

CHAO-TANG LIN

GSAPP 2026



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The Restorative Spine

A Territorial Cycle Between Manhattan and Hart Island

This project examines the narrative of death in New York City, a profound story currently suspended between two disparate and vulnerable islands: Manhattan and Hart Island. For over a century, Hart Island has served as the municipal burial site for the city's unclaimed, yet today it faces an existential threat from severe coastal erosion, rising sea levels, and a rapidly depleting burial capacity. Conversely, Manhattan has legally prohibited human burials south of 86th Street since 1850, rendering the island a sterile void disconnected from the natural cycles of life and death.

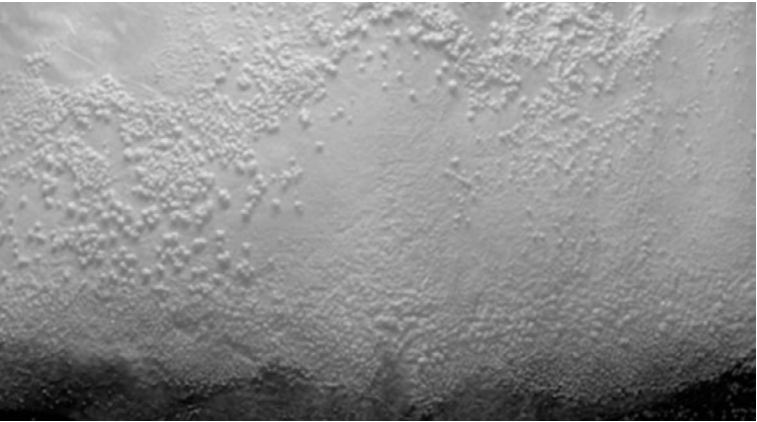
Rather than proposing a static architectural object, this project introduces a dynamic design mechanism to negotiate with the inherent instability of both the shifting coastal environment and the compromised built environment. By engaging with the continuous flow of disappearance and material presence, a new territorial infrastructure is established that bridges these two isolated realms. This reciprocal exchange reclaims stalled urban voids to process the deceased, transforming the narrative of mourning into an active ecological catalyst. Through the careful management of metabolic flows, the design aims to extend the legacy and history of burials, projecting the profound significance of death into a resilient future that sustains the city's most vulnerable landscapes.

Year: 2026

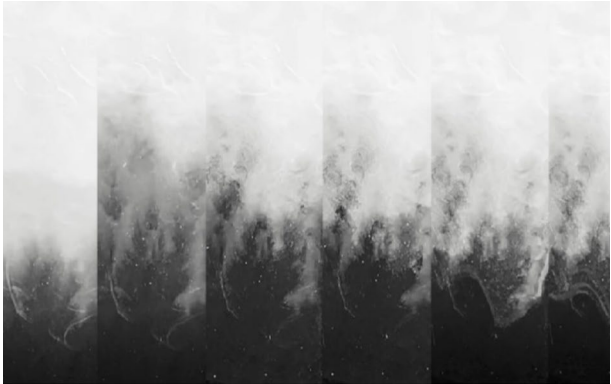
Type: GSAPP Studio Project (Group Work with Dajin Wang)

Location: New York, USA

Instructor: Karla Rothstein (Founder of DeathLAB & LATENT Productions)



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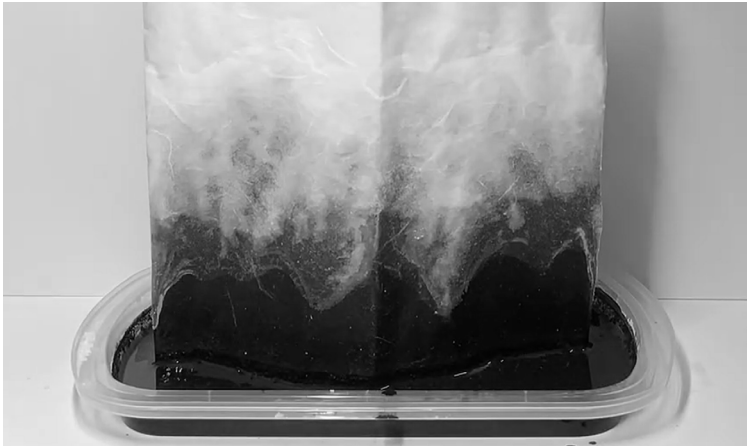
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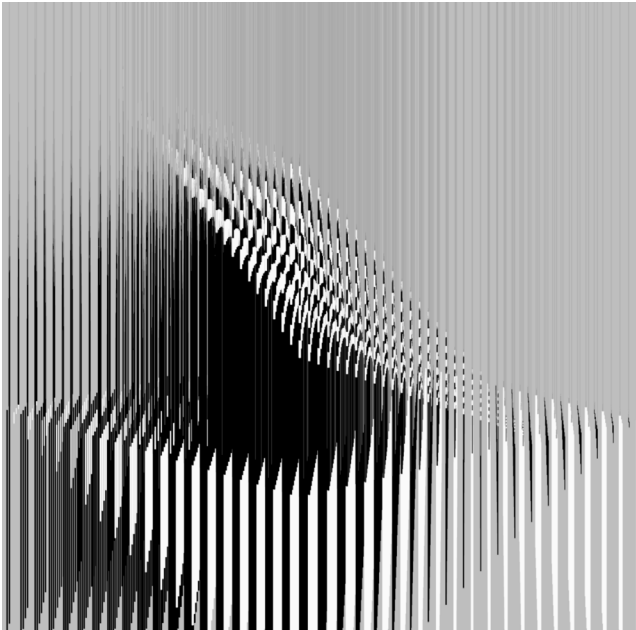
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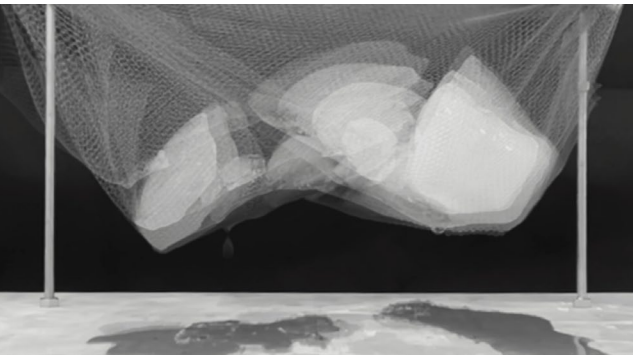
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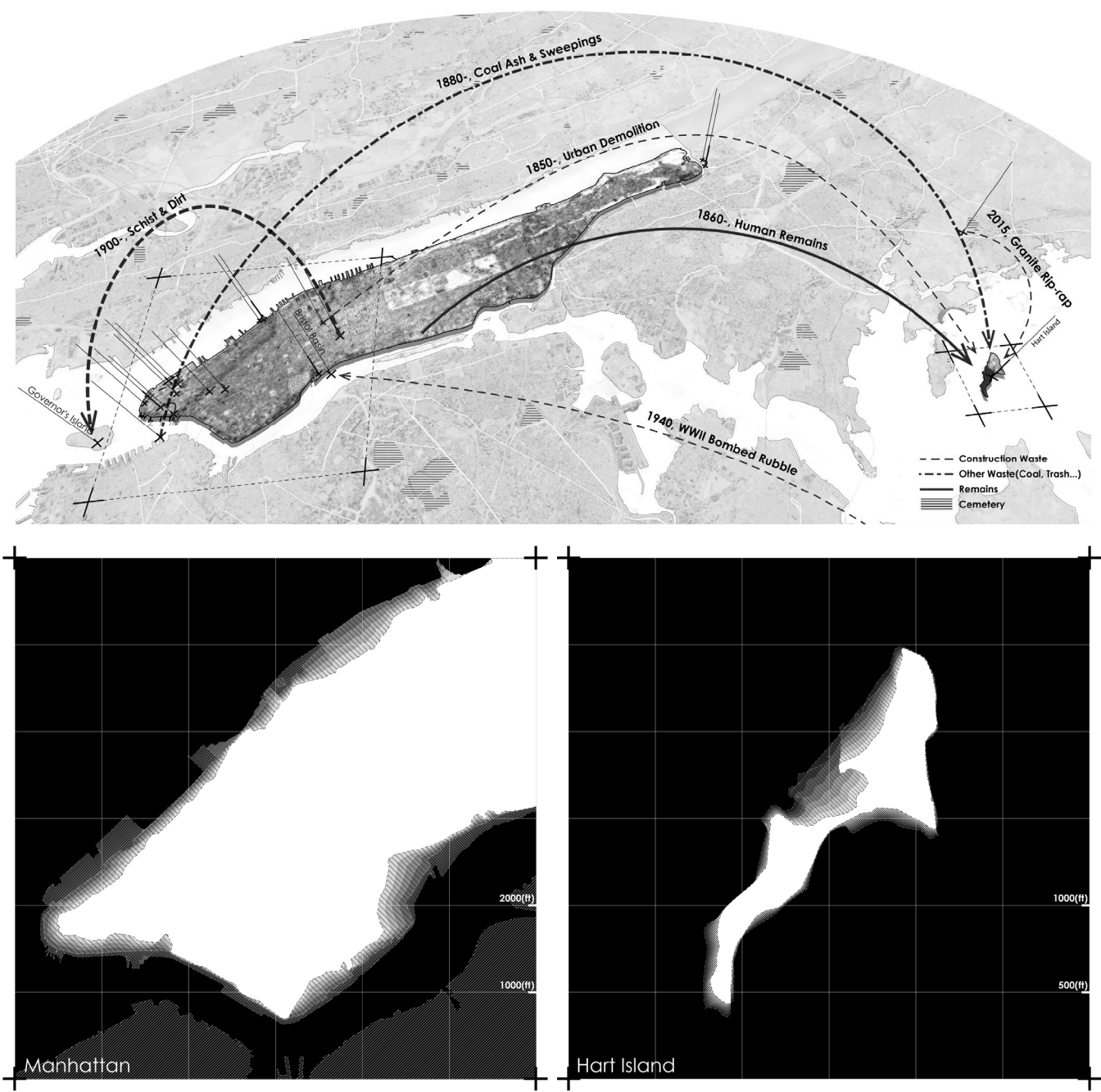
06

The Accumulation of Presence and Absence

By observing the interaction of ink, salt, and water over time, the experiments reveal how differing materials exist, dissolve, and leave residual traces. This process of continuous flux models how matter influences and ultimately occupies shifting territorial boundaries, translating ephemeral chemical reactions into a permanent ledger of spatial and material change.

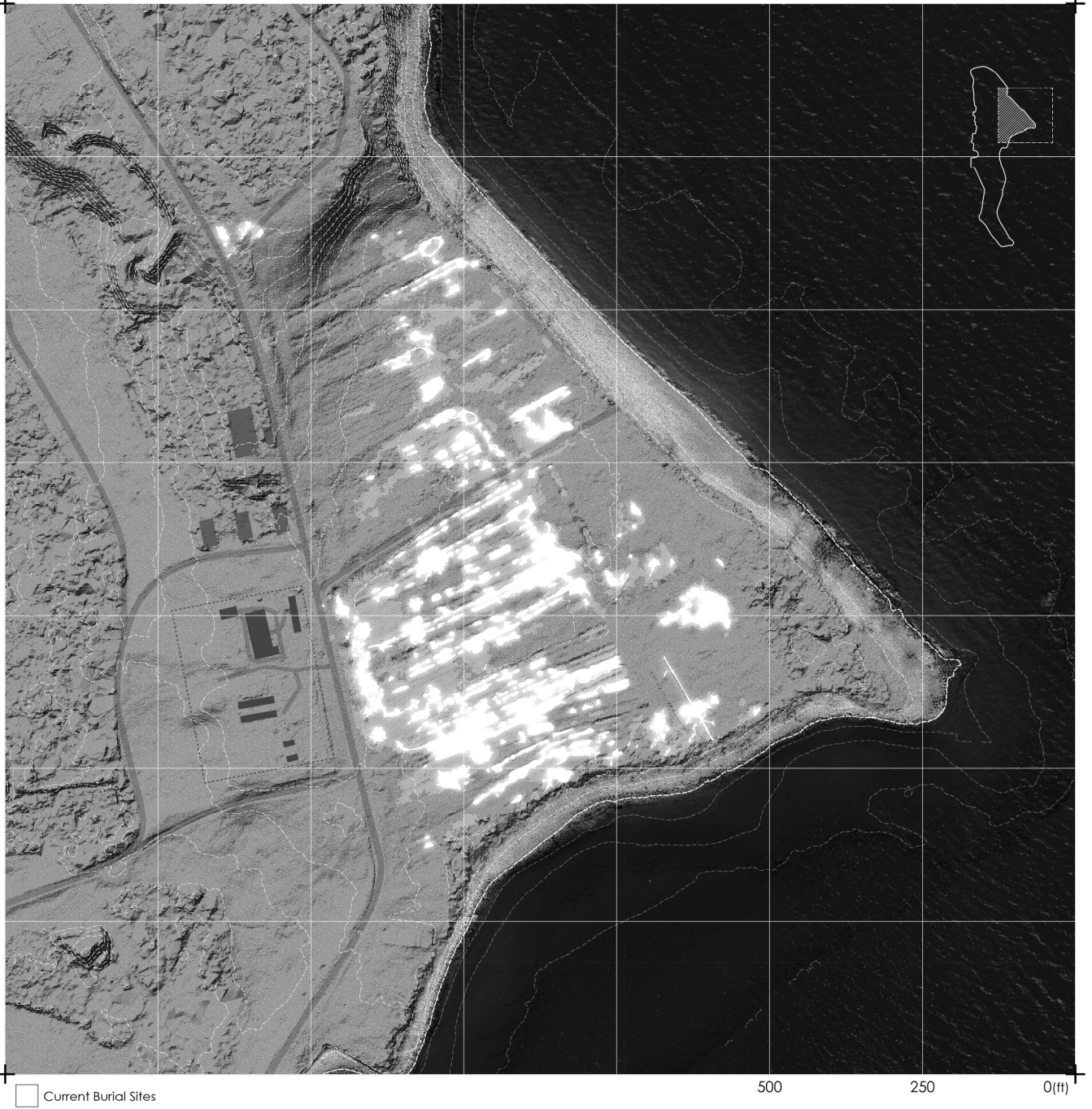
- 01. Salt and Ink on Mulberry Paper
- 02. Salt and Ink on Mulberry Paper
- 03. Process of Melting Ice
- 04. Process of Absorption
- 05. Operative Drawing (Process of Absorption)

- 06. Variations of Salt and Ink on Paper
- 07. Salt Flat, Gujarat
- 08. Salt Harvest, Gujarat
- 09. Variations of Paper, Salt, and Ink
- 10. Relationships between Salt, Ink, and Water



