

An abstract, glowing light pattern in the top right corner of the cover. It features a bright blue, V-shaped or U-shaped glow at the bottom, with a warmer, yellowish-orange glow above it, all set against a dark, textured background.

# Light Touch /Long Term

Projects ,  
Papers  
& Others

Camille McGriff  
Columbia GSAPP

# Light Touch/Long Term: A Portfolio of Projects, Papers & Others

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## Architectural Projects

Cloister Obscura

Commoning the Fracture

Housing in a Mass Timber Armature

A School About Waste

From Prison Farm to Table

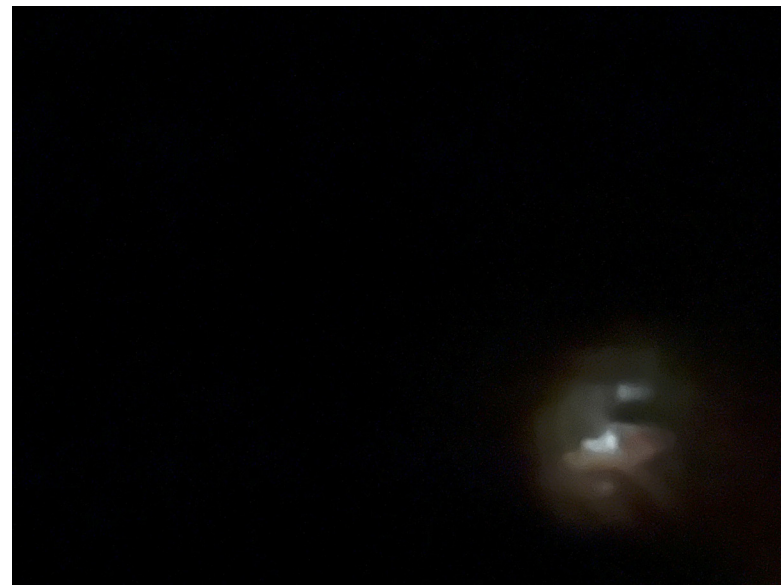
## Papers

No More Sheetrock: Straw Alternatives to Drywall  
Indeed With Everything All At Once

## Others

Collected Sketches

Collages



Camera obscura image of a paper study model in the studio in  
Avery Hall, for *Cloister Obscura*



# Cloister Obscura

ADV V Studio - Fall 2024

Critics: Mario Gooden and Raven Chacón

**Cloister Obscura** is an architectural and curatorial project, a series of interventions that rescripts the Met Cloisters with an implosion of dominant photographic perspective, and therefore the curatorial narrative of the institution. Key in these curatorial interventions that subvert the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s institutional narrative is the *camera obscura*, an installation of room-size pinhole cameras that project the external landscape of Fort Tryon Park, the Hudson River and New Jersey Palisades, and the neighborhoods of Washington Heights and Inwood into the medieval galleries within the Cloisters. The act of projecting the landscape inward, where there was once the only hardwood forest in Manhattan, implodes the imposition of European history and heitage on the site with the image of the land.

The *camera obscura* force the landscape into the galleries, reinscribing the institution and its site of the European imaginary with a projection of the exterior. In the Cuxa Cloister, the pavilion camera obscura bathes the flower and herb gardens in blue skylight and clouds that float above. In each darkened gallery, a sound installation reverberates from the opposite side of the window detail, forcing sounds into the galleries through the pinhole in the same way as light.

Other interventions to rescript the museum include a raised glass floor in the Gothic Chapel, a large block of travertine intervening between the 20th-century wall and the Tricherie window, and raising artifacts on floating black plinths. These strategies heighten the thresholds between the artifacts and their artificial environment, the architectural fragments from their context. The building is forced to reveal the dramatic timescales and vast geography of windows, door frames, and columns by intensifying the experience of entering into new spaces and creating planes that delineate one time scale from another.

Viewers step into a space originally intended to transport them to an artificial past, and are instead allowed into the very act of imaging the land over the artifacts, land over institution over land. Unsettling the narrative paradigms of public institutions enables new possibilities for hegemonies of modernity: the public convenes in a place between academy and sanctuary, interrogating possibilities beyond.

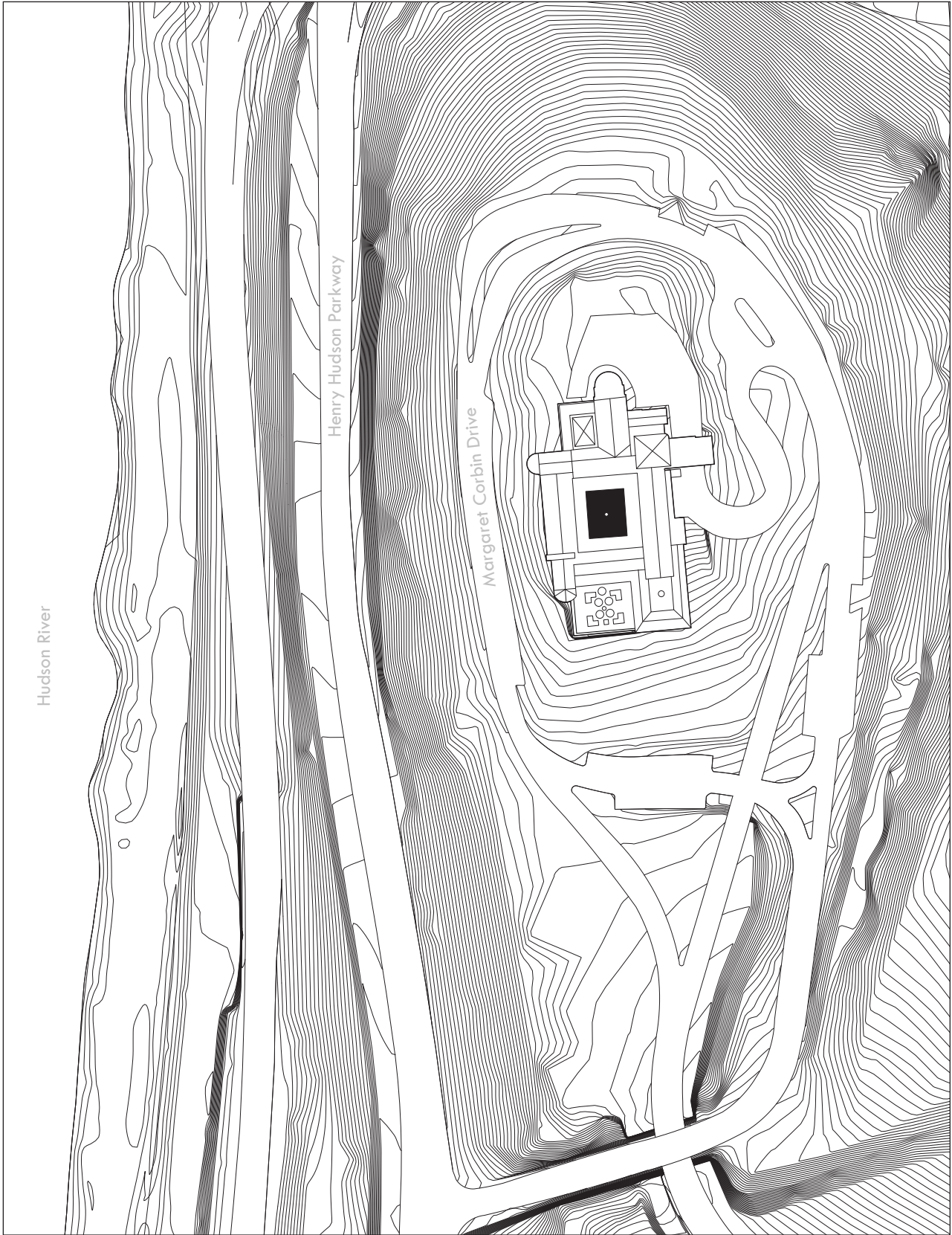
*Cloister Obscura* culminated in a multichannel video and sound exhibition. Images used for renders in this project were sourced from the Met Cloisters construction archive.

## Met Cloisters, Manhattan



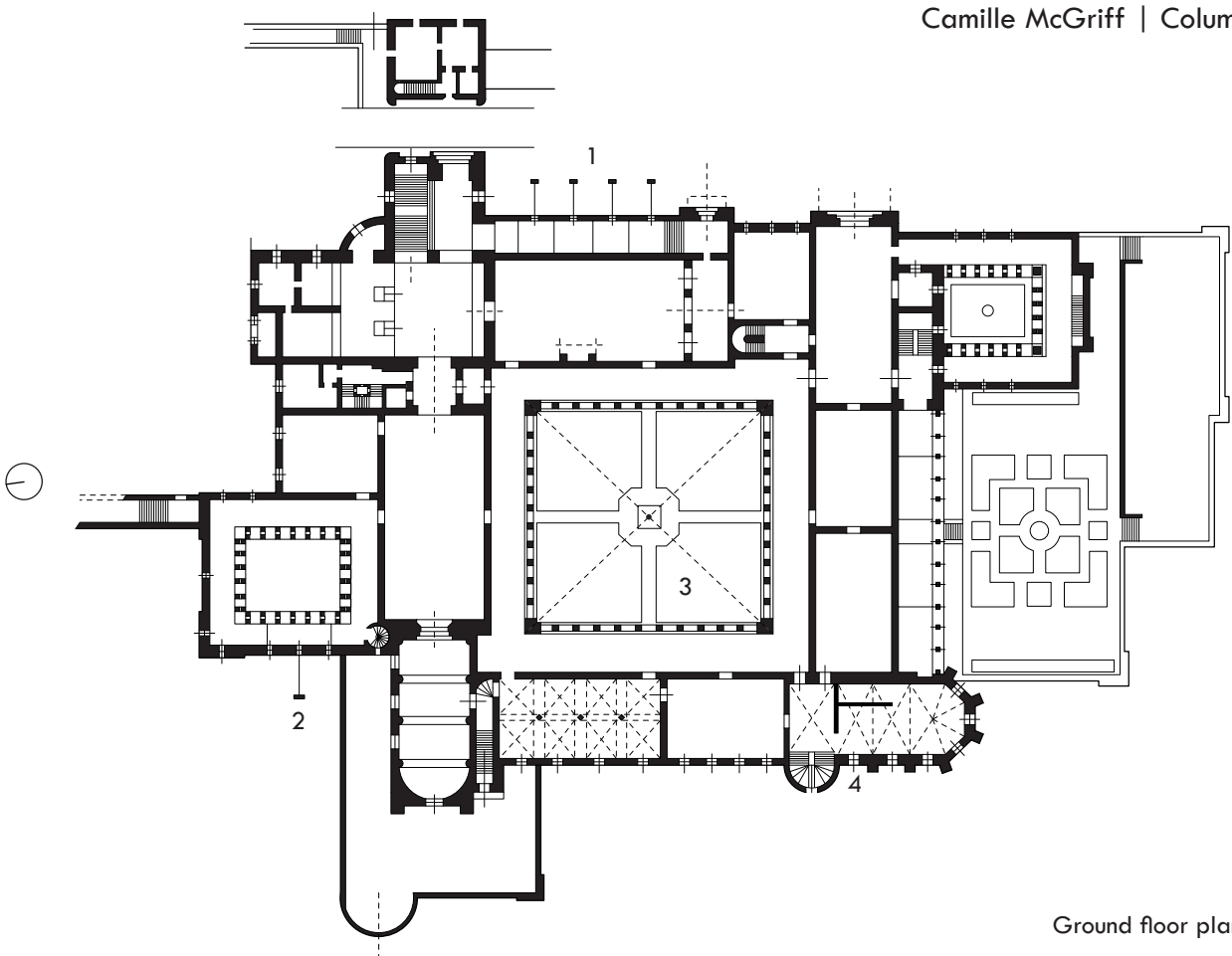
A topographic model of the Met Cloisters and surrounding area reveals the deep human interventions into the landscape during the construction process of Fort Tryon Park.



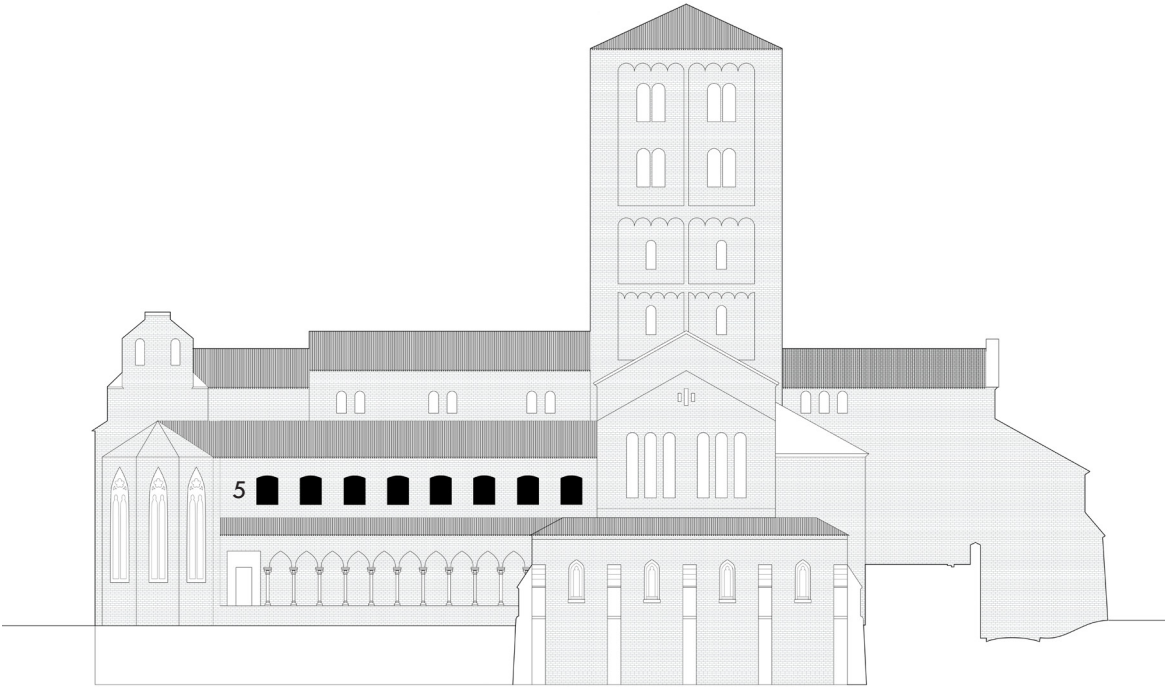


Fort Tryon Park & Met Cloisters site

1/32" = 1'-0"



Ground floor plan



South elevation

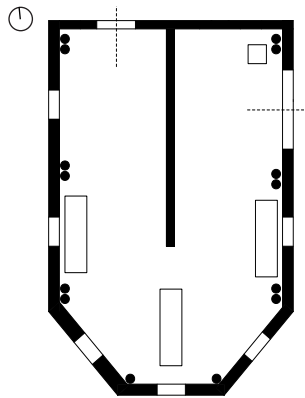
1. Froville Arcade camera obscura 2. Saint-Guilhem Cloister camera obscura 3. Cuxa Cloister pavilion  
4. Travertine threshold in the Gothic chapel 5. Camera Obscura in the Unicorn Tapestries gallery

1/16" = 1'-0"

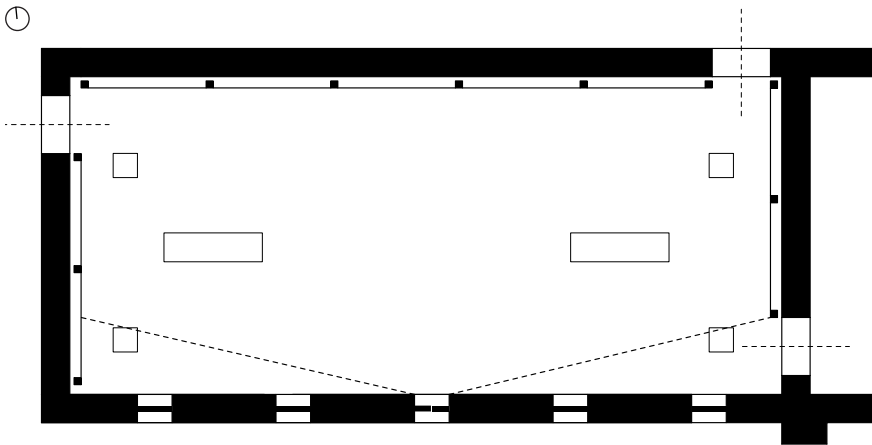




The travertine threshold, floating plinths, and raised glass floors disrupt and dissociate viewers, artifacts, and building fragments from the context.

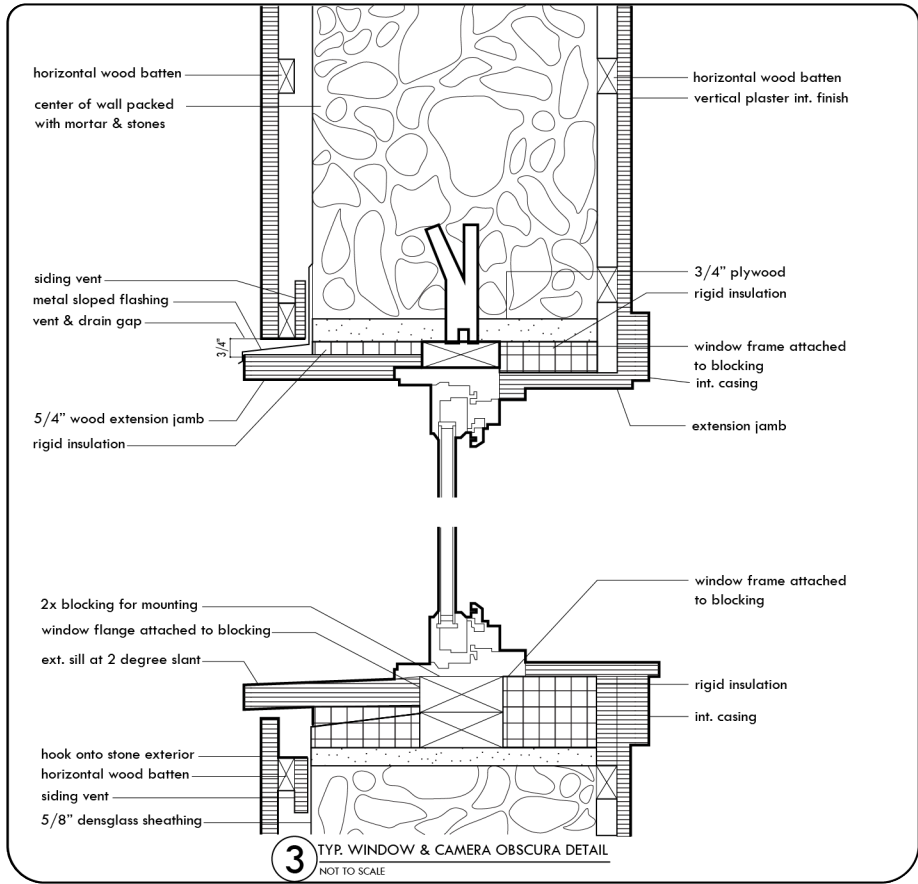
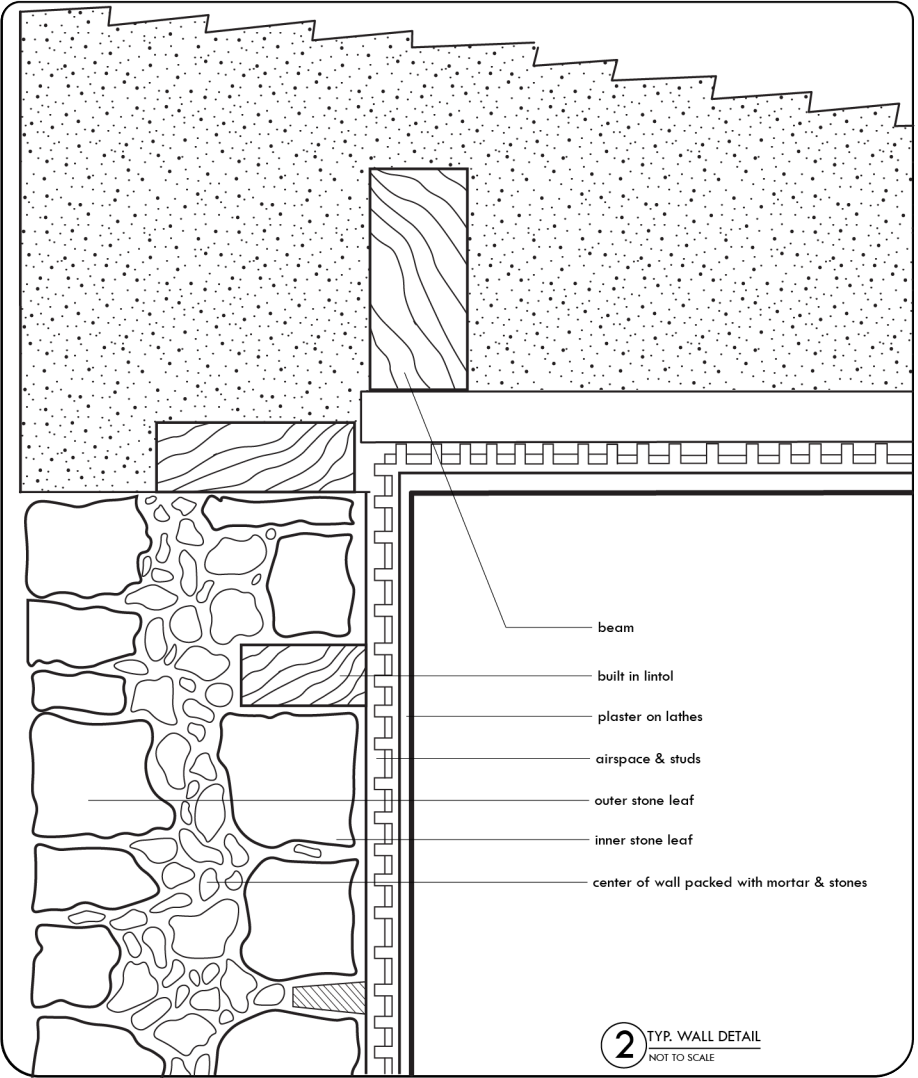
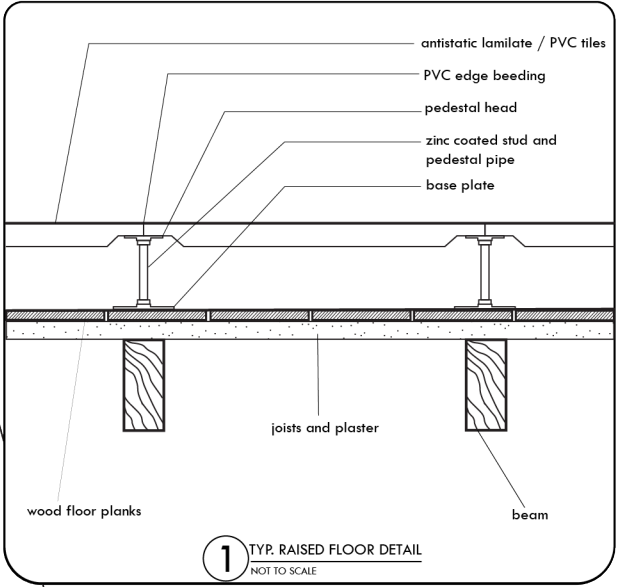
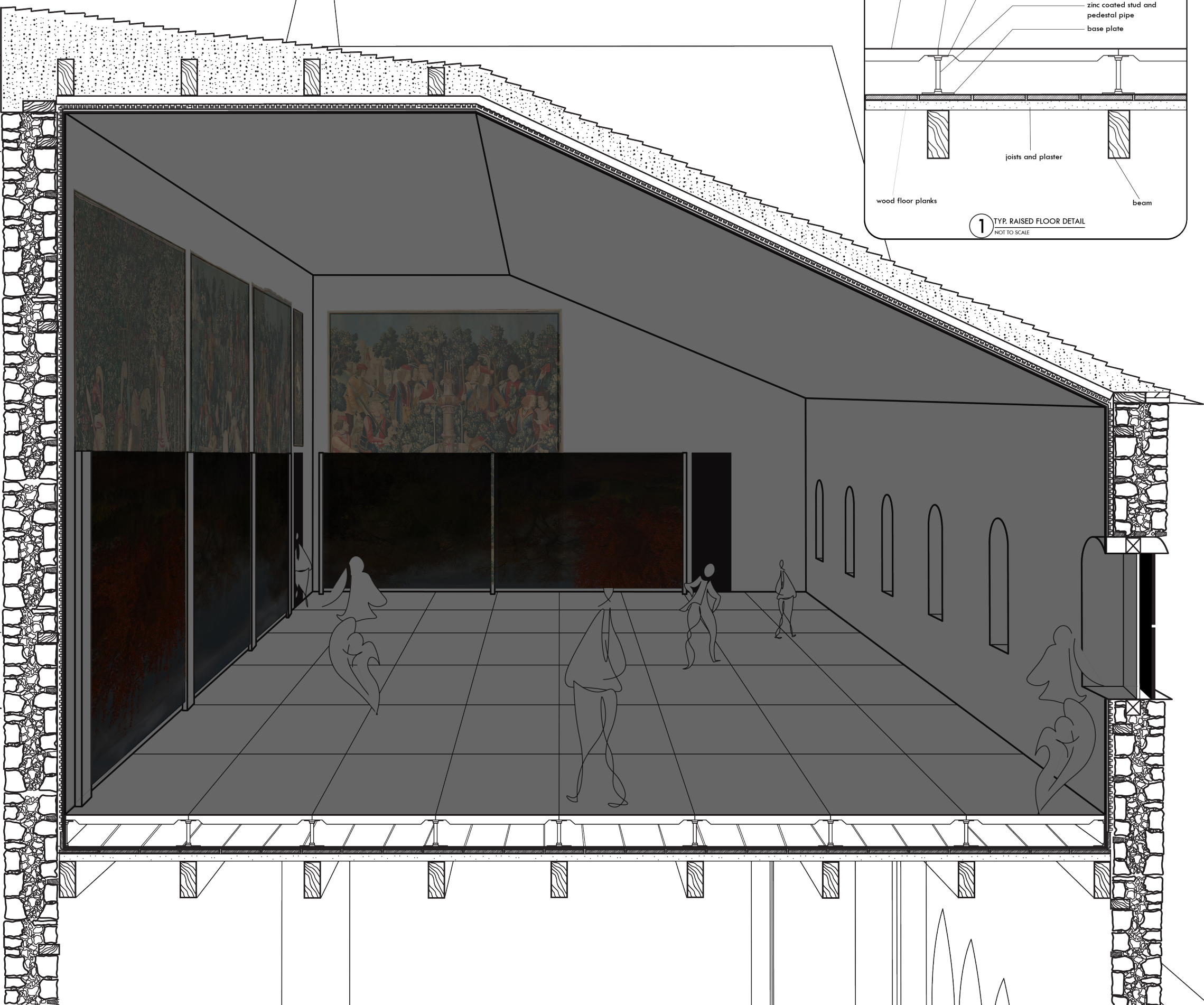


