



SHIKI XU | REFLECTOR

PORTFOLIO in GSAPP
MS.AAD, **Columbia University**, New York, USA





Contents

1

Mussel Built

1-18

—Advanced V Studio: Peaceable Kingdom

2

Phantom 1964

19-34

—Elective: Power Tools

3

Between the Lines:
Architecture, Agency & Marginal Voice

35-38

—Elective: Arguments

4

Shit Sanctuary:
Hudson's River as Sacrificial Area

39-48

—Advanced IV Studio: Hudson River's Political Personhood

5

Solid Haze

49-52

—Elective: Rendering Systems

6

Vertical Kiln Living

53-62

—Advanced VI Studio: OIKONOMIA: Crafting Collectivity

7

Typeface(Orbital), Poster, Zine

63-70

—Elective: Multi Graphics & Representation



Adv V Studio: Peaceable Kingdom
Fall 2025
Critic: Micheal Wang
Teaching Associate: Amy Suzuki
Team: Raven Huang

Conflicts Between Re-Examined, Re-Defined and Re-Coupled Species

MUSSEL BUILT examines the Gowanus Canal as an industrial waterway shaped by dredging, disposal, and long-term material accumulation. The project focuses on the Atlantic ribbed mussel as an organism embedded in these altered conditions, using its growth and decay cycles to study resilience across extended temporal scales. The project treats building as an ongoing process of material transformation. Decay is employed as an operational mechanism, informing how structures change through erosion, accretion, and decomposition rather than remaining fixed in form.

Cube Corner Reflector
Water level supervisor.

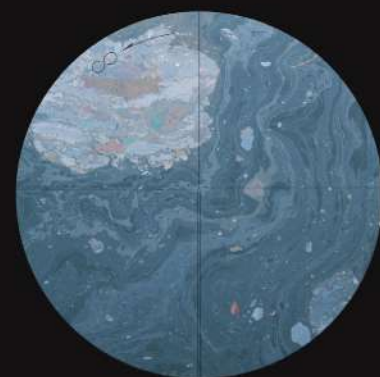


Atlantic Ribbed Mussel





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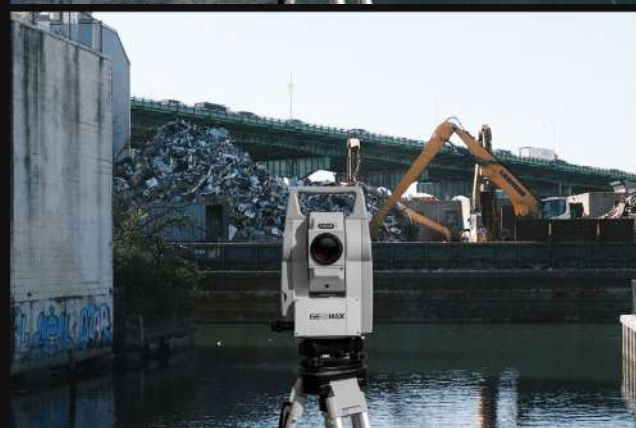
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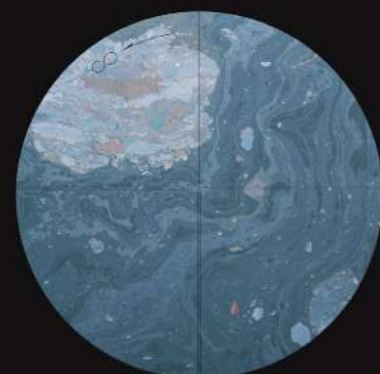
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Ribbon Mussels



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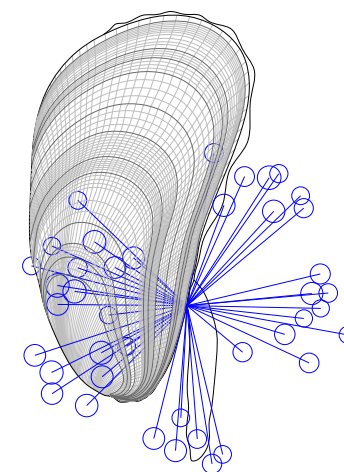
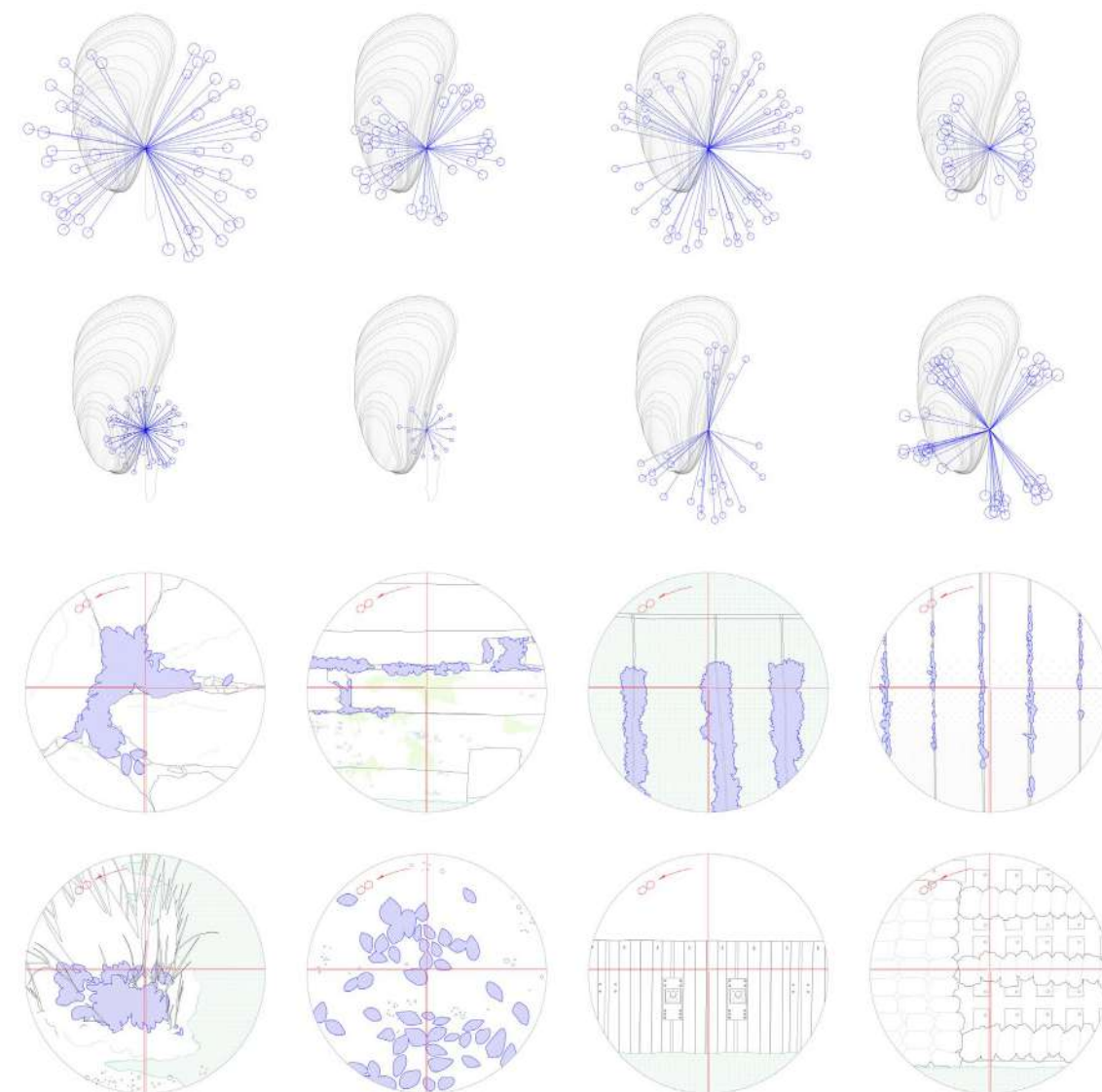
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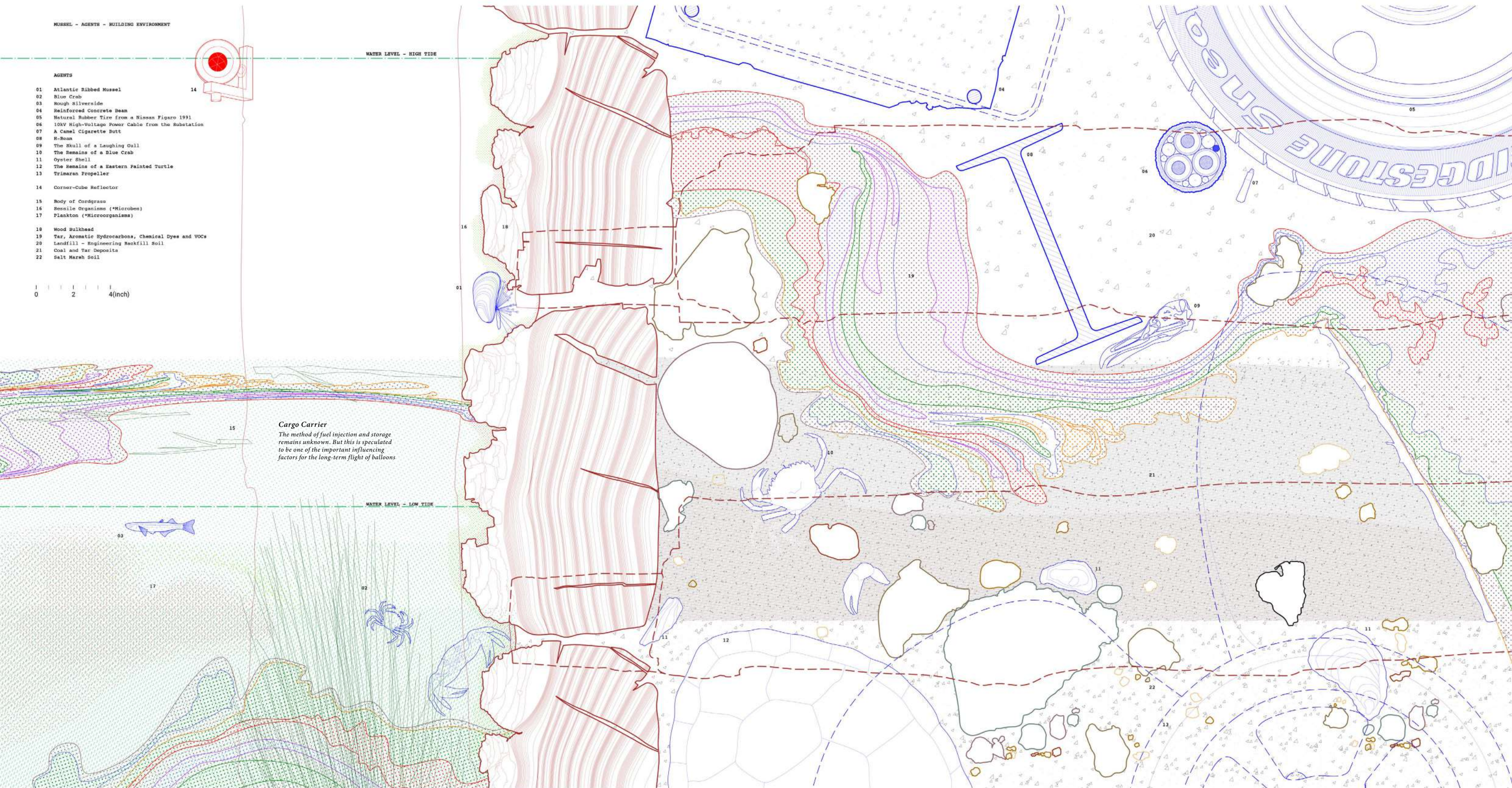
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Ribbon Mussels



Occupying space

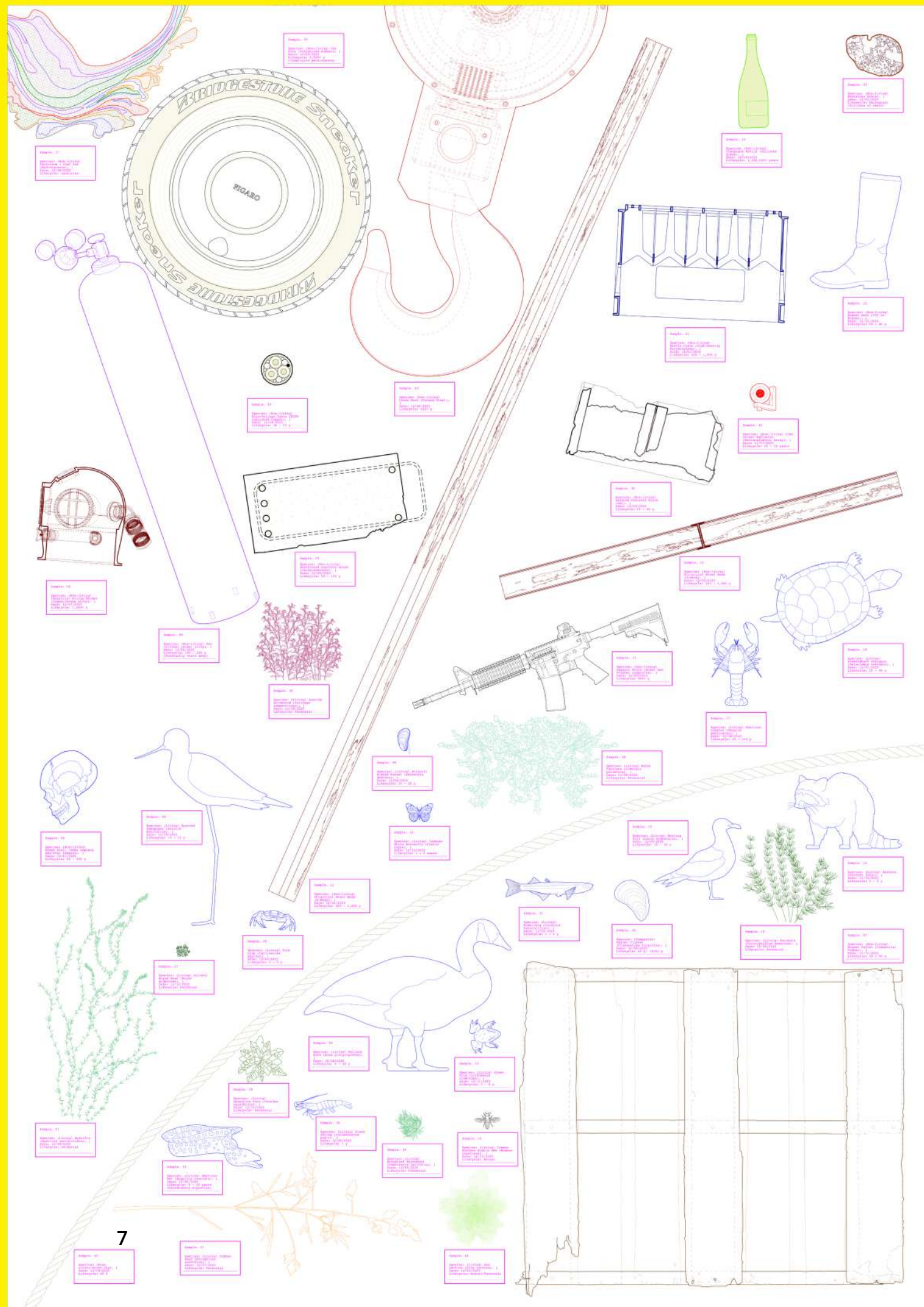
The project treats building as an ongoing process of material transformation. Decay is employed as an operational mechanism, informing how structures change through erosion, accretion, and decomposition rather than remaining fixed in form.

Mussels and allied actors are reorganized along the canal's "murderer-dredger" edge, forming a floating Coupling Body, an evolving architecture that grows, erodes, and rebuilds itself within the canal's longecological timeline and continuous building process.



Agents

This diagram shows a cross-section of a Gowanus canal wood bulkhead, with the ribbed mussel at its core, illustrating all the relevant agents associated with the mussel. It depicts the current state of the situation.



Mussel Murderer

In 2019, government, superfund and conservancy collaborated to propose a draft of Gowanus revival plan and dredging the canal and removing the black mud is the primitive stage of the plan.

To prevent channel collapse and organic soil contaminant leaching, over 80% of the original shoreline structures (like wood bulkheads and salt marshes) were replaced with engineered barriers such as steel and concrete bulkheads. Ironically, these interventions, originally intended for ecosystem restoration, have killed many aquatic organisms already stressed by human activity, notably mussels.

Since the 19th century, human creations have been like a surging monster, spreading its limbs everywhere.

In the year 2020, one of those limbs, advancing in a massive surge, inadvertently brushed against the ribbed mussels barely surviving in the Gowanus Canal.

The mussels retreated relentlessly, while the creation remained stubbornly immobile. But humans did not even spare a glance at mussels, it was just an accident caused by humans' creation, and we just happened to be noticing the accident scene.

We can imagine that similar accidents are playing out, day after day, in places where unnoticed.