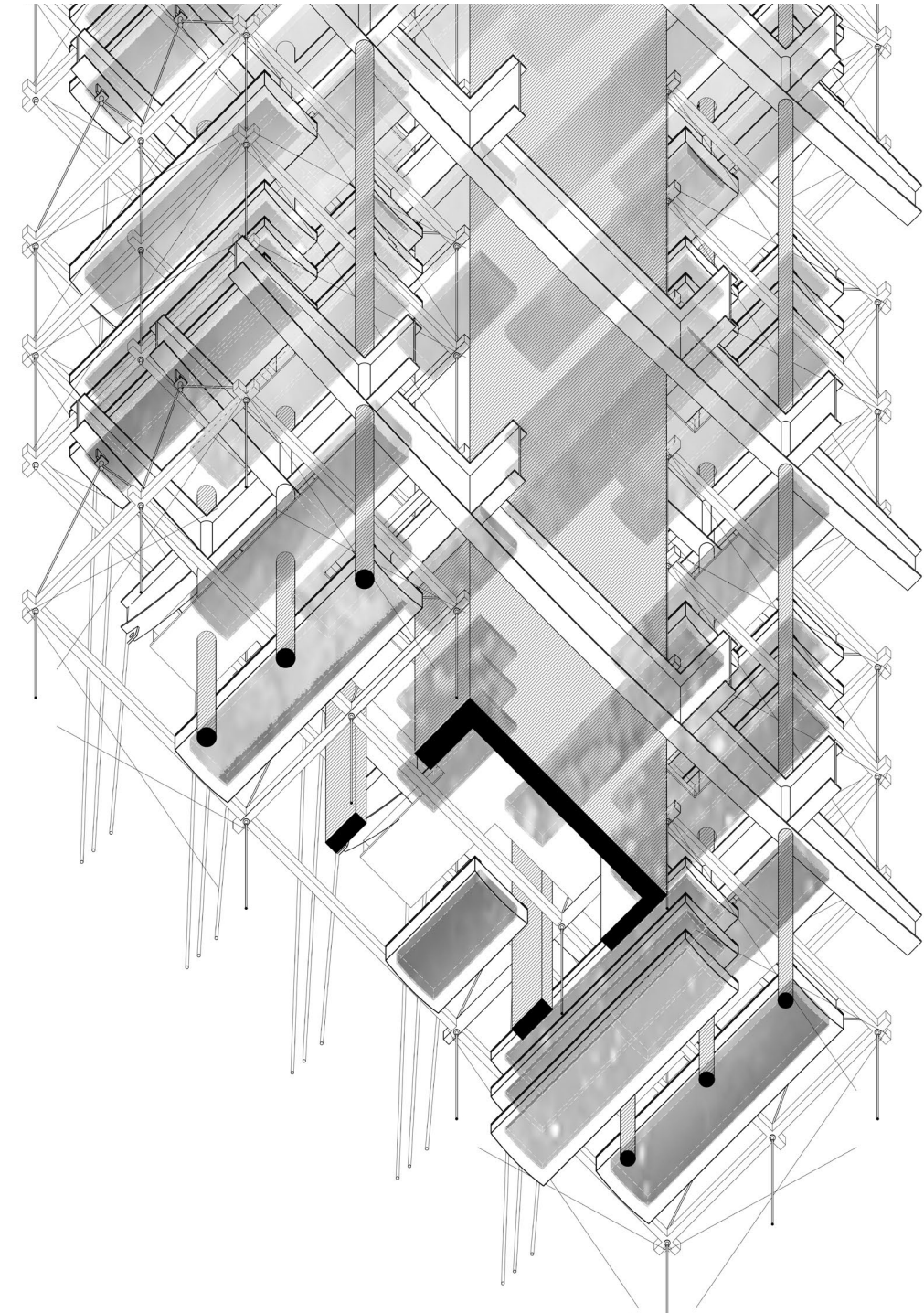
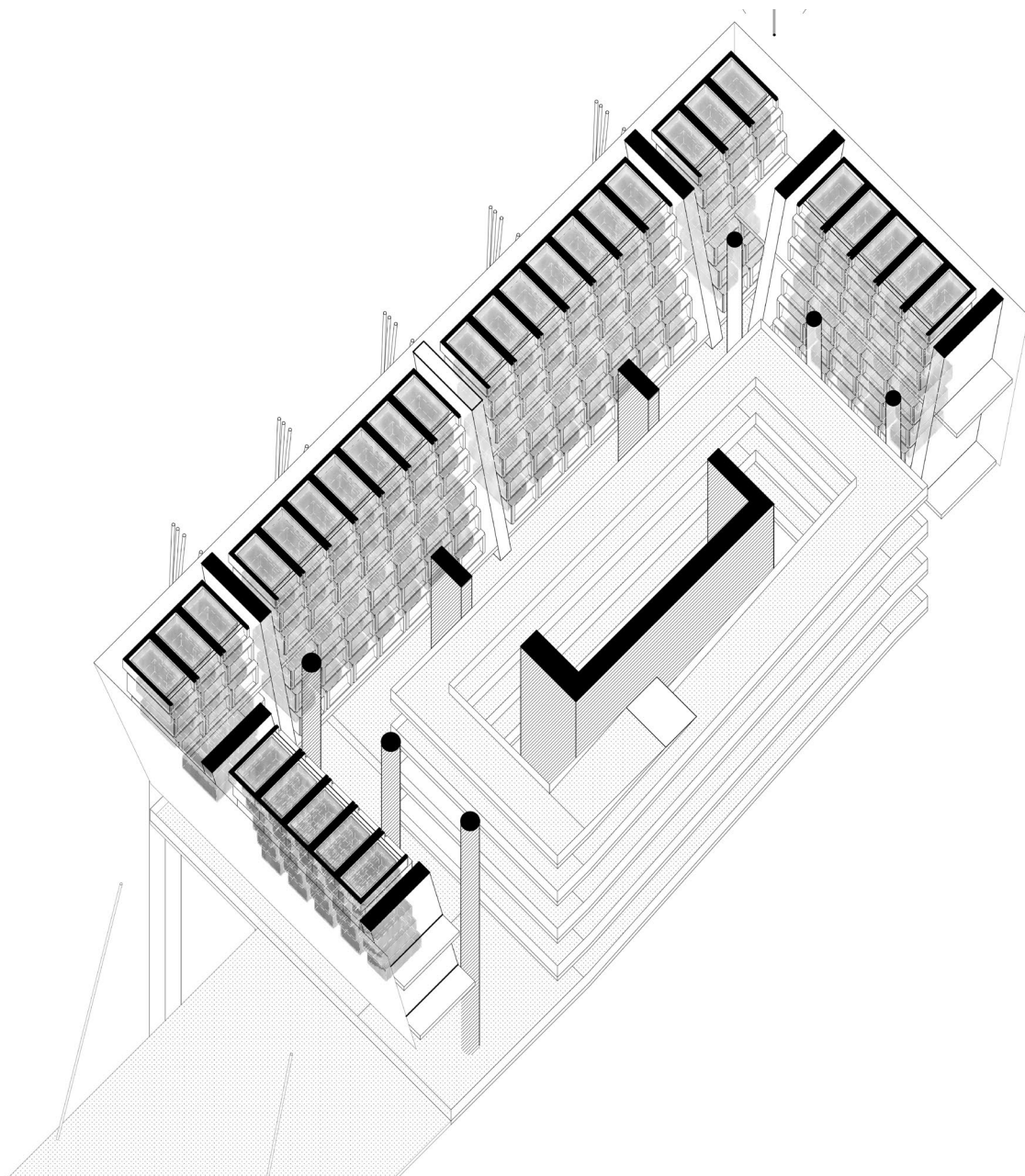
The Growth & Decline of Islands

For over a century, a continuous metabolic exchange has dictated the growth and decline of these two islands. Manhattan has historically exported its excesses—ranging from urban demolition debris to human remains—across the water to Hart Island. This mapping illustrates the territorial flow of these materials, framing both urban waste and the deceased not merely as refuse, but as transported resources capable of redefining boundaries, reclaiming coastlines, and generating new topographies.



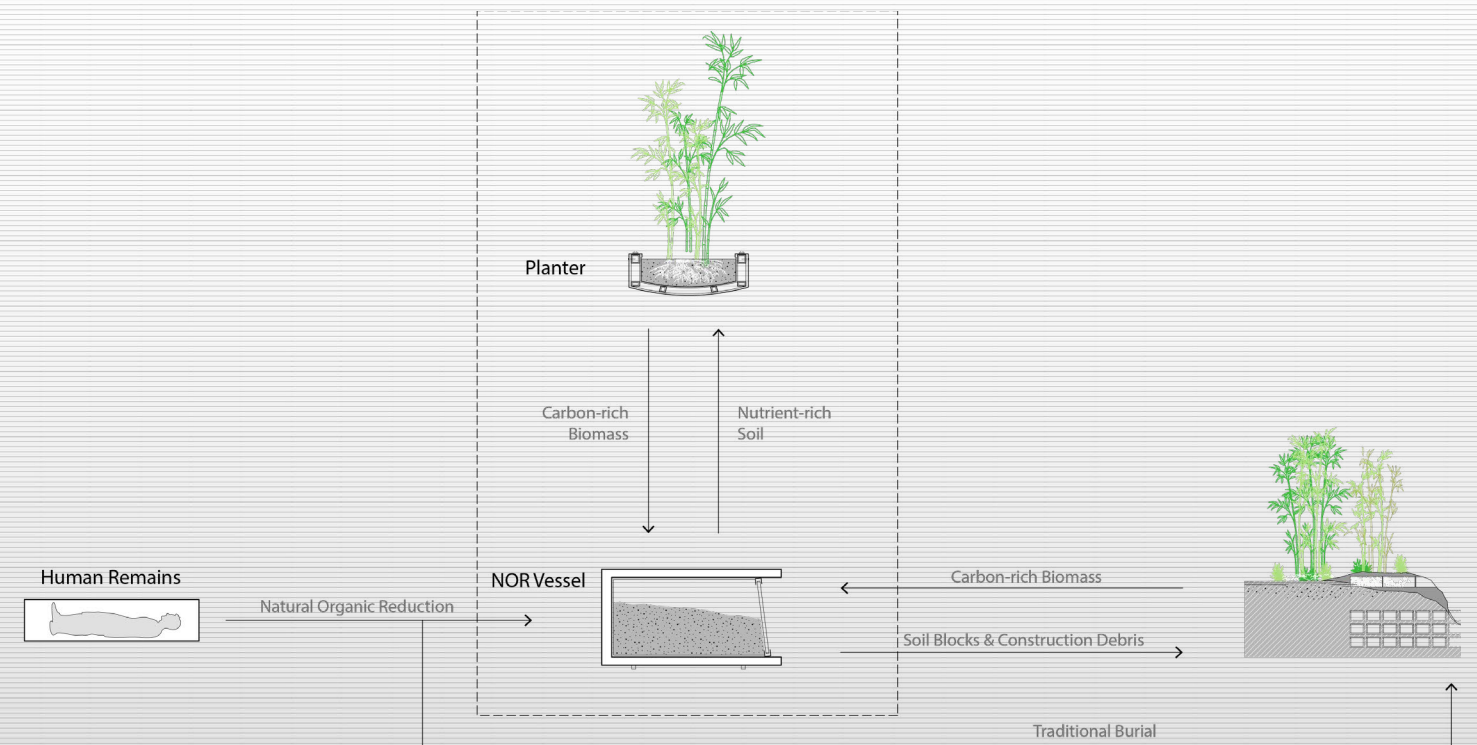
Burial Trenches in Hart Island

Historically, burials on Hart Island have been organized within deep, linear trenches, with pine coffins systematically stacked three deep. Over time, as the organic matter decomposes and the earth settles, these subterranean grids subtly reveal themselves above ground. The shifting soil and the emergence of new pioneer vegetation translate the invisible architecture of the burial trenches into an undulating, living topography etched permanently across the island's surface.

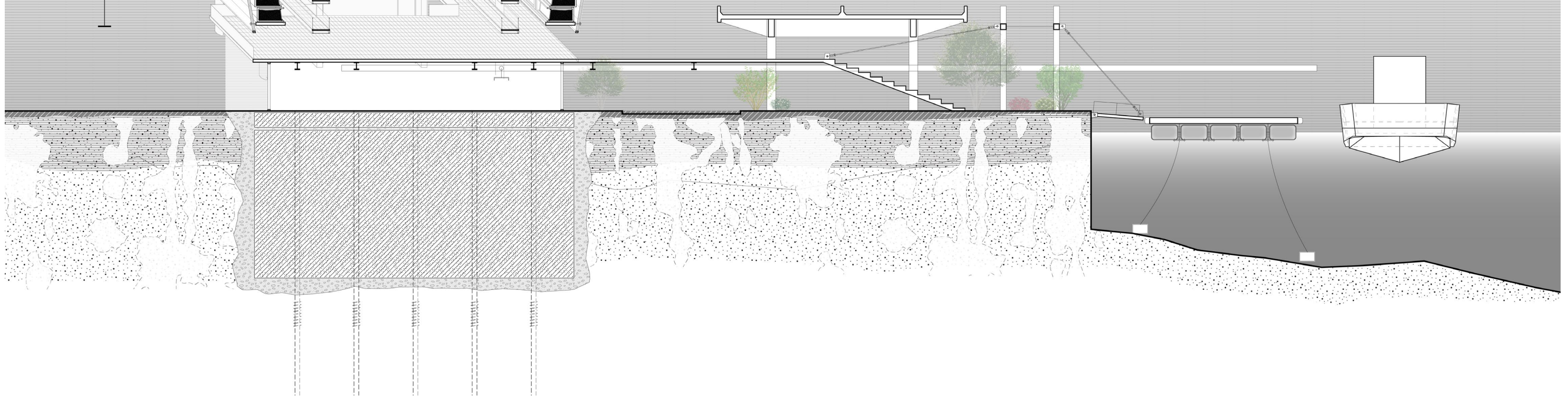


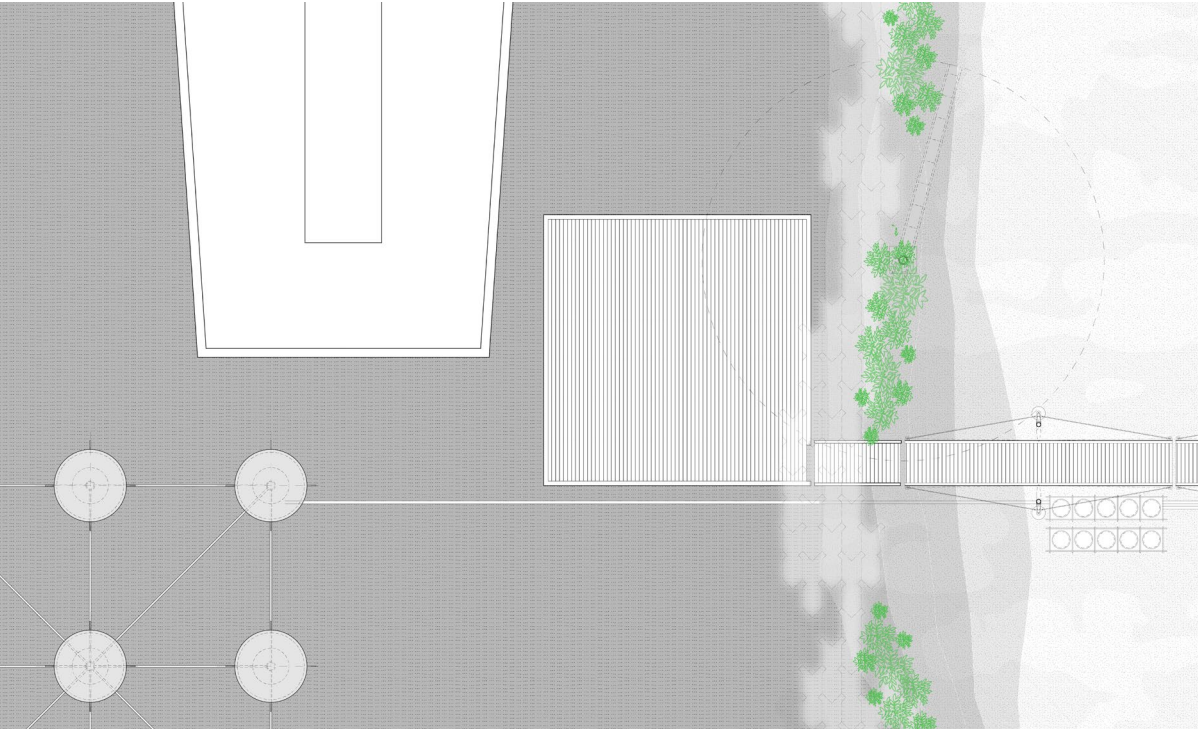
Vertical Metabolism

Reclaiming the stalled exoskeleton of 161 Maiden Lane, this intervention introduces a vertical Natural Organic Reduction (NOR) facility. The upper framework is dismantled to support a solar-carved ecosystem, cultivating the organic roots and carbon needed for the reduction process. Metabolizing 1,500 bodies annually, this machine transforms a paralyzed skyscraper into productive infrastructure, generating nutrient-rich soil to sustain the territorial cycle.