The camera obscura softly projects the live image of the park outside onto a white scrim 6" away from the Unicorn Tapestries.

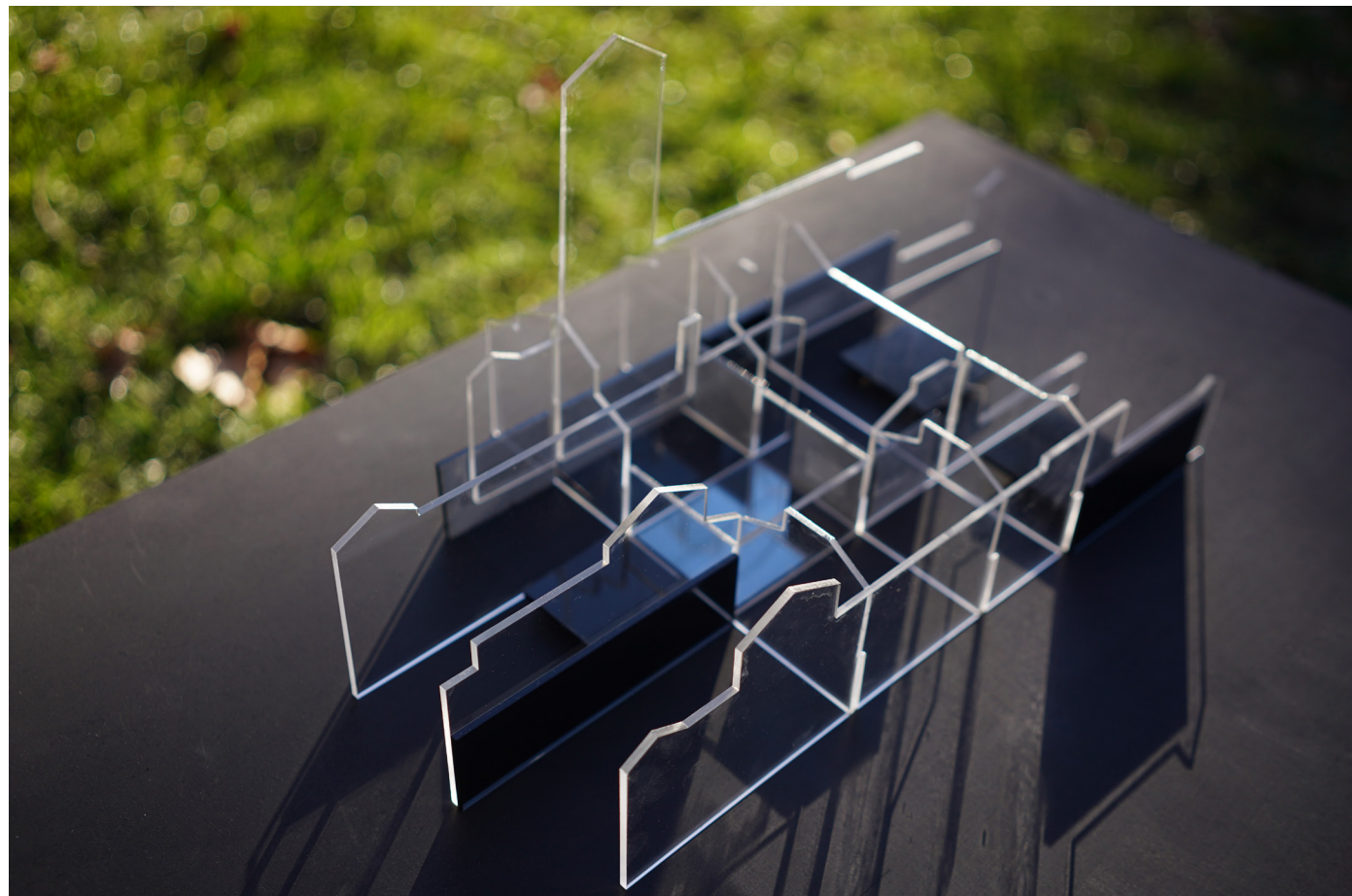
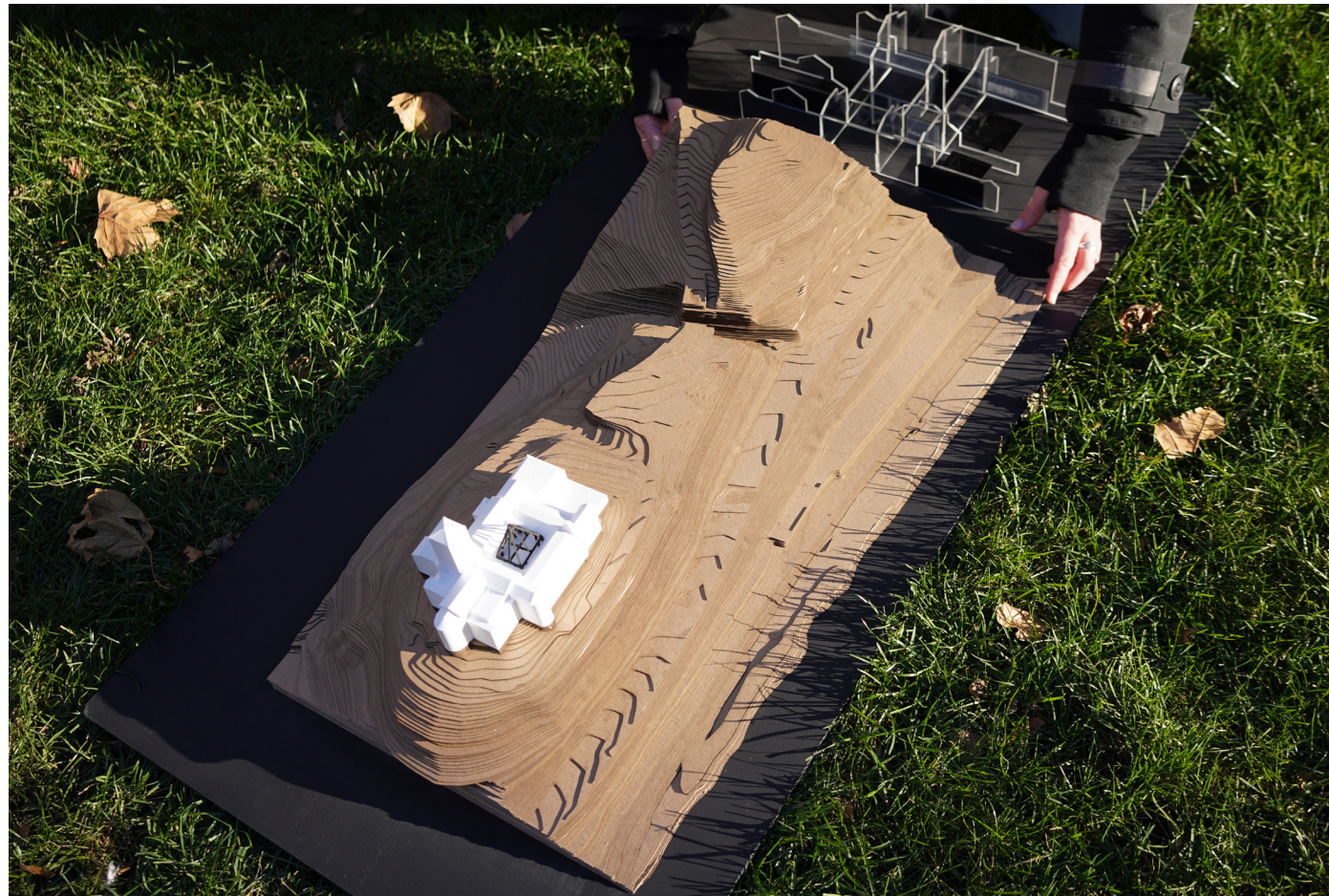




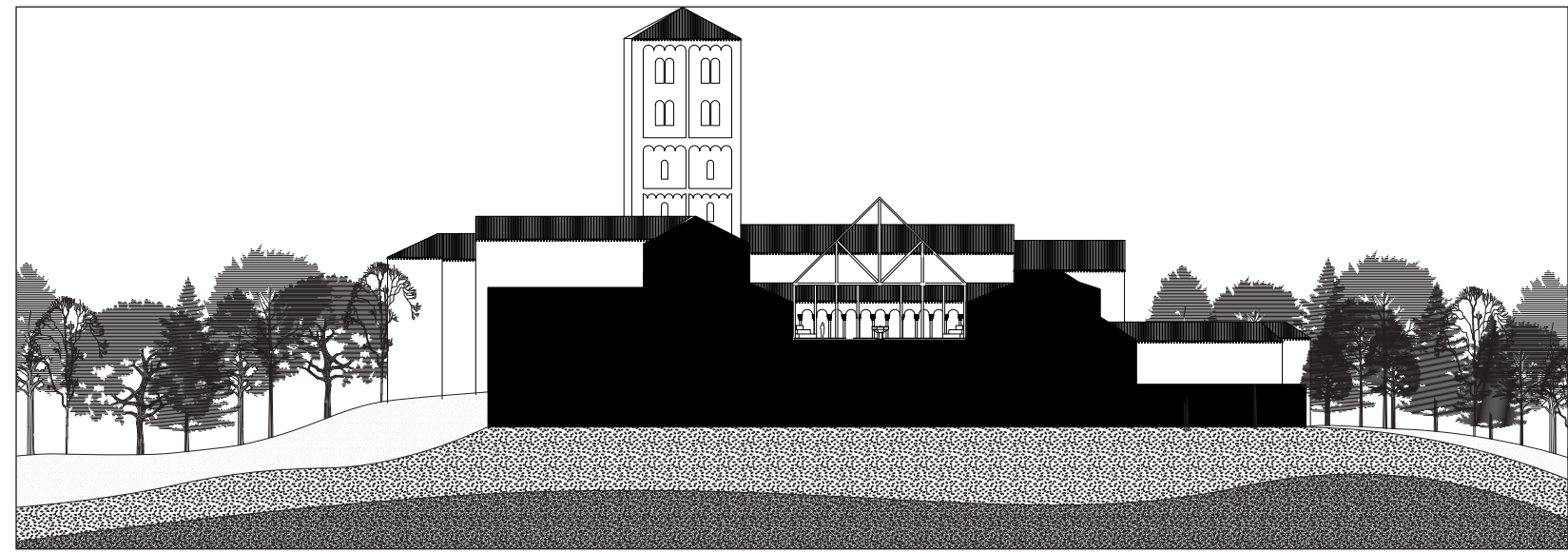
Section detail:  
Unicorn Tapestries Gallery



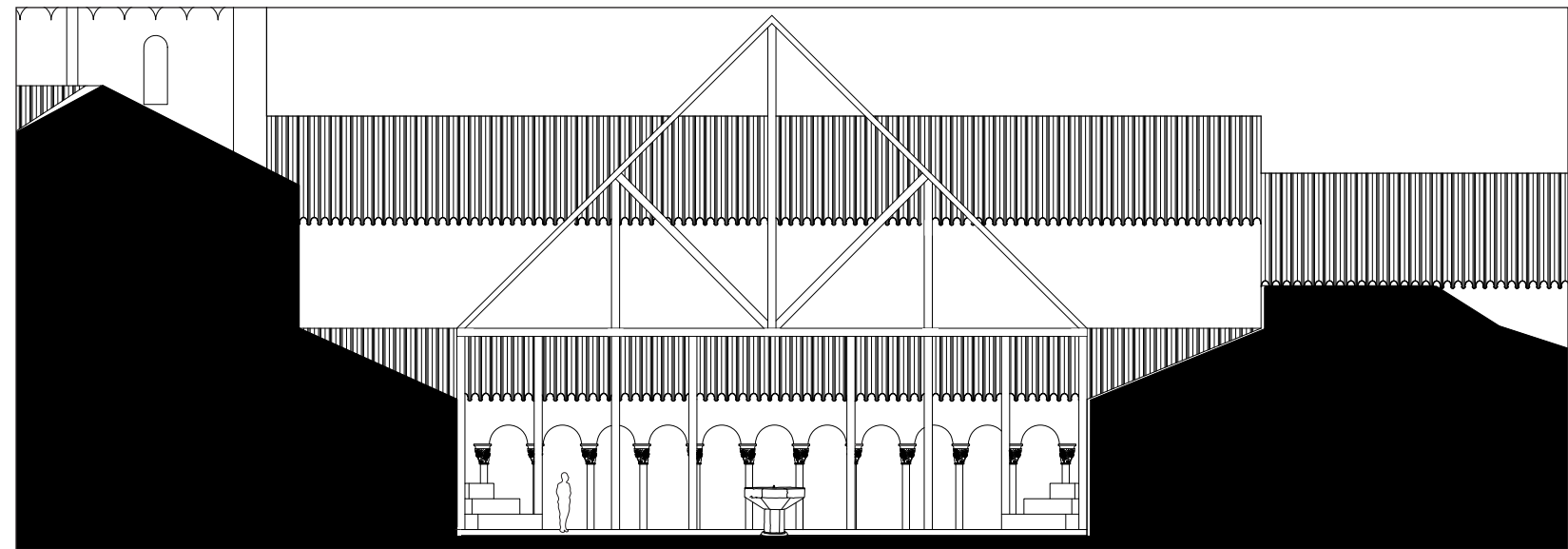




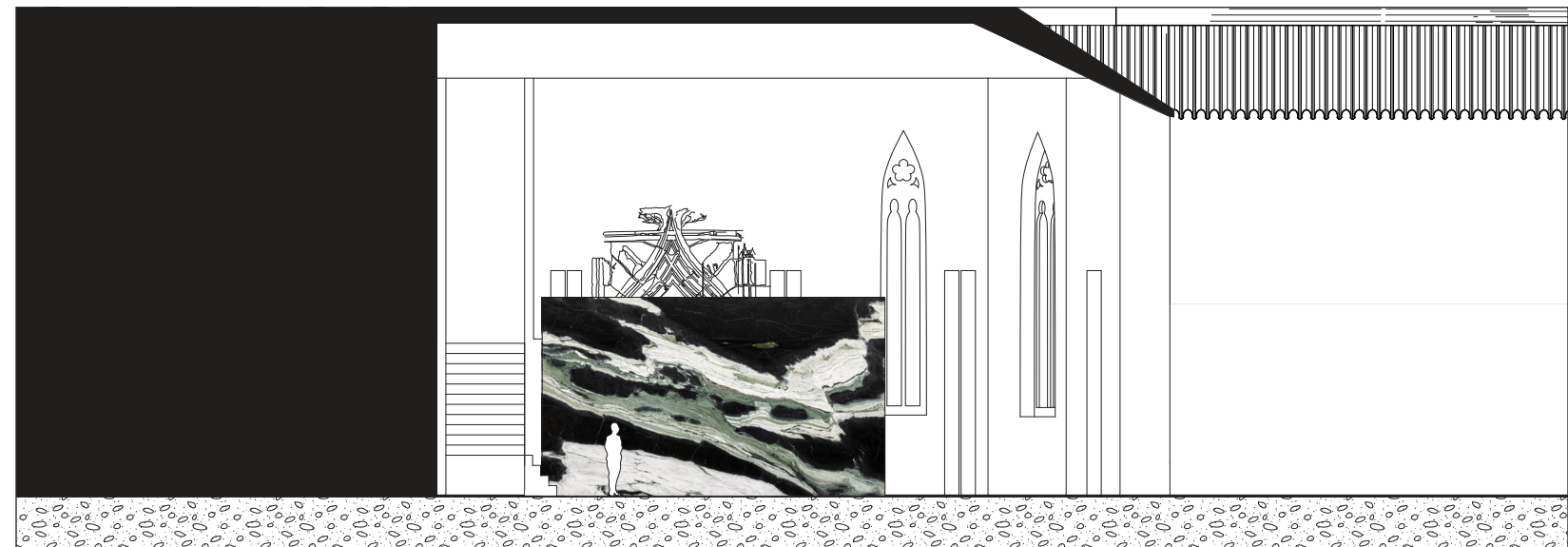
9 Exhibition design model made of clear, black, and mirrored acrylic showing camera obscura galleries and floating plinths



West section showing altered ground condition



Pavilion section



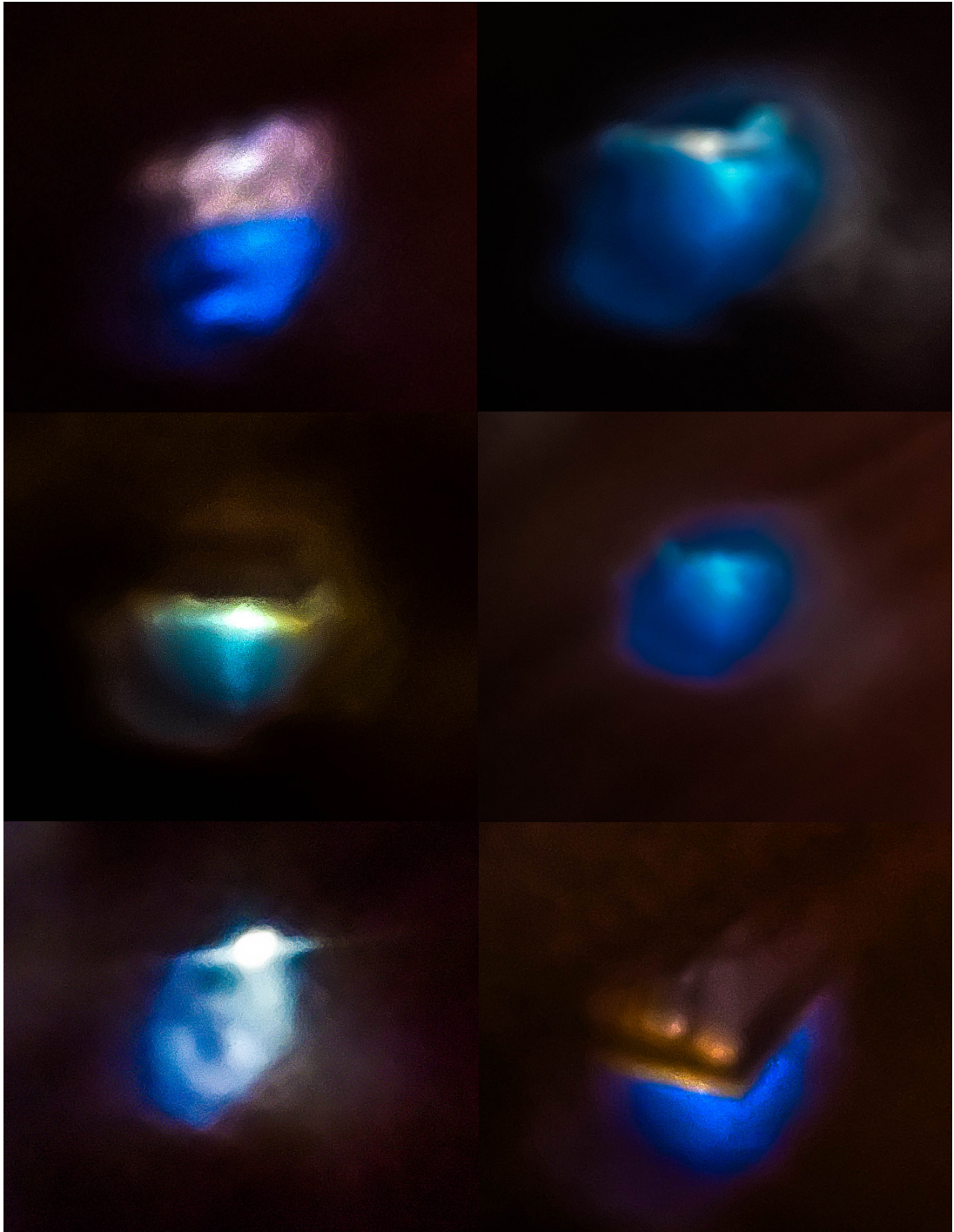
Gothic Chapel section

1/32" = 1'-0"





Camera obscura window detail in the Trie Cloister



Camera obscura photos taken from the Met Cloisters



# Commoning the Fracture

ADV IV Studio - Spring 2024

Critic: Alessandro Orsini

*Commoning the Fracture* is an architectural investigation that explores the thresholds between anthropogenic landscapes created by largescale infrastructure and untouched wilderness, and proposes a network of small-scale collective housing and reservoir management. The Ashokan Reservoir, though critical to the water infrastructure in New York City, has disrupted and fractured the rural communities that inhabit the Catskills; by focusing on the “fracture” as a site of potential collectivity, we can begin to imagine acts of rewilding, living, and care intertwined in bridging fractured landscapes.

