

Subversions

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Keeping up with the Klassics

Loudlistening to Payable Debts: Measuring chrono-cartographies of displacement on artifacts at the planetary scale.

Instructors: Nathalie Frankowski & Cruz Garcia.

AAD Studio. Summer 2023.

Video: <https://vimeo.com/850975937>

Website: <https://kuwtklassics.cargo.site>

This research project tells the story of the Gilded Coffin of Nedjemankh, which was once displayed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The coffin was looted during the Egyptian Arab Spring of 2011, and was later illegally exported amidst the worst economic crisis Egypt ever suffered. The Met acquired it in 2017 from an antiquities dealer, overlooking the inconsistencies in its history.

In an incredibly ridiculous and a ridiculously incredible turn of events, the coffin's fraudulent provenance was discovered after Kim Kardashian posed with it at the 2018 Met Gala photo op. The photo-showcasing Kim's and the Coffin's twinning looks-went viral.

These looks, however, weren't so coincidental: Kim wore a custom Versace dress, designed by Donatella Versace who was hosting (and funding) this year's Gala and Heavenly Bodies exhibition. The dress was part of a tribute collection, marking 20 years since the murder of Gianni Versace. Gianni's last couture collection, shown a week before his murder, was inspired by artifacts he himself saw at the Met. The golden dress perfectly hugged Kim's body, just in time for the launch of her new perfume, bottled in her very own shape.

As for the coffin, after the case was closed and done, it was discovered that the forged

papers had several anachronistic mistakes that should've raised some flags during the Met's due diligence. Researching the Met's open database reveals that it continues its practice of conveniently purchasing artifacts from crisis-struck areas.

The video, in the medium of a reality TV show, is a non-didactic attempt to portray what is real and what isn't, matters of self-presentation, and surprising discoveries. The work is accompanied by a website offering revised entries for the Met Collection. The presentation was complemented by an installation consisting of dressmaking patterns made for Kim's measurements, and measured by the chronocartographies of Nedjemankh, Kim herself, and Versace on a planetary scale.

Kim Kardashian



Overview

Title: Kimberly Noel Kardashian, dressed in a custom Versace gown

Period: Contemporary

Date: 1980-Present

Geography: Los Angeles, California, USA/Armenia

Medium: Flesh and bone, botox, bronzer, glitter, gold, sequins

Dimensions: L. 159 cm, 97-64-105 cm (62 in., 38-25-41 in.), 56kg (123 lb.)

Credit Line: Loan from the artist, 2018

Provenance

Invited by the Met Gala lead chairperson, Anna Wintour, 2018.
Discovered between 2003-2007.
Dress on loan from Donatella Versace.

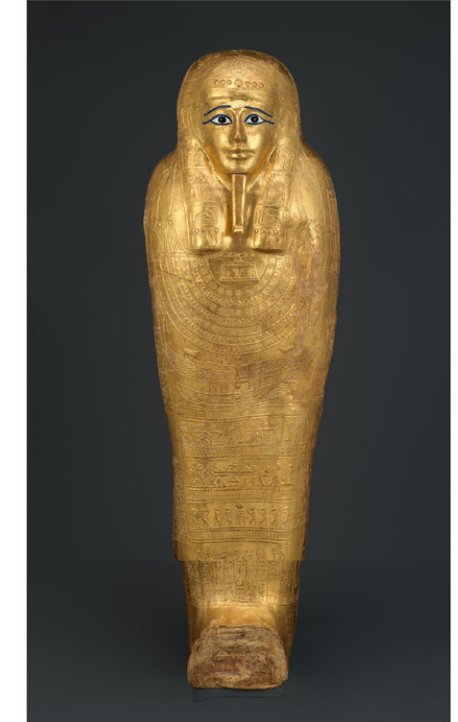
References

Vogue, "Kim Kardashian West Pulls a '90s Supermodel Move at the Met Gala", May 8 2018

Celeb Health Magazine, "Kim Kardashian's Height, Weight, Biography, Lifestyle & More", February 3 2023.

California Birth Index, "Kimberly Noel Kardashian, Born October 21, 1980, in California".

Nedjemankh's Coffin



Overview

Title: Lid of the coffin of the priest of Heryshef, Nedjemankh

Period: Late Ptolemaic Period

Date: 150-50 B.C.

Geography: From Egypt

Medium: Cartonnage (linen, glue, and gesso), gesso, paint, gold, silver, resin, glass, wood, leaded bronze

Dimensions: L. 181 x W. 53 x D. 28 cm (71 1/4 x 20 7/8 x 11 in.)

Credit Line: Purchase, 2017 Benefit Fund; Lila Acheson Wallace Gift; Louis V. Bell, Harris Brisbane Dick, Fletcher, and Rogers Funds and Joseph Pulitzer Bequest; Leona Sobel Education and The Camille M. Lownds Funds; and 2016 Benefit Fund, 2017

Accession Number: 2017.255ab

Provenance

Excavated illegally during the Arab Spring revolution in 2011. Trafficked to Dubai, Germany, and to the French dealer Kunicki, under a forged backdated export license from 1971 with an anachronistic mistake in origin country's name. Originally contained a mummified priest, Nedjemankh, thrown by the looters into the Nile for easier transportation. Acquired by the Met in 2017 for \$4 million.

References

Department of Egyptian Art Annals 2017-2018 Volume 4, New Acquisitions, pg. 1

"Metropolitan Museum Repatriates Gilded Coffin to Egypt". *Archaeology*. Archaeological Institute of America. 19 February 2019

Freakonomics Podcast, Episode 541, *The case of the \$4 Million Gold Coffin*, May 3rd 2023

[opening credits]

Narrator: This show is brought to you by

Narrator: KKW Body I

Narrator: Available in stores now!

[the intro]

KK: I'm Kim Kardashian West

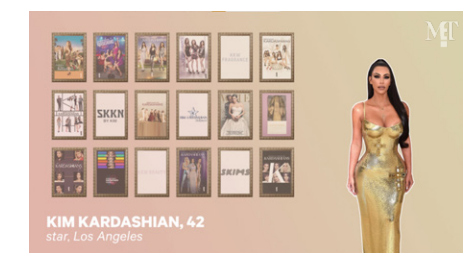
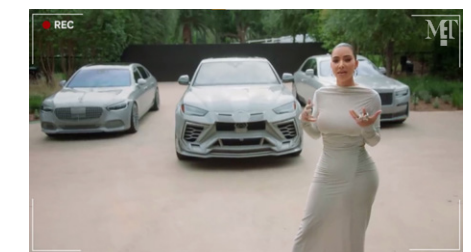
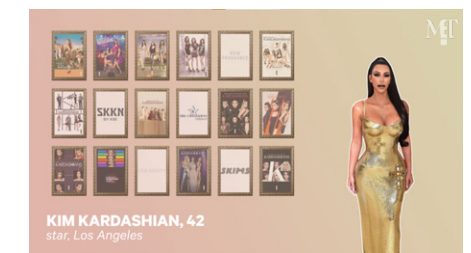
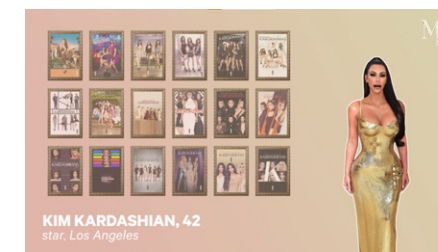
[flash flash flash flash]

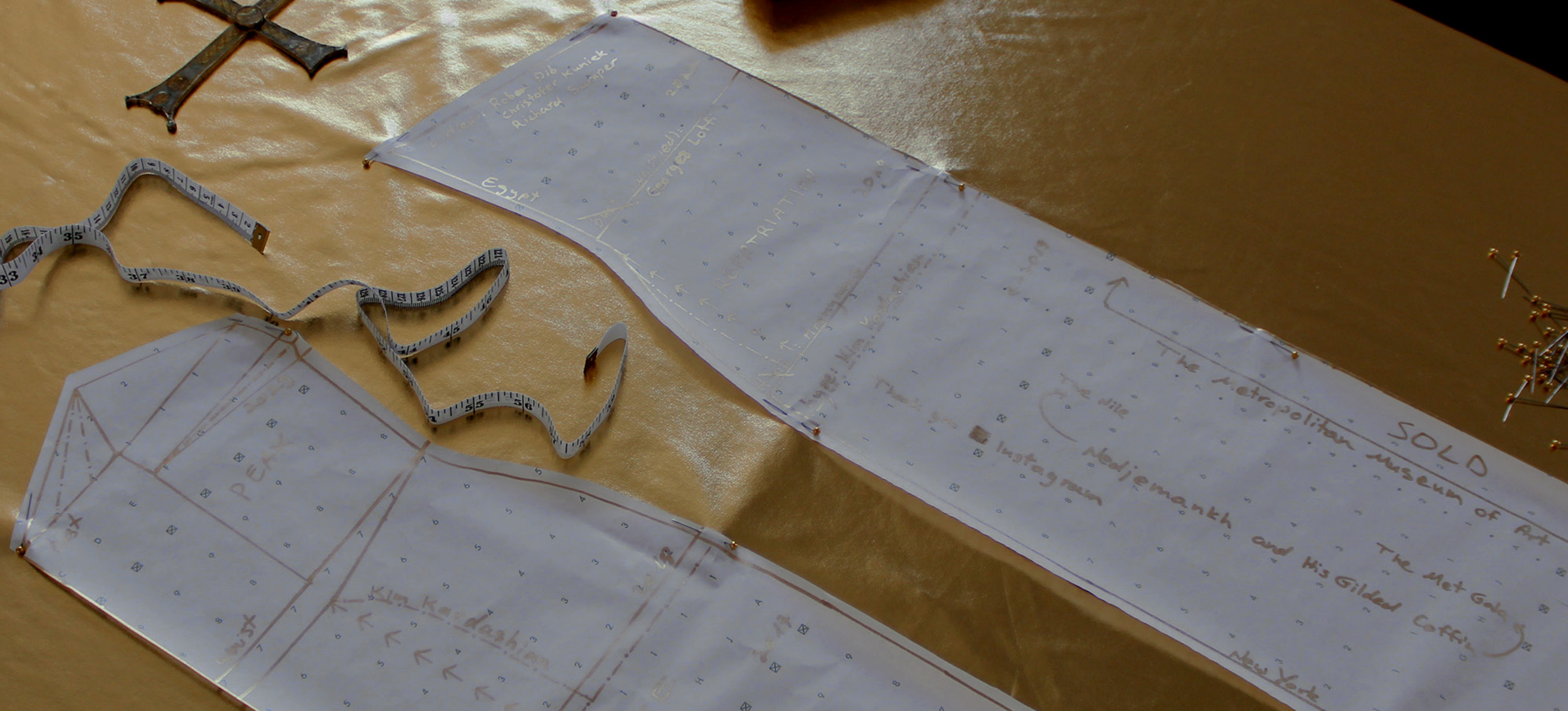
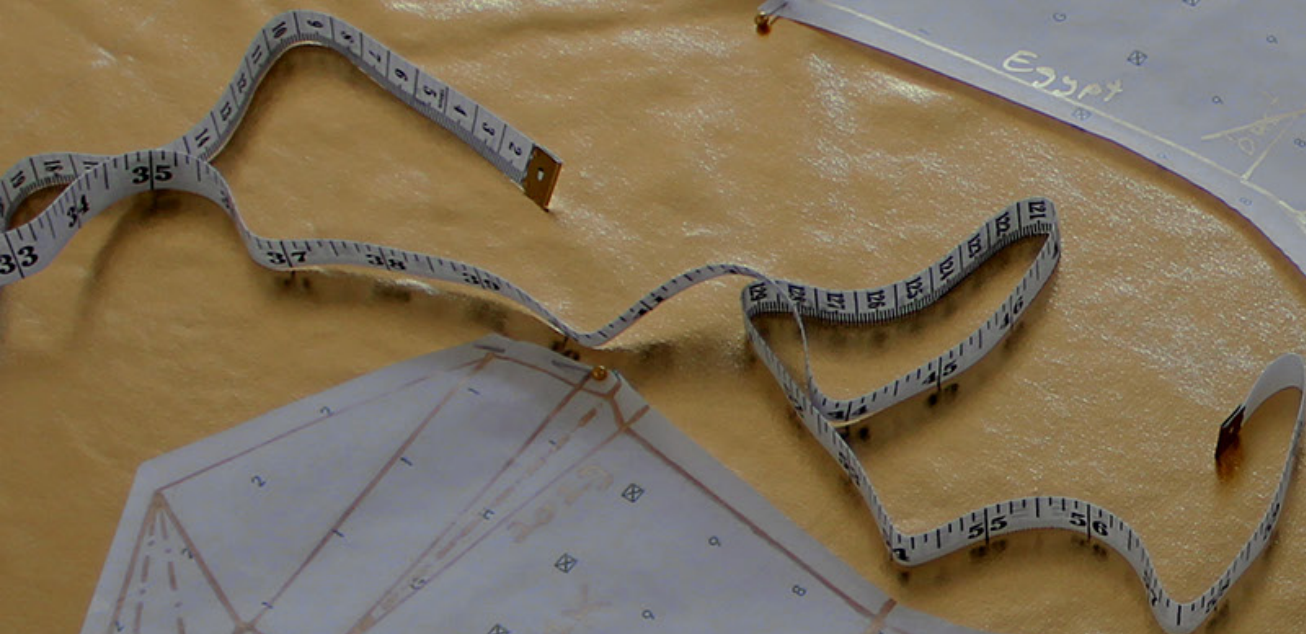
[flash flash flash flash]

KK: I'm a mother, millionaire, law student, and billionaire.

KK: I've always been a car girl, I love cars and I really wanted something different... My house is gray and I wanted them to kinda match the house, So I did all gray cars instead of my typical matte silver that I used to do.

KK: Then Anna believed in me... I think people started to take me seriously in fashion





[the meet cute]

[Dance music]

KK: How are you? You look amazing!

Reporter: You look amazing!

KK: Aww thank you

Reporter: Talk to me about this

KK: I'm wearing Versace, you know it's "Heavenly Bodies" so when I heard Donatella was hosting - she was my number one choice for this theme. I was going for kinda '90s glam on this, like '90s Versace"...

[glitching]

Anchor: ... the editor-in-chief of Vogue magazine, and she has been a close friend of Gianni Versace for more than a decade.

And Anna - I know this is a devastating day for you

AW: ...and not only was he a brilliant designer, he was a brilliant marketer

[glitching]

[dance]

[outfits]

[Nedjemankh]

[Kim K]

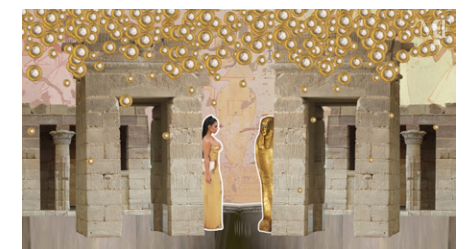
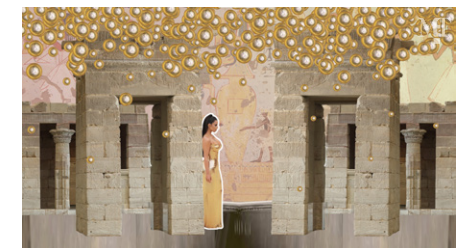
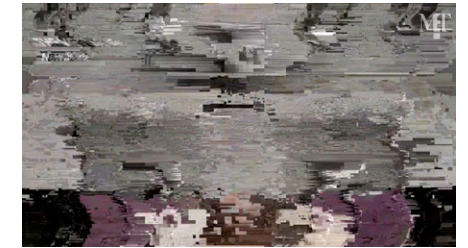
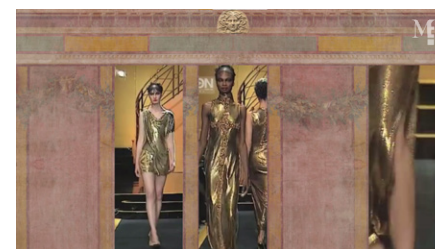
[Nedjemankh]

[Kim K]

[Nedjemankh]

[Kim K]

[Nedjemankh]



[the confession]

N: My name is Ndjemankh. I was excavated and exported in 1971

[glitching]

Reporter: All around this historic square, even in front of the Egyptian Antiquities museum, people began ripping off pavement, turning it into weapons. At least 3 were killed, and hundreds more were injured. A mosque has been turned into a field hospital

[glitching]

N: I was sold to the Met Museum in 2017

[glitching]

Reporter: Poverty level in Egypt have increased drastically, and more than fifty percent of the country's revenue is spent on trying to pay back its foreign debt

[glitching]

N: On the merit of my respected roots





#1000000

2017

حزب العدالة
حزب العدالة
حزب العدالة

حزب العدالة

حزب العدالة

Face book

حزب العدالة

France

Germany

Dubai



[the feud]

MB: Guess what? My kids know it's looted!