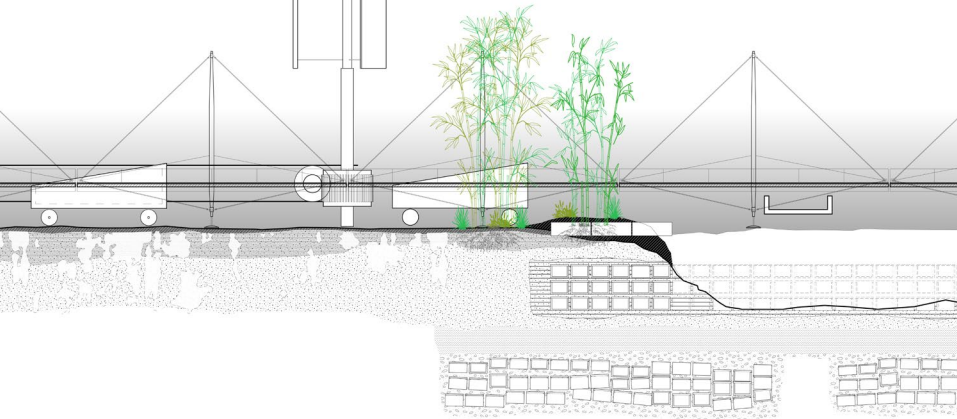
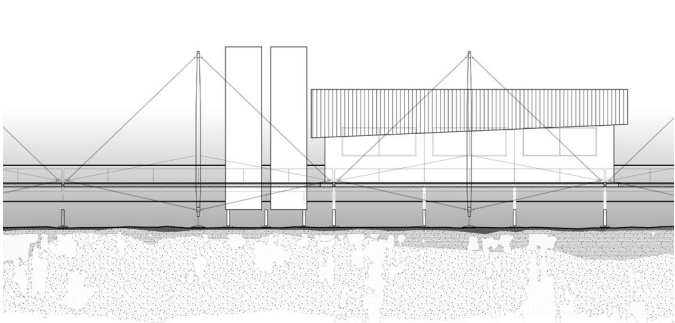
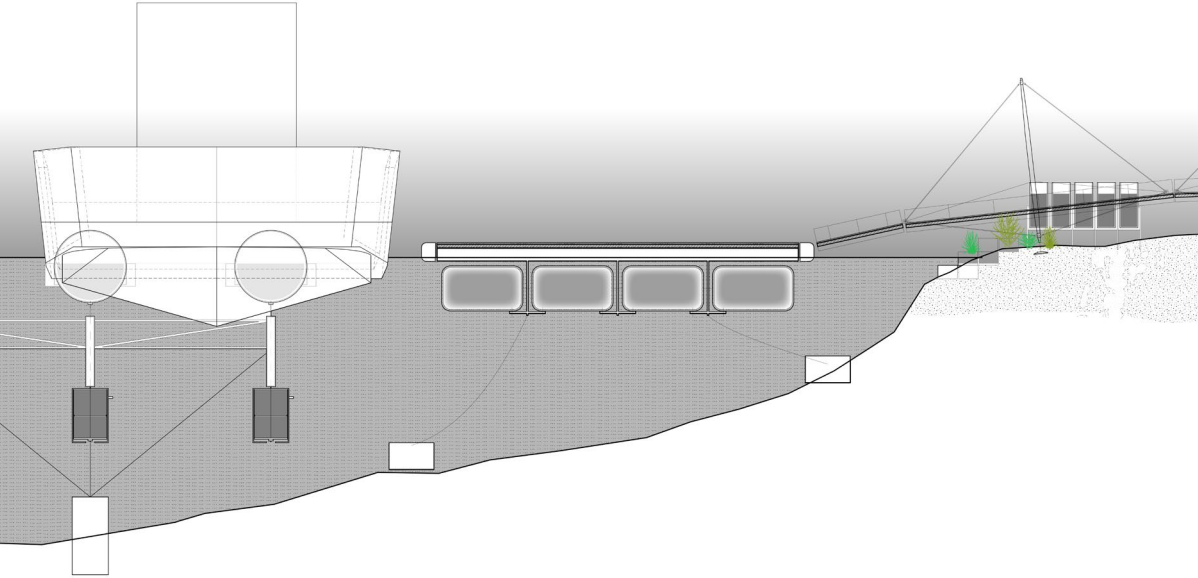
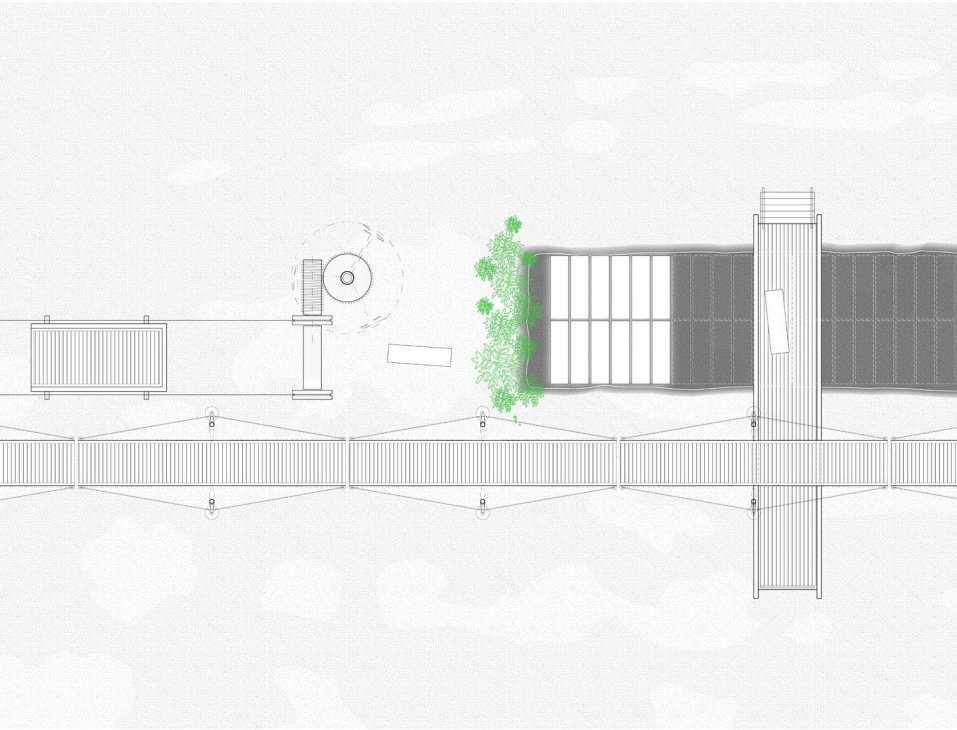
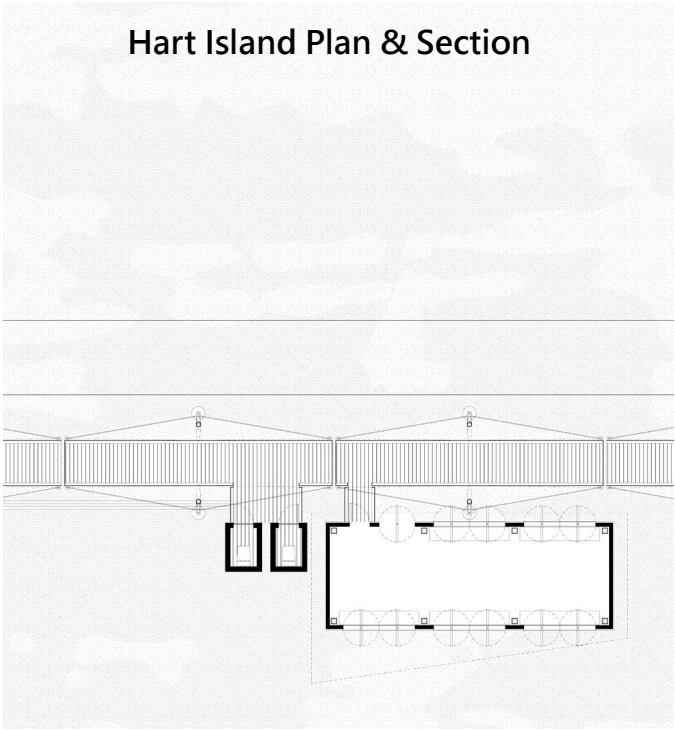


Hart Island





Hart Island Plan & Section



Restorative Infrastructure

On Hart Island, imported nutrient-rich soil landfills existing burial sites, stabilizing the shoreline against coastal erosion and extending the island's capacity. The logistical infrastructure introduces buoyancy-driven desalination for clean water, alongside distinct conveyance pathways for visitors, remains, and soil. This transforms the historically restricted island into an accessible landscape, providing shelters and supporting a dignified cycle of public visitation.





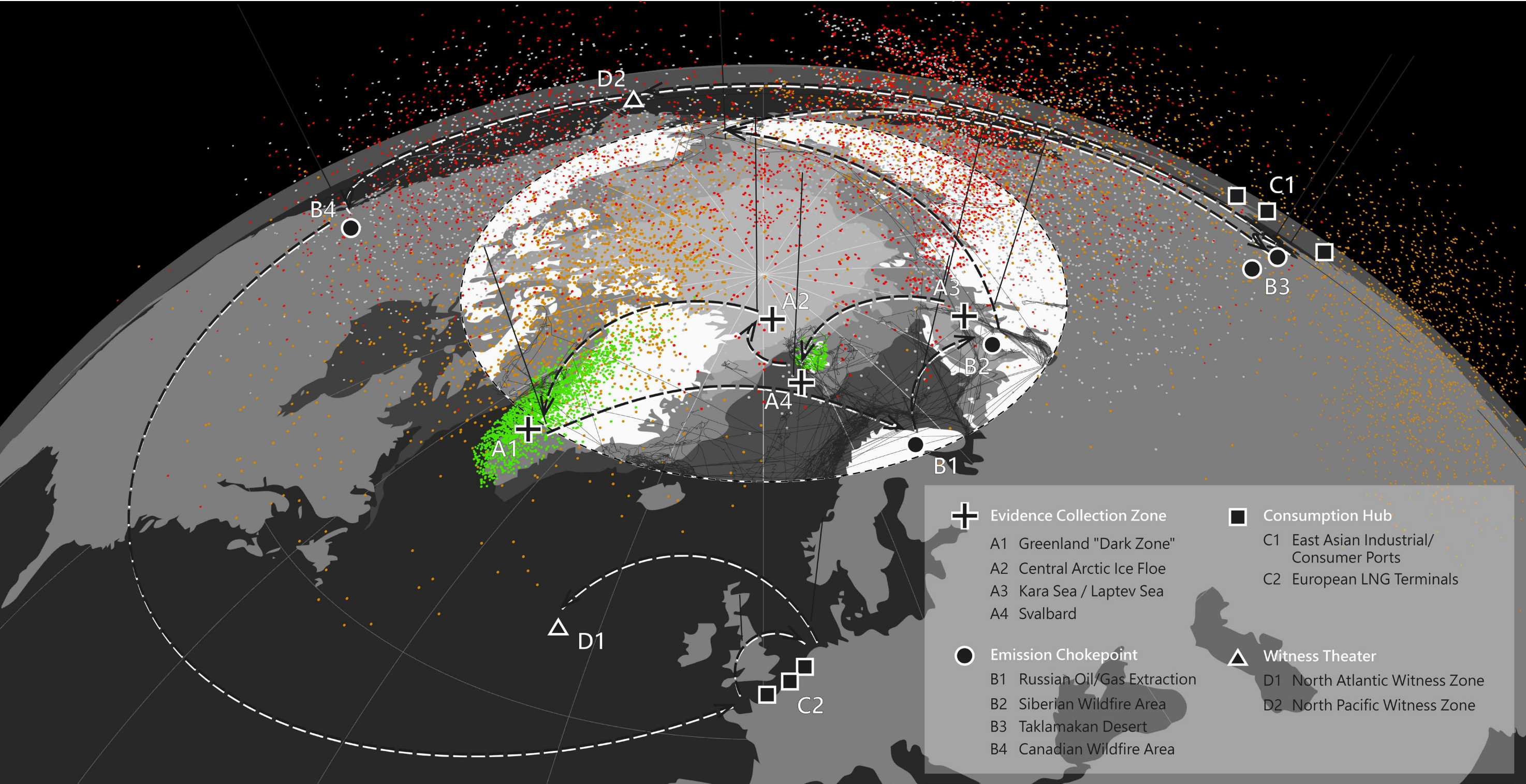
The Albedo Archive

Architecture as Registering and Disclosure

This project is about the Albedo Effect and Dust in the Arctic, viewing it as an interaction between color and temperature. When dark dust falls on the white Arctic ice, it absorbs heat and causes the ice to melt, creating new topographies and landscapes. Following the measurement of dust, the proposal shifts from pure scientific observation to the logistics of preservation and transportation.

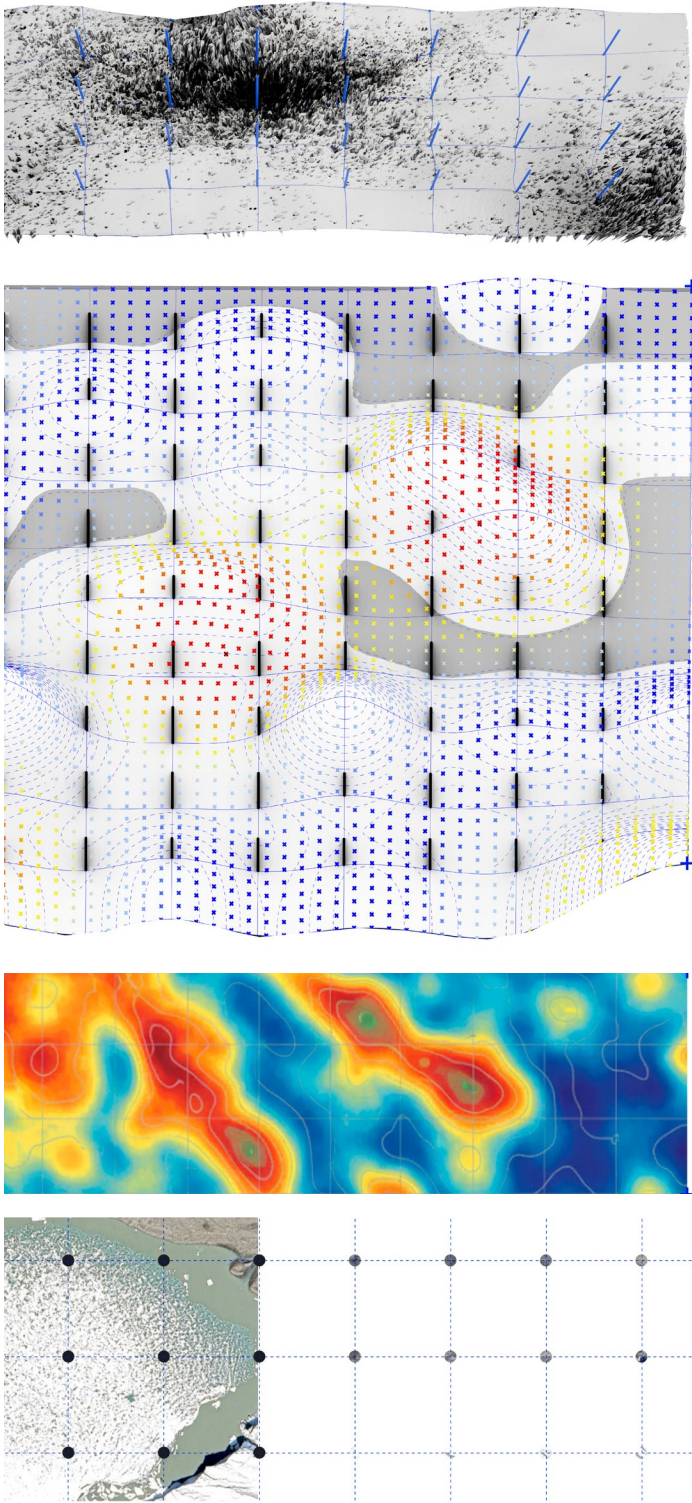
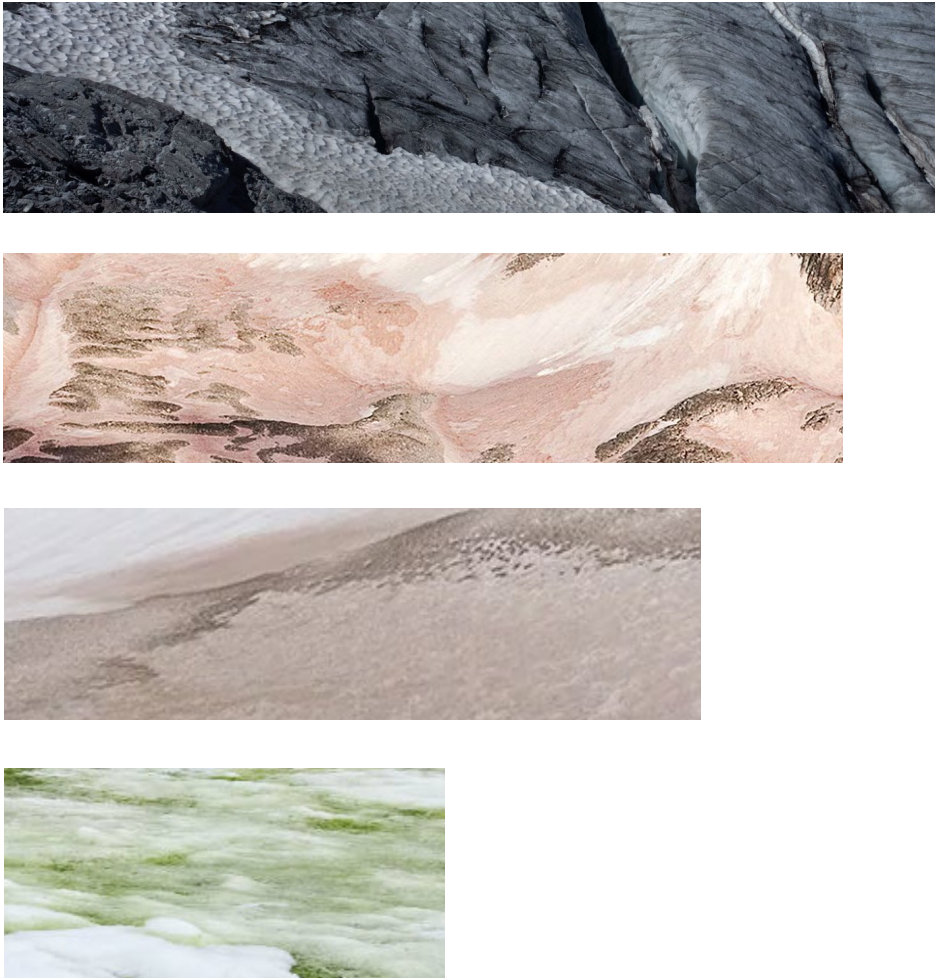
The design investigates how this collected dust is not only measured but also preserved, archived, and physically transported out of the Arctic context to disclose the hidden natural and political genealogy of these particles. An "Outpost" is first used to collect data in the Arctic, and then this data is sent back to the sources of pollution by the Archive as a design statement