Interviewing residents at the surrounding communities of the Ashokan Reservoir revealed that their most pressing need is safe and affordable housing that accommodates the different needs of workers, families, and the elderly. While many have memories of safe and collective downtowns, those spaces have largely disappeared as property has been bought to protect the Ashokan Reservoir by the NYC Department of Environmental Protection and the housing stock has eroded as many homes have been foreclosed and bought by private equity firms, which are then rented to locals at much higher costs. The area has not only become increasingly rural as a result, but also less accessible to the remaining community members.

The resulting project is a small-scale aggregation of housing and civic spaces for multigenerational families at the site of the Ashokan Spillway. Much of the eroding concrete and limestone at the lower edges of the spillway is repurposed into building material for exterior cladding, and residents collectively manage restorative wetlands which remediate turbidity in the Lower Esopus Creek that often results from spring rains in the Reservoir. Following principles of New Urbanism, residents can carry out most daily activities by foot or via public transit, giving each community member freedom of living without the necessity of a driver’s license.

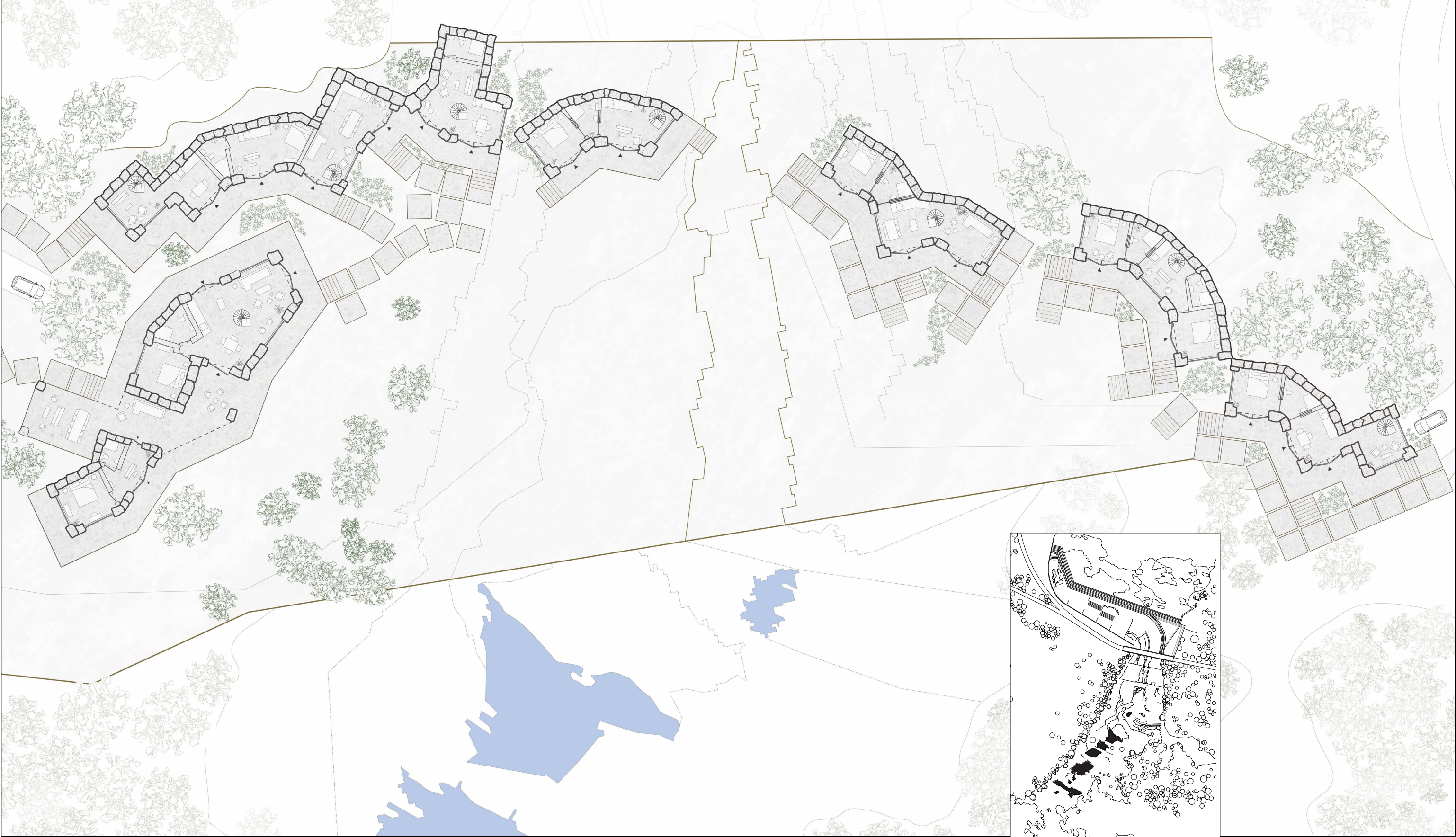
In disrupting the symbolic nature of the fracture through bridging and co-opting the in-between space, the manmade and the natural become a third place, a process moving from human life to wetland ecology, approaching people and their inhabitation from a perspective of stewardship, collectivity, and abundance.



Restorative wetlands in the Esopus Creek remediate turbidity, restore native plants to the area, and are collectively managed by the residents.

Catskills, NY



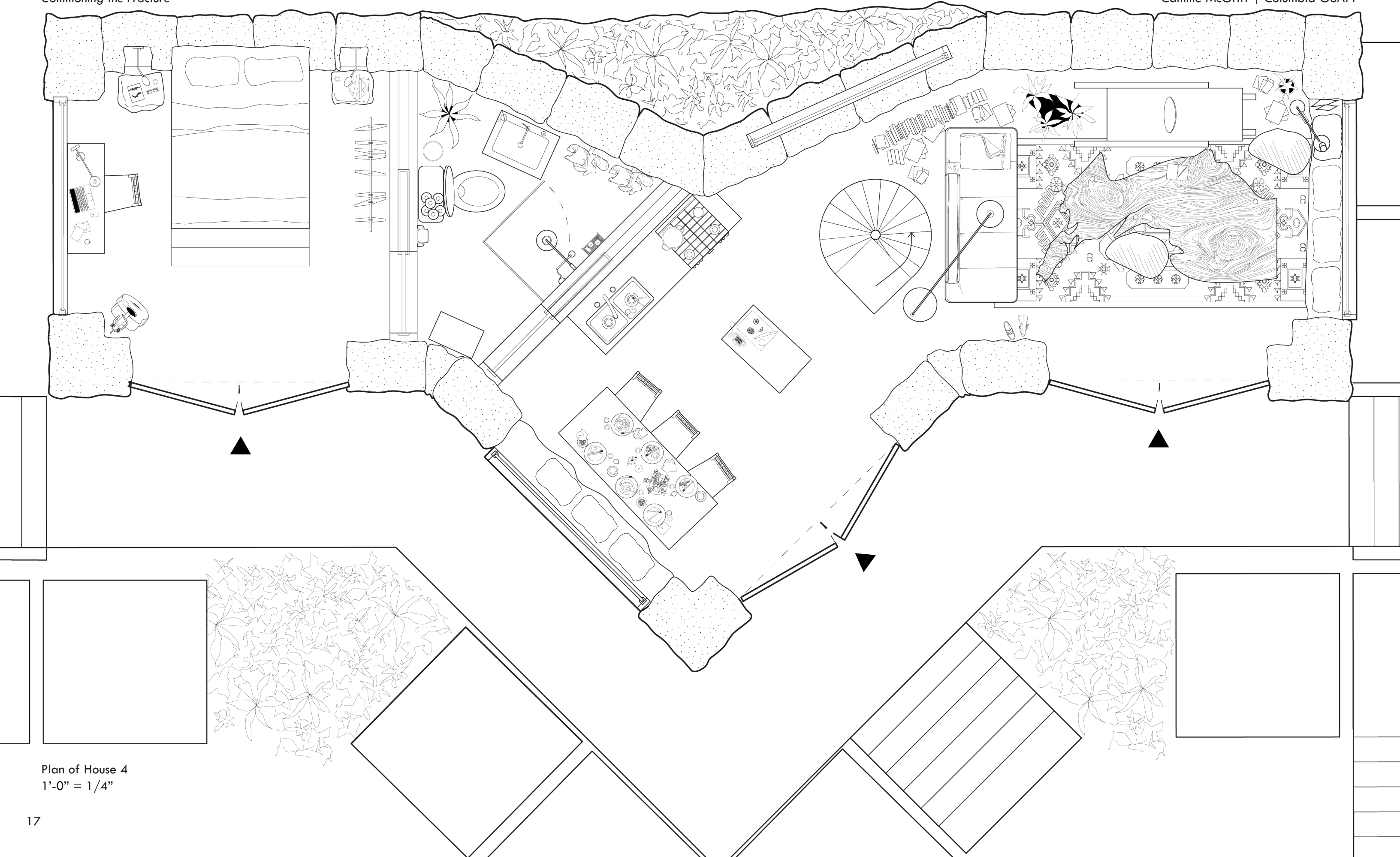


Site with Ashokan Reservoir and Spillway to the north.

1/32" = 1'-0"

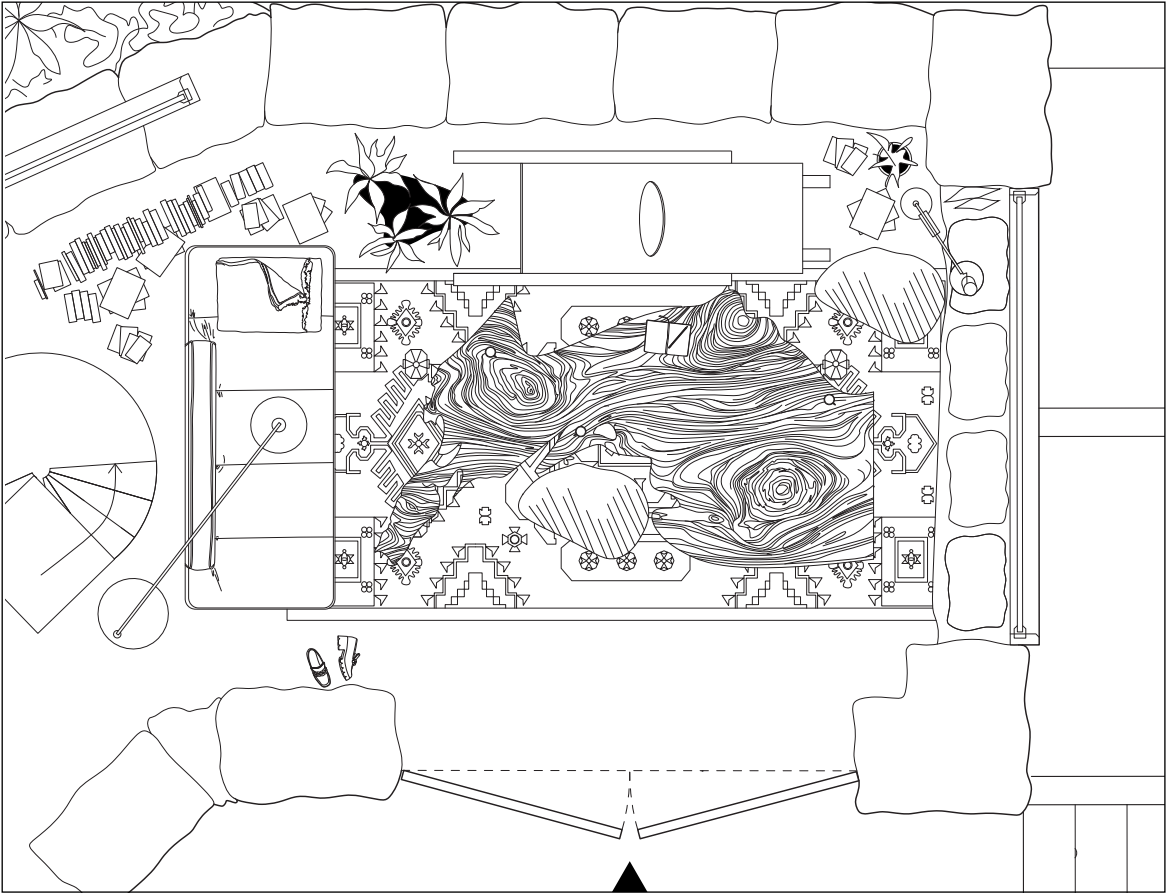
Site before intervention



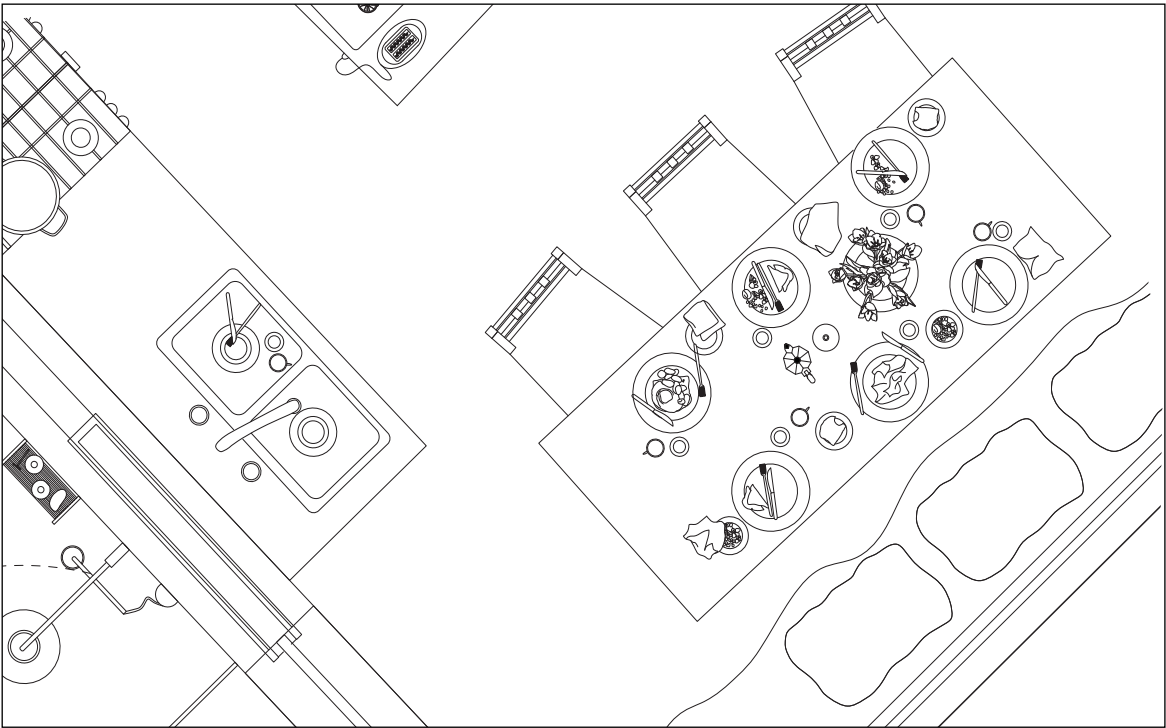


Plan of House 4  
1'-0" = 1/4"





House 4, living room detail



House 4, dining room detail

1'0" = 1/4"



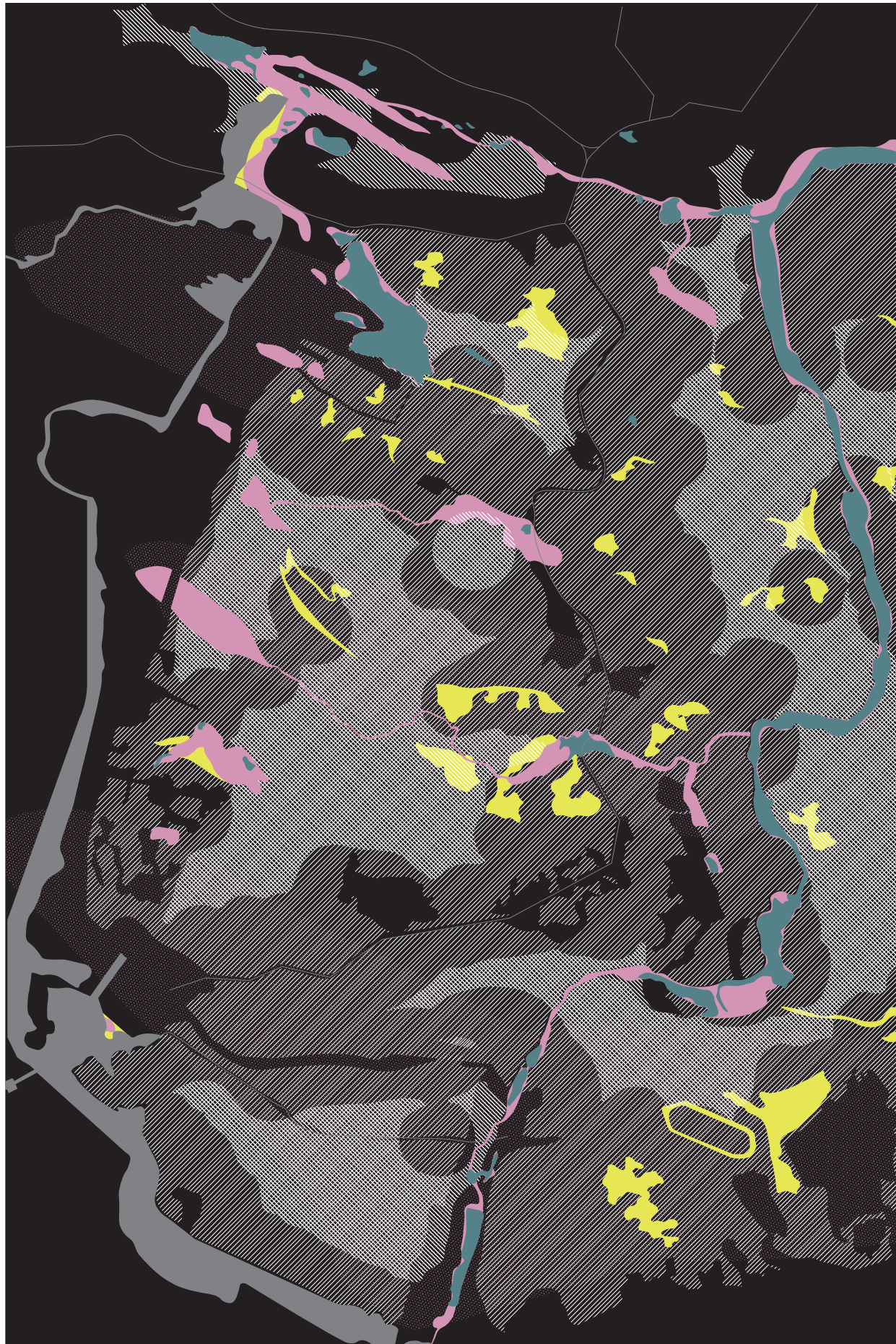


Ground floor plan



Second floor plan





Early exercises in critical cartography using GIS and open data showed major overlap between human inhabitation and terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems due to disruption by the reservoir. The project seeks to foster a nurturing, mutualistic relationship in place of these fractures.



Referencing the collages of Superstudio, these assemblages imagine human inhabitation of large-scale infrastructure.



# Housing in a Mass Timber Armature

Core III Housing Studio - Fall 2023

Critic: Eric Bunge

*Housing in a Mass Timber Armature* is an architectural project that explores the idea of an ever-evolving apartment building that can be tailored to residents' needs as they grow, change, add family members, or move, while simultaneously experimenting with the limitations of cross-laminated and glue-laminated timber in the New York City building code. A mass-timber armature and horizontal energy cores enable residents to continually negotiate private and collective space over time.

The armature enables possibility, asserting that housing is an extension of everyday life and activities in Harlem. The ground floor is programmed for commerce and leisure with small storefronts and two central courtyards, while on the upper floors and balconies provide spaces for collective gathering. Balconies and stairs create micro-neighborhoods within the armature cloistered around the courtyards, so all residents have access to green space year-round.

Utilizing mass timber with 5-ply CLT prefabricated slabs, columns, and beams with a 12 post-beam-panel grid system, the design has an overall lower carbon footprint than a building with similar square footage. An extended Life Cycle Analysis for the project investigates the labor, economies, and social outcomes that intersected in the production of CLT and glu-lam required for the building construction. The LCA studies how each part comes together, from the tree farm to the CLT factory to the transportation of lumber, and how the building can evolve programmatically and eventually be dismantled.