Narrator: That is Matthew Bogdanos

MB: I am an assistant district attorney here in the Manhattan district attorney's office. And I'm the chief of New York's Antiquities trafficking units.

MB: So this particular photo went around the world, and one of the people who saw the photo was one of the people who looted the coffin out of Egypt. This person sees this photo, looks it up and finds out that the Met had paid \$4 million for it. Well, he hadn't been paid. The looter hadn't been paid.

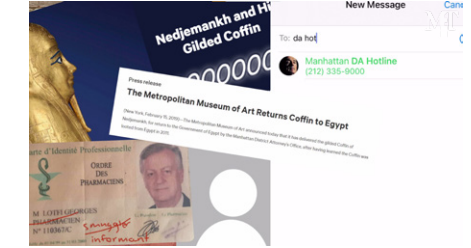
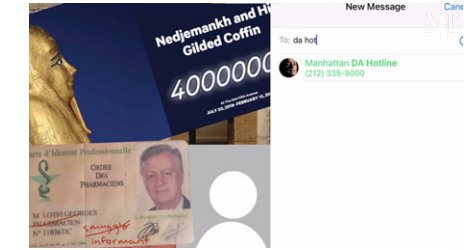
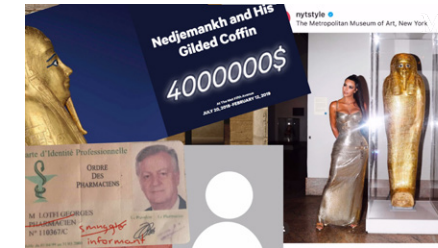
MB: So, he was furious. And he contacted a very good friend of his, who is also a smuggler, named Georges Lotfi, one of my informants. Georges puts me in touch with the looter. You know, we get the warrant. We seize the coffin from the Met.

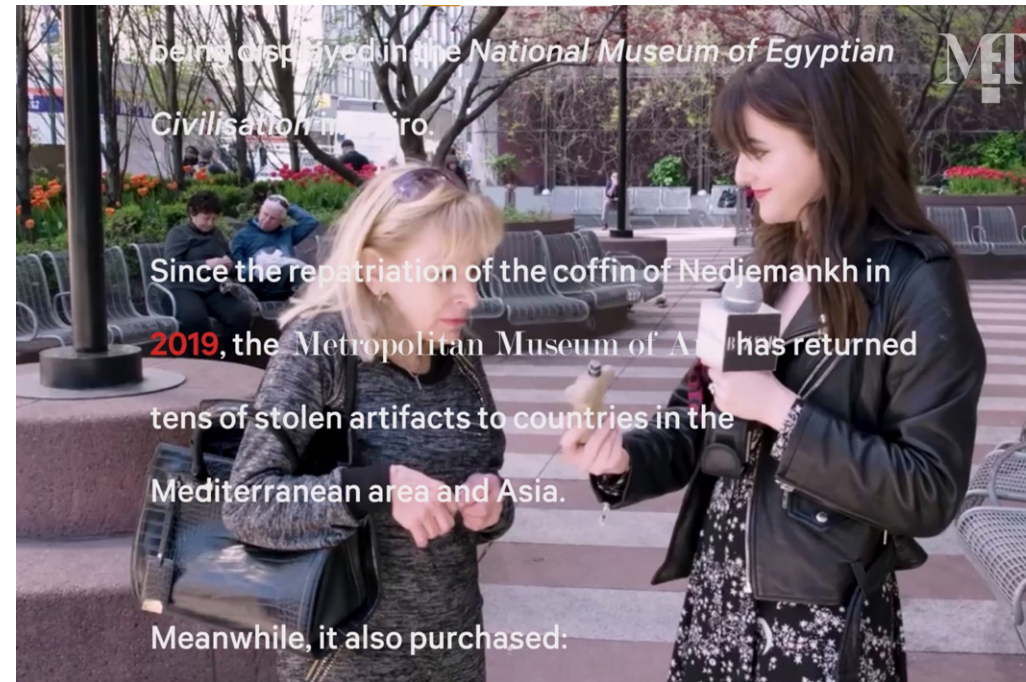
MB: The coffin has already been repatriated. It is sitting in a museum in Cairo, and it is gorgeous.

[sponsorship]

Narrator: This show show was brought to you by

Narrator: KKW Body I





[ending credits]

Interviewer: I'm Jenna Rosenstein, and today we're taking to the streets to see what real New Yorkers think of the new KKW Body fragrance from Kim Kardeshian

Interviewee: It reminds me of something, I don't find it unique. Um, floral now. It started off warmer but it's now lifted, so I pass it as probably as a summery, light.

Interviewer: Do you like it?

Interviewee: Yeah, it's getting better. My first impression was no, it took a second or two.

[interviewer revealing the bottle]

Interviewee: I've seen this silhouette before!

Interviewer: So do you know who makes this?

Interviewee: Jean Paul Gautier

Interviewer: Actually, it's Kim Kardashian's new perfume

Interviewee: really?

Interviewer: um hm

Interviewee: That's a knock off. And not in the best way.

Da quassù è tutta un'altra cosa / From up here, it's a whole other story

Pizzo Sella, Monte Gallo, Palermo, Sicilia, by Rotor for Manifesta 12, 2018

*Transscalarities
Professor: Andres Jaque
Instructor: Benjamin Weisgall
Summer 2023*

Pizzo Sella is a promontory located in the northern coast of Palermo, on the cliffs overlooking the city and the sea. The Hill of Shame is famous for its surreal landscape of 170 incomplete and abandoned concrete structures. These were the result of a collaboration between the Palermitan mafia and a corrupted administration in the 1980s, which granted the dubious building permits that occupy the hill. Following several lawsuits regarding illegal constructions coincided with a change of administration in the 1990s, the entire area was put under preventative seizure.

Rotor, a Brussels based design cooperative, was commissioned by Manifesta 12 to intervene in the urban and natural landscape of Pizzo Sella. Upon receiving the invitation, Rotor initiated the research of the hill by sending out an open call for local volunteers for a series of workshops where they participated in mapping the area. They examined it by foot, following traces left by hikers, herders, pilgrims, goats and boars. The result was a hiking map, consisting of the compilation of the different paths and suggesting an alternative route up the hill.

On site, the designers turned one of the concrete skeletons into an observatory. They took the remaining scaffolding off the belvedere, and used materials harvested from the nearby ruins to make both the structures and pathway safe and hospitable for visitors. The salvaged materials were also used for the creation of a seated viewing platform, which provides the visitors a new way of not only looking at the existing setting, but also considering broader questions on the future and conservation of the landscape.

The practice of reinvesting knowledge in the place where it was acquired resonates with Rotor's other works, where they often develop critical positions and methodologies on design,

material resources, waste, and reuse. The methodology used by the designers for the preliminary mapping of Pizzo Sella was the same one practiced by the visitors when they hiked the hill during the Manifesta. With this notion of a generative pedagogical exercise, the subjective and objective of this work, both the people and the hill, are therefore interchangeable.

By inviting the public to visit the hill, this project reveals the nuances and complexities of the local surroundings. Although the designers might consider the observatory as the focal point of the project, this isn't merely an independent installation offering alternative views of unoccupied land. It is a framing device for the complex terrain of the Palermitan metro, as portrayed by and seen through the exhibition.



Stuffed Air

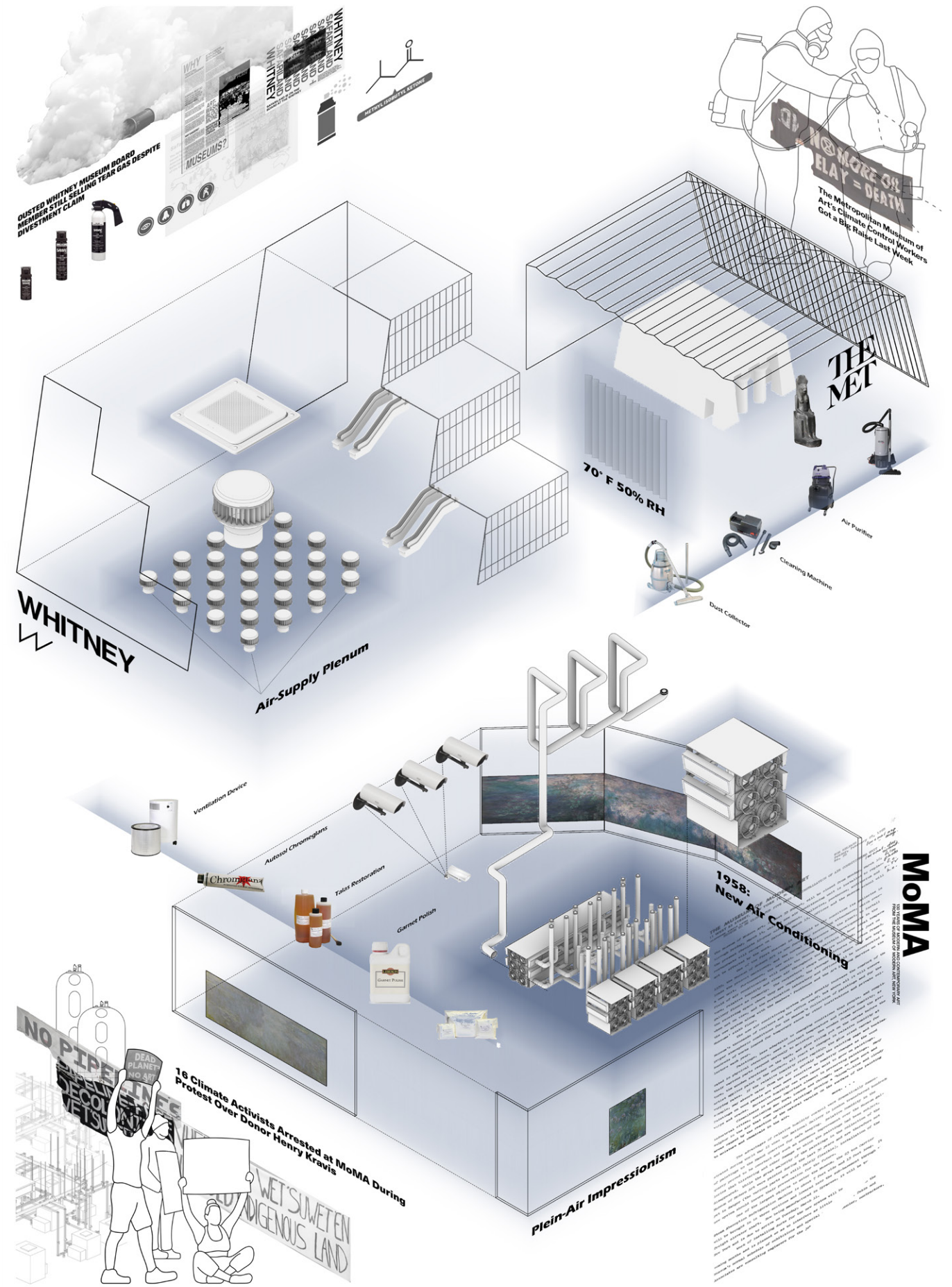
Plein Air. Instructor: Nahyun Hwang.
Advanced V Studio. Fall 2023.
A collaboration with Wenjin Hu.

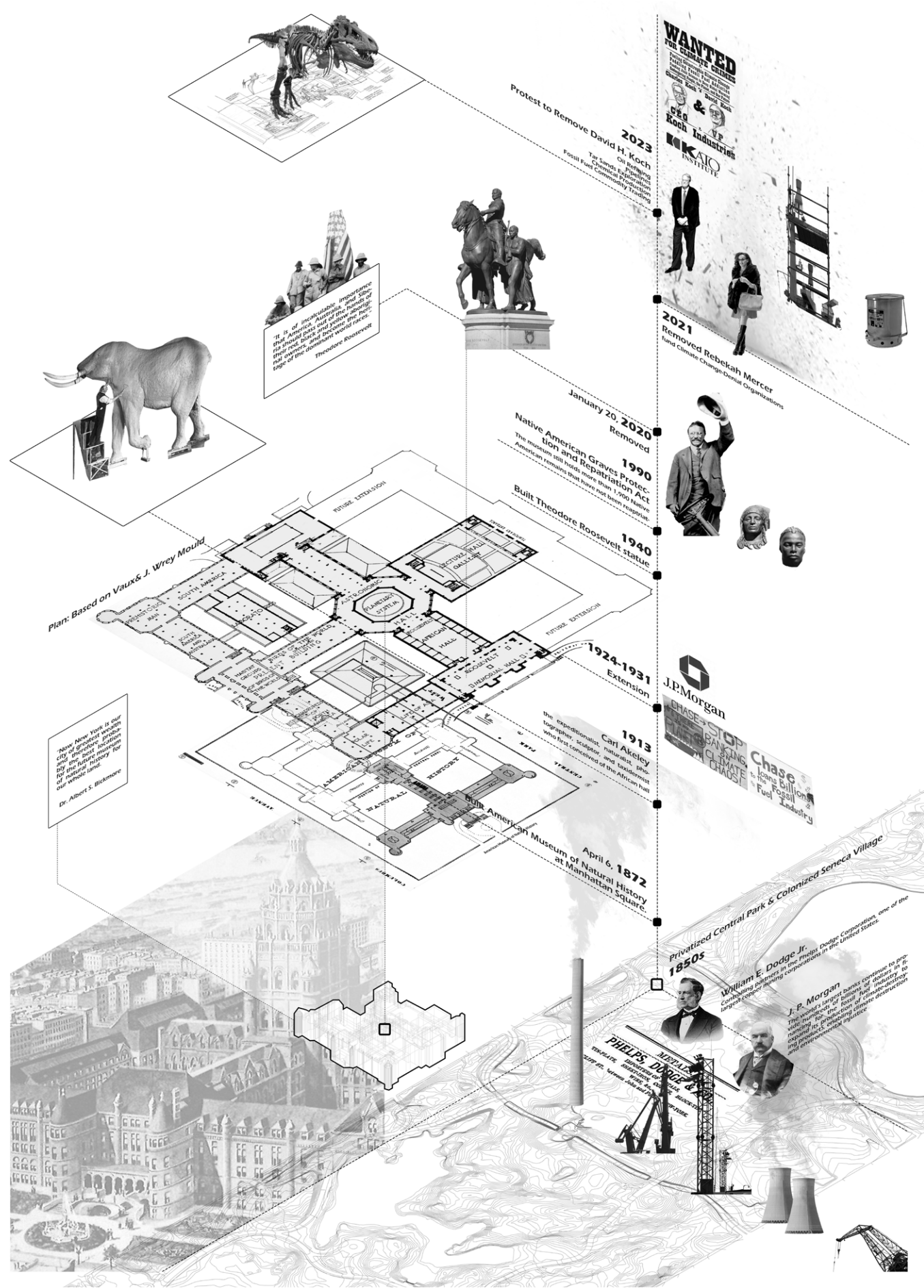
As a starting point of our project, we researched the air-handling of different museums in the city of New York..We focused on the three major institutions: the MET, the MOMA, and the Whitney, to study these complex systems. However, maintaining these institutions' clean and controlled indoor air comes at the expense of the outdoor, oppressed air. [fig. 1]

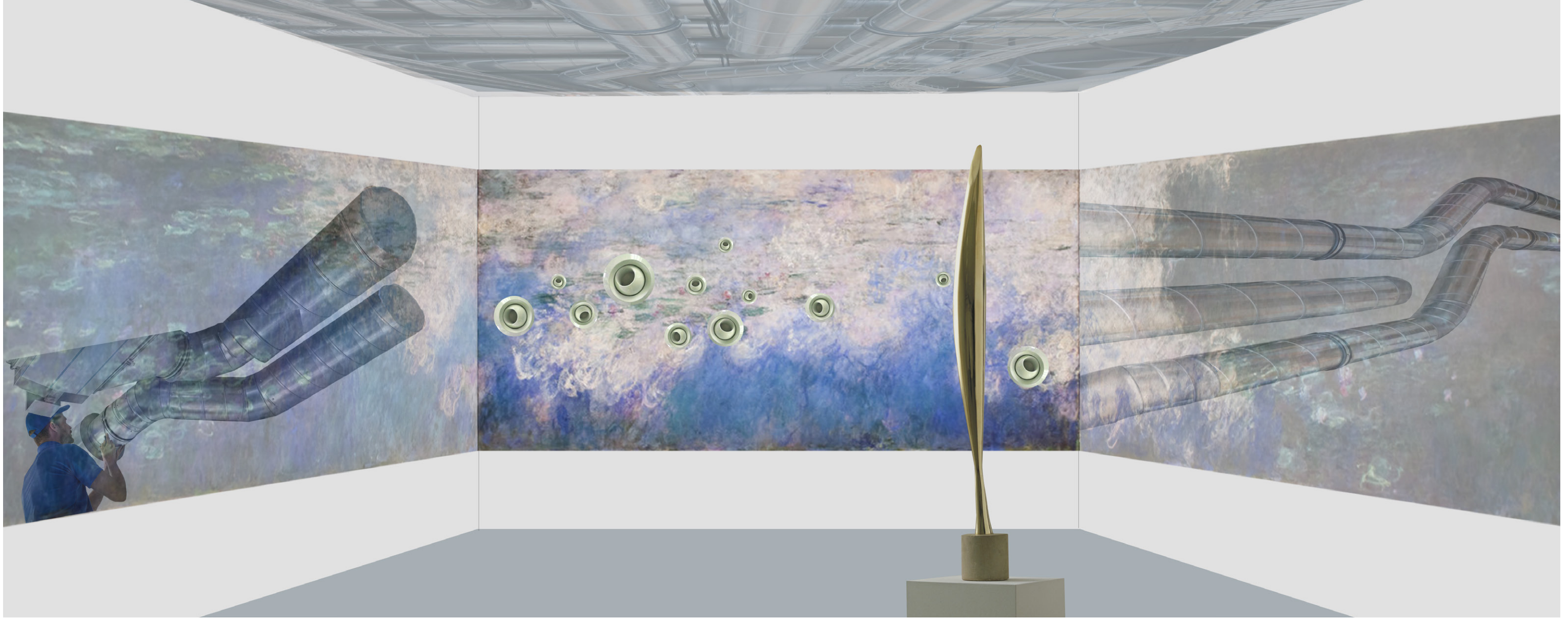
Similarly, the American Museum of Natural History is also funded by major polluters. To name a few - Koch Industries, JP Morgan, William Dodge. With its exhibitionions mostly based on the preservation, conservation