Year: 2025
Type: GSAPP Studio Project (Individual Work)
Location: Arctic
Instructor: Leslie Gill, Khoi Nguyen



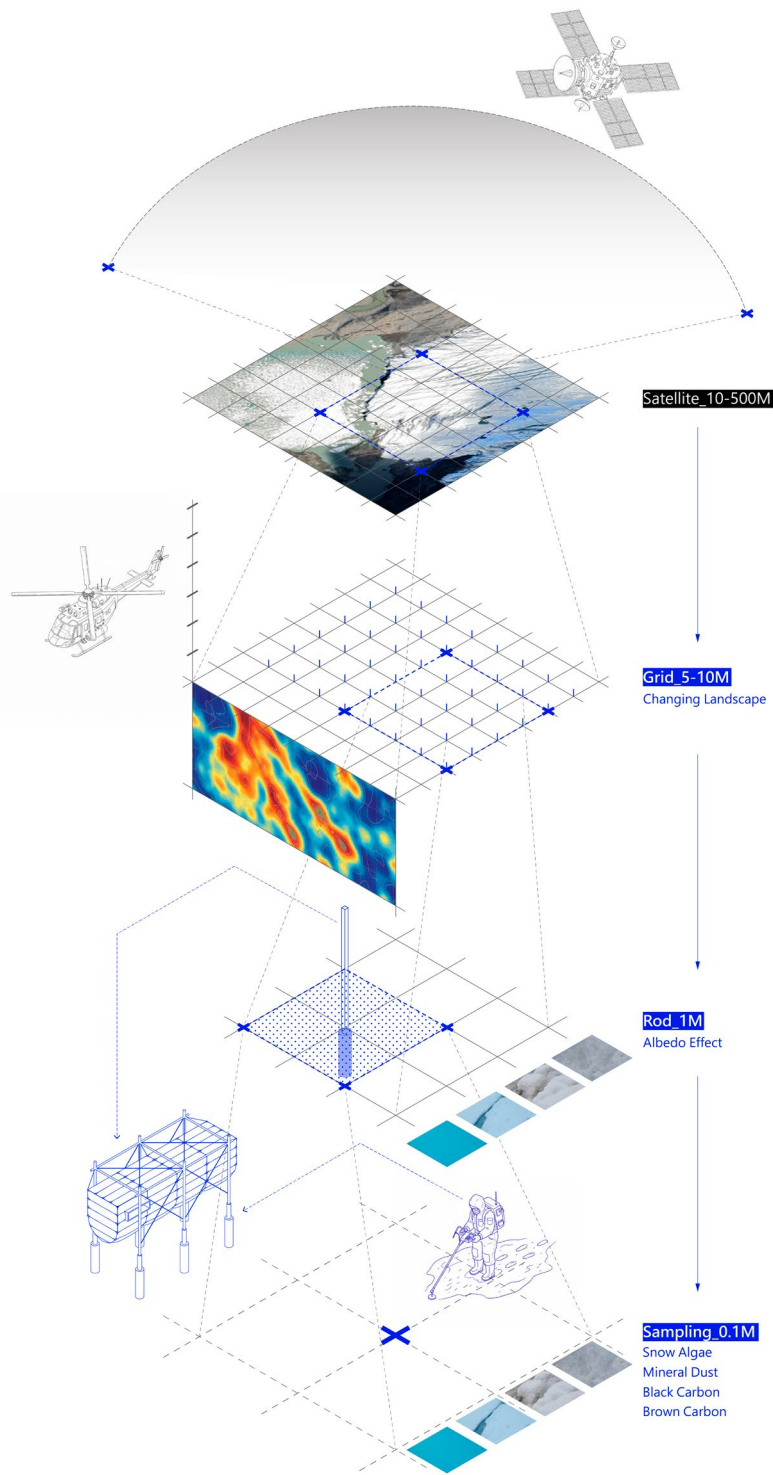
Territorial Route & Forensic Return

The project operates through a synchronized, territorial system. Initially, an "Outpost" is deployed in the Arctic to extract and collect local pollution data. Subsequently, a mobile vessel embarks on a one-year cyclical route, acting as a "Forensic Return". This route transports the collected pollutants across the globe, connecting physical evidence directly back to global extraction sites and consumption hubs.



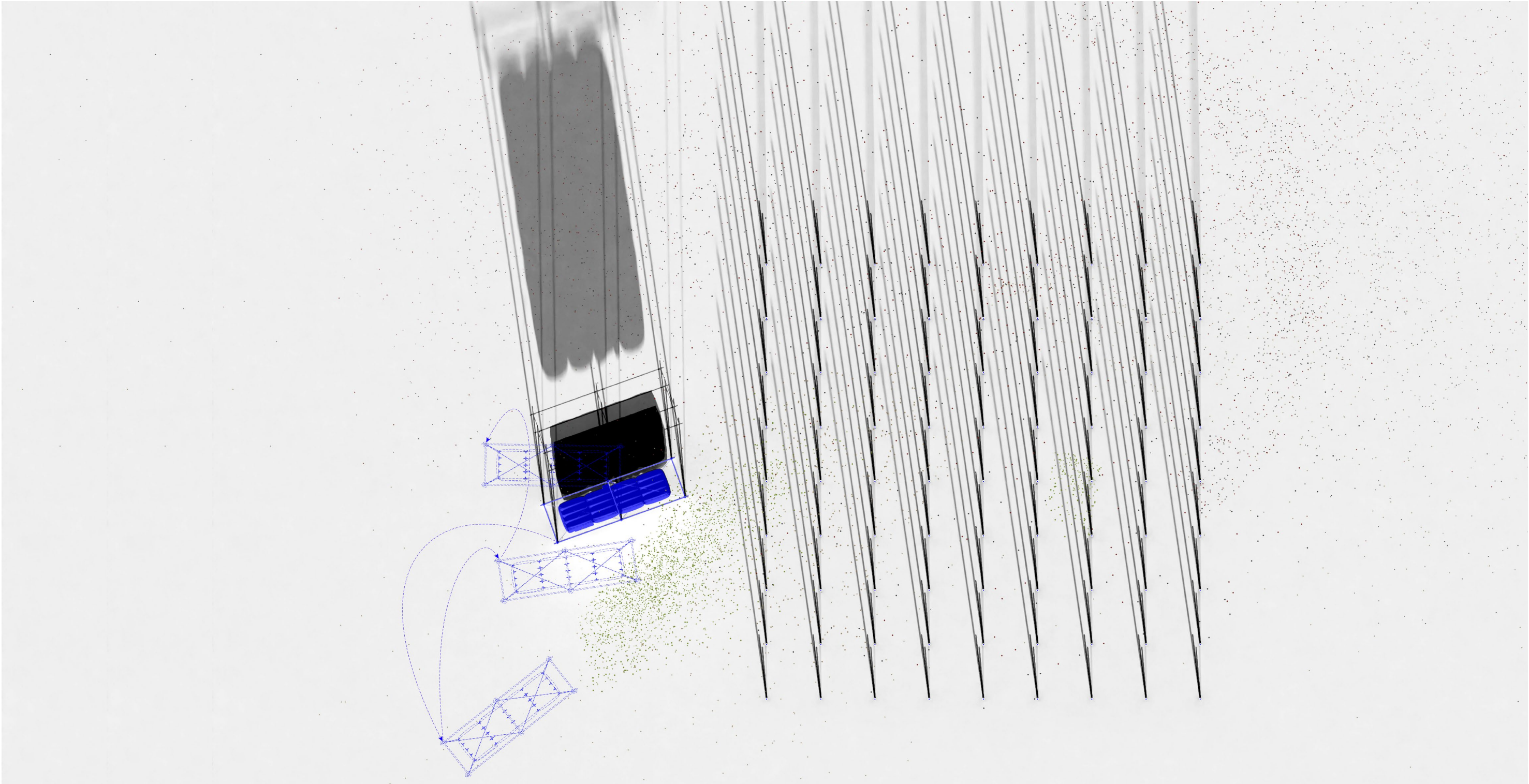
Thermal Topographies

As diverse particulates settle on the ice, they alter the surface albedo and increase heat absorption. This thermal dynamic actively reshapes the frozen environment, causing irregular melting patterns. The resulting shifts continuously generate new, undulating topographies, transforming static ice fields into a dynamic, physical ledger of global pollution and temperature



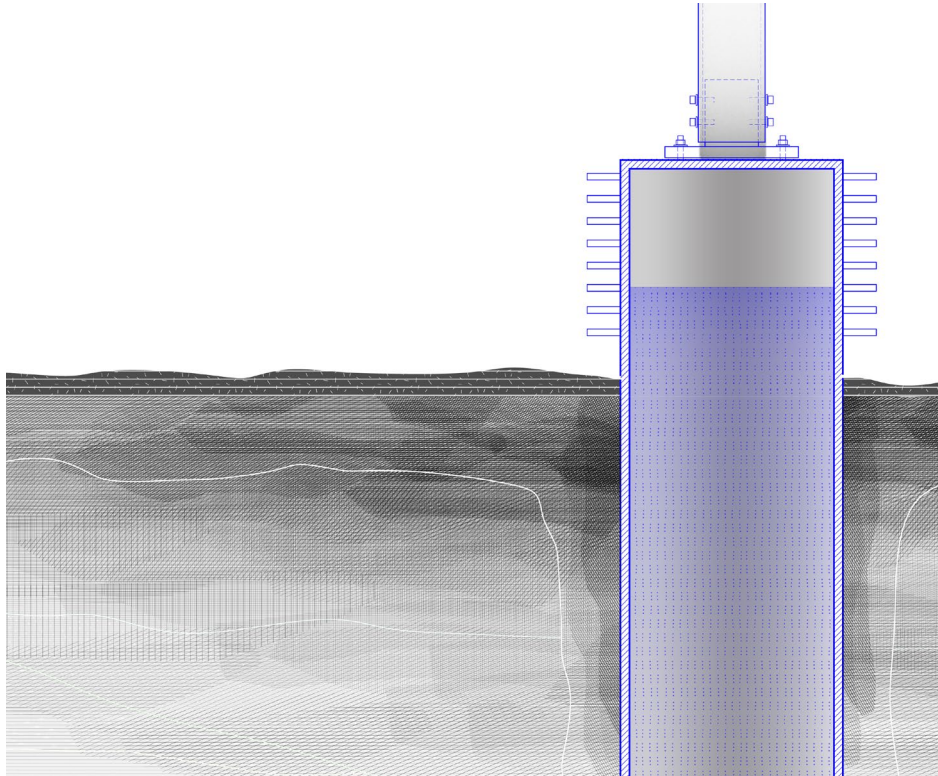
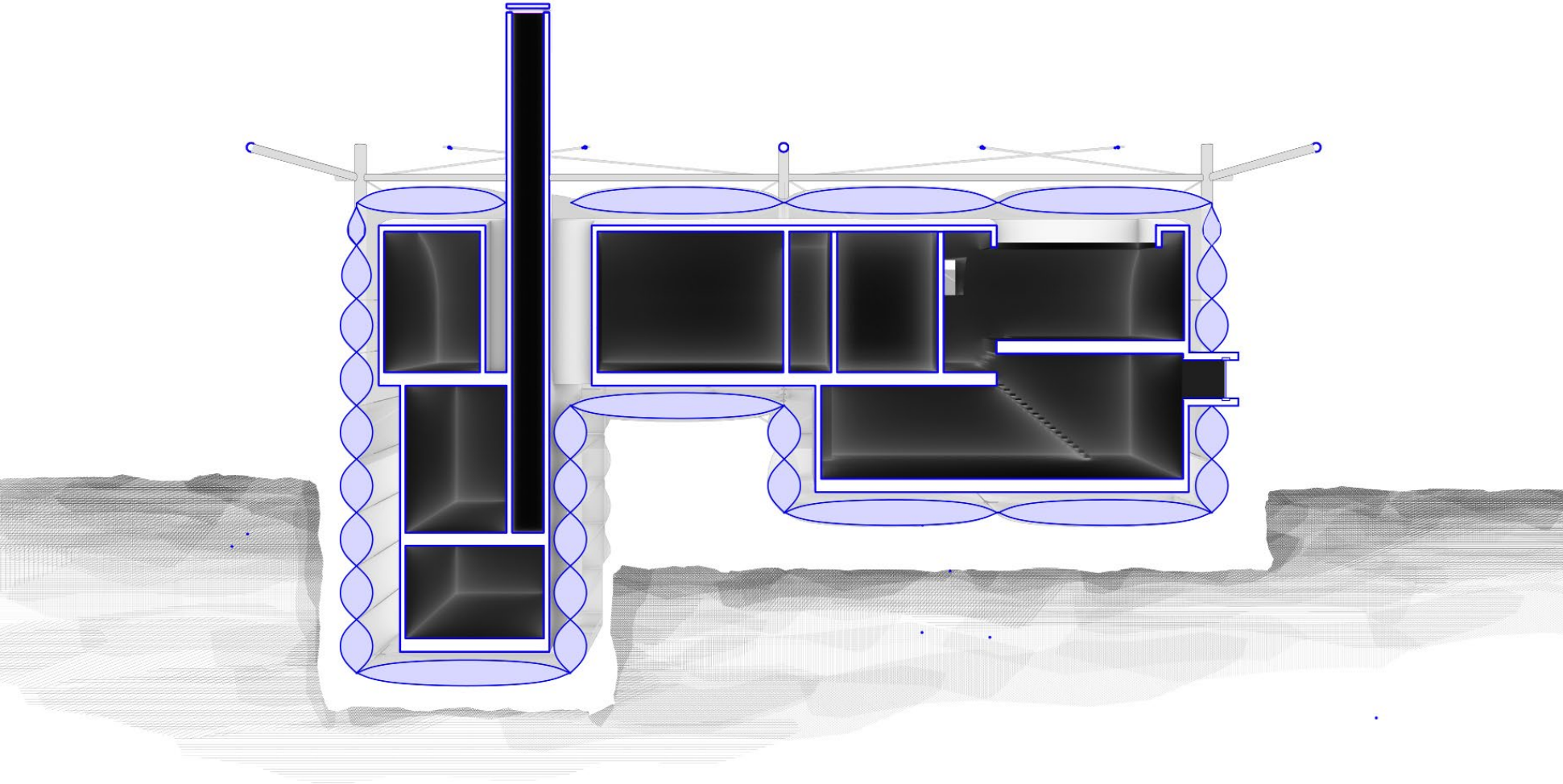
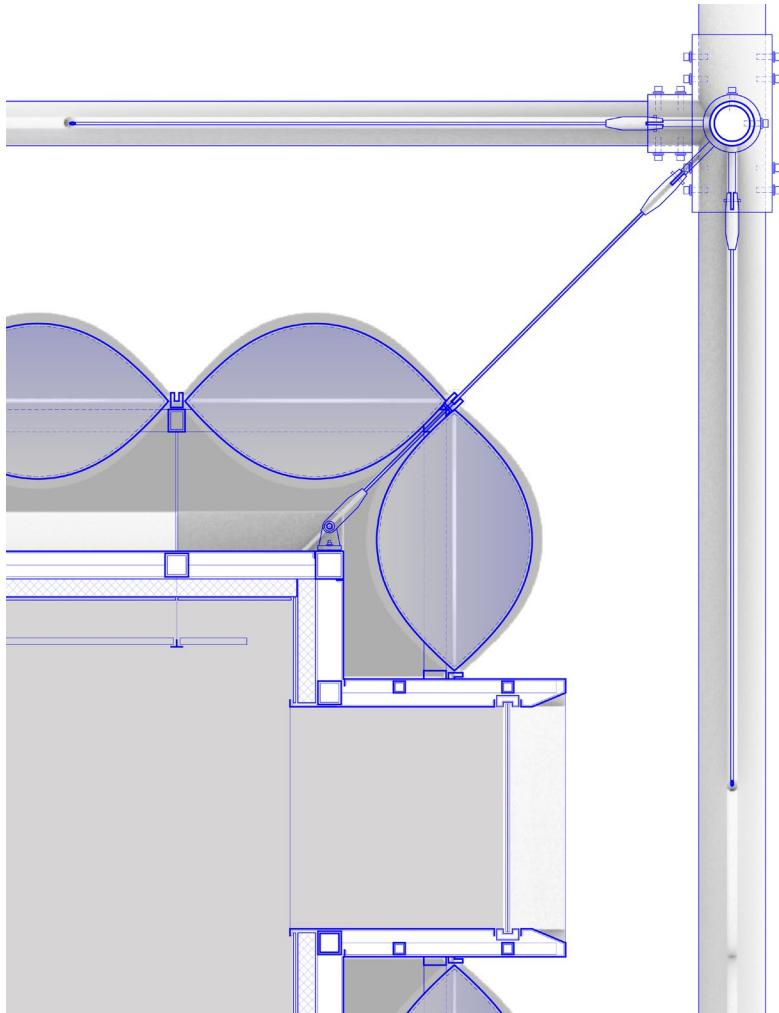
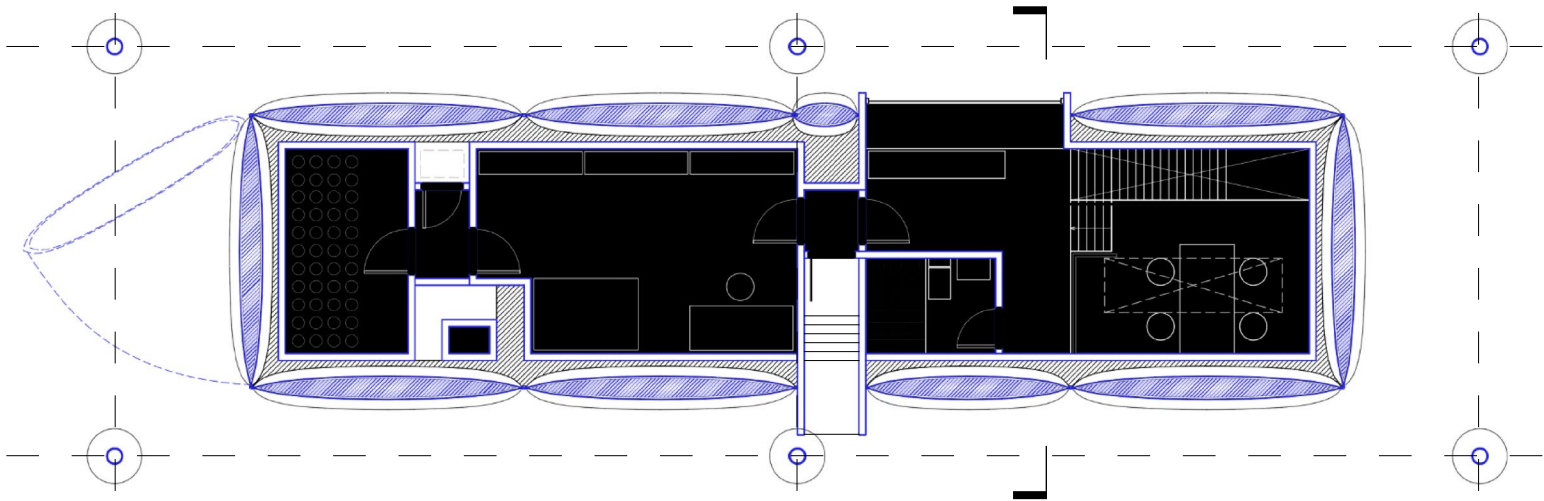
Scales of Measurement