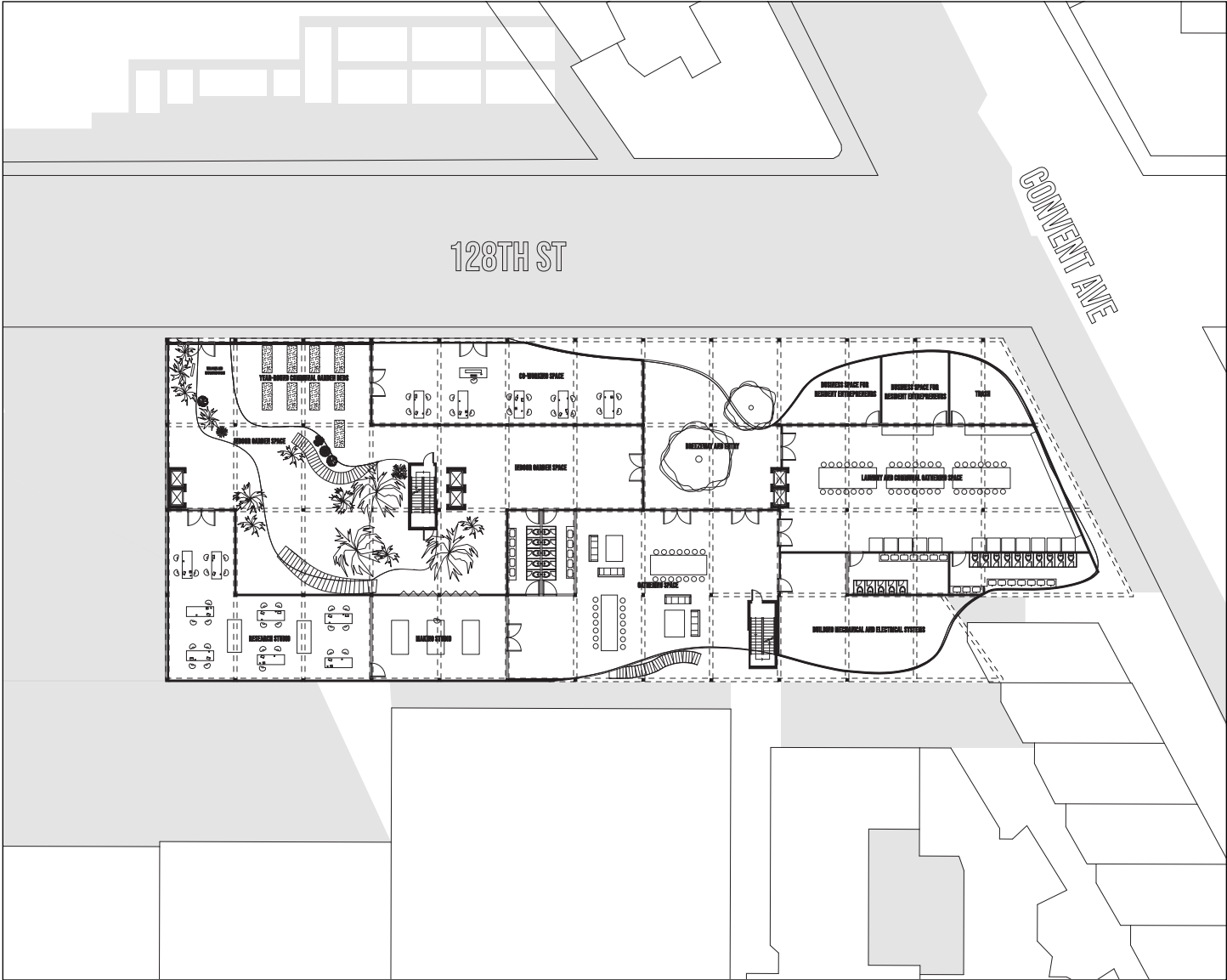
The armature explores a concept of how life exists within a larger ecosystem, conceptually mirroring the material study in mass timber. The project proved that mass timber in multi-family housing is not only safe and sustainable but also cost-effective, while the concept of the armature allows residents to take the design as an imaginative provocation on how to live.

Harlem, NY



A sectional model of the project entices participants to arrange and rearrange walls in the mass timber armature to suit their living needs and simulate the building life cycle of use, reuse, and degradation of modular, interchangeable CLT wall panels.





Site in West Harlem. The ground floor is programmed as a continuation of public space in Harlem, with a place to share meals, workspace, and courtyards.



Section showing negotiations of balcony space between neighbors and localized stairs between floors, creating micro-neighborhoods within the armature.

1/32" = 1'-0"



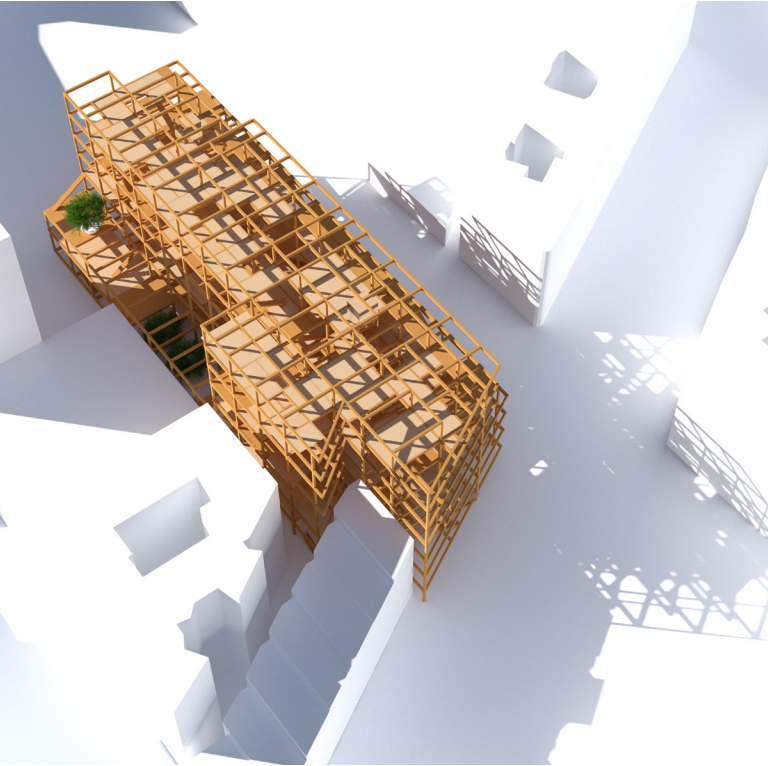


Brace frames through the central void provide structural support and opportunity for vines from the courtyard to grow.



Floors push and retract from the edges of the armature, providing light throughout.



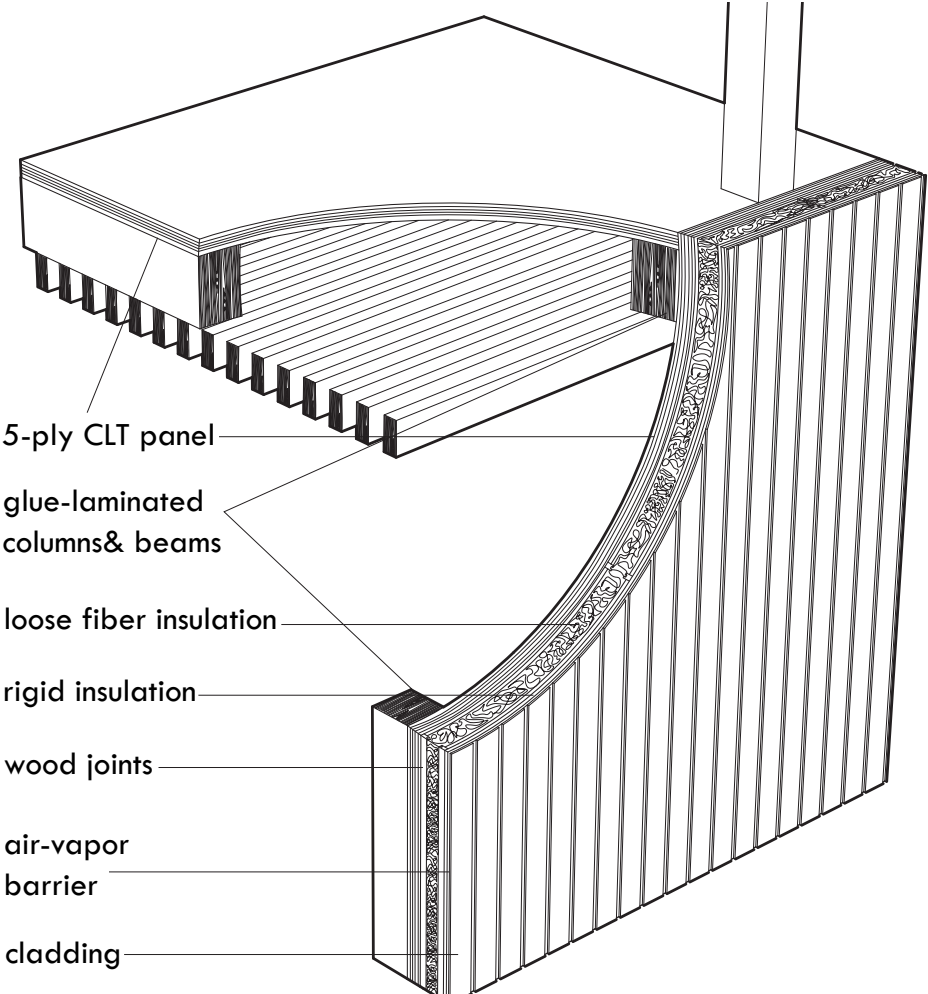
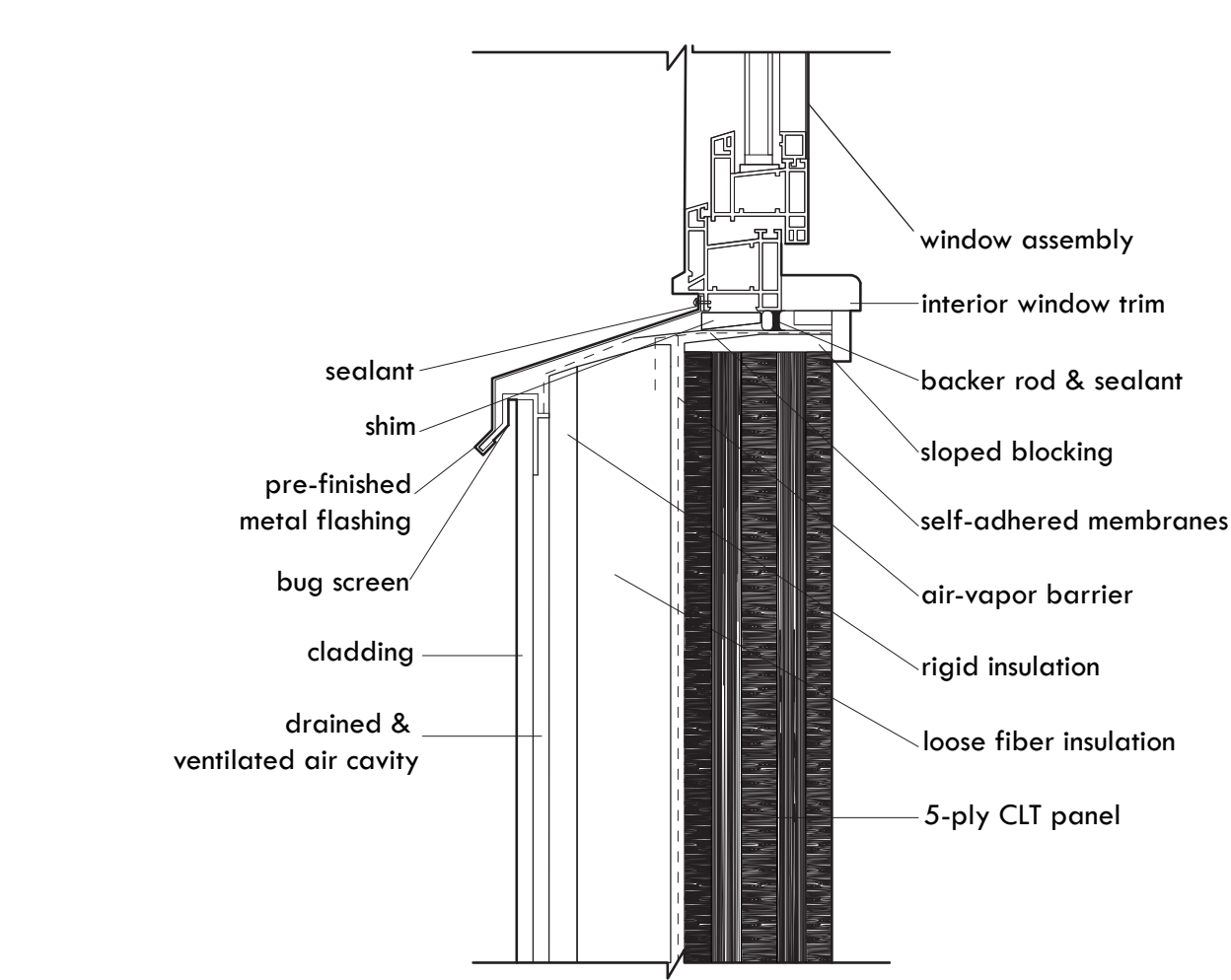
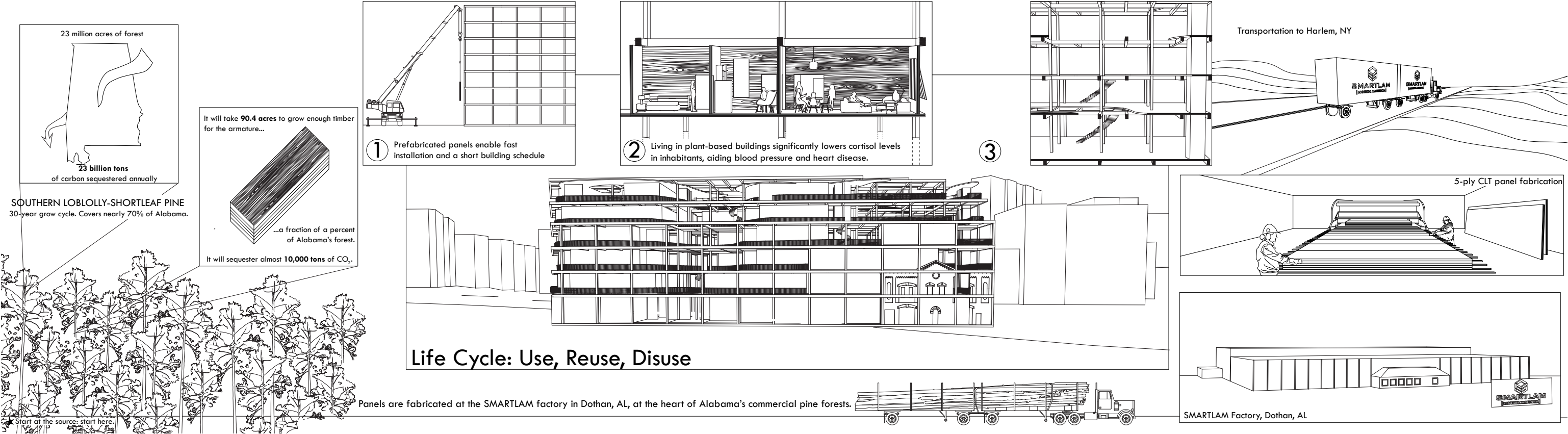


Balconies and voids through the core allow space for trees and plants to grow into the armature. Diagonal brace frames provide playful structural support in the interstitial space.

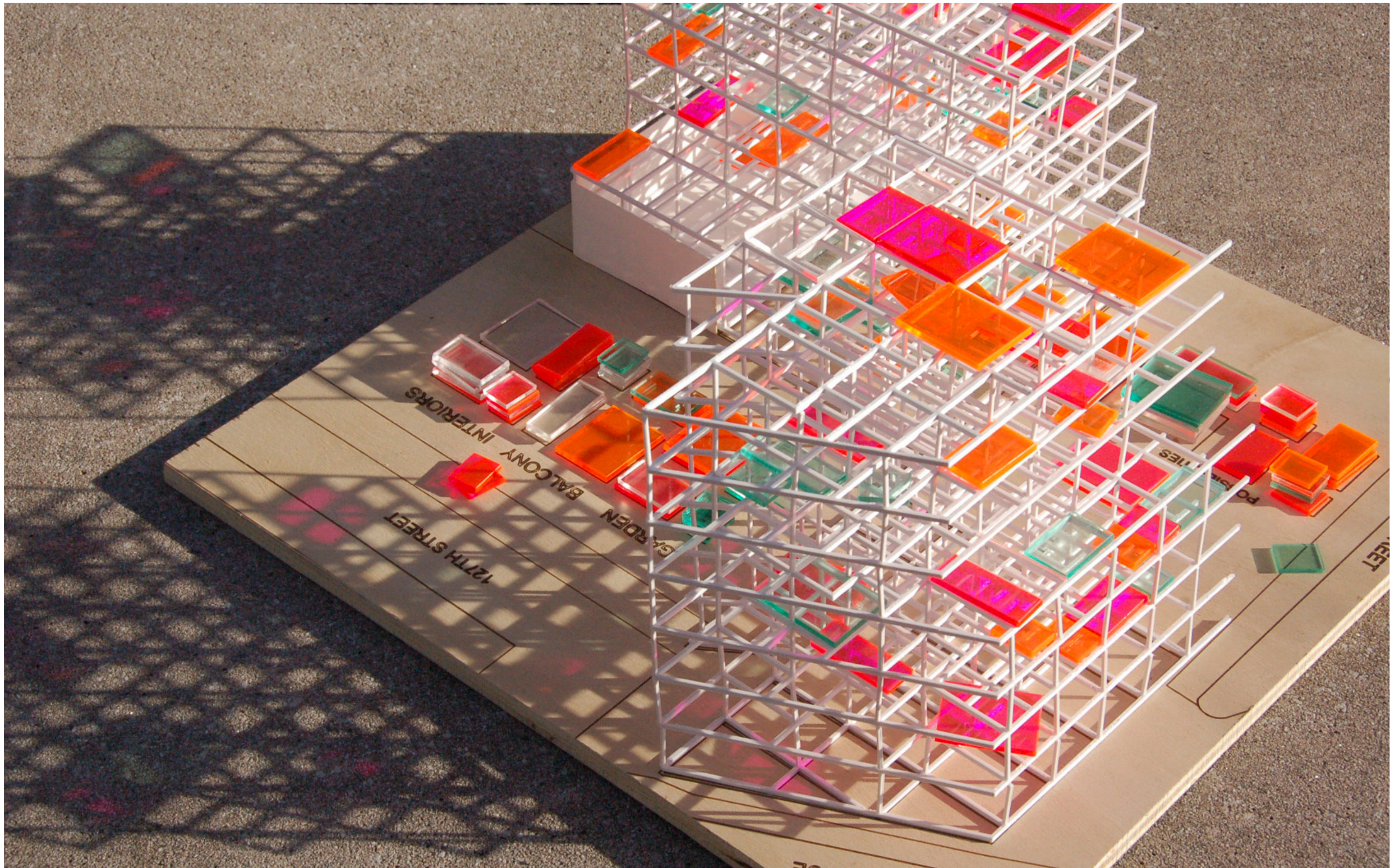


Board game model, in which players create and negotiate their living space based on tiles of private and public space, gardens, and shared balcony space.











# A School About Waste

TECH V: Building Construction and Life Cycles - Spring 2024  
Critics: Lola Ben-Alon and Thomas Schaperkotter  
Project Team: Camille McGriff, Anais Halftermeyer, Kelsey Brown, Bryce Emerson, Aiko Alvarez-Gibson

**A School About Waste** conceptually responded to the problem of waste in each phase of the building’s life-cycle. Our project team considered the origin and sourcing of the materials, prioritizing recycled material from manufacturers local to the US, the use phase of the materials, prioritizing materials that are durable and require minimal upkeep, as well as considering the “end of life” phase of materials. As *A School About Waste* refutes the concept that a building must reach an ultimate “death” or a demolition, our “end of life” phase is identified as a “end of program”, where the building enters a stage of renewal, and is adapted for some other future use. Thus, when conducting a Life Cycle Assessment and considering materials to reduce the global warming potential, we prioritized materials that allow for flexibility of program and yield high recyclable potential.

This analysis allowed us to think more critically about the existing design decisions by expanding the building’s time scale deeper into the extraction, transportation, production, and deconstruction phases and analyzing its inputs and outputs.

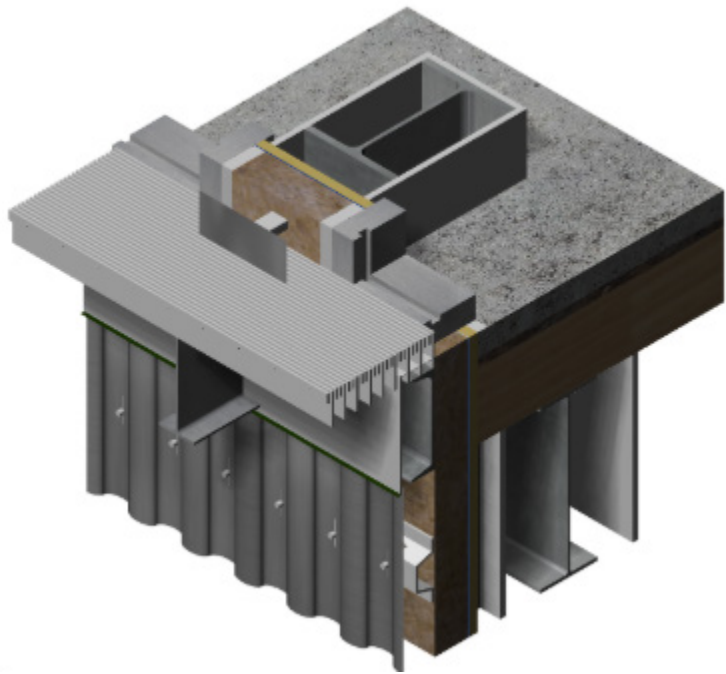
We designed with the imperative of low-impact material choices in mind, designing a steel superstructure that allows for wider spans and greater flexibility of floor area while replacing the sub-structures with wood elements to reduce emissions impacts. We used aspen in place of window mullions and 2”x4” wooden studs to replace C-channel studs.

We reduced the amount of cement within the concrete by adding fly-ash and increased its durability by adding slag. By sequestering fly-ash and slag in our concrete floors, we increased our floors’ durability and reduced maintenance costs while also finding a safe use for toxic industrial byproducts. The overall carbon reduction from a typical structure with our material adjustments reduced the net global warming potential from 7,602 kg carbon dioxide to 4,114 kg carbon dioxide.

