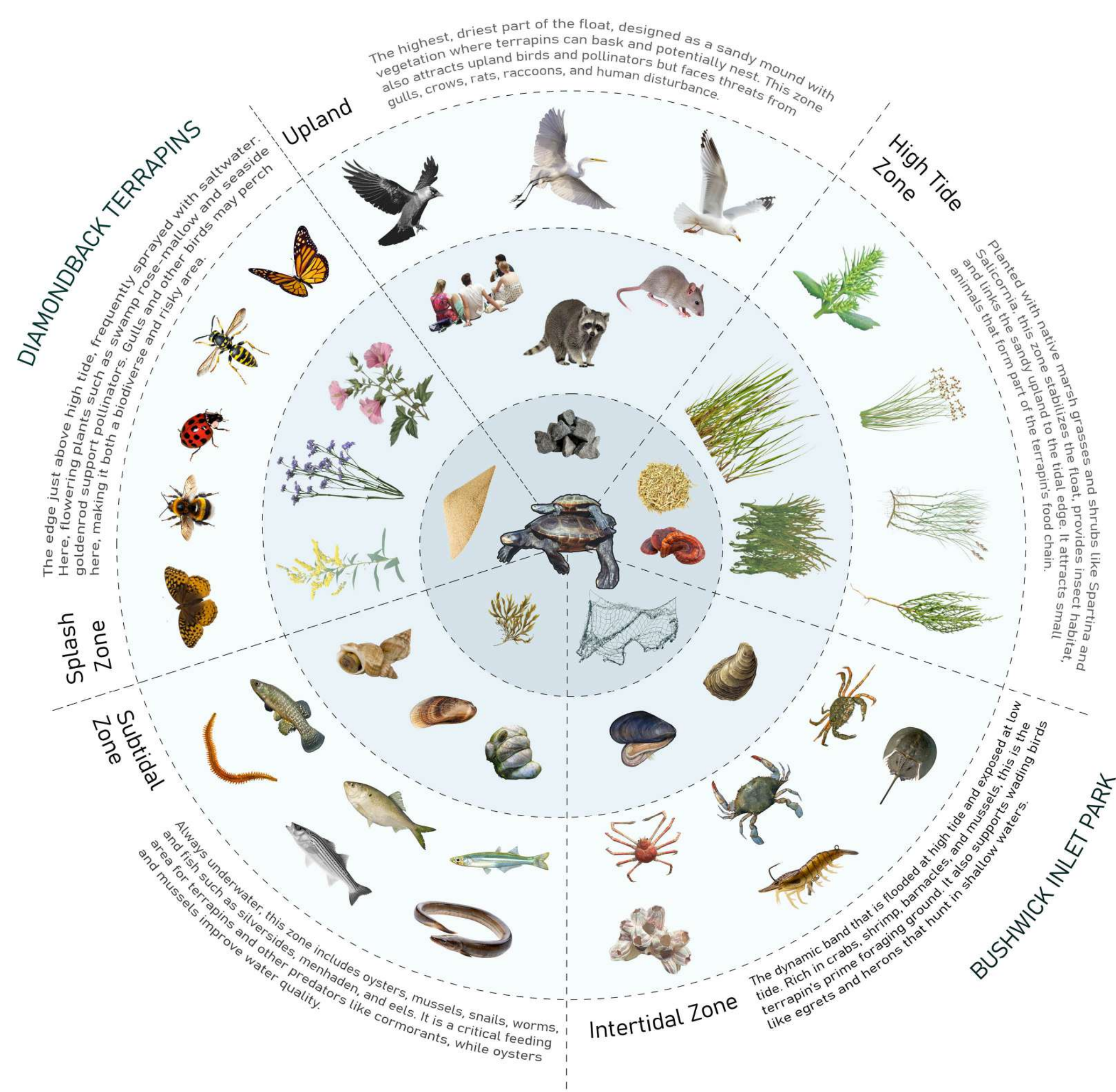
Building Science and Technology Elective: Seed Bombs, *Technologies in Ecological Design*
Critic: Emily Bauer
Team: Luca Antoni Marcelli, Valeria Ramírez
Location: Bushwick, New York

How might mycelium reframe care across species?

The ecological wellbeing of Bushwick Inlet rests on the many interconnected webs of life that sustain us all. Inspired by fungi's role in fostering interspecies mutualism, Fungal Waters utilizes innovative reishi mycelium construction, upcycling discarded industrial waste and organic materials in order to grow infrastructures of bioremediation and ecological healing. Guided by the vision of community members at the Friends of Bushwick Inlet Park, the modular mycelium structure reflects a design that is replicable, low-cost, adaptable, and scalable. With a focus on the unique ecological needs of the Diamondback Terrapin (*Malaclemys terrapin*), the float will provide crucial habitat for this native keystone species of turtle, reinforcing the complex ecological balance of New York's polluted salt marshes and tidal estuaries. With sloping edges and shallow-water access for breeding, feeding, and nesting, the float will not only support the Inlet's threatened turtle population, but also strengthen symbiotic relationships among the inlet's diverse fauna and flora.

Designed to naturally disintegrate within an evolving ecosystem, the completely non-toxic, bio-based structure will seamlessly weave natural technologies of bioremediation within a dynamic and reviving wetland over time.

Together, these elements will help illuminate a future for Bushwick Inlet Park beyond toxic wastelands and toward landscapes of collective healing and environmental restoration. Through strategies of bioremediation, participatory education, and ecological design, Fungal Waters seeks to transform the polluted inlet into both a resilient habitat and a living classroom where human and nonhuman life can thrive together.