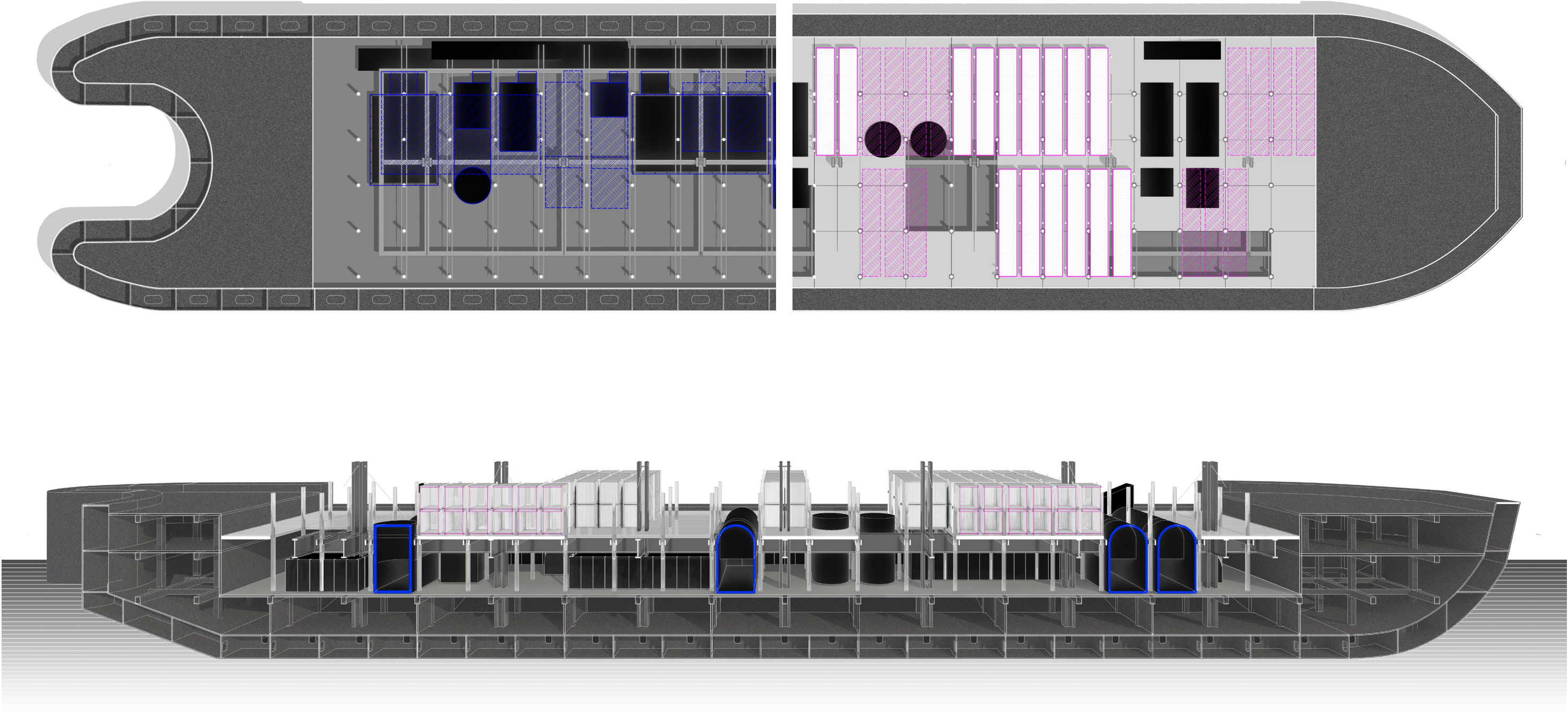
Measuring the Albedo Effect requires operating across multiple scales and resolutions. At the macro level, satellite imagery monitors broad regional shifts. On-site, a 10-meter structural matrix is established to document continuous topographical changes. Attached to this matrix, individual rods capture localized data by collecting specific samples of melting snow and



The Outpost: On-Site Extraction

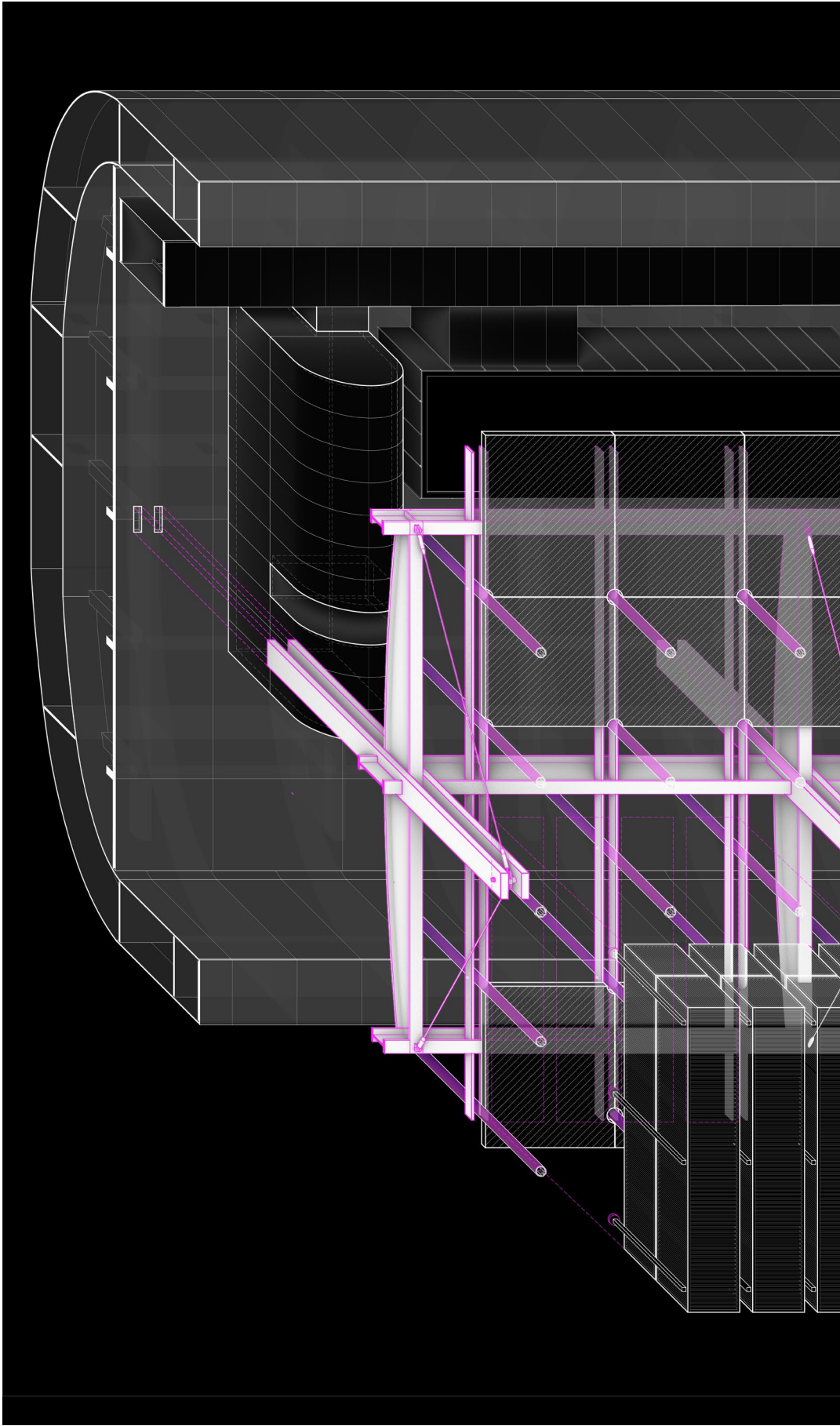
Operating as the primary site of extraction, the Outpost consists of an expansive sampling grid and suspended "data capsules". Designed to minimize ground contact, these elevated structures are wrapped in an ETFE skin for critical thermal insulation. Ultimately, these capsules function dually as secure containers for scientific data and resilient living quarters for researchers.



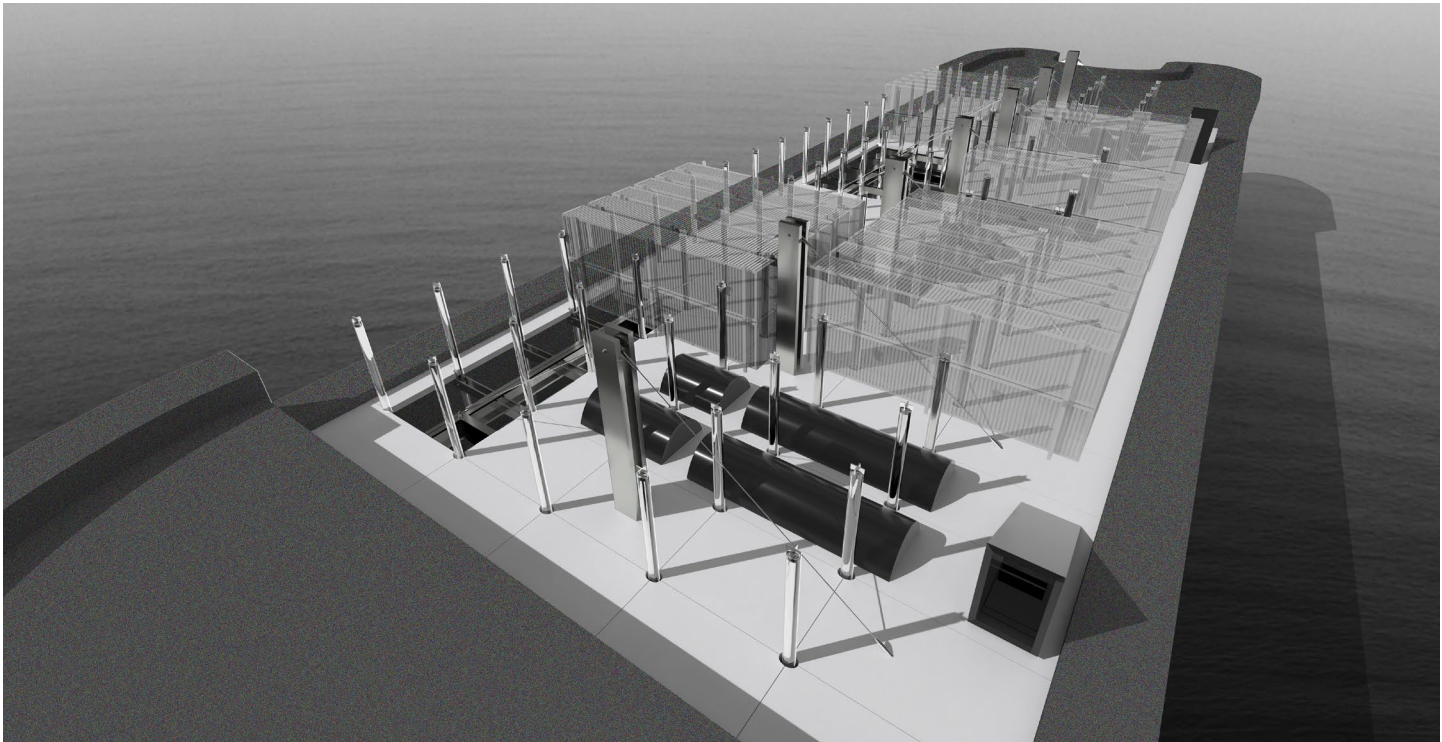


The Agent: On-Site to Non-Site

To transition extracted data from the Arctic "on-site" to global "non-site" locations, a modified barge serves as the logistical agent. The vessel's architecture is bifurcated by its deck. Above, standard shipping containers integrate the ship into global commercial traffic. Below deck, a dedicated environment houses the mobile scientific archive and public exhibition spaces.