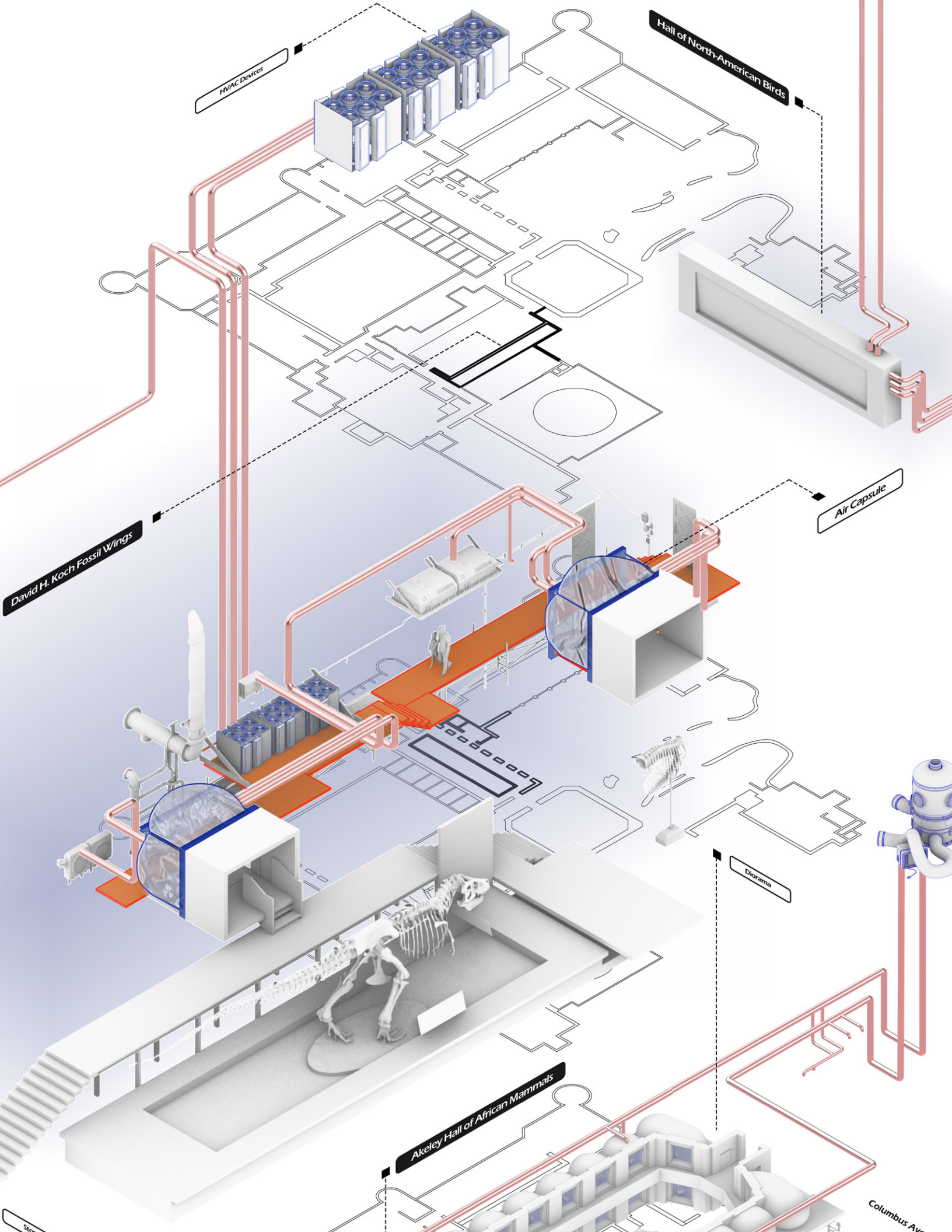
and artificial manufacturing of air, we decided to focus on this institution for our second phase of research. We were fascinated by the way the air is used as an apparatus to recreate, render, artificialize and colonize nature.

From its exploitative expeditions in Africa, South America and more, through an anthropocenic generation of natural environments, and naturalization as a colonialist practice, the museum collected thousands of objects over the years from many different indigenous communities, which are now exhibited together alongside the wild animal scenes of the dioramas. [fig. 2]

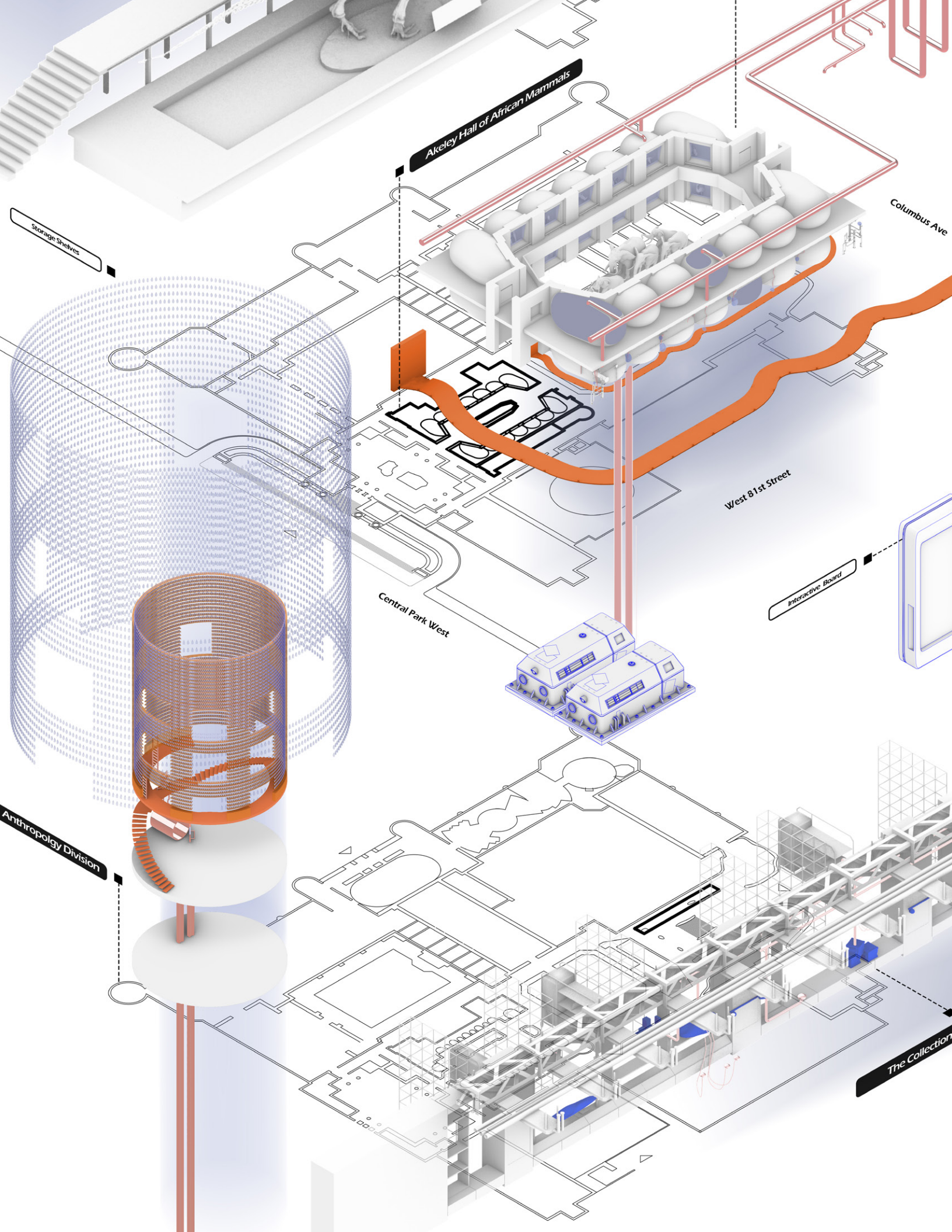






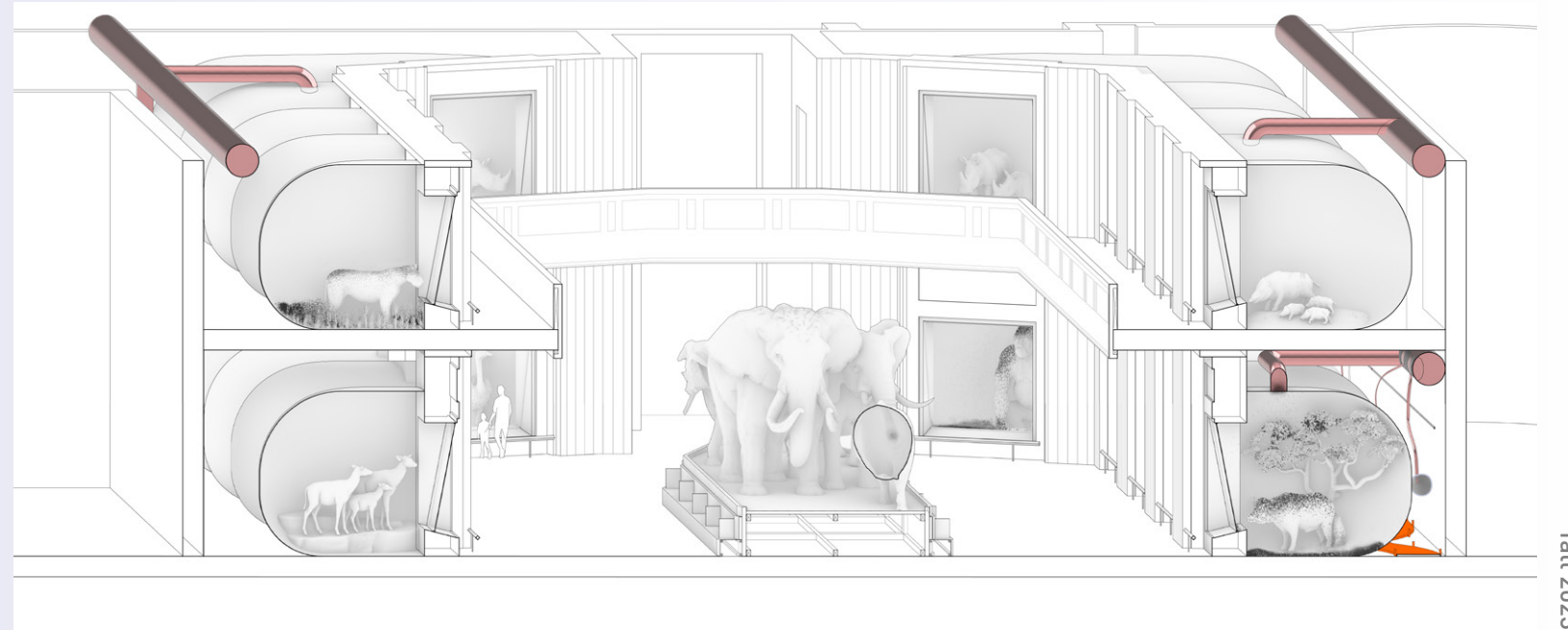
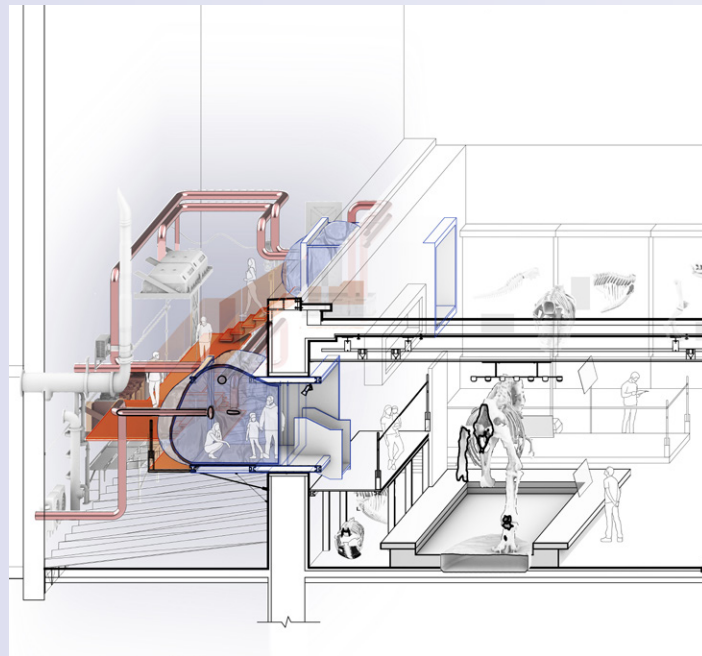
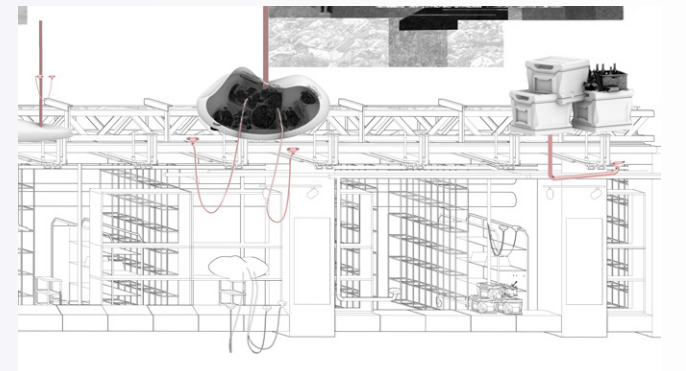
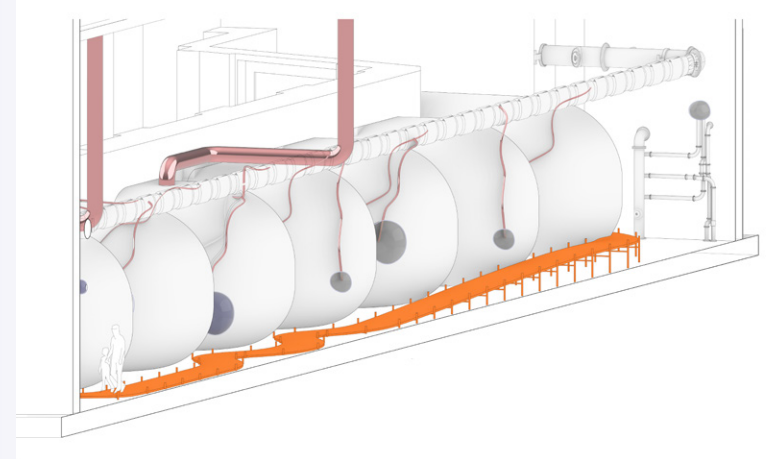
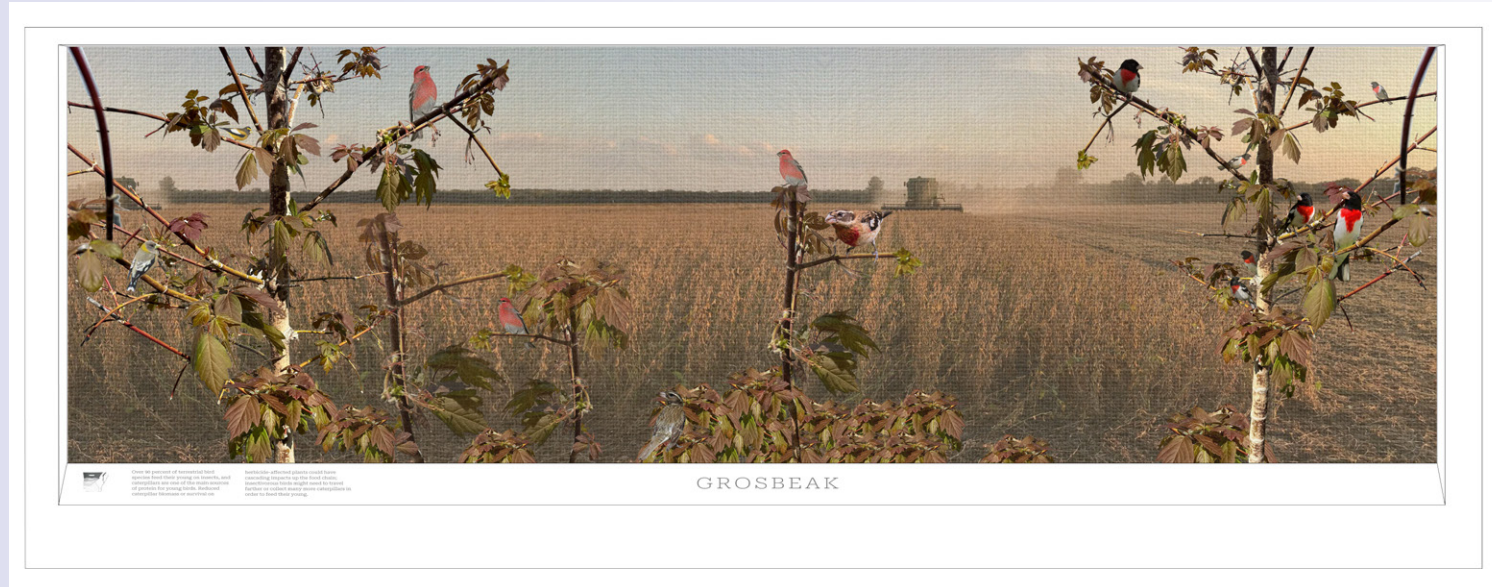
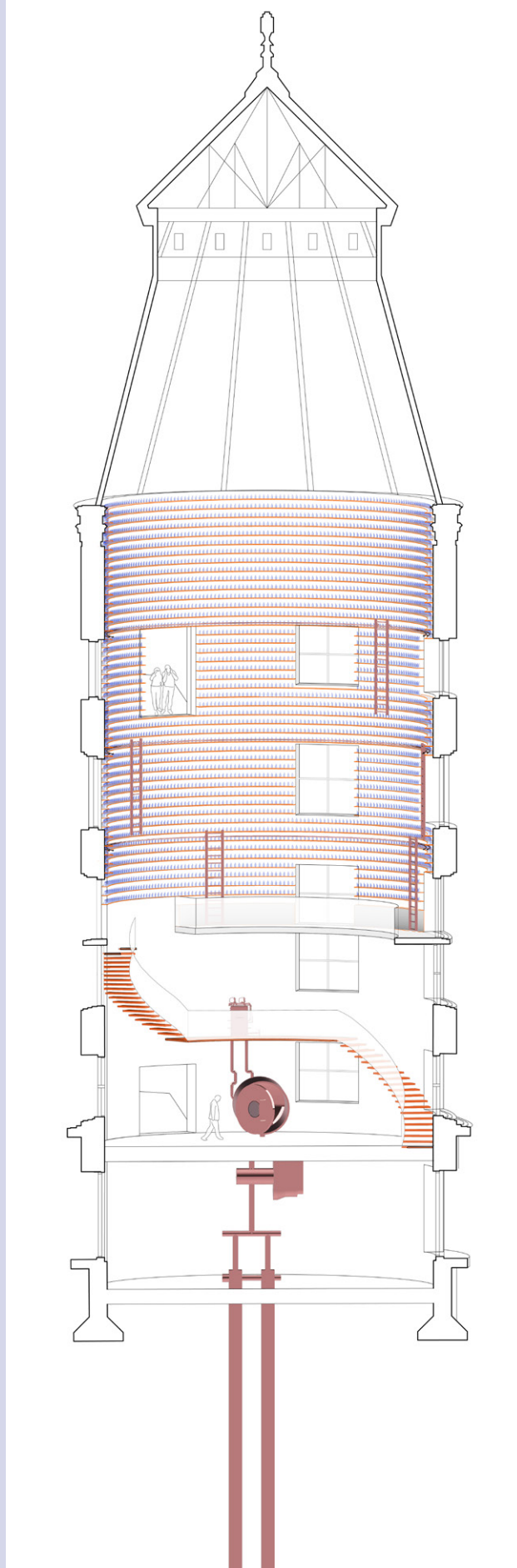