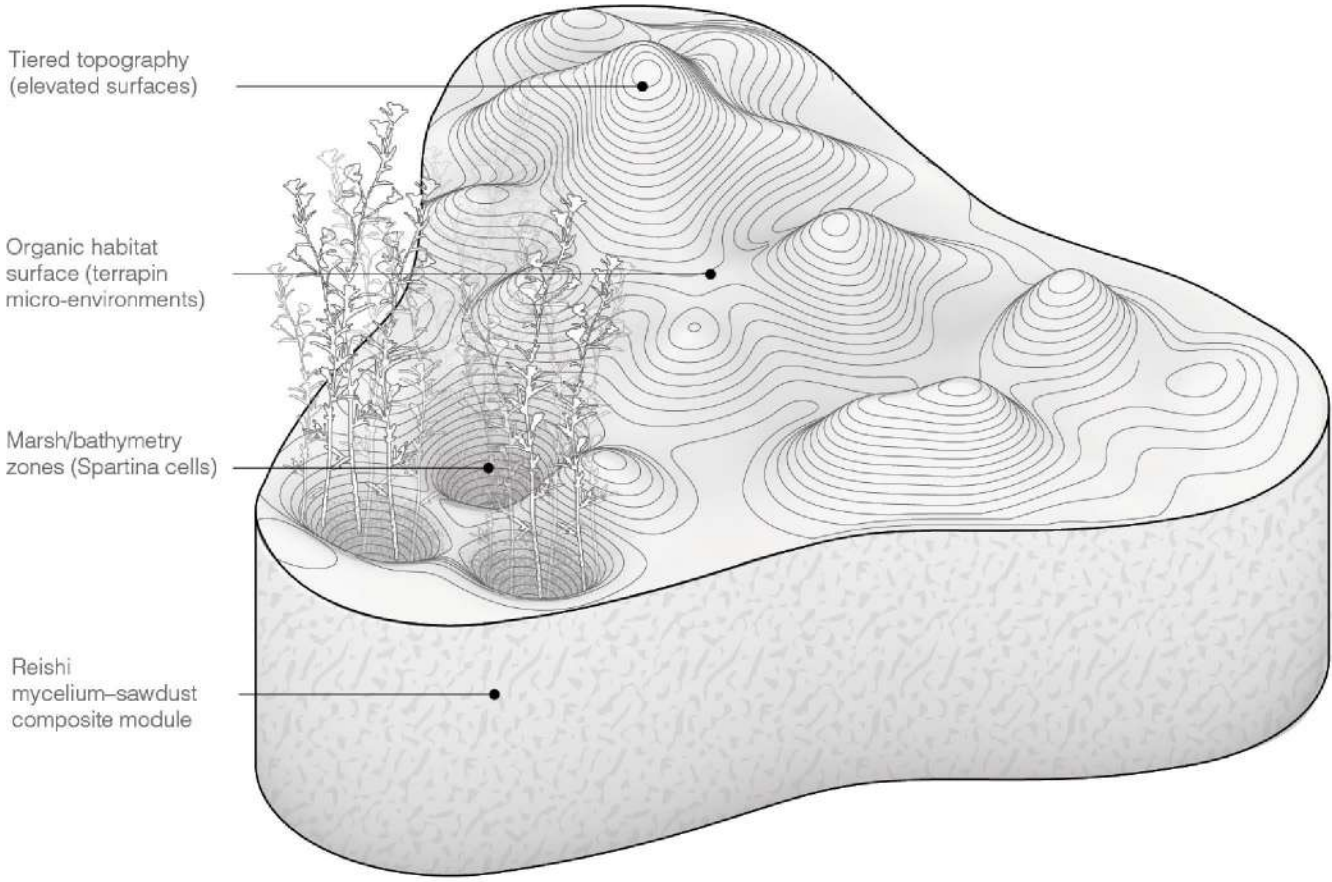
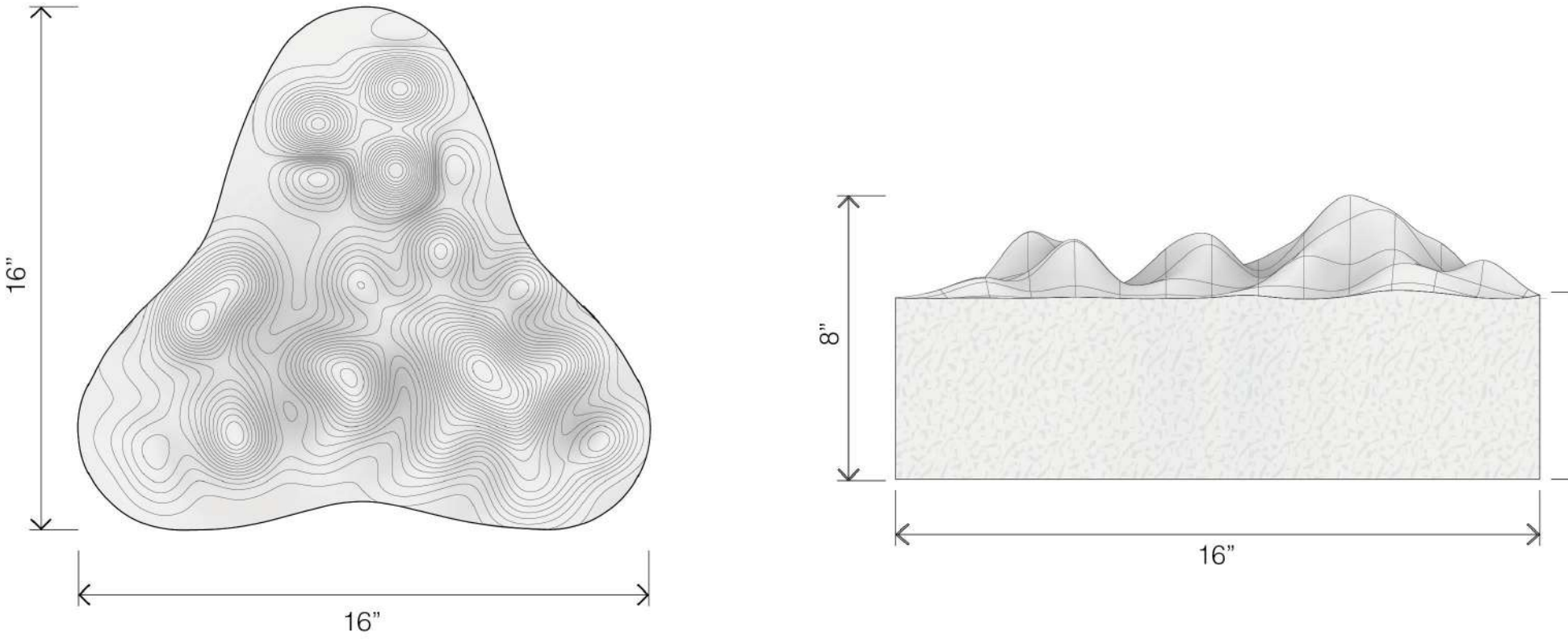
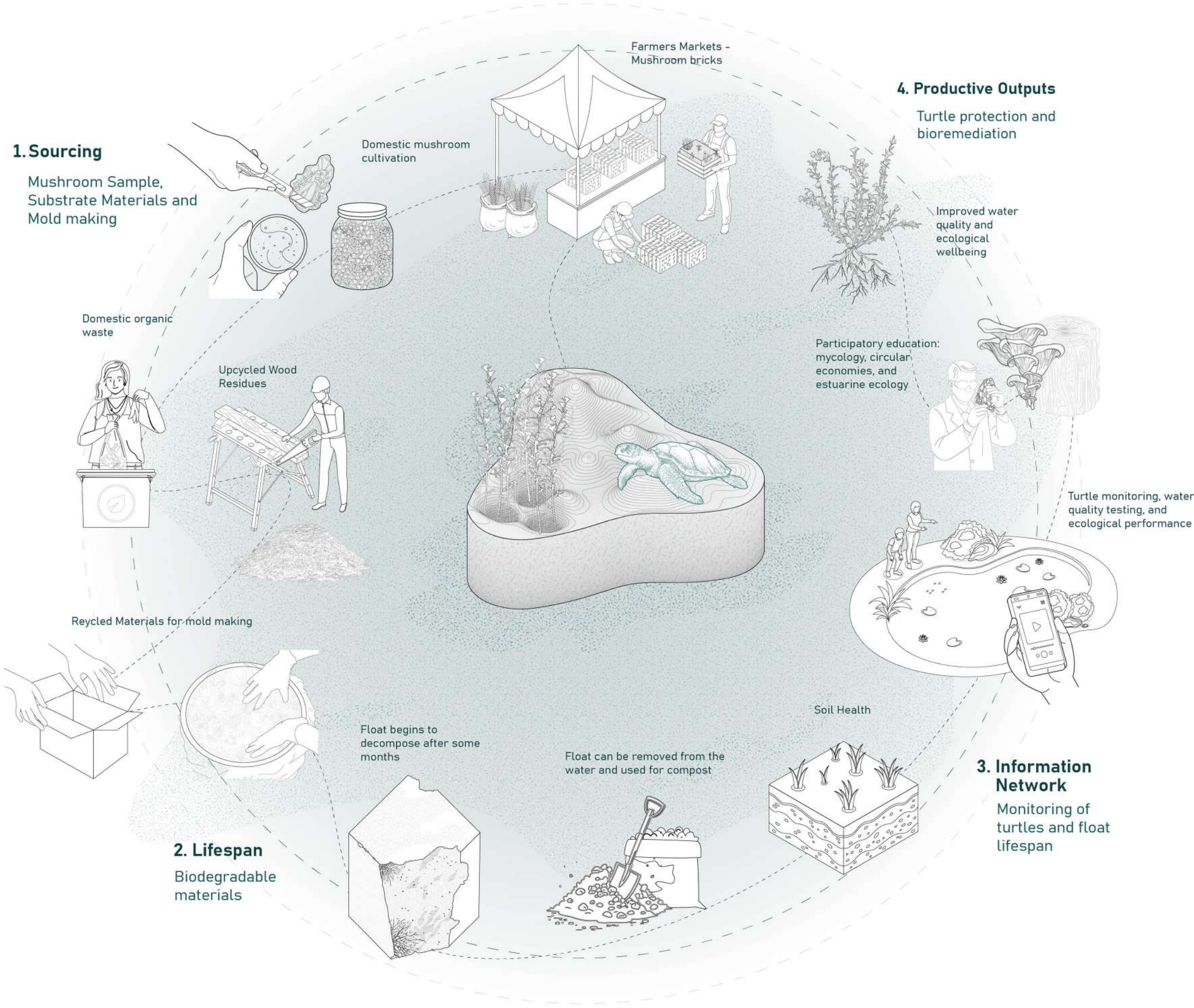
Mycelium samples grown from the waste streams of East Harlem. Testing how local residues can become new materials.