Lower East Side, New York City



A School About Waste

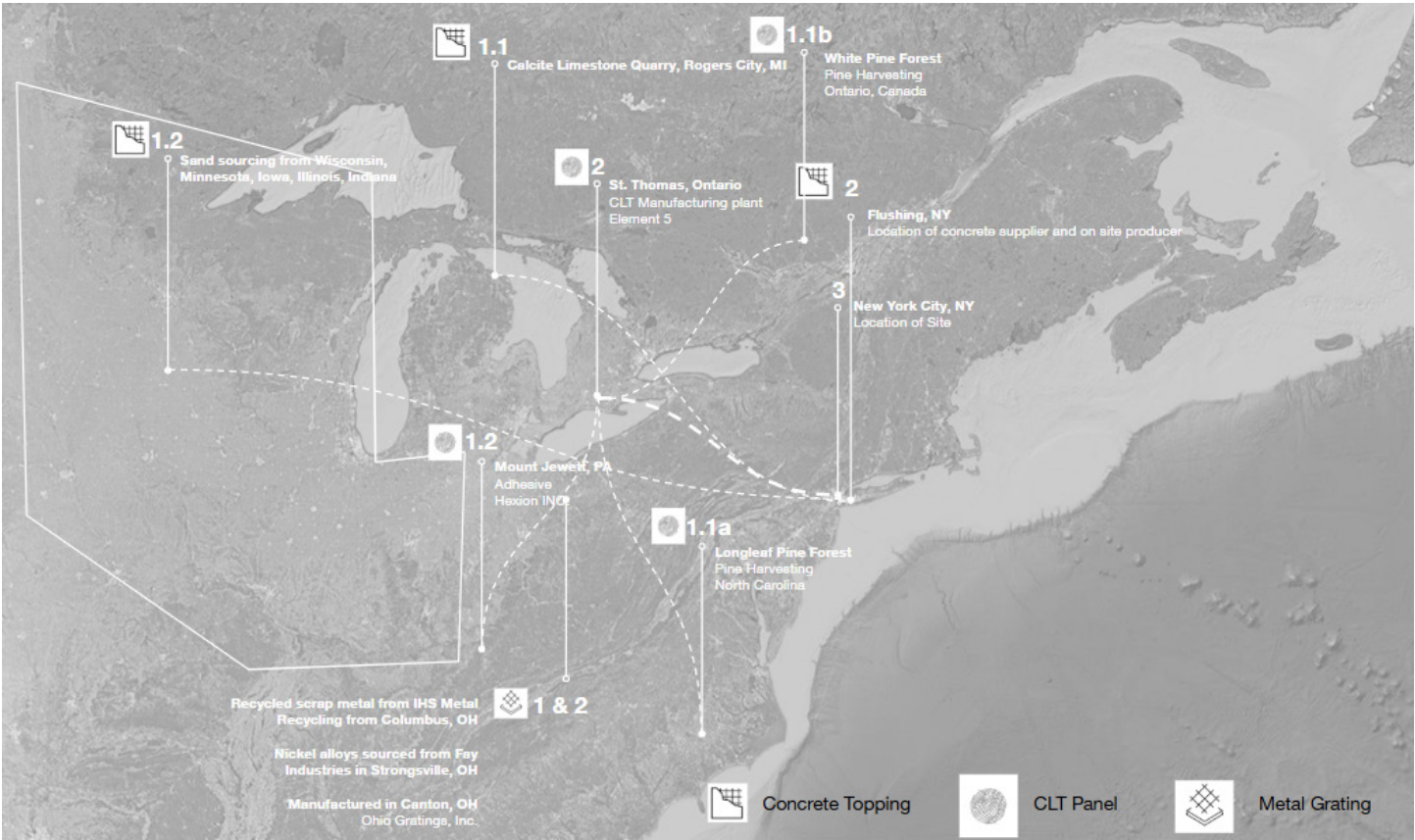


Render of 1'0" = 1'0" moment analysis, depicting the interior and exterior wall, the balcony, a column, and the floor.

## GLOBAL WARMING POTENTIAL

934.1 kg CO <sub>2</sub>	product stage
1,441 kg CO <sub>2</sub>	end-of-life stage
ACIDIFICATION	
15.85 kg SO <sub>2</sub>	product stage
1.105 kg SO <sub>2</sub>	end-of-life stage
EUTROPHIFICATION	
0.7508 kg Ne	product stage
1.105 kg Ne	end-of-life stage
SMOG FORMATION	
239.4 kg O <sub>2</sub>	product stage
31.23 kg O <sub>2</sub>	end-of-life stage
RENEWABLE ENERGY	
14,852 MJ	product stage
235.8 MJ	end-of-life stage





Material geographies: our team calculated the carbon costs of transporting material to the Lower East Side.



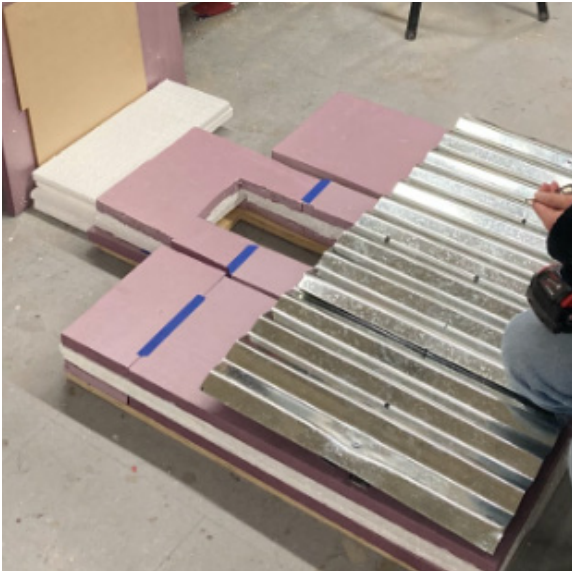
Creating the CLT flooring



Pouring the concrete topping over the CLT



Applying sheathing to insulation and air-vapor barrier



Attaching corrugated aluminum to facade



Attaching wall assembly to structure



Final assembly



# From Prison Farm to Table

Core I Studio - Fall 2022

Critic: Virginia Black

*From Prison Farm to Table* is a curatorial and mechanical intervention into the geography of New York's Financial District, a production line that makes visible the structures of carcerality in the U.S. food system by showing the process a carrot undergoes from its growth in the soil on a prison farm to a clean package of baby carrots on a school lunch tray. Throughout, I incorporate palimpsests of human labor intervening in the production line as the carrots advance through the system.

This intervention serves a dual purpose. It is a protest against the Aramark corporation, which provides food service to prisons and uses produce from state-owned prison farms in public school lunch programs, and is represented on the NY Stock Exchange, and it is also an abolitionist strategy of increasing visibility around infrastructures that are tied to the carceral landscape.

By focusing on the carrot, we can examine how a seemingly ubiquitous and inconsequential vegetable is inherently tied to the project of global colonization, land dispossession, and the production of consumer bodies in a capitalist society. The thorough entrenchment of this seemingly mundane and ubiquitous vegetable in the project of global racialized capitalism demonstrates its insidious habitation in our politics, economics, health, land and food development, from seed to waste.

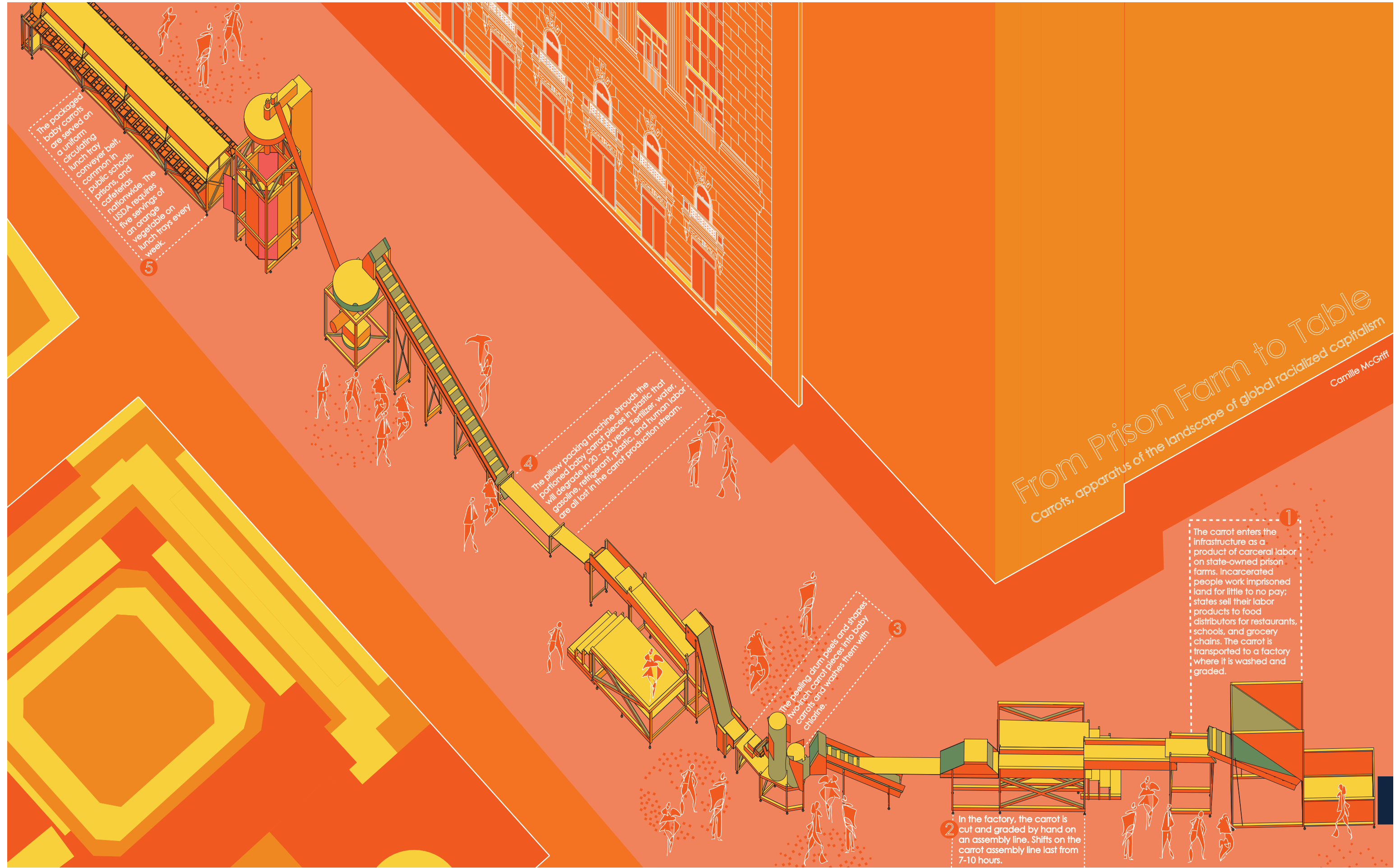
Certainly, modern consumers are divorced from the productive processes of food and land, but we are also alienated from the labor embodied in the processes, structures, and objects of the capitalist system that penetrates the U.S. legal system and the global economy. This exhibition seeks to make capitalism's habitation in our daily lives visible: if it can touch every stage in the making and life of a baby carrot, can there be facets of life in which capitalism does not insinuate itself? By aligning the processes, structures, and objects of racialized capitalism sequentially at the symbolically-charged intersection of Wall Street and Broad Street, I seek to make the carrot infrastructure visible, therefore making the contentious relationships amongst these infrastructures visible as well.

Wall Street, New York



A 1' = 1' construction of a machine in the baby carrot production line shows platforms viewers can stand or sit on to engage with the exhibit and wires that extrude the human labor of prisoner-farmers from the field to the machine. Wheels allow the machines to be moved easily.





# From Prison Farm to Table

Carrots, apparatus of the landscape of global racialized capitalism

Camille McGriff

1 The carrot enters the infrastructure as a product of carceral labor on state-owned prison farms. Incarcerated people work imprisoned land for little to no pay; states sell their labor products to food distributors for restaurants, schools, and grocery chains. The carrot is transported to a factory where it is washed and graded.

2 In the factory, the carrot is cut and graded by hand on an assembly line. Shifts on the carrot assembly line last from 7-10 hours.

3 The peeling drum peels and shapes two-inch carrot pieces into baby carrots and washes them with chlorine.

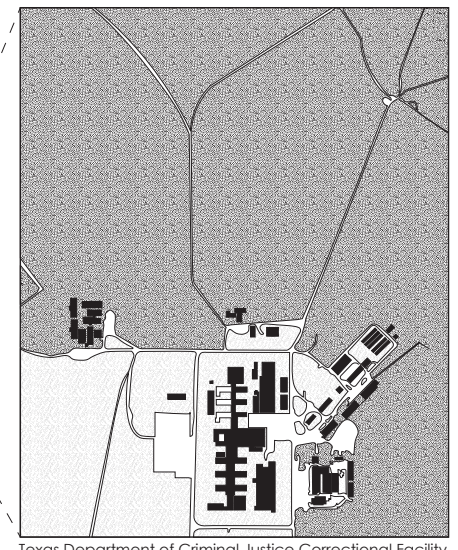
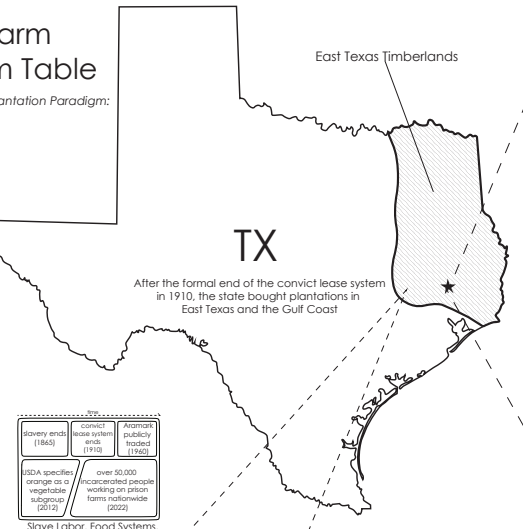
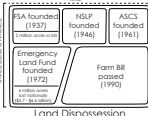
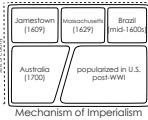
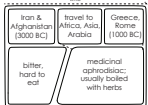
4 The pillow packing machine shrouds the portioned baby carrot pieces in plastic that will degrade in 20-500 years. Fertilizer, water, gasoline, refrigerant, plastic, and human labor are all lost in the carrot production stream.

5 The packaged baby carrots are served on a uniform circulating lunch tray common in public schools, prisons, and cafeterias nationwide. The USDA requires five servings of vegetable on lunch trays every week.



# From Prison Farm to Lunchroom Table

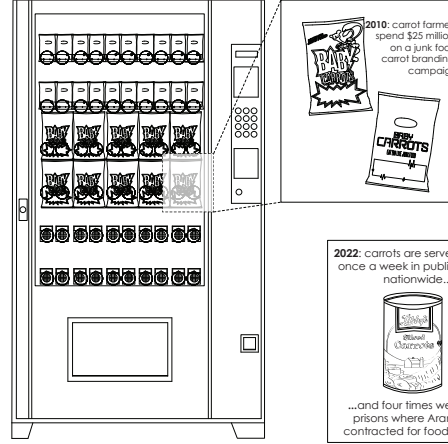
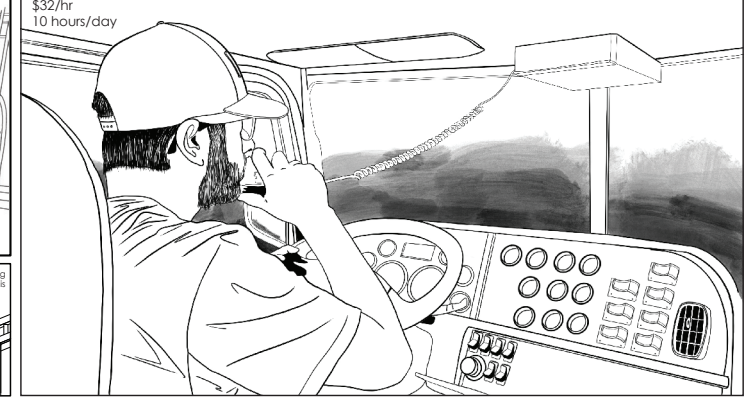
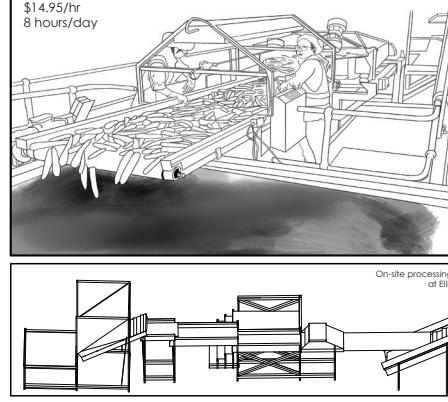
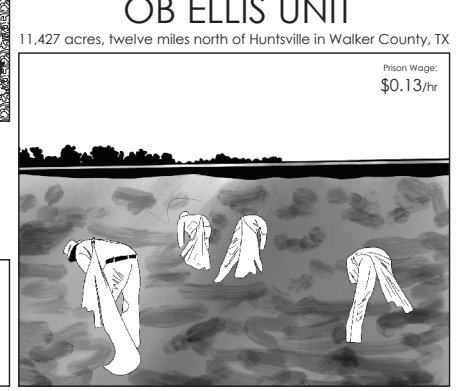
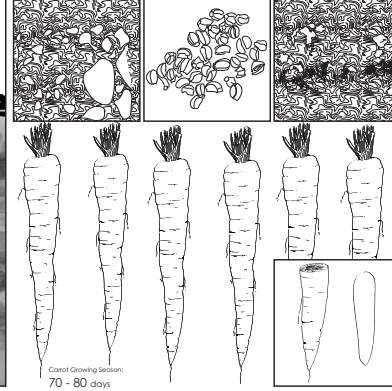
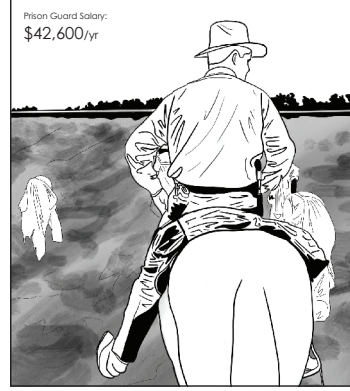
Labor Costs and Profits in the Plantation Paradigm:  
Case Study at TDCJ Ellis Unit



## OB ELLIS UNIT

11,427 acres, twelve miles north of Huntsville in Walker County, TX

Prison Wage:  
\$0.13/hr

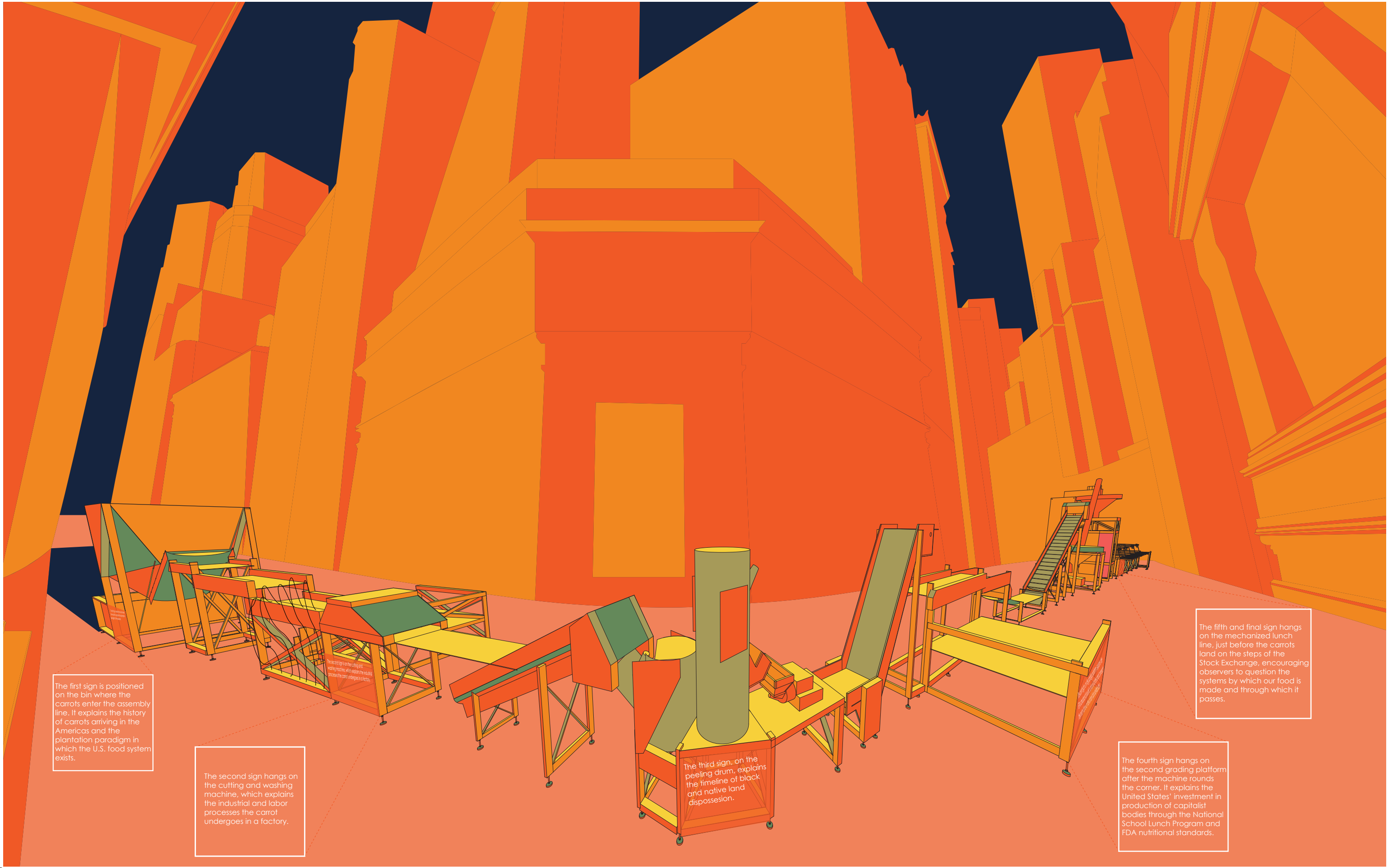


This diagram traces the labor that touches a single carrot at each stage of its life, from seed to processing to transit to tray. Starting at the Ellis Unit, a prison farm that was once a slave plantation in East Texas, we can understand the food system as operating within a “plantation paradigm.”



In the exhibit the carrot moves seamlessly from ground to lunchtray without human intervention, but machines and wire sculptures that reflect the repetitive movements of prisoners remind viewers of the many overlapping instances of human labor required to maintain this food infrastructure.





The first sign is positioned on the bin where the carrots enter the assembly line. It explains the history of carrots arriving in the Americas and the plantation paradigm in which the U.S. food system exists.

The second sign hangs on the cutting and washing machine, which explains the industrial and labor processes the carrot undergoes in a factory.

The second sign on the cutting and washing machine, which explains the industrial and labor processes the carrot undergoes in a factory.

The third sign, on the peeling drum, explains the timeline of black and native land dispossession.

The fourth sign hangs on the second grading platform after the machine rounds the corner. It explains the United States' investment in production of capitalist bodies through the National School Lunch Program and FDA nutritional standards.

The fifth and final sign hangs on the mechanized lunch line, just before the carrots land on the steps of the Stock Exchange, encouraging observers to question the systems by which our food is made and through which it passes.