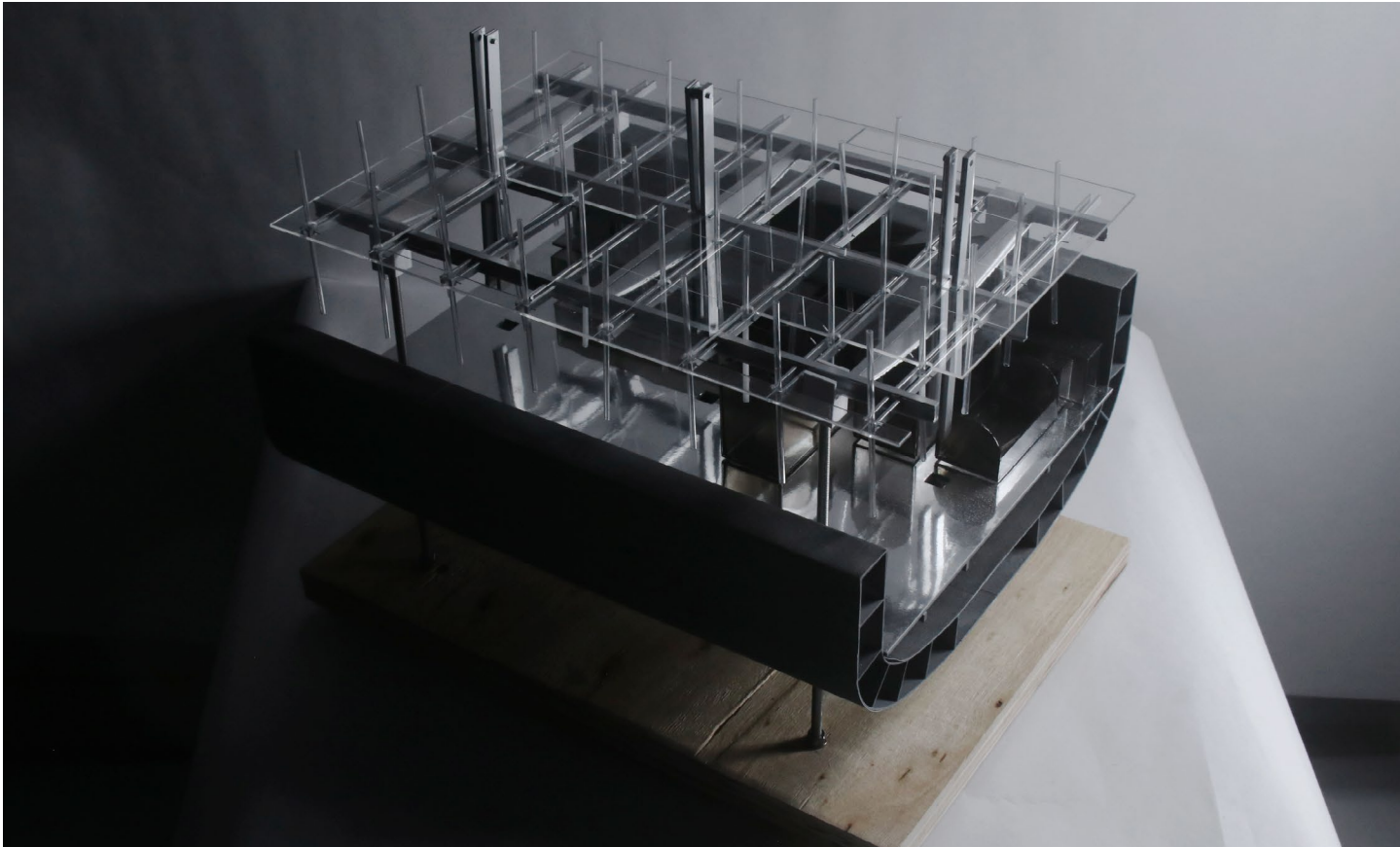
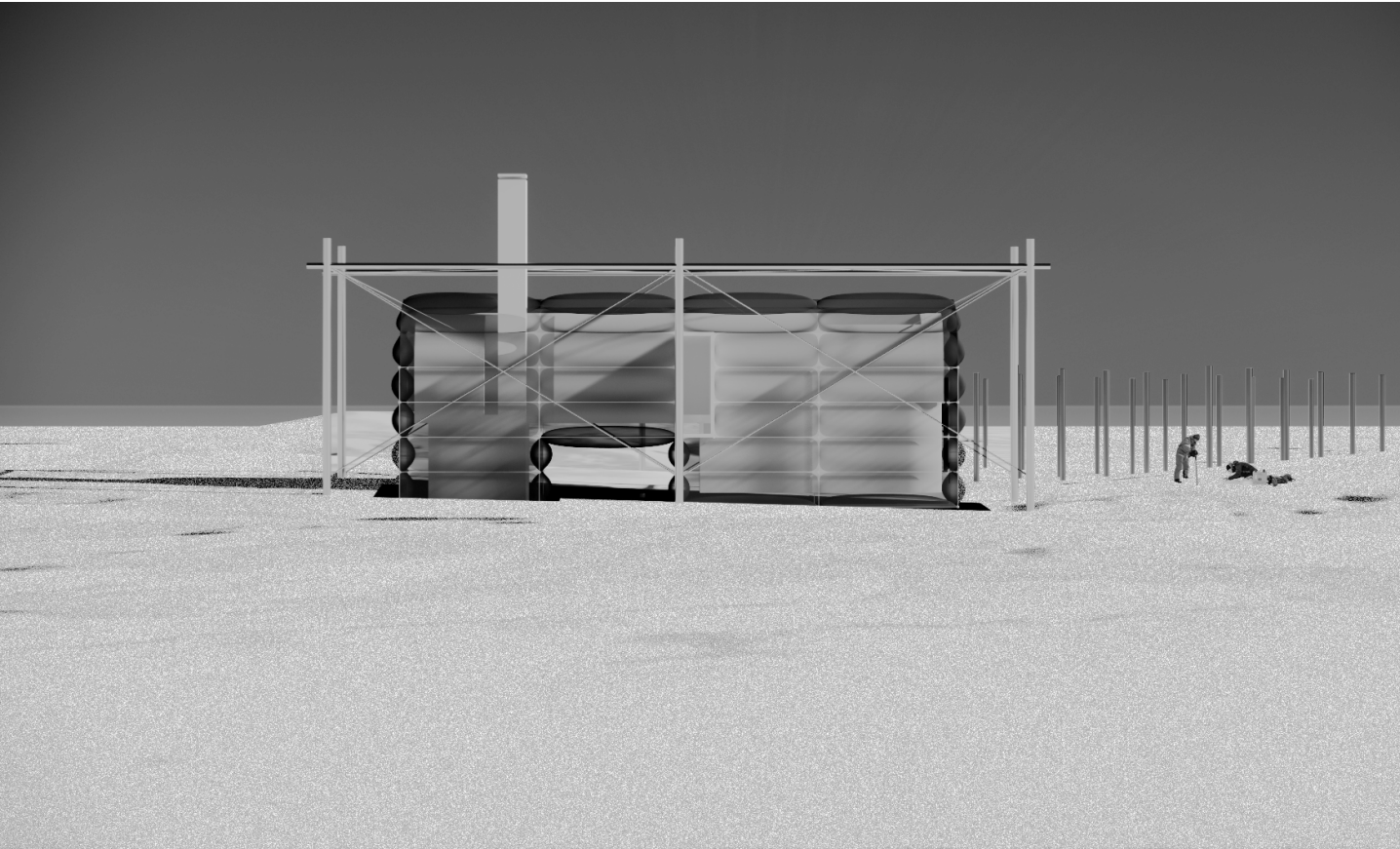


Chao-Tang Lin



Science & Witness

The interior below deck is divided into the "Space of Science" and the "Space of Witness". The Space of Science holds the capsules, serving as functional cores where researchers live and conduct comparative experiments. The Space of Witness is the remaining void space that opens to the public when the ship docks, allowing them to witness the evidence of the Albedo Effect returned from the Arctic. The growth and decline of science and witness act as a geopolitical mapping.





The Urban Firebreak Recomposing the LA River in the Pyrocene

In an era of increasing wildfire threats—a period defined by fire and combustion known as the Pyrocene—this project reimagines the Los Angeles River not just as a channel, but as a critical line of defense. The proposal introduces interventions at the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI), creating dual-purpose infrastructure that functions as engaging public space for daily life while transforming into essential water resources and shelters during emergencies.

Rather than attempting to restore a "wild" state that no longer exists, the design seeks to "recompose" the river's industrial legacy. By converting the concrete channel into a "Reservoir of Defense," the project establishes a resilient landscape built on principles of solidarity, actively fostering social resilience to protect the community against future climate instability.

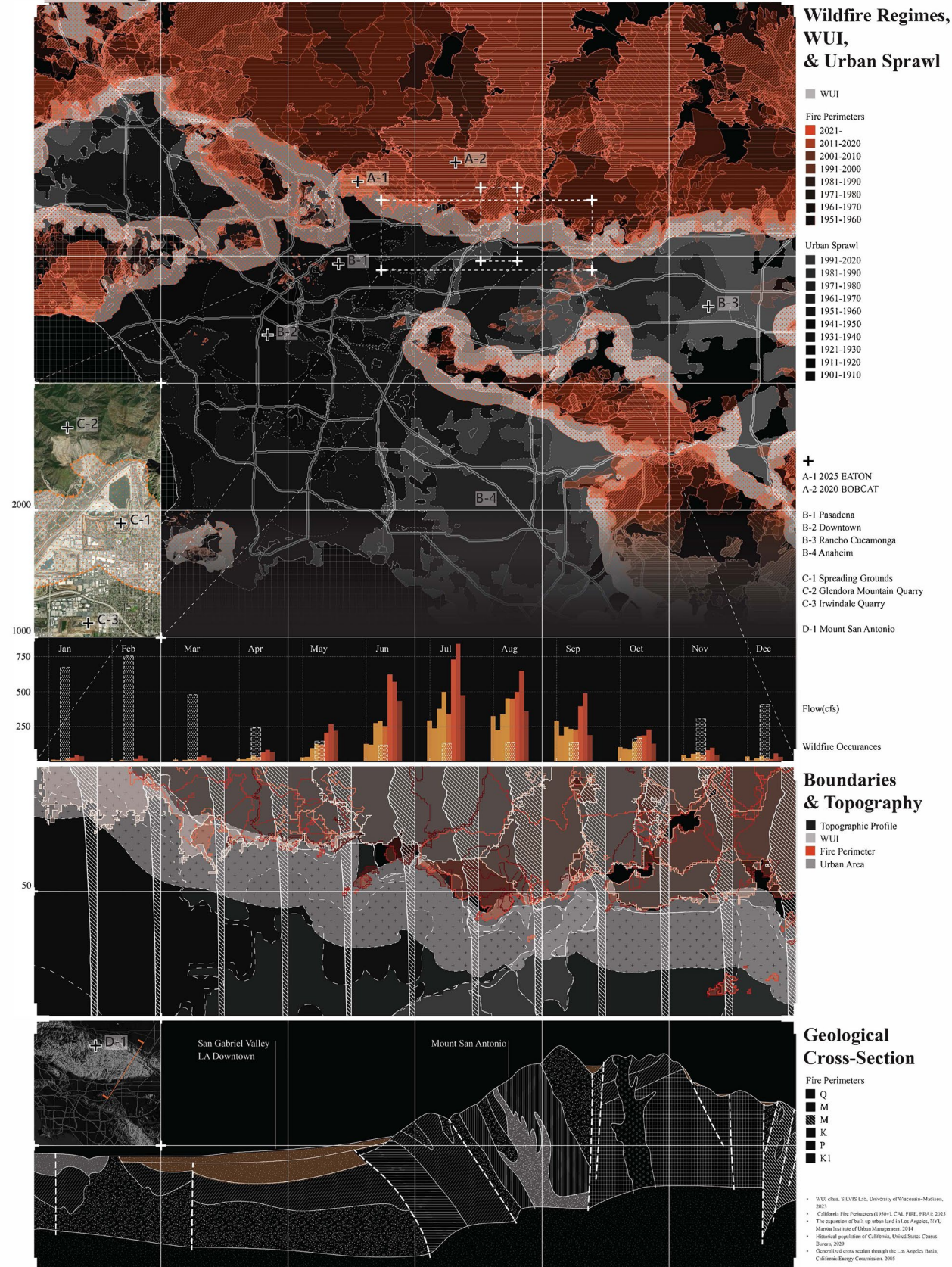
Year: 2025

Type: GSAPP Studio Project (Group Work with Eddie Huang and Norman Situ)

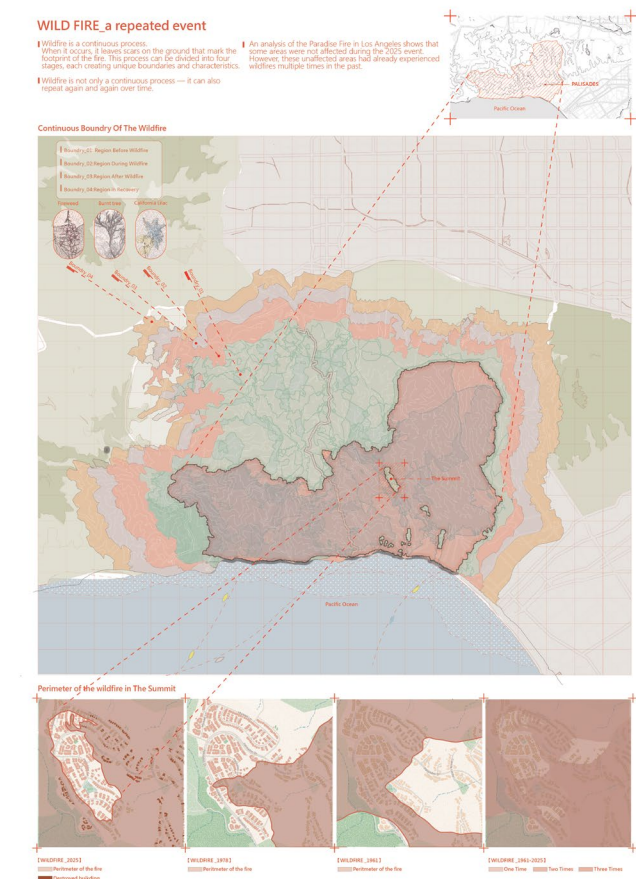
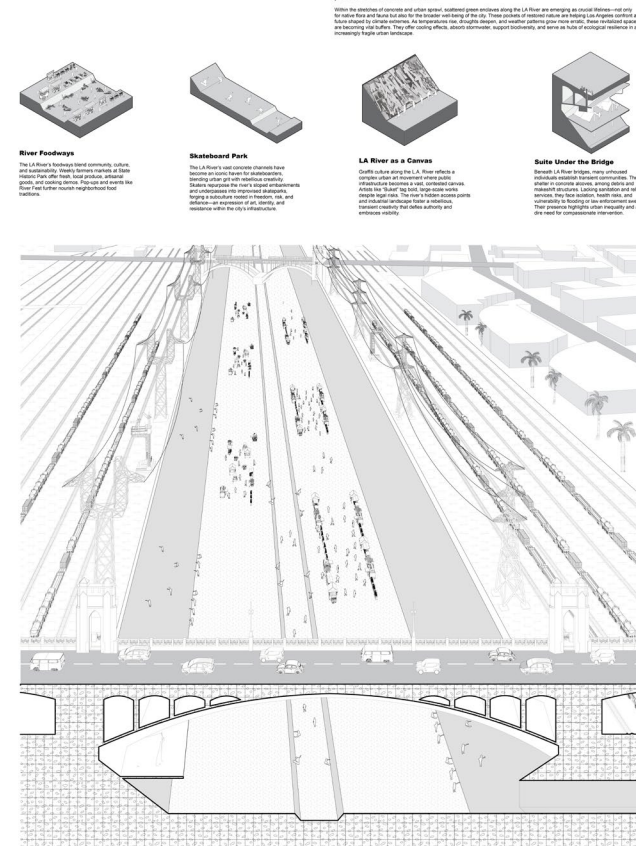
Location: Los Angeles, USA

Instructor: David Eugin Moon (N H D M, Partner)