- 1. Oyster spawn with sawdust
- 2, 3. Blue oyster spawn with cardboard and leaves



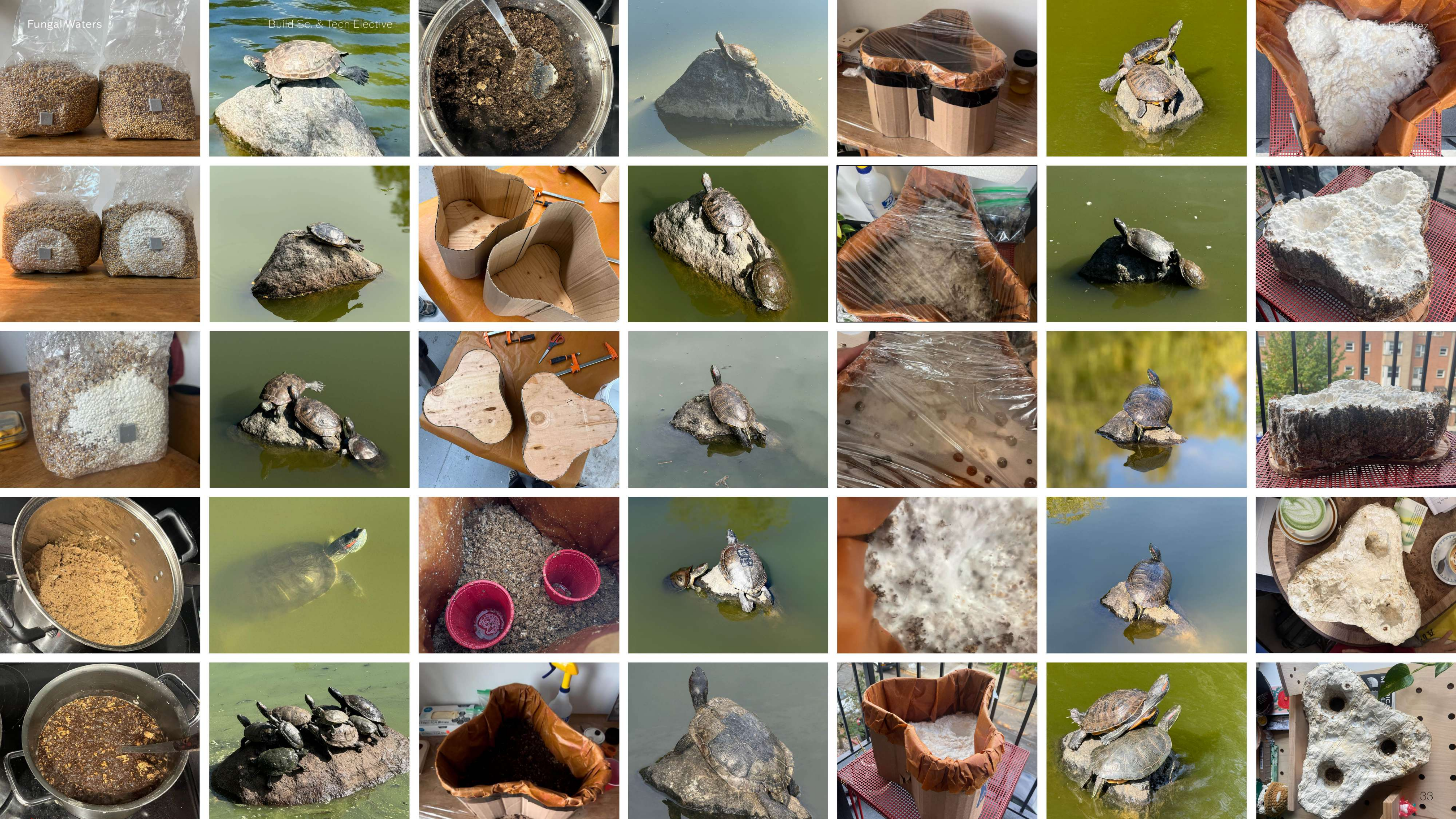
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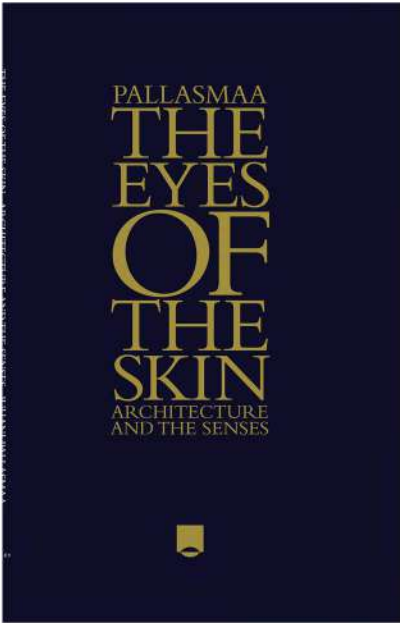


The Architecture of the Body

08

History and Theory: The History of Architectural Theory
Professor: Mark Wigley
Author: Valeria Ramírez

A Forensic Reading of Juhani Pallasmaa’s
The Eyes of the Skin, Part II



Juhani Pallasmaa's The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses, Fourth Edition, John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2024.

In The Eyes of the Skin, Juhani Pallasmaa proposes that architecture should not be reduced to visual form but understood as a complete sensory experience.¹ Part I of the book focuses on critiquing the “dominance of vision and the suppression of other senses” in the way architecture is taught and lived. Part II, The Body in Architecture, moves beyond critique and constructs a new way of thinking and feeling space. Through different methods, like poetic but simple language, real-life examples, and evocative images, Pallasmaa positions the body as the central instrument through which architecture acquires meaning. This essay examines how Part II of the book works as a theoretical device: how it builds its argument, how its images operate, and how its language makes the readers feel what it says. The goal is to observe the internal mechanism that makes this text persuasive and to understand how it continues to speak to contemporary architectural practice.