In our project, we aim to question the notions of “Natural History”, proposing a series of interventions within the museum’s structure that use the museum’s own handled air in an attempt to illustrate” narratives that have fallen out and neglected from the museum’s story, as we seek to subvert the institution and its crafting of air. [fig. 3]



The specific location of each intervention was chosen due to its relation to the figures we researched and to the museum's problematic endeavors:

- (1) Core Collection
 - (2) Carl Akeley's African Hall of Mammals
 - (3) David H. Koch Hall of Fossils in the Dinosaurs wing
 - (4) Hall of North American Birds, funded by Edgar M. Queeny, director of Monsanto
 - (5) Human Remains storage in the Anthropology Division building.
- For this last intervention we dare to speculate on a future where all of the collected items have been repatriated back to where they belong.



A Dark Hope

Bodies and Public Spaces
Professor: Bryony Roberts
Fall 2023

What makes a good memorial? Is it a memorial that teaches us a great deal of a lesson, or rather one that provides us with a solid ground for self-reflection? Is it the one that triggers our emotions and makes us feel the most, or simply the one that embodies a memory? Or perhaps it is the one that withstands the test of time? But then, what constitutes “the test of time”? Is it even possible to achieve a design that memorializes an event of a certain point of history, at a certain point of history, that will also be true to a speculative future? And whose history would that be? As an architect whose professional education was acquired within the landscape of the Holocaust memory, I have found myself pondering these questions over and over, oscillating between my inherited Jewish experience and my own Jewish identity. In other words, my personal-collective memory.

In *Memory and Counter-Memory*¹ (1999), James Young reflects on the work of several contemporary artists that deal with the Holocaust memory in Germany. These artists take a critical modern stance against traditional monumental forms, which, as Young argues, once assigned to a memory, [they] relieve us to some degree from our own responsibility to remember.² I would argue that at this point, in the two decades that have since passed, the denouncing of conservative monuments (those that traditionally memorialize victors as opposed to the oppressed), or at least a more critical reading of them, had become almost a consensus among those who identify themselves as part of the Left. Moreover, the aftermath of the movement in defense of Black lives



makes the case for the prompt removal of some of them. Monuments aren't eternal - not their formal sense nor their significance, both of which were constructed in a specific time and place, “contingent on the political, historical, and aesthetic realities of the moment.”³

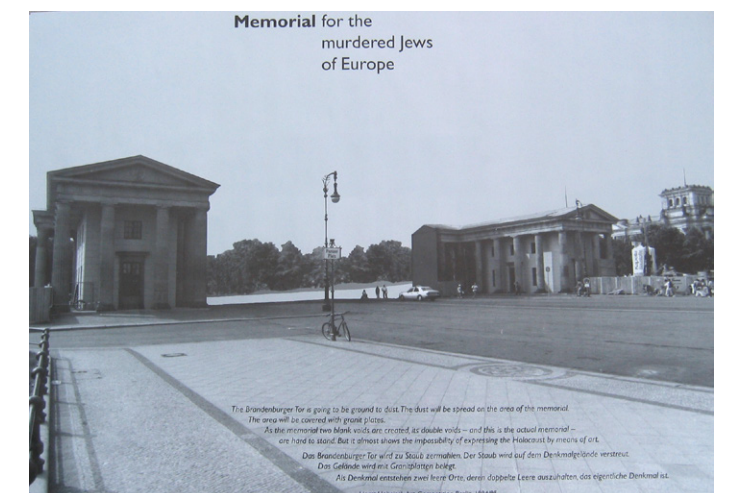
Cruel and Optimism are a couple of words that describe, fit, or at least go along, quite intuitively, with Germany's Holocaust memorial process. Optimism for the country's unique self-redemption attempt as it admirably holds itself accountable for the crimes committed by the evil and cruel Nazi regime. Yet there are more than merely linguistic commonalities that are shared between Young's review of the work by German memory-artists and their coming to terms with their own national-past, and Lauren Berlant's *Cruel Optimism* (2011). While intuition (a concept Berlant deals with categorically as a genre in Chapter two of the book⁴) played a major role in attaching these two pieces together in my head, their reading of

each other becomes less and less intuitive for me, as I found different, often contradictory occasions where a relation of cruel optimism makes an appearance in Young's writing.

“A relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing.”⁵ Berlant shoots straight to the point in the beginning of their introduction to the book. They also reference their national sentimentality trilogy as they look “at the affective components of citizenship and the public sphere.”⁶ The first occurrence of potential cruel optimism I would therefore like to suggest is more of a meta-affect; Germany's ongoing engagement with the memorialization process of the Holocaust and the country's refusal to let it go. And here I feel obliged to express, once again, my appreciation for this nation's honest remorse and accountability that is so rare in the world we inhabit and almost unheard of. Artist Horst Hoheisel's proposal for the 1995 competition for a national “memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe” launched by the German government in a site adjacent to the Brandenburg Gate was radically an anti-solution. Marking destruction by destruction, Hoheisel proposed to “blow up the Brandenburg Gate, grind its stone into dust, sprinkle the remains over its former site, and then cover the entire memorial area with granite plates.”⁷ Young refers to Hoheisel's provocative proposal as the ultimate emblem of the national feelings that derives Germany's memorialization intentions. “Here he seems to suggest that the surest engagement with Holocaust memory in Germany may actually lie in its perpetual

irresolution.”⁸ Young claims that any conventional finite form of a monument would essentially, and perhaps quite literally, seal the grave on Germany's memorial problem.

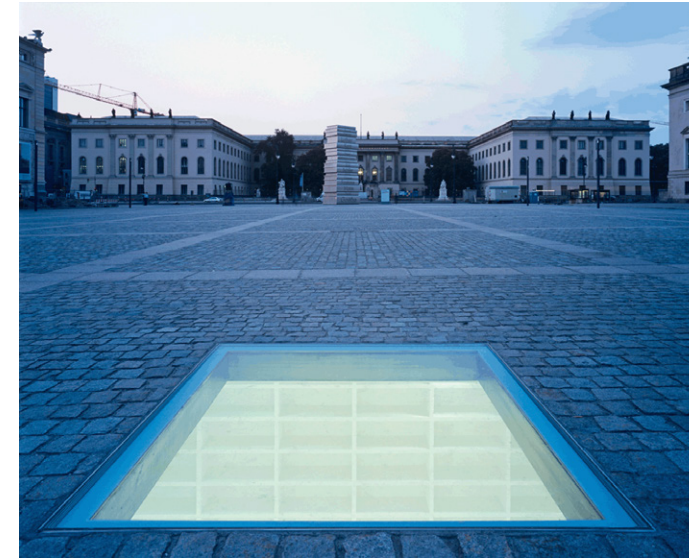
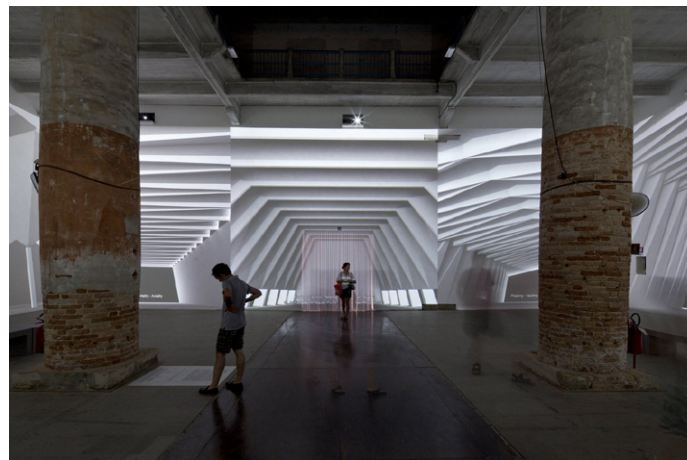
In order to dive deeper into the aesthetic forms of the counter-monuments from Young's essay, we must first look into Affect theory through an architectural lens. As Berlant's texts are not intentionally catered to an architectural ear, it might be more helpful to understand affect from within the architectural discourse. Farshid Moussavi's work for the 2012 Venice Biennale “Architecture and its Affects” helps us in reading the affective qualities of the counter-monuments: “Affects are therefore the aspect of forms through which architects influence—without determining and limiting—people's experience.”⁹



The shared feeling is thus the affect of a memorial as a result of experiencing (or more accurately put, remembering) a collective memory. It is a sense of national identity that, according to Berlant, constitutes a set of attachments and identifications that we feel and not necessarily conscious statements that we make.¹⁰ Berlant claims that historical processes are evident through the (architectural) rendition of affective experience. They go on asking “How is it possible for affective traces in the aesthetic to provide evidence of anything, and not to amount simply to a record of writerly/readerly cleverness or ideology as such?”¹¹

In his installation in Berlin’s Bebelplatz, where the notorious book burning of the Nazi regime took place, conceptual artist Micha Ullman created an enclosed, underground room that consists of nothing but empty shelves. “The Empty Library”—a ghostly white and seemingly sealed room—makes it clear that these shelves could never be filled again. The affective experience it creates, even for casual observers who are not familiar with the painful history, is of ultimate, eternal void. An evident emptiness. The burial of the installation beneath the ground, makes its presence a polite one. The aching memory does not come at the expense of the public space, it just politely sits there, like a distant thought. This abstraction of memorials, by itself, could also impose a relation of cruel optimism. The dismissal of its didactic role as a primary theme makes our

(the readers, visitors and spectators of the memorial) learning experience from it conditional, whence only we will bear the responsibility of having both the historical knowledge of how it came to be, and the national sentimentality the will, hopefully (or not), makes us fear of its recurrence (or not). According to Berlant, hope is optimism. Therefore the inherent hope that a memorial fulfills an educational role in a certain society, considering that we’ve moved on from conservative monumentality, is what dooms it as cruel. “A monument against fascism, therefore, would have to be a monument against itself”, writes Young. In the case of Ullman’s library, the abstract work is not liberated from its own didacticism, as its accompanying plaque carries Heinrich Heine’s famous quote and prophecy: “Where books are burned, so one day people will be burned as well.”¹²



Young’s relation to the precarious feeling of the late 20th-century as the national ambivalence and uncertainty that essentially informs the “antiheroic, often ironic and self-effacing conceptual installations,”¹³ which he defines as counter-monuments, relies on the same Nietzschean-esque postmodernism that Berlant themselves refers to. It is therefore no wonder that Berlant’s quote of Nietzsche (“consciousness is the portable memory of pain, the way you imagine other people’s pain in the world”¹⁴) resonates so strongly with some of the counter-memorials Young describes in his writing. In their offer for the 1995 Holocaust memorial competition, Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock also proposed a radical (although not destructive like Hohiesel) non-monument. The alternative proposal, called “Bus Stop—The Non-Monument”, included a bus terminal, and a corresponding timetable for coaches traveling from Berlin’s city center to tens of concentration and labor camps throughout Europe. In doing so, they would create a network of mobile memory connected through its central core in Berlin, and intertwined with daily life in a way that would serve as a reminder for the “thorough integration of the terror machinery [itself] within everyday life in Germany from 1933 to

1945.”¹⁵

In “Public Feelings Salon” Berlant refers to public spheres as “affect worlds”. Therefore, when we consider public spheres as precarious, these too create a shared sentiment of belonging, maintaining the feeling of reciprocity between the individuals in it. And in the case of affective architecture, I would add, also between the space and the entities in it. Here I would like to offer a viewing of work that although isn’t mentioned in Young’s essay, embodies affective experiences that are similar in notion to those offered in the essay, and makes the case for Berlant’s relations of reciprocity. In his project “The Writing on the Wall”¹⁶ artist Shimon Attieh projected fragments of pre-World War II photographs onto the remaining building of the Jewish neighborhood Scheunenviertel in Eastern Berlin. When those portions of destroyed Jewish life were momentarily recreated, their ghostly appearance intertwined with the living urban space of contemporary Berlin. During the installation, they embodied the relation of living on and the ongoing loss and crisis.