Shifting Boundaries

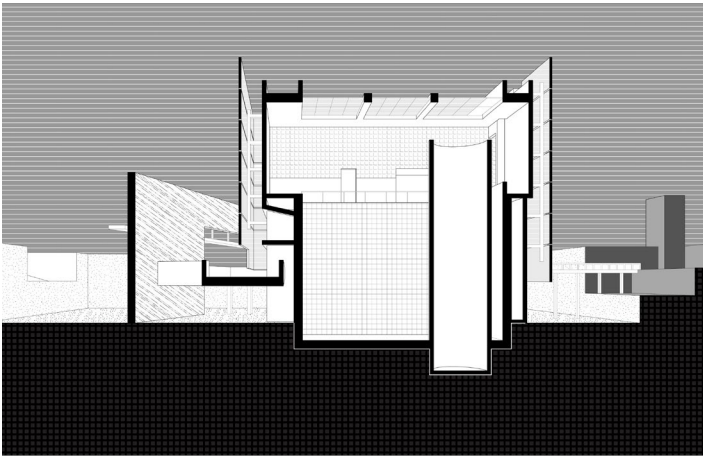
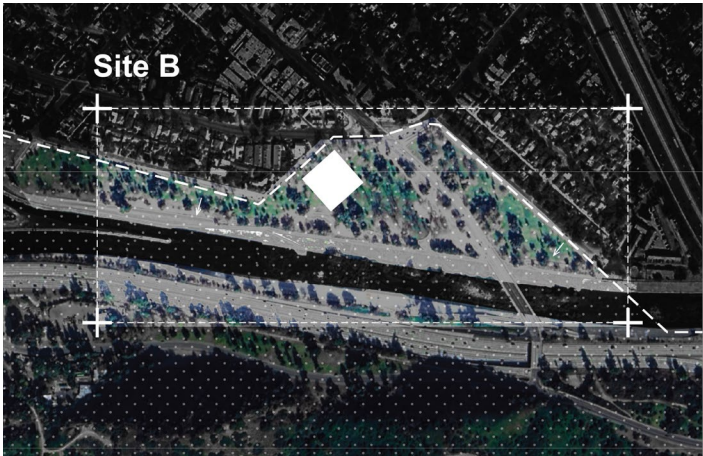
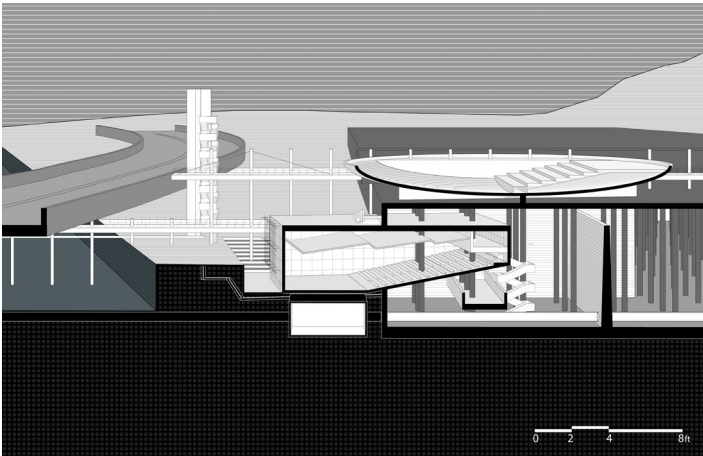
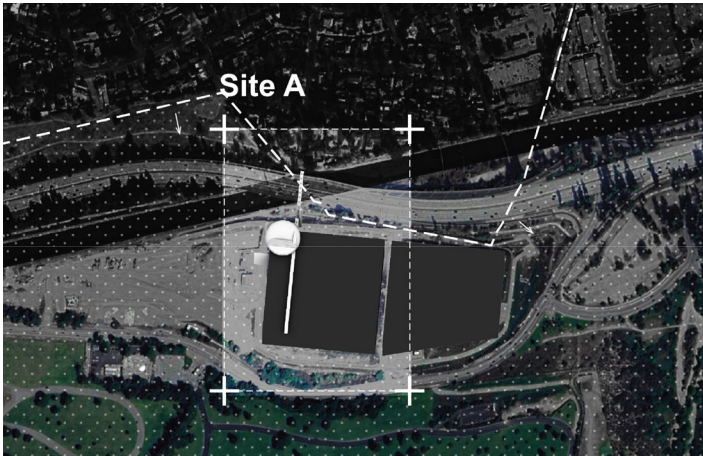
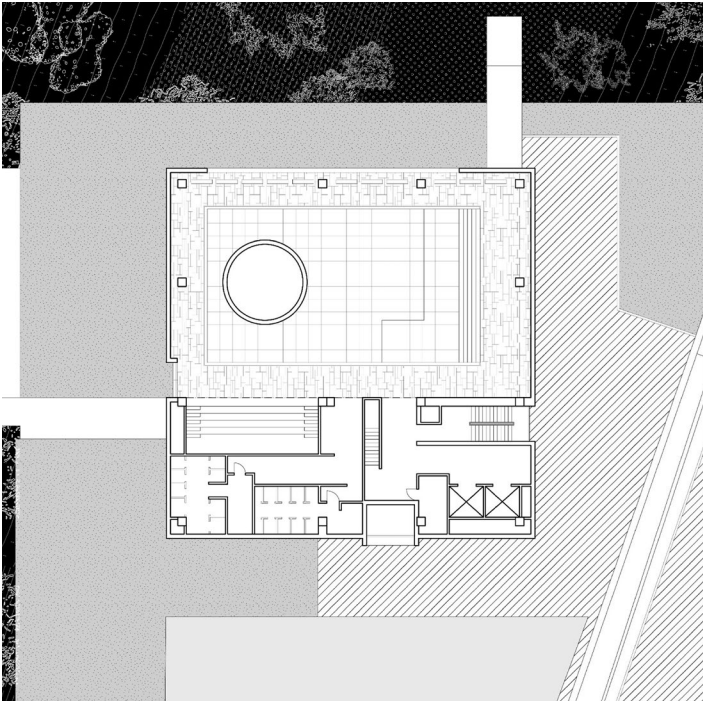
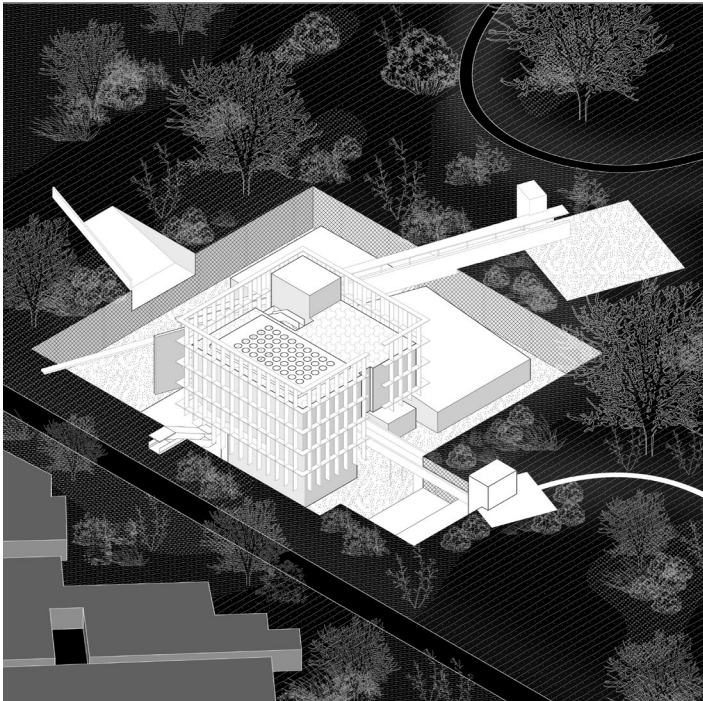
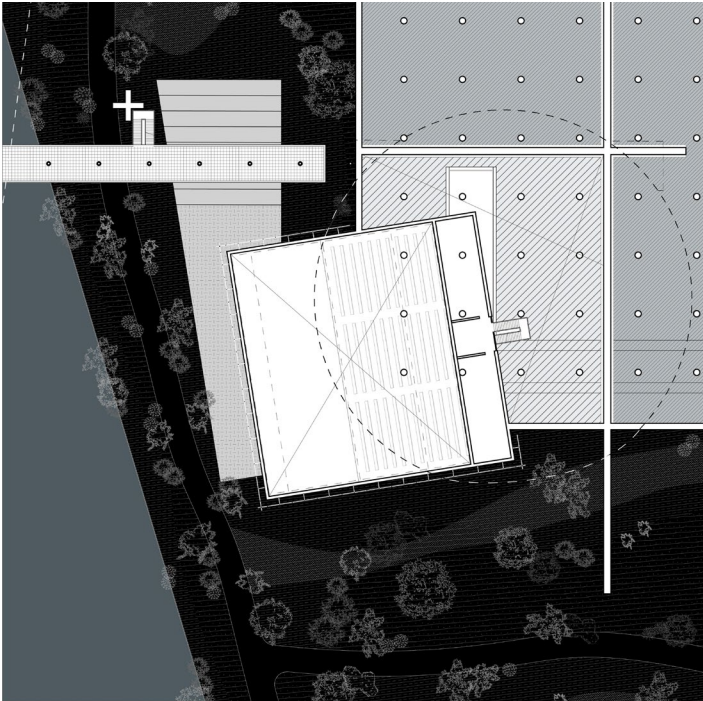
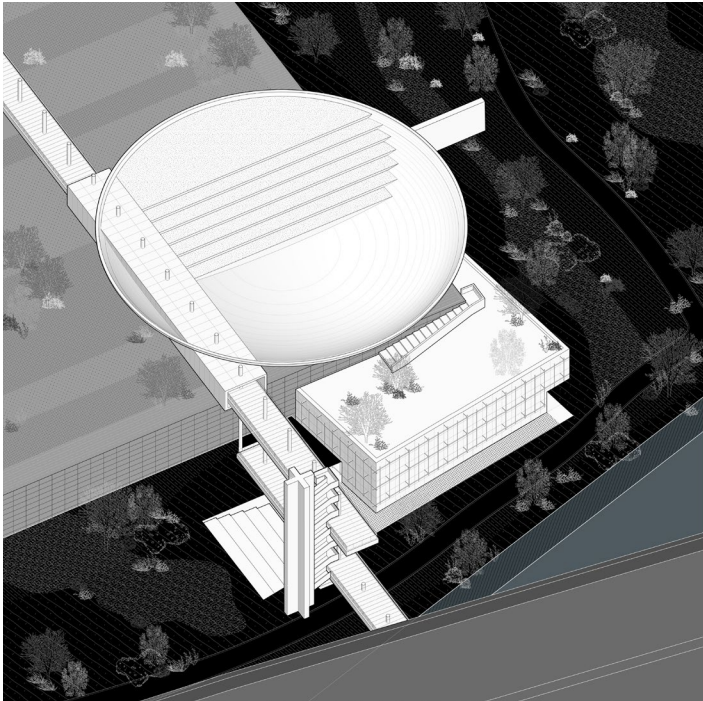


LA CONCRETE RIVER



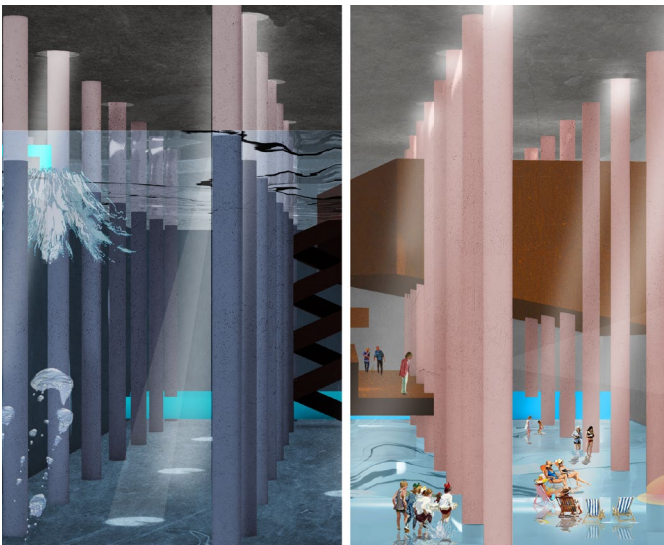
The Accumulation of Presence and Absence

The project directly confronts the shifting wildfire-urban boundary and the destructive fire-rebuild cycle that impacts residents. Sited in the high-risk Glendale area, the strategy is to create prototypes that function as public amenities in normal times and as life-saving infrastructure during a fire emergency.



Reservoir Hub

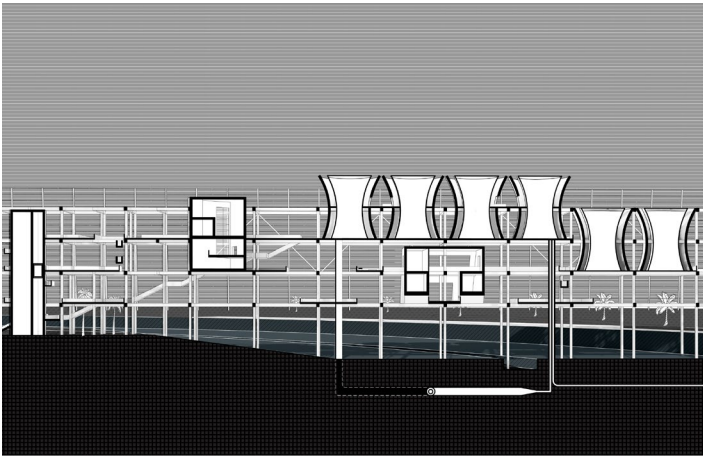
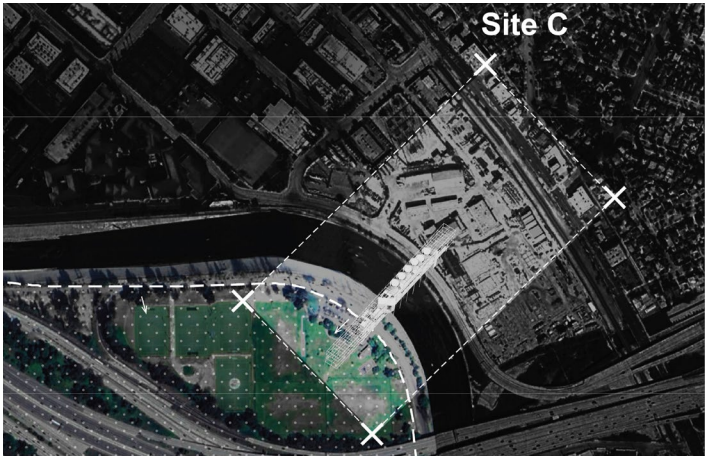
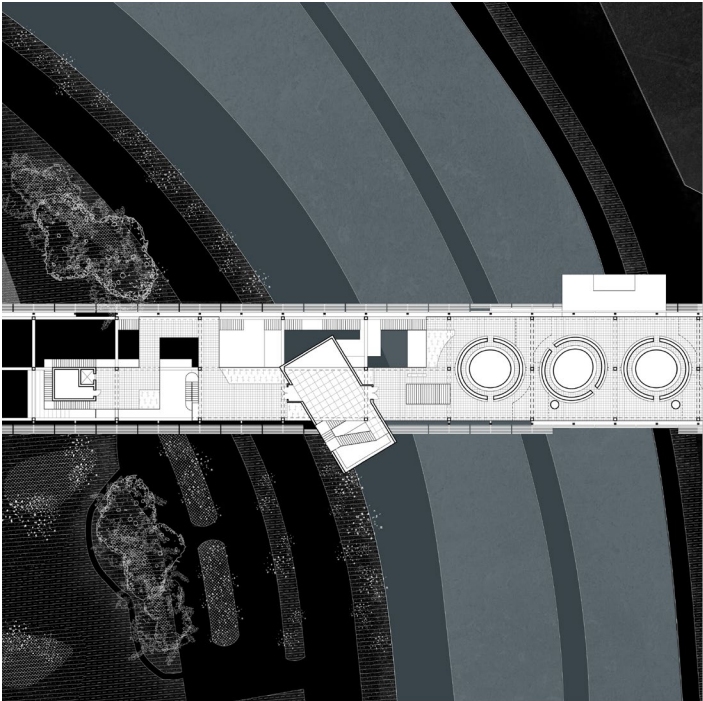
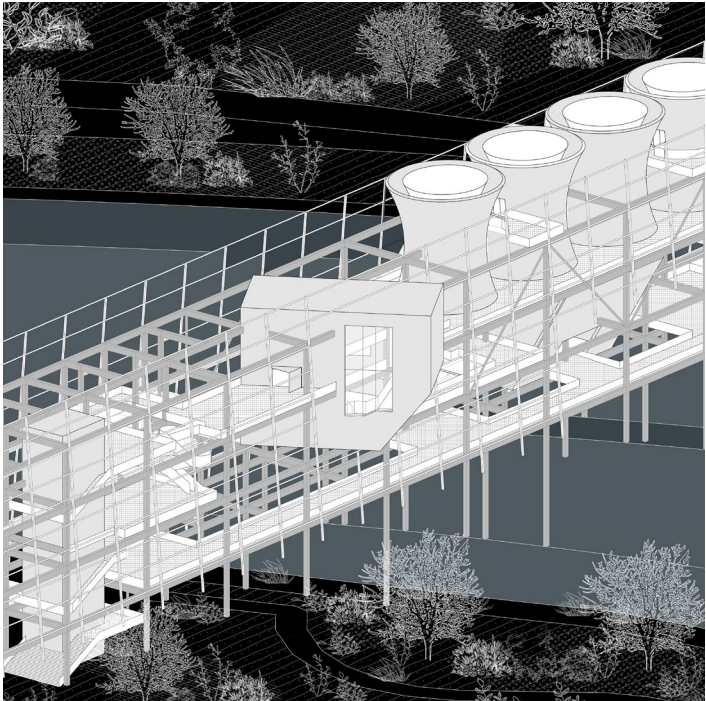
An expanded reservoir featuring a public amphitheater. In daily use, it serves as a cultural venue; during a fire event, it converts into a community fire shelter and a strategic water distribution point for emergency services



Community Pool & Cistern

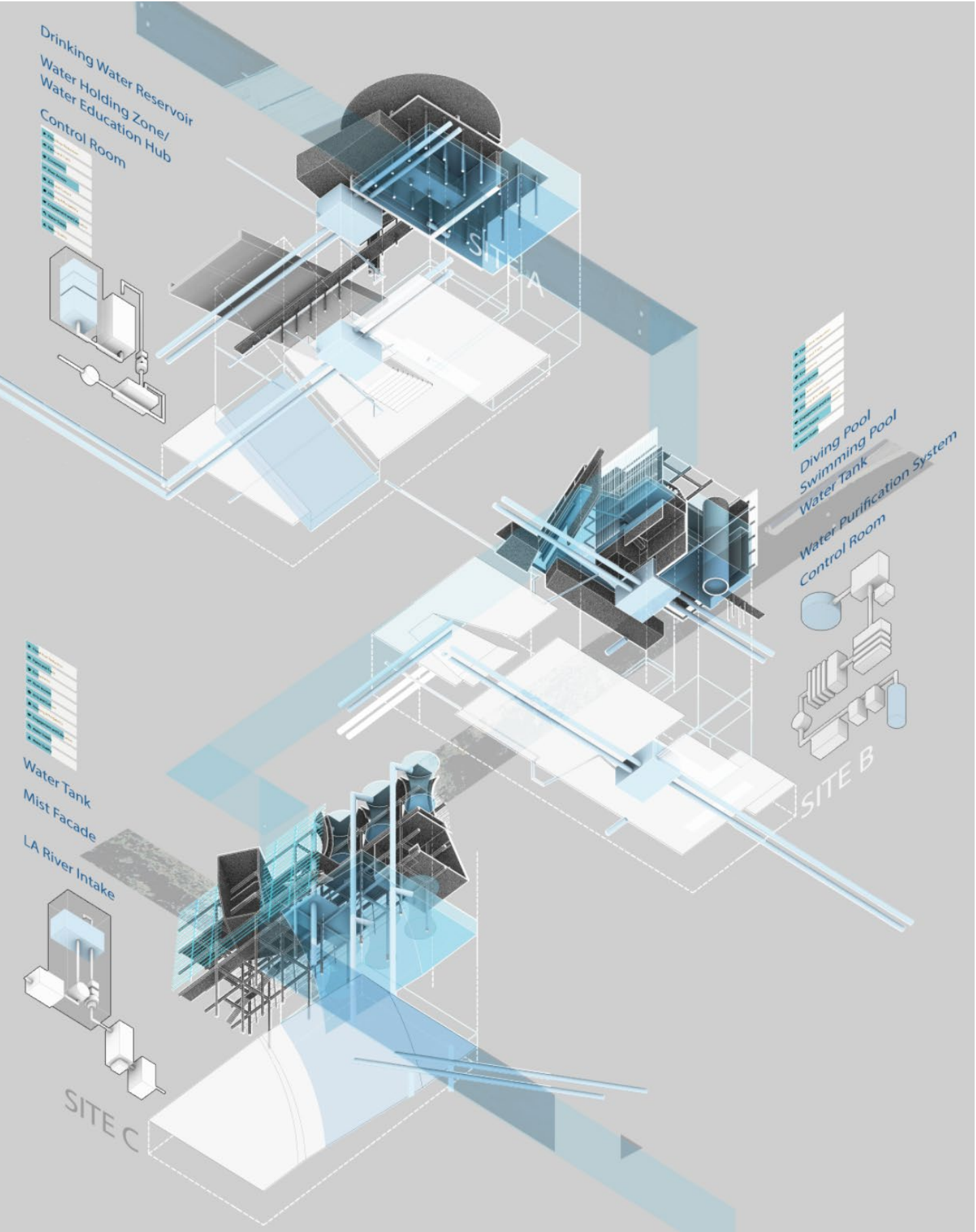
A neighborhood swimming pool that serves as a recreational hub for the local community. Beneath the surface, its substantial water volume acts as a ready reserve for firefighting, integrating leisure with critical emergency preparedness.