This attention to argument and experience extends beyond the text itself to the material form through which it is encountered. **A forensic reading also requires paying attention to the book as a physical object.** The 2024 Fourth Edition has a dark burgundy cover, minimal in composition, with gold serif typography centered on the page. This visual restraint already reflects one of Pallasmaa’s central ideas: that sensory richness does not come from visual excess. By avoiding imagery, the cover quiets the eye and draws attention to texture, weight, and atmosphere. Before the book is even opened, the reader encounters a small architectural moment, one that invites slowness, focus, and a tactile expectation, and quietly signals the book’s attempt to shift the sensory hierarchy.

This attention to the book’s physical framing matters because Part II repeatedly argues that perception is shaped by the conditions that surround it. Just as architecture prepares us to sense space in certain ways, the book prepares the reader to engage its ideas. The cover, typography, pacing, and placement of images work together as part of the same structure the text describes. By doing this, reading the book becomes a sensorial experience, shaped by an intentional set of visual and material choices.

The Body in Architecture

The text speaks directly to architects, students, and designers who have been trained to see buildings as objects rather than environments of experience. Pallasmaa’s mission is to remind readers that architecture lives in the body. His tone is personal and also authoritative, as if he were guiding us back to something we once knew but have forgotten. The text operates as both reflection and manifesto and it has a particular rhythm: short sentences, recurring analogies and repetition. Each paragraph begins with a clear statement, then it unfolds through sensory examples, and finally closes with a short reflection. **This repetitive form becomes a mechanism of persuasion.**

Part II, Pallasmaa builds his argument through a repeated structure. Each sensory claim is introduced clearly, followed by a short example, a metaphor, and a brief reflection before the text moves on. This sequence appears again and again throughout the section, creating a steady rhythm. Instead of advancing through a single linear argument, the text unfolds through these recurring moves. As a result, the reader begins to recognize the structure of the argument and experiences its pace before turning to the images.

The heart of Part II relies on the argument that all the senses are interdependent. Pallasmaa insists that vision cannot exist independently from touch, sound, smell, or taste. “The eye,” he writes, “touches the world.” This phrase becomes the foundation of the section. It transforms vision from a distant act into a tactile one, making the reader imagine how perception depends on the

body’s active engagement with space.

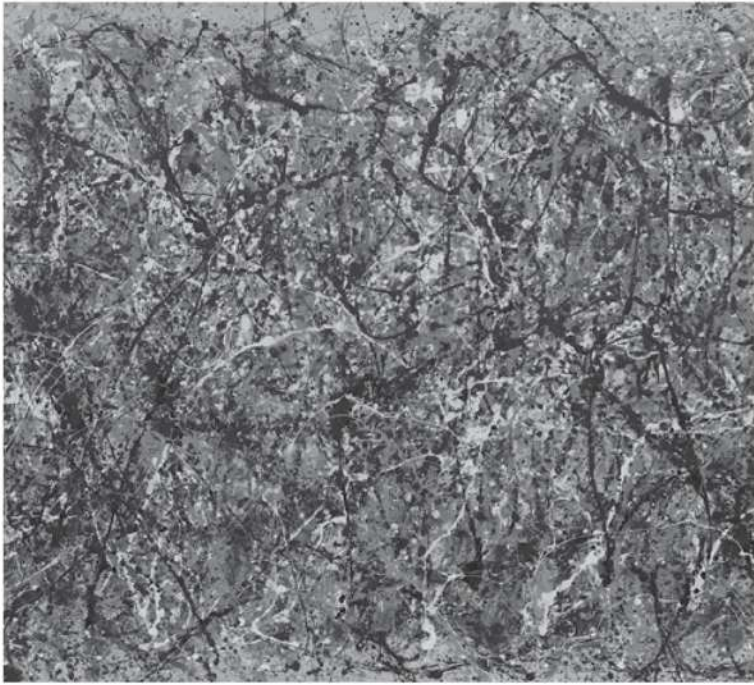
The text is full of examples that make the reader feel this idea. When Pallasmaa describes walking next to a concrete wall and touching its “velvety smoothness and temperature of its skin,” he invites us to inhabit that moment. By doing this, **theory becomes in some way physical.** He repeats such scenes (sitting in a dimly lit room, smelling timber) with the purpose of activating our own senses while we read. In this way, **the writing aims to perform what it preaches.**

This effect is intentional. By repeating this structure, Pallasmaa reduces the distance between the reader and the situations he describes. The sensory examples are concrete and bodily enough that the reader is invited to imagine inhabiting them while reading. As a result, the argument is received through a gradual sensory engagement. Instead of simply explaining multisensory experience, the text also encourages the reader to practice it through the act of reading.

Another recurring mechanism in Part II is comparison. Pallasmaa compares the senses to systems, highlighting that each one is distinct but at the same time interwoven. He writes that we not only see textures but “see the feeling of them.” This statement blurs categories: sight becomes touch, and memory becomes the medium through which they fuse. These metaphors can invite the reader to wonder about the limits of imagination. If we see something we have never touched, can we imagine its texture? Can the eye alone invent sensation? The text invites us to test these questions internally, creating a dialogue between reading and sensing.