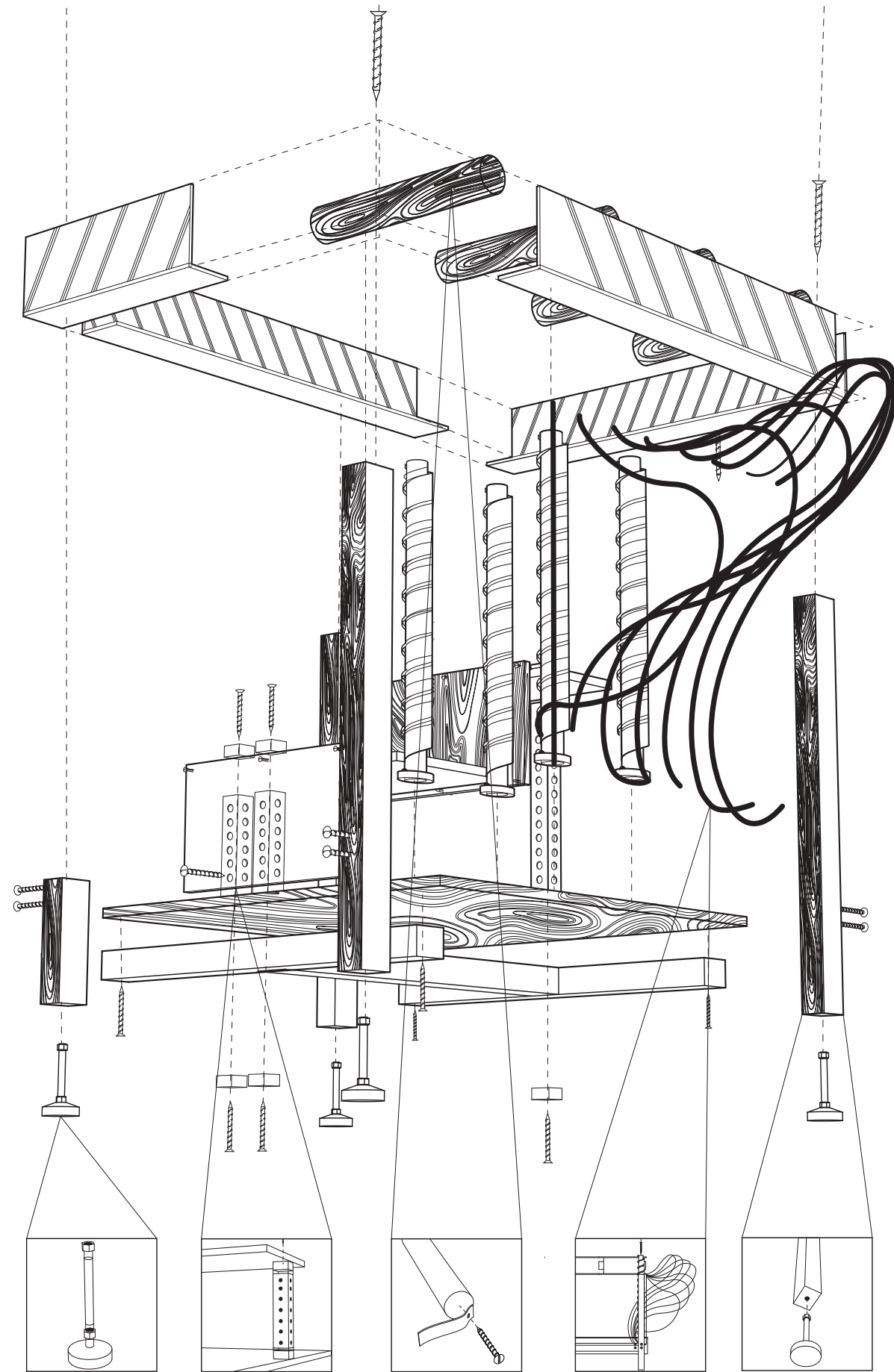
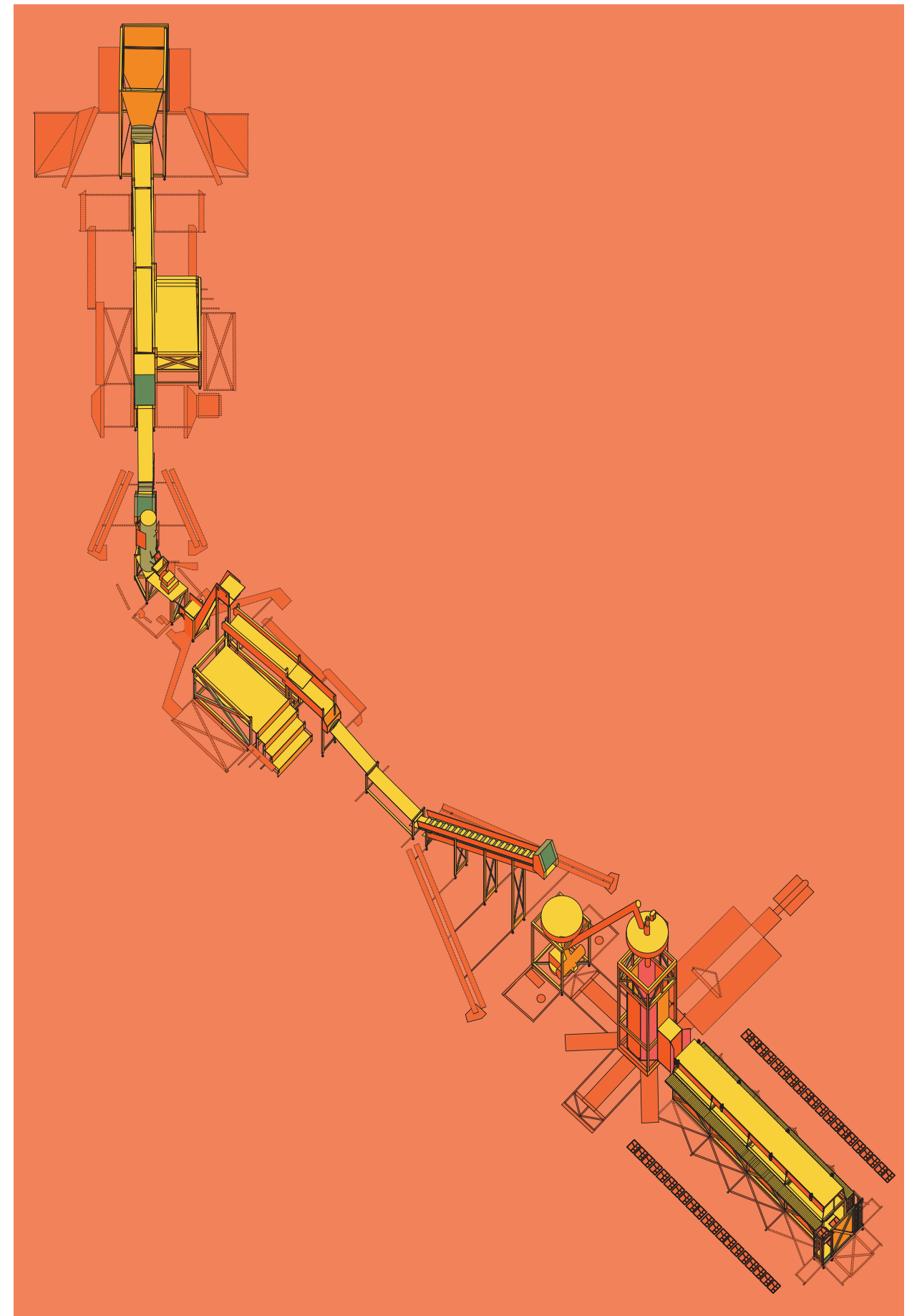
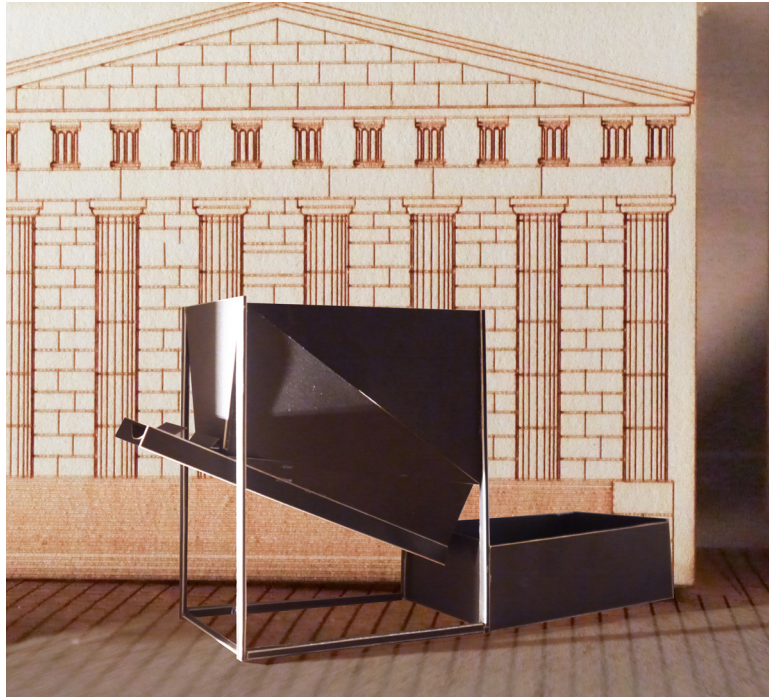


Diagram detailing materials and construction method for the 1' = 1' model of a machine in the carrot production line.

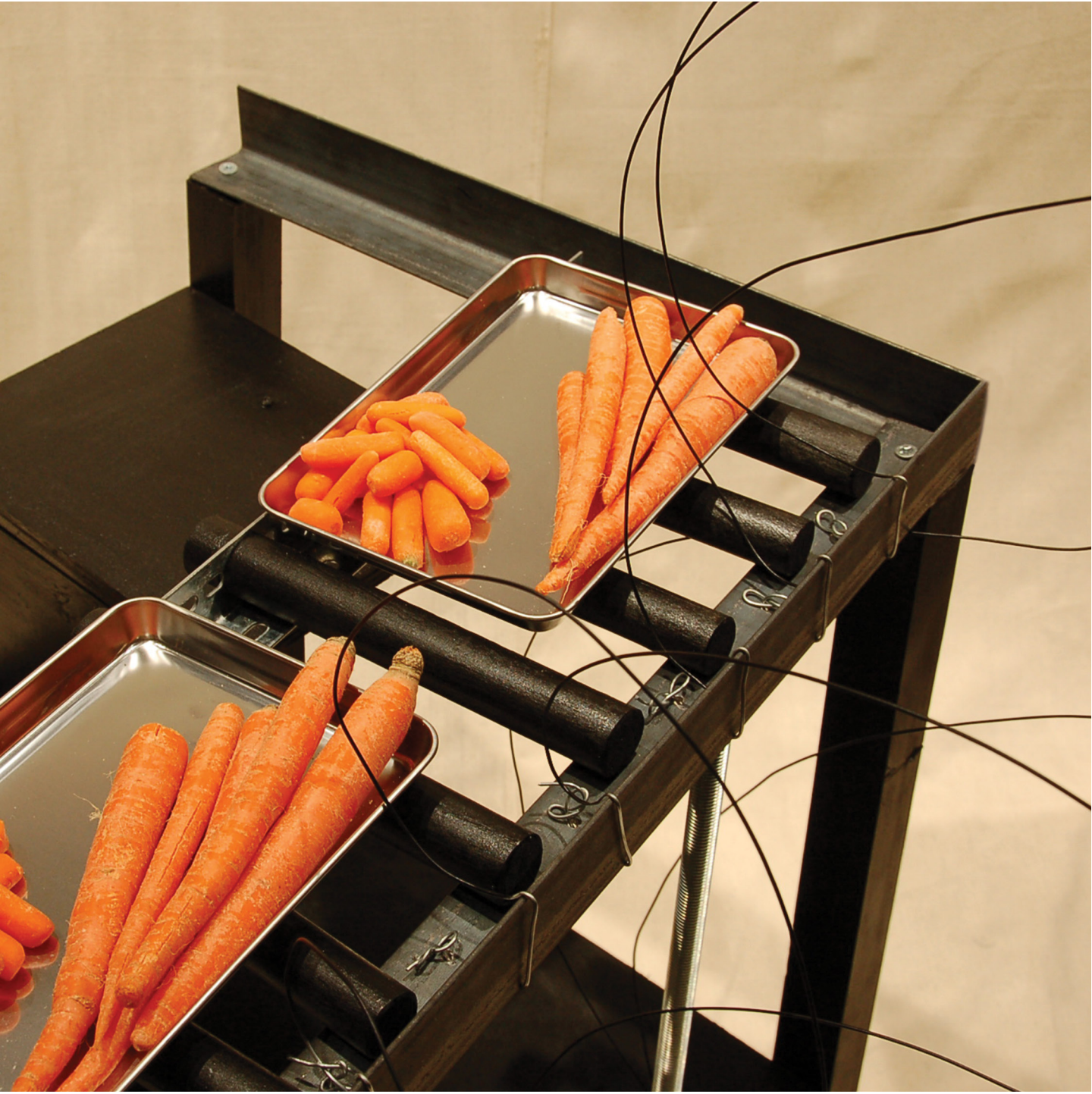


Unfolded axonometric drawing of the carrot production line focusing on its bend from Federal Hall on Broad Street to the U.S. Stock Exchange on Wall Street. Drawing on the symbolism of these two locations, the machine draws a direct line between carceral structures in the government and capitalism.





Above, a paper model depicting the peeling drum where the machine turns onto Wall St. Below, the bin where raw carrots are dumped at the beginning of the production line in front of Federal Hall.





# No More Sheetrock: An Investigation Towards Developing a Straw Alternative to Gypsum Wallboard

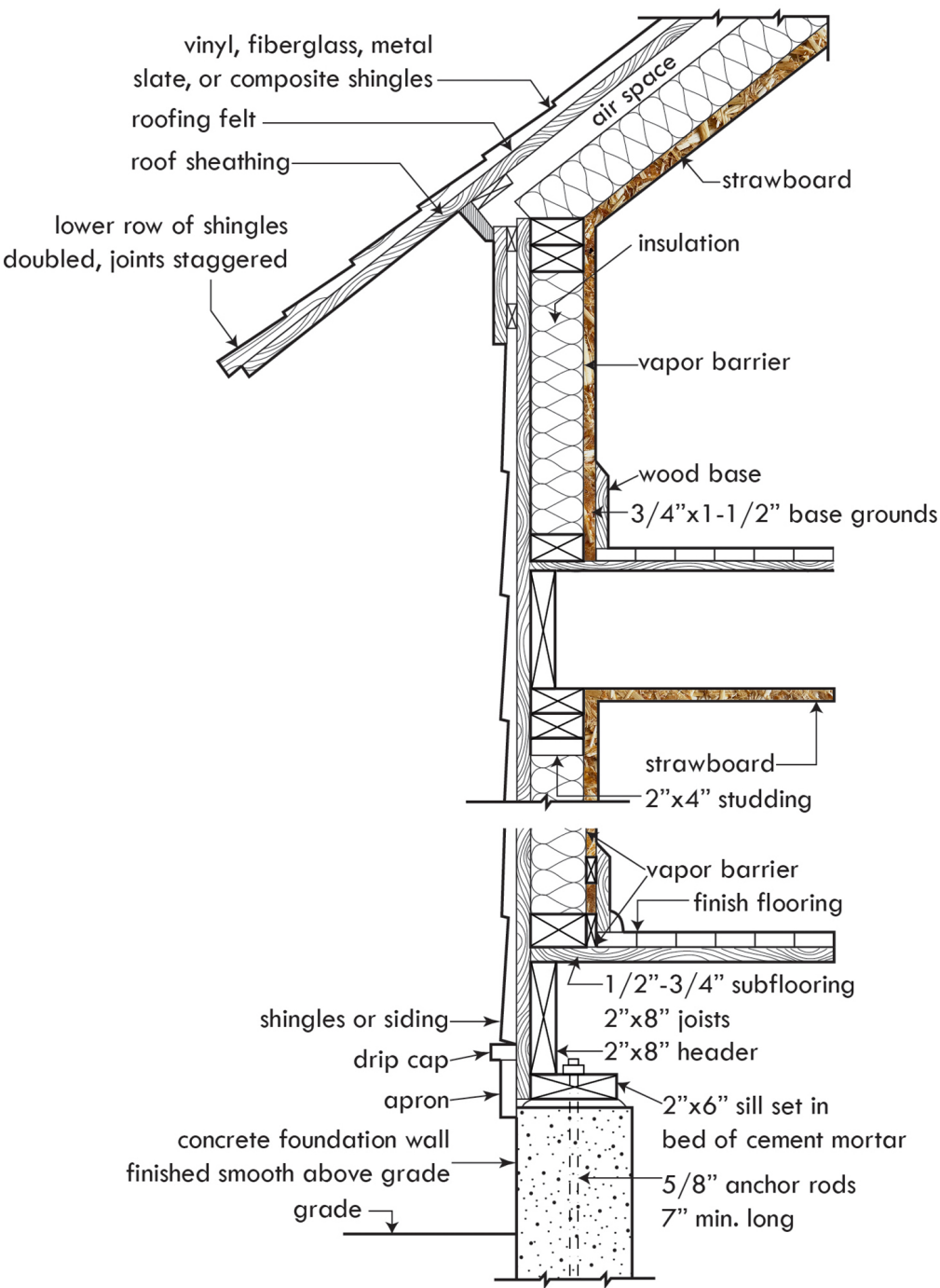
The Long History of Architectural Technology - Fall 2024

Critic: Lucia Allais

Gypsum wallboard (“**drywall**”) is the ubiquitous material of interior wall systems built in the present day. With its high strength-to-weight ratio, durability, versatility, and fire-resistant properties, drywall has established material hegemony in interior construction—and drywall sales top \$3 billion annually. However, the embodied carbon in a sheet of 1/2” drywall is equivalent to a 1” sheet of foam insulation, with significant impacts due to water use as well as mining and heating requirements for production. Further, although gypsum is a naturally-occurring and abundant mineral, drywall manufacturing releases particulate matter as well as sulfur dioxide, nitrous oxide, and carbon monoxide, and about 75% of all drywall decomposes in landfills forty years after its installation, where it releases lethal hydrogen sulfide gas as it rots and often leeches sulfates into the groundwater.

A projected 2.4 trillion sq. ft. of new construction is projected by 2060 to meet demands of population growth and aging building stock, meaning that drywall production alone will generate almost 6 million kilograms of carbon dioxide over roughly 20 billion sq. ft. of drywall – all for a product with a 40-year life before ending in a landfill. Compressed straw panels are beginning to gain some traction in the United Kingdom and Europe as a cradle-to-cradle, plant-based alternative to gypsum board, with companies like EcoCocon in the UK developing modular panels with straw insulation. However, though straw insulation is gaining attention for its high r-values and fire-resistant qualities, homeowners and builders attracted to straw for its anti-chemical properties must finish interior walls with clay or lime, which returns to the same problems of plaster wall systems: lack of industry knowledge and the amount of labor needed for installation raises costs and lengthens construction timelines, and further, straw insulation raises issues for chasing out electrical and plumbing systems for workers.

Looking to historical precedent, my investigation seeks to develop a prototype for a rigid wallboard similar to drywall in its physical properties using regenerative biogenic materials. Using straw as a material for its abundance and viability as a post-agricultural byproduct, my investigation looks to historic thatch wall systems and Stramit of the early twentieth century to develop an alternative to drywall. After comparing wall systems in the preindustrial era and analyzing the global drywall industry, including supply, manufacturing, and landfill chains, I devised an experiment to create a prototype that can be graded comparatively to drywall.



Typical section detail of a suburban tract home. Replacing just one high-embodied carbon material in the wall section can substantially reduce emissions.





#01 Board: 1/2" compressed straw board baked with lime binder



speculative interior render



# Indeed With Everything All At Once

## Charles Moore and the Everyday Practice of Place

“Space itself has a history.”  
- Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces”

### On Architectural Theory and Rhetorical Space

The term “space” has a nebulous definition applied loosely across academic disciplines, used largely metaphorically to apply to the cultural, political, and legal landscapes that give shape to the customs of our lives. In the discipline of architecture, we define space physically, referring to the place created within the constraints or borders of material objects that we call the built environment. In *The Gendered Pulpit: Preaching in American Protestant Spaces*, feminist rhetorician Roxanne Mountford presents a possibility for a useful definition of rhetorical space as the material spaces or conditions surrounding communicative events, referring literally ‘...to rooms, lecterns, auditoriums, platforms, confession booths, and classrooms,’ (Mountford 17), all of which mediate the actions of participants through associated social expectations and material dimensions. Mountford maintains that rhetoric occurs at the intersection of a communicative event and the space within which it is born. Contained within the bounds of architected thresholds is an ongoing rhetorical situation that alters every communicative event occurring inside before and after.

Architectural rhetoric is contingent upon both built structure as object, with its own semiotic value, and written theory, the enactment of which is dependent on the transaction between the reader and the text that results in theory as a built practice or a different written reproduction that similarly contributes to the architectural rhetorical situation. The material object of the architecture and the written theory work in tandem to produce rhetoric in a transaction of meaning-making between the visual, spatial, and literary. And yet, it is not just the juncture of the architectural object and written theorizing that together compose an architectural rhetoric. We must also consider space and its own rhetorical capabilities, as architecture is the facilitator for and defining power on spatial limitations.

Thinking of architecture as a container

for rhetorical space while inherently acting rhetorically as an object, mover of people, and enabler of space gives theory the responsibility of identifying the communicative actions of architecture relational to people, the urban context, the environment, and other architecture; then, theory must determine how the resultant changes in space alter the rhetorical situation altogether. Identifying architectural theory as a type of rhetorical analysis, in which architecture communicates through certain devices as might a piece of literature, allows us to understand our urban environments, the space around us, and our physical place as complex networks of meaning that alter ourselves on a daily basis. Architectural rhetoric can further be understood not simply as the conglomeration of semiological practices of architecture altering each other endlessly, but the incessant interaction between humans and their everyday surroundings in the continual meaning-making of architecture itself that extends beyond designers, structures, and programmatic intent.

Architectural rhetoric—a composition of dimensions that is too little examined by architects and theorists alike—often has unforeseen influence over material structures, the written work of theorists, and the spaces and places contained within resultant architectures.

To investigate this theory, I explore hierarchical and relational place-making strategies as defined by Charles Moore in his 1967 article, “Plug It in, Rameses, and See if It Lights up. Because We Aren’t Going to Keep It Unless it Works.” As I argue in this essay, and as Moore demonstrates in “Plug It in, Rameses,” seemingly everyday, culturally hegemonic architectures are incessantly present, the sites for which most of our daily interactions with architecture, each other, and ourselves occurs, and are therefore rich sites for exploration of architectural rhetoric. To make such a claim is to argue that space, and not architecture itself, is more important to the creation and facilitation of rhetoric, but also, perhaps, that theorizing happens in the in-between space created by material architecture. I then

evaluate the complexities of placemaking and rhetorical space in an increasingly complex world as space is hybridized between the physical and the digital.

### “Plug It in, Rameses, and See if It Lights up. Because We Aren’t Going to Keep It Unless it Works”

The focus of this paper will be a rhetorical analysis of the work of architectural theory, “Plug It in, Rameses, and See if It Lights up. Because We Aren’t Going to Keep It Unless it Works,” by Charles Moore, written for the Yale architectural journal *Perspecta* in 1967. *Perspecta* is an academic journal that was fifteen years old at the time of the publication of this artifact, and was then and is still currently distributed by the MIT Press. This journal’s affiliation with Yale and MIT, two considerably prestigious schools, coupled with the fact that graduate students are competitively chosen to edit each issue, gives the pieces in the journal a credibility of legitimacy and expertise, and also gives readers insight into Moore’s audience. Because Moore was Dean at the Yale School of Architecture at the time of publication of this piece, he himself had a certain credibility as an expert practitioner and academic at the highest level, and wrote for an audience of architectural students, architectural academics, and the highest echelon of the field of architects. Thus, Moore writes with a familiar and informal, rather than formal and rigid, tone—he is more writing a letter to his contemporaries rather than speaking from the pulpit. This is illustrated in the table of contents of Vol. 11 of *Perspecta*—also in the issue were pieces by Robert Venturi, R. Buckminster Fuller (who Moore refers to by the familiarizing nickname “Bucky” in “Plug It in, Rameses”), and Peter Millard. Moore is keenly aware of the late-Modernist/early postmodernist period in which he is writing, a time when many architecture schools were at the point of beginning to or actively disrupting their Beaux-Arts curricula, which we can identify because of the aim of the piece to disrupt. The French-Algerian philosopher Jacques





Piazza d'Italia, designed by Charles Moore and completed in 1978 for the 1984 Louisiana World Exposition.