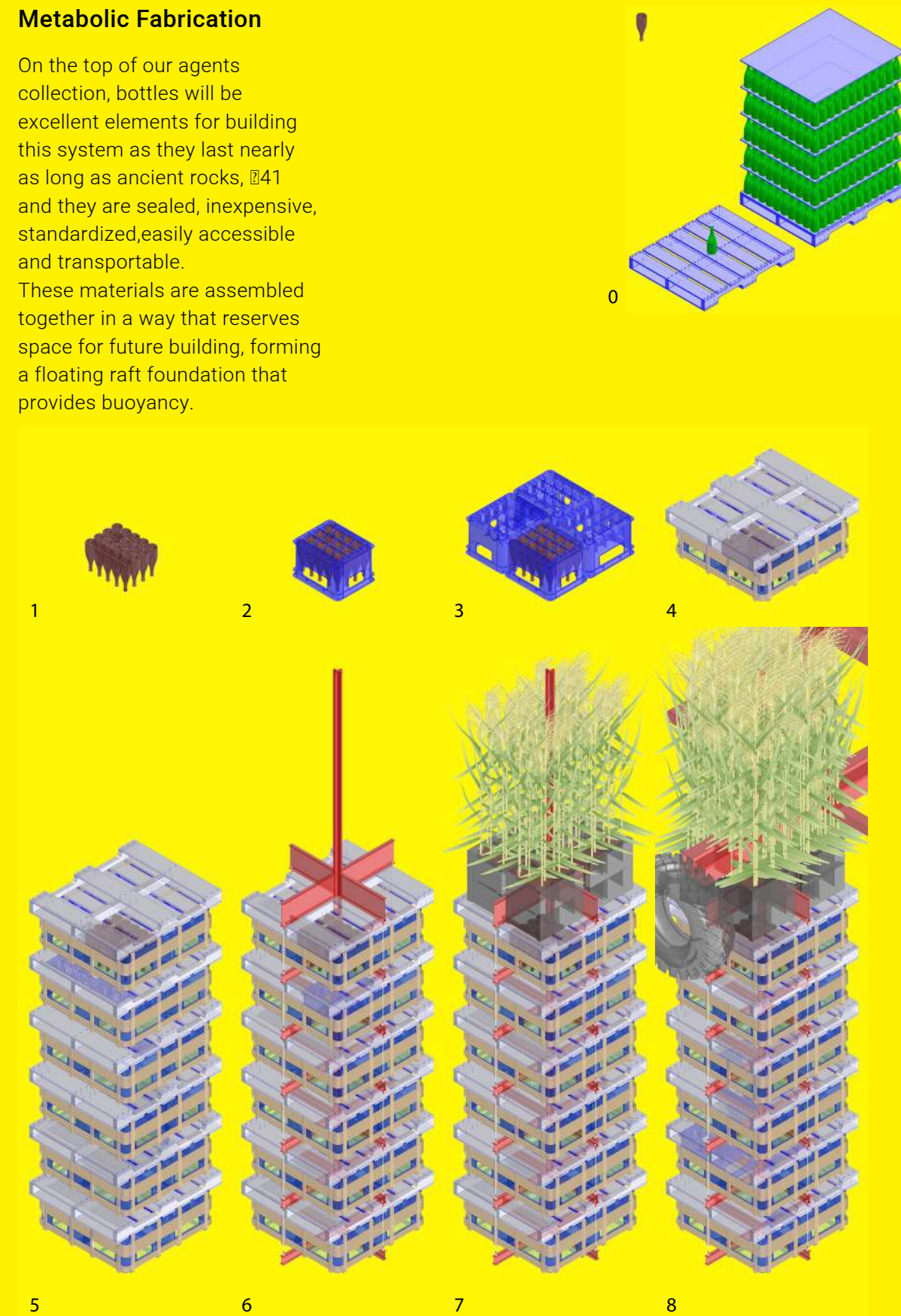
Cube Corner Reflector

An optical instrument composed of three mutually perpendicular reflecting surfaces (like a corner of a room). No matter from which angle the light enters this corner, after three reflections, the outgoing light will remain parallel to the incoming light. The reflector on the Gowanus riverbank is used to monitor the settlement of the embankment.

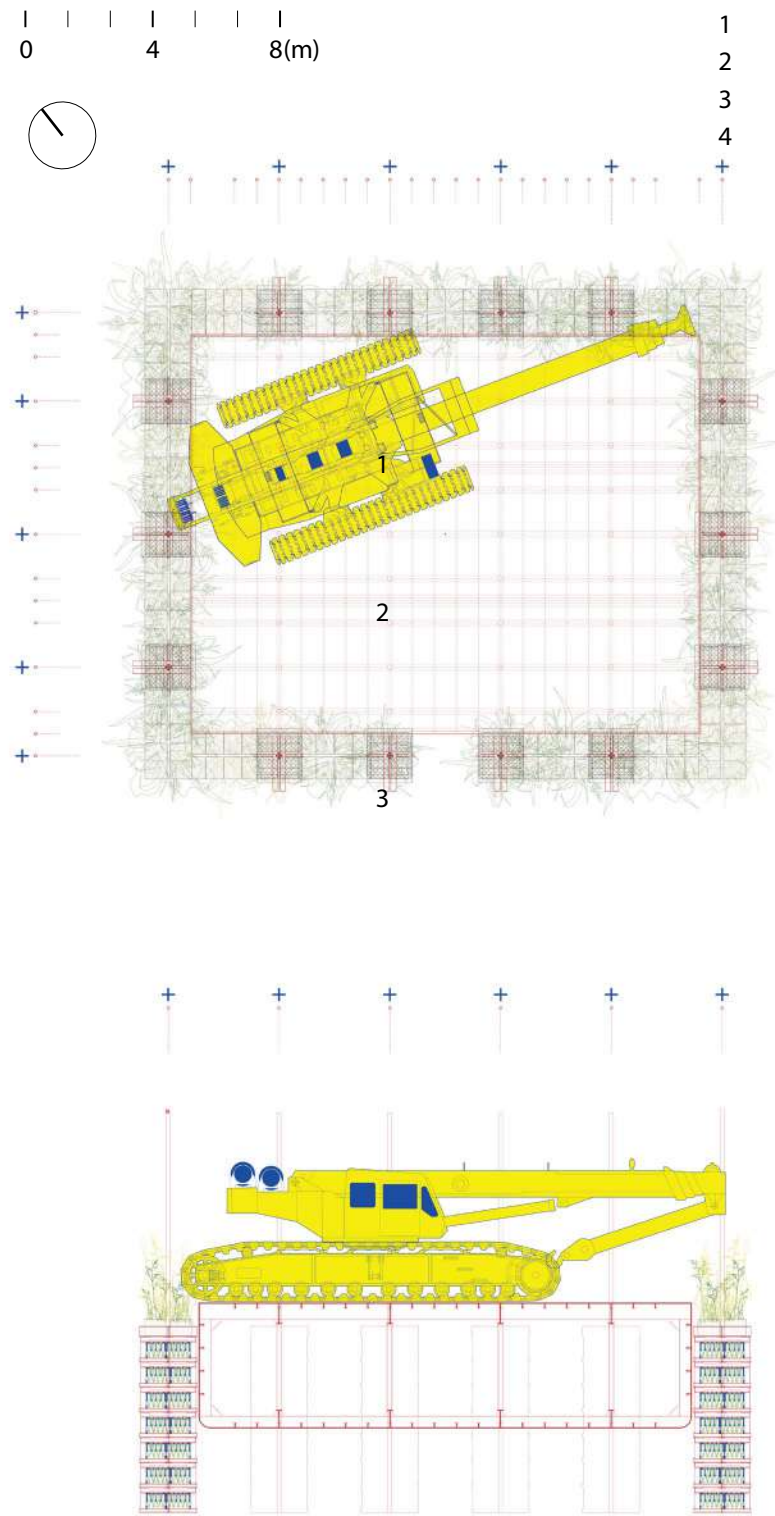
Metabolic Fabrication

On the top of our agents collection, bottles will be excellent elements for building this system as they last nearly as long as ancient rocks, [41] and they are sealed, inexpensive, standardized, easily accessible and transportable.

These materials are assembled together in a way that reserves space for future building, forming a floating raft foundation that provides buoyancy.

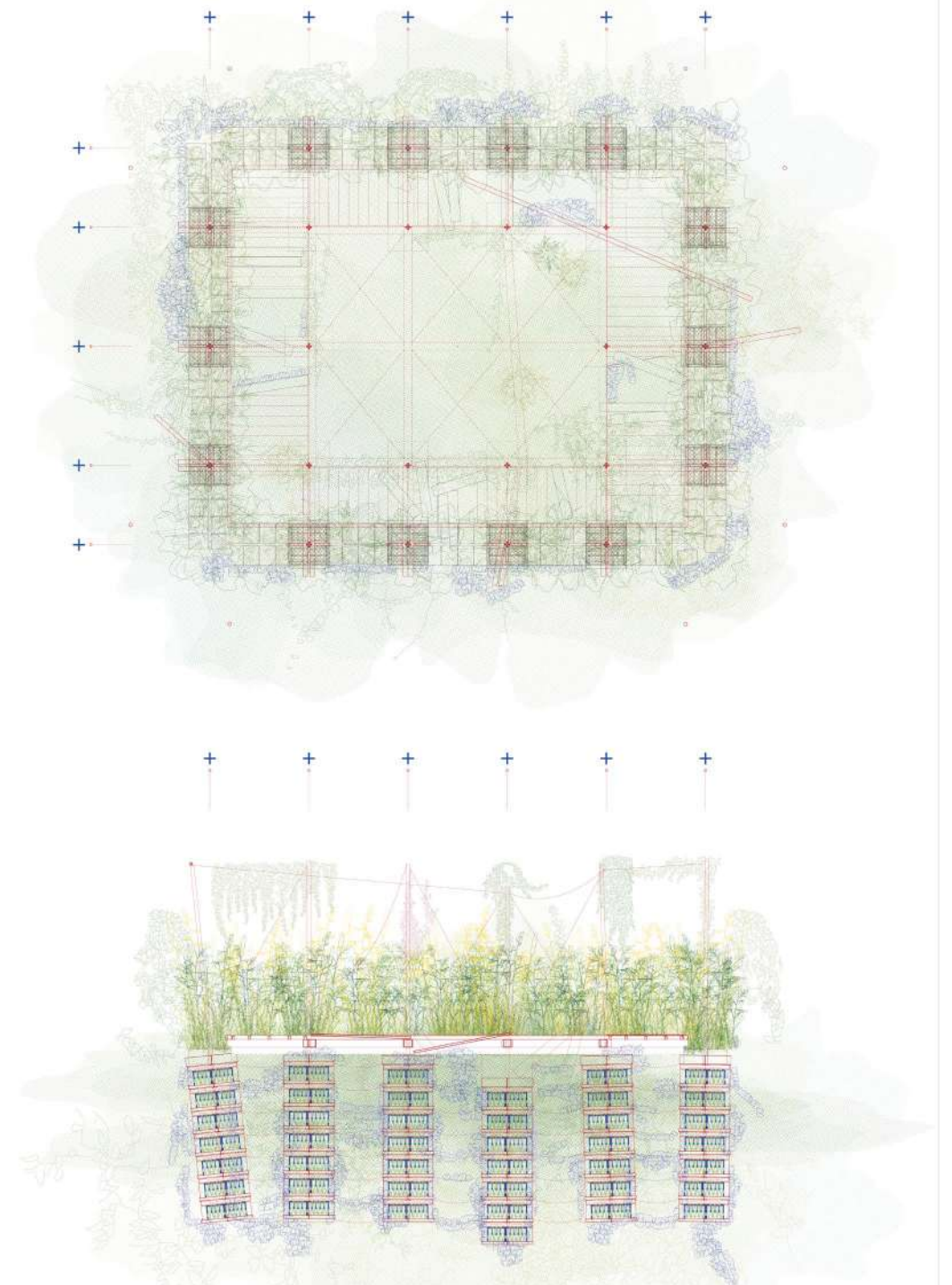
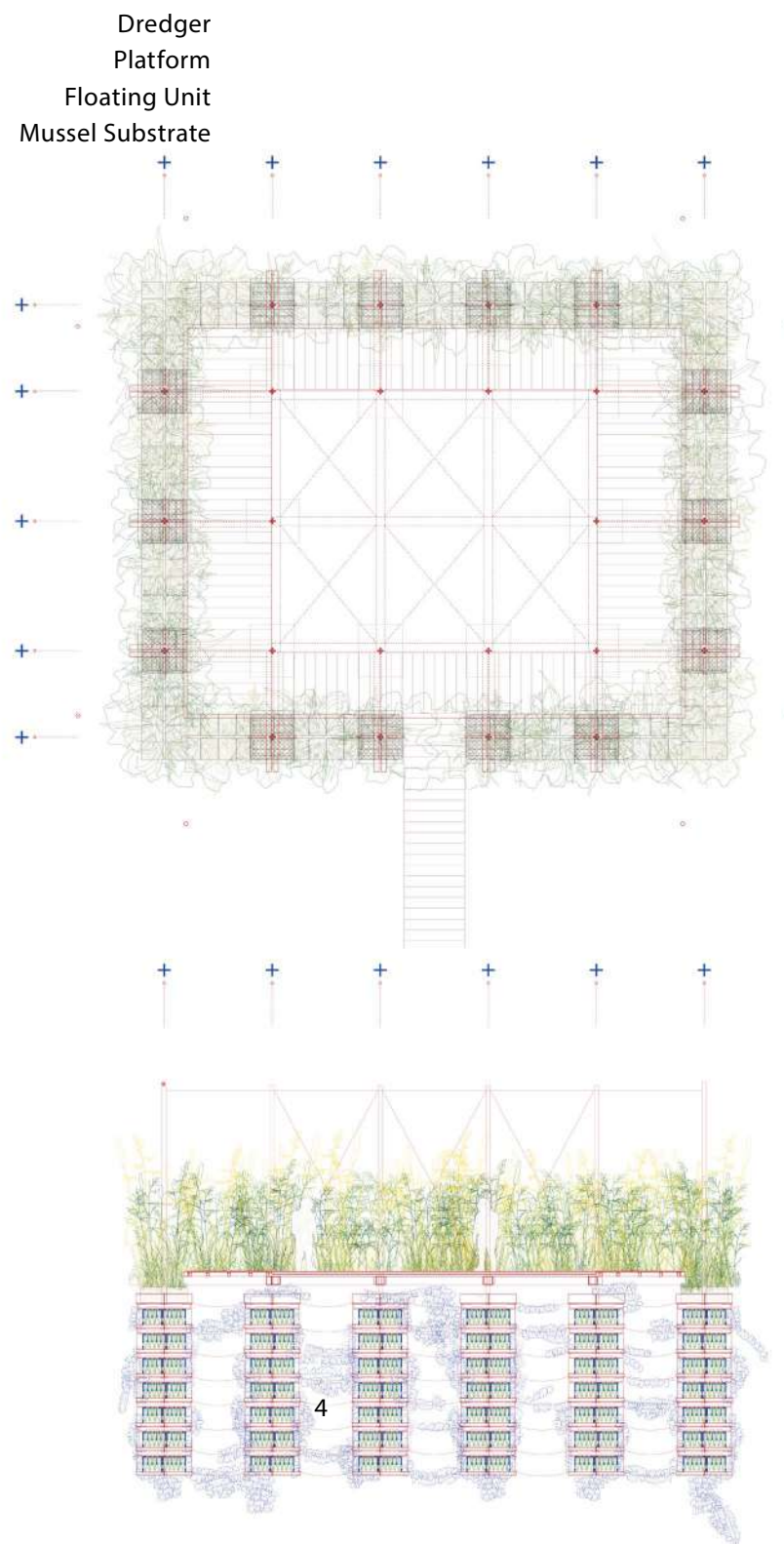


The upper part of the foundation secures the entire base via the downward root growth of marsh land plants like cordgrass and phragmite. Most importantly, the materials in the lower part of the foundation are primarily substrates suitable for mussel colonization, such as brown coir and wood planks. Gaps between bottles, baskets and ropes will be colonized and filled by mussels in the future, effectively becoming an excellent adhesive between the materials.