Similarly, Pallasmaa reinforces this interdependence through constant analogies. He describes how the ear and eye collaborate to measure distance, how smell brings time into space, and how taste connects the body to material origin. Each sense completes the others. The repeated use of analogies clarifies his ideas and builds a rhythm that reflects the connection between the senses. **In the same way, these suggest that experience is always layered, just as architecture must layer materials, light, and sound to become complete.**

This interdependence of the senses also grounds his reflections on materiality. Pallasmaa’s preference for natural materials like wood, stone and clay, reveals a belief that their irregularities engage the senses more intensely than smooth synthetic surfaces. For him, material is not only about decoration but also becomes part of memory. By using examples such as the grain of timber that records growth and the roughness of stone that holds time, he invites the reader to sense materials anew, through touch, memory, and imagination as much as through sight. **Building on this idea, he compares architecture with nature to remind us that both are part of the same continuum:** the texture of a wall reflects the materials and place it comes from.



“Instead of simply explaining multisensory experience, the text encourages the reader to practice it through the act of reading”

Images and Rhythm

The images in The Eyes of the Skin act as extensions of Pallasmaa’s argument. Each one translates a sensory idea into visual form, constructing a pattern between word and image that resembles the interdependence of the senses he describes.

Before looking at specific figures, it is useful to note how images are selectively placed throughout the book. The images are also surrounded by generous margins, and rarely compete with the text. This spacing encourages the reader to pause and spend time with each image. They do not overwhelm the page, instead, the layout keeps vision in the background and allows the images to serve as brief moments of attention while reading.

Figure 1 presents the interior of a Nordic wooden house. The image captures the essence of what Pallasmaa calls the “silence of materials.” Its timber surfaces, softened by light and marked by use, seem to hold time within them. This photograph grounds the text’s ideas in lived space, showing how architecture can hold time, smell, and temperature within its surfaces. Through this image, the book also teaches us how material presence can slow perception and invite reflection.

Still, the way the image is presented carries certain assumptions. It suggests that wood holds a shared sensory meaning: its warmth, texture, and smell are treated as familiar references. Readers who have not lived in similar climates or cultural settings may relate to the image differently. By presenting this interior as an example of sensory richness, the photograph implicitly reflects a Nordic sensibility that runs through the book.

Figure 2 continues this reflection by isolating a corner where wooden planes meet a polished floor. The grain of the timber aligns in horizontal layers, while light enters from an unseen opening, reflecting across the surface like liquid. What could appear as a still image becomes a record of motion: of daylight shifting, of footsteps implied, of the building breathing with time. The image makes tactile what the text calls “the hapticity of vision.” Here, light becomes touch, and architecture becomes an instrument that receives and transforms its environment.

The composition of this image (the framing and the absence of bodies) suggests that sensory experience can be evoked without showing the experiencing subject. This is a recurring strategy in the book: the figures rarely depict people but they always imply them. This is a strategy that could argue that the viewer is silently inserted into the frame.

Figure 3 shows the custom door handles Pallasmaa designed for a Finnish building, their soft, organic contours shaped to fit the human grip. By including this image, the text bridges theory and practice: it shows that haptic thinking can guide even the smallest architectural element. The handle becomes a microcosm of embodied design, where the meeting between skin and material becomes the true threshold of architecture.

The close-up framing reinforces the intimacy of touch by focusing attention on the moment of contact between hand and object. By isolating this detail, the image shifts the scale of architecture to the body, suggesting that sensory experience often begins at the smallest point of interaction. The figure emphasizes how architecture is encountered through use.



1. Interior of a traditional Finnish log house.
2. Jackson Pollock, drip painting (detail).
3. Door handles by Alvar Aalto.
4. Finnish forest landscape
5. Interior view, Säynätsalo Town Hall, Alvar Aalto.

Figure 4, showing a dense forest of tall, evenly spaced trees, translates architectural structure into a natural rhythm. The vertical trunks act like columns, forming an open but defined spatial order. The filtered light and shifting shadows reveal how repetition and irregularity coexist and how the living environment builds itself through variation rather than symmetry.

Figure 5, a painting by Jackson Pollock, continues this exploration through abstraction. The dense network of lines resembles the entanglement of branches and the neural patterns of the human body. By placing this image after the forest, the book draws a connection between natural and artistic structure, between the physical and the mental orders that shape perception. Together, the two images form a visual argument: architecture, like both nature and art, arises from movement. They remind us that structure should also be sensed.

Pollock’s work introduces a different kind of sensory intensity. Unlike the calm interiors and landscapes that appear elsewhere in the book, the dense network of lines suggests movement, energy, and overlap. Placed within Pallasmaa’s narrative, the painting is read through the lens of embodied perception, where abstraction is understood as an expression of bodily gesture and rhythm. The image relies on a shared familiarity with this way of reading abstract art, allowing it to support the argument through sensation rather than representation.

One way Part II organizes sensory experience is through shifts in scale. The text moves from intimate bodily encounters, such as the hand touching a surface or the foot meeting the ground, toward architectural spaces and broader environments. These shifts appear consistently across the figures and examples. Small details, like door handles or material joints, are treated with the same attention as buildings and landscapes. This continuity suggests that sensory perception operates across scales, connecting bodily gesture to spatial order. By moving gradually between detail, structure, and environment, the book frames architecture as an extension of the body’s range.

Taken together, the sequence of figures constructs an argument that unfolds visually alongside the text. The images move from interior architectural spaces, to details of use, to natural and abstract forms, gradually expanding the scale of sensory experience. This progression mirrors the structure of Part II itself, which moves from bodily encounters with materials toward broader reflections on perception, memory, and meaning. The figures operate as a visual rhythm that reinforces the text’s movement. Their order encourages the reader to sense continuity between architecture, nature, and the body, supporting Pallasmaa’s claim that perception is shaped through layered, interconnected experiences.

The strength of Part II also lies in the coherence between its visual and textual elements. The figures return to similar atmospheres and spatial conditions, reinforcing the

sensory themes developed in the writing. This repetition creates continuity across the book, allowing ideas about embodiment and perception to be reinforced through multiple forms.