I often look at theoretical terms as forces in Newtonian mechanics. That is to say, they are defined (for the most part) by a quantitative metric (i.e. size) and a direction (i.e. positive/negative) but could also be, essentially, the same. In the case of cruel optimism, I would argue that an opposed and equal force of that relation is dark hope. I have previously discussed Berlant's viewing of hope as optimism, therefore would have to excuse my possibly self-contradiction here by arguing that this is an oxymoron that in my view, can co-exist. Alas, if cruel optimism is about the fantasy of the "good life"¹⁷ as Berlant calls it, the dark hope in Young's quote of Hoheisel is raising a warning sign for a self-fulfilling prophecy:

"For Hoheisel, the neo-Nazis' "reclamation" of the site, their triumphal striding atop the ruins of the fountain that their forebears had destroyed in 1939, seemed to bear out his dark hope that this would become a negative center of gravity around which all memory—wanted and unwanted—would now congeal."

In that case, the object of desire is the failure of the not-so-didactic attempt of "never again". Firstly, for it re-approves the importance in which the monument came to be, a reminder of and against human evil. Secondly, for the failure constitutes a seal of approval of a democratic counter-monument that allows multiple narratives to exist in it and does not constrain the people's experience of it to the specific political and historical reality from which it was conceived in the first place. Does that mean that we actually want our warning signs to fail in the name of good monumental design? Hell no. I would genuinely—naively—much rather live in a responsible world where there won't be a need for memorials in the first place. But the satisfaction from the failure, the anguishing circularity of dark hope and cruel optimism brings us back to the relentless attempt of the much desired self-redemption. ■



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- ③ Young, "Memory and Counter-Memory."
- ④ Berlant, Lauren. "Introduction: Affect in the Present" *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011): 17.
- ⑤ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 1.
- ⑥ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 3.
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I have a love/hate relationship with utopias.

They are often perceived as heavens, as the places and worlds we aspire to and dream of. The physical form of our ethics. I love utopias because they are precisely not that - they are the impossible sublime. I find their impossibility liberating because it frees us from the fantasy of a perfect world in a way that invites a sort of pragmatism to our living. That is to say, it relieves us from the burden of finding a solution, simply because it acknowledges that there might not be one.

I also hate utopias. They are, for me, like those super sticky labels that once attached to a thing or a thought, cannot be removed. Utopia is therefore a marker for that future that cannot happen. And how sad is that?

Kelley's utopia offers us a way out. It is a non-place, an unusable place. "What does refusal to reform, to rebuild, to restore allow us to imagine?". It takes advantage of its own impossibility and by doing so—by being so—acts as a means of reparation, of breaking the regimes of property.



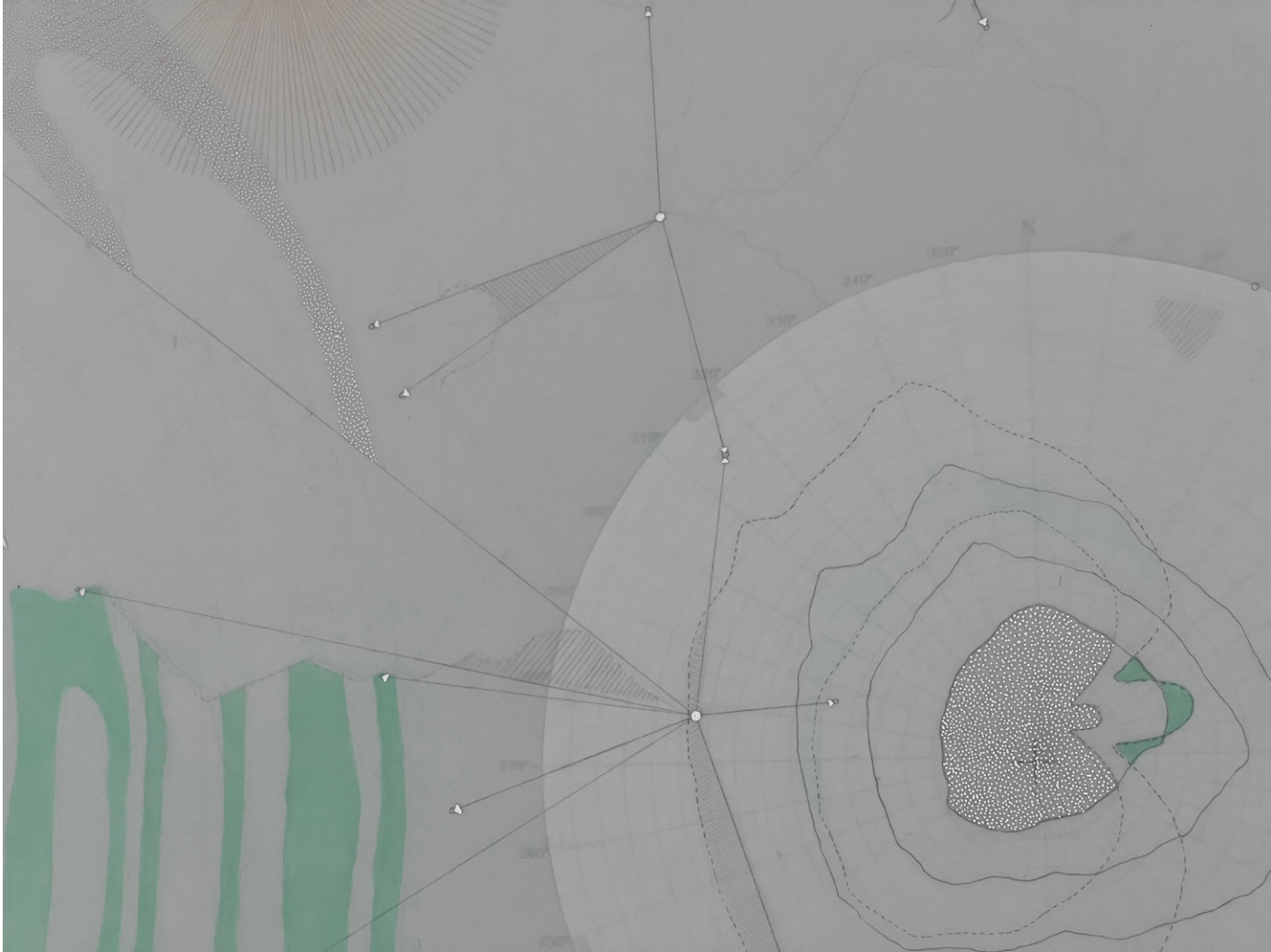
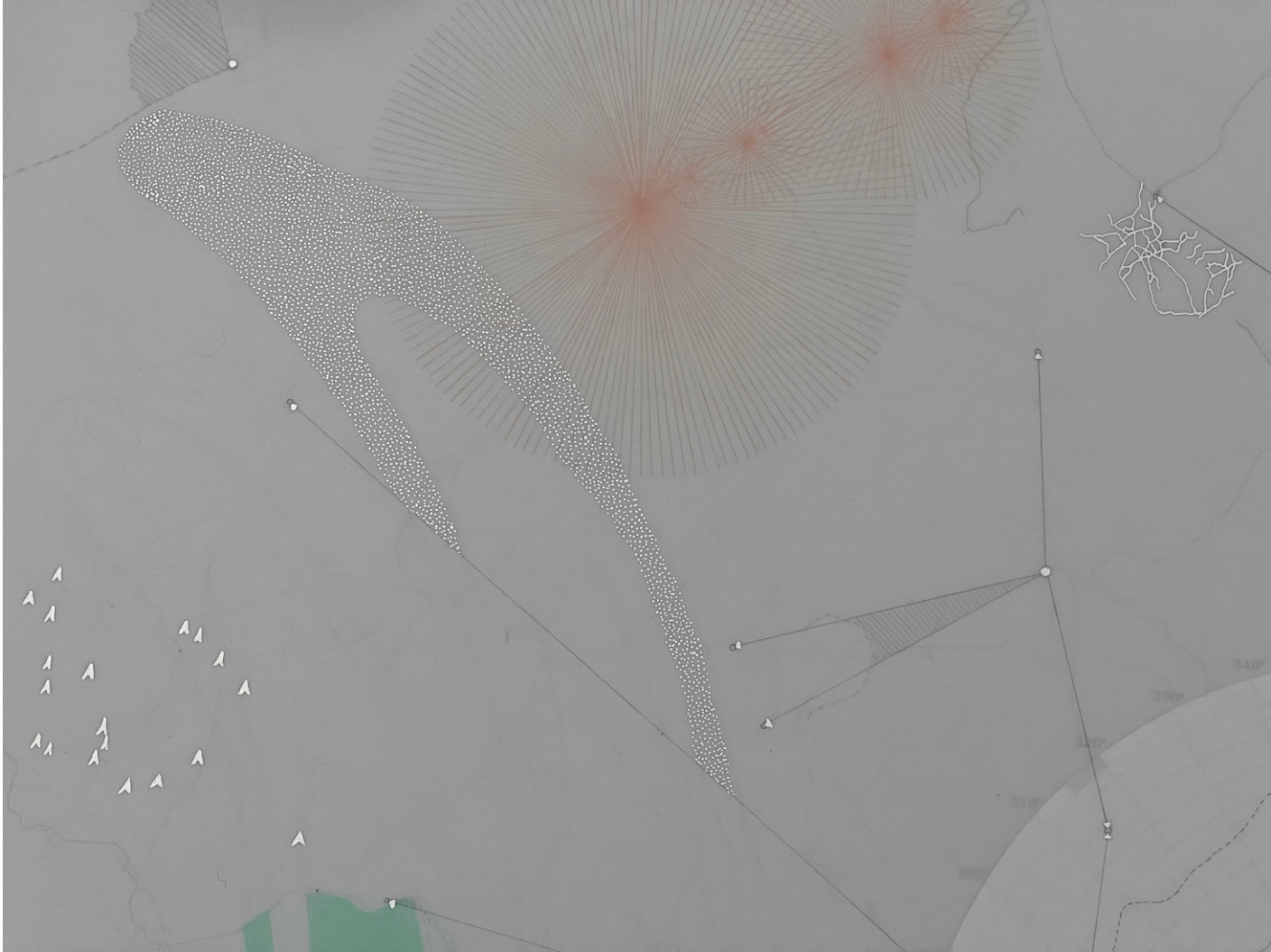
self, *My favorite worst t-shirt*

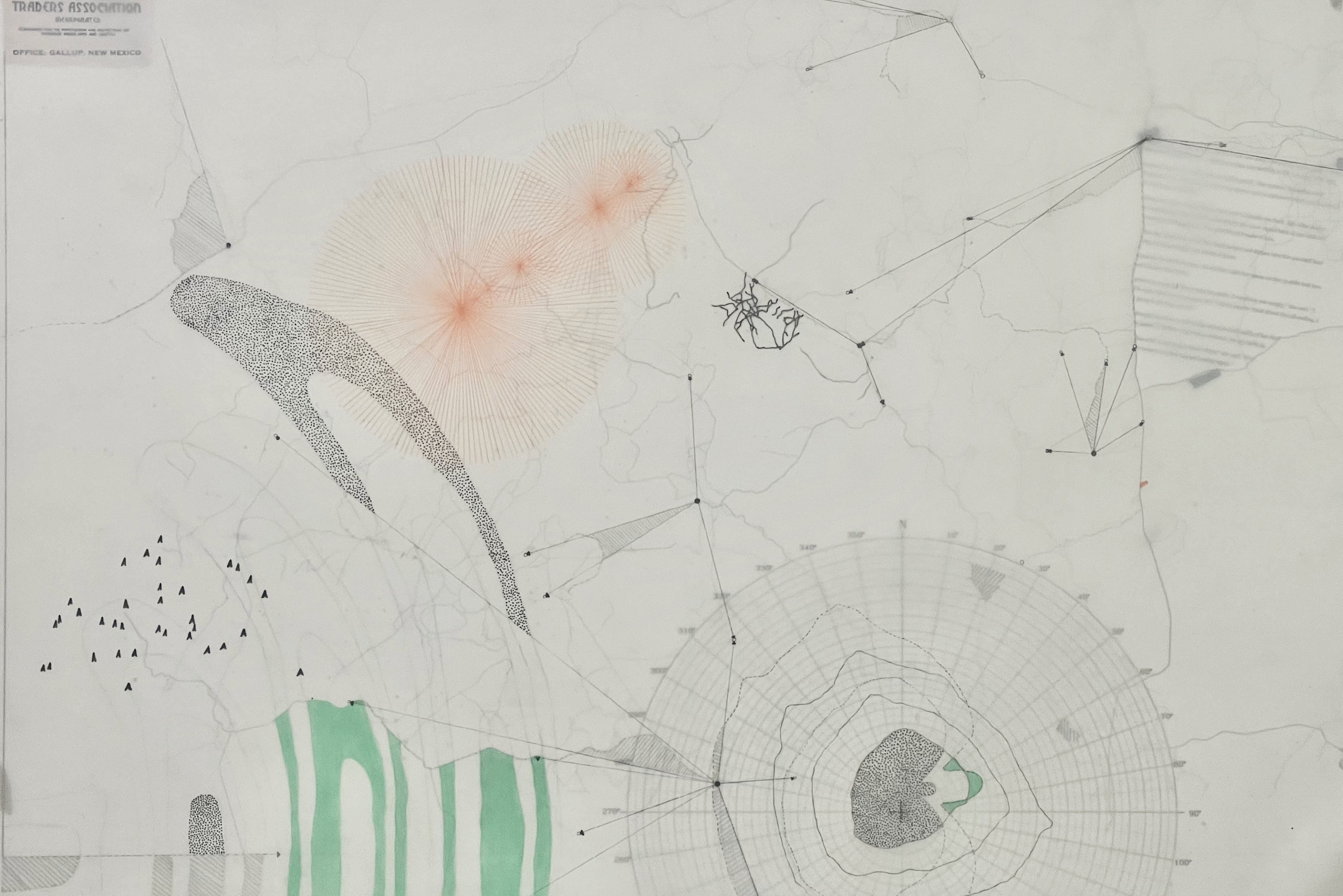
Grazble

Design is Ceremony.

Instructor: Chris Cornelius. Faculty Associate: Adeline Chum

Advanced VI Studio. Spring 2024.







'anít'i', fence.

'iná'ázt'i', fence; fenced enclosure.

'iná'ázt'i'ígíí, that which is a fence; fenced enclosure. 'iná'ázt'i'go, it having been enclosed by a fence.

ná'ázt'i', a fenced enclosure.

nínáá'ázt'i', there is another fence.



Spazio Disponibile—"available space" in Italian—is the name Dawit L. Petros used to subvert the notion of its original meaning; that is, the "availability" of African lands for exploitation and occupation through the colonial gaze. Spazio Disponibile therefore scrutinizes "the historical gaps in European memory, particularly that of modern Italy".

Revealing the intimate relationship between photography, histories of modern architecture and the Mirage, Sean Anderson questions the ability of architectural photography to ever become postcolonial. For him, however, Petros' photographic work offers a certain reckoning. A reckoning that is made possible through the transgression and transposition of the colonial lens, as well as through the reciprocity among the bodies that comprise Petros' work in the exhibition. Those bodies disappear into a precarious landscape, which in turn, reappears as the horizon of a new framework.

"The horizon is as possessive as the sea and land are present throughout Petros's works. A denomination of distance, the horizon is not a limit but a provocation for transgression and movement to and beyond" (Anderson, 68); for Anderson, Petros' line, is never fixed .

What kind of temporalities Petros' work offers then? The suggestive post in post-colonial hints at a possible liberation from—borrowing Anderson's words—"the binds of subjugation".



self, *Mediterraneità*

Gender, Labor and Batteries: Automation of the home and domestic labor

Climate, Technology, and Society
 Professor: Reinhold Martin
 Spring 2024

Much like the Frankfurt Kitchen in the previous millenia, iRobot's Roomba was introduced to the world with the promise of liberating the working (wo) man from the daunting burden of domestic chores. Although (initially) charged with the single task of vacuuming dirty floors, Roomba is hardly a trifling machine. It is an entire complex, a system consisting of a central mechanism, which on one end is powered by an external energy source, and on the other produces a final product.

Therefore, as I would like to argue in this paper, Roomba could be used as a metaphor for contemporary capitalist economy. Moreover, according to iRobot's mission statement, its products are meant "to empower [the company's] customers to do more with their lives and iRoboteers to do more with their careers."¹ That is to say, just like the market in a capitalist economy—Roomba decides how society's surplus (the "saved" labor in our case) will be invested, reassuring the participation of its owners, operators and creators in the market economy. Roomba is an entire system—of the domestic sphere in which it operates, its production and its internal mechanism. As such, it can also be helpful in the understanding of capitalism. In order to have a comprehensive insight, however, it is crucial to understand the limitations of contemporary capitalist theory; as Nancy Fraser blatantly states in her essay titled "Behind Marx's Hidden Abode": we are not equipped with adequate theory to conceive capitalism and the capitalist crisis of our time.² She tackles this issue by offering a path for remediation that starts

with the reexamination of Karl Marx's understanding of capitalism. A Marxist definition of capitalism is, briefly, based on the four core principles of: private property in the means of production; free labor market; accumulation of capital or self-expanding value; and lastly the market's distinctive role in society hence its allocation of social surplus. Fraser argues that Marx's mechanism of production does not make sense unless we consider its background conditions of possibility.³ She refers to 'functional imbrication' as the relation between marketized and non-marketized aspects of a capitalist society. She stresses that the arrangement of semi-proletarianized households left a significant portion of activities, labor and goods outside the purview of the market, which were "intrinsic to Fordism, which was able to promote working-class consumerism in the countries of the core only by way of semi-proletarianized households that combined male employment with female homemaking."⁴

The key argument here is a distinction between Capitalism's front story—Marx's account of how the capital is accumulated—to the back-story of it—where the capital itself is coming from. In other words, there are background conditions that contribute to the mechanism of a capitalistic economy, and they are being neglected in Marx's theory despite them being, in fact, what renders it possible. The three crucial background conditions according to Fraser are concerned with social reproduction, Earth's ecology, and political power, and within this essay I intend to explore them respectively, through Roomba's labor,

energetics and batteries.