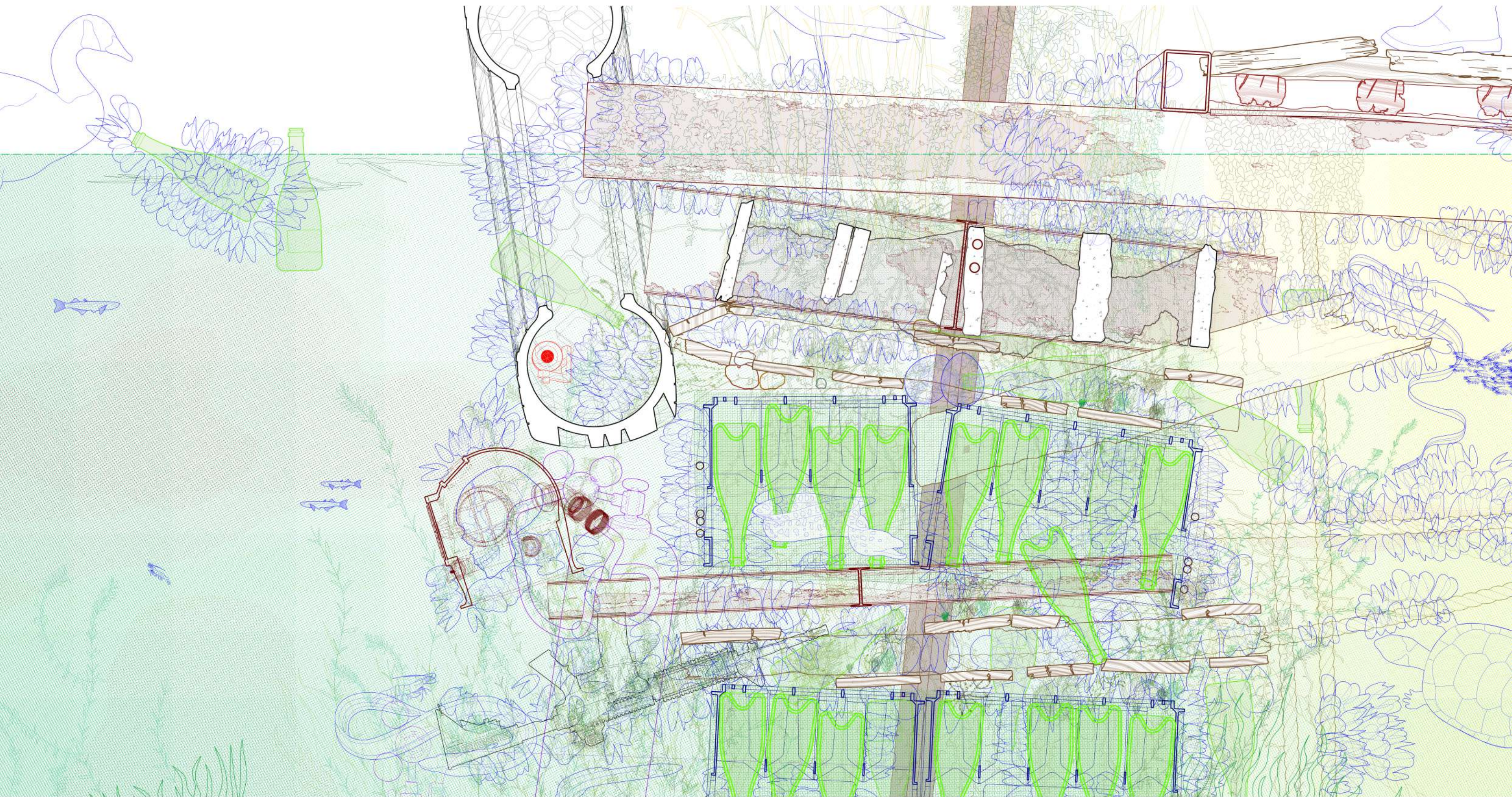


Site plan

This floating platform evolves from an artificial barge into a resilient eco-system that survives global climate collapse and the submergence of Brooklyn. By 2100, it serves as a vital stronghold for human survival, providing rare arable land for agriculture and hunting in a pre-modern society.



As humanity eventually fades, the structure's fractured components become deeply integrated with native species, mussels, and root systems. Ultimately, the platform transcends its man-made origins to become a permanent ecological aggregate that continues its self-building process over centuries.

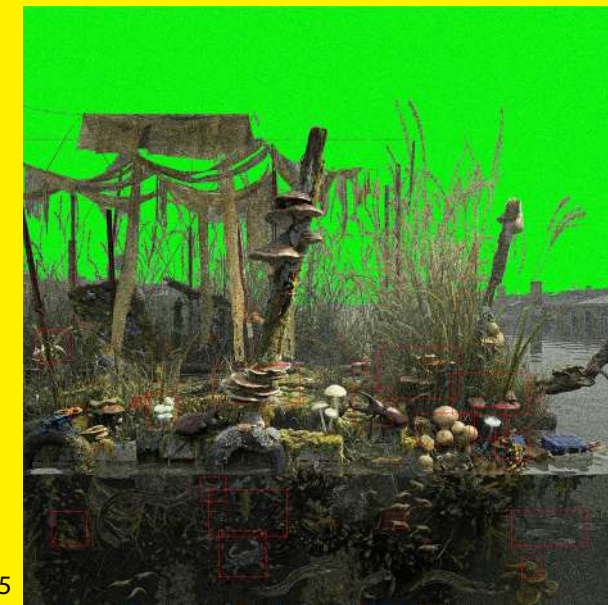




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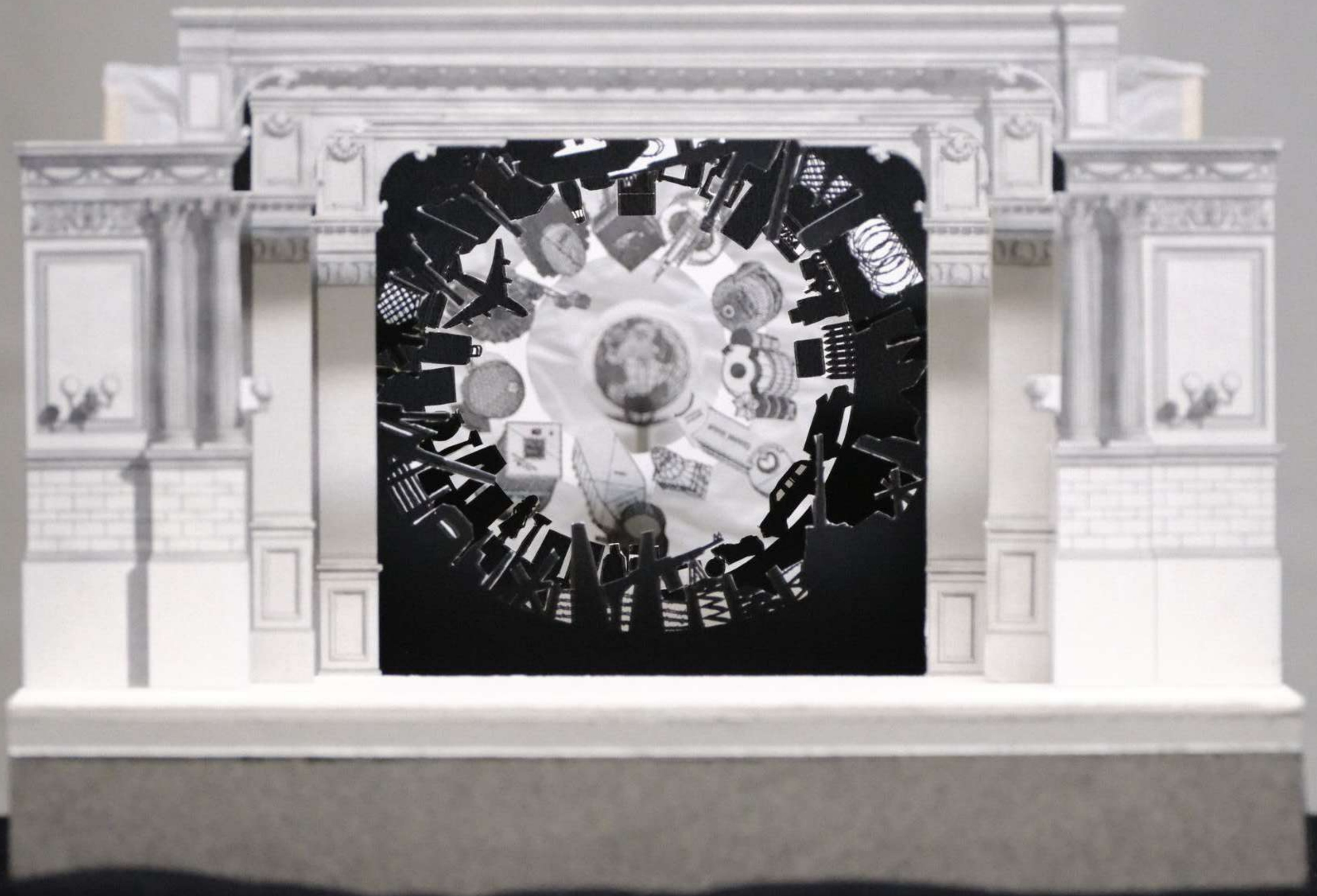
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- 1 Snow Storm Surge
- 2 Survivor Camp
- 3 Aquatic Farmland
- 4 North American Ecology
- 5 Rainforest Ecology
- 6 Salt Marsh Ecology
- 7 Tundra Ecology

Decay Sequence

The evolving platform serves as a stage where diverse agents enact a centuries-long narrative of survival and adaptation: initially, pioneer species like plants and mussels colonize the barge to forge a resilient foundation, which later empowers humanity to establish strongholds for farming and hunting amidst a collapsed industrial world. As the human era fades, native species reclaim their role as masters of the site, thriving upon the structure and coupling their root systems with fractured artificial components to maintain the buoyancy of this enduring ecological aggregate.





Elective: Power Tools
 Spring 2026
 Representation
Critic: Jelisa Blumberg
Team: Raven Huang

Notes:

01. The Unisphere is a spherical stainless steel representation of the Earth at Flushing Meadows–Corona Park in Queens, New York City, United States. The globe was designed by Gilmore D. Clarke for the 1964 New York World's Fair. Commissioned to celebrate the beginning of the space age, the Unisphere was conceived and constructed as the theme symbol of the World's Fair. The theme of the World's Fair was "Peace Through Understanding", and the Unisphere represented the theme of global interdependence, being dedicated to "Man's Achievements on a Shrinking Globe in an Expanding Universe".



"The Site of Specters" interrogates the 1964 New York World's Fair not as a static historical relic, but as a potent symbolic apparatus operating through the dual mechanisms of The Mask and The Specter. The research first dissects "The Mask"—a functional landscape where power and capital synthesized a global hegemony. Through iconic monuments like the Unisphere and corporate pavilions, the Fair manufactured a "unified consensus," utilizing the consumerist mask of progress to claim a monopoly over the trajectory of human civilization. This was a "Serious Theme Park" of Pax Americana, where corporations like IBM, Ford, and Disney acted as the chief designers of reality, using spectacular visuals to define "The World" as a singular, ordered path driven by automation and corporate stewardship. In this stage, the site functioned as a spatial tool of authority, dictating a future that felt inevitable and certain.

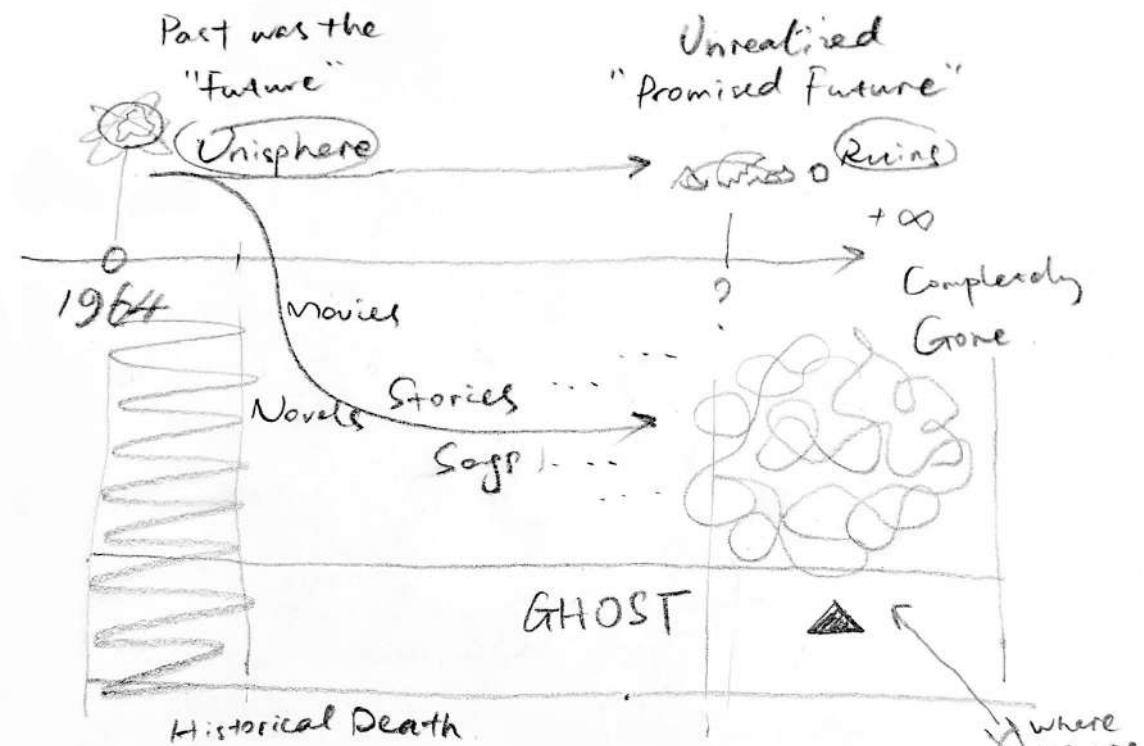
However, as this orchestrated utopia failed to materialize in reality, the Fair transitioned into a state of Hauntology. Borrowing from

Jacques Derrida, the project explores how the site persists in a liminal "middle state" between its physical closure and its "second death" of total oblivion. In this "out of joint" time, the Fair's iconography has detached from its historical origins to become a "meta-symbol" within postmodern culture. Driven by an "Imperial Nostalgia," these spectral remnants—from the rusting structures at Flushing Meadows to their constant representation in media like *Men in Black* or *Iron Man 2*—serve as fragments of a "lost future." When we consume these images, we are performing a "Spiritual Salvage," attempting to recover a sense of totality that has long since shattered. Ultimately, the project frames the Fair as a Portal, revealing how the ruins of broken promises continue to haunt and govern our contemporary cultural imagination from the depths of history.





1



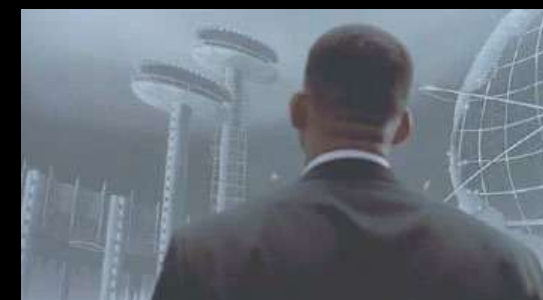
2

1 Jacques Derrida
Hauntology
2 Jean Baudrillard
Simulacra and
Simulation

The diagram identifies the 1964 World's Fair as a temporal singularity—a fracture point where the "Promised Future" and our "Actual Reality" split into two distinct universes. In one universe, the techno-utopian vision of Pax Americana achieved its climax and continued into an idealized era. In our universe, however, 1964 marked the beginning of an endless entropic decay. The diagram maps this divergence: the "Future" we were promised has been relegated to a static image in the past, while our actual future feels like a hollowed-out "Past" that failed to progress.

Following Jacques Derrida's hauntology, the diagram explores the "Interval" between two deaths. The First Death occurred in 1965 as an objective historical conclusion—the physical dismantling of the Fair. The Second Death remains pending: the total oblivion of its symbolic legacy. Between these two deaths, the Specter emerges. This diagram functions as

a diagnostic tool to locate this specter—not as a relic of history, but as an active ghost that continues to haunt our cultural imagination. We are performing a spiritual salvage, attempting to decipher the mechanics of this phantom before it vanishes into the second death of absolute silence.





This project re-evaluates the 1964 New York World's Fair as an "Architectural Masque"—an ideological tool for calibration disguised as technological optimism. Drawing on John Hejduk's theories and hauntology, it dissects the "two deaths" of the Fair: its physical erasure and its spectral afterlife within contemporary consumerist desires.