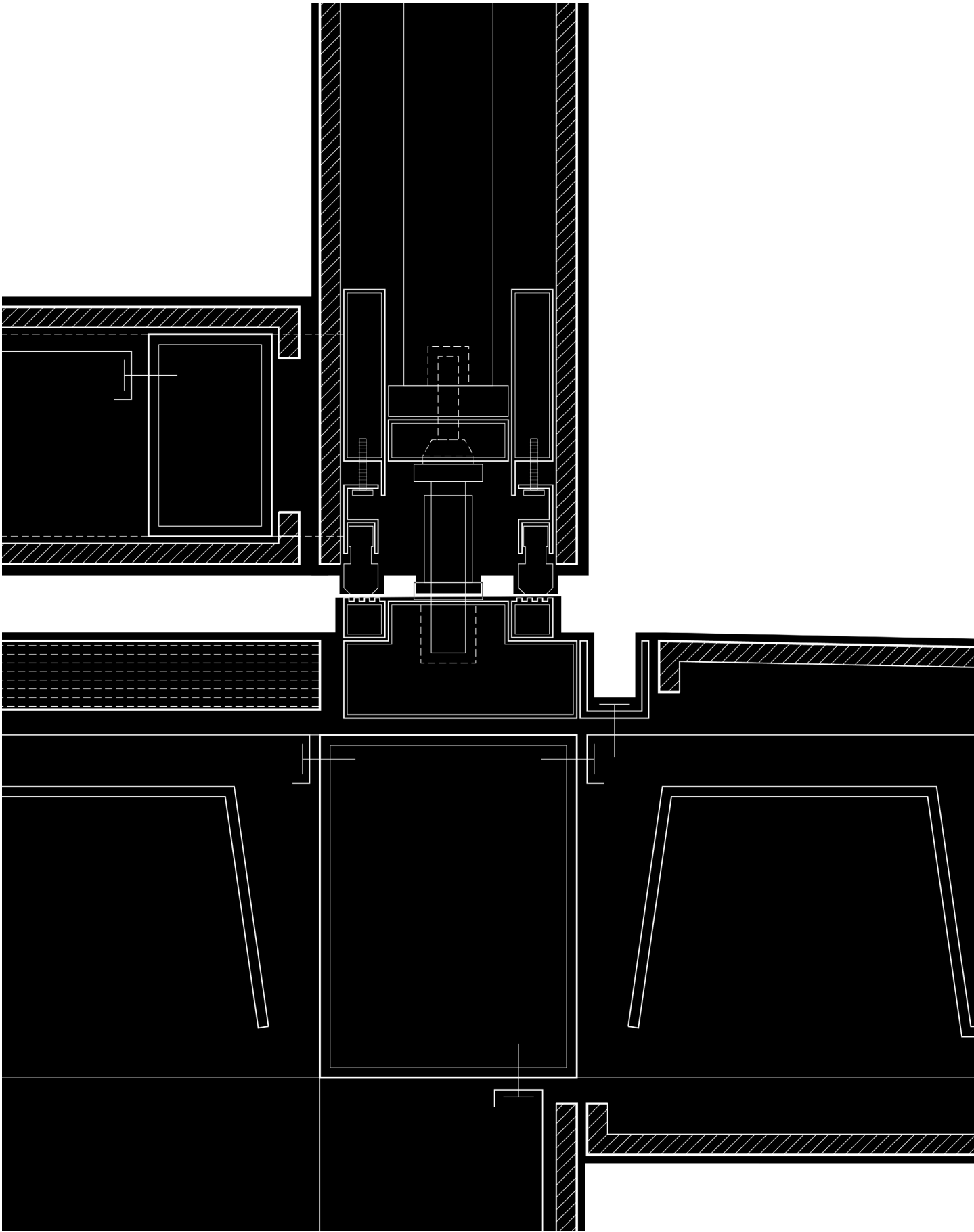




Infrastructural Bridge

A bridge spanning the river with integrated water tanks. This structure supports a linear park while storing vast amounts of water for an emergency fire response, connecting the divided banks of the river both physically and hydrologically.



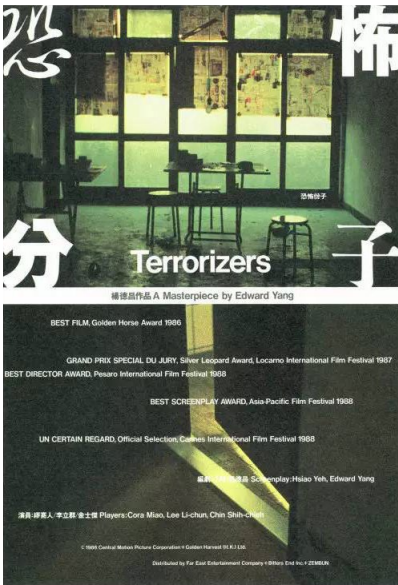
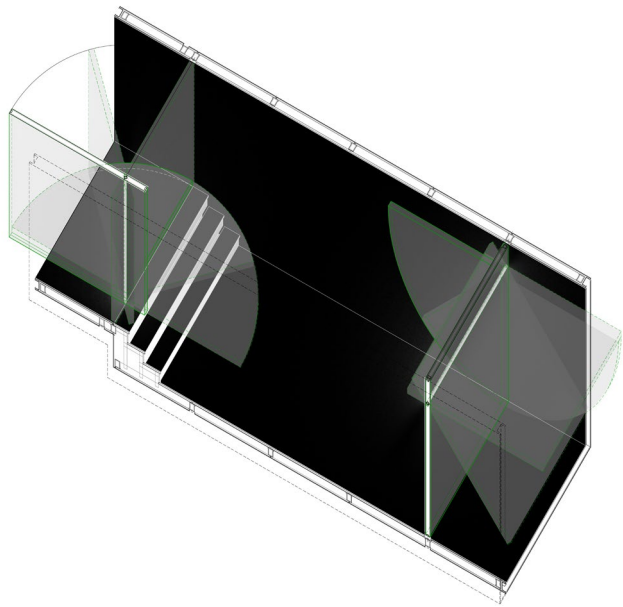


A Darkroom inside a Room From Mask to Exposure

This project explores the dialectic of light and enclosure through a "box" situated between interior and exterior. Inspired by the duality of a mask—concealing while defining a face—the architecture functions as a mechanical apparatus.

It begins as a sealed darkroom. Through the unfolding of its skin, the darkroom breathes, transforming from a hermetic void into a theater of exposure. The opening of the pivot door is not merely a functional act but a spatial event: the black interior expands to claim the exterior, while natural light penetrates to rewrite the room's atmosphere.

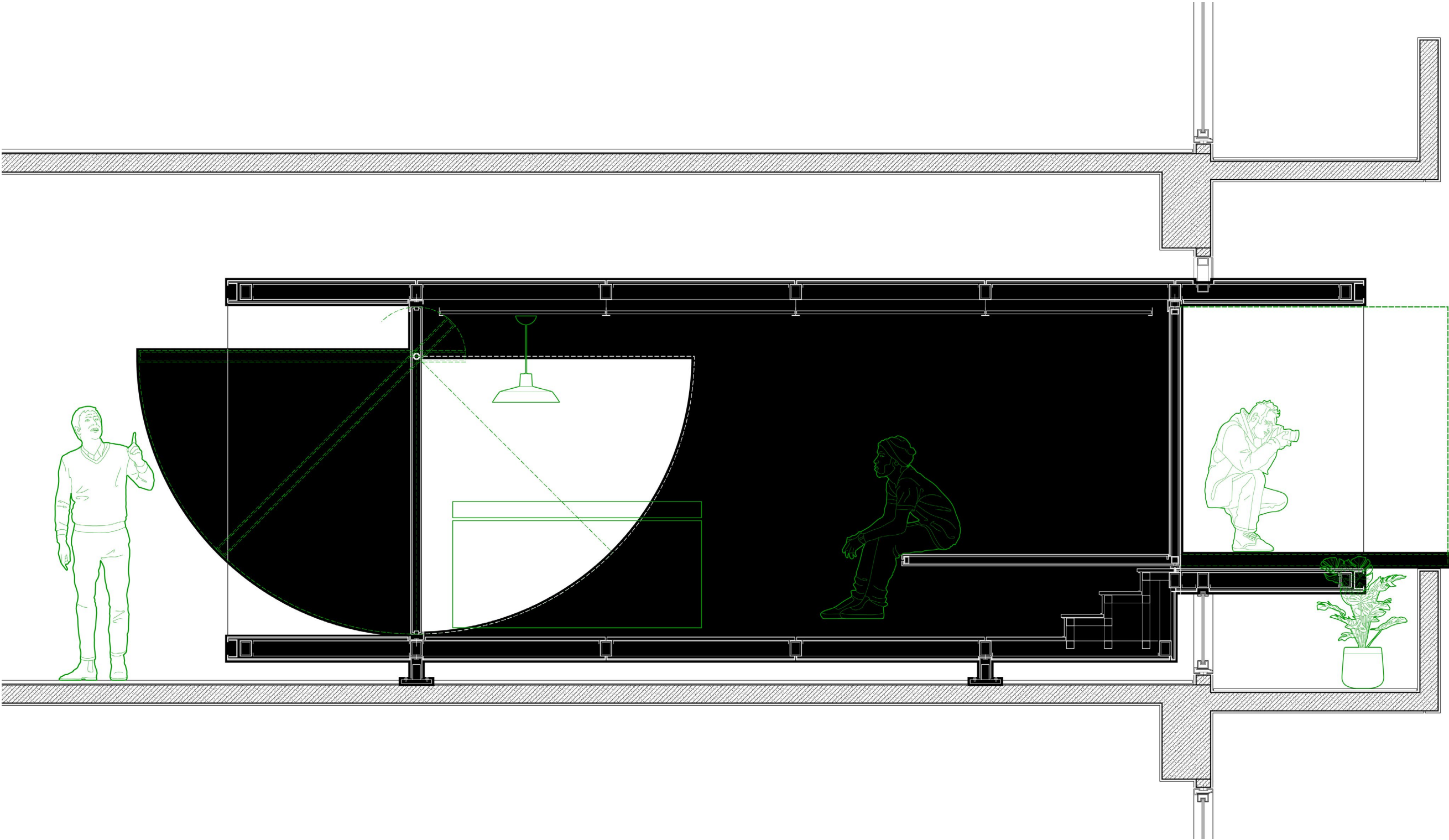
Year: 2025
Type: GSAPP Elective Project (Individual Work)
Location: Taipei, Taiwan
Instructor: Christoph Kumpusch

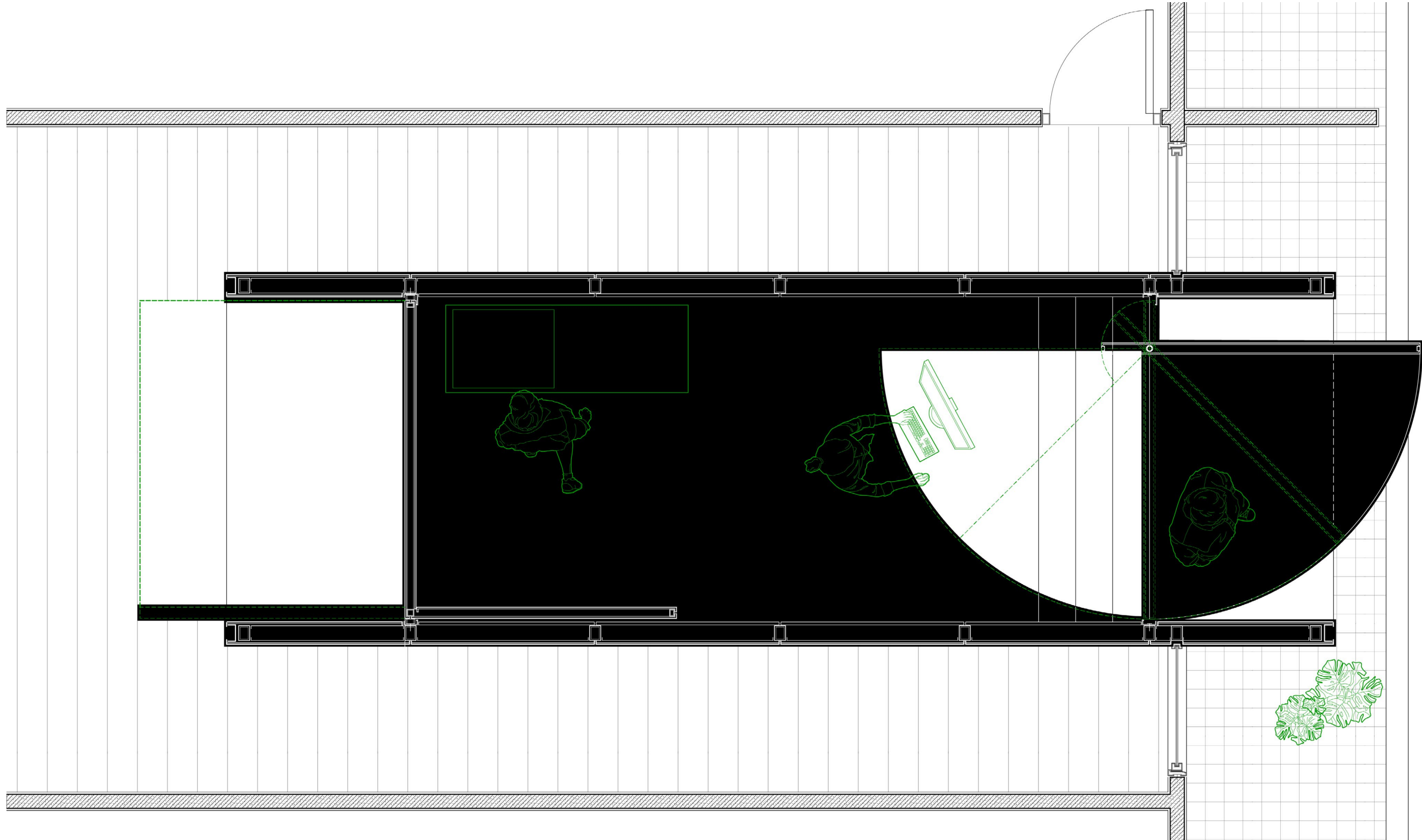


Cinematic Reference: The Terrorizers (1986)

Inspired by Edward Yang's depiction of Taipei's urban solitude, specifically the photographer's darkroom. The design translates the film's atmospheric tension—the drifting photographs, the sudden intrusion of light upon curtain opening, and the shifting boundaries between observer and observed—into an architectural mechanism. The room captures the precise moment when a sealed "darkness" is breached by the "brightness" of the city.









Sculpturing Water Volumes of Light and Mass

Sculpturing Water examines Carlo Scarpa's treatment of water as an active tectonic presence. By studying the Monument to the Partisan Woman in Venice, the project investigates the intersection of shifting tides and Scarpa's staggered double-line system. This layout replaces rigid grids with a perpetual state of flux, activated by the lagoon to create constant movement in space and light.

To register this dynamic relationship, the project treats the fluid medium as a sculptural volume, translating it into distinct physical states. First, melting ice captures water as a disappearing element, recording its ephemeral traces. Second, fluid volume is materialized as a negative concrete cast, highlighting its sheer mass and sharp light-shadow interplay. Finally, translucent casts represent fluctuating water levels. Exposed to sunlight via the cyanotype process, these models permanently record how light filters through the depth and internal volume of the sculpted water.

Year: 2026

Type: GSAPP Elective Project (Individual Work)

Instructor: Steven Holl, Dimitra Tsachrelia