First, to explore social reproduction as a background condition through Roomba it would be beneficial to critically examine the modern history of domestic labor and automation of the household, specifically in relation to feminist theory and gendered labor. Examining the history of mechanization of the household, including the energetics of Roomba, will inevitably lead us to Fraser's second condition of possibility—Earth's ecology and the [finite] sourcing of natural resources. Lastly, as this paper will show, Roomba's operation, its productivity and efficiency, is made possible by its batteries, which renders visible what Fraser calls the Political background condition—the transnational Capital.

I. Social reproduction

The intricate tasks of socializing the young, building communities, and perpetuating shared cultural meanings diverge significantly from conventional notions of labor based on age. Activities such as housework, schooling, child-rearing, and affective care—put together under the umbrella term of social reproduction—are not only vital for the maintenance of waged labor but also fundamental for nurturing future generations of workers. Much like Marx's 'original accumulation,' Fraser argues, "social reproduction is an indispensable background condition for the possibility of capitalist production."⁵ Capitalism is therefore structured with a division

between social reproduction and commodity production. A divide that is profoundly gendered, with social reproduction historically attributed to women while production to men, thereby reinforcing women's subordination within modern capitalist societies. The relegation of women's labor and the entire domestic sphere to the "private" realm renders it invisible, perpetuating a systemic imbalance in the recognition and valuation of different forms of labor. Fraser further claims that the expansion of capital occurs not through equitable exchanges but rather through the non-compensation of a portion of workers' labor-time, much of which does not manifest as wage labor.

Domestic reform and automation discourse

While it could be reasonably argued that the discipline of industrial engineering dates back to the Industrial Revolution, it wasn't until over a century later that production processes were actually engineered. In 1911, Frederick Winslow Taylor, often referred to as the "father of industrial engineering", published his monograph titled *The Principles of Scientific Management*, where he laid out his theory of management that analyzes and synthesizes workflows. Also known as Taylorism, the movement sought to improve labor efficiency and productivity hence cutting down production time. Around that same period, industrial psychologists Lillian and Frank Gilbreth developed Therbligs—the elemental motions in the study of workflows, used for optimizing manual labor by the means of reducing motion. Less

than a decade later, domestic reformers, such as the American Christine Frederick applied different techniques of scientific management, primarily Taylorization, to make housework more efficient. Assuming domestic work to be a drudgery, reformers generally believed that greater efficiency would eventually yield more happiness. Moreover, they believed that the application of temporal discipline and spatial rationalization in the home would free up women's time for more leisure and yield an escape from the "never-ending-ness" of housework.⁶ In what is considered a milestone in modern, domestic architecture, the reform peaked with Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky 1926's revolutionary Frankfurt Kitchen. The Austrian architect, who worked in the housing development offices of Vienna and Frankfurt, designed the kitchen to be factory-assembled and craned into place. The layout and dimensions were calculated to optimize the housewife's workflow and promoted efficiency, comfort and hygiene. With the goal of revolutionizing traditional gender roles to fit an industrial, capitalist, modern society, the focus of domestic reformers was on the redesign of the dwelling. Equipped with a technocratic-managerial ethos, they strove to reduce the time spent on housework, rather than rethinking labor or exploring the redistribution of work within and across homes, gender, class and race.⁷

The following postwar developments in the United States were heavily marked by the mechanization of households and fossil-dependent consumerism. They purportedly aimed to "save labor" yet relied

almost exclusively on women's unpaid domestic labor to operate the newly developed appliances. Paradoxically, this period also marked an unprecedented surge in women entering the labor market. In his book *Labor's End: How the Promise of Automation Degraded Work*, Jason Resnikoff argues that the overall increase in women's labor contradicts the narrative of "liberation" associated with the industrial revolution, which initially portrayed the home as a non-work space. However, rather than freeing women, this mechanization only served to increase their productivity, challenging the assumptions of the "feminine mystique," as was formulated in the namesake book from 1963 by Betty Friedan.⁸ Meanwhile, postwar suburbia, driven by fossil-dependent urbanization, rejected the notion of a "grand domestic revolution" by confining labor to isolated domestic spheres and eschewing paid domestic labor. Mid-century automation discourse and aspirations for domestic robots reflected hopes for a future where household labor would be alleviated. However, as Resnikoff notes, the global economic crises and hyper-industrialization of the world that characterized the early 1970s situated the automation discourse on the wane, and by the end of the decade "the "automation" of housework no longer appeared imminent or even possible."⁹

In 1990 members of the MIT Robotics lab founded the iRobot Corporation. While its focus has always remained on the realm of space exploration, the technological innovation was initially implemented for military use; designing robots that search buildings, detect mines, and more. iRobot's Defense & Security business—which was sold off the company in 2016 and then renamed to Endeavor Robotics—is the developer and manufacturer of PackBot, a series of tactical, multi-mission military robots. One of the earliest deployments of the PackBot was searching the debris of the World Trade Center after the 9/11 attack in 2001, and it has been leading the genre of "disaster robotics" ever since.¹⁰ The company's current line of products includes a wide range of autonomous home cleaning devices of which, according to the



iRobot website, 3 million units were sold in 2023 alone, adding to almost 50 million units sold in total.¹¹ Furthermore, 20% of all vacuum cleaners sold worldwide in recent years were robotic, with

iRobot's products comprising almost 50% of them.^{12 13} Nonetheless, the most notable out of the company's products is without doubt the Roomba; iRobot's flagship series launched in 2002 and was the first commercially successful robot vacuum brand.

Long before its contemporary version was conceived, the idea of an autonomous vacuum cleaner was introduced in Robert Heinlein's 1956 science fiction novel *The Door into Summer*. The protagonist and narrator of the futuristic story, describes the robot, manufactured by its namesake company *Hired Girl Inc.*, in a manner befitting mid-century America. The robot's productivity, as he explains, is essentially achieved through its "unintelligent" programming:

What Hired Girl would do (the first model, not the semi-intelligent robot I developed it into) was to clean floors...any floor, all day long and without supervision. And there never was a floor that didn't need cleaning. It swept, or mopped, or vacuum-cleaned, or polished, consulting tapes in its idiot memory to decide which. Anything larger than a BB shot it picked up and placed in a tray on its upper surface, for someone brighter to decide whether to keep or throw away. It went quietly looking for dirt all day long, in search curves that could miss nothing, passing over clean floors in its endless search for dirty floors. It would get out of a room with people in it, like a well-trained maid, unless its mistress caught up with it and flipped a switch to tell the poor thing it was welcome. Around dinnertime it would go to its stall and soak up a quick charge—this was before we installed the everlasting power pack.¹⁴

There was not too much difference between *Hired Girl*, *Mark One*, and a vacuum cleaner. But the difference—that it would clean without supervision—was enough; it sold.

Heinlein's exploration of automated domestic chores was not limited to science fiction. In 1951, a few years before "*Hired Girl*" saw light, Robert Heinlein—also an aeronautical engineer—designed a house for



There's everything to please a housewife in the kitchen, including an "office" with phone and typewriter. Below, "commuting" table is set with china in kitchen, then rolled through a wall to the dining area.



66

POPULAR MECHANICS

himself and his wife Ginny. "A House to Make Life Easy," as named by the magazine *Popular Mechanics*, was designed with the goal to minimize the need for maintenance and housework. Prioritizing efficiency and automation, the single-story, flat-roofed home featured built-in furniture and appliances to eliminate clutter and streamline cleaning tasks. Careful attention was paid to the kitchen, which was connected to the dining area with a "commuting" table. Hence enabling seamless meal preparation and serving, by simply rolling it back to the kitchen, where Ginny could load the dirty dishes straight into the dishwasher. And so, as one could imagine, the magazine piece from 1952 depicted pictures of Ginny in the kitchen, working hard in her "House to Make Life Easy."

The automation discourse in the domestic sphere, just like that of factories and offices, described housework and even reproduction as an essentially degraded and degrading activity.¹⁵ Heinlein's forecast of what would essentially become Roomba, is directly correlated with the role and space he destined Ginny to, situating both Ginny and Hired Girl in the same enclosed sphere of social reproduction.

II. Earth's ecology

In the context of Marx's account of capitalism, nature is commodified, becoming a resource for capital. Similarly to social reproduction, Nature is thus conceived as a provider of free services, providing unlimited supply of "raw material" available for

appropriation.¹⁶ Its inherent value is simultaneously acknowledged and denied. This process is accompanied by a reinforcement of the distinction between the human and non-human, with first seen as spiritual, socio-cultural and historical and the latter as material, objectively-given, and ahistorical. Fraser argues that nature's capacity "to support life and renew itself constitutes another necessary background condition for commodity production and capital accumulation."¹⁷

Mechanization of the American house

The history of domestic labor and automation of the household as examined earlier, ties the two together with fossil-fuel dependent economy. The suburban dream of a mid-twentieth century America is therefore, in a sense, both the cause and effect of this. A typical, white, middle class household would maintain at least two cars; the husband would commute to his workplace, where he would earn a salary with which he would later purchase more household appliances, to be operated by the housewife. His ability to participate in the market economy is dependent on his gas-operated vehicle, the wife's unpaid operation of the household mechanics, and the electricity required for them. The energetics of the house are therefore interconnected with both production and reproduction of the capital. That is to say, the gendered distinction between paid and unpaid labor is inevitably intertwined with the reliance of modern capitalist society fossil-fuel markets.

III. Polity

Fraser argues that historically, the state constituted the capitalist economy. It was the legal systems of such states that established the contours of seemingly depoliticized arenas within which private actors could pursue their 'economic' interests, free from overt 'political' interference, on the one hand, and from patronage obligations derived from kinship, on the other.¹⁸ The state's capacity to function

globally relies on frameworks of international law, diplomatic negotiations among powerful nations, and supranational organizations that serve to partially stabilize, albeit in a manner favorable to capital interests, what is often conceptualized as a state of nature. Within capitalist society, structural divisions further emerge: the 'Westphalian' separation between the domestic and international spheres, and the imperialist division between core and periphery regions.¹⁹ The institutional divide between the economy and polity reinforces the notion that economic matters are distinct from the political agenda of territorial states, which in turn reinforces, along with gender oppression, territorial oppression in colonial and neocolonial geographies. In many cases this oppression takes the form of excessive extractivism, which more often than not is destined to be used transnationally.

Batteries

In the case of our Roomba, it would not be able to roam freely and vacuum (alas, exist) if not for its rechargeable batteries. As predicted by Heinlein almost half a century earlier, just like *Hired Girl*, Roomba's success lies, ironically enough, in its ability to be a highly inefficient machine; Joe Jones, inventor and one of the founders of iRobot, describes the challenges in its design:

Your manual vacuum likely draws [...] 1.9 horsepower from the wall socket. In a Roomba-sized robot, that sort of mechanism would exhaust

the battery in about a minute. Make the robot bigger, to accommodate a larger battery, and [it] won't fit under the furniture.²⁰

iRobot's engineers sidestepped this problem by applying a century-old carpet sweeper mechanism instead of an actual vacuum cleaner. Jones continues:

We realized that our energy-efficient carpet sweeper would not clean as quickly nor as deeply as a powerful vacuum. [...] However, if the robot spends enough time doing its job, it can clean the surface dirt just as well.²¹

Instead of using its power to clean thoroughly in a shorter amount of time, Roomba is designed to replace human labor by moving more, for a longer duration, many times over. In other words, a human's fifteen-minute vacuuming chore is replaced by a Roomba's ninety-minute and battery-powered sweeping labor.

Roomba is generally designed to be low enough to go underneath most furniture and sized to be able to fit a sufficient battery and a dust bin while roaming relatively freely. Its round disk shaped body enables it access to tapered areas, by way of being able to rotate 360 degrees and retrace its path. The patented first generation of the autonomous vacuum cleaner includes four crucial components: multiple sensors, a bumper, wheels and brushes. A combination of different sensors (infrared and photoelectric) is used to help the Roomba navigate through a room; a "cliff sensor" to alert the robot when it reaches a cliff such



as stairs or a balcony, and keep it away from the edge; a "wall sensor" that allows the robot to follow closely along a wall without constantly bumping into it; and "object sensors" that are mechanically activated when the robot knocks an object with its bumper, sending it back on its tracks and rotating until it finds a clear path. The bumper therefore plays a critical role in both the obstacle handling, as mentioned above, as well as in the robot's pathing logic. The wheels are naturally prominent in the robot's ability to move, and in newer models even contain sensors to assess the room's measurement and travel distance. Finally, Roomba's brushes are perhaps the "dumbest" instrument of the robot, which, by being unsophisticated as they are, allow the entire machine to be sufficiently powered by a rechargeable eighteen-volt-NiMH (and later, lithium-ion) battery. The industry of batteries is therefore an inseparable element within the ecosystem of the domestic robot,

as I have been exploring in this paper thus far.

Not coincidental with the founding of iRobot in 1990, the NiMH batteries (nickel-metal hydride batteries) for smaller applications appeared in the market around the same time.^{22 23} These batteries were used for the first-generation Roombas and in more advanced versions were replaced by lithium-ion batteries. The latter became the world's recent promise for a clean, rechargeable energy source and eventually granted its inventors a Nobel Prize in Chemistry for their development. Moreover, they made possible what is arguably the most important advancement of recent decades—the cell phone, and are now at the forefront of the race toward net-zero emissions, powering electric vehicles and storing wind and solar energy.²⁴ The extraction of lithium, however, is not so clean as the battery-running energy; the unprecedented desire for lithium-ion batteries in recent years have had a significant ecological impact on the extraction sites. The extraction process itself requires a tremendous amount of water, and given the geographic location of the largest lithium mines in the Atamaca desert of northern Chile, for example, the environmental consequences are devastating. The massive amount of clean water, which is considered a precious resource in these arid Salar de Atamaca, are diverted for lithium mining operations, fueling the salt flats brine, displacing and endangering local Indigenous communities and more-than-human species.²⁵ It is not just the geographical location of the mines in the southern part of the globe that determines such consequences, but rather the situation of Chile in the Global South. The transnational extraction of resource, which is enabled, as Fraser argues, through the reinforced division between the Politic and the market, showcases it as a necessary background condition of possibility.