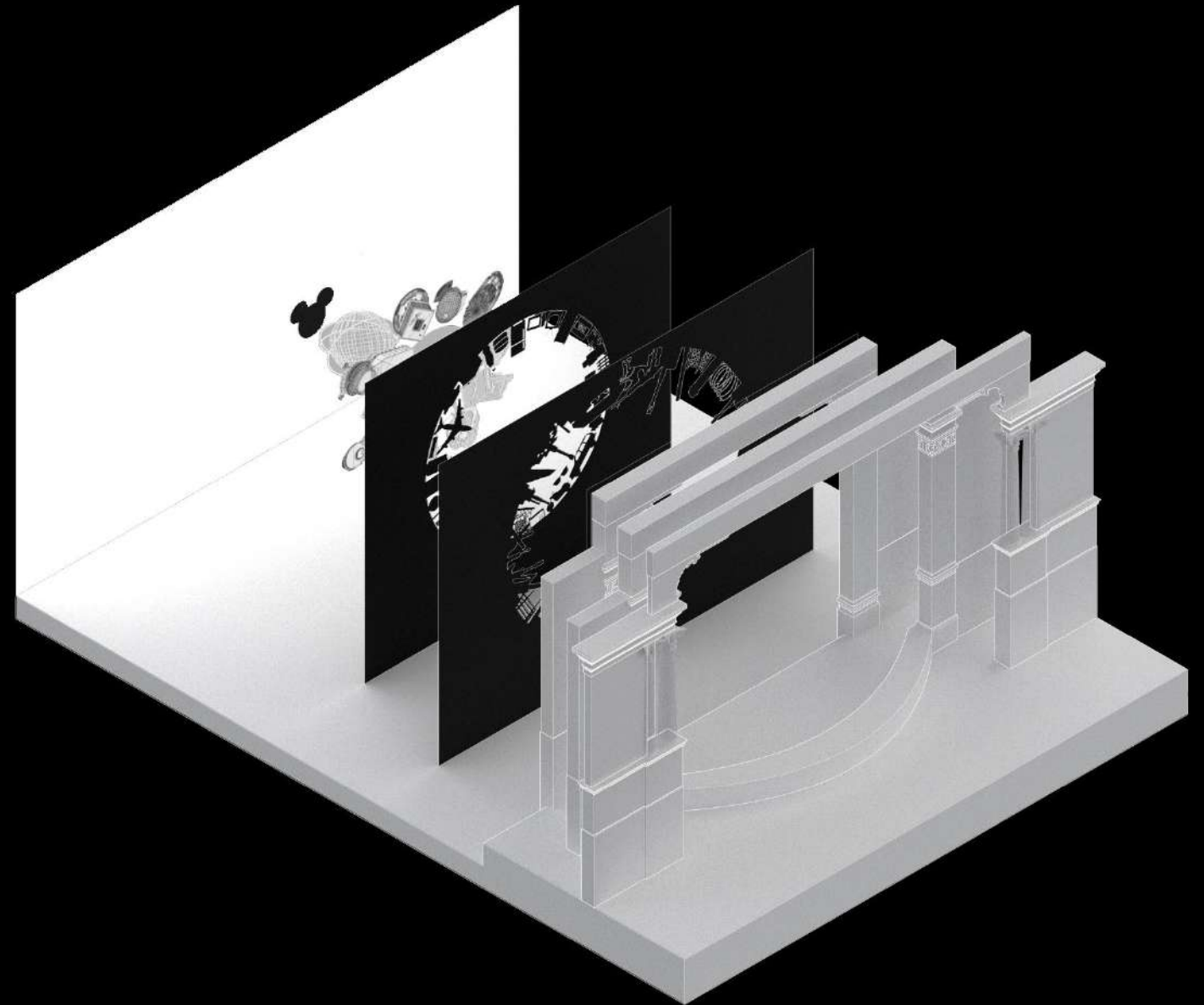
The conceptual model, a vertical concentric section, functions as a Baudrillardian theater of "Simulacra":

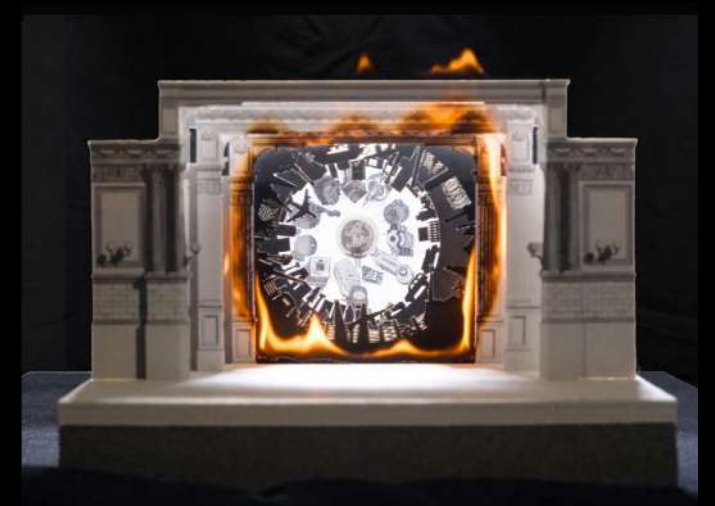
The first layer representing the military-industrial complex of the Cold War. Utilizing heavy black museum board, bunker-like sections, and chaotic scaffolding, it exposes power in its most primitive, violent form—a physical substrate locked in gravity and nuclear anxiety, buried beneath the utopian narrative — the brutal world.

The middle layer is no longer a factory of goods, but a factory of meanings. It functions as a capitalist assembly line that dehydrates social crises and reassembles

them into 1970s commodity fetishes (cars, televisions, credit cards). As Baudrillard posited, the sign precedes the reality; here, complex societal contradictions are transformed into alienated silhouettes of consumer objects, acting as a "Masque" for visual dominance.

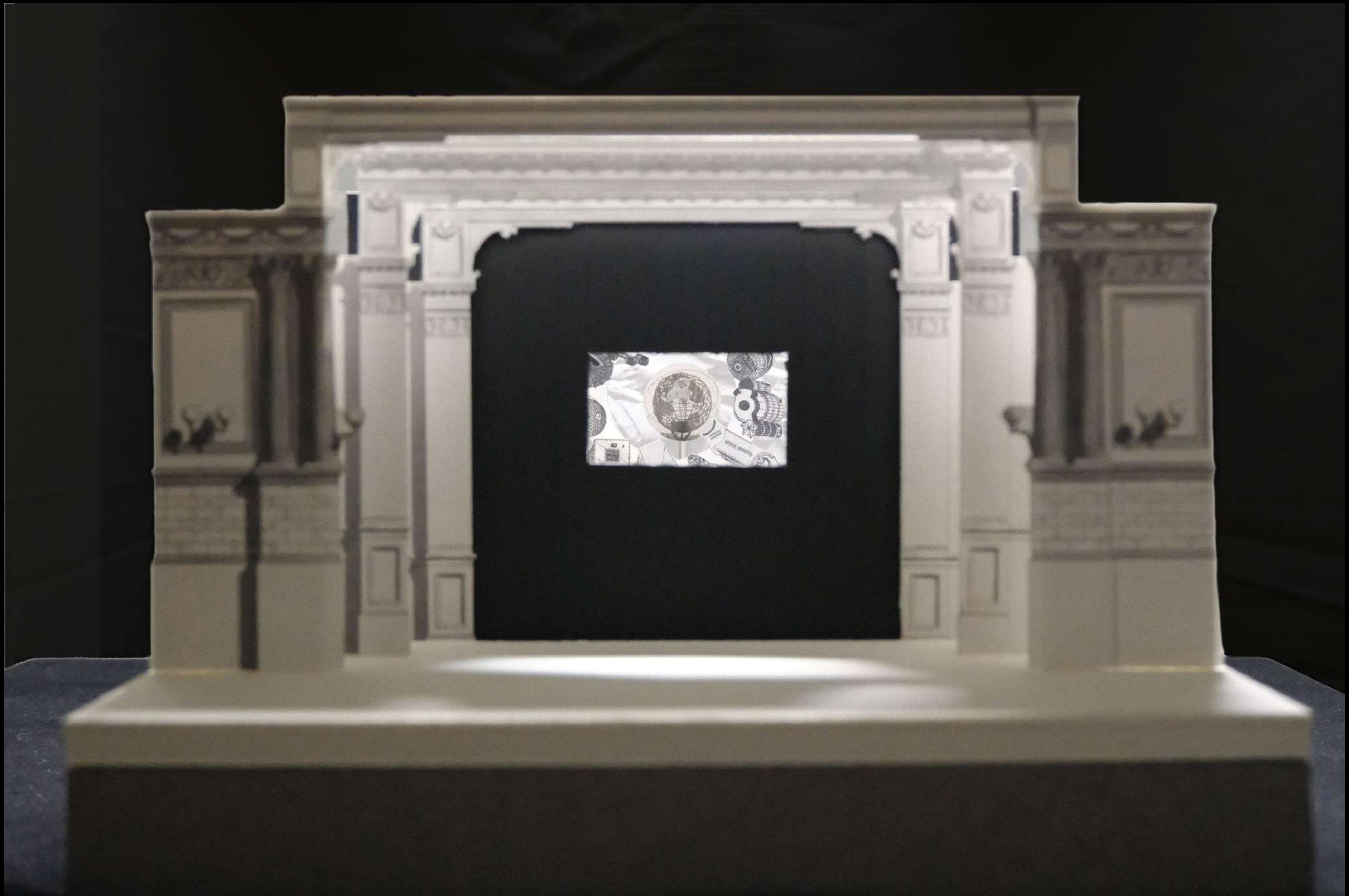
The Innermost Layer holds the core fragile, intangible "Ghostly Future." As the Unisphere collapses within the flames, the grand narrative of technological salvation undergoes an implosion. Mirroring the Phantom's disappearance in the burning Opera House, this destruction completes a historical reckoning.

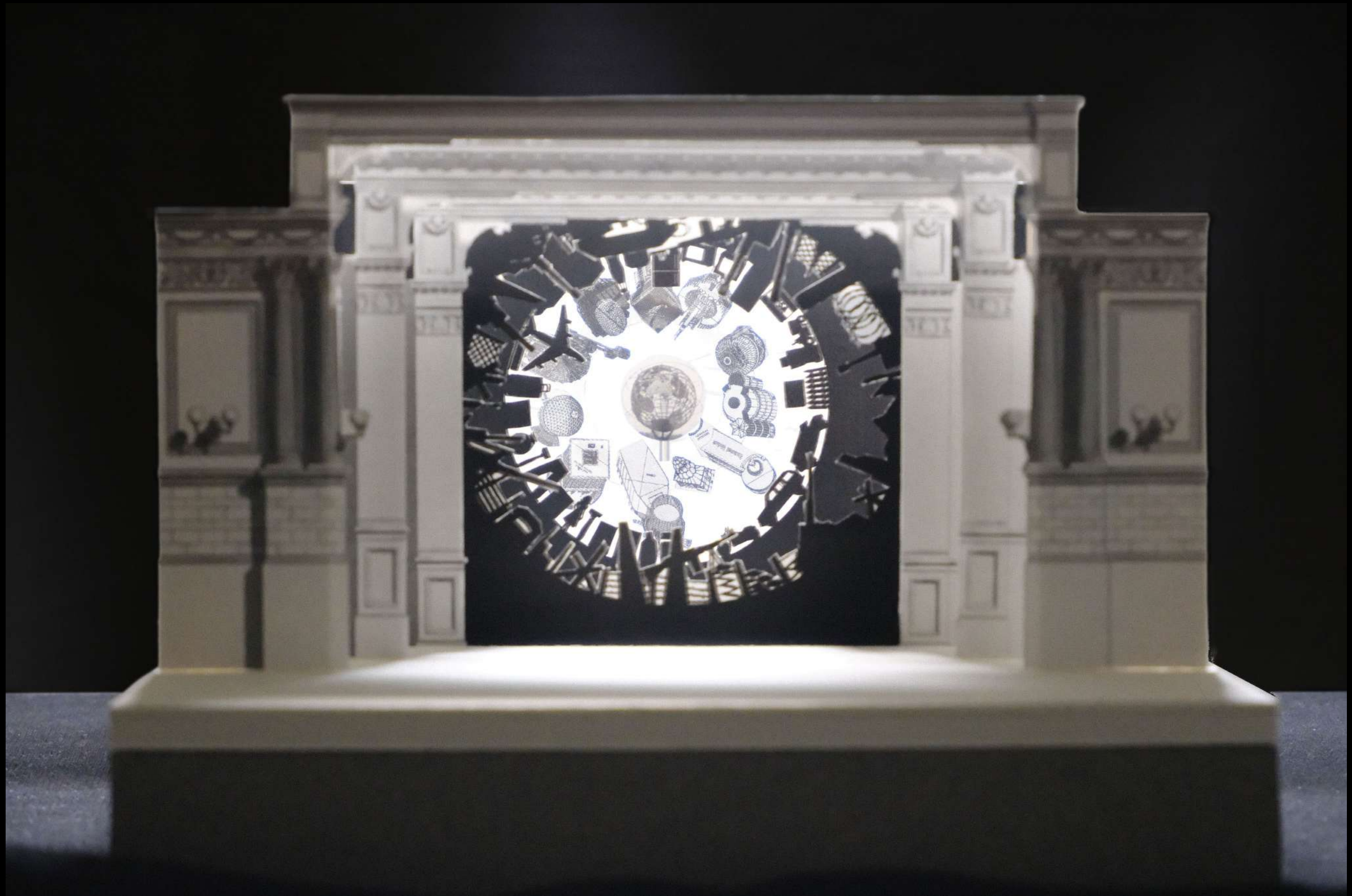




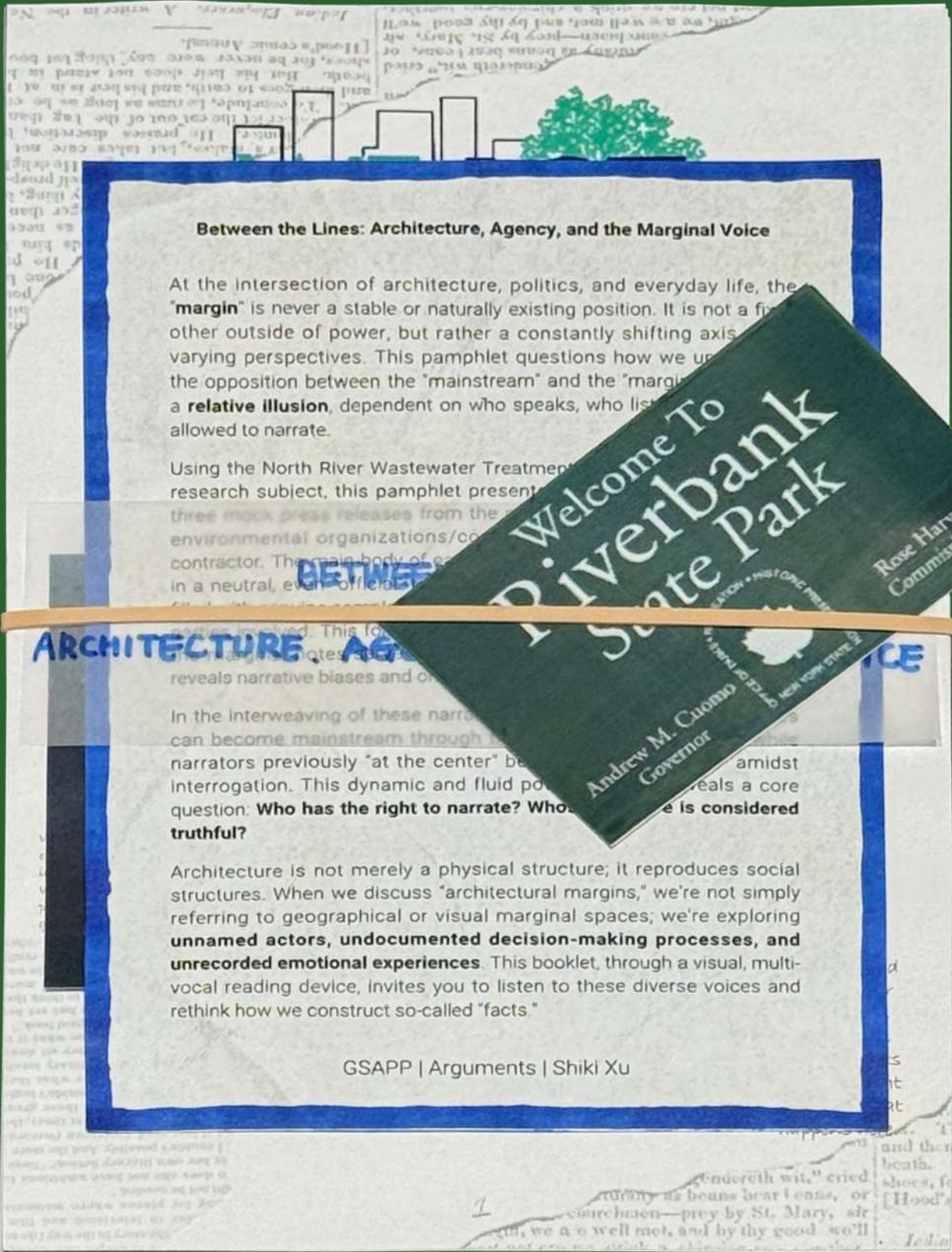
The fire persists as a profound metaphor, echoing the night in London when the Crystal Palace—the world's first iron-and-glass Expo structure of 1851—succumbed to a catastrophic inferno. As the flames incinerate the last vestiges of modernism, the model's innermost depths unveil a primal specter: the silhouette of Mickey Mouse, a ghost birthed in 1964 and now haunting the Disney Empire.

This revelation aligns with Baudrillard's assertion that "Disneyland exists in order to hide that it is the 'real' country... that all of America is Disneyland." It signifies that the specter of the World's Fair has not perished; rather, through total "virtualization," it has erected a perpetual, reality-less cycle of consumption atop the debris of history.