Derrida is also a clear influence in the piece, as *Of Grammatology* was published the same year as Vol. 11 of *Perspecta* and Moore overtly aligns the “electronic architecture” of the present with “networks of meaning,” a direct result of Derrida and deconstruction theory.

“Plug It in, Rameses, and See if It Lights Up” is self-conscious about the rhetorical situation into which it is entering as well, which is reflected in the intent of the piece. Moore openly acknowledges in the piece that he is writing at the beginning of a new age, and is conscious that he is making a case for a low-brow “architecture of inclusion” in an Ivy League publication. But as Dean, he has the agency to do so, and the formulation of his argument into claims and evidence, coupled with the discursive tactics of familiarization and framing, solidify his argument.

The two central arguments of the artifact that Moore constructs are that place, once defined hierarchically in relational terms between objects and location, is now electronically determined by networks of meaning; and that there is a difference between “architects of exclusion,” who have failed to address the environmental concerns and social conditions of the past several decades, and the “architecture of inclusion,” which places into contention the subjectivities

of beauty and taste and highlights the once-understated importance of the vitality that arises out of vernacular commercial spaces. Moore’s key concern is the rhetorical situation of place in space, and “Plug it In, Rameses, and See if It Still Lights Up” can be identified as theory because its argument is predicated on the assumptions of an existing body of architectural rhetoric.

### Place-Space Relationships and the Architecture of the In-Between

Moore addresses the rhetorical situation of architectural rhetoric by breaking down the hierarchical relationships between object-space in the past rhetoric of placemaking by acknowledging and affirming that place is now created by the electronic extension of human bodies. The human scale, or extension of the body, has always been part of the practice of placemaking, but was previously acknowledged as man’s physical body coupled with the extension of that body through mind and thought. The electronic transactions between humans and spaces makes the “human scale” now a constantly-shifting evolution of changing bodies via electronic extensions and recessions of self, and place is thus instantaneously accessible predicated on networks of meaning. This revelation results in the absolute collapse of place as a hierarchy of place-object relationships in contiguous space.

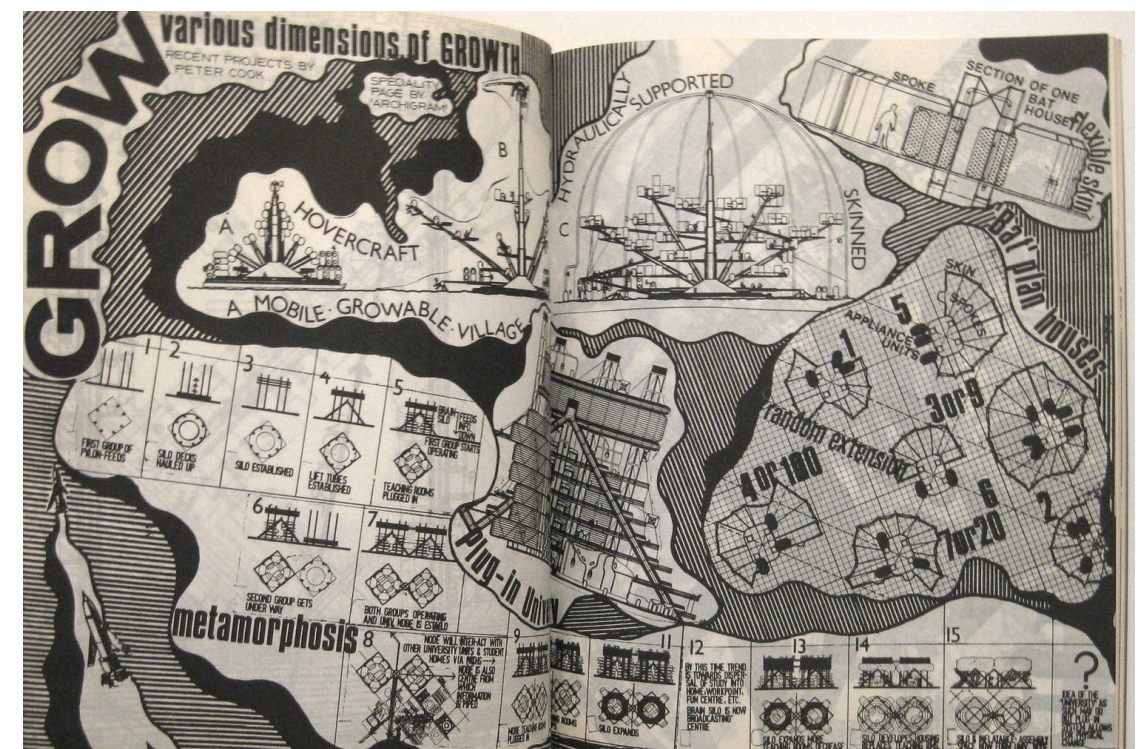
Moore’s discursive tactics craft “Plug It in, Rameses, and See if It Still Lights up” as a persuasive argument. Moore makes many declarative statements such as “...surely their proper concern must be, as it has always been the creation of *place*.” (Moore, 34) He uses bold face font to make distinctions, and claims are phrased as fact through his diction. The only other place boldface type is used is to denote *Perspecta* as a publication—thus, “place” as a definition is elevated to publication status. Rhetorical questions are posed to which he has the answer: “If architects are to continue to do useful work on this planet, then surely...” (34), while adverbs and adjectival phrases are used as modifiers to make us

question previously-held assumptions about our world: “This, supposedly, will be useful to help people know where they are which will aid, by extension, in helping people know who they are” (34). Moore leads readers to challenge this assumption—should this be supposed? Should we take this for granted as true? This isn’t a question—it’s a statement of the hegemonic paradigm about how we orient ourselves geographically, spatially, and personally in our world—but the diction fractures the rigidity of the paradigm.

Moore follows with declaratory statements. In the first paragraph, he outlines the fullest extent of the hegemonic paradigm, the one in which we think we live. He cites evidence of the paradigm of the object-location relational hierarchy at Peking, in Hindu towns, and at Angkor Wat, using the plan of Peking to bolster the argument, as it illustrates the “axis (penetrating) from outside through layer after layer of increasing importance to the seat of the emperor himself” (35). He then draws a direct comparison between the cross axes and concentric rings of temples at Angkor Wat to concentric rings of mountains around the seven seas which center on the sacred Buddhist mountain.

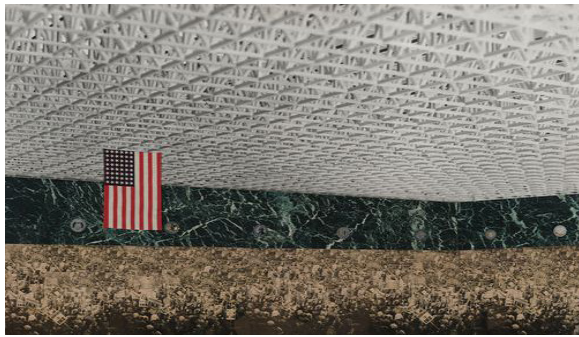
In the second paragraph, he completely debunks the paradigm in which

he has just familiarized us. He follows with declaratory, factual statements, showing that he knows where we are now: “Our own places, however, like our lives, are not bound up in one contiguous space” (35). He utilizes anaphora, with the sentences “Our own places...Our order,” a repetition that creates a mentality of us in the present vs. them in the past, further distancing us from where we are to where we thought we were, which actually isn’t where we’ve been for at least the past half century. Further, in referencing R. Buckminster Fuller and Marshall McLuhan, Moore’s statements are given credibility: other people, professionals in the field, agree with him, and by calling Fuller “Bucky,” Moore exhibits a sense of familiarity with someone we should assume is an expert in the field, and because he is familiar with him and we are not, Moore is a credible source. Moore continually uses the words “us, we, our,” “Many of us...” “Even more important, independently of where we move our bodies at any moment, we have as we all know...”, building a heightened sense of familiarity and identifying with the readers makes us trust Moore. “We all know” makes the next part of the sentence even more credible. Moore, previously established as a credible source, asserts that we know as well as he does, so of course it is true—we



Peter Cook, “Grow: Various Dimensions of Growth” from *Perspecta 11: The Yale Architectural Journal* 1967.





Mies van der Rohe, Collage for *Chicago Convention Hall*, 1954.

presume ourselves to be on the same plane of expertise as Moore, who we trust as an author both through the power of his biography as well as his writing.

Paragraph five is the first instance in which Moore does not use any familiarizing language with the reader, and for the most part stops using that diction for the rest of the piece. Here he makes his first point about the change of human scale in this new paradigm. Moore does not classify the electronic as a world in itself, but simply as the new mode of accessing and experiencing place. This I identify as a precursor to digital space—here, Moore fails to identify the electronic as a space and place in itself but merely defines it as a mode of experiencing other physical places. He gives an example of a person dancing to the same song in New York and Los Angeles that, while it weakly exemplifies that one might share an experience simultaneously with another individual or community regardless of geography, lacks an understanding that the immaterial, electric movement of sound through digital space can itself become a habitable site for new forms of architecture to take shape. Because readers are now familiarized with the author, Moore drops the “us/we/our” diction and is able to make claims such as “the hierarchy of importances from private to monumental has vanished” (35) without the same substantial evidence backing them up as he had to on the first page, when he was still seeking credibility from the readers.

While Moore has delineated the hegemonic paradigm we thought we belonged to and outlined the conditions of the new, electronic paradigm to which we

actually belong, and have for much longer than we suspected, on page 36 Moore begins contributing to, rather than just acknowledging, the current architectural rhetorical situation. Having familiarized his readers with himself, his expertise, and his framework, he states, “The network, on the contrary, needs help. It needs to be plugged in, into the right markets to make money, into electricity in order to light up, into a sewage system in order to drain, into a working social framework in order to avoid immediately being torn down” (36). Here he demonstrates the influence of Derrida, as the “network of meaning” defined by Derrida in deconstruction theory now takes physical form, albeit not in the semiologies of constructed space but in the multivalent systems on which the architectural paradigm is now predicated.

Moore then begins to question the point of defining cities spatially. He is able to identify the “electronic world,” yet seems to not fully comprehend the scope of an electronic world nor its capacity for hosting/creating space, as he can only elucidate the electronic as a mode through which transactions occur, not a container for interaction. This is demonstrated by the quote “In an electronic world where space and location have so little functional meaning...” (38). Yet at this point in the piece, a little over halfway through the essay, Moore reminds us that he is self conscious of the moment in which he is writing, identifying that he is writing at an “early point in the new age” (38), where he has the agency to both safely critique late Modernist projects while also speculate on the architectural practices of the postmodern period. He refers to late Modernist projects under the category of “the architecture of exclusion,” remarking



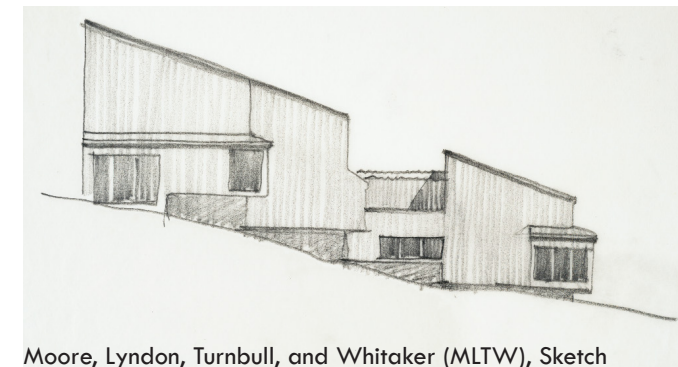
Robert Venturi, *Vanna Venturi House*, 1964.

upon their failures to gain control over the physical environment to create place. He argues:

“If we can presume that the point in ‘organic’ order is to make something with life which somehow grows, reproduces itself, and spreads into other aspects of life, then we have sadly to admit that the (architecture of exclusion) has spawned no legitimate progeny” (38)

Although Moore used tone, familiarizing language, anaphora, and other such discursive tactics to build trust between himself as author and his readers, he provides evidence for this claim; the claim that the last several decades (and it seems he claims also, with the inclusion of Andrea Palladio, centuries) of architecture have been unsuccessful in mediating between humans and their environments would have seemed bold and unsubstantiated. Moore provides evidence for this claim using Frank Lloyd Wright, Mies van der Rohe, Andrea Palladio, and Louis Kahn as examples of “...the enigma in any revelation that plane and solid geometry together have not solved (the) environmental problems...” (39). By capitalizing on the name recognition of these architects and then proving that, semiotically, their architecture doesn’t function as their designs claim they do, Moore claims another degree of credibility as an author, similar to his alignment of himself with Buckminster Fuller on the first page of the essay.

After the weaving together of many prolific architects of the past 150 years to substantiate this argument, Moore has again aggregated credibility with readers by providing more than a page of substantiating evidence outlining some of the most important parts of the architectural canon as failures



Moore, Lyndon, Turnbull, and Whitaker (MLTW), Sketch for *Condominium at the Sea Ranch*, CA, 1964.

to address civilization and its most prescient concerns. If the past several decades of architecture have thus been a failure in addressing the vitality of human life, and these architects can be referred to as “exclusive” due to their inability (or perhaps, lack of want) to address the rapid growth, diversity, and creativity of common life, then, Moore concludes, others should be given (and will seize) the opportunity to create an architecture of inclusion. And where he finds that architecture of inclusion is somewhere he identifies as a place the “architects of exclusion,” the upper echelon of the discipline, would abhor: the commercial strip, a vernacular and prevalent architecture that Moore frames as a manifestation of vitality, growth, and furthermore the inevitability growth. He states that the:

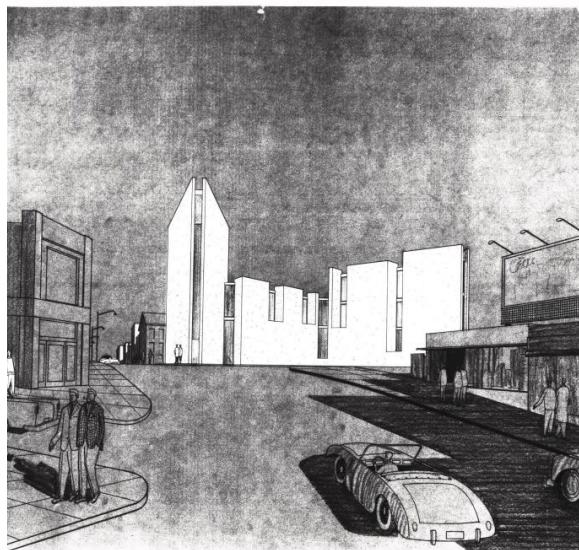
“...chance should now be given to, or seized by, some architects of inclusion...make their order with as much of life as they can include, rather than as little, who welcome redundancy and depend on it even as the electronic information networks do, and who are willing to accept into their systems of organization those ambiguities and conflicts of which life is made” (39).

This claim is supported by evidence of Robert Venturi, who Moore denotes as a paradoxically conscious architect of inclusion, with interests ranging from “the history of architectural composition (with an encyclopedic knowledge of its hallowed monuments) to the popular roadside manifestations of our own time” (39). Still, with the same familiarizing tone that entrusts readers to Moore and unrelinquishing structure of claims, evidence, and analysis that comprise Moore’s arguments, he follows with examples of what he cites as the architecture of inclusion, starting with an example most likely to be accepted by the architectural establishment to whom he writes—Venturi is on equal footing with Moore in the publication, as he is among the authors featured in the issue of *Perspecta*. Moore then takes readers from Venturi down a spectrum of examples of the architecture of inclusion, to a strip commercial street in Monterey, California mostly attributable Donlyn Lyndon, then to



Peter Millard's Whitney Avenue firehouse, to what he calls "one of the century's great monuments of the architecture of inclusion" in the Santa Barbara County Courthouse, and finally culminating in the Madonna Inn south of San Luis Obispo, California, which Moore readily admits "...would never get a passing grade in a school of architecture where tastefulness was prized" (43).

By taking readers down a gradation from establishment-approved Robert Venturi to a lowbrow joint gas station motel off a highway, Moore is able to convince readers fully of his argument. Had he started after his bold claim that vitality lies not in the existing canon of architecture, but in the commercial strip, and then followed that claim with the evidence of the Madonna Inn, the argument would have been much less convincing. By appealing to what his readers know first and then slowly whittling down the argument until he reveals at the core that the truly exciting and creative architecture is really the common, the mundane, and the everyday, readers



Earl Carlin, Peter Millard, and Paul Pozzi, Sketch for New Haven Fire Headquarters, 1961.

arrive at the conclusion of the essay with the assertion that the Madonna Inn is the epitome of an exciting architecture of inclusion, rather than a failed point in the argument. It is here, in the final two sentences, that Moore bridges the gap between the two central concerns of the essay:

"It is not at all disquieting, but rather exhilarating to note that here there is everything instead of nothing. A kind of immediate involvement with the site, with the user and his movements, indeed with everything all at once, with the vitality and the vulgarity of real commerce, quivers at a pitch of excitement which presages, more clearly than any tidy sparse geometry, an architecture for the electric present." (43)

### Fracturing Hegemony with the Existing

Architectural rhetoric is comprised of both built structure as object, with its own semiotic value, and written theory, the enactment of which is dependent on the transaction between the reader and the text that results in theory as a built practice or a different written reproduction that similarly contributes to the architectural rhetorical situation. Architecture, like literature, awaits human interaction for the enactment of its spaces; a text awaits the transaction between itself and a reader for the creation of literature, an infinite variety of mental constructions held within the reader. But unlike literature, architecture can hold meaning as an object acting semiotically or with artistic value without human enactment. Yet when the space contained by and enabled by architecture, whether within it or altered by it, is enacted by humans, we can begin to question what architecture actually is. When we begin to

align our definition of architecture with the enactment of rhetorical space, it is evident that architecture seeps into every aspect of the world manifested, crafted, and perceived by humans, because our synthesis of architectural object or material structure into theory—which in turn produces more architecture—is dependent on a transactional, ongoing experience of space and place.

"Plug It in, Rameses, and See if It Lights up" works as architectural theory because it engages with and alters the architectural rhetorical situation of its time while addressing material objects of the past and present and predicating a paradigm shift that will affect the way architecture will be conceived of and produced in the future. No work of literature that does not engage in the rhetorical situation can claim to be theory; theory must disrupt or alter the situation that authors, architects, historians, and students are constantly contributing to, that which we may even generously call the architectural canon, that defines the paradigm in which we practice as academics, designers, and builders.

What Moore achieves in "Plug It in, Rameses, and See if It Lights Up" is a successful argument for the serious consideration by the field of architecture what had previously been disregarded as unserious, or even not part of the architectural discipline at all. At the end of the Modern era, the juncture between two movements of the twentieth century, Moore is able to assess the efficacy of Modernism and its forebears to produce a sense of place and simultaneously acknowledge that, regardless of that assessment, humanity and its accompanying technologies are advancing at a pace so rapid that architecture and its placemaking strategies will be radically outpaced before the field realizes. Moore looks past the highbrow Modernist projects of the day and sees what's right before him, and everyone, as the prolific typology of the day: the common "commercial strip," a vernacular typology that has brought more vitality to the urban environment in its growth and inevitably of reproduction than any other architecture of the twentieth century. Moore asks correctly—has it been more effective at producing a

sense of place? Looking around the United States, united by ribbons of asphalt from sea to shining sea and the consumerist ideals that accompany car culture, Moore finds that the commercial strip sympathizes with the "vernacular desire to embrace rather than exclude." This realization significantly fractured and indeed shifted the entire assumed paradigm, as the upper echelon of the field to whom Moore was writing realized that the prevailing typology of the twentieth century was not anything that had been designed in the Bauhaus, in Holland, or in any of the Ivy League architecture schools, but instead had been mass-manufactured and stamped across America with the same rhythm and regularity as powerlines. More than any Corbusian or Miesian project, the commercial strip is the single most defining architecture of the 20th century.

Not only does this essay bring forth mass-produced vernacular typology for serious consideration by the architectural establishment, but it also asserts the absolute dissolution of hierarchical place-object relationships in contiguous space, replaced with networks of spatial relationships and constantly changing meanings. Moore is one of the earliest to assert that the "electronic" has a significant role in placemaking strategies, and goes so far as to say that not only has it impacted architecture's ability to create place, but it has also become "the one true architecture, the electric architecture" (38). Although in this essay Moore fails to grasp the electric's capability for being itself a place (indeed, an infinite multiplicity of places), and mostly relegates it to "electronic glue" that connects people to physical places, he recognizes that the probable conclusion, when this new paradigm has been iterated upon



Dining Room at the Madonna Inn, San Luis Obispo, California, 1958-1960.



William Mosser, Santa Barbara County Courthouse, 1929.





Christopher Fowler (photographer), from “How LA became the land of strip malls,” *Curbed*, 2019.

to the *n*th degree, is an aspatial electronic world.

Further, “Plug It in, Rameses, and See if It Lights up” is one of the first to shift architectural rhetoric because of Derrida, inciting what would become Deconstructivism in architecture arising from Derrida’s deconstruction of meaning into endless networks of signs and signifiers. *On Grammatology*, published in the same year as Vol. 11 of *Perspecta* in 1967, immediately impacted the architectural rhetorical situation due to Moore’s analysis and translation of Derrida’s theory from semiotic networks to electro-spatial networks of place. Not only does the introduction of deconstruction into architectural rhetoric significantly alter the rhetorical situation, but this happening in the very same year that the book was published signifies another major shift in the discipline: architecture, classically one of the slower disciplines to evolve due to the time-consuming nature of building projects, was immediately impacted by an academic discourse outside itself. Although this has happened before through history and is how the discipline evolves, the fact that deconstruction was absorbed into the discipline, discourse, and rhetorical situation of architecture so instantaneously signifies a shift toward interdisciplinarity as the field rapidly accelerates towards building quicker—more mass-produced.