Historians often use the term “automation” to describe certain changes in the means of industrial production. Resnikoff argues that the origins of automation were not primarily technical, but rather ideological, and expressed a conviction that industrial progress means the end of human laboring.²⁶ The substance of automation, Resnikoff argues, was not the abolition of labor but, rather, its mystification. By examining the modern history of domestic labor, its energetics and the geo-politics of extraction involved in its production, Roomba’s mystified system renders Fraser’s background conditions of possibility visible. ■

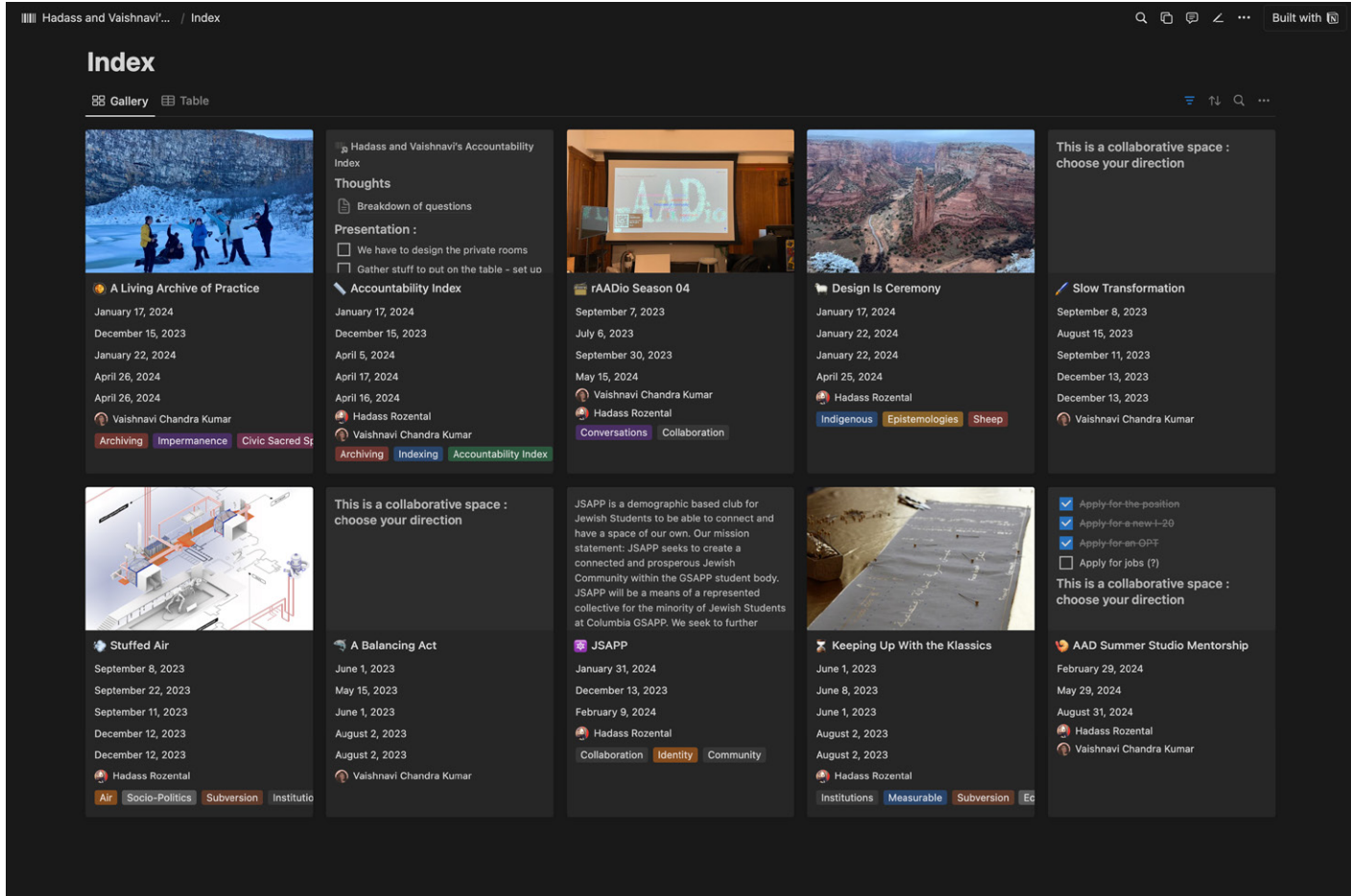
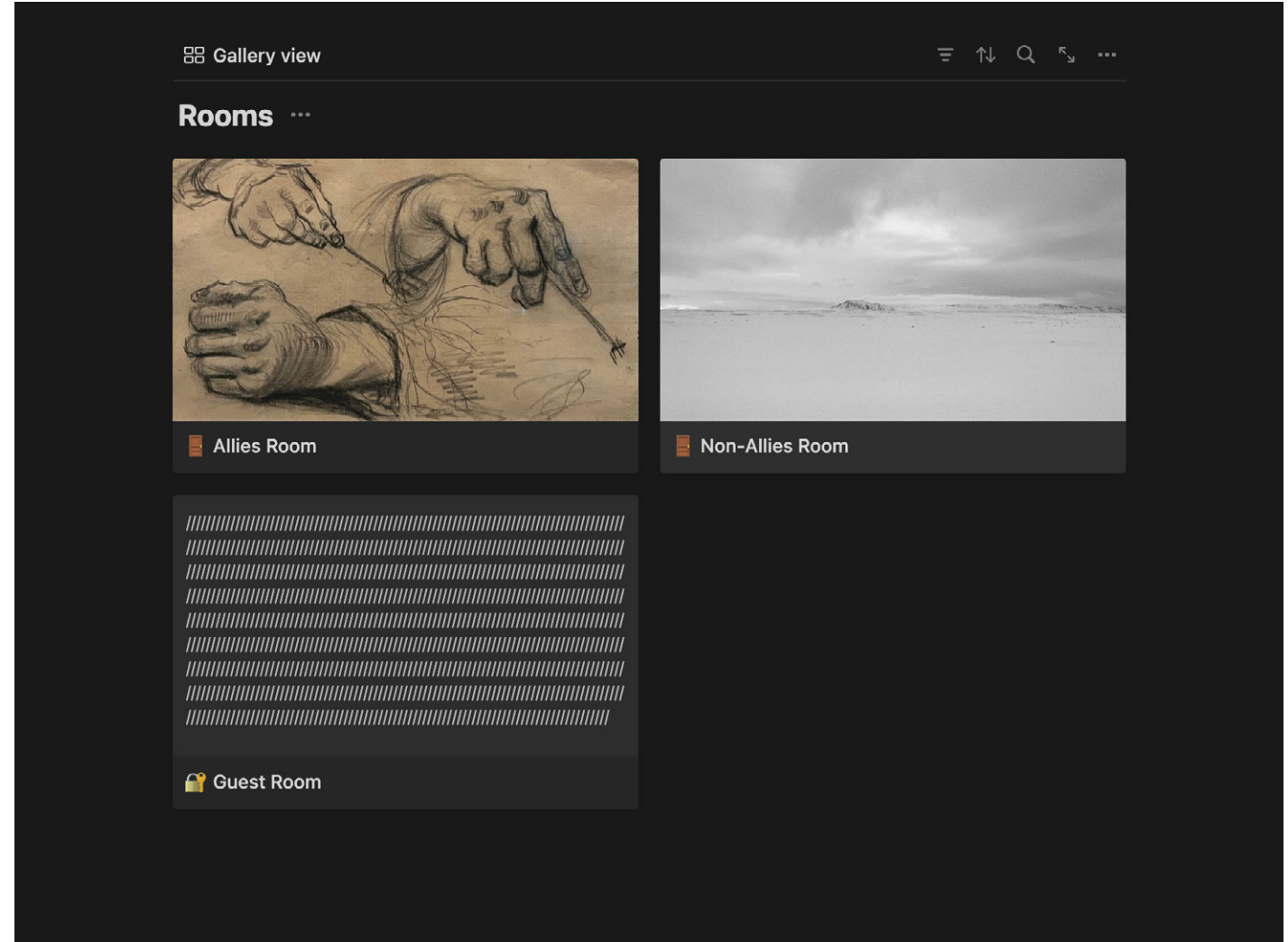
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Hadass and Vaishnavi's Accountability Index





Accountability Index

- ☰ A.00.Working Title Empty
- 👤 A.01.Who is worki... Hadass Rozental 🧑 Vaishnavi Chandra Kumar
- 📅 A.02.1.Commissio... January 17, 2024
- 📅 A.02.2.Inception ... December 15, 2023
- 📅 A.02.3.Start Date April 5, 2024
- 📅 A.02.4.Due Date April 17, 2024
- 📅 A.02.5.Completio... April 16, 2024
- ☰ A.03.Keywords Archiving Indexing Accountability Index Measurable
- ☰ B.01.What is the ... Hadass and Vaishnavi trying to figure out what their new practice will look like. What are the different ways we can stay true to our beliefs as we step into the practical world which is polar opposite of the academic bubble
- ☰ B.02.What is exp... Develop a set of ideas into a draft working model
- ☰ B.03.What is the ... The impact is determined by the decision to take a project forward after assessing the answers from the questionnaire, the need at the time
- ☰ B.04.What knowl... A framework for having an ethical practice
- ☰ B.05.Who needs t... Hadass and Vaishnavi
- ☰ B.06.Who will pro... Hadass and Vaishnavi, a possible third party
- ☰ B.07.Who will ben... Hadass and Vaishnavi
- ☰ B.08. Who will co... Hadass and Vaishnavi, a possible third party
- ☰ C.02.Who funds it? N/A
- ☰ C.03.Why me? Self preservation in the capitalist world
- ☰ C.03.1.How did th... Through the seminar in spring semester
- ☰ C.04.Why now? Final submission requirement for the semester
- ☰ C.05.Who else is ... N/A
- ☰ C.06.What is the ... N/A
- ☰ D.01.What will I g... A methodology for practice that we can use for the rest of our lives
- ☰ D.02.What will it c... Time
- ☰ D.03.Is this proje... Yes
- ☰ D.04.Does it align... Yes
- ☰ D.04.1.How far a... N/A
- ☰ D.04.2.How far a... If necessary for improvement, as long as it does not undercut all the existing value systems
- ☰ D.04.3.Why am I ... Nothing yet
- ☰ D.05.What will I lo... Nothing that comes to mind
- ☰ D.06.How will I ch... Will either be validated for the project to become a scaffold for the rest of our careers or force us to think of alternate approaches
- ▼ 1 more property

- A.00. Working Title
- A.01. Who is working on it?
- A.02.1. Commission Date
- A.02.2. Inception Date
- A.02.3. Start Date
- A.02.4. Due Date
- A.02.5. Completion Date
- A.03. Keywords
- B.01. What is the project about?
- B.02. What is expected of me?
- B.03. What is the environmental impact of this project?
- B.04.What knowledge will be produced?
- B.05. Who needs this project?
- B.06. Who will profit from the project?
- B.07. Who will benefit from the project?
- B.08. Who will continue to profit from the project in its lifetime?
- C.02. Who funds it?
- C.03. Why me?
- C.03.1. How did they learn about me?
- C.04. Why now?
- C.05. Who else is commissioned?
- C.06. What is the compensation?
- D.01. What will I gain?
- D.02. What will it cost?
- D.03. Is this project a valuable addition worthy of time, money and energy?
- D.04. Does it align with my value systems?
- D.04.1. How far am I expected to deviate from it?
- D.04.2. How far am I willing to deviate from it?
- D.04.3. Why am I making this exception?
- D.05. What will I lose?
- D.06. How will I change from the experience?

Presentation :

- We have to design the private rooms
- Gather stuff to put on the table - set up studios - physical living room
- Fill in text data for the projects
- Set up 2 living rooms - digital draft
- Presentation sequence

Presentation Pointers/Sequence

@Vaishnavi Chandra Kumar

- Hello we are Vaishnavi and Hadass and this our practice which is in the form of a work in progress website
- Throughout the semester we've been literally talking, discussing and asking ourselves and each other questions. It took us a while, but we have finally come to the realization that this actually our practice.
- This being the accountability index - as we're calling it right now
- Why this title : we think that this project is more inward and centered to us. So we're situating ourselves in the future, where we'll be expected to make decisions responding to very real and practical concerns. So this index is supposed to help us ground ourselves and make us question our choices at the very beginning. It is a record of our past choices in a way that allows some reciprocity with collaborators, commissioners, viewers, users and so on.

@Hadass Rozental

- Where does the index come from?
 - Maria Eichhorn



- working within and critiquing institutions
 - Thinking about the limitations of that
 - Bringing the freedoms of an art practice to an architectural practice

◦ **FormaFantasma**

INTRODUCTION	CHANGE	IN	ARCHIVE
			animism, colonial archive, ecology, forestry, history, legislation, nonhuman rights, timber industry, trade, wood analysis
Video	Fake Earth		history, history, legislation, nonhuman rights
Website	Nonhuman earth		ecology, forestry
Video	"13 Miles - 17th Avenue"		legislation, nonhuman rights
Article	Comparing forest to forestry at alarming rate		history, timber industry
Article	The Commission Has Not Stopped the Global Trade of Forest Products		timber industry
Website	Global Forest Watch		ecology, timber industry
Article	A complete guide to carbon offsetting		ecology
Article	Pushing for fair sites		ecology
Article	The Mangled Plant		animism
Article	In The Forest Hills		legislation
Article	In New Zealand, Laws and Courts Can Be People's Legals		legislation

- archiving as both part of the actual work + what remains after the physical installation is done
 - Also touches on the skepticism around the finalization of a work + completion date. When are things finalized? Archive is almost be definition meant to remain open for new entries

Why we index

- The index is a measurable way for us track and reflect - during the process of the project and after. It will also help asses prospect projects in the future by asking - having measured this, do we want to take that commission?

@Vaishnavi Chandra Kumar

- How we index
 - When we began designing this index - we realized that we didn't necessarily have a single format of representation that would drive the archive. It was supposed to be an archive of anything and everything that we consider as a project. So eventually we landed on a questionnaire that we would fill in, print it out and hang it on our wall so that becomes a reminder for what the project really is about.

- What are the questions?
- No access
- The second segment of questions is about the project...
- The third segment is about the commissioner and the commissionee. Which is out relationship with the project
- The fourth segment is about questioning our value systems and speculating about whether we'll be expected to deviate from it and if yes how much are we willing to move away from it
- Why are they so simple : *It is our way of breaking down and dealing with the larger complex questions that we think about deeply in now, in school and academia. But there is a good chance we forget to ask these questions when we're caught up in our day jobs - within which our practice will exist.*

@Hadass Rozental

Hadass and Vaishnavi's Accountability Index

- Transparency of the project, legibility
 - It is us holding ourselves accountable for our measuring
 - Others will be able to read it as we do, and assess
- Filters
 - Its about being straightforward - a filter is a derivative of being an index - it allows us to have specific views, read patterns of the choices we've made
 - we were also thinking about having "fixed" filters?
 - what would they be?
 - would they be automated? Meaning, do we have a set of rules that we could say would always apply? Like a certain threshold of how we measure a project that is always true
- Rooms
 - What are the two kinds of rooms
 - Private vs. public
 - private: a space for each of us to keep our personal thought, ideas, etc.
 - is not visible to anyone but us

@Vaishnavi Chandra Kumar and @Hadass Rozental

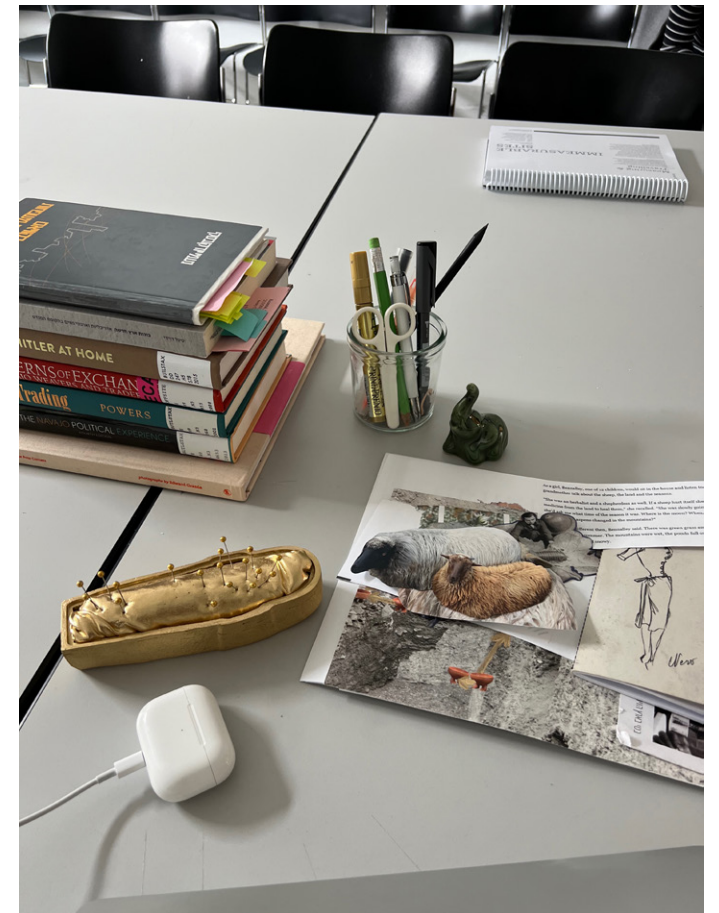
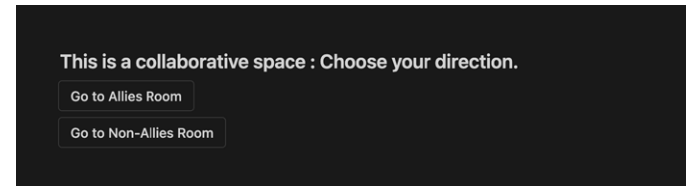
- Talk about the set up of objects - the physical space
 - The physical format of our living room - typical our work desk in the studio
 - @Vaishnavi Chandra Kumar : For me personally, having a visual cues or reminders of what is important to me is incredibly important
 - What physical object do I want to have in my living room - the first draft is a photograph rolodex (think about this @Vaishnavi Chandra Kumar)
 - @Hadass Rozental We recognize that these objects necessarily have some value in a project - whether that's a draft, a documentation, a task or a break
- Even in this process we ended up spatializing our practice on a digital platform - the way we imagine this space to function, the way our thoughts are organized and so on.
 - Mind palace - how do we access this plethora of information we have inside our heads



An image of Vaishnavi's (current and physical) living room with Hadass in it and working on the 'Accountability Index'

@Hadass Rozental

- Going back to the public room,
- This is the collaborative space within our practice, which we divided into the allies and non-allies.
 - We know that they fit here, but not sure how they would evolve and who enters them
 - We know why we need these rooms
 - How (and if?) does a non-ally end up in a room?
 - We invite people to contribute



rAADio

*S04E04:
Queer Time
A Collaboration with Vaishnavi Chandra
Kumar*

Episode Hook

*[Informal conversation with a lot of background noise
- like a scratch recording]*

HR : So we can start off with the reading from Emanuel's class. The Miriam Abraham Hillawi reading where she says "We begin, as all stories do, with land."