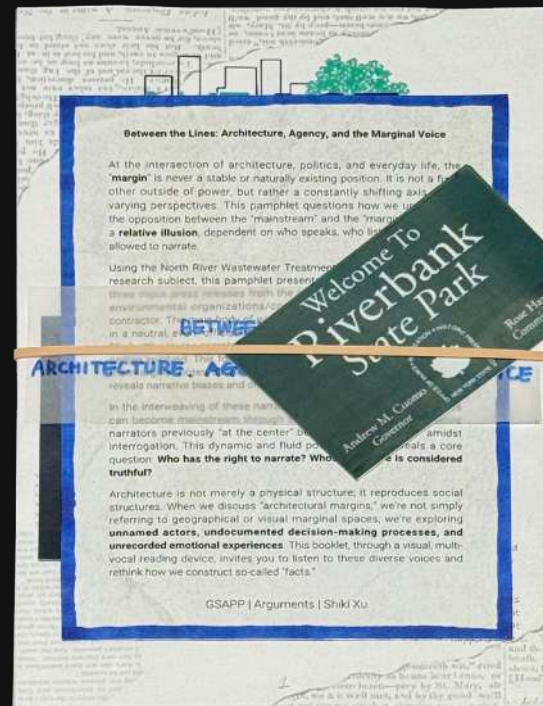




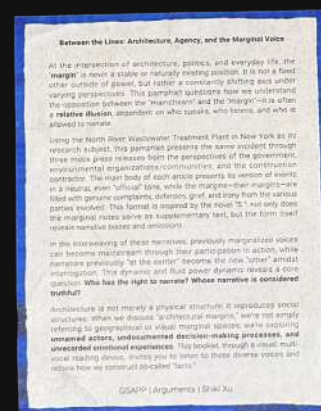
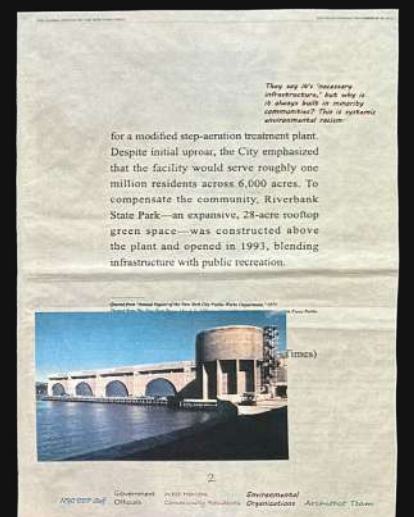
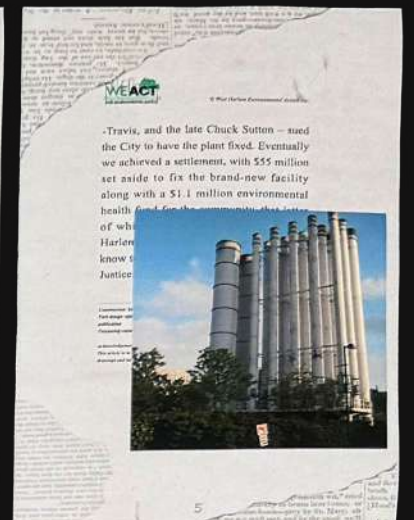
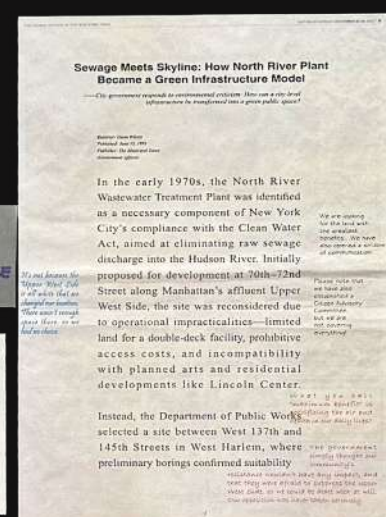
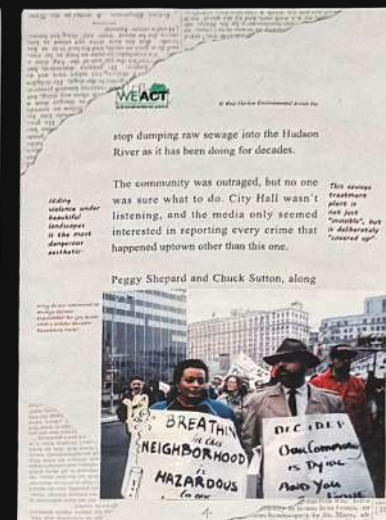
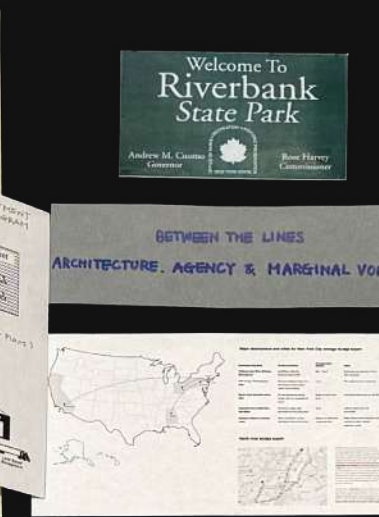
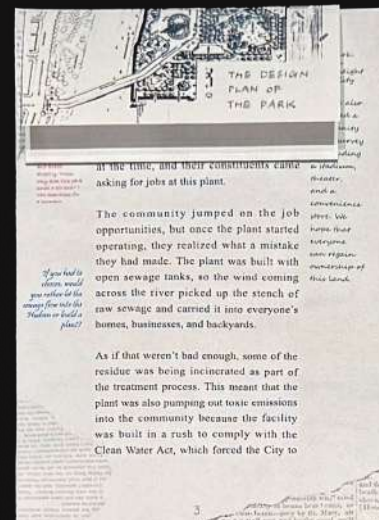
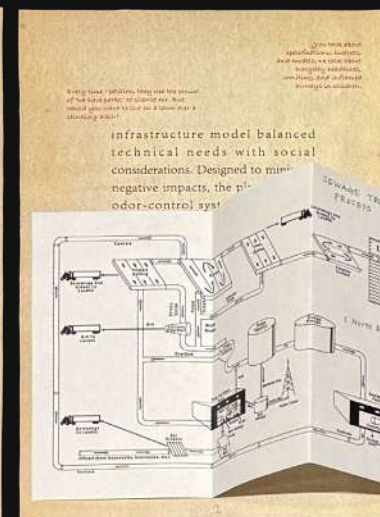
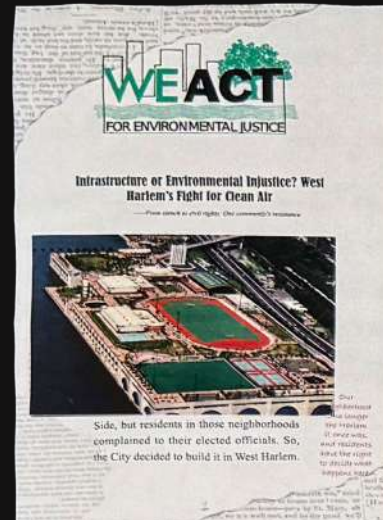
Elective: Arguments
Summer 2025
Critic: Marie de Testa

Typeface Desgin
ORBITAL is a structural deconstruction of the Latin character set, replacing calligraphic tradition with a rigorous logic of geometric assembly. Synthesized from absolute arcs and uniform beams, the typeface operates as an extension of tectonic thinking. It rejects decorative surplus, building complexity through the layered progression of minimal units—a direct application of simple principles to generate spatial tension.

The monolinear consistency grants the text block a standardized materiality, transforming it into a rational "spatial field." ORBITAL is engineered to construct atmosphere through precision, where negative space holds the same informational density as the physical strokes. By simulating the logic of structural force systems, the typeface evolves from a passive carrier of language into an active "informant" of space. It internalizes rational structure into a visual rhythm, establishing a stable, deep geometric field upon the page.



At the intersection of architecture, politics, and everyday life, the "margin" is never a stable or naturally existing position. It is not a fixed other outside of power, but rather a constantly shifting axis under varying perspectives. This pamphlet questions how we understand the opposition between the "mainstream" and the "margin"—it is often a **relative illusion**, dependent on who speaks, who listens, and who is allowed to narrate.



Using the North River Wastewater Treatment Plant in New York as its research subject, this pamphlet presents the same incident through three mock press releases from the perspectives of the government, environmental organizations/communities, and the construction contractor. The main body of each article presents its version of events in a neutral, even "official" tone, while the margins—their margins—are filled with genuine complaints, defenses, grief, and irony from the various parties involved. This format is inspired by the novel "S."; not only does the marginal notes serve as supplementary text, but the form itself reveals narrative biases and omissions.

In the interweaving of these narratives, previously marginalized voices can become mainstream through their participation in action, while narrators previously "at the center" become the new "other" amidst interrogation. This dynamic and fluid power dynamic reveals a core question: **Who has the right to narrate? Whose narrative is considered truthful?**

Architecture is not merely a physical structure; it reproduces social structures. When we discuss "architectural margins," we're not simply referring to geographical or visual marginal spaces; we're exploring **unnamed actors, undocumented decision-making processes, and unrecorded emotional experiences**. This booklet, through a visual, multi-vocal reading device, invites you to listen to these diverse voices and rethink how we construct so-called "facts."



Adv IV Studio: Hudson River's Political Personhood: Staging Alternative Fluvial Future

Summer 2025

Critic: Amaia Sánchez-Velasco & Jorge Valiente-Oriol

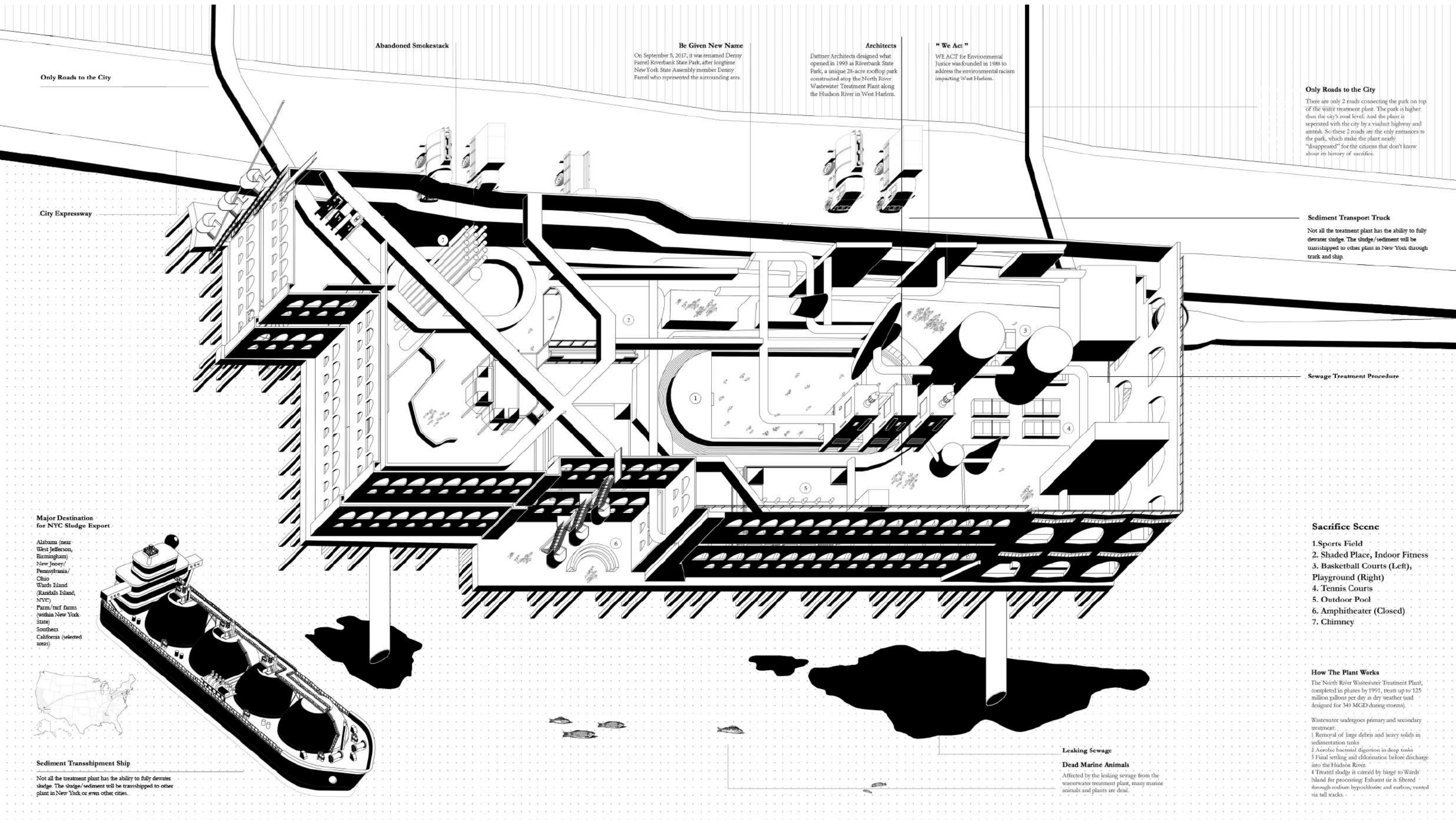
Teaching Associate: Amy Suzuki

Team: Xinyi Kong

This project investigates the North River Wastewater Treatment Plant in Upper Manhattan, addressing the environmental injustice imposed on surrounding marginalized communities. By introducing the concept of "sacrificing sacrifice," the design seeks to dismantle the zero-sum hierarchy between urban waste, public health, and local ecology.

The proposal reimagines infrastructure through speculative metabolic scenes where daily life and technical systems overlap. Ultraviolet disinfection zones are repurposed as communal sunbathing grounds, while organic waste is processed within a "waste sanctuary" to produce nutrient-rich compost. Furthermore, filtered wastewater sustains endangered oyster populations, and captured methane gas powers a central musical tower, transforming a hidden urban burden into a celebratory public landmark.

The methodology focuses on collapsing traditional binaries—such as pollution versus ecology and waste versus resource—into a state of coexistence. By integrating perspectives from public health, marine biology, and sociology, the project positions architecture as a platform for interdisciplinary dialogue. Ultimately, it challenges the frameworks of modern infrastructure, moving beyond technical solutions toward a broader critical practice of urban metabolism.







Constructing the Fluvial Future: Scene Renderings

- 1

The Scene: Worm's Shit Sanctuary. That beast of a bulding that turned pipes and vents into public expression. Our pipes grow food. Our scaffolds hold rain. Our compost heats the roots. Everything here is part of a cycle, a flow, a metabolism. Not a metaphor. A literal system of energy, waste, and renewal. The city's stomach, on full display. This is our patch of soil and worm farm.
- 2

The Scene: UV-light Bath Club. More of the existing structures that were oncebaried underground. we've tansformed the UV light water refinement chambers into spaces that aren't just for water treatment, they are occupiable by people. Under the playground, beneath the steel grid, there's a pool, a place to pause, float, cool off. And yes, the original machines are still there, doing their work. Grids follow the structure, but the pools couldbreak free, irregular, soft, uncontained.
- 3

The Scene: Market & Long Table for Food. we created this space so that people from the community can sit together along a shared table and engage im conversaion. It's a place that celebrates the individuals who, make up the society, strengthening connections and reinforcing relationships among them.
- 4

The Scene: Pool for both People and Oysters. This long strip of water flows from inside the building to outside, connecting bodies and shells. One part is for swimming, The other? An oyster nursery. We share the pool, because metabolism doesn't stop at the human body.

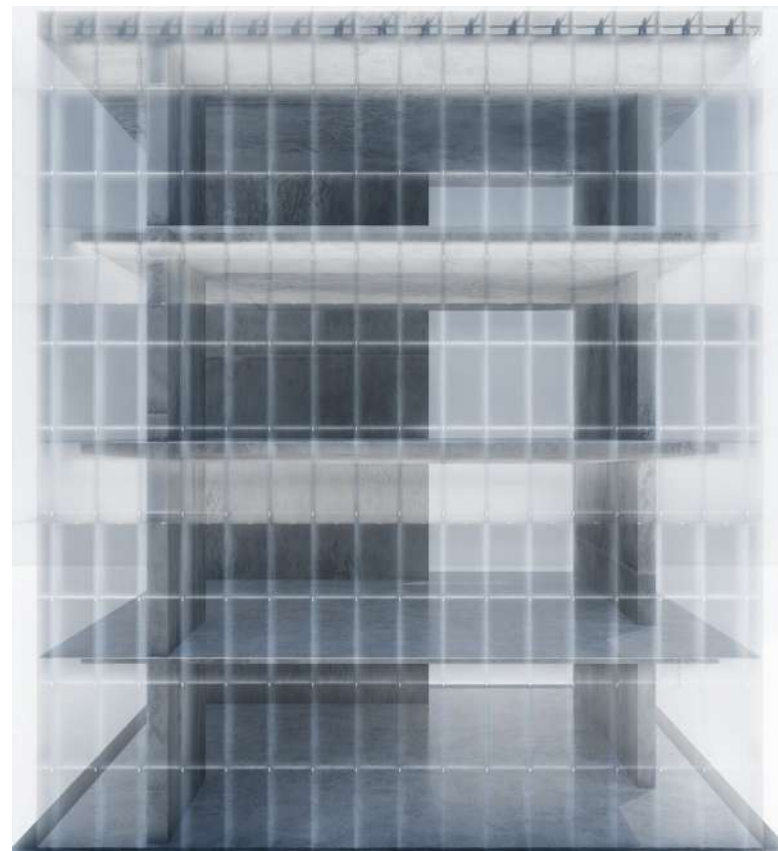
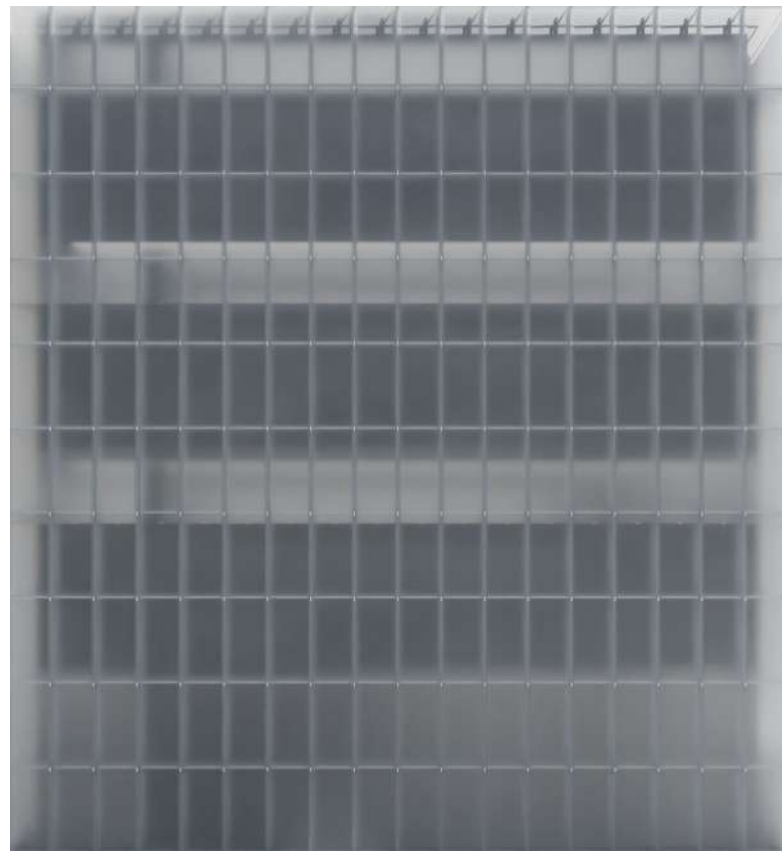
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3	4



Elective: Rendering Systems
Fall 2025
Computation
Critic: Seth Thompson

This project investigates the atmospheric agency of Peter Zumthor's Kunsthhaus Bregenz through a simulated diurnal sequence. By navigating the transition from daytime materiality to nocturnal luminescence, the study dissects the building's façade as a metabolic filter rather than a static boundary. The investigation focuses on the interplay between the multi-layered glass shingles and the interior concrete volumes, examining how transparency and light conditions reshape the perceived boundaries of space. Moving from "skins to bones," the sequence explores the structural logic through the lens of fluctuating solar and artificial radiation, treating the façade as a reactive interface that modulates the relationship between the monolithic interior and the urban environment of Lake Constance.