## Conclusion

“Plug It in, Rameses, and See if It Still Lights up” is an impactful piece of architectural theory because it highlights two seemingly unrelated things—electronic communication and commercial strip malls—and combines them into a new way of understanding architecture as object, place as a network of conditions and meanings in both physical and digital space, and the recognition of a spatial order that is at once mundane and dynamic, mass-produced and hegemonic yet exciting and worthy of study. Moore was early to the understanding of the digital world as a mode of extending the human body outside its physical into physical space and thus transforming the meaning of place, and although he did not understand the that human bodies could extend too into the digital world itself and create place within that ephemeral electric architecture, he saw that instantaneous communication changed the previously hierarchical relationships between architecture and its physical geography. The conclusions in “Plug It in, Rameses, and See if It Still Lights up” foundationally shifted the architectural rhetorical situation at a critical juncture of the twentieth century, socially, politically, environmentally, economically, and architecturally as well. Moore’s findings spurred the beginnings of the Deconstructivist movement in architecture and certainly contributed to what were the core principles of postmodernism (though no postmodernist ascribed to any “core principles” or rules, and those are retroactively applied).

“Plug It in, Rameses, and See if It Still Lights up. Because We Aren’t Going to Keep It Unless It Works” is worthy of study as a piece of architectural theory because of how deeply it impacted the course of architectural history. But on a much more significant level, the essay demonstrates that if Moore was able to introduce and seriously, critically consider things we in the discipline hadn’t previously seen as architecture (and perhaps looked down upon), then we must continually ask of ourselves what it is now that we are

not seeing as architecture that is worth serious and study. When architectural scholars examine topics of discourse outside our purview in the spatial world, then the possibilities for placemaking and new forms of architecture are radically expanded. Although Moore was incapable in his time of envisioning a way of placemaking coupled with electronic spaces and the meaning-making networks of the digital age, this is one site we can find rich with possibilities for creating immaterial spaces.

This requires exiting the discipline of architecture, embracing with fervor the interdisciplinarity that drew Moore to include Derrida’s theory of deconstruction in his essay so soon after the publication of Derrida’s book, and closely examining both the rare and the hegemonic mundanities of everyday life. Rhetorical space and its relationship to placemaking only grows ever more complex; we live now in a different world than Moore, where physical space has not at all vanished but exists in contention with the digital-electric world and generates hybrid places in their interaction. These generative spaces present to us possibilities for new forms and definitions of architecture to take shape, and with those, the capabilities of architecture to both act rhetorically as object and facilitate rhetoric in the fashioning of new rhetorical space.

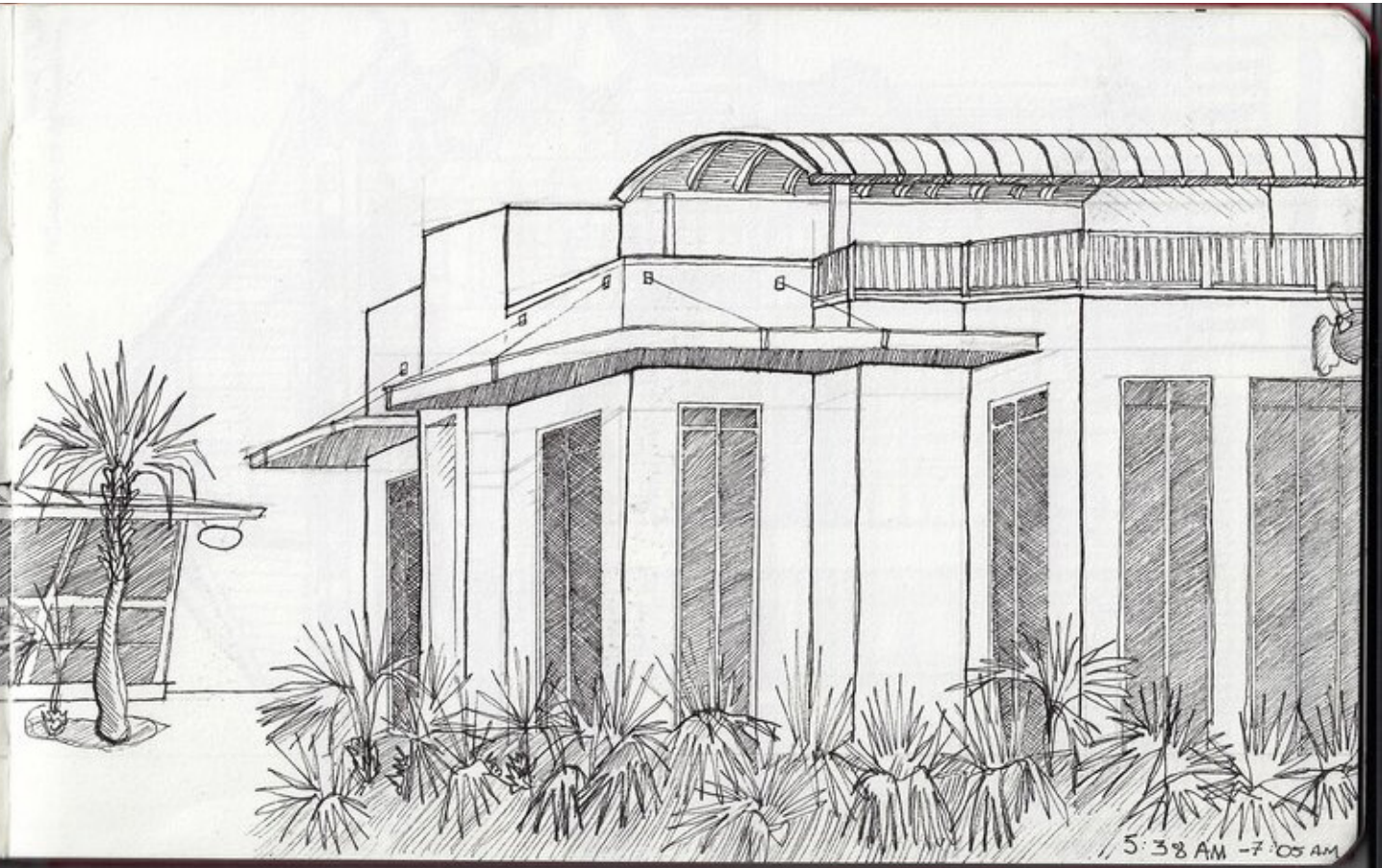
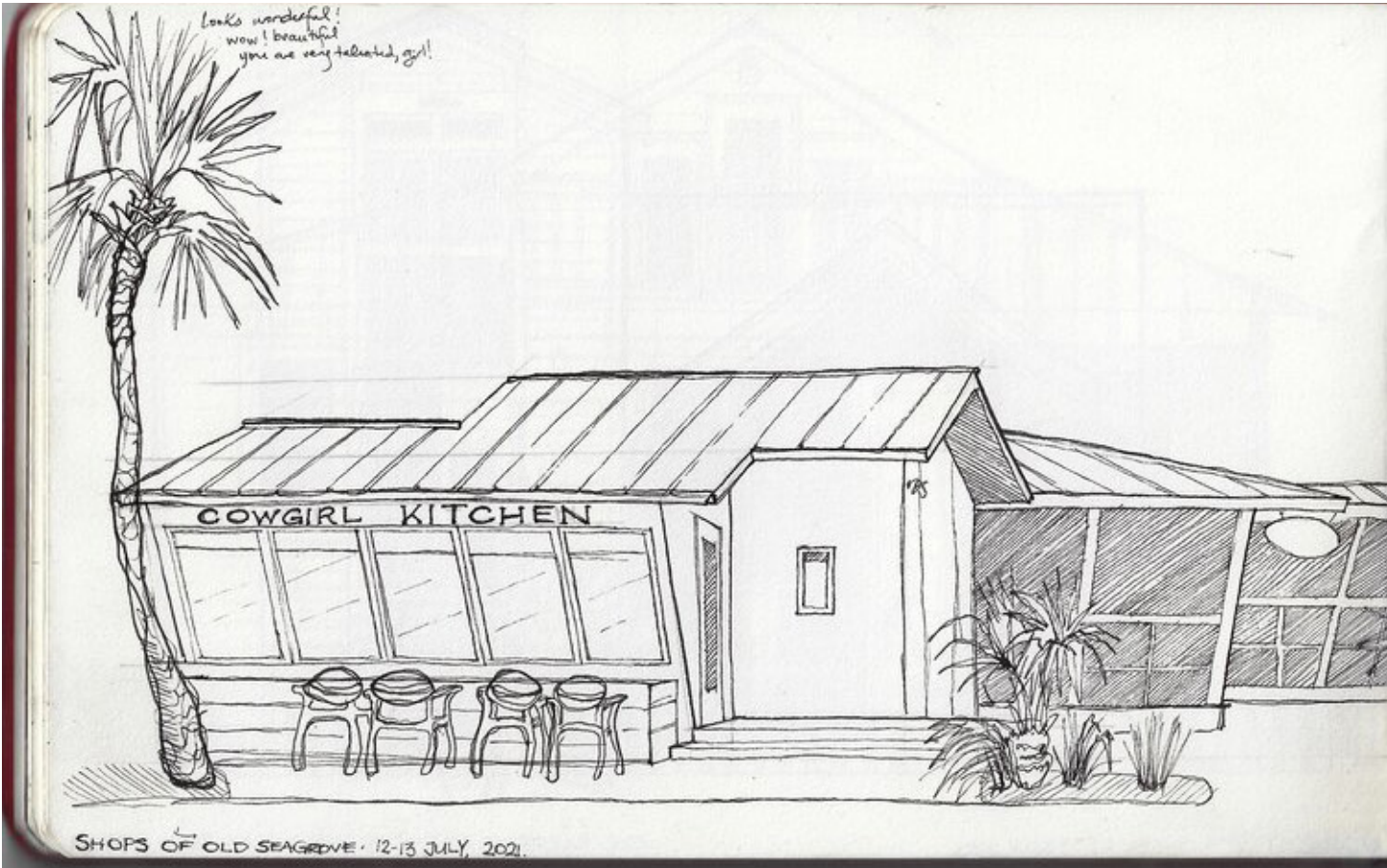
It is not the job of architectural theory to advance the field of architecture by finding new building techniques or representation styles. We must self-consciously define ourselves as we evolve, rationalize our movements in the very moment they occur. Architectural theory must contend, indeed, with everything all at once.



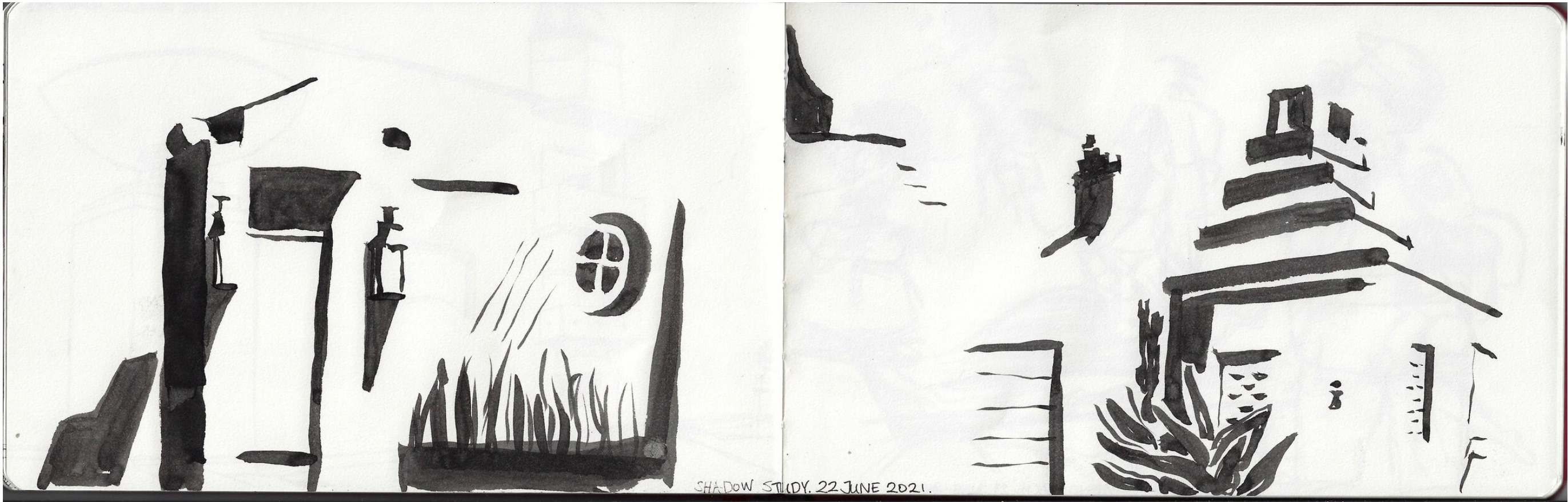
Christopher Fowler (photographer), from “How LA became the land of strip malls,” *Curbed*, 2019.

- 1 Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 1st American ed., Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976.
- 2 Foss, Sonja K. *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2018.
- 3 Moore, Charles. “Plug It in, Rameses, and See If It Still Lights up. Because We Aren’t Going to Keep It Unless It Works.” *Perspecta*, vol. 11, 1967, pp. 32-43. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/1566932](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1566932).
- 4 Mountford, Roxanne. *The Gendered Pulpit: Preaching in American Protestant Spaces*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003.

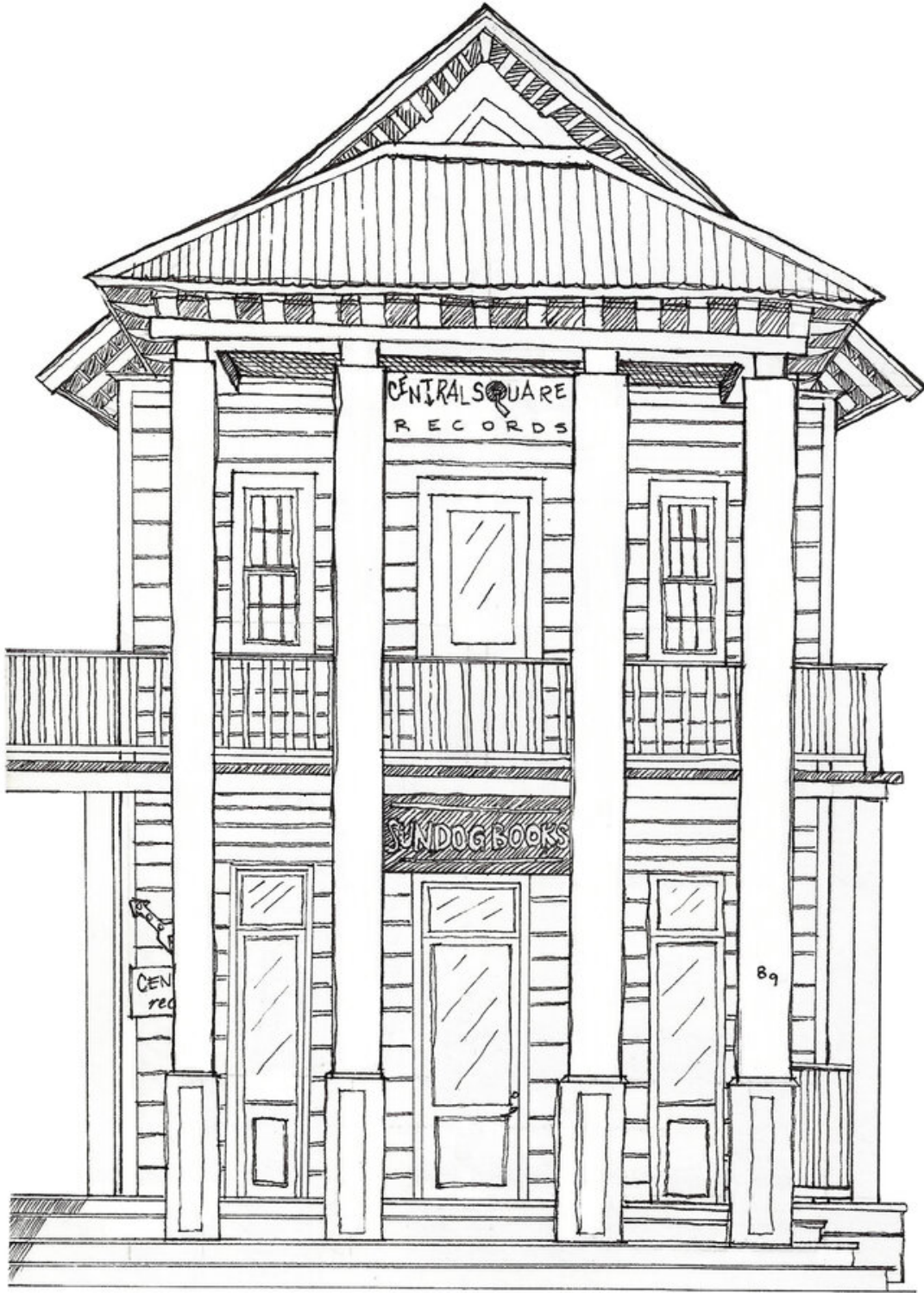




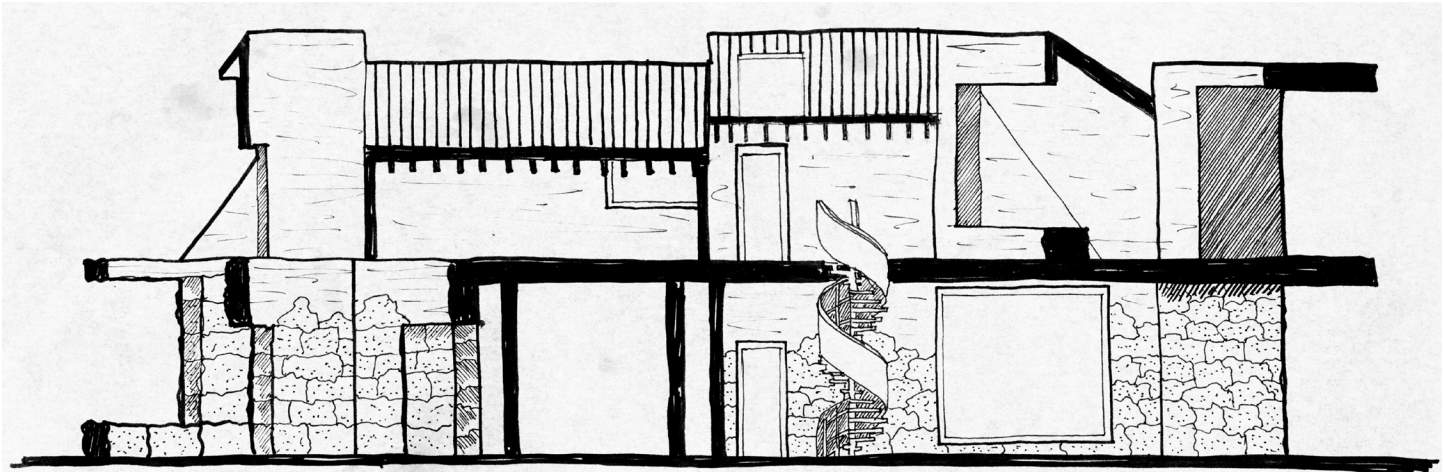




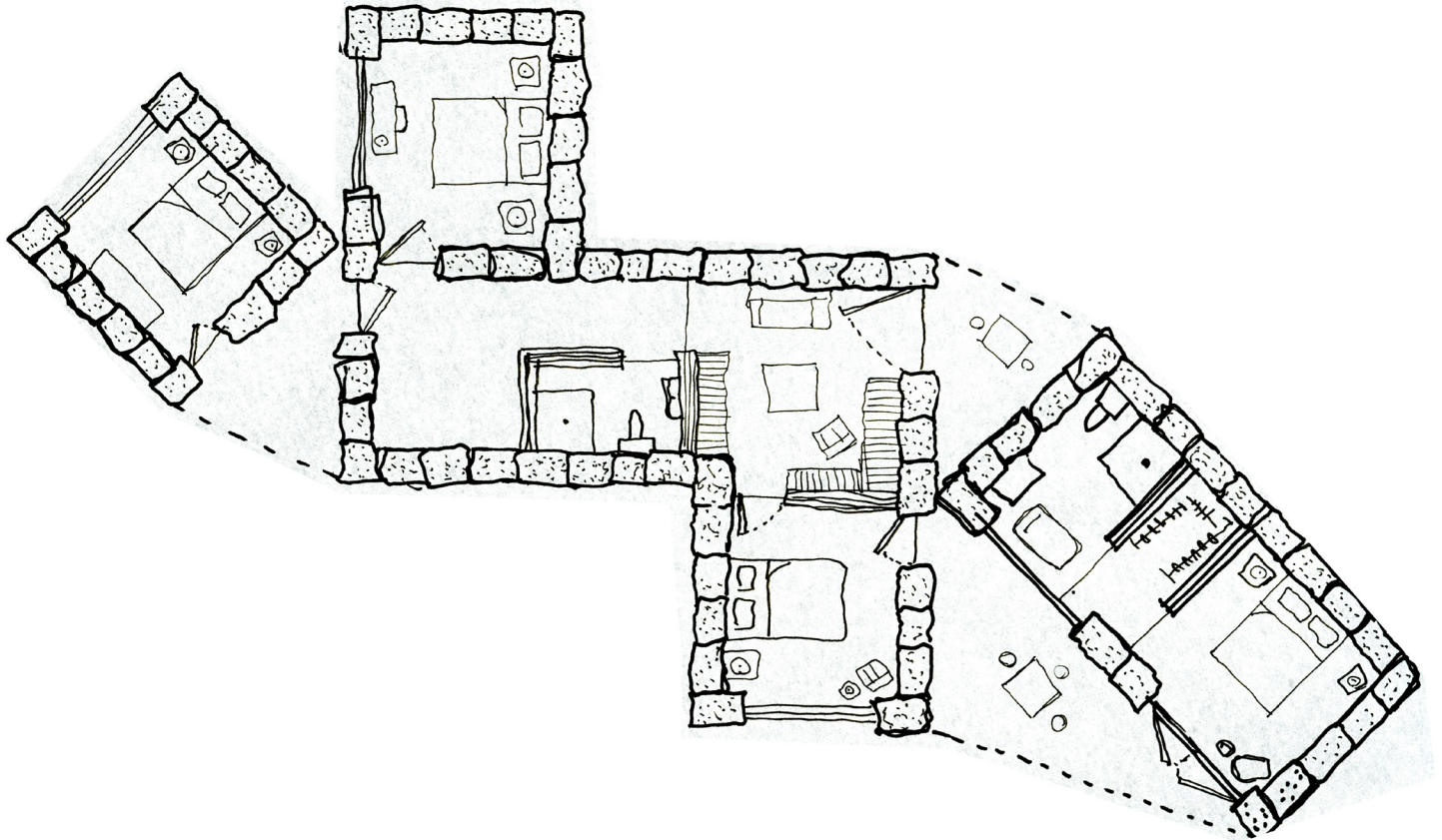




sketch of Sundog Books, Seaside FL, summer 2021



section sketch for *Commoning the Fracture*, Spring 2024



plan sketch for *Commoning the Fracture*, Spring 2024





conceptual collage #4 for *Housing in a Mass Timber Armature*  
“Walkable Apartment for College Girls”



conceptual collage #7 for *Housing in a Mass Timber Armature*  
“Recreation and the Commons for Retirees”





conceptual collage #9 for *Housing in a Mass Timber Armature*  
"Unit for 4 Generations"



conceptual collage #6 for *Housing in a Mass Timber Armature*  
"The Commons in Summer Weather"