Pallasmaa’s sensory descriptions echo this coherence. The scenes he describes are consistent in tone and scale, emphasizing material presence and bodily proximity. By aligning images, language, and layout, the book supports its argument through a unified sensory environment that unfolds gradually through reading.

The same persuasive strategy extends to his use of lived examples, which he uses to invite readers to imagine being there. When he describes touching cold marble or entering a warm wooden cabin, we can almost feel it, but this rhetorical strategy also exposes a tension: is he doing the same thing he criticizes? Using images to evoke sensation through vision alone? The text plays with this paradox, using vision to teach us its limits. By making us see texture, he proves that sight alone is insufficient. This tension is part of the way the book constructs its argument. By relying on vision to question visual dominance, Pallasmaa attempts to reposition sight. Vision becomes a point of entry, guiding attention toward touch, sound, memory, and bodily presence. In this way, the book trains the reader to read visually while sensing beyond the image, turning perception itself into a learned practice.

The text also encourages readers to question what happens when sensory expectations fail. If we expect to touch softness and find hardness instead, the encounter surprises us, awakening an uneasy awareness of our own senses. This unpredictable result reminds us that space is active and unpredictable. Pallasmaa’s insistence on such moments teaches that architecture should invite us to reflect on how we perceive and inhabit space.

Apart from its theoretical arguments, the impact of Part II comes from the precision of its language and structure. Pallasmaa’s sentences alternate between description and pause, creating movement and rhythm. Reading the text can be compared to some of the same analogies he uses within it, like walking through light and shade. The structure shapes time, directs attention, and leaves space for reflection.

In other words, the structure of the writing is an extension of its content. The cadence of short sentences followed by reflective pauses choreographs a kind of slow inhabitation. The reader “moves through” the text with the same attentiveness Pallasmaa associates with moving through a meaningful architectural space. This is part of the internal logic of the book: theory becomes atmosphere.

Pallasmaa often returns to the same phrases: “the eye touches,” “the silence of space,” “the warmth of materials.” His language moves in circles and this looping form makes the reader stay inside the thought instead of just moving past it.

On the other hand, the pauses between paragraphs act like thresholds. They slow the pace and invite reflection, much like the placement of the images throughout the book.

Pallasmaa also builds a quiet hierarchy of values. The “good” building listens, touches, and remembers, and the “bad” one is blind, smooth, and silent. These contrasts are never stated directly but emerge through the tone and examples. Together, they reveal a deeper aim of Pallasmaa’s writing: to cultivate imagination and self-awareness as essential parts of both education and design.

This hierarchy, however, is not without assumptions. The text presumes shared values around slowness, silence, shadow, and natural materials. These sensibilities are grounded in specific cultural and climatic histories: Nordic, modernist, tactile, minimalist. Recognizing this helps clarify how the book constructs its understanding of sensory experience.

This tone positions the text as a form of instruction. Reading Part II becomes a process of learning how to notice space differently. Through repeated examples, familiar references, and clear assertions, the book trains attention toward specific sensory qualities. Over time, the reader begins to recognize these qualities as meaningful and coherent. The argument unfolds gradually through this process of training, shaping perception through repetition and consistency.

Part II also places responsibility on the reader. Through repeated sensory cues, the text trains attention and encourages readers to remain aware of their own perceptions beyond the act of reading. Sensory awareness appears as an ongoing practice that unfolds over time. This responsibility extends into everyday encounters with space, materials, and environments. In this way, the reader becomes an active participant in the argument, carrying the book’s attentiveness into future experiences of architecture.

The structure of Part II supports this continuity by sustaining the reader’s trained attention over time. The early focus on sensory interdependence establishes the body as the measure of space. The images anchor these ideas in spatial and material situations, while later reflections on materiality and memory extend perception across time. These moments function as linked parts of the same system, guiding the reader from immediate sensory awareness toward longer reflection. The argument unfolds gradually through this movement, allowing the essay to read as a single line of thought shaped through experience.

Memory, Time, and Relevance

In the final pages of Part II, Pallasmaa turns his attention to time. He describes how buildings gather traces of use and how their surfaces record the passing of years. Details such as worn steps, faded paint, and polished thresholds reveal that architecture changes with those who inhabit it. **Time becomes a part of the building itself.**

This move toward temporality deepens the earlier focus on senses. Materiality is no longer only tactile but historical. Pallasmaa suggests that our sensory encounters accumulate, layering personal and collective memory onto surfaces. **The building becomes a kind of archive where bodily experience accumulates over time.**

In the same way that materials absorb time, language too begins to solidify meaning. When Pallasmaa writes that “outside we dream, but inside we think,” the sentence appears simple but carries the force of a declaration. Its tone leaves little space for doubt, as if perception could be neatly divided between two states of being. This firmness gives the phrase its power but also its risk, it sounds absolute, even subjective. Yet that directness is deliberate. By presenting the statement as fact rather than argument, the text embodies the clarity it attributes to architecture itself. The line persuades through confidence and compression; its authority comes from how tightly it is written.

“The reader moves through the text with the same attentiveness required to move through meaningful architecture.”



Binet, Hélène. Interior of Bruder Klaus Field Chapel, Wachendorf, Germany.

“What is needed most in architecture today is the very thing that is most needed in life – integrity.”



Eye-slicing scene from the 1929 surrealist silent film *Un Chien Andalou*.