VC : Yeah and discuss how humans have always had an inherent connection to land, and say that it is the source of life. So no matter which community we belong to we all feel strongly towards land.

HR : The time component in this is the most interesting bit - how we all have these histories that's true and real for different people but why do we always have to pick one history?

VC : Exactly, the fact is that histories and time aren't binary, it's not black and white. So if we know that Time has been used as a measure of control and subjugation, what if we attempt to break down the institutional structures that guide such thinking, especially in areas of conflict, and start referring to time as queer?

I think we should clarify here what Queer means - a trait that allows time to exist on multiple axes and to uphold several identities at once.

HR : Yes, and where multiplicities surround a singular piece of land - that's where it often becomes complicated (a pause) and, well, ugly. So let's circle our conversation around that.

[Transition sound]

HR : I'm Hadass Rozenal

VC : and I'm Vaishnavi Chandra Kumar and in this episode of 'TBD podcast title' we're thinking about 'WHAT IF TIME WAS QUEER'

rAADio Episode Opening

[Intro sound]

rAADio is an investigation by Advanced Architectural design students in the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation at Columbia University.

As a cohort from a plurality of diverse backgrounds, we aim to observe the many polycentric entanglements of architecture. We explore the questions of how we expand the traditional role and associations of architecture between assemblages, interrelationships, bodies, and technologies; beyond simple scalar translations.

[Transition sound]

Part 1.1 - The Ayodhya Conflict

VC : So this conversation really just started out by talking about places and times of conflict. When we have so much about this particular topic in the news, we wanted to think more deeply and definitely more sensitively about why these conversations spiral into

the extremities forcing people to choose sides.

HR : Exactly I often feel that for the sake of having a conversation, situations are flattened instead of simplified. Sometimes it happens from an honest attempt to create more accessible conversation, but the result is usually a superficial rendering of the complexities that for the most part happen when multiple realities are layered on top of each other.

VC : So let's break down what we actually mean when we say, quote-unquote multiple realities. With this episode we are trying to understand the unconscious biases that influence most of our perspectives and how we could create conversations that could lead to more accountably inclusive discourses for territories of conflict.

HR : Okay, so let's use a specific case study, that is closer to home for you Vaish - The Ayodhya Conflict. For those of you unfamiliar with it, this is a case that went on for 140 odd years from its legal inception in court in 1885. It is a contested holy site for two religious groups in India - Hindus and Muslims. At the time the suit was filed, on-site was a mosque, Babri Masjid, that had been constructed during the Mughal rule in India in the 1500s. The argument for the case was that historically, or mythologically, however you wish to say it, Ayodhya is the birthplace of Lord Ram, a god to millions of Hindus who believe that the site of the mosque rightfully belongs to them and must have a temple.

[Transition sound]

Part 1.2 - The prompt

VC : As we found ourselves discussing this case, we thought we could use it to deconstruct ideologies inherent to socially charged situations. We used a slightly different format where we posed this topic to three different people and we gave them each this excerpt and a question, which read as :

"One of the most controversially debated cases in India was the Babri Masjid - Ram Mandir Dispute or Ayodhya Dispute, which was finally "resolved" by a supreme court ruling in 2019. Fueled by communal tensions that have compounded over the last 200 years, the state of the existing relationship between the Hindus and the Muslims in India today is a portal to its future and the legitimacy of democracy.

On the event of the inauguration of the Ram temple in Ayodhya, what image does that portal create for you? How do you feel about the entire situation?"

[Transition sound]

Hadass and I started to think about this issue as a possible topic for the podcast a few days before the inauguration of the temple. And by the time we sent the prompt out, in India, the temple was being inaugurated and celebrated by the prime minister just ahead of his re-election campaign.

Our respondents were a mix of people old and young, familiar and unfamiliar with the case.

Part 2.1 - M's response

HR : So let's start with the first response from a 26 year old Indian Christian respondent, whom for the sake of this conversation we will refer to as M.M starts off by saying:

"As a neutral Indian who belongs to neither the Hindu nor the Muslim community, I am pro the construction of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya."

HR : I would argue that this is our first point of critique. You hear this a lot usually amongst the

younger generations, where they identify as “neutral” but simply by saying that he is for the construction of the temple, he has aligned or even rationalized the situation in whatever arbitrary way that works with his belief system. I think it's important that people carefully use their words with more intention to say what they believe without having the fear of being ostracized for having an opinion.

VC : I agree with you, even while thinking about this topic I remember how we debated which word to use instead of neutral. Because that's exactly what we're trying to do here, start discourses about how not to be neutral but rather aware. In a way which says “yes this is my history but there is also another person for whom the opposite may be true and that is his history”. This is however, easier said than done and we do not want to come off as naive and ignorant trying to say that you should be open minded because there are also so many facts and numbers that speak to violence that are happening as we speak.

HR : Absolutely, and this is probably a good spot to state the importance of being critical about the sources we draw information from. Especially in this era when we consume so much of our data from social media and sometimes forget that it is designed to do the exact opposite - it amplifies our own voice, often at the expense of hearing others.

But coming back to our first response, M says that despite belonging to the Abrahamic religions, he feels that the construction of the temple was the right decision, because he views and I quote:

“churches, mosques and synagogues as spaces of congregation where the site does not hold as much importance except on the rare occasions where it was testimony to miracles or divine intervention.

On the other hand, Hindu temples are more often than not built on sites that hold significant importance to the faith as whole. All major temples are built on sites/ locations that have some historical context with regards to the epics and other religions scriptures.”

HR : While there is definitely truth to that statement, at least one that I personally resonate with, it comes from a place of objectivity that removes all emotional and sacral associations (or religious sentiment) that people feel with this case. Especially when it manifests itself into a physical form that is visible to the human eye, that is a grand temple in this case.

VC : M goes on to say that he, however, does not support the way the whole situation was publicized and he is absolutely right here. The spectacle of the whole event, the celebration of it, was a very concrete and real way of the government reinforcing the idea that ‘A’ group of people have won the fight and the other hasn't. It was memorialized as a victory that instead of finding a common ground for the conflict, sealed its fate forever, complicating the already complex relationship between the two communities that exists.

HR : He ends on this almost dismal note where he is saying [quote]:

”Should a similar issue arise in the future, I strongly doubt there will be an amicable solution. It was an opportunity for all sections to show camaraderie and respect for each other , the rift only seems to widen and it is a tragedy that the country couldn't come together for an event that holds such importance to such a large majority.”

HR : It brings us back to the first point about neutrality which in a way can be synonymized as a lack of interest, indifference and maybe even a nihilistic attitude that seems to be festering across the world. The idea of what is the point, which is definitely an issue. But even stopping to think about this crisis is a step towards addressing the problem.

VC : Agreed. M is a friend of mine and I tried to start this conversation on my group chat of people who are close to me and I have known for years, but there was so much resistance to voicing their opinion while my entire social media was flooded with images of the new temple for the two-three days around its inauguration. People chose to use the platform and



method of posting stories to in a way show their alliances. In the digital age that we are currently living in there is so much misinformation and superficial content out there that leaves critical data out of the system that it creates divides. In the sea of orange posts

HR : For our listeners who aren't familiar, orange is the color of the Hindu flag

VC : [so among all these orange posts] there were a few voices opposing and challenging the status quo but the numbers were so poor that the effort almost felt insignificant.

Part 2.2 - D's response

VC : Let's look at another perspective here. Sadly our respondent pool was restricted to the male gender and that might itself be something we should have addressed to create a more equitable representation of voices, but due to logistical constraints, this is the data we're working with.

HR : Well, we surely do claim that patriarchy doomed us...

VC : Oh yeah, definitely agree on that. I remember that conversation we had with your building superintendent. That was an interesting perspective, not so unique to how the majority of the country thinks. Do you want to summarize your conversation with him?

HR : Yeah, this was a particularly interesting conversation for me. Just the sheer excitement about the whole topic was fascinating to watch. Or hear if I'm being more precise.

HR : For D this whole story was about the historical fact - he emphasized that there was an entire investigation and a historical research of the site and its surroundings which concluded that the Hindu history of the place was prior to Muslim one. Then he specifically mentioned the Muslim judge (1 out of 5) in the supreme court bench that unanimously ruled in favor of the Hindus, as a sort or re-affirmation of that chronology by an Islamic representative, in a way that, according to D, sheds an objective light on the supreme court rule. Simply put - If even the Muslim guy approved it, it must be right.

VC : This whole experience, the way you just described, is so familiar to me. I've heard this in so many different versions back home. I would say there is a fundamental compartmentalisation of religion versus rationality that we all make in our minds. Whether you're progressive or conservative. And that might be where we begin to have a conversation. It's which half we let dominate.

Part 2.3 - A's response

HR : I just want to use this quote from another one of our respondents. A is a 23 year old American, providing us with an “outside” opinion of the case. And he goes:

”The inauguration of the new Ram temple in Ayodhya made me feel like spiritual and physical intentions lack its original monumentality. The original monument presented the labor intensive detail which embodied belief. The alternative photos found online presents the same temple as it's digitally rendered and built using larger modern cranes. What's the monument around it? Is the temple not just an installment of lazy power. A temple in the carcass of a site. I challenge the temple to be part of current times, to be monumental within limited technology and to present its relevance counter to advance.



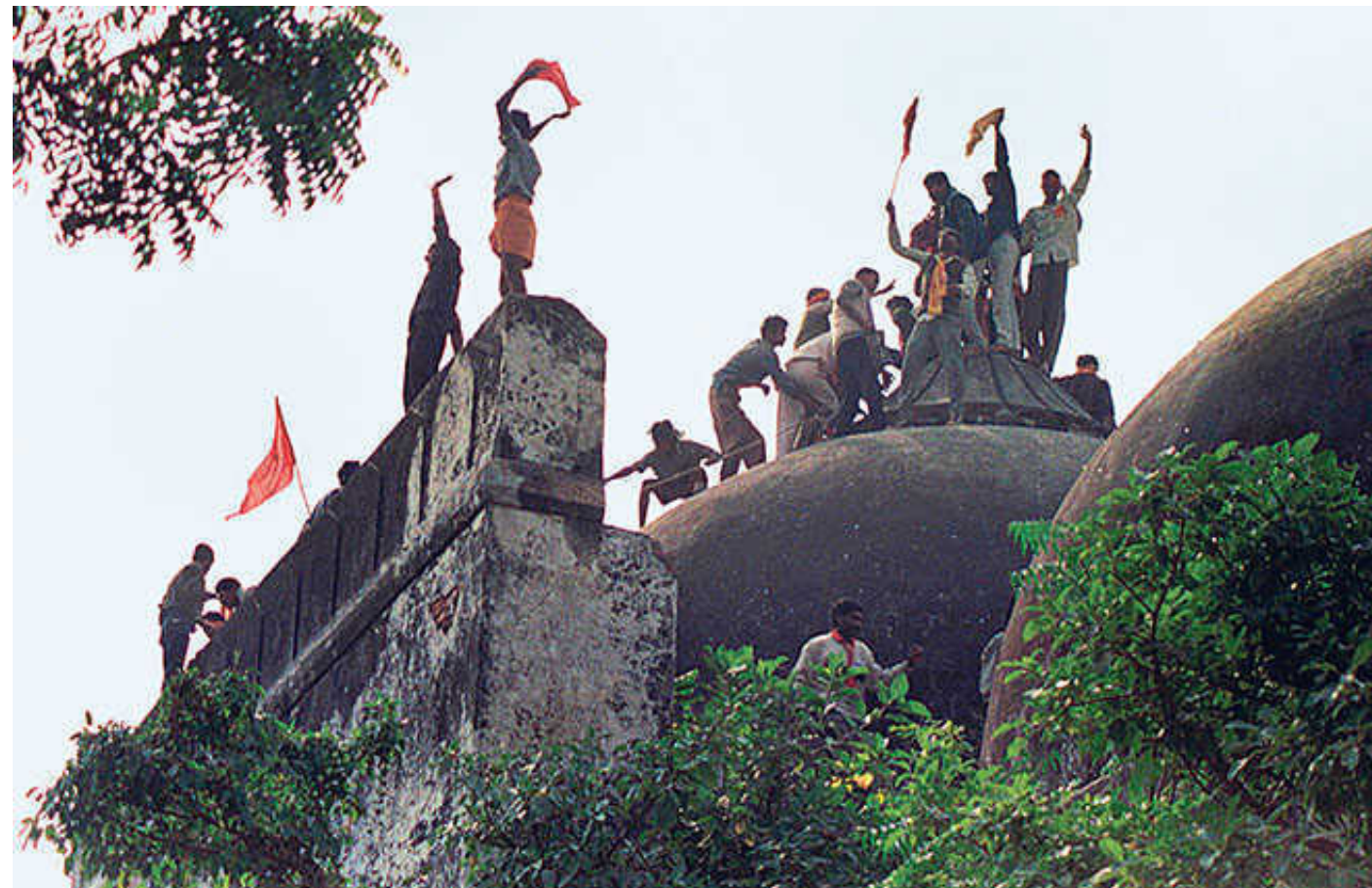
Spirituality as alternative empowerment within the age of the techno-socialites. Less formally, a temple to the current age of religion could single handedly be absent from strategies of belief.”

HR: What I find interesting about A’s response is that he is actually offering us an architectural framework for this dispute. Which nicely fits the fact that he is a fellow architecture grad student. Now, I really don’t want to sound naive, but I do think it would make an interesting experiment to provide architecture

students with a brief for an alternative temple or worship space that would answer everybody’s needs. Of course we are aware of the fact that just like most of what’s happening in the world there are major forces in play here besides the actual physicality of Babri Masjid, that probably benefit from that polarization in one way or the other. So the point of that proposed experiment is not to conveniently ignore these complexities, but rather to use architecture as a tool that starts to mitigate between all these ends.

VC: Can I just add here, being an architecture student myself and I’ve thought about what the ideal proposal would look like and in this context I keep circling back to haptic non-specific space that can be meditative and reflective to different communities. Something that is guided by the landscape and natural elements as opposed to hard edges and enclosures.

VC: Yeah. A also touches on the idea of being of time here. In challenging the temple to “be part of current times”, what A is really saying is that we



Now when our site is euthanized, it liberates itself from its religious constraints to a point where it is both no-man’s land and all-man’s land.

VC: I have to admit that sounds like poetic justice to me, what if the site or building went ‘I QUIT!’ It sounds freeing and like there is a chance at a new life where you archive the multiple histories for new ones to exist over them. To move on.

rAADio Closing Credits

[Transition sound]

This episode was produced by the 2024 rAADio editorial team, a collective of Advanced Architectural Design students at Columbia University’s Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation. Thanks to Dean Andres Jaque and AAD assistant director Xiaoxi Chen for their guidance. Also a big shout out to our director and producer Max Lauter, [add additional people if involved] for their support.

[Closing sound] ■

have to, first and foremost, rethink what it means to worship in our times. The masjid was built 500 years ago, to accommodate the religious needs and the power structure of that time. The same was done for the worship site before that. Religious practices and power structures have evolved since then. Time has changed, for better or worse, and space must reflect that. There is a contemporary aspect to this matter that has been entirely left out of the current, newly inaugurated temple.

[Transition sound]

Part 3 - Bias/Conclusion

HR: Taking this whole conversation as a template, the number of tangents that we’ve digressed into is simply incredible. That process itself kind of reveals the idea of positionality, as Rolando Vazquez would put it, that one must have. A bias that allows you to think about your beliefs and a bias that allows you to contest another person’s bias. We talked in length about what religion means to each of us and you mentioned how you find solace in a non-functional temple, where you can actually see a myriad of people come together irrespective of their ethnicity. The possibility of that is based on the fact that being religious is removed from the religion itself.

VC: So coming back to the [non-space] that I mentioned earlier, in such contexts of conflict what would the site itself do?

HR: Well, If I was the place of worship, I would want to be euthanized. Not in a pessimistic, giving up kind of way - but in a constructive sense.

VC: OK, please do explain!

HR: The Hebrew term for euthanization is *Hamatat-Chessed* (המתת חסד). It could be translated as either “death by mercy” or “death by grace” and could be passive or active. I personally think of it as a beautiful thing (or concept?) - a person taking control of their own life, even at the very end.

Thank you to my friends and educators who kept arguing. ❤️