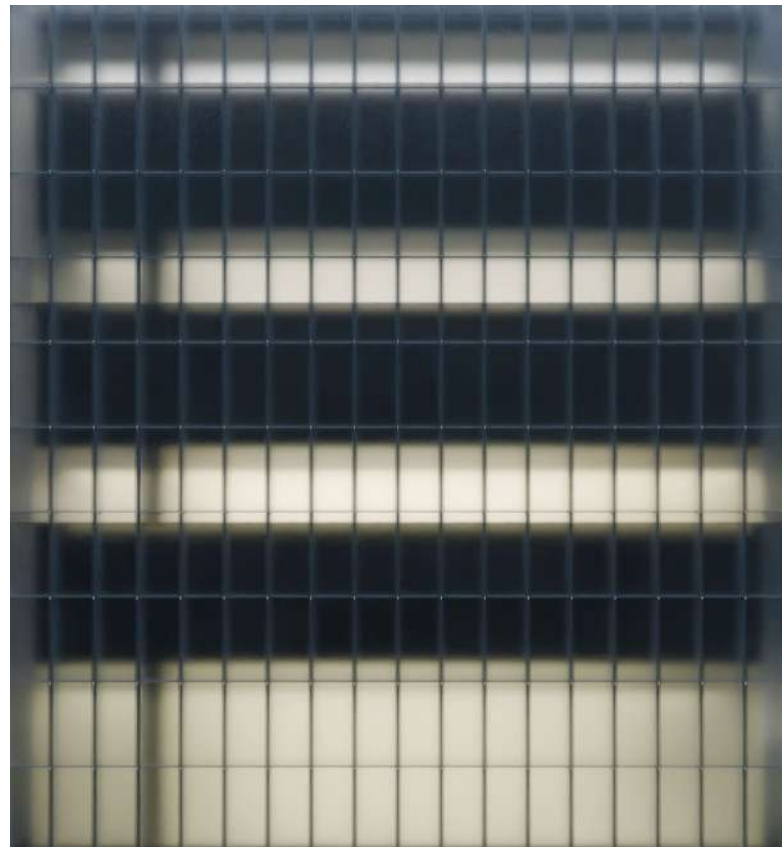




1



1 Day Series
2 Night Series



2

The rendering sequence captures a fundamental volumetric inversion between day and night. During daylight, the museum operates as an opaque, monolithic "ice cube," where the hazy diffusion of solar light emphasizes the shingles' physical grain. As the sun recedes, the hierarchy is radically reconfigured. The internal lighting, housed within the plenums between the concrete slabs and the glass skin, transforms the building into a luminous machine. While the physical structure is defined by stacked "concrete bowls," the nocturnal illumination suggests a spatiality derived from the interstitial mezzanines. Light becomes the primary tectonic agent, reshaping the viewer's perception of mass and void. The final summary exaggerates chromatic attributes to emphasize this atmospheric deduction: a transition from a material object to a purely optical structure.

Adv VI Studio: OIKONOMIA: Crafting Collectivity

Spring 2026

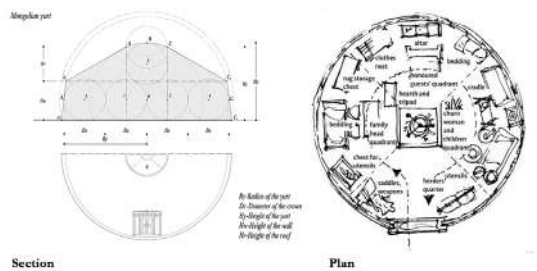
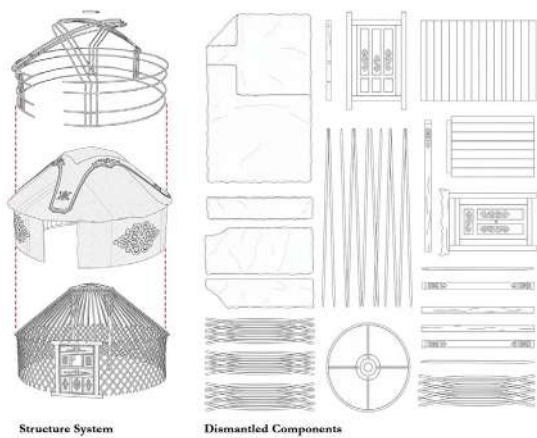
Critic: Michaeljohn Raftopoulos & Alejandro Marin

Teaching Associate: Matilda Terolli

Located in Athens, this project redefines collective life by inserting a vertical "thermal spine" into the Polykatoikia framework. The core is a monumental cylinder: housing a professional pottery kiln at its base, it extends into a metabolic vessel for exhaust and domestic "negative spaces" carved into the heated axis to foster productive symbiosis.

The project operates through a seasonal metabolism. In winter, kiln firing drives radiant floors and pyrolyzes aromatic wood, producing incense ash and meditative voids. In summer, the flue acts as a ventilation chimney for passive cooling, while the open kiln transforms into a communal music chamber, resonating sound throughout the structure. Here, the family unit shifts from kinship to "production-ship," where material, scent, and sound serve as the connective tissue mending the urban fabric.



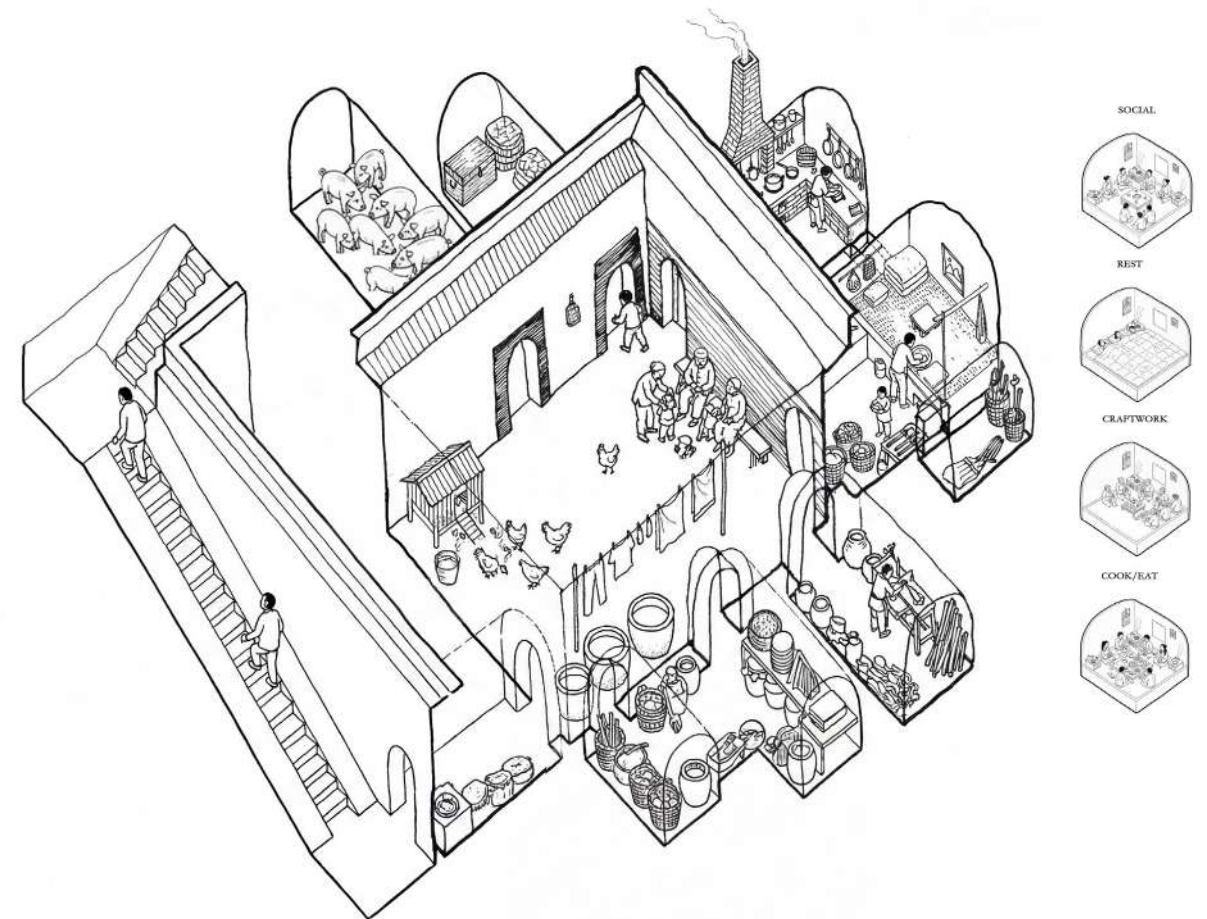


Monocell Study

Case 1: Yurt

The Mongolian Ger is a traditional portable dwelling used by nomadic people on grassland, northern part. A single open space serves all functions of life without any physical walls. The Center (Fire Pit): serves as a communal zone for eating, working, and hosting guests during the day. The North Bed (Honorary): Located in the "Hoimor" (North side), this is the Owner Couple's Bed. stable and sacred sleeping spot, situated directly behind the altar. The East (Women's Space): This side is for kitchen work, food storage, and dairy production tools. The West (Men's Space): This side is traditionally used for male activities and storing herding or hunting tools.

All components can be dismantled and packed away, making the structure easy to relocate. The lattice framework can be collapsed, and the felt coverings can be folded. Animals used by Mongolian herders when moving their homes, valued for their strong load-bearing capacity.

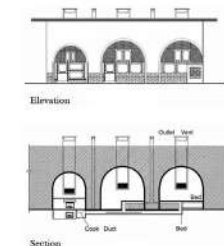


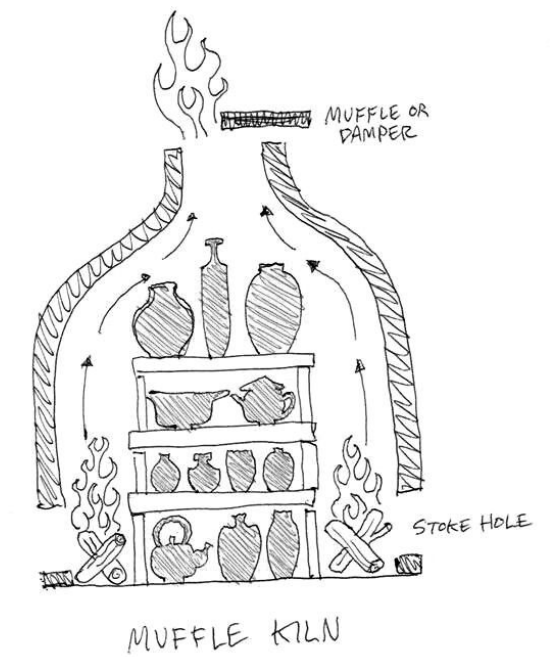
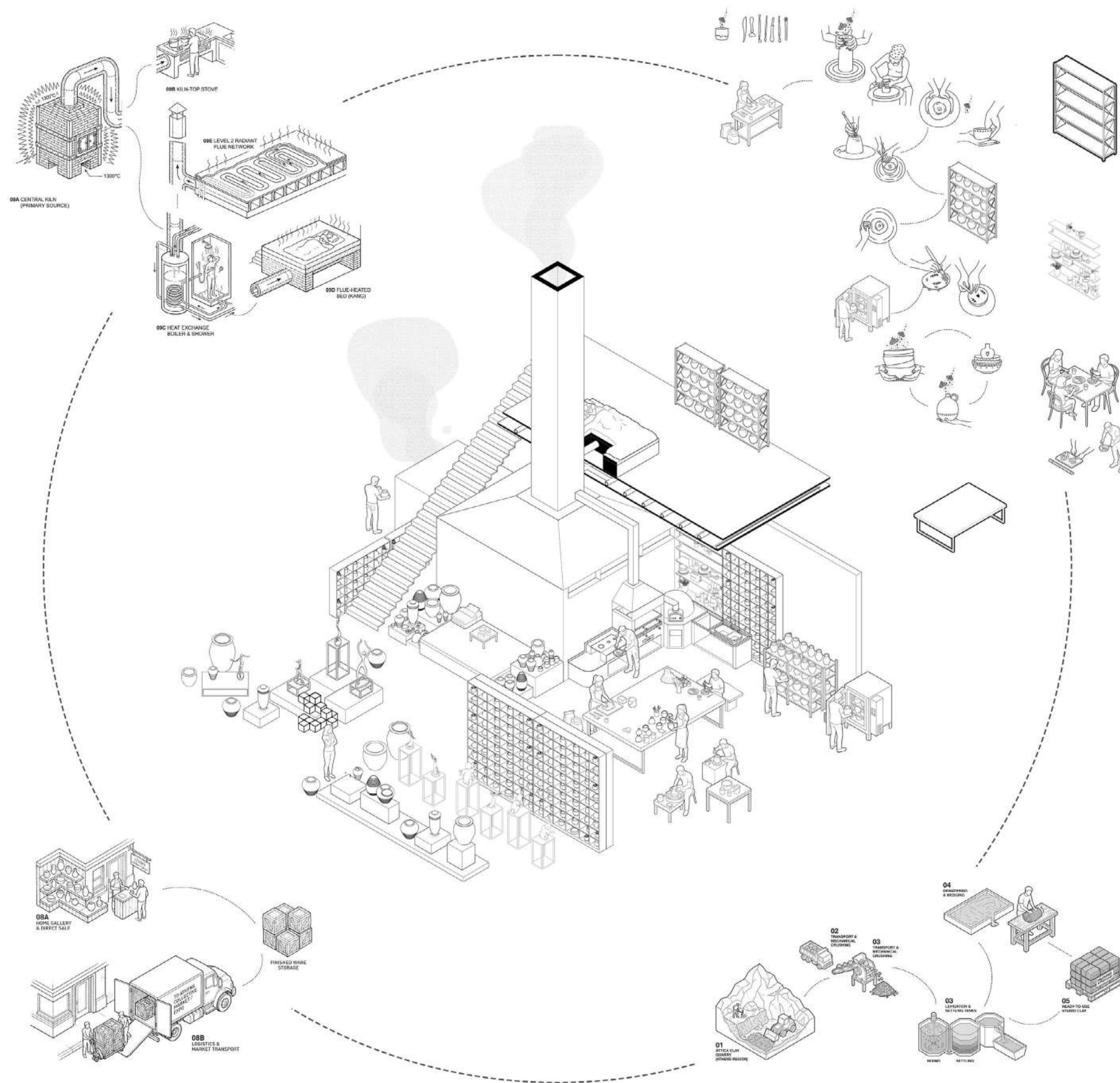
Case 2: Yaodong



In a traditional layout, three adjacent caves are often linked functionally. The Kitchen (Left) serves as the engine, where the heat from the cooking stove is channeled through flues in the walls to heat the living spaces.