Culture and Sensory Universality

Throughout the text, Pallasmaa uses examples from different parts of the world. These moments serve as demonstrations of how culture shapes sensation. Each example links climate, material, and ritual. The Japanese tea house mentioned at some point, for instance, condenses temperature, scent, and silence into a single gesture. Through these scenes, theory becomes a kind of global sensory map, revealing that perception is shared across humanity while shaped by place.

These examples also invite broader questions about how sensory experience is framed. Which cultural sensibilities are foregrounded, and which remain less visible? By moving between different contexts, the text suggests a shared bodily basis for perception. At the same time, this approach raises questions about how cultural specificity is addressed, and how differences in climate, material, and tradition shape sensory experience within that shared framework.

By grounding his reflections in diverse settings, Pallasmaa keeps his writing concrete and accessible. These examples allow readers to move through different sensory situations while maintaining a sense of shared bodily experience. The text presents cultural variation as another way of approaching shared sensory conditions.

The Book as Object

Even the physical design of *The Eyes of the Skin* embodies its argument. Its white margins, simple typography, and balanced spacing help to create visual quietness. The images are printed softly, without glossy contrast, and in black and white. These choices might have the purpose to encourage the reader to observe the texture, shadow, and contrast, some of the elements that Pallasmaa treats as the foundation of perception. This material modesty can be a way of representing the same humility Pallasmaa asks of architecture itself.

Likewise, the order of the images follows a sensory sequence: vision, hearing, smell, touch, anatomy, and memory. The reader moves through them awakening different sensations and thus different perceptions. Each photograph emerges like a pause for reflection, positioned at moments when the text grows more abstract.

Closing Reflections

In conclusion, this forensic reading shows that the strength of *The Eyes of the Skin* lies in how coherently it operates as a sensory device. Pallasmaa’s goal of re-centering the body within architectural thought is achieved through various strategies like the simplicity of the language, the rhythm of repetition, the recurring metaphors, and the images: working all together as a single mechanism.

This analysis shows how the book builds its argument through multiple layers. The arrangement of figures, the

rhythm of the sentences, the use of white space, and the material presence of the cover all shape the reading experience. Together, these elements guide how the reader moves through the text and encounters its ideas. The book becomes an experience that is sensed as much as it is read.

Pallasmaa’s purpose goes further than simple critique: while he denounces the disembodiment of modern architecture, he also proposes a path forward. His text functions as a diagnosis and a guide, articulating what architecture “should inspire us to feel.” His references to Alvar Aalto, Frank Lloyd Wright, Louis Kahn, and Peter Zumthor operate as an example of how material, light, and proportion can foster intimacy and care. Conversely, his allusions to the “machine aesthetic” or to overly glazed, weightless buildings expose what he considers the sensory failures of late modernism. In this way, the text organizes its argument through contrast: embodied design versus abstract form, and lets the reader feel the difference through tone and example. This mechanism reveals the author’s role as both critic and educator. **The book teaches what architecture has lost and how it might recover its emotional and physical resonance.**

The text also opens space for reflection on how sensory experience is framed. By foregrounding Nordic material cultures, natural textures, silence, and shadow, it reflects a particular set of sensibilities. This focus draws attention to the ways other cultures, climates, and bodies might shape sensory experience differently. Read in this way, the book offers a framework that invites further interpretation and extension.

This pedagogical quality becomes clearer when seen in the context of its time. At the turn of the twenty-first century, architecture was already shaped by digital tools and global imagery. In his closing reflections, Pallasmaa anticipates the growing gap between design and human experience. The tone of the book shifts from calm reflection to a sense of urgency. In his final pages, Pallasmaa recalls Frank Lloyd Wright’s reflection, cited by Steen Eiler Rasmussen in *Experiencing Architecture*: “What is needed most in architecture today is the very thing that is most needed in life – integrity.” Pallasmaa follows this with his own remark that “this emphatic declaration of architecture’s mission is even more urgent today than at the time of its writing seven decades ago.” What begins as a reflection on perception ends as a moral call, inviting the reader to move from contemplation to responsibility.

This ending shifts how the book can be understood. By linking sensory experience to ethical concerns, Pallasmaa connects perception to action. **Attention to the senses becomes a way of caring for materials, environments, and people.** In this sense, architectural theory serves as a way of shaping how we notice and respond to the world. The book remains relevant today because it calls for slowness and attentiveness within a context shaped by speed, distraction, and digital mediation. This appeal connects to the inclusive nature of the book

itself. Its audience reflects the double purpose of the text. It speaks to architects, teachers, and students, but its clear language also welcomes general readers. By avoiding technical terms and appealing to shared sensory memories, Pallasmaa turns the text into a cultural statement. Its accessibility becomes a position in itself, demonstrating that architecture should belong to everyone who inhabits it.

Beyond accessibility, the book’s continuing relevance comes from the precision of its structure. It challenges the dominance of sight by showing that theory can also be something we touch, hear, and feel. By shaping the reading experience as a form of inhabiting, Pallasmaa turns writing into a spatial act.

Ultimately, the power of Part II comes from the way it amplifies the reader’s awareness. By the end of the book, ordinary sensations: light on a wall, the sound of footsteps, the smell of timber, gain new significance. This change in perception becomes the book’s central claim, one that unfolds through experience. The text offers a quiet space for attentiveness, encouraging a way of sensing that continues beyond architecture and into everyday life.

Through its examples, tone, and final urgency, the book expands what architectural theory can do. Pallasmaa’s closing call to understand “the human condition” invites readers to carry the attentiveness learned while reading into the acts of designing, building, and living. The text remains powerful not only for the conclusions it reaches but for what it awakens: **a renewed ability to sense, to care, and to imagine architecture as a truly human art.**



Valeria Ramirez

Bodies, materials, environments.