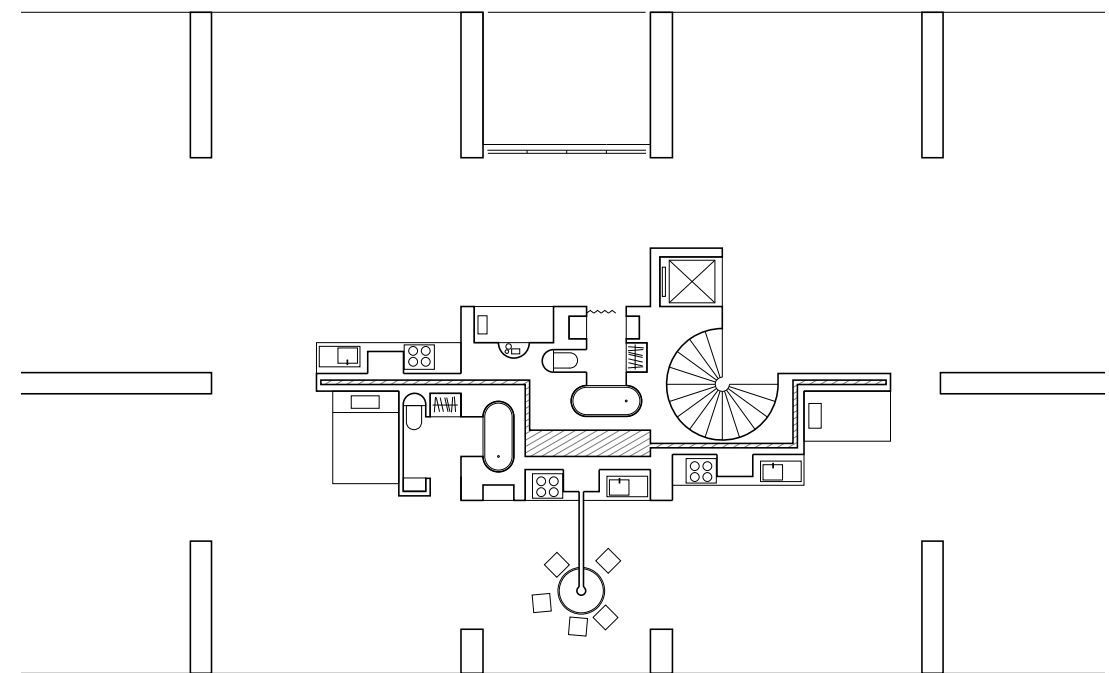
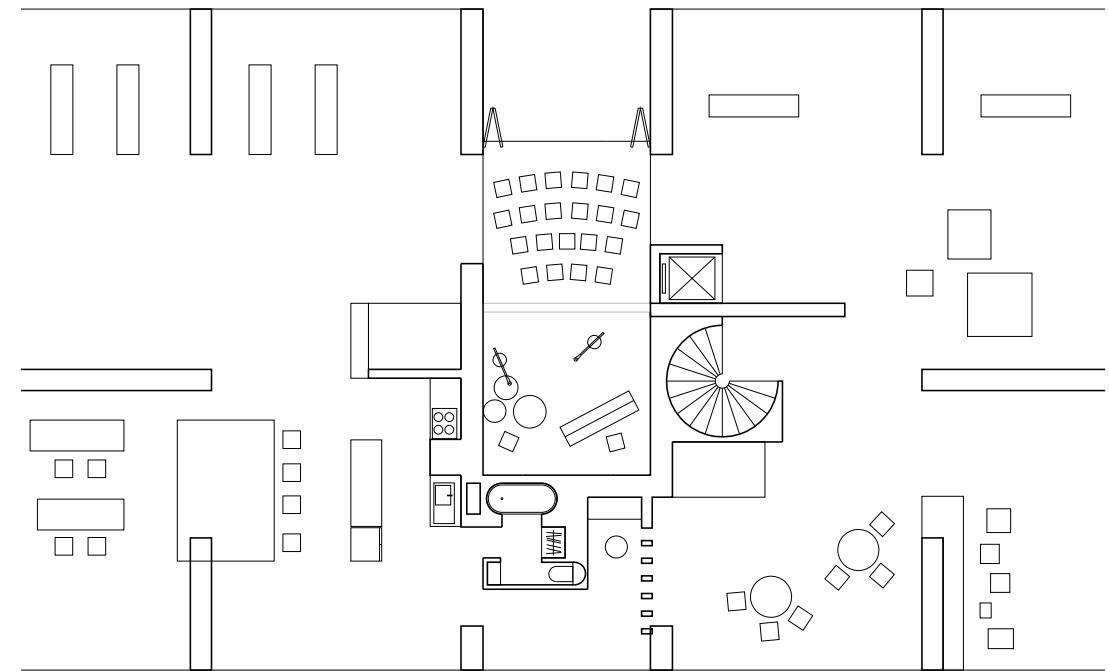
The Kang is the primary heat source, activities are condensed onto its surface: Socializing & Eating: During the day, a small table is placed on the Kang for meals and hosting guests. Production: Manual labor, such as sewing or weaving, is performed on the warm platform to combat the cave's dampness. Sleeping: At night, the entire family sleeps on this shared "Grand Bed", which retains the day's cooking heat.

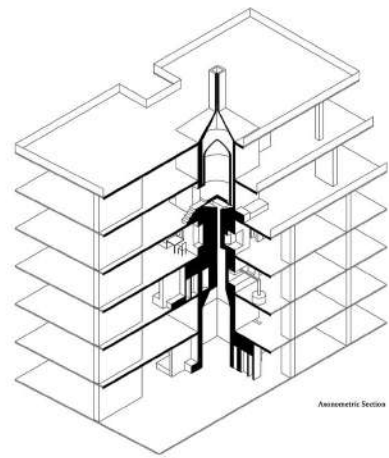




This project investigates the primitive logic of domesticity by adopting pottery as its central craft as pottery is traditional and important in Greek culture. It focuses on the development of a "monocell"—an autonomous, singular living unit where architectural form is dictated by the material and thermal demands of clay production.

Drawing from the tectonic strategies of Chinese Yaodong and Mongolian yurts, the monocell is conceived as a thermal landscape. Here, the kiln is not a peripheral appliance but the primary organizational core. Spatial zoning is defined by temperature gradients: zones for clay preparation, drying, firing, and rest are integrated into a continuous material shell. The pottery monocell serves as a metabolic prototype, where the boundaries between the maker, the craft, and the environment are blurred through the singular logic of heat transfer.

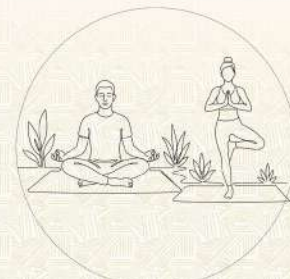




Asymmetric Section

The building survives through a metabolic cycle. In Winter, the system is fire-driven. The pottery making and firing craft is working and all the usage of heat is happening everywhere in the building. The core pyrolyzes aromatic wood at 300°C within the flue's jacket, distributing heat and scent through the negative spaces. In Summer, the kiln is extinguished, and the structure operates as a Solar Chimney. The sun-heated masonry creates a stack effect, drawing hot air out of the living units to provide passive cooling. And the ground floor which is the kiln place in winter opens the door to become a open place for music gathering for the whole building. Its unique acoustics, combined with its cavernous, monumental scale, transform it into a gathering space for music, where sound resonates vertically through the entire structure.

DOMESTICITY



Meditation and Yoga



Cooking and Eating



Music



Bathing and Sauna



Pottery Making

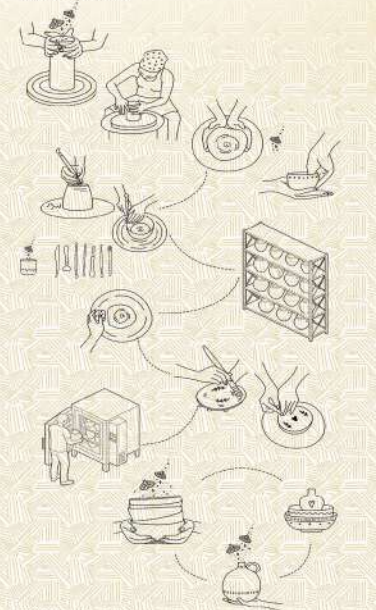


Bed: Social/Sleep

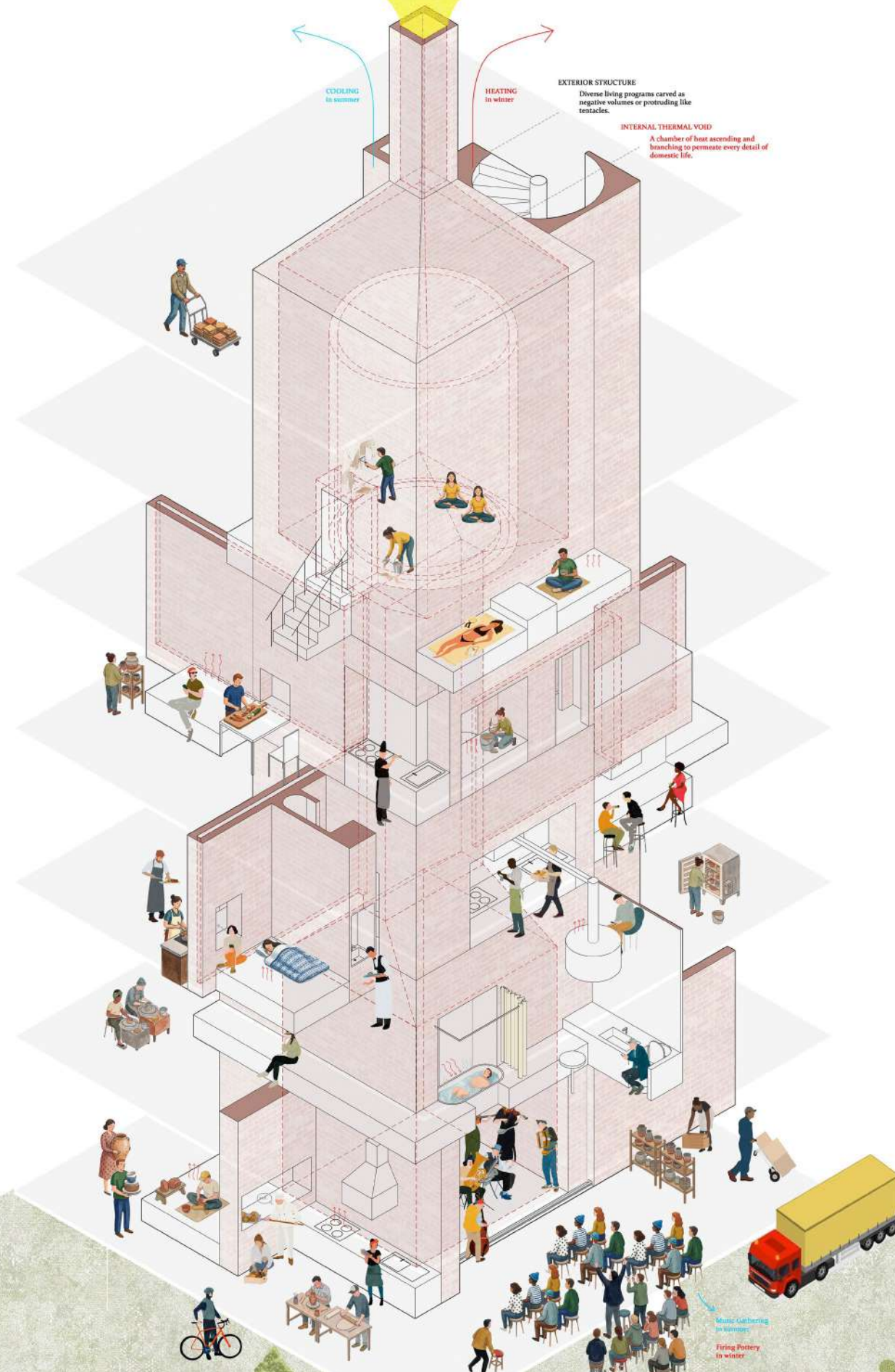
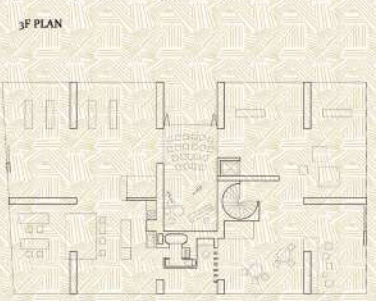
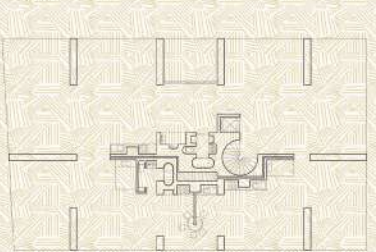
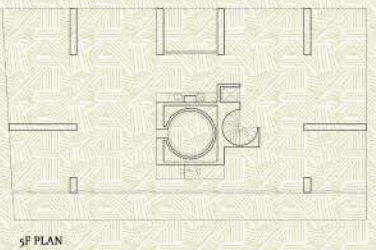
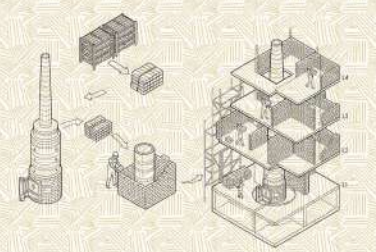
OIKONOMIA: Crafting Collectivity

CRAFTING

Craft: Pottery Making



Kiln Making the Building



SHIQI XU

LEFT MY CITY FOR SAN FRANCISCO
TOOK A FREE RIDE OFF A BILLION
AIRES. JET LAIM FROM NOW-HERE
WH-IO AM I TO LOVE YOU LAIVE GOT
NOTHING WH-IO AM I TO LOVE YOU
WHEN I'M FEELING THIS WAY AN
DIVE GOT NOTHING TO OFFER
A NOT QUIT THE CITY THAT NEVER
SLEEPS NOT QUIT THE CITY THAT
WAKES BUT THE CITY THAT DREAMS
FOR SURE IF BY DREAMS YOU ME
AN INNIGIT MARES LAIM A DREAM
ER BUT I'M FROM NOW-HERE WH-IO AM
TO DREAM LAIM UPSET II-AVE COM
PLAINTS LISTEN TO ME THEY SAY I
CAME FROM MONEY AND DIDN'T AN
DIDN'T EVEN HAVE LOVE AND IT
SUN FAIR LAISOLD MY LIFE RIGHT
FOR A BIG CHECK AND I'M UPSET AND
NOW I CAN'T SLEEP AT NIGHT AND I
DON'T KNOW WHY PLUS I LOVE ZACH
SO WHY DID I DO THAT WH-EN I KNOW
IT WON'T LAST LAI PICKED SAN
FRANCISCO BECAUSE THE MAN
WH-IO DOESN'T LOVE ME LIVES THE
CLAIM PATIETIC BUT SO ARE YOU
CAN I COME-IOMENOW DAUGHTER
TO NO ONE TABLE FOR ONE PAR

Elective: Multi Graphics &
Representation

Spring 2026

Representation

Critic: Wael Morcos

Typeface Desgin

ORBITAL is a structural deconstruction of the Latin character set, replacing calligraphic tradition with a rigorous logic of geometric assembly. Synthesized from absolute arcs and uniform beams, the typeface operates as an extension of tectonic thinking. It rejects decorative surplus, building complexity through the layered progression of minimal units—a direct application of simple principles to generate spatial tension.

The monolinear consistency grants the text block a standardized materiality, transforming it into a rational "spatial field." ORBITAL is engineered to construct atmosphere through precision, where negative space holds the same informational density as the physical strokes. By simulating the logic of structural force systems, the typeface evolves from a passive carrier of language into an active "informant" of space. It internalizes rational structure into a visual rhythm, establishing a stable, deep geometric field upon the page.

● A TYPEFACE
FOR THE FUTURE.

GEOMETRIC
MINIMAL
TIMELESS

DESIGNED
BY SHIKI
001-025



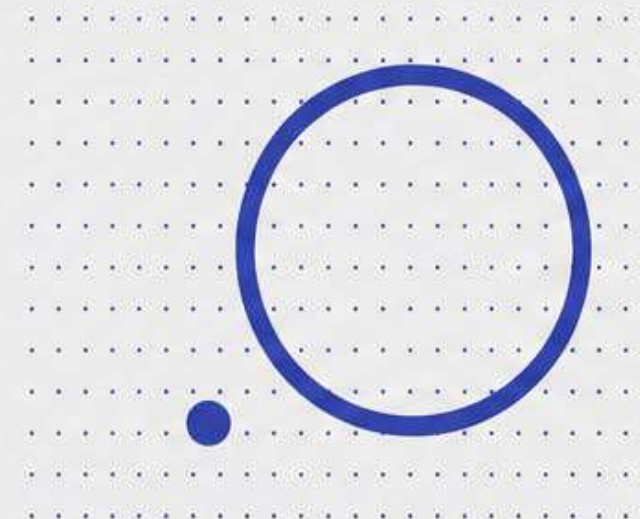
ORBITAL

PURE
FORM.
FUTURE
LANGUAGE.

—

ORBITAL IS A GEOMETRIC DISPLAY TYPEFACE
INSPIRED BY SPACE, TECHNOLOGY,
AND THE TIMELESS BEAUTY OF FORM.

A B C D E F G
H I J K L M N
O P Q R S T U
V W X Y Z



SIMPLE
YET
BEYOND
SIMPLE.

—

BUILT ON BALANCE AND
RHYTHM, ORBITAL BRINGS
CLARITY AND STYLE TO
EVERY MESSAGE.



MODERN
MINIMAL
GEOMETRIC
FUTURISTIC

—

PERFECT FOR POSTERS,
EDITORIAL DESIGN, BRANDING,
UI/UX, AND MORE.

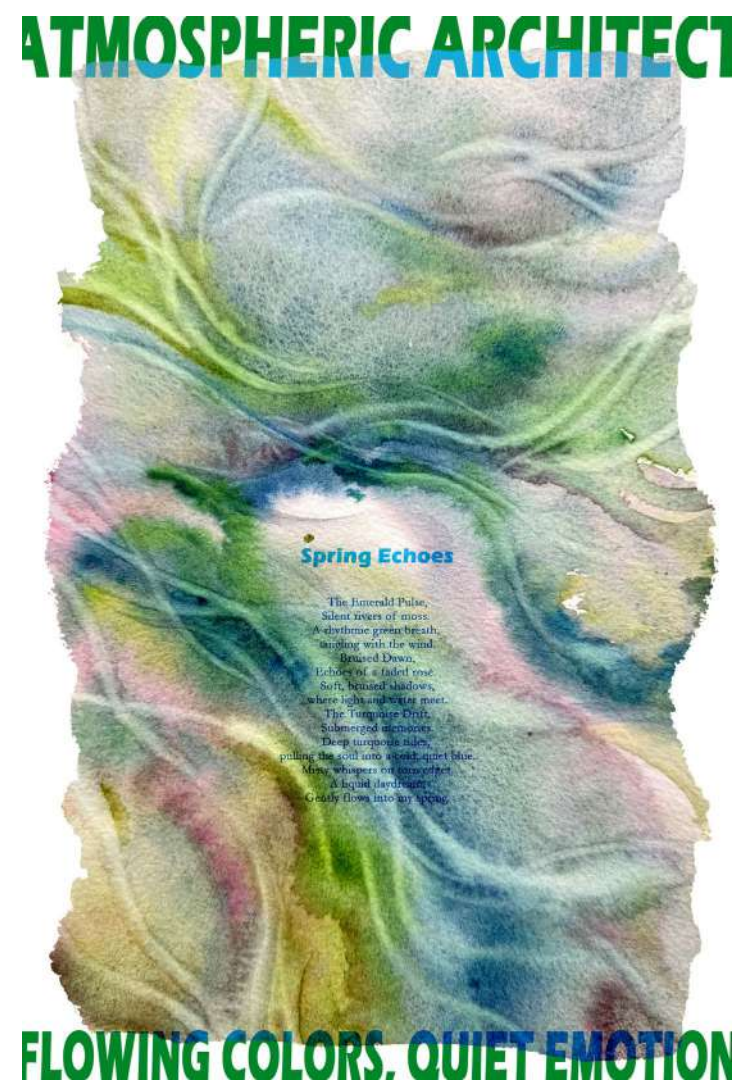
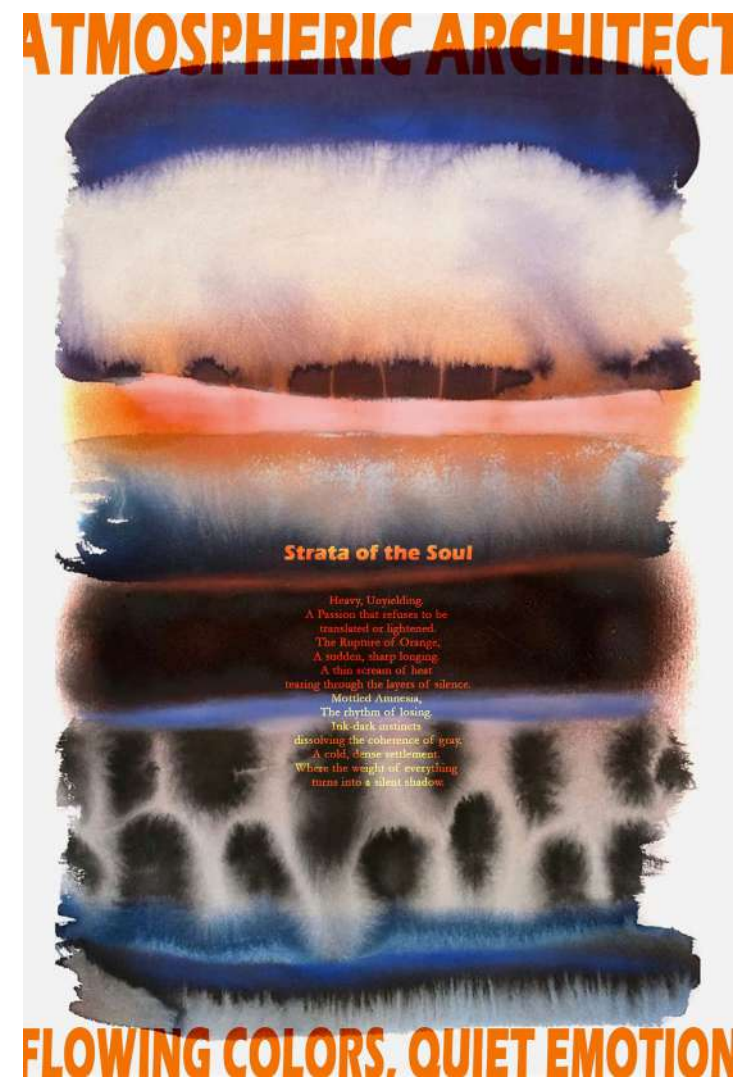
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ORBITAL
TYPEFACE
DISPLAY
SYSTEM

—

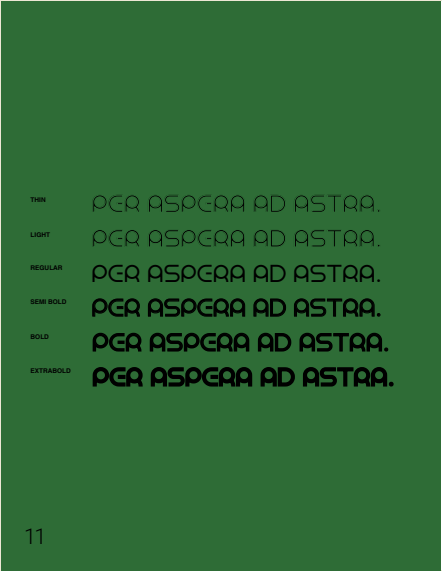
LETTERS, NUMBERS, SYMBOLS—
DESIGNED TO WORK IN HARMONY
ACROSS ANY MEDIUM.

.,!?;
:— — ()
« » / \ *



Poster Series

- 1 Strata of Soul
- 2 Spring Echoes
- 3 The Sweetest Radius



ORBITAL: GEOMETRIC ORDER AND SPATIAL ATMOSPHERE

Designed,
Written by: Shixi Xu

ORBITAL represents a structural deconstruction and reconstruction of the Latin alphabet. It abandons traditional strokes—typically rooted in handwriting conventions—in favor of a rigorous, almost industrial logic of geometric assembly: every character is composed exclusively of absolute arcs and uniform-width linear segments (beams). This strict limitation of the design vocabulary is, at its core, an extension of architectural thinking: a firm conviction that true spatial tension does not arise from ornamentation, but rather emerges through the incremental application of fundamental geometric principles—building profound complexity from simple starting points. Consequently, each letter is transformed into a miniature two-dimensional construct, designed to explore how an immense order can be established within a flat plane using the most elemental geometric units.

In this design, form itself possesses a powerful narrative capacity. ORBITAL is not merely intended to be "read"; it aims to cultivate an "atmosphere"—a spatial ambience that is intense, refined, and imbued with architectural aesthetics. The monofunctionality of the strokes dissolves the traditional hierarchies and distinctions found in calligraphy, endowing blocks of text with a standardized "materiality" within the typographic layout. These repetitive and precise visual characteristics are designed to ensure that the reader, before processing specific semantic information, first

perceives the sense of space defined and enclosed by this geometric order.

Within ORBITAL's structural system, negative space carries an informational weight equal to that of the solid lines. The closure of arcs, the surgency points of segments, and the overlapping of paths are not arbitrary graphic embellishments, but rather stem from a precise control over the sense of spatial flow. The construction of each character simulates the logic of a load-bearing structural system. In this way, the typeface transcends its role as a mere linguistic vessel to become a spatial assemblage—materializing mutual structural beauty into a visual rhythm, and ultimately constructing a stable yet profound geometric field upon the page.



Roni Horn Library of Water

aesthetic sensibilities to enjoy themselves unimpeded by your reasoning faculties.

The fine arts do this, but that is not the purpose of printing. Type will need to be visible to type, just as the perfect talking voice is the unexcused vehicle for the transmission of words, ideas. We may say, therefore, that printing may be delightful for many reasons, but that it is important, first and foremost, as a means of doing something. That is why it is unexcusable to call any printed piece a work of art, especially for art, because that would imply that its first purpose was to exist as an expression of beauty for its own sake and for the pleasure of the viewer.

Caligraphy can directly be considered a fine art wonder, because its primary concern, and educational purpose, has been taken away; printing in English will not qualify as an art until the present English language no longer conveys ideas to future generations, and until printing itself hands its usefulness to some yet unnamed successor. There is no end to the mass of practices in typography, and this idea of printing as a conveyor is, at least in the minds of all the great typographers with whom I have had the privilege of talking, the one idea that can guide you through the maze. Without this essential handle of mind, I have seen authors designers go more hopelessly wrong, make more ludicrous mistakes out of an excessive enthusiasm, than I could have thought possible. And with this, this perspective in the back of your mind, it is possible to do the most abundant of things, and find that they justify you abundantly. It is not a waste of time to go to the simple fundamentals and reason from them. In the flurry of your individual problems, I think you will not mind spending half an hour on one broad and simple set of ideas involving abstract principles.

I once was talking to a man who designed a very pleasing advertising type which undoubtedly all of you have used. I said something about what artists think about a certain problem, and he replied with a beautiful gesture: "Oh, make me, we artists do not think—we feel!" That same day I gained four centimeters in another designer of my acquaintance, and he, being less personally inclined, remarked: "You not feeling very well today, I think? He was right, he did think he was the thinking sort; and that is why he is not so good a painter, and so my mind has been better as a typographer and type designer than the



Beatrice Ward Crystal Goblet

Beatrice with me in this long-winded and tedious metaphor, for you will find that almost all the virtues of the perfect type-glass have a parallel in typography. There is the long, thin stem that chooses typography as the best. Why? Because no cloud must come between your eyes and the fiery heart of the liquid. So too the margin on type pages usually means to obviate the necessity of fudging the type page! Again, the glass is colorless or at the most only faintly tinged by the bowl, because the connoisseur judges more purely by its colour and its impurities of anything than others. There are a thousand moments in typography that are as impudent and arbitrary as putting post in position of red or green glass.

When a goblet has a base that looks too small for security, it does not matter how cleverly it is weighted; you feel nervous but it should tip over. There are ways of setting lines of type which may work well enough, and yet bring the reader subconsciously worried by the fear of 'shocking' lines, reading three words in one, and so forth.

Now the man who first chose glass instead of clay or metal to hold his true type 'lockdown' in the sense in which I am going to use that term. This is, the first thing he asked of his particular object was not 'This should be a bowl' but 'What must it do?' and to that extent all good typography is concerned.

There is so strange and potent a thing that it has been used in the central ritual of religion in one place and time, and another by a village with a teacher in another. There is only one thing in the world that is capable of stirring and altering man's minds to the same extent, and that is the inherent expression of thought. This is man's chief miracle, unique to man. There is no 'explanation' wherever of the fact that I can make arbitrary sounds which will lead a mind stronger to think my own thoughts. It is sheer magic that I should be able to hold a one-sided conversation by means of black marks on paper with an unknown person half my across the world. Talking, broadcasting, writing, and printing are all quite literally forms of thought transference, and it is the ability to express in tangible and receive the contents of the mind that is direct alone responsible



Robert Rauschenberg Erased de Kooning Drawing

text itself, as complex and referential as any traditional understanding of content.

A director can be the external master of a film but he didn't write, score, edit or shoot. What makes a Hitchcock film a Hitchcock film is not the story but a constellation of style, which which moves through different technology, plots, actors, and time periods like a substance of its own. Every film is about filmmaking. His great genius is that he is able to model the form into his style in a genuinely unique and entertaining way. The meaning of his work is not in the story but in the story-telling.

Designers also trade in storytelling. The elements we must master are not the content narratives but the devices of the telling: typography, line, form, color, contrast, scale, weight. We speak through our assignment, literally between the lines.

The span of graphic design is not a history of concepts but of forms. Form has evolved dramatically from one year to the next, and suggests a profession that continually revises and reshapes the world through the way it is rendered. Rather examples of graphic design, design that changes the way we look at the world, are often found in service of the most mundane context: an ad for ink, cigarettes, spaghetti or machinery. Think of Piet Mondrian's condensation for electrical cable or the novel posters of Cassandre or Maitre; or the New Wave work of Wimpey, Griesman and Freedman; or the punk incursions of Jamie Reid, in which the manipulation of form has an essential, even transformative, meaning.

At a 1962 conference at the Museum of Modern Art, conservative art critic Hilton Kramer denounced Pop Art as "indistinguishable from advertising art" because "Pop Art does not tell us what it feels like to be living through the present moment of civilization. It is about it." Likewise, for me, one What is Here. Our content is, perpetually, Design itself.

the content of a typeface or why the typography of a setting magazine suddenly becomes relevant? Or how a series of end-of-year 'salvational' posters—already a medium of dubious functionality—can end up on the wall of a major design museum? Work must be saying something, which is different than being about something.

Because the nature of the designed object is limited, individual objects are rarely substantial enough to contain fully rendered ideas. Ideas develop over many projects, spanning years. Form itself is subliminal. We are intimately, physically connected to the work we produce, and it is inevitable that our work bears our stamp. The choice of projects in each designer's oeuvre lays out a map of interests and priorities. If we the singular designer in the categorical sense, not the individual. The way these projects are pared out, disassembled, reconfigured and rendered reveals a philosophy, an aesthetic position, an argument and a critique.

This deep connection to making also positions design in a mediating role between the user and the world. By manipulating form, design reshapes that essential relationship. Form is replaced by exchange. The things we make negotiate a relationship over which we have a profound control.

The trick is to find ways to speak through treatment, via a range of rhetorical devices—from the written to the visual to the operational—to make those proclamations as poignant as possible, and to return consistently to central ideas, to reexamine and re-express. In this way we build a body of work, and from that body of work emerges a singular message, maybe even what it feels like to be living now. As a popular film critic once wrote, "A movie is not what it is about, it's how it is about it." Likewise, for me, one What is Here. Our content is, perpetually, Design itself.

/ Tectonics of the Page /

In Designer as Author I argued that we are insecure about the value of our work. We are curious of the power, social position and control that artists and authors seem to command. By declaring ourselves "disempowered" we hope to garner similar respect. One desperate-of-anxiety has motivated a movement in design that values ornamentation of content over manipulation of content. Designer as Author was an attempt to recuperate the art of design itself as essentially linguistic—a vibrant, evocative language. However, it has often been read as a call for designers to generate content in effect, to become designers and authors, not designers as authors. While I am all for more authors, that was not quite the point I wanted to make.

The problem is one of content. The misconception is that without deep content, design is reduced to pure style, a bar of dithyrambs tricks. In graphic-design circles, form-follows-function is reconfigured as form-does-homework. If content is the source of form, always preceding it and imbuing it with meaning, form without content (and that were even possible) is some kind of empty shell.

The apothecosis of this notion, repeated ad nauseum (told), is Beatrice Ward's famous Crystal Goblet metaphor, which asserts that design itself should be a transparent vessel for content (the wine). Anyone who favored the creative or the beyond-the-look-at-the-designing-out. Agitation on both sides of the ideological spec-

trum took up the debate: minimalists embraced it as a minimalist; maximalists derided it as aesthetic fascism. Neither camp questioned the basic, implicit premise: it's all about the wine.

This false dichotomy has circulated for so long that we have started to believe it ourselves. It has become a ritual tenet of design education and the benchmark against which all design is judged. We seem to accept the fact that developing content is more essential than shaping it, that good content is the measure of good design.

Back when Paul Rand wrote "There is no such thing as bad content, only bad form," I remember being intensely annoyed. I took it as an abdication of a designer's responsibility to meaning. Over time, I have come to read it differently: he was not denigrating late speech or shallow or banality; he meant that the designer's prerogative is to shape, not to write. But that shaping need is a profoundly affecting form. (Perhaps this is the reason that modern designers—Rand, Minsky, Lowy—always seem to end their careers designing children's books. The children's book is the purest venue of the designer's due because the content is negligible and the evocative potential of the form unlimited.)

So what else is new? This seems to be a rather mundane point, but for some reason we don't really believe it. We don't believe shaping is enough. So to being designs out from under the thumb of content we must do one step further and observe that treatment is, in fact, a kind of

Cornelia Parker Thirty Pieces of Silver



Author: Michael Rock / 2009

AUTHORSHIP / FORM / CRITICAL DISCOURSE

FUCK CONTENT

GSAPP

SHIKI XU

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